

Hearing God's Voice

When God seems silent, has He stopped speaking?

Or are we not truly listening?

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John 10:27 “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”

John 10:27 (MSG)

²⁷ My sheep recognize my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

John 10:27 (NET)

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

John 10:27 (YLT)

²⁷ according as I said to you: My sheep my voice do hear, and I know them, and they follow me,

John 10:27 (GW)

²⁷ My sheep respond to my voice, and I know who they are. They follow me,

John 10:27 (BBE)

²⁷ My sheep give ear to my voice, and I have knowledge of them, and they come after me:

John 10:27 (AMP)

²⁷ The sheep that are My own hear and are listening to My voice; and I know them, and they follow Me.

My childhood home was an apartment building in the South Bronx, NY around the corner from a tree-lined field at Crotona Park, the perfect place to let a dog run free for its daily exercise. Many evenings I took my dog Sunshine there for an after-supper romp. We both enjoyed the outing, but dreaded the roundup that brought it to an end: Sunshine knew it meant the loss of his freedom, and I knew I had to chase him in order to catch him. Sunshine never seemed to hear me when I called.

Other dog owners had discovered the same field. Most of us had ordinary mutts, but ours was a Collie, and had not bothered to train them. When it was time to go, we all chased our pets around the field in an often-frustrating effort to hook leash to collar.

There was one man, however, whose relationship with his dog stood out in sharp contrast to the rest of us. When the man was ready to go, he stayed where he was and said, "Come." He didn't speak loudly or use the dog's name, but simply said the word within earshot of his dog. We would all watch in envy and astonishment as



one large brown head suddenly lifted from the noisy pack and turned to find the voice. Then this dog would run to his master's side, where he'd sit, panting with the excitement of responding to his master's command, and wait for the leash to be attached.

Years later, this experience helped me to glimpse some insights into how a person learns to hear the voice of God. One dog in that pack had learned to hear and respond to his master's voice. His training had taken place in private, without the distractions of the noisy field. The result was that even amid the confusion of play, that dog's ear was tuned to his master's word. The dog ignored all other voices and conversations, but he immediately singled out and obeyed his owner's "Come."

Jesus used a similar picture of response when He said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" ([John 10:27](#)).

What is involved in hearing the voice of our Master?

THE BIBLE: GOD'S WORD TO US

The Bible is the only living book in the history of the world. It lives not because it is relevant and full of powerful truth (although it is both of those), **but because it is the active voice of our living God, communicating Himself to us.** His Person, His character, His ways of dealing with people, His purposes—all remain eternally unchanged and unchanging, revealed in His Word. Not only has God spoken, He speaks. He speaks to you and to me today about Himself, about His truth, and about us, His creation. And what He says is indispensable to our lives: "The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" ([John 6:63](#)).

Our interaction with God in His Word is our private training to recognize and listen to His voice. As we read, hear, study, memorize, and think about God's Word, our Shepherd's voice becomes more distinct to us, more easily discerned in the loud noisy and confusing times of life.

- 1) Why, then, do so many of us approach the Scriptures with confusion and leave with frustration or disappointment?**
- 2) Why do we find ourselves unable to hear God speaking to us?**
- 3) Too often the pages seem to hold only printed words. We can't seem to grasp, "God is speaking to me."**

Allow me to share another illustration with you:

An Indian was walking in downtown New York City alongside a resident friend. As they approached a busy street corner in the center of Manhattan, the Indian seized his friend's arm and whispered, "Wait. I hear a cricket." "Come on!", the city boy sneered, "This is downtown New York -- how could you possibly hear a cricket?" His friend persisted however, "No - seriously, I do!"

As cars were roaring, horns honking, people shouting, brakes screeching, cash registers clanging, subway clamoring and people bustling about, the Indian began leading his friend along slowly, every now and again stopping and turning his ear toward the seemingly noiseless sound.

At last, the Indian insisted they were near and proceeded to follow the sound across the street and toward a small dark corner next to a graffiti covered wall. There, he bent down to a miniscule tuft of grass and pulled out the cricket. "I told you", he said, "I heard a cricket."

Astounded, the New Yorker marveled "How could you have heard that cricket in the middle of all this noise?" "Well", said his foreign friend, "My ears are different from yours. It simply depends on what you're listening to." Here, let me show you what I mean." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of change --a couple of quarters, three or four nickels, and a dime and a few pennies. "Now," he said, "watch this." He held the coins waist high and dropped them to the sidewalk. At once, every head within nearly a block turned around and looked in the direction of the Indian.

"You see, It all depends on what you're listening to."

Good People, to what sounds are our ears trained to listen?

Are they trained to hear the sound of money, of gossip, of complaining, of worldly things or are they trained to hear the still small voice of the Most High, directing and advising us in the way we should go? Let's ask the Lord to train our ears to hear the things of God today. We need to be listening for His direction in the hustle and bustle of this noisy and influential world or we will surely go astray!

TRAINING OUR EARS

The very best and highest attainment in this life is to remain still and let God act and speak in you.-- **Meister Eckhart (1260-1328 German philosopher)**

We may believe that God uses His Word directly in our lives. We may trust His working with us. We may spend much time poring over our Bibles. Yet one more thing is needed if we are to know, when we come away from our time spent with God in His Word that **"God has spoken to me."** Perhaps you have had the experience, as I have, of wishing the words on the page would suddenly come alive. Yet you've once again been discouraged to find that despite your earnest intention, they remained simply printed words.

Why do God's Words sometimes seem lifeless? Assuming we have dealt with any sin of which we are conscious (for sin surely deafens us more effectively than anything else), made ourselves available to God in His Word, and come trusting His Person, we must give our attention to the focus of our listening: *For what are we listening when we open our Bibles?*

Herein lies the root of our discouragement: We are listening for something, not someone. We are, as it were, trying to hear the voice of God, not the voice of God. This deviation of focus is subtle but pivotal. Without the right focus, listening degenerates to polite (if frustrated) attention, and praying becomes dry duty.

Psalms 46:10 (KJV)

¹⁰ **Be still**, (Stand silent, Let be and be still, Desist, Be quiet, Cease striving, Let go of your concerns, Be at peace in the knowledge that I am God, Stop and shut up, Close your mouth) **and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.**

See if you recognize any of these responses:

- 1) "I'm not getting anything out of my quiet time (Bible study) lately";
- 2) "God isn't making Himself clear about what I should do";
- 3) "I keep asking God about my problem, but He hasn't given me any answers";
- 4) "I wish the Bible seemed more relevant to me—it's so dry and obscure most of the time."

Not one of these concerns is wrong, but all reflect a deviation of focus: These concerns are **issue-centered, not God-centered**. They focus on *what* God is saying, without a prior focus on *God Himself*.

Issue-centered listening is a perilous endeavor. By nature it is both selective and pressured. Often what results from such listening is a misuse of Scripture, an attempt to use one verse as a simple answer to a complex situation, or an effort to justify selfish preference with Bible quotes.

This kind of listening commits the sin of treating God as a means, not an end. With such a frame of mind, whether we realize it or not, we are using God to try to get what we think we need. **Instead, God calls us to listen to Him, to seek His face**; He will take care of our needs. **Matthew 6:33** echoes that very call: "**But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**"

And so, as we open the Word, our hearts should cry out with David, "**Your face, LORD, I will seek**" (**Psalm 27:8**). What questions can I devise that will help keep this focus:

- 1-What is revealed about *God* in these verses?
- 2-What do I see of *God's* character, work among men in this passage?
- 3-How is *God* responding in this event or circumstance?

Too many of us are seeking *God's Word* and not seeking God in His Word!

When we seek *God* in His Word, we will find ourselves hearing Him. We will know Him better and better and, in that context, the truths He reveals, the principles He shares, the insights He gives will become profoundly meaningful to our everyday existence.

To seek truths and insights without a focus on God Himself is not to commune with a Person who will speak to us, but to collect ideas that will be at best temporarily helpful, at worst obscure and irrelevant.

As we look into the *face* of God, the *words* God has for us will take on the perspective He intends for our current situation.