

Listening

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[0 : 00] This week in our series on prayer, we're thinking about listening. What's that like for you? What's been your experience of listening to the Lord and in the everyday things of life?

Because everything is clamouring to divert us, isn't it? Winston Churchill once said, Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak.

Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen. Listening and Courage are linked in this morning's reading. And Ananias listens, gets a message and responds.

And we're told that he's a disciple because that's what disciples do, don't we? You and I, we listen. On this day, the Lord calls him.

The Lord calls him in a vision by name. Notice this, he recognises the Lord's voice above all others. That's very important. I'll tell you a story about that later.

[0 : 57] And he tells Ananias to go to the most dangerous person that any early follower of Jesus would have known. Saul. Saul the tyrant. Saul, who is actively persecuting Christians.

He tells him to go to Saul. He doesn't know what's happened before this. Is that the point in our listening where we stop listening?

Where the Lord asks us to go and do something difficult. Ananias keeps on listening. He gets directions filled with the Holy Spirit.

He goes and courageously does what the Lord asks him to do. His hands were probably shaking when he got to Saul. He laid hands on him. Saul can't see. Yet he brings a message.

And he brings a message to Saul through Ananias. Ananias says to him, Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here as filled has sent me.

[1 : 59] He sent me so that you may see again. What an encouraging message. He then says, be filled with the Holy Spirit. And then Saul could see.

And he got up and was baptized. What an amazing transformation. God's prompting brings hope, healing and new life for Saul.

Why? Because Ananias was tuned in. He listened and he responded. Great day's work, Ananias. Great courage. Along with the Lord's voice, there is someone else in my life who I listen to intently. After 38 years of marriage, I'm tuned in to the tone in Mandy's voice. When Mandy calls, I know whether it's urgent. I certainly know when I'm in trouble. But yet even in a noisy crowded place, Mandy doesn't have to shout.

I can hear her voice above all the others because I'm tuned in. This is what we're called to do. Are we tuned in and listened to recognize the Lord's voice?

[3 : 07] To hear his character through that communication which he longs to give to us. That gentleness, the wisdom, the encouragement. Sometimes calm.

His discernment and direction. In the power of his Holy Spirit, he sometimes gives us words and pictures. Speaking into our lives. Sometimes for us.

Sometimes for others as well. And even when he says no, it's not harsh. In Christ, there is no condemnation. Tuning in and listening and knowing him is so important.

It also helps us recognize when the Lord isn't speaking. Come with me and I'll tell you where that happened. Because here at Christ Church, I was leaving on a Sunday morning.

I left here on a Sunday morning and I got to the bowling club walking on my way home. We'd had a fantastic Sunday morning service. It was brilliant. And I got to the bowling club on my way home, thanking God when I sensed a voice.

[4 : 11] And it said, oh, Clive, what a load of rubbish. Do you know what? You are really up yourself. Who do you think you are? You are well above your station.

Punching well above your way, I'll tell you. Do you know what? It was so stark. And I just sensed, I knew straight away this wasn't of God.

I knew who this was. So as Jesus told me, I rebuked it quite loudly. And I said out loud, oh, just get behind me, Satan. Now, I didn't know there was a chap sat down in the bowling club on a bench. And I sort of was aware of him. He looked up and I looked at him. He saw the collar and he goes, good on you, Vic. You tell him where to go. I think we both had a really good laugh that morning as we talked about that.

But we recognize God's voice because it wasn't encouraging. It wasn't helpful. And it certainly built us up. Listening is so important.

[5 : 17] How do we expect to hear from God? One is to grab your hearing aid. And my hearing aid is the Bible. This is the most helpful way that I hear from him through his word.

He speaks through his word because it's God breathed. Hear and speak to him personally through that. Maybe it's a word for you.

Maybe it's a word for your family. Maybe it's something about your life. Maybe it's something about your context. Something that he's asking you to do. It's there. Listen for it in his word.

Be encouraged, challenged, enthused. Be amazed. Tune in. Get to recognize also that still small voice. That gentle prompting that he often gives us through scripture again and again.

And hearing and listening just isn't for us either. Perhaps sometimes he speaks and maybe it's for others. Ananias knew that the message was for Saul.

[6 : 16] He was told, be prepared to be courageous and be the messenger. And listen for his promptings too. How he seizes your attention. For me, my heart races.

Tears sometimes come into my eyes. Something often comes into stark focus. And I know it's time to listen intently. Ask him. Ask the Lord, what are you saying to me?

What do you want to say? I'm listening. And don't get distracted. Tune into him and tune out the things that distract you. Enter into his presence.

There's a thing called Lectio 365. It's an app. I do it every morning. I lay in bed and I listen to it. And it helps me enter into the presence of God for the day.

Be aware that it's powerful stuff. Often midway through the day, you'll have heard a verse or something. And you meditate on it during the day. And you think, yeah, I can see why the Lord sees my attention with that.

[7 : 17] Be aware too that he can communicate through anything. A sunset, music, whatever. Ask the Lord, what are you saying to me in this moment? I'm listening. Now also, I've had some pretty wacky stuff in my life as well.

I'll tell you. And there's a good principle that I use when the wacky stuff comes. Pete Gregg says, use the ABC principle. And I agree with him. First is A, get advice.

Get advice from a prayerful, wise Christian who is in tune. Who is sensitive to the prompting of the leading of the Holy Spirit. And get into the Bible as well.

Is what I'm hearing in line with the character of God? What do I need to hear? In 2 Timothy 3, it says, All scripture is God-breathed.

And is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in all righteousness. So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. I like that. And C, is use common sense.

[8 : 22] God gave us common sense. Test it out. Did God really tell me to do this? Use common sense. Get advice. Get into the Bible.

But I'm too busy. I hear that so many times. I hear that saying to myself, I'm too busy. Slow down. Slow down. Be still and know that I am God.

I'm not good at being still. And when I'm not being still, I can't listen properly. Yet the more and more I still myself, I seem to hear God a lot clearer.

He doesn't have to shout as loud to grab my attention. That slow, quiet whisper of the Holy Spirit. And as we read the Bible, don't rush.

You know, often we rush through a verse, pause and meditate on it. Stop. Just use a verse for the day. And think on it. Ponder on it. And say, Lord, what are you saying to me through this?

[9 : 22] Holy Spirit, come into this verse today and speak to me. And speak to my life. What is it saying to me? What is it showing me? What do you want to say?

Where should I be tuning in? And the second is soften up. In our busy lives, it's easy for our hearts to be hardened and cynical. We become negative, sharp, snappy.

And we tune out. Soften up. My goodness, did Paul soften up? He had to. He had no choice. But look at what happens when God can reshape your life.

And there's no better example than Saul for us to do that as Christians. So, are you listening?

What's he been saying to you?

What's he been saying to you over these last few minutes? Tune in. Tune in. Let's make sure we don't miss him.

[10 : 27] Amen. Amen.