

5 Ways to Listen to God

I work with many leadership teams, including pastors, prayer ministry teams, missions teams, etc. about hearing from God together for next steps ... for decision making and road maps into the future of kingdom work, etc. Of course, without each individual practicing the spiritual discipline of listening prayer first, the corporate exercise of listening cannot be fully realized. Lisa Swanson has defined listening prayer as "the practice of the presence of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

The apostle John fully understood the importance of listening prayer. It would follow that the one whom Jesus loved was the one who was most in tune with His divine heartbeat. John listened to the words of Jesus as He described on multiple occasions how He discerned what to teach, say and do from the Father, just as we are to also hear from, and respond to the voice of the Father and the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit:

In John 7:16, Jesus says, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me." This was in response to the questions of the Jews, amazed at the profound teachings of Jesus, who had not been formally educated.

In John 5:19 we read: "Then Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do. For whatever He does, likewise the Son does.'"

Seeing with the eyes of the Spirit can only be done when one spends time in silence and solitude before God. Jesus and the Father were in continual communication as Jesus moved through His days on earth, carefully representing the perfect will of God.

John also described how we, His people, are to listen so that

we will be able to easily identify the voice of Jesus: “But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and he leads them out. When he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them. And the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him. For they do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:3-5). This passage clearly shows how we can easily be led astray or confused if we do not take time to know the voice of our Shepherd.

Based on these Scriptures and others, we can assume that Jesus never acted independently of His Father and that His example should teach us how to relate more fully to God. Listening prayer will keep us in a posture of humility before God which will protect us from acting out of our own selfish desires. It enables us to be willing to lay down our own plans and preferences in favor of God’s kingdom purposes.

The difficulty? It takes time to listen. The benefit? There is much fruit that springs from listening prayer. When we are willing to give up our agenda for the sake of His plans, He is pleased to move in and through us to accomplish His work. Most of all, the deepening of our relationship with God happens when prayer is not just words on our part. He is able to transform us when we are in a posture of listening, of seeking, of desiring more of Himself and the revelation of His character.

Simple Instructions for Listening:

1. Find a quiet space where you will not be disturbed.
2. If necessary to keep your focus, light a candle to represent the presence of the Holy Spirit, or put a picture of Jesus, the cross, or whatever will represent the one to whom you are listening. If your thoughts begin to wander, use these visuals to keep your attention on the Father.

3. Simply pray as Samuel was instructed to do: "Speak Lord, for Your servant is listening."
4. Don't have grand expectations as to what you will hear ahead of time. Come simply to be in His presence, loving and being loved.
5. Keep a journal and a pen handy in case there is something that needs to be recorded.

This process can also be done corporately! However, if each individual does not willingly submit to Christ through listening, unity in decision making and reaching consensus and/or compromise is much harder to achieve. The spiritual discipline of listening prayer is not an easy one, but it will eventually bear the kind of fruit that will change you, your team(s) and your church in such significant ways that the world will know that God sent His Son for us.

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