

Going Deeper **LISTENING TO GOD**



Discipleship
Course

HOW CAN I EXPERIENCE GOD?

Section 1: GOD SPEAKS

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WHY LISTEN TO GOD?

God Wants A Love Relationship With His Children

Perhaps the main reason for listening to God is because he wants to have a real relationship with us as our heavenly Father, who loves us and created us for fellowship with him.

Just as it is difficult to imagine a loving human father who does not want to speak to and listen to his children sharing their joys and sorrows, so it is inconceivable that a God of love would not want to listen to and communicate with his children.

Jesus Promised His Sheep Hear His Voice

Of course to hear God speaking to us as his children, we need to be sure we are his children. In **JOHN 3:3, 5-6** Jesus said: "I tell you the truth. No one can see the kingdom of God unless s/he is born anothen....again or from above.....I tell you the truth. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

In **JOHN 10:27** Jesus said: *"My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me."*

To be one of Jesus' sheep, I need to have had a supernatural encounter with God through faith in Jesus as the only way to receive God's Holy Spirit.

Questions

Q When was the last time you heard God speaking to you?

Q If you have never heard God speaking to you, are you one of Jesus' sheep?

GOD CREATED US FOR RELATIONSHIP

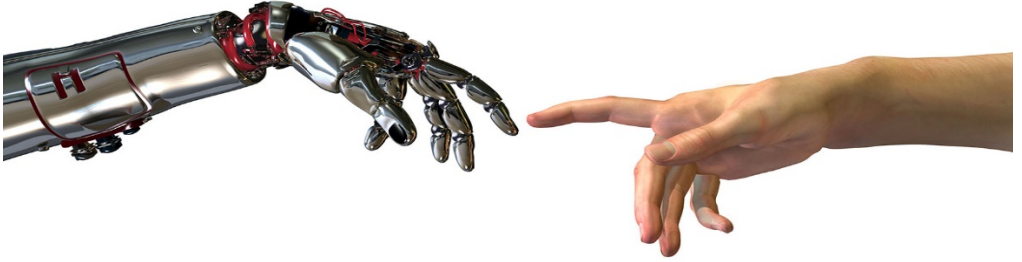


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God Did Not Create Us As Robots

When God created the first human beings in the Garden of Eden, he created them for perfect fellowship with him. Even when Adam and Eve rebelled against God's instructions and that perfect relationship was broken, God still wanted to have fellowship with his children.

He could have created robots to do whatever he ordered. Instead he created human beings with free will to choose to respond to his love or not because you don't get love from robots.

Free Will To Choose To Listen To God Or Not

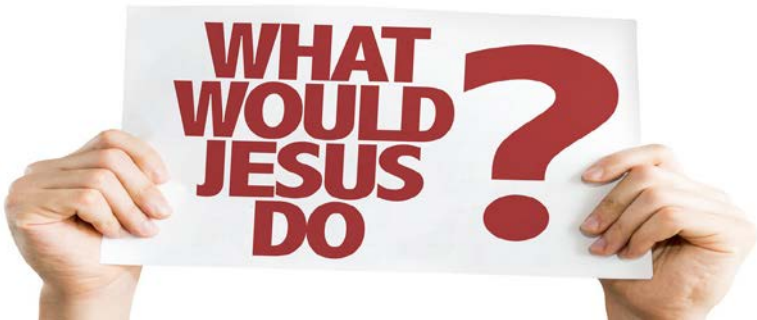


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When we hear God speaking to us, I have a choice: to obey or go my own way.
JOHN 5:19-20 Jesus said: *I do nothing except what I see the Father doing and say nothing except what I hear the Father saying.*

Section 2: GOD LOVES TO COMMUNICATE

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All Through The Bible God Speaks To People

All the way through the Bible we see God wanting to have fellowship with his children, speaking and listening to them sharing their joys and their sorrows.

PSALM 27:8 My heart has heard you say: *“Come and talk with me.”* And my heart responds: *“LORD, I am coming.”*

PSALM 34:11 *“Come. Children, and listen to me. I will teach you what it means to worship God in reverent fear.”*

PSALM 81:13 *“Oh, if only my people would listen to me and walk in my ways.”*

PROVERBS 8:17 *“I love those who love me. Those who search for me diligently will find me.”*

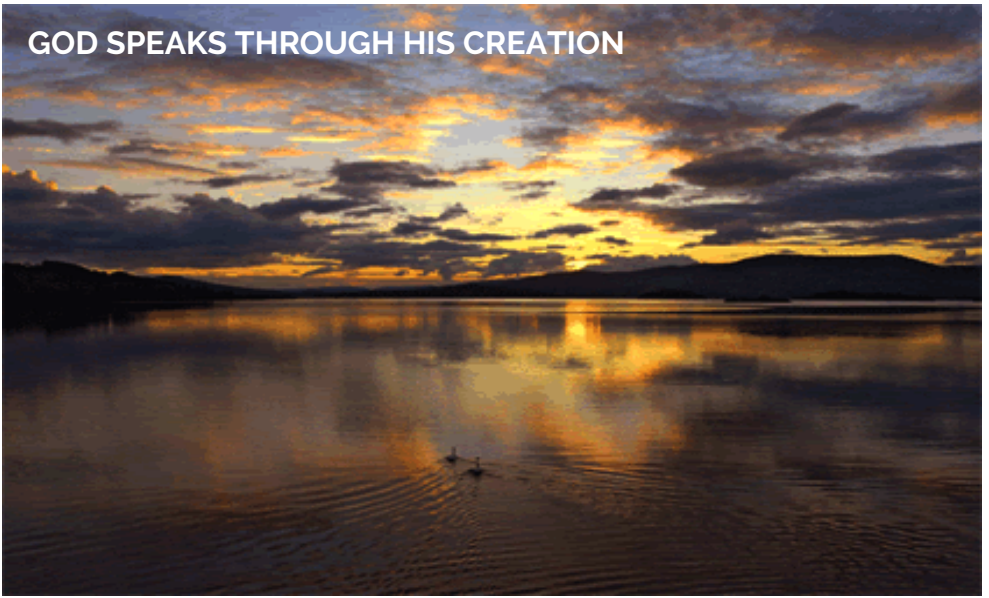
JEREMIAH 29:12 *“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”*

MATTHEW 4:4 *“It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”*

JOHN 10:27 *“My sheep hear my voice; I know them and they follow me,”* said Jesus.

HEBREWS 1:1-2 *“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets many times in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe.”*

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS CREATION



Sunset over Loch Lomond Photo © Andrew McMahon - by kind permission

The Beauty of Creation

A beautiful sunset, the colours of autumn, the delicate jewels of a cobweb after rain, the roar of a waterfall, the serenity of a baby asleep on its mother's breast, the awesomeness of the universe.....are all capable of stirring something deep within the human spirit. It's no surprise therefore that Paul writes in **ROMANS 1:18-20**:

"God's anger is being unveiled from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who wickedly suppress the truth, since the knowledge of God is obvious because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly visible, being understood from what he has created, so that people have no excuse."

Q What aspects of the visible world cause you to wonder and marvel about God?

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS WRITTEN WORD - THE BIBLE

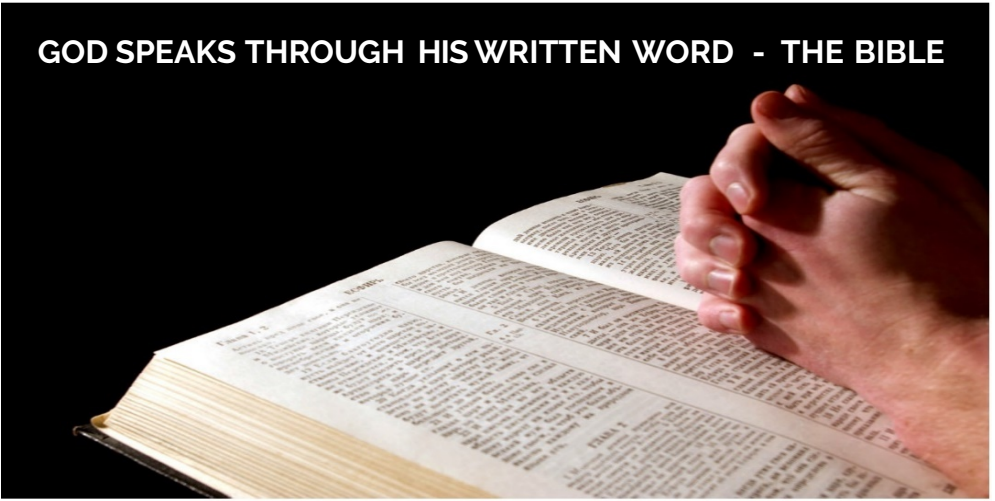


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The Divine Inspiration Of Scripture 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

God Spoke To Chosen Spokespersons 2 PETER 1:20-21

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Various Ways God Spoke In The Old Testament

HEBREWS 1:1 *in the past God spoke to our ancestors the prophets in various ways, including:*

- Dreams
- Visions
- Angels
- Spoken words *"Thus says the LORD"; "The Word of the LORD came to..."*

WAYS GOD SPEAKS IN THE BIBLE

All the way through the Bible, we see God speaking to individuals.

- **GENESIS 17:1-5** Abraham
- **GENESIS 37:5-9** Joseph
- **EXODUS 3:1-10** Moses
- **1 SAMUEL 3:1-10** The boy Samuel
- **JEREMIAH 1:1-12** The young Jeremiah
- **LUKE 1:5-22 and 7-64** Old Zechariah
- **ACTS 2:22-38** Peter
- **ACTS 8:26-38** Philip and An Ethiopian
- **ACTS 9:1-19** Saul of Tarsus and an old man named Ananias
- **ACTS 10:1-17** A Roman army officer and Peter

Q How did God speak to each of these individuals?

God Speaks To His Children Today

- Through SCRIPTURE
- Through DREAMS
- Through A STILL, SMALL VOICE
- Through CIRCUMSTANCES
- Through PICTURES (Still or Moving)
- Through WORDS OF KNOWLEDGE & WISDOM
- Through OTHER CHRISTIANS
- Through CREATION

Q In which of the ways listed above have you heard God speaking to you?

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS LIVING WORD: JESUS CHRIST



Jesus Christ Is God's Final Word To Mankind

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, his life and ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, and his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension are God's final word to mankind about how to get right with a holy God who hates sin but loves sinners.

When Jesus died on the Cross, his blood paid the penalty for the sins of all those who admit they are sinners in need of God's forgiveness and who put their trust in Jesus' blood as the only way to take the punishment we deserve.

Christ Dying On The Cross At Calvary
Painting by Eugene Delacroix, 1845

That's why the writer of the Book of HEBREWS wrote:

HEBREWS 1:1-2 *"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets many times in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us through his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe."*

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was [eternal] life, and that life was the light of all mankind. [.....] He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.." **JOHN 1:1-4, 11-14**

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE CHURCH



Photo: © Inbetween Lightstock.com

God Speaks Through Other Christians

God also speaks to us through other Christians in the Body of Christ - The Church - through the preaching of his Word, through prophecies and words of knowledge, and through godly counsel.

In **1 CORINTHIANS 14:26** Paul describes a typical meeting of the Church in Corinth.

When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said.

In **ACTS 13:1-3** we read that the fledgling Church at Antioch met together for prayer to decide who to send out to share the gospel.

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

In **MATTHEW 18:20** Jesus promised that "where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am present there among them."

So we should expect Jesus to speak to us when we meet together for fellowship if we are willing to wait on him and listen.

GOD CAN SPEAK THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES

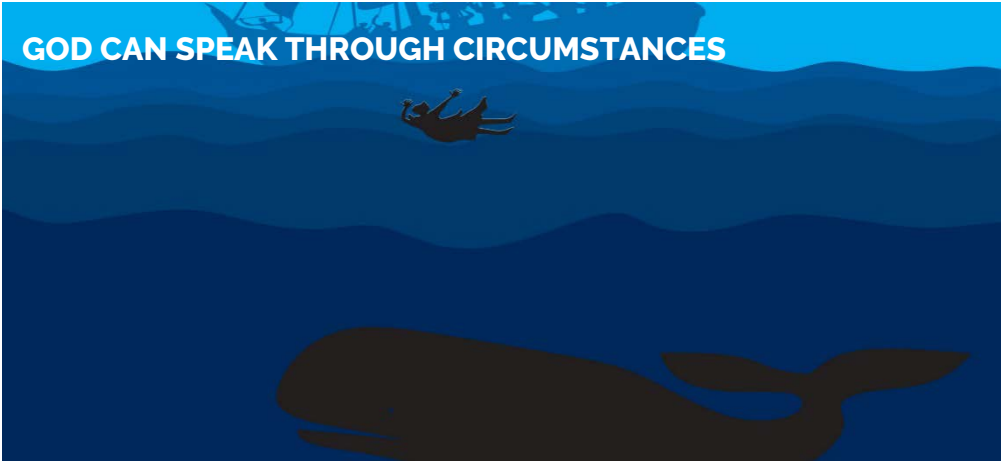


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God Sometimes Speaks Through Circumstances

God spoke to Jonah, when he was running away from God, by being thrown overboard and being swallowed by a whale or large fish.

It is important to ask God to confirm what he is saying through circumstances in some other way, preferably through Scripture.

God Can Work When Circumstances Seem Against Us

God will sometimes use apparently negative circumstances to fulfill his purposes.

In **ACTS 12:1-17** we read that Peter had been thrown in prison for continuing to preach Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation after being forbidden to do so by the religious leaders in Jerusalem. But his miraculous escape simply served to confirm his obedience to preach the good news of salvation through Christ alone.

Similarly in **PHILIPPIANS 1:12-14** Paul writes: *“I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that my situation has actually turned out to advance the gospel. The results of this are that the whole imperial guard and everyone else knows that I am in prison for the sake of Christ, and that most of the brothers, having confidence in the Lord because of my imprisonment, now more than ever dare to speak the word without fear.”*

God Will Never Contradict His Written Word

God will never contradict what he says to us through Scripture by circumstances - for example, an opportunity may be offered to have a sexual relationship with someone outwith marriage, but this would violate God’s law on sex.

GOD SPEAKS IN A STILL, SMALL VOICE



Sunlight shining into red cave Photo: © Eli Murray, Lightstock.com

God Sometime Speaks In Whispers

In **1 KINGS 19:11-12** Elijah had taken refuge in a cave at Mount Horeb. The LORD said, *“Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for I, the LORD, AM about to pass by.”*

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. And Elijah wrapped his cloak around him and went and stood at the mouth of the cave.

These whispers may come as thoughts or vague impressions nudging us to visit someone who is sick or seek the forgiveness of someone we have hurt. Someone has likened them to a butterfly flitting across our field of vision. One moment they are there, the next they are gone.

The Importance Of Testing What We Hear

1 JOHN 4:1 warns us not to believe everything we hear is from God but to test everything to see if it is from God, from our soulish nature or even from the devil.

One sure test is that God will never contradict his Written Word - The Bible.

Section 3: WAYS OF LISTENING TO GOD

LISTENING TO GOD IN SILENCE

Gazing At God

A student on his lunch break one day observed an old man go into a city church and emerge about an hour later. This happened on the next two days. Curious to discover what was going on, the young man followed the old man into the church and sat at the back watching. The old man went down to the front and sat in a pew. An hour later he got up and walked out.

The young man stopped him and said:

"I can't help noticing you come in here at lunchtime every day and just sit in a pew. What's going on?"

The old man replied with a smile:

"Well, you see. It's like this. I look at Him and He looks at me, and we tell one another we love each other."

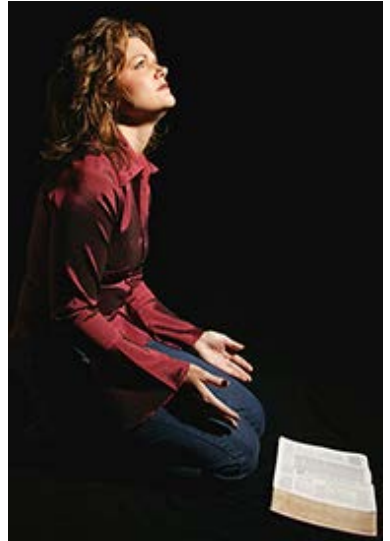


Photo: © Jupiter Images

Part of our quiet time alone with God may be spent just basking in his presence in silence, in wordless wonder at his awesome greatness and amazing grace for sinners like us. It may also be a prelude to our approaching God in prayer.

Using The Psalms To Meditate On God's Awesomeness & Love

As an aid to your silent gaze at God in his might, majesty, dominion and glory, you might like to read the following Scriptures - **1 CHRONICLES 16:23-35; PSALM 145; PSALM 103; PSALM 105; REVELATION 4:1-11; REVELATION 5:6-14**

LISTENING TO GOD IN SCRIPTURE



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Devotional Bible Reading: God Speaking To My Heart

Devotional Bible reading involves taking a passage of Scripture and letting God speak to my heart rather than my head through it by the Holy Spirit, who inspired its writer. It can involve:

- Choosing a passage of Scripture myself as the Holy Spirit leads
- Using Bible reading notes to choose the passage and comment on it
- Taking a passage of Scripture and meditating on it by allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to me as I 'chew over it' several times

Biblical Meditation Is Different From All Other Kinds Of Meditation

Biblical meditation is the opposite of New Age methods, such as Transcendental Meditation (TM) and other forms, which tell you to empty your mind of everything and let in ideas from goodness-knows-where. Instead in biblical meditation we fill our mind with biblical truth and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us through it as we focus on it.

In the following pages we are going to meditate on **JOHN 10: 27-28** using a form of meditation called **Lectio Divina**.

LECTIO DIVINA: A Practical Exercise In Biblical Meditation from The Gospel of JOHN 10:27-28

Lectio Divina (literally = 'divine reading') is a form of Biblical meditation on a passage of Scripture involving

- A. Reading (*lectio*) the Text
- B. Meditating (*meditatio*) on What I Have Read
- C. Asking God Questions (*oratio*)
- D. Listening to the Holy Spirit's Answer (*contemplatio*)

A. LECTIO (Reading)

[Jesus said]
"My sheep

*hear/listen to my voice;
I know them and
they follow me."*

*I give them eternal life;
they will not perish/die
for ever*

*and no one will snatch
them out of my hand*

COMMENTS

Jesus' sheep = those born again from above by the Holy Spirit.

LUKE 10:20; REVELATION 20:15

The shepherd knows them personally and calls them by name. They follow where he leads.

Jesus promises eternal life (*zoe*) to all who put their trust in him and says they will not perish/die for ever. They are safe in his hands because no one will be able to steal them.. from his Father's hand (v29)

B. MEDITATIO (Meditation)

Am I one of Jesus' sheep? Jesus says in **JOHN 3:3** and **6-7** I am one of his sheep if I have been **born anothēn** - ie again *from above* supernaturally by the Holy Spirit and can now cry out to God in prayer: "*Abba! Father!*" as Paul says in **ROMANS 8:15-16**.

Q Do I expect to hear Jesus speak to me day by day? When did I last hear Jesus' voice?

In **PSALM 27:8** David says: My heart has heard you say, "*Come and talk with me.*" My heart responds, "*LORD, I'm coming.*" NLT

How amazing that the God who created the whole universe wants to speak to each of his children because he wants to have a personal relationship with each of us and loves to talk to us and hear us talk to him. He wants me to be able to share my most intimate thoughts - my hopes and fears, my joys and sorrows - with him and show me his love. Amazing grace!

C. ORATIO (Asking God Questions)

Praying to God the Father in response to the following questions:

Q1 Am I one of Jesus' sheep through being born anothen?

Q2 Do I have a personal relationship with God as my heavenly Father through faith in Jesus Christ?

Q3 Am I hearing the voice of the Good Shepherd each day and being obedient?

Q4 Am I dying to my own ideas daily and following where Jesus leads?

Q5 Do I know the experience of being filled with the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit and refilled daily with the streams of living water Jesus promised in JOHN 7:37-39?

Q6 Do I know that I am safe and secure in the Father's love and that nothing and no one can separate me from his love in Christ Jesus? (ROMANS 8:38-39)

D. CONTEMPLATIO (Listening to the Holy Spirit's Answers)

Allowing God to speak to me in response to my questions and meditating on what he says.

Q What has the Holy Spirit been saying to you about the verses you have been reading?

Systematic Bible Study: God Speaking To My Head



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Reading For Understanding

Systematic Bible Study speaks to the *head* rather than the heart.

It is designed to increase our knowledge and understanding of God's Word by a detailed study of a particular book, chapter, theme, character, topic or word.

- Study of a **BOOK** to find out when it was written, to whom and for what purpose.
- Study of a **THEME** eg The Story of Redemption from **GENESIS TO REVELATION**
- Study of a **CHARACTER** eg David: A Man After God's Heart; Abraham: Father of Faith
- Study of a **TOPIC** or **WORD** such as faith, grace, forgiveness, repentance, salvation, etc.

Inductive Bible Study

Inductive Bible Study looks at a Bible passage in three stages.

Stage 1: OBSERVATION asks: What Does The Text Say?

Asking 6 questions: 5 Ws and 1 H - Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

Stage 2: INTERPRETATION: What Does The Text Mean?

Stage 3: APPLICATION: What Does It Say To Me?

LISTENING TO GOD IN PRAYER & FASTING



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Prayer & Fasting For Important Decisions

Sometimes we need to listen to God very carefully where important decisions are involved. Prayer and fasting is simply a way of showing God that we are serious and need to hear him speaking clearly for guidance.

The Church in Syrian Antioch grew as a result of the teaching and encouragement of Paul and Barnabas. But the time came when it was felt that God had a bigger plan for them and so the fellowship of believers prayed, fasted and listened to what God was wanting to do. As they prayed and listened, God spoke to them through his children.

ACTS 13:1-3 *1 While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*

It was the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey to take the good news about Jesus Christ to Asia Minor and eventually to Europe.

Prayer & Fasting For Spiritual Warfare

Prayer and fasting are not a technique to twist God's arm but a way we show God that we are really serious about a situation. They are also a way of drawing closer to him when we are engaged in spiritual warfare.

SOME PRINCIPLES IN LISTENING & TESTING WHAT WE HEAR

Three Steps To Hearing God [Source: Loren Cunningham *Is That Really You, God?*] Before trying to listen to God, it is a good idea to do three things:

- 1. Take Christ's authority to silence the voice of the enemy.**
- 2. Ask God to clear your mind of your own ideas and thoughts.**
- 3. Wait on God expecting him to speak to you in his way and in his time.**

After you have listened and sensed God speaking to you, ask yourself the following questions:

Q1. Who took the initiative - God or me?

When God speaks, He always takes the initiative. He's the Boss, we're his servants. He gives the instructions: we don't tell him what to do.

Q2. How did the word come?

In the Bible we see God speaking to individuals in a variety of ways. Do I recognize similarities with the ways I see God speaking to individuals in Scripture?

Examples from Scripture

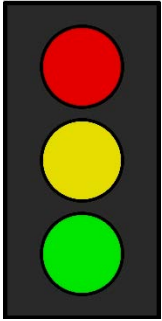
- 1. God gets my attention** eg Moses and the Burning Bush and an audible voice
- 2. A Dream** eg Joseph's dreams at home and when he was in prison
NOTE: Dreams always needed to be treated with caution and tested carefully.
- 3. Repetition of A Phrase or A Verse or Verses of Scripture**
eg The young boy Samuel who heard God calling his name three times
- 4. God Speaks To Two People At The Same Time Independently**
eg God sometimes speaks to two individuals A and B independently at the same time about the same thing.
[See ACTS Chapter 8 Philip and the Ethiopian
9 Ananias and Saul/Paul
10 Cornelius and Peter]
- 5. God confirms what he said to A through what he says to B**

Check It In Or Chuck It Out

Always test what you hear by the Written Word of God and the *Rhema* Word of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will never contradict the Written Word of God.

WAITING FOR GOD'S ANSWER

Traffic Light Answers To Prayers For Guidance



Sometimes the answer is **NO**

Sometimes the answer is **WAIT**

Sometimes the answer is **YES**

Sometimes the answer is not what we expected or hoped for.

Examples: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. MATTHEW 26:36-46
Paul's prayer for healing 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-11

THE IMPORTANCE OF OBEDIENCE

Jesus told a little parable about *A Wise & A Foolish Builder*. MATTHEW 7:24-27

The Wise Builder heard God speaking to him and obeyed.

Jesus said that his house would stand when the storms hit and the rain fell because it was built on a solid foundation.

Q What happens each time we hear God speak and are obedient?

A God confirms what he said and we lay down a layer of 'faith cement'.

The Foolish Builder also heard God speak but did not obey.

Jesus said that his house would fall when the storm struck because it had no foundation and was built on sand.

Q What happens when we hear God speak but do nothing about it?

A We don't get the confirmation we heard God speak so our faith does not grow.

Going Deeper
LISTENING TO GOD



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