

PREPARING TO HEAR GOD'S WORD

Luke 8:18

(Not entirely original with me)

Introduction: The Bible is called "God's Word" by most Christians and it is their guide to becoming a Christian and then to living the Christian life that God wants, however, do most Christians really have a holy reverence for God's Word as they should? Do they really "hear" God speaking through His Holy Bible? There is a "process" that brings life to God's Word and that is "Listening to God, Understanding what God says, Trusting in what God says, and being transformed by what God says." Without this process, there just can't be any real spiritual change in one's life. How well do YOU listen when you are "listening?"

I. PEOPLE NEED TO LISTEN TO GOD

1. The Bible emphasizes the idea of listening over and over and in several ways.
 - "Hear the Word of the Lord" occurs 32 times.
 - "Hear O Israel" occurs 6 times, "Listen" occurs 331 times and "Hear" occurs 347 times having to do with hearing God's Word.
2. "Incline your ear, give ear, pay attention" are used in various ways to tell people to listen to God intently.
3. **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear..."**, **"..if anyone has ears to hear, let him hear..."** *Mark 4:9*
4. The point is clear, God has much to say and because He is the all-wise and sovereign God and because of man's finite humanity as well as his/her fallenness, it is imperative for everyone to listen carefully.
 - However one can easily be like Martha, who was distracted by many things, unlike Mary who sat at the feet of the Lord Jesus to hear His Word. (*Luke 10:38-42*)
 - Jesus told a parable about a farmer sowing seeds and how some of the seeds (Word of God) was not fruitful because of things choking out the Word of God. (*Mark 4:18-19*)
5. People are to listen to the Word of God so they can learn to trust Him.

II. HOW GOD SPEAKS

1. God speaks through the Bible.
 - If one is going to listen to God and recognize His voice, one must go to the Bible, God's primary method.
2. God speaks through the Holy Spirit.
 - The Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Jesus Christ and teaches the truths of God's Word, helping each believer to understand God's truth, to worship the Lord correctly, and to be transformed through his/her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. God speaks through other people in believer's lives.
 - Believers are to encourage and build up one another. *1 Thessalonians 5:11*
 - Believers are to love one another, therefore proving that they are indeed disciples of the Lord.
John 13:34-35
 - Parents are to rear their children according to God's Word. *Ephesians 6:4*
- 1 Timothy 5:1-2; Galatians 6:1-2; 1 Peter 3:1-2, 7
4. Listening to God must involve God's Word and the Holy Spirit working together in the believer's mind and heart.

III. THERE MUST BE PREPARATION AND PARTICIPATION IN ORDER TO HEAR GOD

1. In order to listen/hear God, one must be prepared to listen for listening to God is a spiritual matter.
 - It matters to God HOW one listens and worships.
2. Often believers go through the motions of religious activity and are deceiving themselves, they are playing church and giving God a "nod" of recognition while in reality they are absent spiritually.
 - Their hearts are not in what they are doing, they are passive listeners, not prepared physically mentally or spiritually to hear the Word of the Lord.
 - Church attendance is just a routine day and they are not really ready to meet God or to listen to Him.
3. To understand the message and respond with faith and obedience, SPIRITUAL preparation is needed.
 - ***Ephesians 3:16-19 ; 1 Corinthians 2:9-3:3***
 - The worldly minded believer is apathetic and simply cannot understand and respond to the things of God while in that frame of mind.
 - The disciples didn't understand what Jesus was trying to teach them when He fed the 5,000 and He had to rebuke them. ***Mark 6:30-52***
4. To understand the message and respond with faith and obedience, there needs to be an OPEN HEART.
 - One's heart must be open to personal, soul searching examination for the purpose of seeing one's motives and what he/she is trusting on for security, etc.
 - Most believers arrive at church in a rush or once there get busy being friendly, talking, etc...and when sitting down, they have never given any thought of their heart's condition or their need to focus spiritually being controlled/led by the Holy Spirit.
 - The purpose of self-examination is to be honest with God in a sincere confession in a spirit of repentance.
 - Before there can be a proper response to God's Word one must deal honestly with his/her sin.
 - Dealing with one's sin is be personal examination and honest confession of his/her sin.
5. To understand the message and respond with faith and obedience, there must be active participation.
 - Active participation means concentrating, searching, probing, questioning, thinking, interaction, responding and applying God's Word.
 - God wants actively involved listeners, not pious, passive spectators.
 - ***1 Corinthians 2:15*** - A "spiritual" person is one that the Holy Spirit is free to work in an active heart and mind, therefore he/she is able to apply God's Word effectively.
 - ***James 1:22-27*** - There is a difference between superficial, unprepared, passive and uninvolved "listening" and the kind of listening God wants which is "active" listening that wants to understand His Word so that it brings change by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - One must carefully notice to whom God is speaking, what He is saying and why He says it and do so accurately.
6. To understand the message and respond with faith and obedience, one needs to test God's Word.
 - ***Acts 17:11*** - Believers need to listen attentively and put to test what they learn from God's Word.
 - One's background, tradition, personal experiences, prejudices, etc., can block the power and truth of the Word of God in one's life.
 - One needs to be sure that he/she is truly listening to God and not the ideas of somebody for so many "beliefs" of today in the Church are based on tradition or somebody's experience.
 - One must not apply his/her own poor methods of Bible study and poor methods of listening for he/she could end up hearing somebody other than God's voice.

7. To understand the message and respond with faith and obedience, one needs to prepare physically.
 - Worship and being in a position where one can truly listen to God involves physical as well as spiritual preparation. (Often not recognized as a necessary need).
 - Noise, people moving around, poor lighting, etc., can be great distractors hindering one's ability to concentrate.
 - Being physically tired for whatever reason can create a real block to good listening.
 - Leaders of worship need to be well prepared.
 - Preparation for worship needs to start at home the night before.

CONCLUSION:

1. Listening to God is no small thing.
2. If one is not prepared to listen, so he/she can respond in his/her hearts, then he/she is just playing at reading God's Word, at Church, at Worship.
3. Being not prepared to listen is in reality, withholding one's heart from God.
4. Being not prepared to worship is nothing more than wasting one's time for God is not going to be of any help.
5. People need to hear God's Word, and in order to do so, they need to know HOW God speaks, and get themselves PREPARED to hear God's Word and then to become ACTIVELY INVOLVED in God's Word.
6. So, do YOU really hear from God when you read His Word?