



THE  
THREE-DAY  
LISTENING  
PRAYER  
DEVOTIONAL

SETH BARNES

**THE THREE-DAY  
LISTENING PRAYER  
DEVOTIONAL**

**BY SETH BARNES**

## INTRODUCTION: WHY LISTEN?

The purpose of this three day devotional is to help you recognize the voice of God. God does not merely exist. He is not just good. He is personal and he cares about you.

The trouble is, this “personal relationship with God” that we as a Church advertise to nonbelievers may not feel very personal at all. Somewhere along the line you may feel as though you’ve been sold a bill of goods. We’re so saturated with doctrine that has little or no basis in our experience that we look and act like hypocrites.

It’s time you face the issue; trifling with God doesn’t serve him—if our friends can

see the unreality of our faith, then he certainly can.

So what if you could set your skepticism aside for a just a few days and try listening for God, just like Moses did? Or Samuel, or David, or the disciples, or Paul, or many of Christendom's greatest saints did down through history? What if they understood something that you've missed?

What if God was just waiting to break out of the box you've had him in, to show you that he does still talk to people and wants to talk to you? You may not be that far away from it even now. Chances are you already do hear the Lord's voice and just struggle to admit it.

Maybe God has been talking like this to a lot of us, but we're just not listening. We don't know how to listen. When he speaks, we say, "It's almost as if he were speaking." We don't want to dishonor him by attributing words to him that he never uttered. But

we never consider the disrespect of appearing deaf before the Almighty.

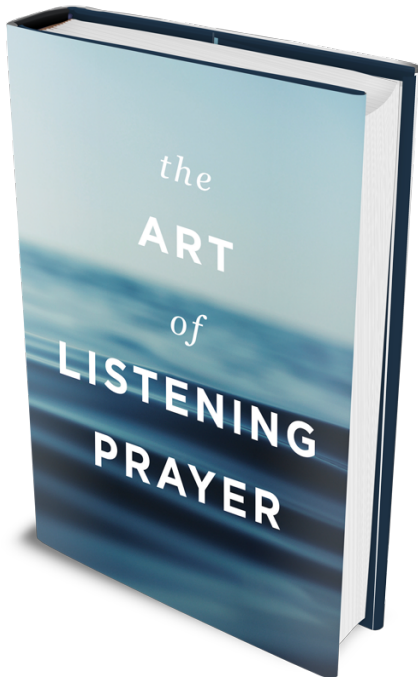
God has said in Scripture that he loves faith, that without faith you cannot please him (Hebrews 11:6). He implores us over and over to seek him. Why not take a risk and begin searching for the still, small voice of God that may be speaking to you, even today?

The fact is, God does speak to us, and he uses a variety of means to do so. As you begin listening to God and hearing his voice, you may find that a question I've written will lead you to ask the Lord one of your own. That's great! The purpose of this devotional is not to keep you dependent, but that at some point, your conversation with God will begin to flow naturally. You may find that the Lord begins to guide your conversations more over time.

Again, the goal is for you to grow in your personal relationship with God, not to complete every exercise.

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## DAY 1: HEARING WHAT HE SAYS

Communication can be complicated and can complicate our relationships. We've established that God wants a personal relationship with us and that he uses a variety of means to communicate. This devotional is founded on the premise that his relationship with us, like our relationships with our parents, loved ones, and friends, involves frequent two—way communication.

How does this look in Scripture? In John 15:15, Jesus says to his disciples, "I have called you friends." John 10 describes this personal relationship as one between a shepherd and his sheep. It is a relationship in which the shepherd calls to the sheep,

and the sheep obey him. Therefore, in a relationship, whether friends or acquaintances, communication must happen. Looking at Scripture, we can see a set of divine communication principles that describe the way God wants us to interact with him: ask questions, expect a response, recognize his voice, know there is variety in communication, and be honest.

## I. ASK QUESTIONS

In normal personal relationships, dialogue is initiated by asking questions. Questions prompt responses. Scripture is full of examples of people asking God questions. Isaiah 8:19 says, “Should not a people inquire of their God?” Jeremiah 10:21 says, “The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the Lord; so they do not prosper.” Matthew 7:7 says, “Ask and it will be given to you.” God wants to answer your ques-



tions. He expects us to initiate dialogue, just as we would in any personal relationship.

## II. EXPECT A RESPONSE

In normal personal relationships, after posing a question, it is customary to expect a response and to wait for it. So it is with God.

He is neither rude nor unreasonable. He wants to answer us; he doesn't want to exasperate us. Matthew 7:9 says, "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?" Then in Jeremiah 33:3 it says he will answer us if we call on him. Habakkuk 2:1 underscores this principle as well.

We often lack faith or patience after posing a question to wait for God's response. Or we doubt that he will answer us (see James 1:5-8).

### III. RECOGNIZE HIS VOICE

In normal personal relationships we recognize the voice of the other party. While our lives are filled with hundreds of relationships, we recognize the voices of our friends. They can call us on the phone, and we can identify them before they give their name. John 10:4 says, “His sheep follow him because they know his voice.”

Author Peter Lord tells the story of an entomologist studying crickets who could distinguish the unique sounds of over 200 crickets. He did this by listening carefully to them over a period of time. Gradually, he began to recognize their differences.

I have a pilot friend who can distinguish the sounds of different jets flying five miles overhead in the same way. In the same way, as we listen for God’s voice we’ll begin to discern his voice from our own or the enemy’s. The point is, if you are not accus-

tomed to hearing God's voice, don't expect miracles right away. Keep practicing. Just as you learned to recognize the voice of a friend, you will learn to recognize his voice.

#### **IV. VARIETY IN COMMUNICATION**

In normal personal relationships, people use a variety of means to communicate. I write letters, send emails, make phone calls, communicate messages through others, and talk to my wife, Karen. In all these different means of communication, she has learned not to look at the channel (the means I use to communicate), but at the message being conveyed. This principle fits with the variety of methods we see God employing to communicate with people in Scripture.

#### **V. BE HONEST**

God wants us to be honest with him, just as we expect honesty from our friends. As

you pray, you will notice that if there's something bugging you (i.e. a known sin in your life, something you're ticked off at someone about, your own doubts about God's wisdom, boredom with your life or your relationship with him), it's hard to hear God and get truly intimate with him until you've cleared the air regarding whatever issue is bothering you.

## **LISTENING PRAYER PRACTICE**

Use the following steps as a conversation starter and then continue talking with him on your own—it's what he's been waiting for!

1. When you're ready, quiet yourself, and examine your heart. It's often good to begin by reading Scripture. Ask the Lord to speak to you through it.
2. Ask the Lord to protect you in Jesus' name from deception.

3. Ask him to speak clearly in a way that you can understand, and to confirm anything he shared with you in Scripture.
4. Next, write down your questions for prayer.
5. Then pause. This is where you wait and listen. The Lord has much to say to you. He may direct you to another passage of Scripture. He may share a tender word. Whatever you feel he may be saying to you, write it down.

Remember James 1:5–7: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God.”

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK THE LORD**

1. Have I picked up any bad habits in the way I communicate with people? What are they?

2. Is there anything you want me to try doing as I attempt to converse with you?
3. Have I failed to expect you to respond or even to give you the time to respond? How so?
4. Are there any questions you'd like me to ask you?
5. Is there anything you'd like to share with me?

## **DAY 2: INTERPRET WHAT GOD SAID**

Yesterday, we opened our ears to hear God's voice, but we are sometimes still left with the question, "Was that really God?" Knowing the different ways in which God communicates will help us discern his voice.

Our family wanted a dog and after much searching, found the perfect puppy. "Whimsy" turned out to be a bundle of affection and constant source of amusement. At just over seven pounds, he was more fur than anything else.

Slowly he began to develop a routine comprised of just three activities: sleep, eat, and play. Though he spends most of his

time sleeping, occasionally he grabs a dog toy and starts running around the house. It's his way of saying, "I want to play!" What a bundle of energy Whimsy is to watch when he's playing! The name fits perfectly as every playful burst seems whimsical in origin. Whether darting about the house, chasing imaginary rabbits, playing keep away with the ball, or any manner of games, Whimsy quickly found his way into all of our hearts.

I have many ways of communicating with Whimsy. If I spill food on the floor, all I have to do is tap my foot and he runs over to lick it up. If he's done something wrong, the tone of my voice says plenty for I don't need words to communicate displeasure. If I grab the leash, it's time for a walk. Then the worst, when I am packing suitcases, Whimsy gets a sense of insecurity and fear of getting left behind. I would never want to restrict the ways in which I can communi-



cate with Whimsy. Words are just a small part of my repertoire.

Similarly, why should God (who is infinitely creative) limit himself? The list of the methods he has used in the Bible shows us something about him, but it doesn't begin to do justice to the possibilities available to him. The God who has communicated to people in so many ways throughout history wants to have a conversation with us. We need to be open about what shape that conversation takes, allowing the Lord to choose his means of communication.

Scripture shows that God uses a variety of methods to communicate to his people. The following is a list of some of the methods he has used. As you go through the list, find the Scriptures in your Bible. To properly interpret Scripture, we need to look at the context.

## THROUGH SCRIPTURE

- Acts 2:16–21 “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel...” Peter links the manifestations of the Holy Spirit with Old Testament prophecy.
- Acts 4:25–26 “You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David.” Peter and John echo Psalm 2 in their prayer.

## THROUGH OTHERS

- Deuteronomy 18:17–19 “I will put my words in his mouth.” God declares that he will speak through a prophet.
- Numbers 15:2 “Speak to the Israelites.” God commands Moses to communicate his desires to his people.
- Isaiah 28:11 “With foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people.” A prophecy to the Israelites.

## THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES/EVENTS

- Genesis 50:20 Joseph said, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.” Joseph tells his brothers how God redeemed his bad circumstances.

- Acts 1:26 “They cast lots.” After days of praying, with no obvious direction, they ask God to use the luck of the draw to decide who will replace Judas.

## AUDIBLY

- 1 Samuel 3:7–10 “The Lord called Samuel... Samuel said, ‘Speak for your servant is listening.’” Eli guides Samuel after having never heard the Lord’s voice.

- Exodus 33:11 “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.” Moses, having spent 40 years in the desert and having confronted Pharaoh, converses with God.

- 1 Kings 19:11–12 “And after the fire came a gentle whisper.” Elijah finds God not in the wind, an earthquake, or a fire, but a whisper.

## INWARDLY

- 1 Samuel 23:2 “he inquired of the Lord...The Lord answered.” David hears of the Philistine’s attack and looting and asks God what his response should be.

### Through Visions

- Ezekiel 12:23–28 “Every vision will be fulfilled.” God is tired of cynicism concerning his speaking. Though there have been false visions, he promises a change.

- Ezekiel 40:2–4 “Tell...everything you see.” Ezekiel had many visions that God asked him to record.

- Daniel 8:1 “I, Daniel, had a vision.” Daniel actually has a series of visions that leave him exhausted and ill.

## THROUGH DREAMS

- Genesis 37:5 “Joseph had a dream.” Joseph tells his dream to his brothers and they hate him all the more.

## THROUGH DEMONSTRATIONS OF POWER

- Acts 3:1–10: “All the people were... filled with wonder and amazement.” Peter and John heal a beggar, draw a crowd, and bring thousands to Christ.

- 1 Corinthians 2:4–5 “My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.” Paul recounts his evangelistic methodology –it’s not his words that count, but what God does through him that communicates most loudly.

These are just some of the ways our Creator reveals his voice to us, but how do we

discern if every dream, vision or word is indeed from God?

How do we avoid mistaking our own thoughts for God's?

Obviously, our first check is to see if it lines up with Scripture. Use the questions in the box on the next page to clarify if God has spoken.

<sup>1</sup> Thessalonians 5:21 says, "Test all things; hold fast what is good." But how do we do this?

## **LISTENING PRAYER PRACTICE**

In a quiet room with your Bible and journal, take two different colored ink pens. Use the first ink color to record your own thoughts.

You'll use the second pen to record what you sense God is saying. The different colored inks clarify "who's talking." I use a black pen to record my prayers. If the Lord responds to a question I've asked, I journal

this in blue ink. This process of listening may feel awkward and, possibly, presumptuous. It contains the potential for mistaking ordinary thoughts for the voice of God. But the important thing is that you are giving God the opportunity to speak to you. Just as children must be taught to listen and to sit respectfully during adult conversation, so we must learn to stop our one-way monologues with our heavenly Father.

## **USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO CLARIFY IF GOD HAS SPOKEN:**

- Was it a clear word or just an impression? God may give us different degrees of confidence in what he has said. We therefore need to humbly admit our fallibility.
- Does it exalt Christ? (John 16:14)
- Is it Scriptural? Scripture is our authority. God does not contradict himself. (Proverbs 30:5–6)

- Do other Christians confirm it? (Proverbs 20:18, Proverbs 15:22)
- Will it produce good fruit? (John 15:1–16)
- Will it produce spiritual growth? (John 11:41–42, Isaiah 55:10)
- Does God cause it to actually take place? (Isaiah 55:11, Deuteronomy 18:21–22)

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK THE LORD**

1. What are some ways in which you have spoken to me in the past?
2. How have I quenched your Spirit when you wanted to speak to me?
3. Is there anything I'm doing now that is quenching your Spirit?
4. Have I limited the ways in which you've desired to speak? How?
5. What can I do to better hear your voice?



Go outside somewhere in nature and imagine sitting with God. As you look at the world around you, ask God to teach you about his love. Can you see God's love as you look at trees, hills, water or wildlife that you may find around you?

## **DAY 3: APPLYING LISTENING PRAYER TO OUR DAILY LIVES**

Paul Miller was a bear of a man who ministered in the prisons of north Georgia with his wife in the 80's and early 90's. They had a team of people who ministered with them that Paul constantly challenged to get out of their comfort zones. Miller's trademark was a guitar he carried around like a Mexican bandolero. Because he was so big, the guitar seemed tiny in comparison. He was always getting the inmates to sing along to the music. Many gave their hearts to Jesus as a result of the testimonies and love shared.

Then, one of the team members received a very disturbing message from the Lord one day. He got a clear impression that God was going to take Miller and his wife home and that they were going to die. In fact, he felt the Lord saying that they were going to die within two months. At first, he didn't want to share this with anyone.

The thought that it might actually happen was horrifying. But the impression was so strong that finally he got the courage to share it—first with the leaders and then with the rest of the team. When they were gathered, he said, “I know this is a terrible thing to share, but I believe God said, ‘Prepare for this ministry to be transferred within the next two months.’” He then shared the specifics of what he felt God had shown him.

You can imagine the impact this had on the rest of the team. A number of the team members rebuked the man who had gotten this impression. But Miller silenced them.

After praying about it, Miller sensed that this might in fact be what God was saying, and he had a peace about it. As hard as it was, he began to get his affairs in order and appointed a successor should anything happen (the man who later shared the details of this story with me).

Two months later, Miller and his wife were in a car accident in which they were critically injured. They were pulled out of their wrecked car and loaded into an ambulance that sped toward the hospital.

As they drove, Miller lifted his head and weakly asked the paramedic, “How’s my wife?”

“She’s gone,” came the reply. On hearing this,

Miller nodded, and breathed his last.

When the news reached the team, they reacted with a mixture of grief and awe because God had tenderly prepared them for the loss of their leader.

When he calls, he wants to know that you will come. Just as we want to know that we can trust God, so he wants to be able to trust us as well.

*Look up the following passages to better understand what the Bible says about the matter.*

- Ezekiel 11:20 “They will follow my decrees.”
- Proverbs 8:32 “Blessed are those who keep my ways.”
- Acts 5:29 “We must obey God rather than men!”
- John 14:23 “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.”
- Hebrews 4:7b “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”

## LISTENING PRAYER PRACTICE

Continue to use your journal and record your conversations with the Lord. Ask the Lord this question, “What do you want me to do today?” As you continue to grow in hearing and discerning his voice test what you hear against the questions of yesterday's devotional.

When God has given you a directive, first write it down so that you don't forget it. Then, obey him. God doesn't speak just to sound off. When he shares something with us, he wants us to act on it!

Look at what a complex task it is to learn to communicate with our parents: First, we learn to recognize their voices, then we learn their vocabulary, how decipher their meaning, how to speak words, how to interact, then lastly, we learn how to respect and obey.

Ultimately, not until our 20s and 30s will we learn to communicate with our par-

ents on a mature level. It's the same way with God.

Our understanding of how to communicate develops over a long period of time. That's why it's so important to assess our interactions with him after the fact so that we can better understand what worked (and what didn't).

This practice—today we call it “debriefing”—is found throughout Scripture:

- Luke 2:19 “Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”
- Luke 24:14–15 “They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.”
- 1 Corinthians 14:29 “The others should weigh carefully what is said.”
- Luke 10 The debriefing with Jesus after the 72 had gone out.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK THE LORD

1. Do I struggle in the area of obedience?
2. Is there anything within me that needs to die so that I can better obey you?
3. What have you shared with me that I've failed to do?
4. Do I pause sufficiently to evaluate my interactions with you?
5. What do you want me to do today?



## CONCLUSION

My prayer is that hearing God's voice has transformed your thinking. This devotional is a practical introduction to that conversation. The conversation doesn't end here. Use the tools from this devotional to begin hearing what he has for you daily. If you're like me you'll want to find ways to continue listening for his voice as you go forward from here. How can you do that? Here are a few ideas:

## **CONTINUE YOUR DISCIPLINE**

Continue in your discipline of setting aside uninterrupted time to be with God. Remember, he is a jealous God. He doesn't want to compete for your attention. When you meet with the Lord, ask him your own questions and take the time to patiently wait for his response.

## **SHARE IT**

Recognize that one of the best ways to grow is to share what God has shown you with others. Ask the Lord to show you who he would like to help you along this path.

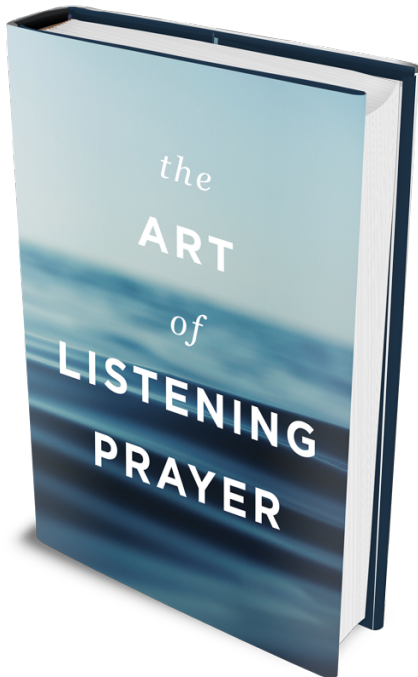
Thank you for joining me in the possibility of a conversation with God that leads to deeper intimacy.

This is just the beginning.

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

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