

MODULE 2: COMMUNICATION

SESSION 4: LISTENING TO GOD

Key Ideas for This Session:

- The stronger our relationship with God, the more deeply we will hear.
- God speaks to us using various methods.
- Listening for God’s instruction results in great rewards.
- Key verse: Matthew 13:9:
Whoever has ears, let them hear.

When we are spiritually deaf, we are not aware that anything important is happening in our lives. We keep running away from the present moment, and we try to create experiences that make our lives worthwhile...When we are truly listening, we come to know that God is speaking to us, pointing the way, showing the direction. We simply need to keep our ears open. Discernment is a life of listening to a deeper sound and marching to a different beat, a life in which we become “all ears.”⁶

What do you think this quote is saying?

When we choose to be in a relationship with someone, we naturally want to know them better. Much of our thought time and our actions go towards this goal. Our desire to strengthen our relationship with God is similar. This desire can be expressed in different ways including spending time with Him and being

⁶ Source: Henri Nouwen, *Discernment*, p. 5

motivated to know Him more. We also want God to know more about us as we share our lives and ask for things in His will.

Do you believe that as you grow in your relationship with God, you will be able to hear His voice more clearly? If yes, how?

The Bible points to the different ways that we can hear God’s voice when we are ready to truly listen. We are ready when we genuinely want to know more about God and when we have hearts that are open. According to the Bible, our relationship with God begins with belief. John 3:16 states, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* From that belief, the relationship can grow and there is back and forth in communication with God—Him to us, and us to Him.

God Speaks Through Nature:

Psalm 19:1
The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. ²Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. ³They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. ⁴Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

Romans 1:20
For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Do you agree that nature has a “voice” that reflects God? If yes, what elements of nature do you think speak loudly of His glory?

God Speaks Through Prayer, Reading, Meditation:

There are many verses in the Bible that encourage us to give our requests to God.

Matthew 7:7

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Through prayer, we essentially have a conversation with God where we can share our deepest desires, concerns, fears, joys, and anything on our minds or in our hearts. These times are also a time of listening.

The Bible describes how God communicates to humans who are listening. Through meditation and prayer, this communication can include:

- **The reading of Scripture**—For example, a verse may suddenly jump out at you even though you may have read it before.
- **Listening to music and worship**
- **Hearing your conscience or inner voice**—The Holy Spirit, representing God within you and promised by Jesus can guide you internally and support your decisions to make positive life choices. John 14:26 *“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*
- **Dreams/visions:** God can use our imagination and place visual images or pictures in our minds that communicate something to us.
- **Circumstances:** God can use certain events and situations to get our attention so that we will listen to Him. (For example, Saul—who later became the Apostle Paul—was blinded by God so that he could finally see the light.)

Has God communicated to you through your circumstances in the past? (If yes, give an example.)

Can you think of other ways God can speak to you or has spoken to you?

Do you have a quiet place where you can go to meditate and reflect on God and His character?

Lectio Divina (Divine or Sacred reading) is an ancient Christian practice of meditation popular among the Monastics. Its purpose is to deepen your communication with God through His Word. The method is simple. Below is an example to try:

Psalm 25:4-5

Show me Your ways, LORD, teach me Your paths. ⁵ Guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my Saviour, and my hope is in You all day long.

1. Read this verse slowly, several times. Listen to what the text is saying. What is it saying to everyone who hears it? What is it saying to you?
2. Listen for a word or phrase that stands out as you read and re-read.
3. Repeat the word or phrase over and over.
4. Think deeply about the words: What do these words mean to you? What place might they have in your life? How do they encourage?
5. Read the Scripture one last time and consider: What is God's invitation to you as you hear the Word. What might you do, not do, or change because of it?
6. Offer up a prayer of thanks to God, for this reading and time spent together.

If you are interested in Lectio Divina (an exercise of deep connection to God through His Word), your group leader can run an additional exercise (found in the appendix of these Life Skills materials).

Elijah, a powerful prophet and man of God experienced the quiet power of God's voice, while being hunted down by Queen Jezebel. He was afraid,

confused full of despair and running for his life. While on Mount Horeb, he cried out to God, "I am the only one left; and they seek my life, to take it away." Here is how God responded:

1 Kings 19:11-13

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

How do these verses describe the voice of the Lord? Why do you think the Lord chose to speak this way?

Based on these verses, how should a person listen for God?

Why do you think God is described as both awesome and powerful through nature, as well as gentle and still as in the Elijah story above?

God Speaks Through Others:

The Bible describes communication with God to include listening to Godly people who play a role in our lives. This could be pastors, chaplains, teachers, elders, friends, and community members who believe in Jesus Christ, what He did through the cross and that He was God's son.

Our life experiences and relationships influence the way we hear and understand such messages. When we are trying to be good listeners of God, we may ask, “Is this person saying something that rings true?” Or, “is this person in agreement with what I know and with what the Bible teaches?”

Most of us know someone who has given us good advice, and sometimes we can almost hear that person’s voice and what they would say to us as we face certain situations. It might have been something simple like, “Save your money for a rainy day” as you were considering whether or not to purchase a big-screen television.

All of us have been foolish at some time in our lives because we ignored good advice and that got us into trouble. Listening is more than hearing. Listening means that we pay attention to a message, understand it, and take it seriously. Often good listening involves asking questions based on our experience and knowledge and beliefs.

When faced with a tough choice, how do you go about making a decision? What influences do you listen to?

List two pieces of good advice you did not listen to but should have paid attention to:

Do you think Godly advice is always good advice?

James 1:17
Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Throughout history there have been people who have done terrible things and believed that it was God who told them to do it. For instance, many people defended Apartheid in South Africa or slavery in the United States because they believed God was in favour of Apartheid or slavery.

How do you think those who supported such things used the Bible to support their belief that they were right?

Can you give another example in history of someone, or a group of people, who did something bad and believed it to be God's will?

When people do terrible things and say that they were listening to God, what are they really listening to?

1 Timothy 4:1
The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

2 Corinthians 11:14
Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

James 4:7
Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Consider these three verses together. What do you think they are saying?

Break into small groups and discuss the following if there is time, or think about these topics this week:

- *Think about something you are trying to make a decision on and consider the advice you have gotten from others. Then apply this test to that advice:*
 1. *Does what I am hearing align or match up with what is written in the Bible?*
 2. *Does what I am hearing motivate me to do what is right?*
- *Read the story below and answer, “Why do some people hear, and others do not hear what God has to say?”*

Matthew 13:1-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then He told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

¹⁰ The disciples came to Him and asked, “Why do You speak to the people in parables?” ¹¹ He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ““You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.”^[a]

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to

see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”