

3 Sure Signs You're Actively Listening to God's Voice

There are two kinds of listening: active listening and passive listening.

By passive listening, I mean when we suddenly, unexpectedly hear the voice of God without planning it or seeking it. If there is a combination of a good knowledge of God's Word plus obedience, then the ecstatic breakthrough may come and come quite unexpectedly.

Most of us want only passive listening. We want God to seek us out. That way we don't work hard at hearing God, but when He taps us on the shoulder, we say, "Praise the Lord! He's still speaking to me."

But God calls us to active listening: "Hear what the Spirit says ..." (see Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22). The writer to the Hebrews said, "But solid food belongs to those who are mature, for those who through practice have powers of discernment that are trained to distinguish good from evil" (Heb. 5:14). Exercised senses come through active listening.

The first quality required for active listening is an open mind. That means a mind closed to nothing that coheres with holiness. Paul says about this, "Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

The second prerequisite for active listening is a willingness to let go of our pride, a willingness to be vulnerable. Jesus said to the church of the Laodiceans, "For you say, 'I am rich, and have stored up goods, and have need of nothing,'"

and the truth is, says Jesus, "you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). I sometimes think that revival will break out when Christians are willing to lose face. Jesus said, "He who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39b).

The third characteristic is that we are always listening out for God's voice, even when this involves a telling-off. Jesus said, "Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19). God may speak to us through a friend or a stranger, through unanswered prayer, or through the withholding of vindication. It may be through illness. It may be through a hymn. It may be through disappointment. It can be simply because you see the need. If we are really walking in the light, we will look anywhere for God's way of speaking.

The fourth prerequisite to hearing God is that we deal with any impediment that militates against the Spirit—for example, any personal bias which we superimpose upon God, calling it His will when it's actually our own prejudice, and any grudge or unforgiving attitude. We may justify our hurt and say that God is angry too. We may think He is because that's the way we want Him to feel, but He's not going to bend the rules for us, even if we are in the right. Total forgiveness is our only way out. If we walk in the light, we are going to have to forgive. If we don't forgive, there will be uncleansed sin.

Another impediment that militates against hearing God speaking is when we superimpose our traditions upon the Word of God. This is what the Pharisees did when they made the word of God of no effect through their traditions (Matt. 16:6).

Again, we must beware of any fleshly appetite that dulls our spiritual outlook: It may be a television program, our choice of reading, or our choice of friends. Some things may not be bad in themselves, but we know that they dull our desire for God. Though others may think we are silly, we know that if we

want to hear God's voice consistently and clearly, we must be willing to give some things up.

Finally, as we have already seen, we must obey that impulse of the Spirit which we know leads to holiness and brings honor and glory to God. If we don't obey, we become hard of hearing and gradually don't hear God saying, "This is the way, walk in it" (Isa. 30:21b).

Active listening is reading the Bible without feeling any inspiration. There are times when we don't feel like reading the Bible. We think, "Oh, Lord, I don't want to read Your Word today." But we go on and read God's Word in spite of our feelings, because Paul said, "Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2b). When we learn to develop a lifestyle of active listening, we will hear God's voice much more frequently than before because now we are beginning to recognize when He speaks. {eoa}

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