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The Secret of Listening

When God brought the people of Israel from Egypt, through the Red Sea, to Mount Sinai, He appeared to the nation as a visible fire on the mountain and spoke to them with a thundering audible voice. The experience was so awesome it totally overpowered the Israelites, who asked that Moses go instead and speak to God by himself on their behalf.

The psalmist described this scene with a most unusual phrase: “I answered you in the secret place of thunder” (Psalm 81:7). God viewed the convocation with His people on Mt. Sinai as a “secret place” encounter with His people. He called them aside to a deserted mountain in order to speak with them and give them His commandments.

God has always designed that the secret place be a place where He answers us and speaks to us. Sometimes, He even apprehends us by thundering to us with His awesome voice. There is nothing more glorious in all of life than hearing His voice! God has always longed to have the kind of intimate relationship with His people wherein they hear His voice and respond accordingly. *We close the door to our secret place so that we might shut out all distracting voices and tune our hearts to the one voice which we long to hear.* “The secret place of thunder”—what an awesome description of

the place where we come aside to be with our Lord!

Something profound happened inside me the day the Lord showed me the single most important word in the entire Bible. I was on an intense study of Jesus' teachings, and was suddenly struck by how often Jesus talked about the necessity of hearing. For example, He cried out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 13:9). His words hit me like a freight train. I realized that everything in the kingdom depends upon whether or not we hear the word of God. The Holy Spirit began to extrapolate that truth for me to the breadth of the entire Bible, and suddenly I saw it: The word "hear" is the most important word in the Bible! The most important treasures in the kingdom are predicated upon the necessity of hearing God. When the Lord gave me this truth, I wanted to underline every occurrence of the word "hear" in my Bible. My paradigm of kingdom living was radically realigned because I was awakened to the fact that everything changes when I hear from God and act upon that word. This is the wellspring of eternal life; this is the fountainhead of kingdom power and authority; this is the source of wisdom, understanding, and life direction! Nothing can replace the confidence and authority that comes from hearing God. *Hearing God's voice has become the singular quest of my heart, the sole pursuit that alone satisfies the great longings of my heart.*

For this reason, I strongly advocate for a prayer life that is comprised mostly of silence. It's a great delight to talk to God, but it's even more thrilling when He talks to us. I've discovered that He has more important things to say than I do. *Things don't change when I talk to God; things change when God talks to me.* When I talk, nothing happens; when God talks, the universe comes into existence. So the power of prayer is found, not in convincing God of my agenda, but in waiting upon Him to hear His agenda.

I do not mean to give the impression that hearing God's voice is my daily experience in the secret place. Far from it! Most days I come away with unfulfilled longings, unrequited initiatives, unanswered prayers, unrealized aspirations, deferred hopes, and incomplete understandings. But then along comes one of those days—you know what I mean—when heaven leans over and God

speaks a word directly to the heart. He breathes upon a portion of Scripture and personalizes its meaning precisely to my felt needs. Oh what glory! That moment is worth all of the knocking and seeking of the preceding days. I will endure months of silence if He will but speak one creative word from His mouth to my spirit.

My role in the secret place is to listen for anything God might want to speak. If He doesn't speak to me, my time spent in silent listening is not futile or in vain. I haven't missed something or failed to connect. I've done my part. It is so important to me that I put myself in a posture of listening. I'm convinced there have been times I have not clearly heard God's word to my heart because I have not been listening at the time He was speaking. I realize I can't tell God what to speak, or when to speak it. But I can position myself in the secret place so that, when He chooses to speak, I am found listening.

Scripture says, "Today, if you will hear His voice" (Psalm 95:7). So hearing the voice of God is largely a matter of the will. We must choose to hear Him. We make the choice by setting aside time to listen quietly. This hearing is a "today" thing that we do. It says "if" because hearing His voice is conditional—built upon the condition of quieting our hearts to listen.

All of us want God to hear our prayers. But the Lord said, "Therefore it happened, that just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen" (Zechariah 7:13). In other words, God is saying, "When I spoke, you didn't listen to Me; therefore, when you speak, I won't listen to you." The inference is that when we hear God's voice, He in turn listens to our voice.

Oh, how can I speak of this wondrous secret more articulately? How can I make it more plain? *Hearing God is the most cherished secret of the secret place.*

Do not believe your adversary's lies. He would tell you that you are unable to hear the voice of God. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus said of you, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). You *can* hear the voice of God. Stop everything, come aside, listen, and wait

on Him. Wait until. He longs to commune with you.

When listening, it is a common experience to be bombarded with thoughts about all that must be done in our daily duties. A practical suggestion: Take a notepad to the secret place, and write down “things to do” as they interrupt your listening. Then, you can put those thoughts out of mind and maintain your focus where you want it, knowing that you’ll not forget about those details later.

Be encouraged by the fact that you’re not the only one who finds listening a very challenging discipline to master. The best attainments in God always come the hardest. Be prepared to make the discipline of attentive listening a lifetime pursuit that will become easier in the doing of it. Let’s grow together!