

Hearing God A model for Conversational Prayer

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The Holy Spirit loves to teach! One of His most important ministries is to be your personal Mentor in regard to life. He especially wants to teach you in regard to your own heart and the things that get in the way of living life the way God intended: distorted images of yourself, distorted images of who God is, distorted ideas of how life works in the Kingdom, and confusion about love and relationships. Like any good mentor, He wants to engage with you in the process of discovery, not just hand you black and white answers about everything. So “listening” can be a very active process. As the Spirit of Truth, He can speak Truth that is transformational, most notably during “teachable moments” of life. Examples of teachable moments are:

1. when emotions run high
2. during periods of intense confusion
3. when you set aside time for the purpose of engaging with Him

The following model offers a simple means of engaging in dialogue with God that most people find quite helpful. Please be aware that listening to God and having two-way conversations with Him is a learned process that will grow with time, and is impacted by a variety of maturity factors. Allow yourself the grace to be uncertain at times, and to acknowledge when listening to God seems difficult.

Hearing God involves all four of the facets discussed on the following page. While we must almost always begin with Quieting and Focusing, the process of engaging with God involves all four areas, flowing back and forth in a rather fluid motion. As you learn to pay attention to what is going on as you are listening to God, you may find yourself drawn more toward one area at any given moment. It is usually important to follow this leading rather than attempt to hold to any rigid format.

A great way to begin this process is to ask God to open the Word to you as you read (Ps.119:18). A good place to start is with one of the following passages that are rich in the messages about who we are in God's eyes and what he has given to us for life.

Isaiah 55, Psalms 23, 27, 84, 100, and 139, John 14-17, Ephesians 1-4, and Colossians 1-3

For further reading on listening to God, we also suggest the following books:

Dallas Willard: *Hearing God*

Lays out a theological basis for listening to God in the present day, describes what it is like to hear God's voice, and discusses various issues surrounding this topic.

Mark and Patti Virkler: *Dialogue With God*

An easy-to-read read, step-by-step mentoring on how to engage in 2-way prayer.

Includes ideas on how to overcome obstacles. Available from:

www.cwgministries.org

1. Quieting and Focusing

Goal here is to put your mind in a state that is receptive. This is not an Eastern exercise of emptying your mind completely, but a way of allowing God to fill your mind with his presence, and reduce the amount of “static” that keeps you from hearing your deepest thoughts. For those who can go to rest easily, simply quiet down, take a few deep breaths, and let go of all distractions. For those who have difficulty with this, try walking around in a relatively peaceful area, where there are relatively few distractions. This can help absorb the physical energy so you can focus better.

Use your imagination to place yourself somewhere with Jesus: for example, on a hillside near Jerusalem, or walking alongside you. Pray a short sentence prayer for His voice, and accept by faith that your primary source will be the Holy Spirit.

2. Listening

God’s voice most often comes to us in the form of spontaneous thoughts rather than in audible tones. Prepare yourself to pay attention to your body, your emotional reactions, the Spirit of God, and your spontaneous thoughts. This is mostly about receiving or being led through a process, not analyzing a text or relying on your powers of reason. Begin your discussion with God, and ask Him about a word or phrase you have read in Scripture that caught your attention, or ask Him any question for which you would like His mentoring and teaching (not a yes/no question). For example, “God, what do I need to know today about my relationship to You?”

Either write out (if sitting) or carry on the conversation vocally (if pacing), writing or speaking whatever comes to you. If your sense is more of a dialogue than just thoughts, then write or speak both sides of the conversation. Do not worry too much about whether the thoughts originate with you or God. *The goal is not to be able to quote God but to engage with Him.* Feel free to ask further clarifying questions and to say what you currently believe about the issue at hand. Be honest about your reactions, and be open to spontaneous thoughts that see the issue differently than what you might have predicted or thought proper.

3. Discerning

Not everything that goes through your mind originates with God. Be aware of when you are clearly working things through on your own. Allow the Spirit to prompt you when your thoughts stray too much, and be willing to question things that sound a bit odd theologically. Go back to earlier points in your discussion to get back on track. Ask some of the questions again if necessary.

After the flow quiets down, go over your conversation and ask God to draw you to whatever it is that He wants you to learn from this. It is not always necessary to identify who said what. Rather, tune in to whatever God wants you to take away from the conversation. Be open to asking a trusted friend or your community for help discerning whether or not what you received came from God.

4. Responding

You may feel led to pray a prayer of thanksgiving, of forgiveness, of repentance, for encouragement, strength, resolve, or to take action in some area of your life. If you received some enlightening truth or rich phrase, consider writing it out somewhere to remind you in the coming days.