

Listening to God sounds easy but, as the Israelites showed us, it is harder than it looks. How can we become better listeners? Is there anything different about being a good listener to God? How would our lives change if we became better listeners? Let's spend some time this week answering these questions.

Day 1

Pay Attention

Spending any real time listening to God in our modern world is not an easy undertaking. In our times of prayer, it is important to listen as well as to speak, usually listening by accepting the answer God gives to our prayer. When the answer is no, that is just as much of an answer as when He says yes, even though we think of it as God not answering our prayers. Why was the no a no? What can we learn about God through this answer of no, and are we willing to hear it and accept it as an answer of love? In addition, listening to the word of God is not easy. We find it hard to set aside times to read and meditate on the word of God and to apply it to our lives. We can set aside times in bible studies and sermons, and that should make it easier but mental distractions can leave us thinking about upcoming events in our lives or the fact that we just noticed that the media screen isn't exactly straight in the sanctuary and we wonder how long it has been like that and why we never noticed it before. The more pressing problem of listening is engaging with what is being said, applying it to our lives, thinking of ways to connect the truth we are hearing with other truths, and finding the message that God has for us that isn't merely a reflection of our desires and a deflection of the truth God wants us to see. Most of the time the message that God has for us is a combination of love and conviction. God loves us enough to bring to our attention things that are out of alignment with Him, but our fallen nature prevents us from hearing what could be a loving truth that transforms us and instead we think of our disagreement with the pastor, how our friend should really hear this message because they really need it, or we think of something else entirely. The art of paying attention is difficult, but yields abundant fruit.

Verses: Proverbs 1:5; Proverbs 25:12; James 1:19, Proverbs 22:17

Prayer Topics: Listening, Attention, Focus, Humility, Motivation, Blessing, Joy

Day 2

Context

To hear God is most often the ability to read and understand His word. This seems very straight forward but seemingly simple things are not beyond our ability to mess up. One way this often happens is when we have a specific question and we go to scripture to answer it. There are dozens of times I have spoken with people who were facing a specific decision or problem and listened to them describe seeing a verse that really spoke to them. Sometimes these verses were appropriate to their situation and sometimes they weren't. The problem is that these verses, taken out of their context, can lead us to believe they mean something that they don't. God said what he said in the bible to specific people in a specific circumstance. There is always something you can learn from scripture, but certain scriptures are not always an answer to your questions. The bible is not a magic 8 ball, and cannot be consulted as one. The purpose of scripture is not necessarily to answer all of your questions, but to lead you into a relationship with God that makes you wise and able to handle all the circumstances of life. Relationship is the context of scripture. Like a child asking you how to be an adult, not everything has a straightforward answer. Sometimes the answer is for the child to spend formative years walking and talking with their parent to become wise and able to handle the challenges of adulthood. Recently I spoke to Chad about preparing people for tests and about the difference between tests and the thing the tests are testing. Integrated knowledge and competence are not something that cramming for a test

produces, but if you are competent and knowledgeable you will pass the test. To hear God's voice is not a momentary action we take when we have a problem, but a relationship we engage in until we are complete, lacking nothing. The process of gaining wisdom and maturity is not a quick or easy one, but it begins right now, where you are.

Verses: John 1:1-5, Hebrews 4:12; Psalm 119

Prayer Topics: Word of God, Inspiration of Scripture, Obedience, Love, Joy

Day 3

Be Open

Perhaps the hardest part of listening to God is the ability to be open. Being open means allowing God to say whatever He needs to say to you. It is easy to fool myself into thinking I am open, but reality shows something different. Have you ever noticed it is easier to see someone else's faults than our own faults? If we were really open with God this would not be the case. We spend more time with ourselves than anyone else, and yet we are surprisingly blind to the reality of who we are and what our faults are. Remember you are doing it wrong, that is why you need God. Let Him show you where you are wrong, don't close your eyes to the best that He can give you. It is always interesting to me that Israel cried out to God for salvation and then argued with Him all the way to the promised land. That is exactly how it is. The most helpful conversations with God are the arguments, where he shows us something that is truly surprising about who we are and what needs to change. Don't expect God to say what the culture says. If we are only open to things that are culturally acceptable, we don't need God, we already have one. Why should we be open to God when he might say something I dislike, something I disagree with, or something that is not culturally sensitive? Because His glory will elude us if we are not open to hearing it. If all we want is an echo chamber of what we already believe, God is of no use to us. The glory of the love of God awaits us, let's not throw it away because it's unexpected.

Verses: James 4:7, Romans 8:7, Romans 13

Prayer Topics: Love, Submission, Obedience, Humility, Reverence, Respect

Day 4

Meditate

Meditation is a vital part of listening to God. Meditation requires mulling what God has said repeatedly, seeing His word to us in light of our lives and in light of His love. First, we must understand what God has said in light of His love. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden they hid from God's presence and made fig leaf clothing to hide their inadequacy from Him. When the Israelites heard God's voice in the wilderness, they begged Moses to listen to God for them because they found His voice terrifying. Because of our sin we tend to ignore anything that shows our sin, and to seek out things that build us up even when untrue. It's only the love of God displayed to us in the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins that allows us to deal with the gulf between who we are and who we should be. It is the love of God that allows us to celebrate Him with joy even in the midst of understanding our sins and shortfalls. It is the love of God that allows us to see our lives in light of His word, that gives us the confidence to know what needs to be transformed and how long that transformation may take, but to proceed living our lives with joy nonetheless. Meditation allows us to extract every morsel of glory out of his word, to savor it and the salvation it brings. Spend some time today meditating on His word to you.

Verses: Psalm 19:14, Joshua 1:8, Psalm 63:6, Psalm 49:3

Prayer Topics: Consideration, Meditation, Reflection, Obedience, Joy, Love

Day 5

Act

Listening to God is not complete until we act. Our role as priests and kings on the earth is to make manifest the love and will of God through our actions. Scripture tells us that to hear the word and not act on it is like seeing yourself in the mirror and then immediately forgetting what you look like. Our role as Christians, as followers of Christ, is to make the word flesh like he did, to transform our lives and our world, to cooperate with the Spirit to make both glorious in His image. We have no higher purpose or calling. In what areas of your life is your listening incomplete? Is there anything that you could joyfully do today to change that? What would your life look like if you completed listening just in the areas you already know? Would it be a better life than you have now? Would it be worth the effort? Do you have something better to do? Just do it then.

Verses: John 14:15, 1 John 2:3, Luke 11:28, Exodus 19:5

Prayer Topics: Service, Love, Obedience, Hearing, Vision, Energy, Worship