

“HOW TO LISTEN TO GOD”
by Rom A. Pegram (1/19/20)

Welcome back to Vertical, folks. Today, we’re going to learn ‘how to listen to God.’ I don’t know how good we are at listening, but—if you remember, I talked about this last week. In good relationships, you need a balance of both talking and listening. It’s OK to talk about yourself (pray for yourself), but if it’s a good, balanced relationship, there needs to a degree of listening as well...

One of the things my folks used to tell me had to do with our biological make-up—how God created us. They’d always say, ‘God created you with two ears and one mouth for a reason!’ And we didn’t have to guess what that reason was. But it always amazed me that God, our creator, made us so we could listen more than we talked...

If we learn to listen more than we talk, I know that’d help our human relationships, but this series is about prayer. And that’s a relationship, too. So, it’s a pretty good principle for prayer as well. Folks, *what if we spent more time listening in prayer, instead of just talking in prayer?* What would that be like?

One observation: I’ve noticed that a lot of folks *over-talk* in their prayers. Maybe you’ve been guilty of that, while wanting God to answer your prayers. ‘God, if you just tell me what to do, if you just show me your will, I will be certain to do that! ... God, you are so good. You have been good to me in the past. So, I really want to do your will, God. Just tell me what you want me to do and I’ll do it! In Jesus’ name. Amen.’ And then we walk away ... and wonder why God doesn’t speak to us...

Now, God would never do this, folks, but somehow, I think God must get a bit impatient at times, thinking to himself: “If you’d just be quiet for a moment and listen, maybe I could speak! Maybe I could share my will with you!” Do you think God may feel that way at times?

Folks, remember, *prayer is communicating with God*. Effective communication is a give and receive process. *Sometimes we give*. You can offer your prayer up to God. We talked about that last week—praying for yourself. Today, I want to look at the issue of receiving. *Sometimes we receive*. How do we receive from God?

Well, let’s start with our main prayer verse for today: Psalm 46:10. You guys probably know this one. Let’s say it together. Would you join me? ““Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.” And it’s the first part of that we want to concentrate on today...

This one verse has some very important truths about how God wants to speak to us ... and, particularly, why God wants to speak to us. The *reason* God wants to speak to us is ... *so we can know him better*. “Be still, and *know* that I am God!” God wants you to know him better. Why? It’s so we might become more and more like his son, Jesus—the goal of the Christian life...

So, if the purpose of prayer is to know God better, let me share with you what the purpose of prayer is NOT! The purpose of prayer is NOT that God might know *you* better! You may think: That doesn’t sound very nice! But, remember who your Creator is. God already knows you better than you know yourself! Prayer is not for God’s sake; prayer is for YOUR sake—that you might come to know God better...

Now, some of you are still thinking, ‘Why should I get to know God better?’ It’s a good question ... and there’re some practical benefits of knowing God better...

- ✓ Knowing God better draws you into a lifestyle Jesus called ‘the abundant life’—a life of significance and a life that’s fulfilled...
- ✓ Knowing God better causes the peaks of your life to be higher ... and you have more strength to go through the valleys of your life...

All this comes to you by knowing God better. Folks, we must learn to listen to God! Some of you are waiting for that Charlton Heston or James Earl Jones voice to speak to you, but that rarely happens. What I want to show you today are *other ways God speaks to you* ... and some steps to being a better listener—to truly being still so you can know God is God. So, if you want to be still and listen to God, you must learn to...

SPEND TIME WITH GOD DAILY. And that’s the answer to this question: *How often should I talk to God in prayer?* DAILY...

Here’s what I know about most church people today: The single greatest reason many don’t hear from God is this—*we simply don’t make time to hear God!* The scenario usually goes ... we fail to make time for God to speak to us ...then we get mad at God when he doesn’t!

It’s kind of like God is trying to speak to us, and he’s saying to us ‘if you’ll just slow down long enough, if you’ll just take a moment and catch your breath, I’ll speak into your life, give you guidance, give you assurance, give you insights, and give you direction for your life.’

We don’t hear God because our lives are overly busy; so, we have to schedule time with God. And the Bible tells us that mornings are the best time to meet God—before anything else in our day has managed to get in the way (sorry, if you’re not a morning person). Psalm 143:8 reminds us, “Let me hear of your unfailing love each morning, for I am trusting you. Show me where to walk, for I give myself to you.” This should be our attitude each and every day. It’s been said, ‘The first hour of the day is like a rudder of a ship.’ It’s going to determine where you end up. It’s going to determine your destination at the end of the day. No wonder the Bible says, over and over again, *begin your day with God!*

And, it’s not really a matter of being a morning person ... or being a night person; the issue is really ... *are you a God person?* Do you care enough about your eternal relationship with God to seek him out daily? Scripture guides us on this. By Jesus own example, in Mark 1:35, it says: “Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray.” There was Jesus’ habit. What is your habit in meeting God daily? Folks, if your heart’s desire is to truly hear from God, don’t overlook how you start your day! In John 10:27, Jesus also says: “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” Not only should we listen to God regularly, but regularly enough that we know it’s God speaking to our hearts! Spend time with God daily (whenever your day starts)—reading, studying, and praying; then you have to...

THANK GOD FOR WHAT I HAVE. Listening to God *is being thankful* for what you have! Many of you understand the idea of ‘counting your blessings,’ so I don’t need to say much about this, but here’s the point I do want to make...

There’s a connection between your spiritual ears and your heart. In other words, if you want to learn to hear God, you have to get your heart right! (And if you love the English language like I do, you’ll notice that’s a play on words ... because ‘hear’ and ‘heart’ are very similar—just one letter difference in the English language. The ‘t’ should remind us all of ‘thanksgiving.’) And the Bible talks about this: offering thanksgivings up to God prepares your heart in such a way that *you can hear from God!*

Notice what it says in Psalm 100:4: “Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name.” The imagery here, of course, is that of God as royalty and we, when we’re thankful, get to enter into his throne room—his courts; when we’re thankful, we’re—mysteriously and supernaturally—brought into God’s presence. So, be thankful for something God has done for you ... and amazing things will happen in your spiritual life! You will learn to hear God! Here’s something else you must do. Learn to...

INVESTIGATE THE WAYS GOD SPEAKS TO ME. This is the third way we can learn to listen to God—‘I’ = investigate...

Our sound system here at Trinity UMC uses mostly wireless microphones. The problem with that is ... it works on radio waves. And sitting here this morning, there are radio waves all around us, but we can’t see them or hear them or touch them, but we know they’re there. There’re all kinds of frequencies that carry country, rock & roll, classical, Christian, and truckers going by on the highway. And, every once in a while, our sound system will tune into some of those frequencies and we’ll have bleed over into our system ... and hear what’s on the trucker’s minds. We can’t hear that though until we tune in to those frequencies...

So it is with God. When you investigate the ways God speaks to you, you can then tune in to what God’s saying to you! In fact, the Bible says God’s wired you up in such a way that you can hear from him in various ways. Romans 1:19-20 tells us: “They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them.

²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.” It’s instinctive, isn’t it? God has made himself obvious in so many ways ... so let me talk about them for a moment:

- Nature – God speaks to us through nature (i.e. camping, bonfires, hikes, etc.)...
- People – God speaks to us through other people (besides your pastor)...
- Music – God speaks to us through music. Have you ever had your emotions moved before by music? Music is powerful!
- Movies – If you haven’t seen a Christian movie recently, you’re missing something. Quality-wise, they’ve made leaps and bounds in the past few years. Movies, especially with a Christian emphasis, can really speak to you!

So, one question that comes up often is this: How do you know it's God who is speaking to you? Well, for one thing, God will never contradict himself; whatever you're hearing/sensing, if it's from God it will not go against God's word. Psalm 119:105 says (*read this with me*), "Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path." When God speaks to you, if it's God it will not contradict his Word, the Bible! A couple more things, if you want to learn to hear God, you must learn to...

LEAVE THE NOISE BEHIND. Do you ever have trouble finding a quiet time or a quiet space in your life? Is there something always going on, with no down time? First off, anybody who knows 'healthy' will tell you ... that's not healthy! Besides that, the busyness of life can be a real barrier to hearing God!

In my family, if someone is distracted—for any reason, someone usually says 'squirrel!' It's like you've got your dog out for a walk, trying to keep the dog's attention on where you want to go. Then, a squirrel pops out from behind a tree and the dog ... is suddenly distracted...

Do you ever find it hard to have a conversation, even with those you love, because of distractions (i.e. cell phone)? And it's not just modern technology that distracts us. People and situations—aside from technology—tend to distract us. Jesus experienced that same thing (squirrels in Israel?)...

In Mark 6:31-32, it tells us: "Then Jesus said, 'Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.' He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat.

³² So they left by boat for a quiet place, where they could be alone." And we need to learn to do the same ... if we truly want to hear from God. It's called the practice of solitude; we must learn to leave the noise behind! Finally, if you want to hear from God:

LEARN TO SAY 'YES' BEFORE GOD SPEAKS. This step, folks, is a real step of faith! Jane and I learned to do this when I went back to school at 29 years old, moved my family to Kentucky, switched jobs, and so forth; we learned how powerful this step of faith can be...

Jane and I went down to Kentucky, before I went back to school at Asbury College, to deal with the details of life (i.e. check out schooling, find a job, etc.). I hadn't sung in 10 years, since I dropped out of music school at 18 years old—not seriously anyway. I didn't know what else to do, since God had called me into the ministry, so I auditioned for their music department at Asbury College. And I was the one who'd been employed for several years, while Jane raised children, so I had to look for employment too—to take care of our family...

I remember it like it was yesterday. We stayed at the guest house at the college, and, in our room there, we began to pray together. We prayed for my audition. We began to pray for a job. The family had to be supported. We could probably do without insurance if we had to. We knew lots of non-traditional students who were in that boat. But we began to pray. And how we prayed was this: *We began to thank God for what God was going to do in our lives!* We had that much faith. We thanked God for helping

me through this audition, which seemed impossible at the time. We thanked God for the new job he was going to provide ... and, the way we prayed, it was like saying 'yes' to God before God even spoke to us. 'Yes, God. We believe you can, and you will provide for us, as you've called us to this life of ministry...' That was our reality at the time.

Long story short, I passed the audition with flying colors! And little did I know that a semester later, I'd be a Bible major instead of a music major, but that's how God worked it out. And the third place I went to interview ... I had a job before I left. The man who would become my boss came out to the car and met Jane; I introduced him as my new boss. And the job, folks, came with insurance for my family. That's how God answers prayer and will speak to you when you say 'yes' to God first!

I'm reminded of Isaiah 55:8-9: "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. ⁹ For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." Those who aren't believers wouldn't understand this. But, in faith, know that when you say 'yes' to God first, you will hear from God!

Do you want to hear from God? Remember, prayer's about both giving and receiving. It's about offering God our prayers, and listening for that still, small voice to speak to our hearts. And God does this in a variety of ways (I'll let you copy these ideas down):

- Impressions in our soul—intuitive leadings from our times of prayer...
- Insights into scripture – hearing God's leading as you read his word...
- Promptings in your spirit – the Holy Spirit nudge, as I call it...
- Callings on your life – the big speaks, when God speaks to you (quit your job and go back to school; I need you in ministry, etc.)...

Look at what this last verse says in your notes (Romans 8:28): "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." My life, folks, (and Jane's) stands as a testimony to this verse! You can trust God. You can count on God in your life. But you have to learn this 'other part of prayer.' This is part of a balanced relationship with God. You have to learn to listen—to hear the still, small voice of God ... if you want to be more & more like Jesus! So, in your prayer life, have you learned to listen to God?