

Listening to God

Taking time to listen to God hard can be hard for us in our busy lives. And as we read in our Bibles, it wasn't easy in Biblical times, either.

God spoke directly to His people to guide them and still they didn't always hear His voice. Today, those who are seeking God continue to listen to Him. These are gifted people who are able to discern His voice, yet the opportunity to listen to God's call isn't just given to those who are 'gifted'. It is an opportunity for all who believe to seek God and listen to him.

God speaks to people in different ways. We see this in scripture. God spoke to Abraham in verbal communication. We can read this in Genesis 22 v 1-2, in the testing of Abraham; we read that God calls out to Abraham and he answers and then God tells him to sacrifice Isaac. From Genesis 37 to Genesis 50, we read the story of Joseph, a man who had the gift of interpreting dreams. In Exodus 3, God speaks to Moses through a burning bush. God speaks to Elijah in a still small voice in 1 Kings 19 v12. And we know that God spoke to Paul in a blinding light in Acts 9 v3.

So how do we hear Him?

Firstly, *we need to be in a place to listen to Him*. Where are we most receptive to hearing God?

Where has God spoken to you in the past? Did God speak to you when you were on a walk in the hills or by the sea? Were you alone or with others?

Listening to God is normally more about a journey than an event, although we know that God can and does speak in the instant.

We need to get to a point in which we are ready to hear God's voice, and this is our second point. Preparation is important.

Thirdly, *listening to God can take place in a corporate setting*.

Here are two suggested ways forward, firstly a focus on the characteristics of God and over the page, the Temple model of prayer.

God's Greatness

Reading: Psalm 145

Images of creation: take a walk and look; reflect on something that reminds you of the greatness of God

Worship: songs of worship

Reflection: reflect on the greatness of God

Sharing: What you have found on your journey and how does it remind you of God's greatness?

Prayer: giving thanks for what we have heard, what we have learned

God's Love

Reading: John 19 v14 -30

Images of God's love: reflection

Worship: focused on God's love for us: songs of worship

Reflection: the agony of the cross and what Jesus did for us. Walk and reflect.

Share: our feelings

Prayer: Confession and repentance, both Individual and corporate

God's Will

Reading: Luke 12 v31-34

Reflective worship: songs of worship

Prayer: Humbly asking God for His plan

Silence: Take time to wait

Reflection: Walk and reflect on what God is saying

Share: What is God saying to me?

Prayer: Giving back to God what we believe he said

One of the models we can use to help us is the temple model. The Jewish temple had an interesting design which encouraged worshipers to journey, moving from one stage to the next, with the ultimate destination being the Holy of Holies.

Although today we are not confined by a model that keeps God at a revered distance, it can be good to follow the pattern of the temple to help us come close to God in order to listen to him. This model can be used very simply in a prayer meeting.

Temple outline:

Outside the temple through the gate Beautiful into the first court.

Moving from the first court through the Nicanor gate into the court of the Priests. Here we find the altar of Sacrifice for the cleansing of the people.

Moving on into the Holy Place. The Holy Place contained the altar of incense. We are reminded of the prayers of the saints being like incense ascending to God.

Moving through the veil (curtain) into the Holy of Holies.

Our journey:

Praise and Worship

From the outside we come to God in praise and worship. This can be either sung worship or prayers, or both. We have found the longer you spend at this point the easier it is to listen to God.

Confession

Take time to repent of our sins before God. In terms of a physical act you could try washing each other's hands as a sign of cleansing after the time of confession.

Supplication

This is the point where we humbly ask God for what is on our hearts. This can be done in a time of praying for the situation. We have found that it is good to remind people to pray for the situation rather than what they believe is the answer.

Listening

It can be hard to move from asking God into a time of listening to Him. Quiet, reflective worship songs or music can help this process. Take time in silence to wait on God. Sometimes we may not hear what we want or expect to hear. It maybe that we don't hear from God at all.

Don't be disheartened.

God likes us to persist in asking Him.

When we hear from God, it is helpful to follow three steps:

1. Write down what we hear
2. Offer the word back to God in prayer
3. Arrange to meet with Him again in a few days; go home and pray about the word or words. Meet again to see if you still feel the word is right and then share the word with others outside the group. Share the word with Interserve office staff.

This is just a suggested way forward but we do not have to follow a rigid structure. We can vary our approach.

Instead of focusing to the temple, we might focus perhaps on the characteristics of God. Below is an outline of such a model.

Additional tips

Use CD or mp3 music to help you worship in a small groups. If you can't go for a walk in the reflection sections then take time alone to focus in a quiet place. For the first section on the greatness of God, instead of going out and immersing yourself in creation, you could select an image that helps you to worship. Each member of the group could be asked to bring such an image to the meeting.

As we were reminded earlier God wants to speak to us, we just need to have the time and the patience to wait on Him.