

# Hearing God

Series: Connecting with God in Prayer

Brad Bailey – January 31, 2016

**Big Idea:** To teach how we can all hear God speak to us in the context of prayer; noting it is what God has planned in sending the Spirit; and several points about the nature of Gods' voice and hearing that voice.

Father breaks into history...Christ enters history... Spirit fills history.

Jesus explains this as he prepares his disciples at the end of his earthly ministry with them.

**John 14:15-19, 25-26 (NIV)**

*"If you love me, you will obey what I command. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ...<sup>25</sup> "All this I have spoken while still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

**“the Father... will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.” – John 14:16**

Take a moment to REALLY hear this. All the comfort of Christ being present... all the counsel of Christ...is now present.

**“...he lives with you and will be in you.” – John 14:17**

The Spirit is, truly and literally, God within us.

**He is described as “Counselor”...** a good English word to translate this relationship. It has also been translated Advocate... which reflects that this is not a passive counseling force but a force that has authority and is for you. [2]

So God speaks by His Spirit in relationship to our spirit.

**Hearing God involves developing an inner dialogue between our spirit and the Spirit of God.**

**God generally speaks to us by the Spirit’s inner voice that is distinct from our own thoughts, an inner image, that upon reflection or further revelation, offers meaning, a feeling that comes upon us (such as a peace), or a prompting that directs us.**

The whole nature of something as subjective as inner thoughts and images can be difficult for some of us. Some of us **like the objective reality... 2 + 2 = 4**. But we do well to **stand back and realize...what is true and real is never defined by just a physical measurement**.

Our entire lives are lived out of what we understand physically as well as relationally and intuitively and spiritually. As such, knowing someone involves relating on a personal level. If you ask me to tell you about my wife...listing the names of the chemical compounds that she is made of would be a limited level of knowing her to say the least. [2b] The truth is that we all know through the inner experience of relational life. And part of how we relate to God is the same.

Your very presence here today is an indication that you **have heard**, or **are hearing** his voice. But developing clarity in the process of hearing God remains a challenge; learning to listen to God is not always as simple as we'd like?

- Perhaps you are one who may wonder "How come I don't get clear words from God like other people describe?"
- Perhaps you can identify with those who may say, 'I'm not sure I'm really getting any inner direction from God' or... 'Ideas come, but how do I know they're from God?'

**Let me offer...**

## **10 Truths that Will Help Us Hear God's Voice**

These are not a formula for hearing God... but some truths that will help us hear God speak to us.

### **1. God's voice is most naturally heard when naturally expected.**

Some people have the problem of thinking every idea they have is from God. Others have the problem of thinking none of their thoughts are from God. God is speaking to His children.

**I believe every one of us can hear God... and has heard God in some form and fashion....and will hear more.**

The process often starts with developing a basic expectation.

We do well to share the expectations of Isaiah who writes...

**Isaiah 50:4 (NIV)**

The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue,  
to know the word that sustains the weary.

**He wakens me morning by morning,  
wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.**

Or the Psalmist...

**Proverbs 8:34 (NIV)**

Blessed is the man who listens to me,  
**watching** daily at my doors,  
**waiting** at my doorway.

What difference would it make if we understood that this afternoon... God would value us talking to him about our lives... and that He may have something to speak to us?

### **2. God's Voice is that of a Father who is developing us more than simply directing us.**

I believe this is where **we often can get the most confused** about hearing God.

We have a **tendency to want God to help us make decisions**...to tell us whether to go left or right... who we should marry... what job we should get. We want to be in His will...or we want him to make the decisions.

But that is not the nature of a Father. I want to help develop my kids...not just direct them.

God doesn't want robots, but relationship.

God doesn't want to **program** us, he wants to **parent** us.

He wants to deepen not just our **intelligence** but our **intimacy**, moving from **information to formation**, from **knowing to growing**, from **head to heart**, from **accepting to understanding**.

One of the things I have found is that **while I may tend to want** God to tell about the **“WHAT” in life (what I should do)**...**God speaks far more into the “why” and “how”** of what I am doing. [3]

Ex – On the morning of the day I planned to ask my wife Leah to marry me.... Prayed... “Lord, is Leah the one I’m to marry?” Immediately I heard God speak in my mind, “You are ready to commit the rest of your life to someone.” I already had total peace about her being a great life partner...so God spoke to something that spoke even more deeply. God spoke as the ultimate Father...not simply declaring a decision...but developing me.

God is parenting us; helping us to develop as spiritual adults.

### **3. God’s voice will be clearest when we are familiar with His Living Word (Scripture).**

**Let me say a word here about the relationship between the Scriptures and the Spirit. We are not only a people of both the Scriptures and the Spirit...but we declare that they are both an integrated part of being a people of God.** God revealed Himself into history... culminating in His Living Word...Christ... who brought salvation.

So we affirm the “Sufficiency of Scripture” ...that the written word of God tells us all we need to know about the way to salvation, right beliefs and what is true and good in general.

> **But God brings revelation to personal and specific matters that is not “adding on to doctrine.”**

*The same God who spoke is still speaking.*

**What’s helpful to realize is that they are the same voice...so familiarity with the Living Word of Scripture, helps us to recognize the voice of God. [4]**

We all become more or less sensitive to certain things depending upon whether we’ve been exposed to them...by familiarity.

- **A musician learns to distinguish the key of F from the key of C** by listening to their sound over and over again. He develops **an ear for music**.
- Mechanics hear the engine of my car and tell what’s wrong...so familiar with the sound.

- The new parent may sleep through many sounds... but **develop an acute familiarity for one voice you heard all day... so that when it calls out to you at night...the familiarity is natural.**
- I can be at the park amidst a lot of children... hear my child cry... or yell 'daddy' ... it stands out. The voice and words of God can stand out amidst the many voices that surround us, as we become more familiar.

**Our minds are not just physically wired...we also have a mindset...** an inner reality...a way of learning to relate to everything **based on what we have internalized.** We all have a lot of voices that have taught us...that have been internalized... that are more familiar...so we need to transform our minds.

### **Romans 12:2**

*"... be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

**Jesus wasn't passive** about this process.... **Luke tells us how at the age of 12, when visiting Jerusalem... his parents found him in the Temple ...** listening, asking questions... and it says "he grew in wisdom and stature."

### **4. God's voice will often transcend our natural thought and human wisdom.**

This doesn't mean that everything God says will conflict with all common wisdom or thought... God gives us wisdom... and true wisdom will lead us well. But God will often lead us in ways that transcends our natural thought and limited understanding.

I find that **God usually speaks** something **I need beyond what I asked.**

There's something more profound and pointed that God wants to impart than what I was seeking.

Examples of...

- Our church building process – the night we were to prepare our offer... and spoke to me and says: "Offer the least"... which would mean giving up what we knew would be needed to secure it against the other bidders. Everyone shared a sense we should offer more...but we took that word in...offered the least we could...and a couple days later were told that they chose us...and then added...against higher offers.
- Praying for one of my children...ahead of his age in school...struggling...2<sup>nd</sup> grade...all my best thinking said yes... I spoke with friends...they shared the same basic natural thought...Leah and I prayer...with that decision already planned...and immediately God spoke into my mind.... "Let him rise up." Wow. It's not something I wanted to risk...but we did. At the final day of the school year...and as he won the award for most improved student...with outstanding grades...I wept at how God had transcended our understanding. He rose up. Now exactly ten years later he's being accepted into top colleges I could never have imagined applying to.

### **5. God's voice will often challenge and expand our faith.**

Romans 10:17

“Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”

God wants to lead us into the reality of His Kingdom. So He is going to lead us into that which requires trust.

He may speak to us about going to someone to ask forgiveness...that we can't imagine doing.  
He may speak to us about giving beyond what we can imagine.  
He may speak give us a word for someone else that we can't imagine will make sense to them.

So if we want to hear God...we **need to loosen our comfort zone.**

## **6. God's voice will sow good "fruit" in and through us.**

Speaking of those who claimed to be prophets in the church, Jesus said,

### **Matthew 7:15-16**

*“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.”*

Look at the fruit. If someone or something we hear doesn't bear that which brings life...which is good... it's not from God. What is from God will bear good fruit. And the fruit that the Spirit is developing is described to us...

Galatians 5:22-23

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

## **7. God's voice will usually bring peace to our spirits.**

Some of us may fear that if we hear from God it will lead us into tension.... It will call beyond our comfort zones. While we may face some initial challenge...the truth is that ultimately all that God calls us to will lead us into a place of peace. The Scriptures tell us...

### **Isaiah 32:17**

*The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.*

### **1 Corinthians 14:33**

*For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. - 1 Corinthians 14:33*

Our Shepherd's voice always produces peace—not turmoil and anxiety. Even if He is telling us to do something we don't want to do there is a greater peace and confidence in his voice that reassures us. [5]

## **8. God's voice is most easily heard when we quiet our soul.**

**Psalm 46:10**

**"Be still, and know that I am God..."**

**Psalm 37:7 we are called to**

**"be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him."**

It's important to understand that the **quietness that enables God's leading is more than the absence of external noise.**

Far from any notion that God speaks only to monks... the **Spirit will lead** any who will follow... and particularly those who are going somewhere. Jesus was lead amidst the hustle and bustle...the crowds and conflicts. His disciples would do the same.

They **couldn't always quiet the world outside**, but I believe they **developed a quieter world inside.**

While a quiet soul is not limited to quiet places, it may be developed there. Jesus began his days in quiet places...where it was easier to quiet his soul. We do well to quiet our souls.

Often when we sit in quiet...we realize that there are still many voices in our heads...the worries and planning and related thoughts. But if we let them settle... we can better hear God speak.

**9. God's voice will generally find confirmation with others.**

Proverbs 13:20

"He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm."

**10. God's voice is best explored in a climate of openness and freedom.**

If we're to develop our sensitivity to the Spirit's leading, both for ourselves and in praying for others, I believe one of our **greatest needs is to overcome tendencies** to be **too certain...** or **too cynical** about such leading.

There is a subjective nature to experiencing the leading of the Spirit.

There appears **no need to presume certainty... but rather a freedom to sense... and share... and discern together.**

**This is what the Apostle Paul says to the community..**

**"Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold onto the good." - 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 [6]**

We do well to receive and share what we sense to be the Spirit's leading in an open fashion... allowing others to help bring confirmation.

I've mistaken God's leading along the way... and still can.... But the Spirit is still speaking so I'm going to keep learning to listen.... The Spirit is at work to lead so I'm going to keep seeking to be led. I've learned that when we are most free to be wrong, we will be most free to be right.

**Closing: Today God wants us to know that He will speak to us. More naturally than we think. The question we may be wise to ask, is: Do we want to hear Him?**

**Resources:** Rich Nathan, Richard Tow (Series “Guidance”);

**Notes:**

1. God had been looking towards the day in which He would pour out His Spirit and it would release a new freedom or level of human lives hearing from God. “...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. Acts 2:16-18 (cf Joel 2:28ff)

2. John 14:26 says that the Spirit teaches "all things." That does not mean He imparts to us some kind of omniscience. "All things" is used here in a relative sense. It speaks of "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3, New King James Version). – John McArthur

There are four ways in which the Scriptures refer to the Spirit effecting our lives...

The Spirit has been sent and now bears the ongoing work which ... convicts, comforts, changes, and counsels us.

- Convicts us – our initial sense of needing to surrender our lives back to God... as well as ongoing sense of what is right
- Comforts us – usually given the English word “encourage”... and often with the power of knowing God is with us and we are His.  
Romans 8:16 “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”
- Changes us – He forms his nature in us...
- Counsels us – helps us discern what may be best in both what we do...and how we do it.

2b. Ken Wilson writes the following about the role of imagination...

A word is only meaningless sound unless it stimulates the imagination.

Example, word “green” means nothing if it doesn’t conjure the color green in your imagination.

How would a human mind receive *any* impression from God *in the mind*—especially an Incarnate God who is the image of the invisible God—without imagination being stimulated?

And the inner life is a relational discovery.

*“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.” (Eph. 1: 17-19)*

He wants us to know God better. The knowledge he’s talking about is personal knowledge, not abstract knowledge. “To-know-him-is-to-love-him” knowing. Paul prays “*that the eyes of your*



*heart may be enlightened” so that we may know* God...and all these good things.

Heart, Gk. *dianoia*, comes from the root, *nous*, to know: the heart in Scripture is the person-knower.

“*I pray that the eyes* (Gk. *ophthalmos*) *of your heart be enlightened* (Gk. *photizo*): Well what in heavens name is he talking about if not the imagination, the capacity to see with the heart-mind-knower?

In fact we could say Scripture is nothing if not an effort on God’s part to engage the human imagination! Same could be said of the Spirit.

Hypothesis: visual media (TV, etc) may not exercise the imagination as much as reading or hearing stories. While reading fiction your mind has to fill in many more details—using the imagination--than it does watching a movie, where details are filled in for you by the filmmaker. If you spend 3 hours a day watching visual media (average is closer to 5 hours) you might **replace a third of it** with reading or listening to books on tape. Including Scripture of course.

And rather than simply reading it like a textbook to gobble up information, try engaging words of Scripture with your imagination.

Meditating on Scripture: take a scene from Scripture and place yourself in the scene to fill in the details with the imagination. As if the Scripture is a book being turned into a movie and you are the director, filling in the details for the screen adaptation.

3. While our priority is often that of wanting clarity...God’s is that of trust. Brennan Manning describes how the brilliant ethicist John Kavanaugh went to work for three months at "the house of the dying" in Calcutta, he was seeking a clear answer as to how best to spend the rest of his life. On the first morning there he met Mother Teresa. She asked, "And what can I do for you?" Kavanaugh asked her to pray for him. "What do you want me to pray for?" she asked. He voiced the request that he had borne thousands of miles from the United States: "Pray that I have clarity."

She said firmly, "No, I will not do that."

When he asked her why, she said, "Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of."

When Kavanaugh commented that she always seemed to have the clarity he longed for, she laughed and said, "I have never had clarity; what I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God."

Citation: Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust* (HarperCollins, 2000);

4. Such active pursuit of familiarity is portrayed by the Berean community...and praised by Paul Acts 17:11

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

Hebrews 5:14 (NIV) declares that “solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

5. When Jesus speaks of leaving them with the Spirit (who will be sent)...he speaks of leaving them with a supernatural peace.

John 14:26-27 – “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

The Holy Spirit provides God’s comfort amid chaos, an inner trust despite our outer circumstances.

6. This reflects a significant shift from the role of the prophet in the Old Testament. In the old injunction in Israel that if a prophet spoke falsely they were to be stoned. In the Old Testament, God’s enlistment of a people was at stake. The prophets served as God’s definitive Word. Now it is Christ that sets us apart, and the Spirit resides in all people as a guide. Prophecy is spoken of in terms of edifying and encouraging others. In the new work of the Spirit, **BOTH A PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS A POTENTIAL FOR DECEPTION ARE ASSUMED AND CALL FOR DISCERNMENT.**