

Sermon Notes: "The Power of Prayer: Listening Prayer"

(Focus: Listening Prayer & Discerning God's Voice)

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Introduction & Series Context

- Continuing the series on **prayer**, specifically **listening prayer**.
- Key truth from previous message: **God speaks** — He has always spoken and still speaks today in various ways (Scripture, nudges, dreams, visions, circumstances, other people, etc.).
- God invites us to ask questions in prayer and expect answers.
- Crucial step: When we believe we've heard from God, we must **test** it to discern if it's truly from Him (vs. our own thoughts, desires, or other influences).

Opening Prayer & Desire

- Invitation for God to take hold of the space, reveal His glory and love.
- Desire: Not just rule-following to avoid anger, but a **deep, abiding relationship** with God that transforms us inwardly and witnesses to the world.

Personal Story: Learning to Trust God's Voice in Relationships

- Early dating experiences: Unrequited love in high school; falling in love at camp (long-distance); heartbreak from a non-believer despite warnings.
- Turning point at 19: On knees in dorm, surrendered heart to God — vowed not to date until God showed "the one."
- Two weeks later: Met future husband (Jim); immediate deep sense: "I'm going to marry this man."
- Hesitation: Didn't want to be fickle after surrender.
- Prayer for confirmation: "God, confirm if it's him — I trust You."
- God spoke through a **dream** (angel with "smacktalk" attitude: "Yes, this is the one — don't screw it up").
- Like Gideon, asked for more confirmation ("fleece").
- Astonishing affirmation: Jim's family unexpectedly diverted to her camp (due to grandmother's funeral) — saw him there.
- Overwhelmed by God's tenderness in indulging her request for affirmation.
- Lesson: God speaks in the language we need (dreams, circumstances, Scripture, others); He guides personally.

Core Truth: God Still Speaks Today

- Not silent — speaks through Scripture, others, dreams, impressions, circumstances, whispers (like to Elijah).

- Speaks into decisions, strongholds/sin (no condemnation; power over sin through Christ), heartbreak, fear, joy.
- Key verse: **1 Thessalonians 5:20-21** — "Do not treat prophecies with contempt, but test them all; hold on to what is good."

How to Test What We Hear from God

(Practical tests to build confidence it's from God — and red flags if we resist testing)

1. **Does it exalt Christ?**
 - **John 16:14:** Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus; any true word from God points to and exalts Christ.
2. **Is it scriptural?**
 - God never contradicts Himself.
 - **Proverbs 30:5-6:** Every word of God is flawless; don't add to it.
 - Requires being in Scripture regularly (resources make it accessible).
3. **Do other Christians confirm it?**
 - Lack of affirmation from mature believers = big red flag.
 - Example: Man who thought God told him to divorce for happiness/new woman — no confirmation.
4. **Will it produce good fruit?**
 - **John 15:** Remain in Christ to bear fruit; apart from Him, nothing.
 - Fruit like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc. (Galatians 5:22-23) — byproduct of abiding.
 - Produces inward character transformation → outward obedience, holiness, love, gospel influence.
5. **Will it produce spiritual growth?**
 - For self and others (e.g., Jesus delaying for Lazarus' resurrection — benefited witnesses' faith).
 - God's directions lead to deeper belief and maturity.
6. **Does God cause it to take place?**
 - **Isaiah 55:11:** God's word accomplishes what He desires.
 - Example: Ministry leader sensed transition (Paul Miller's death); prepared succession — tragedy happened, but ministry continued (grief + awe at God's preparation).

Practical Encouragements

- **Write it down** (journal what you sense God saying) — for accountability; God speaks with purpose (guidance, love, strength, peace).
- Analogy: Parent-child communication matures over time (recognize voice → vocabulary → meaning → obedience → mature dialogue). Same with God — be patient; practice builds "muscles."
- Don't beat yourself up if starting out or stumbling.

This Week's Application: Exercise Listening Prayer

- Use journal with two pens (one for your questions, another for what you sense from God).
- Sample questions to ask God:
 - What can I do to better hear Your voice?
 - Do I struggle in obedience?
 - Is there anything in me that needs to die to better obey You?
 - What have You shared that I've failed to do?
 - Do I pause enough to evaluate our interactions?
 - What do You want me to do today?
- If it passes the tests — act on it confidently.

Closing Thoughts

- Scripture gives general truth (e.g., don't be self-centered; God loves you as His child).
- God's personal voice applies it specifically (points out self-centeredness in your life; wraps you in felt love: "You're mine, chosen, delighted in").
- Be people who ask God to speak, listen, test, obey — growing in relationship for His glory and our good.

Amen.

Provoking Questions for Further Thought & Reflection

1. Looking back, can you recall a time when you sensed God speaking but didn't test it — what happened, and what might you do differently now?
2. Which of the six testing questions feels most challenging for you personally, and why? (e.g., seeking confirmation from others, checking against Scripture, waiting for fruit.)
3. In what area of your life right now (decision, struggle, joy) do you most need to hear God's voice — and are you willing to ask Him directly and test what comes?
4. How has fear of "getting it wrong" kept you from listening prayer? How might trusting God's grace in the process change that?
5. If God has spoken something to you before (through impression, Scripture, dream, etc.) that you wrote off or ignored, what might happen if you revisited and tested it today?