

HEARING GOD SPEAK

- Prayer is the key to hearing God's voice

1 Thessalonians 5:17 – “Pray without ceasing”.

Now how on earth can you do that? Why is God asking us to do the impossible? Or, is it possible to so? Well, I believe the answer lies in the definition of prayer. People normally define prayer as, simply, talking to God. But I have learnt that prayer exceeds merely talking to God. Prayer involves an actual dialogue, conversation, communion or interaction with Him.

- Prayer is a **dialogue – a two-way communication** – not a monologue.

Hence the command to pray without ceasing means to be in constant communion with God. To pray without ceasing involves 3 things

1. Talking to God
2. Listening to him – John 10:10
3. Obedience – Acting on what we hear

How Do We Know?

If prayer is a two-way communication, does God speak to us? Yes, God speaks and is constantly speaking to us. We know that God speaks to us because:

1. He is our Father. Most fathers speak to their children and God is no different.
2. Prayer is communication, and communication is a two-way interaction, so God speaks to us, just as we speak to Him.
3. The bible tells us that God wants us to speak to Him so that He can speak to us.

Jeremiah 33:3

“Ask me and I will tell you remarkable secrets you do not know about things to come.”

Some People God Spoke to in the Bible

It is very clear from the scriptures that God speaks to His people. God has been speaking since the beginning of creation.

- In Genesis 1, God spoke to bring all of creation into existence.
- He spoke to Adam, Eve and Noah in the Book of Genesis.
- He spoke to Abraham and the other patriarchs.
- He spoke to Job in his times of trouble
- God spoke to and through the judges, kings, and prophets.
- God was in Jesus Christ speaking to the disciples.
- The Lord spoke to Apostle Paul
- God also spoke to the early Church.

BARRIERS TO HEARING GOD SPEAK

“The biggest communication problem is that we do not listen to understand, we listen to reply”

What are some the things that stop us from hearing God speak? There are many barriers to effective communication in any relationship, which also apply to our communication with God. Barriers to hearing God speak include:

1. **Listening** – many of us just don’t know how to listen. See above quote
2. **Time** – listening requires time which we often claim we don’t have or can’t make for prayer. A busy lifestyle and schedule, filled with programmes and commitments could be a hindrance.
3. **Choice and priority.** Listening is a deliberate choice to shut out everything and focus your thoughts on what another person (God) is saying. Many don’t make that a priority.
4. **Self-focus** – being more interested in what we have to say than what God has to say.
5. **Distance** – How near or far we are away from God determines how clearly we hear. The closer we draw near to Him, the more we are able to discern and hear His voice.
6. **Interferences and distractions.** What ‘noises’ interfere with our hearing?
 - Cares of the world, unbelief, doubt and lack of faith
 - Verbal clutter – we talk and talk and don’t listen.
 - Worry, fear, anger, grief and depression
 - A cluttered mind – constantly buzzing with plans, dreams, schemes and anxieties (difficult to clear and focus).
7. **Lack of focus and concentration.** Preoccupation, boredom and low attention spans, apathy and indifference
8. **Lack of knowledge and understanding** of God’s word. This produces lack of faith.
9. **Language and terminology** and Lack of clarity. – understanding what God is saying.
10. **Familiarity** – pre-empting what God has to say. Also, individual bias and prejudice causes us to ‘cut off’ and not listen.
11. **Hopes and expectations** – when God does not speak or answer the way we want or expect Him to, we tend not to listen to what He’s actually saying.
12. **Negative or bad experience.**
13. **Sin, disobedience and rebellion** – Waxed or blocked ears, hardness, dullness or deafness of ears. Itching Ears – 2 Timothy 4:3; Jeremiah 6:10
14. **Modern technology** – these often undermine our listening capacity. Emails, text messages, social networks, have replaced face-to-face meetings and telephone conversations (which are priceless listening opportunities).

Isaiah 30:18-19

“So, the LORD must wait for you to come to Him so He can show you His love and compassion. For the LORD is a faithful God. Blessed are those who wait for His help. O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. He will be gracious if you ask for help. He will surely respond to the sound of your cries.”

BENEFITS OF HEARING GOD SPEAK

- Job 33:14-18

We benefit from listening and hearing God speak to us. Some of the benefits are:

- A sense of purpose and clarity of direction. (*Psalm 25:4,5; Proverbs 3:5,6*)
- Keeps us from sinning (*Psalm 119:11; 25:8*)
- We get to know God's thoughts and plans for us. (*Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 139:17-18*)
- Affirmation and assurance of God's presence and protection (*Psalm 91:15*)
- Assurance of God's provision and blessing (*Joshua 1:7,8; Proverbs 8:34*)
- Comfort, assurance and peace (*Psalm 23*)
- Knowing Him better and more intimately (*John 15:15*).
- Answered prayer (*John 15:7-8*)
- Confidence and encouragement to do great things for God (*Daniel 11:32b*).
- God is pleased when we know and understand Him (*Jeremiah 9:24*)
- We become more effective in prayer, especially in intercession, as we join with Him in affecting people's lives and the world
- We do not get easily deceived – (*John 10:3-5*)

It is, therefore, important for us not only to talk to God, but also, to learn how to discern His voice and know how He speaks to us.

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US

“Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left”. – Isaiah 30:21

Hear:

- To hear, listen to, obey.
- To perceive by ear, to understand, to consent, to yield to.
- To hear in Hebrew concept, simply means to listen and obey.
- Therefore, to hear is to respond in active obedience.

WAYS IN WHICH GOD SPEAKS TO US

1. The Bible

The bible is the primary and most usual way in which God speaks to us. Anything else we hear from God MUST tally with the scriptures otherwise it MUST be rejected.

2 Timothy 3:16

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”

To learn to hear God speak, we must begin to read the Bible daily and regularly, since it is the Word of God.

These are some of the ways in which God speaks to us through His word:

- a. As you read and study the Bible and begin to understand it, the Holy Spirit reveals truth to you. As you obey and adjust your life to the truth you received, you are drawn closer to God, which makes you discern His voice even better.
- b. Another way is that during prayer or a time of waiting on the Lord, a particular scripture might spring to mind. As you read, study and/or meditate on it, the Lord begins to show you His will and mind through that particular scripture.
- c. Also, you may hear a sermon and reference is made to a particular scripture which instantly, registers on your heart and addresses an area of your life.

2. Jesus Christ – The Word of God

Another way in which God speaks to us is through His Son Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God.

- **Read: John 1:1-14; Read: Hebrews 1:1-4**

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...” - Hebrews 1:1-2

John 14:10

“Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.”

God speaks to us through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The more we learn about Jesus, the more we know the Father’s heart, will and mind towards us. The more we pattern our lives after Jesus, the more in tune we become with God.

- The most important message God gave to us through Jesus Christ is, “GOD LOVES YOU!”

3. The Holy Spirit (See Session 4)

1 Corinthians 2:10-12

“...For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”

- God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit – Acts 13:2
- The Holy Spirit teaches us and helps us to know and understand the word of God. – Nehemiah 9:20; John 16:13; John 14:26
- The Holy Spirit brings a revelation to you as you pray and fast, or as you meditate on God’s word – Acts 13:2
- He leads, prompts or nudges our spirits/hearts to God’s word and will – Romans 8:14
- He makes a scripture come alive, and you know God is speaking to you –
- The Holy Spirit helps us in prayer by showing us the mind and will of Christ – Romans 8:26-27

4. Peace – An Inner Witness

Philippians 4:6-7

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

- An indescribable peace settles on your heart when God speaks in confirmation to you.
- Restlessness and lack of peace in your heart often tells you the contrary.

The Still Small Voice

- Elijah sought to hear God speak through the wind, earthquake and fire, but He spoke through the still small voice. – 1 Kings 19:11-13

5. Prophecy – Message Or Word From Other People

1 Corinthians 14:3

“But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.”

- Prophetic word, or scripture, etc

- A word of encouragement
- A word of knowledge or Word of wisdom
- All of these, however, must tally with the written word of God.

6. Dreams And Visions

Some dreams may be nothing more than the food we ate the night before or the result of a very active mind. However, God often speaks to us through dreams. Dreams and visions are an important part of the promised latter day outpouring.

Joel 2:28

“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.”

- A vision is a vivid mental picture, through which God speaks to us. It is often a picture or image which is imprinted or flashes in your mind regarding someone, something, an issue or situation. This often prompts us to pray, act or intervene
- However, a vision could also be an open one where what is shown is not just an image but a real experience of the spirit realm. This is not very common but happens. Paul experienced it in Acts 9.
- **Read: 2 Kings 6:15-18.**
- Most people find it hard to interpret their dreams, however, we can rely on the Holy Spirit or ask mature Christians with the gift and ability to interpret dreams. Not every dream is a word from the Lord. Hence, the need to pray and ask the Holy Spirit for discernment

7. Experiences and Circumstances

God speaks to us in our everyday lives and through our experiences and circumstances. However, these by themselves cannot be our guide. Every experience must be interpreted and understood by the scriptures and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Seeking to know God's will based on your circumstances alone can be misleading. Your experience is valid only as it is confirmed in the Scriptures.

Whenever you find yourself in difficult or confusing circumstances, go to prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you through the Word of God, in order to get God's perspective. You cannot know the truth of any circumstance until you have heard from God.

- Our experience of answered prayer sometimes tells us the mind and will of God. When we receive the things we have prayed and asked for, we know that God is saying “Yes!”

8. Angels

Angelic visitations are rare, but, there now appears to be an increasing number of people who assert to have been visited by an angel. The angel brings a specific and direct message from the Lord

- Hagar – *Genesis 16:7-14*
- Zechariah (Father of John the Baptist) – *Luke 1:11-20*
- Mary, mother of Jesus – *Luke 1:26-38*
- Mary Magdalene after Jesus' resurrection – *Matthew 28:1-7*
- Peter and the other apostles in prison – *Acts 5:17-21*

9. Audibly

This is not a normal or usual way in which God speaks, but it has happened before.

- Young Samuel – *1 Samuel 3:1-14*
- The Baptism of Jesus – *Matthew 3:16-17; Luke 3:21-22*
- The Transfiguration of Jesus – *Matthew 17:5*
- Apostle Paul's (Saul) Damascus experience – *Acts 9:1-9*

10. Fleeces

Some people put 'fleeces' before God to determine what He is saying, and God in His mercy may speak through that. When we put 'fleeces' before God, we are seeking to know His will in a matter by asking Him to arrange circumstances to show us His response to our question. Gideon did that in Judges 6.

Judges 6:17

"Gideon replied, 'If now I have found favour in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me.'

However, Gideon lay out His fleeces in doubt and unbelief, and not faith. This is not one of the best ways in which God speaks to us.

Finally...

This is not a comprehensive list of the ways in which God speaks to us. God is still speaking and may speak to us through any means He wants/chooses to. He is sovereign and decides how He wants to speak to us. Our privilege is to discern His voice and obey Him.

Some biblical examples of unusual ways in which God spoke:

- Through a donkey – *Numbers 22*
- A shaking and trembling mountain and the sound of trumpet – *Exodus 19:16-19*
- Urim and Thummin – *Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65*
- Casting lots – *Acts 1:23-26*

However, whatever you believe to have heard from God must correspond with His written Word. The Bible is, therefore, the yardstick with which we judge the accuracy of what we have heard. God will not contradict His written word.