

Listen Up

Study Guide #1 Discerning The Voice of God

“GOD WILL SPEAK TO THE HEARTS *of those who prepare themselves to hear; and conversely, those who do not so prepare themselves will hear nothing, even though the Word of God is falling upon their outer ears every Sunday.”*

— A.W. Tozer

It is true that God is still speaking to each and every one of us. Contrary to what some might believe, God is not stingy in his desire to be heard, nor does He play a cat-and-mouse game to see who will pass the test and be worthy to hear him. However, the Bible does teach us that there are people of certain character and circumstance who are more apt and ready to hear God than others.

This study guide is to begin the process of making us aware how God wants to prepare us to hear him. You will revisit the life of Samuel and see how he learned a new discipline in his life listening to God. It might be a pretty awesome thing to know that you can hear God’s voice, but as we will discover, it is not always going comfortable, for He does not waste his words on deaf ears.

You are invited by God to start your time with prayer:

*“Lord, during this time of learning and prayerful discovery,
heighten my spiritual senses to begin
seeing that which I have not seen before
hearing that which I have not heard before
sensing that which is not tangible
and believing that which I have yet to believe.”*

*Teach me to sort through the noises in my world
in order to hear and discern your
powerful, wonderful, pure, precious voice.”*

Focus Scripture

1 The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

2 One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. 3 The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." 5 And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

6 Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD : The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

8 The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Thoughts From The Text

- ✚ What was Samuel's purpose for being in the temple? (vs1)
- ✚ According to verse 2, what time of day was this? (Lev 24:3)
- ✚ How many times did God call to Samuel? How many times did it take Eli to realize that God's voice was rising out His quietness? (vs8)
- ✚ How did Samuel finally learn to listen to God? (vs9,10)
- ✚ Where was God located when He called to Samuel the fourth time? (vs 10)

Group Talk

- ❖ Put yourself in Samuel's shoes for a moment. After the third time of mistaking this voice, what would you have been thinking?

- ❖ Notice the different in the ways that Samuel responded to God's call in vss 4-6, 8. What do you think is going on inside Samuel?

- ❖ What is different about God's call and Samuel's response in verse 10?

- ❖ Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the temple. Do you think this put Samuel in a position to more easily hear God? Why or why not?

- ❖ Read 1 Peter 2:4-10 and 2 Corinthians 3:6. What does this tell you about yourself and how does this compare to what Samuel was doing?

- ❖ What does it mean to you that God called Samuel by name?

Sometimes Unexpected

According to the text, Samuel was asleep at the time that God began calling. We could call this an interruption of what was a regularly scheduled activity. God often times speaks to us in times that interrupt our schedule, when it is least expected. When the angel spoke to Joseph and Mary on separate occasions about the divine birth of Christ, we could call this an interruption. The question remains for us to consider as to how willing are we to have our lives interrupted by God like this. Think about what it means for God to interrupt your life. Would you welcome this for His sake, or fret over the thought of having life changed from hearing God's voice+

God still speaks to us today, calling us by name and repeating his calling. He is looking for those who will listen to his voice and follow Him, even if that means giving up our own plans and dreams to be used for His purpose. God used Samuel's obedience to bring about the next stage in the Kingdom of God. He desires to do the same through those of us who will listen and respond to His voice.

What Does It Mean To Listen

When God spoke to Samuel the fourth time, Samuel replied, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." Something we miss when reading over this is the term used in the Hebrew that we translate 'listening' here. It is the term *shama*, which refers to giving someone your undivided attention with the intent to obey or give heed to what is said. The use of this very term indicates that to clearly hear God is to seek and listen with the intent of following or obeying what is said. In 1 Sam 15:22, note the use of the same word:

"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying(shama) the voice of the LORD? To obey(shama) is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams."

Have you ever noticed how the Scripture places a pointed emphasis on listening to God. For example, the phrase "hear the Word of the Lord" occurs 24 times. We also find numerous uses of the phrase "He who has ears, let him hear." It is apparent through out scripture that hearing and listening is so much more than acknowledging an audible sound or that something spoken has been heard.

Group Talk

Read **Luke 8:16-18**.

16"No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. *17*For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open. *18*Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."

- ❖ What does it reveal to you about God's desire to speak to you?
- ❖ Why do you think that the analogy of "light" is being used in the context of talking about how one listens?
- ❖ How do you interpret the last part of verse 18, i.e., what is being given more of or taken away?
- ❖ How does this connect with discerning God's voice?

Three times in Hebrews (3:7,15; 4:7), we find the Psalm 97 being quoted: *So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion,..."*

What does it mean to you to 'harden your heart'? Why do you think this has to do with hearing God?

Personal Time

What is it so important about listening to God? Read to following verse and complete sentence.

- ✚ John 10:27 - Listening to God helps us _____
- ✚ Acts 8:26-38 - Listening to God helps us _____
- ✚ Acts 13:2-3 - Listening to God helps us _____
- ✚ Acts 10:9-23 - Listening to God helps us _____
- ✚ James 4:1-3 - Listening to God helps us _____

What's Your Type

There are two types of listening: *passive listening* and *proactive listening*. We do not need much training to become passive listeners. We hear with our physical ears, but we don't digest the truth of what is being said or revealed. So, most of us are already pretty good at passively waiting for God to speak loudly to us.

God wants his children to be proactive in their listening skills, those who will look and listen and seek intently for God to reveal himself in ways that are unique to how He made each of us.

