

Learn to Hear His Voice Clearly

If you want to hear God clearly, you must reject the voices that distract and distort His Word.

Many voices clamor for our attention in the course of every day. Whether they are voices from our places of employment, our homes or our social lives—they are vying for our time and attention. None of them are without significance.

But we have to be able to discern the voice that is from God. We must guard our ears from the distractions that seek to drown out His gentle voice.

Jesus emphasized how important listening is when He said, “‘If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear’” (Mark 4:23, NKJV). But He also warned us to be discerning: “‘Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given’” (v. 24).

How often have you walked into your house and called for your teenager, only to realize the CD player was turned up so loud your teen could not hear you? No matter how loudly you screamed, it was impossible to get your teen’s attention over the clamor of that noise.

The same is true in your relationship with God. Many times our “stuff” is turned up so loud that when He comes to visit and speak vision to us, we cannot hear His voice.

Let’s discuss a few things that hinder our ability to hear.

Mediocrity. The word “mediocre” comes from a Latin word that means “to go halfway up the mountain.” It denotes something that is done in a halfway manner. Mediocrity is an attitude of the heart.

Too often Christians are satisfied with what they have and do not reach for anything more. Their contentment becomes a place of containment.

Your satisfaction with the status quo becomes a barrier to your listening heart. Rather than being “quick to hear,” you become quick to justify your ineffectiveness and spiritualize your barrenness!

God has called you to be exceptional. When you continue to flounder in the land of “Barely Enough,” you are robbing God of His investment and yourself of your destiny. God’s standard for His creation is excellence. If you accept anything less, you have chosen to live below your privilege as a child of God.

Maybe someone once said to you, “You can’t do that.” When those words were spoken, zap! a stake was driven in your mind, and you began setting your vision by the limiting words of that statement.

Friend, God is not intimidated by your limitations. He already knows what they are, why they exist and where they are located. He is big enough to change your weaknesses into strengths.

God delights in giving you a dream that is too big for you to do in your own might. He wants you to get excited about His plan for your life and to take the leap of faith that will move you into the awkwardness of knowing, “If God doesn’t come through for me, I am finished!”

Familiarity. The Bible tells us that when Jesus went to Nazareth, “He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching” (Mark 6:5-6).

Jesus’ ministry had begun to explode in popularity. Tremendous

signs and wonders were being done in many cities. But when Jesus came to His own hometown, suddenly the meetings changed.

What happened? Didn't Jesus have the same anointing in Nazareth as He had in other cities? Were there too many strongholds in Nazareth? Wasn't the worship good enough?

What happened in Nazareth is a common occurrence. The people could not get beyond their familiarity. Jesus was too much of an everyday commodity. They knew His family and His previous place of employment—His life was an open book to them. And because of it, they could not "hear Him."

Has God ever used one of your closest friends to speak a word of promise to you that could change your life forever, but you were unable to hear it because it came through a familiar vessel? Undoubtedly you were totally unaware that your friend's speaking was a moment of destiny.

Have you remained locked up in everyday cycles of familiarity? If so, break free of your routine! Consciously develop a habit of listening for anything new.

Traditions. Jesus berated the religious leaders of His day for following their traditions rather than God's Word: "'Laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men ... making the word of God of no effect through your tradition'" (Mark 7:8-13).

When we insist, as the scribes and Pharisees did, on hearing the Word through the smoke screen of our own traditional beliefs and viewpoint, we nullify its truth. Tradition affects our hearing.

Isn't it amazing that the Pharisees had spent their entire lives looking for a Messiah, yet when He showed up they couldn't see or hear Him because He did not come as they had expected Him to come? Isn't it also likely that there are people today who respond in the same way? God intends to work

through these churches and individuals mightily, molding them into vessels for His purposes and plans. But their religious formulas continue to get in the way of their “hearing.”

Our worldview is being confronted. Whether it happens over racial issues that have divided our society or over the involvement of women in ministry, tradition is being challenged. Don't allow the power of tradition to keep you from living your life according to the principles found in the Word of God.

Hurts and offenses. Proverbs 18:19 says, “A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city.” This is because wounded people build formidable walls around their hearts.

The problem is that when wounds and hurts enter your heart, you begin to shut down your capacity for listening. It then is easy to become preoccupied with who is to blame for those wounds and hurts rather than hearing what is needed to be free.

If you live very long, someone is going to hurt you. That is a reality of life. Jesus said, “‘It is impossible that no offenses should come'” (Luke 17:1).

Sometimes offenses are deliberately inflicted upon another person, and at other times they occur accidentally. Either way, your ability to handle them properly will determine how successful you are at having a listening heart.

What do you do? Begin by endeavoring to clear the airwaves. Pursue the one who offended you and seek reconciliation.

Don't allow your hurts to drive you inward, causing you to be self-centered and self-protective. God is still at work in your life to bring you to His desired end. Let Him.

Pride. Pride is like bad breath—when you have it no one will tell you that you have it; they just stop coming around. Pride

is a killer to the listening heart.

Many times God wants us to break through to new places in His kingdom, but our pride hinders us from hearing the simplistic commands He gives. We are waiting on God to give us some difficult assignment or impossible task to prove our worth. But all God wants is our obedient response to His voice of invitation.

Maybe God has been asking you to give Him the first 30 minutes of your day. Maybe He wants you to lay down your image and worship Him with passion and expression.

It could be that He wants you to honor Him with 10 percent of your resources. Or perhaps He is asking you to forgive a friend. None of these are difficult challenges, but how often does our pride keep us from hearing them?

Benefits of a Listening Heart

When we are quick to hear and quick to respond, we can expect several things to happen in our lives.

A listening heart will change the atmosphere of our lives. When Nehemiah stood to read the word of the Lord in Nehemiah 8:5, the people stood to their feet to hear the word. They were expectant! As a result, the atmosphere of the city changed from weeping to one of joy! Nehemiah declared, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10).

Hearing God's voice is a great motivator. His words are spirit and life (see John 6:63). The mundane begins to have meaning when you know you have heard from God. The details and difficulties become worthwhile avenues to a desired end.

A listening heart will open doors for us. Have you ever seen an employee who was quick to listen to what his employer was saying and then quick to respond with action? What happens to that employee? He gets promoted. The same will be true in your

life.

A listening heart will give us direction. One of the practical advantages of a listening heart is that it sets the direction for our lives. When we have direction, we know where we are going. Then decision-making becomes much more simplified.

If you hear the voice of God telling you what He desires and wants for your life, it becomes much easier to prioritize and focus your energy.

The challenge for you is to maintain your listening heart. What are you hearing? What voices are clamoring for your attention?

Make a choice today to keep the soil of your inner man clear of obstacles that would hinder you from receiving God's invitation to a life of significance. You may not clear the roadway all at once, but remember the key is to make progress. When you begin to "tune in," God will respond, and you will hear clearly.

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