



Listening Prayer

Prayer is an umbrella term that refers to the conversation we have with our Father in heaven, therefore **it's a matter of relationship rather than a mindless liturgical ritual**. It is a way of developing relationship with the Father via dialogue. Like any relationship, communication is key to producing a healthy relationship in which both parties are heard, understood and are able to grow in intimacy. Hence, a key component in this dialogue is hearing, or better yet, listening to the Father. As we listen to God we begin to understand His will and desire for our life, the role we play in his Kingdom and in executing His will on earth as it is in heaven. He also begins to shape our hearts and minds to become more our true selves (the people He created us to be) as we begin to understand ourselves better.

Jesus provides a clear image of what it's like to be in relationship with him in [John 10:1-21 \(NIV\)](#), where he identifies as the good shepherd and us as his sheep. He states,

“The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.” (v3-5)

Jesus clearly communicates the significance of listening and why it is one of the most important things in life. For us to listen to God is to be led by him, shaped by him and be in relationship with him – **communication is external guided thought. When you give someone your ear, you've given them your mind and heart to be shaped.**

So, how do we hear God's voice? He doesn't speak in the ways we're used to. However, He does speak in a variety of ways which include Scripture, circumstances, community, prophesy, dreams, visions and the still small voice. Ultimately God speaks to us through Jesus.

Learning to sift through all the “voices” in our head and to discern how God is speaking to us is a key task of discipleship. Often, we hope for a large audible voice, for some significant supernatural event or maybe a display of God's power, but He often speaks with a still small voice. We see this played out in [1 Kings 19: 9b – 18 \(NIV\)](#), as Elijah approaches Mt Horeb with a heavy heart after fleeing for his life. You can almost hear the angst in his voice as he exclaims,

“I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” (v10)

We then see God display His power and might through the elements, however, His presence and His voice were absent in them all. Finally, God comes to Elijah in a still small voice to console him. How funny! God chose a still small voice to reveal Himself rather than His mighty displays of power, I wonder why that is? **To hear God requires something from us – space.** We need to create space in our mind and heart to hear Him, **we need to quiet down those other voice and thoughts to engage with God.**

Below is a brief guide in how to approach Listening Prayer. We recommend as you begin this practice that you take a hard copy of this document and work through it and get familiar with its flow.



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Guide

1) Take a First Step and Show Up.

2) Quiet Your Heart and Mind: This is a form of awareness, a way of being present and perceptive within all of life. In an interview with John Mark Comer, Strahan Coleman once described God's voice as a large crystal-clear lake.

“The water was a perfect turquoise colour; the lakebed was clearly visible and there wasn't a single ripple in the water. Suddenly, all this ‘stuff’ was being dumped into the lake, kicking up the sediments along the lakebed, disturbing the surface of the water and making the water cloudy. The lake was no longer that perfect picturesque scene, but regardless it was still the same lake.”

This is much like trying to hear God's voice, the more ‘stuff’ we dump, like Netflix, various books, podcasts, conversations, etc – the more we preoccupy our mind with things other than God. To be clear we aren't against these things, however they do act as a distraction and clutter our hearts and minds, making it harder to hear and discern His voice clearly even though He is constantly talking to us.

3) Work Through Forgiveness: Often the biggest hinderance to hearing God's voice is that lack of forgiveness in a person's life – it rots the heart and soul. We must learn to forgive others and do our best to reconcile with them, regardless if we have been wronged or if we have wronged. In Matthew 6, Jesus wraps up His teaching on the Lord's Prayer and then states “But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”. Its almost as though they are linked.

4) Attempt to Discern What Comes to Mind: Often God speaks to us through what feels like internal thoughts but are not. Dallas Willard in his book ‘Hearing God’ states,

“In the still, small voice of God we are given a message that bears the stamp of his personality quite clearly and in a way we will learn to recognize. But, in contrast with other cases, the medium through which the message comes is diminished almost to the vanishing point, taking the form of thoughts that are our thoughts, though these thoughts are not from us. In this way, as we shall see, the human spirit becomes the “candle of the Lord” (Prov 20:27 NIV)”.

This is a regular mode of communication for God.

5) Give Thanks. Write and Test: Thank God for being present during the listening prayer practice. Take note of what you believe God is saying to you, reflect on it and test it against Scripture and within a communal setting.