

HEARING GOD ABOVE THE HEADLINES

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In the midst of media headlines, prayer is our powerline to God through which we can experience the joy of friendship with Him (John 15:16). Prayer is also listening to God and hearing His voice.¹ In this article we will focus on how we can hear God more distinctly above the hustle and bustle of contemporary life. The verb *akouó* (“to hear”) is used more than 400 times in the New Testament. Indeed, the New Testament was written to hearing communities of Christ-followers across the Mediterranean. Most early Christians were poor, illiterate workers.² Jesus reminds us in Luke 11:28: “Blessed rather are those who *hear* the word of God and obey it!” (NET).³ Reading and hearing the Word of God is the primary way to hear God’s voice whether it’s through an app or through the printed pages of the New Testament.

Drawing near to God is never self-generated but is rather the work of God Himself. He draws us not just with love, but also with lovingkindness.



This Word has life-giving power and impact, and the more we hear it, the more we will grow in our faith (John 6:63; Hebrews 4:12; Romans 10:17). Moreover, the more we hear from God, the more we will want to talk to Him! Hearing the Word begins and continues the journey toward life-transformation.⁴ This Word reveals the majesty of God's character, unfolds the plan of salvation, and the deep involvement of God in the human story (Exodus 34:6; 2 Timothy 3:15). As Christ-followers we should seek (Psalm 119:2), store in our heart (Psalm 119:11), delight in (Psalm 119:14), listen to and learn from (Psalm 119:7, 12, 26, 29), sing about (Psalm 119:54), delight in (Psalm 119:24), praise God for (Psalm 119:48), and walk in (Psalm 119:1, 32) the Word of God. God is ready to speak if we are ready to listen!

JESUS: GOD'S LIFELINE IN HISTORY

We have heard God in an unparalleled way through Jesus, God's Lifeline, as revealed in His Word and in human history (Luke 24:27; Hebrews 1:2, 3). There is no other voice on the planet that can talk to the human heart like the voice of Jesus. We hear His voice all through Scripture, but especially as we focus on Matthew 11:28 and 29: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (NKJV).⁵ The gospel invitation is always in that rich and special word *come*. In spite of our fallenness we can always come to Jesus. This invitation from Jesus is both remarkable and radical. I remember sharing this invitation at an evangelistic meeting in Seoul, South Korea, and seeing students come forward to surrender their lives to Jesus. I still get goose bumps thinking about it! There is power, through the Holy Spirit, when this call is made to the human heart (Zechariah 4:6).

In Jesus' day, people were spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically tired from Roman oppression and taxation, from legalistic religious teaching, and from the vagaries of life. Jesus invites His listeners and us into a partnership with Him by using the metaphor of "yoke." This was a wooden device used to harness the power of oxen. Jesus invited His hearers and us today to actually put on *His yoke*.⁶ His yoke is not burdensome (Matthew 11:28–30) but produces joy and delight in the context of His "come to Me"

and "learn from Me" invitations (see Matthew 11:28, 29; John 6:35, NKJV). The more we come to Jesus, the more we can learn from Him and deepen our partnership. Ellen White put it this way: "We can receive only as we impart to others. As we continue imparting, we continue to receive; and the more we impart, the more we shall receive."⁷

God also speaks to us through the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is always in harmony with Scripture, for His ministry is to lift up and testify about Jesus (John 15:26; 16:13, 14). The Holy Spirit testifies to us that we are God's children, speaks to our minds, gives us insight and understanding, directs our thoughts, and even ministers to us when we sleep (Job 33:14, 15; Psalm 42:8; Proverbs 2:6; John 14:26; Acts 27:23–25; Romans 8:16). The thoughts He gives us, the direction He clarifies for us, perhaps even the visions He grants us will always be in harmony with what Scripture teaches, because not only does He lift up Jesus, but He has also inspired God's holy Word (2 Timothy 3:16). So, the Holy Spirit will impress us to carry out acts of kindness, to use our spiritual gifts in service to others, to share the gospel with a friend, to pray for someone in need, and in innumerable other ways to share and show God's love. The more we exercise our faith in Jesus, the more familiar and precious His voice will be.

We also hear God speak through others. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 7:6: "But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus" (NKJV). God works through people, and godly people can be a source of guidance, encouragement, and strength. Many of these good folk are in the churches we attend, so we also hear God speak to us through the Body of Christ. The primary person God uses to speak to me is my wife. She is a kind-hearted person with godly wisdom, and listening to her always helps me clarify things. I recall a problem I had while working as a pastor. The church was divided regarding its future direction, and folk were unclear about what to do. My wife reminded me to share Scripture, keep pointing to Scripture, and to keep lifting up Scripture. That made all the difference because God spoke so simply and beautifully that the church received clarity on what to do next. No doubt, there are people in your life whom God has placed there to provide that listening ear and that spark of godly wisdom to assist you in life's journey.

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HEARING FROM GOD MATTERS

Hearing from God matters because God is still actively working in the midst of the suffering in war-torn countries and various communal and social crises and in the life of every person through His Holy Spirit. Scripture reminds us that God is invisible (Hebrews 11:27), and because He lights everyone who has come into the world (John 1:9), we know that He is at work through humanitarian and government agencies and in myriad other ways I can't even describe or understand. While social media is ubiquitous, only God is omnipresent (Proverbs 15:3; Isaiah 57:15). Therefore, we are called to live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Let's continue to pray for and be involved with various aid organizations, frontline workers, first responders, rescue teams, and carers. Prayer works because God works *even more*.

James reminds us to “draw near to God and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8, NKJV). Perhaps we would have preferred that James would have written “God will draw near to you when you are in trouble” or “God will draw near to you when you call on Him.” Certainly, God does indeed draw near to us when we are in trouble and call on Him (Psalm 20:1; 50:15; 91:15). However, in this verse, James places the onus on us. You can be as close to God as you want! God moves in response to our move, which is a move we can't make on our own. In other words, our drawing near to God is never self-generated but is rather the work of the Father Himself (John 6:44). God draws us not just with love, but also with lovingkindness (Jeremiah 31:3). There is a divine reciprocity in our relationship with God. He moves on the basis of our need, but the realization of our need is itself the work of the Holy Spirit. God is desperate to connect with us!

I used to listen to a local Christian radio station when I traveled around the central coast in the state of New South Wales, Australia. As I headed toward Sydney, however, the sound on the FM station became muffled and choppy as I was going farther away from the radio tower. But when I headed back up the motorway toward home, the signal became stronger, and I could hear and enjoy my favorite station once more. Some might suggest that, in the same way, God's voice becomes fainter when we drift away from Him. But I would disagree and suggest that God's voice is louder when we initially drift away from Him. He is desperate to save us (John 12: 32). Although His voice becomes fainter the longer we keep drifting from Him, He will never ever stop calling out to us (2 Peter 3:9). If we turn around in confession and repentance and come back to Him, we'll hear His voice in clearer and stronger tones again (1 John 1:9). Through the powerline of God, we can deepen our partnership with Him because of all that the lifeline of God has accomplished for us. ☪

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Philip Yancey, *Prayer: Does It Make a Difference?* (Nashville, Tenn.: Zondervan, 2006), 46.
2. James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1999), 245–249.
3. Quoted from the *New English Translation* of the Bible. NET Bible® copyright © 1996-2017 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://netbible.com>. All rights reserved. Italics supplied.
4. According to J. Gary Millar, our union with Christ leads to our transformation into His likeness (*Changed Into His Likeness: A Biblical Theology of Personal Transformation*, D. A. Carson, ed., vol. 55, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* [Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2021], 36).
5. Scripture references in this article credited to NKJV are quoted from the *New Kings James Version* of the Bible. Scripture taken from the *New King James Version*®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
6. Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Academic, 2003), 424, 425.
7. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1898), 370.