

Fifth Exercise in Spiritual Training

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Listening to the Voice of God

Listening to the voice of God does not depend on a formula, a method or some skills, but on relationship. The closer the relationship with God, the easier it is to hear God's voice. And relationship is related to three things, namely, communication, obedience and trust. These three are the attitudes in listening to God's voice.

Communication: Maintaining an unbroken relationship with God

Relationship has to be cultivated. Without a daily nurturing of our relationship with God, it is difficult to hear from Him when in need.

Relationship has to be cultivated!

The Bible refers to this cultivation as continuous prayer, which a consciousness of always maintaining a communication with God.

2 Corinthians 13:14 (ESV)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Having fellowship with the Holy Spirit is to keep company with Him. Tell the Holy Spirit about everything, treating Him as your bosom friend. If you always have a close fellowship with the Holy Spirit, you will spontaneously hear the voice of the Holy Spirit.

There is only one thing that would block our relationship with God, which is unresolved sins. Not sin in itself, because sin has been forgiven on the Cross. Unresolved sins are those sins that you have not dealt with even though God moves you to deal with them. Continuous quenching of the Spirit would make us numb to the voice of the Holy Spirit, and then we become to His voice.

Let us have a practice on spiritual breathing:

Exhale: confess our sins.

Inhale: Ask the Holy Spirit again to take control over you and fill you.

Do this by faith and not by feeling, believing that your sins have been cleansed and you are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Do this exercise often, just like breathing. When the Holy Spirit moves you and let you know that you have sinned against God in your attitude or behavior, confess your sins immediately, and let the Holy Spirit take control of you in that aspect. When you maintain this kind of unbroken communication, you can easily hear the voice of God in your daily life. Hearing the voice of God is a natural result of unbroken relationship with God.

Obedience

The Hebrew word of obedience is "Shama", which means listen with all ears. Listening to the voice of God cannot be separated from obedience. Listening to God's voice is for obedience, to walk in God's guidance.

There are two types of obedience. In the West, obedience comes after understanding; but the East, obey first, then understand. God calling Abraham to offer up Isaac belong to the second type. Doing without understanding is a test of faith.

“Obey, then understand” is the key to listening to God’s voice. Only if you are willing to obey, then you can easily hear the voice of God.

Why is obedience so important? It is because if you are not obedient, then saying becomes meaningless.

Do not quench the Holy Spirit. Even if there is just a slight urge from the Holy Spirit, do it; otherwise there would be no more urge.

Trust: trust and expect God to speak to you

You have to deeply believe and yearn for God’s word to you, because God is yearning to speak to you.

Isaiah 30:21 (ESV)

And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

Isaiah prophesied that in the Last Days the Holy Spirit would come and speak to you.

John 16:13 (ESV)

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

One of the purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit is to guide us into all the truth, which is not just letters, but the inspiration of God.

1 John 2:27 (ESV)

But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

The anointing is the Holy Spirit. In whatever circumstances, seek for the Holy Spirit first, and He will teach you.

You are the beloved of God. God is very willing to let you know about His mind, and He likes to speak to you. The problem is not that He does not speak, but you do not hear even when He speaks.

Listening requires a pair of teachable ears and an obedient heart. When you have these, you will spontaneously hear God’s voice. God can speak to you through all sorts of activities, all situations, all circumstances, and all means. Just open up, and you will hear. There is no other secrets.

Means of Listening to the voice of God

- Through experiences: any kinds of experiences, including happiness and sadness, gathering and departing, joy and anger, grief and jubilation.
- Through persons: including encouragements, consolations, rebuke, testimonies, etc.

- Through the Bible or sermons
- Through media, either texts or videos: including books, magazines, movies, tv, dvd, etc.
- Through any other means, such as taking a bath, that nature, witnesses of others, exercises, etc.

Many have a misconception that hearing God's voice is like the episodes in the Old Testament when God dramatically manifested and revealed Himself. But in the New Testament, God usually uses peaceful and natural ways to speak to man. Why?

First, in the Old Testament days, only prophets, priests and kings were anointed by the Holy Spirit, and others were not. Only they could hear the voice of God, others could not. In order to let the people knew that God indeed spoke to them through these leaders, God had to give them particular evidences, and chose to appear to them in dramatic ways. But in the New Testament day, every Christians have the Holy Spirit living within them, and we can directly come to God for revelations. Thus in the New Testament, God's revelation becomes more peaceful and natural.

Second, in the Old Testament days, the Holy Spirit had not descended yet. When God wanted to speak to man, He had to descend from heaven and spoke to man through external and hence more dramatic means. But in the New Testament days, the Holy Spirit speaks within us, not from without. Therefore the voice is natural and peaceful, and there is no need of dramatic means.

How to receive the moving of the Holy Spirit?

- Special insights or revelations: "Special" in the sense that it is novel to you. This may happen through reading Bible, listening to sermons or in daily events.
- Special urge: "Special" in the sense that it has resonance in your spirit or peace in your heart.
- Unexpected intuition of Scriptural passages: Not through intellectual analysis or deduction, which usually has a process.
- Pictures in the spirit: In general these pictures would not be as clear as seen by the eyes. When you see such pictures, ask the Holy Spirit the meaning of these pictures, and then announce these explanations by faith.

How to ascertain the will of God?

All revelations has to be tested. There are three tests: Biblical principles, moving of the Holy Spirit and our encounters in life. Moving of the Holy Spirit has to be compatible with the Biblical principles and tested in life, and only then can the guidance of God be ascertained.

- How to distinguish emotional impulse and moving of the Holy Spirit: Time is the best proof.
- Bible: moving of the Holy Spirit would never oppose the general principles of the Bible.
- Encounters in life: We cannot frivolously think that when things go smooth, then it is God's guidance, and when things go rough, it is God's forbiddance. Encounters in life has certainly a value of reference, but they have to be assessed together with moving of the Holy Spirit and the Biblical principles.