

ENCOUNTER
PRAYER

Listening to God

SESSION 6

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01 Listening

Often when we pray, we spend the whole time talking to God. Listening is a simple part of prayer, but it can be challenging.

In the Bible, a King called David wrote this:



"You've always given me breathing room, a place to get away from it all; a lifetime pass to your safe-house, an open invitation as your guest. You've always taken me seriously God; made me welcome among those who know and love you."

PSALM 61:3-5

David is saying that speaking to God is where he's able to get away from everything.

This was something that Jesus also used to do:



"After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone."

MATTHEW 14:23

One of the greatest things about prayer is learning not only to speak to God, but also to listen to God:



“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak.”

JAMES 1:19

Prisons can be noisy environments: you will need to train yourself to find peace and silence in the midst of the noise.

02 **Make space**

- Listening takes time and it helps if you start by removing distractions. Choose a place and time that helps you focus on God. We know it can be difficult to find some space on your own - it could just be before you go to sleep.
- If you can, get your breathing and posture right. Sitting in an upright position concentrating on slow steady breathing helps us relax.

03 **Clear your head**

- Many people find it difficult to still their minds when they sit in silence. If you find you're thinking of things you need to do, make a list for later then put it to the side.
- Don't worry if the thoughts filling your mind are about situations or worries you want to pray about; give them to God one at a time and then let them go. A good physical way to release your anxiety is to grip your palm shut as each worry or anxiety comes into your mind, and then releasing your grip; imagining you're dropping the anxiety.

04 **Learn to recognise His voice**

God can speak to us in many ways. He can use our thoughts, feelings, experiences and surroundings to capture our attention. If you find your mind filling with pictures or thoughts that seem a bit strange or random, pay attention to them and test whether you think they're God's voice.



"...but test everything; hold fast to what is good."

1 THESSALONIANS 5: 21

Use the following as a guide:

#1

Ask the Holy Spirit for help to hear God's voice and to distinguish God's voice from other voices, or our own inner voice – if you think that any of the thoughts you have are strange, talk to the chaplain about them.

#2

Remember that God will not contradict what He says in the Bible. Jesus's teaching in the New Testament provides a framework for the way that Christians should live. God's voice will always be in line with what is written in the gospels.

#3

The Bible is an important way to learn to recognise God's voice:

- Read short passages of the Bible, especially focusing on the Psalms, for example. If a particular verse comes alive to you, this could be God speaking.
- Another exercise might be to take a story from the Bible and read it five or six times, asking God to speak to you. Remember, the Bible is God's word, so expect to hear from Him.
- It could also be helpful to picture yourself in the story.

This passage from Matthew is a good example:



“Then He got into the boat and His disciples followed Him. Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke Him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’ He replied, ‘You of little faith, why are you so afraid?’ Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The men were amazed and asked, ‘What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey Him!’”

MATTHEW 8:23-27

Ask yourself questions, such as:

What would it feel like to be in the boat with Jesus? What would you have felt as the waves swept over the boat? How would you react to Jesus sleeping? How would you have felt when He calmed the storm?

Doing this same exercise as a Bible study in a group can be equally helpful too, with one person reading whilst the others listen and discuss what is said after a time of silence to allow God to speak further.

Whatever form it has taken, as you finish your time of listening try to write everything down or remember the feelings and thoughts you had. If God is speaking, He will continue the conversation, or you can ask Him to confirm what He's said in other ways as you go on with your day or week. If they are just random thoughts, that's okay; it's all part of the process of learning.

Remember, God's voice will never tell you to do anything that harms or negatively impacts others, like steal, kill, harm, rob or hurt someone, etc. God only ever wants us to strengthen and encourage others.



"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17

05

Be still and know that I am God

Practice stillness and silence – it will help you. Here are some Bible passages:



"Be still and know that I am God."

PSALM 46:10



"Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him."

PSALM 37:7



"A time to be silent and a time to speak."

ECCLESIASTES 3:7

06

You are not alone

We can often struggle with feelings of isolation and loneliness. By spending time in prayer, listening and talking with God, you will discover that you are not alone; that you have a Father in heaven who is always with you and always listening to you.



"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

HEBREWS 13:5

You can pray and listen to God all the time, wherever you are, whatever you are doing. God is with you and He is always available - you don't need to have a visitor's order or a special time; he is available to you 24-7, and wants to enter into an ongoing conversation with you. Knowing Him will not only help you through your time in prison, but throughout the rest of your life.

The Bible says:



*"Rejoice always, **pray continually**, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

Moses was a friend of God:



"The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend."

EXODUS 33:11



*“When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. **So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.**”*

ROMANS 5:6-11

Our prayer is that this course helps you enter into a lifelong friendship with God, a friendship that he really wants to have with you, an ongoing, face to face conversation that will sustain throughout your life.