There is a difference between a quest and an adventure. An adventure is something you choose. But you are called to a quest. An adventure is there and back again. But you never return from a quest. God invites every one of us to join Him on a quest leading into an intimate relationship with Him. If developing such a relationship was not a quest, God would not have told us many times in His word to seek Him. It’s not because He is playing “Hide and Seek.” Nor would He have compared our relationship with Him as a friendship or a marriage. Friendships and marriage are quests not adventures. The same is true with our relationship with God. It is a quest.

One of the best ways to begin this quest is to learn how to listen to God in prayer; to learn how to turn your prayers into two-way conversations. This booklet will help you to start this quest.

Bob Japenga, with his wife Barbara have been leading groups and inviduals into times alone with God and helping them to learn to listen for over 20 years.
Chapter 1 - Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide both the foundation and the basis for listening prayer. In a broad sense, all prayer is intended to involve two way communication. It is this broad definition of listening prayer that I will be using in this guide. Henri Nouwen calls all prayer "listening to the voice of the one who calls us beloved". Listening prayer as I am describing it does not always involve hearing words from God. Listening prayer can include receiving new light into the nature of things as we meditate on God's word, creation, or our experience (sometimes called meditative prayer). It can also consist of strictly being in God's presence in silence (sometimes called contemplative prayer). God can communicate to us without words merely by His presence. His presence "speaks" volumes to our spirit (see note 1). All of these fall under the definition of what I call listening prayer. With or without words, we are receiving from God and are hearing the Master's "voice".

But hearing the Master's voice in prayer is not as common place as one would hope; partly because of the challenge of it; partly because it is hard work; and partly because it casts a certain unfavorable image upon us in the world. There is an immense difference between telling a non-Christian friend, "I'm going to go for a walk and pray," and, "I'm going to go for a walk and talk with God". As a famous contemporary "theologian" has remarked:

*Why is it that when we speak to God, we are called pray-ers but when He speaks to us, we are called schizophrenic?*

Lily Tomlin

If listening prayer is already part of your normal communion, this guide is probably not for you. There are many wonderful books that deal with the subject in more depth than I am
intending to plumb. Rather, my purpose is to introduce the concept to those readers for whom this is foreign or potentially fearful territory.

About five years ago, God challenged me to take a deeper step of commitment in my prayer life. He challenged some of my latent belief systems. These systems, when carefully examined devalued prayer and put my work in the physical realm on a higher plane than communion with Him. With my mouth I preached, taught and exhorted others about the importance of prayer. Yet, if I was given a choice between doing or praying, I would usually find myself "doing". He challenged this idea and showed me how limited doing was without praying. In fact, as Martin Luther has said, "Prayer without work is not prayer, and work without prayer is not work". Moreover, He showed me that I could do more than I could pray about. I always have the propensity of taking on as much as I can physically handle. I was finding that I could not adequately cover all I did in prayer. He challenged me to take a radical step of devotion to Him. He began to sovereignly wake me very early so that I had no excuse about outside distractions. One day, He showed me a verse from Isaiah:

*He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught*

**Isaiah 50:4**

I knew that I had embarked on a new journey through waters which were for me, uncharted. I knew others who had their ears awakened to listen and sought them out. I read several other books by other saints who offered navigational maps and warnings concerning learning to listen to God.

I not only want to introduce the concept of listening prayer, I want to pass on some of my enthusiasm for the journey. I have
found this journey to be more exciting and more challenging than anything else I have ever done. Exciting, because for me, there is nothing like a confirmed and tangible encounter with the living God. When the holy God, the unapproachable majestic One, speaks to us in a personal way, we are forever changed. When the creator of the entire universe calls you by name, you cannot help but be affected.

On the other hand, learning to listen to God has been the most challenging thing I have ever done. We all desperately want to become masters at it. In our vain thoughts, we imagine what others would think of us if we could master listening prayer! Such is never to be the case however. Richard Foster has said that we will never master prayer because the chief end of prayer is "to be mastered." Thomas Merton has said that we "will always be beginners at listening to God". So learning to listen has challenged me because I hate always being a beginner.

Listening to God is also challenging, in that true listening can be verified. Sometimes God directs you very specifically and it's either God or just your own vain imagining. The proof will soon become evident. This very often puts you on the point. When you are praying for someone, and the Lord gives you specific direction to share with them, it takes a lot of courage to step out and speak what you believe God is showing you. (Thankfully, when this is done in the context of the body of Christ, we have one another to keep us from straying too far). When you tell your business partner "I think God is telling us to pursue this contact", it really puts your ability to hear God on the line.

Lastly, I know that in the current culture, listening prayer is to life as spaces and punctuation marks are to a sentence (see note 2). Spaces and punctuation marks are used in communication to separate and highlight our thoughts in order that we can
understand one another. Have you ever tried to read a sentence with no punctuation or spacing in a sentence?

It just wouldn't make any sense and at best would be difficult to understand.

That's the way our life is when we don't take the time to quiet ourselves and listen to the only one who can make sense out of it all. Although "all things work together for good ...", quite often we need to hear the Designer's commentary concerning what is working together and even to see the good in the situations. It is not an indication of lack of faith to say to God: "I do not see anything good in this situation". It is evidence of faith to say: "Lord, show the good in this situation".

Simply put, the purpose of this booklet is to stimulate your interest in embarking on this endless journey of learning to listen to God and to launch us on an initial trajectory heavenward.

Basically, I would like to address some of the many questions that are asked of us as we lead retreats whose sole purpose is to have the participants encounter the living Lord and to enter into deep communion with Him. We have been doing this for about four years and have learned a lot. We have also had much need to practice what we teach.

The first set of questions relate to the general nature of God's revelation:

- Did God really speak to those in the Bible?
- How did He speak?
- Does God speak to us as He did to those in the Bible?
- Does He speak now?
- Does He still instruct us to seek Him/to listen to Him?
• Is God's word to us new revelation? Does it add to the Bible?

The next set of questions is of a more practical nature:

• How does God speak to us now?
• What is the role of faith in hearing?
• How does the element of time affect our ability to listen?
• Are there things that God will not speak to me about?
• What is the relationship between intercessory prayer and listening?
• How often can I expect Him to speak to me?
• Can I expect periods of silence?

Finally, I would like to lay out two aids that we have found helpful in opening up to listening to God. The first has been used for centuries and is directed at listening to God through the written word. The second is a technique older than the Psalms and is centered on the use of journals in recording God's personal words to us.

Chapter 2 - The Nature of Revelation

It’s very important to address a number of questions concerning the nature of revelation because it is central to our case for listening prayer. Many of these questions may have obvious answers which you may take for granted. If this is the case with you, you're welcome to skip to the next chapter. It never hurts however to "ponder anew, what the Almighty can do, if with His love, He befriends us."

Did God really speak?

It is not a foregone conclusion that a creator desires to communicate with his creation. Although we take this for
granted, the deist does not believe this. For him, the great
watchmaker/creator set the universe in order and then stepped
back. We haven't heard from him since, or so they say. But as we
"ponder anew", we see that the concept of the Creator
communicating with His creation is central to all that we know of
Him.

Consider the following:

- He brought everything into being by speaking (Genesis 1).
- He communicated His law through His ten "words".
- He promised not to do anything except for what He
  revealed through His prophets. (Amos 3:7)
- One of the members of the trinity is called "the Word"
  (John 1).

Given the importance of speaking, words, and revelation, is it
any wonder that He would continue speaking? Jesus said that
since creation, His Father has not stopped working. Since
communicating was a major part of His work, why would that
have stopped?

Also, the amazing way the Scriptures have come into being,
testifies of a God who desires to communicate. That He would
leave us such a diverse yet highly integrated series of
communications, is not a given. Even the format is indicative not
only of the creativity He takes in communication, but His close
identification with humanity in communicating with us. Can you
imagine trusting your most important communications with your
creation to the corrupted and polluted likes of us?

One of my favorite Bible teachers used to describe how he
would have set up the Scriptures "if he were God". Just opening
the book would cause angels to sing (beautifully and in parts)
and flashes of light to beam forth somewhat reminiscent of the Ark of the Covenant in Raiders of the Lost Ark. Yet, God's interest in communicating in plain "English" is evident. No bells or whistles. One of my high schools students once asked if it was okay to read the Bible while he was eating crackers. I didn't dare tell him where I frequently read it. For all its beauty and majesty, it's not too holy to be approachable.

Dallas Willard, in the excellent case he makes for a God who still communicates with His creation, develops the idea that a personal God who did not continually speak to His creation, would not be a personal God.

It is simply beyond belief that two persons so intimately related as indicated by Jesus in his answer to Thaddeus (John 14:23), would not speak with each other. (See note 3)

Willard lays out three generally agreed upon means in which God demonstrates His presence.

1. When He indeed is close to us but we are not aware of Him or His effects, except through blind faith or abstract reasoning.
2. When He is sensed or there is a strong impression of His presence.
3. When He acts in conjunction with our actions to change our surroundings in ways beyond our own powers.

He then goes on to say:

*How can we be friends of God if this is all there is to it? How is the rich conceptual content and knowledge found in the Bible to be understood as something communicated to us in revelation if the three forms of presence thus far discussed are the totality of*
the human interaction with God. Why, if God be personal, would he not also talk with us. (see note 4)

Each of these truths speaks volumes to us about the fact that we have a God to whom communication with His creation is extremely important.

**How did He speak?**

So let's take as a given that He spoke. Not just once, but as the King James records it "in sundry ways and diverse manners". But what are some of the ways in which He has spoken? God's speaking to His people is such a central part of the revelation of Scripture, we will list just a few. For the most part, the Scriptures do not tell us how God spoke to the saints of old. Some of the phrases used to describe their experience are:

- Adam "The Lord God commanded the man..." Gen 2:16
- Noah "So God said to Noah ..." Gen 6:13
- Abram "The Lord had said to Abram" Gen 12:1
- Moses "God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses, Moses!'" Ex 3:4

For the most part, when God spoke through the prophets, the phrase was "And the word of the Lord came to ...".

In all cases, we see direct two way communication between God and His servants, covering a wide variety of topics. However, how He spoke is not addressed. There are some hints, however. There is a general description provided when God established the priesthood and spoke to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam:

*When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I will reveal myself to him in visions. I will speak to him in dreams.*
In contrast, the Lord continues:

*But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him, I speak face to face, clearly not in riddles.*

Num 12:6-7

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. Ex 33:11

However, there are a few places where some other forms of communication are described. The following general list broadly covers some of the ways we know God spoke to others in more descriptive terms:

- Angelic vision seen in a dream - Joseph (Mt 1:20, 2:13, 2:19);
- Dreams - Wise men (Mt 2:12); old men after Pentecost (Acts 2:17);
- Visions - John's revelation of Jesus (Rev); Ananias (Acts 9:10); Isaiah (Is 6:1-11), Ezekiel (Ez 1:4-3:15).
- Circumstances - (Jeremiah 32:8 See NASB).
- Other People - Paul through Ananias (Acts 9:17); the prophets speaking in a variety of contexts (see especially Nathan with David in II Samuel 12:7-12)
- Still small voice - Elijah (I Kings 19:12)
- Urim and Thummin (Exodus 28:30)

**Does He speak today?**

Most of us, no matter what our background, would not have any problem with what has been said so far. God has spoken and in a wide variety of ways. He is there and He is not silent. But does He speak today like He did then? This question is a bit thornier because it leads to some theological questions. Extreme dispensationalists would contend that God does not speak in
that way anymore. They would contend that the written Word is what is referred to as "the perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10. When the perfect comes, all other methods of God's revelation will "be done away. As a result of this interpretation, God no longer speaks as He did. However, the same verses (1 Corinthians 13:10-12) refers to that time as the time when "I shall know even as I am known". Clearly, in this, the age of the closed canon, we are much closer to "seeing through a glass darkly" than we are to knowing as we are known. This "proof" of a change in God's method of revelation is weak at best.

Some would quote, completely out of context, the words of John at the end of the book of Revelation as proof that nothing should be added to these words. But John specifically is referring to the "words of the prophecy of this book" meaning the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Historically, some of the Reformed tradition, are equally strong in making a case against modern day revelation. When God speaks to his people, it is through illumination rather than revelation. Illumination brings us into the light which is already given. Revelation is bringing light where there previously was none. Quoting Jonathan Edwards, R.C. Sproul states that we should "run for our lives from such preachers" who would accept new private revelations from God:

[That we can receive] ... spiritual light is not the suggesting of any new truths or propositions not contained in the Word of God. This suggesting of new truths or doctrines to the mind, independent of any antecedent revelation of those propositions, either in word or writing, is inspiration; such as the prophets and apostles had, and such as some enthusiasts pretend to. (see note 5)

Sproul goes on to state unequivocally and without support that:
God does not give us today visible displays of divine glory as he gave to Ezekiel. (see note 6)

We are not talking about mere semantics. Sproul and Edwards would deny the kind of relationship that Dallas Willard says should be normative. However, I cannot say it anymore more strongly than Dallas Willard:

There is nothing in Scripture to indicate that the biblical modes of God's guidance to humans are superseded and abolished by the presence of the church or by the close of the scriptural canon. (See Note 7)

If this is a sticking point for you, I would encourage you to ask yourself the following question: Is there any biblical evidence that God would change the way He communicates with His creation. I have never found any. Rather, we find ample evidence that God does not change (Heb 13:8). An unchangeable God, for whom intimate personal communication with His creation was at the very heart of who He is, would certainly leave more than vague and obscure clues to such a cataclysmic change.

Does He still instruct us to seek Him/to listen to Him?

Another way to look at this question is to ask "If God still speaks today, what does He expect from us?" Does God expect us to merely observe the "Dorothy, Go Home" signs written in the sky as we tread life's yellow brick road? Or is He looking for something more pro-active?

To answer these questions, we will look at two injunctions in the Scriptures; the injunction to seek Him and the injunction to listen.
Injunction to Seek God

Unless the Word of God has gone through an extraordinary air brushing, one cannot go very far in the Scriptures without finding a consistent plea for us to seek Him. Seeking is far from inactive and has a definite goal. In fact, the root Hebrew word used is most often used in the context of seeking information. By the very use of the word and the strength of its modifiers ("always"; "devote your heart and soul"; "seek first"), we get more than a hint at the effort involved. Seeking God is to be a continual and all consuming task. Seeking God is not like "tuning in" your favorite radio station. No radio station ever advertises with the words "Seek us out tonight." Seeking implies a form of hiddenness by God and that concept creates a paradox with the concept of God's desire to reveal himself to us and His accessibility. In spite of that access, we are still enjoined to "seek" God, and that takes regular and significant effort.

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**1 Chron. 16:10-11**
Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Look to the LORD and His strength; seek His face always. (also Ps 105:4)

**1 Chron. 22:19**
Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the LORD your God.

**Isaiah 55:6**
Seek the LORD while He may be found; call on Him while He is near.

**Hosea 10:12**
Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until He comes and showers righteousness on you.

**Amos 5:4**
This is what the LORD says to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live;"

**Matthew 6:33**
But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

**Acts**
From one man He made every nation of men, that
they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.

Paul's words on Mar's Hill portray the paradox clearly. Although He is ever close, it is His desire for us to not only seek Him, but *perhaps* find Him.

**Promised Results of Seeking God**

The Scripture never leaves hard labor unrewarded. And God's call in our lives to seek Him promises the following blessings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We Will Find Him</th>
<th>Deuteronomy 4:29</th>
<th>We will find Him But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find Him if you look for Him with all your heart and with all your soul.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proverbs 8:17</td>
<td>I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jeremiah 29:13</td>
<td>You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healing and forgiveness</td>
<td>2 Chronicles 7:14</td>
<td>If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God's</td>
<td>Psalms 9:10</td>
<td>Those who know your name will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presence</td>
<td>trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vindication</td>
<td>Psalms 24:3-6</td>
<td>Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God His Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob. Selah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No lack</td>
<td>Psalms 34:10</td>
<td>The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand justice</td>
<td>Proverbs 28:5</td>
<td>Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand it fully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards</td>
<td>Hebrews 11:6</td>
<td>And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This last passage provides a clue to the role of faith in seeking God which we will address later. As with all of God's promises, they are all ours in Christ but require appropriation by faith. We are not talking about instant gratification here. Where would faith be, if all of these were given after just one week (or even one month) of intense seeking of God? If that were all there was to it, the church would be full of those who sought God with all
their heart and all their soul. Faith is laying hold of what God has said and believing it without laying a presumptuous claim on the blessings before His time. In the Scriptures, the fulfillment of God’s promise sometimes took years and even generations. Seeking Him involves waiting expectantly.

**Injunction to Listen to His Word**

Most of the references in the Scriptures to listening reflect the consequences of not listening. However, a significant number of injunctions to listen exist.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecclesiastes 5:1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 28:23</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 50:4</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah 55:2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luke 8:18</td>
<td></td>
<td>Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew 17:5</td>
<td></td>
<td>While He was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, &quot;This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>John 6:45</td>
<td>It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>John 10:3</td>
<td>The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.</td>
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<tr>
<td>John 10:16</td>
<td>I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.</td>
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<tr>
<td>John 10:27</td>
<td>My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.</td>
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</table>

### Promised Results of Listening to God

Just as seeking God has its favorable results, God promises to bestow the following on those who would listen:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Exodus 15:26</th>
<th>He said, &quot;If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On God's side</td>
<td>Exodus 23:21-2</td>
<td>Pay attention to Him and listen to what He says. Do not rebel against Him; He will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in Him. If you listen carefully to what He says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of course there is more to listening to God than looking to receive the promised results. We are called to obedience in all areas of our lives. And listening to His word is to be an essential part of that obedience.

**Is God's word given to us in listening prayer new revelation? Does it add to the Bible?**

One of the most frequent objections to listening prayer or the assumption that God still communicates to His creation in an intimate and personal way, goes like this: Since the canon (i.e. the 66 books of the Old and New Testament) is closed, no further revelation can be given. I believe there are two strong cases that can be made to refute this position. The first comes from our understanding of the relationship between revelation and the Bible. The second is addressed by looking at the express purpose the Scripture was given.

We can address the first by asking the following question: Is the Bible a record of all of the revelations given by God? If this is true, then a strong argument could be made, that once the canon was closed, there would be no further revelation. If, on the other hand, every word God has spoken is not recorded in
the Scriptures, then there is a strong precedent that God can still speak to you and I without adding to the Scriptures. We need only look to the Scripture for the answer to this question. During the time the Old Testament was being written, there were several prophets mentioned for whom there were no words recorded (for example the prophet Iddo in 1 Chron. 13:22). Was their prophetic anointing present only because the canon was still open? Though they heard the Word of the Lord, it did not add to the Scriptures. During the inter-testament times, when the canon was still open but no Scripture was being written, Anna (Luke 2:36) was recognized as a prophetess yet only her words about Jesus were recorded. To be recognized as a prophetess requires her to have been an instrument of the unrecorded Word of God. During the time of the New Testament, the four virgin daughters of Philip were prophetess' who received revelations which did not make it to the Scriptures. How were these recognized as prophets and prophetesses if they spoke no revelation? The answer here is plain. All revelation did not get recorded in the Bible. The corollary to that is that additional revelation is not precluded in a closed canon age. (See Note 8)

One could make a point however, that revelation, though not recorded, was only available because the canon was open. Once the canon was closed, all revelation must stop. To address this argument we must understand why the canon was closed. For years this was a fuzzy point for me. Nothing in the Scriptures told me why it should be closed. What has helped me the most in understanding why the canon was closed has been to hear the reformers understanding of the purpose God gave the Scriptures. They saw the Bible as a unity - one story of the saving grace and mercy of God in Christ (see the Westminster Confession of Faith). Jesus himself said that "all of Scripture testifies of me." When that story was fully told the canon was closed.
The reformers went on to describe the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and life. But they also went on to say that the Scripture is not the rule for the arts and sciences, for example. The Bible is true in all of what it says, but does not contain all truth. In simple terms, listening prayer can provide God's revelation in areas not covered in the Scriptures to help us make specific decisions concerning family, business or ministry. What is unnecessary now that the canon is closed is further revelation concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. Who could say that we don't need God's revelation in these other areas of our lives?

What then is the relationship between what we hear in listening prayer and the Bible? Are we to trust what we hear in the same way we trust what we read in the Bible? The answer to this question is vital to our being able to validate what we hear. Clearly, the canon is complete. We know all that we need to know concerning God's nature and the work of grace wrought in Jesus Christ. The Scripture requires the Holy Spirit to illumine this truth in us, but no additional truth need be revealed. In addition, only the written Word is completely reliable and true, having stood the test of time. What is heard in listening prayer is still God's word, but needs to be tested and authenticated before it should be trusted and acted upon.

Once, I thought God had given some direction concerning a particular medical problem my business partner was having. I proceeded to act on this direction and found it to be completely off. Needless to say, I was discouraged and it affected my ability to listen for weeks. How could I trust what I heard? At last, God spoke a word of warning and instruction concerning listening prayer. "Beware of a word that comes quickly". Although there are times that I can sit down and receive from God instantaneously, generally hearing takes time. If a word comes
very quickly, I have found that I need to proceed with a little caution.

All words received in listening prayer need to be tested. That is why the New Testament says to "test everything." What did Paul mean when he penned these words? Let's look at the text in its context:

_Do not put out the Spirit’s fire, do no treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good._

1 Thess. 5:19-21

Paul is talking about the divine fire of God's presence through His Spirit. He is talking about God speaking (the prophetic). He is talking about a mixture of error in the midst of the good. Let me take the liberty to paraphrase.

_We are to test everything that we believe God is saying. Don't get discouraged if you hear incorrectly. Whatever you do, don't stop the divine presence from etching His words on your hearts by being wet blankets. No matter how much error you see, do not view the prophetic with disdain. And, after you have fully tested the prophetic and it has proven true, hold on to it; honor it as the Word of God, and most of all, obey it._

Isn't this the way the Scripture came into being? When the Word of God came, much of what was heard was questioned and looked down upon. How do we know that the 66 books of the Bible are the Word of God? Because it says so? No, even the Koran claims to be the Word of God. Because some church body has blessed it? No, the Mormon church has blessed the book of Mormon. No, we know it is the Word of God because it has been tested and proven to be true. And the same holds with all words that we hear from God in listening prayer.
One final word about this. Since God's word is to be always tested, be very careful of any word that says "But don't tell anyone else, ... especially your wife (or husband). They won't understand this deep revelation." Almost without exception, we are to reject such words as being straight from the pit.

Chapter 3 - Some Practical Questions

What is the role of faith in hearing?

Faith is the key to listening prayer. They are inter-related. Listen to the Word of God:

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.  
Romans 10:17

And

without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.  
Hebrews 11:6

If we are going to seek Him, we must believe that He is going to reward us. Time and time again, whenever I begin to doubt that God is truly going to speak to me, I stop hearing. As I stop hearing His voice, my faith continues to weaken because faith comes from hearing Jesus' words to us. Not until I take that step back in faith and say "I will seek you" do I begin hearing again. Sometimes I paraphrase Job in a faith statement to the Father. "Though You are silent, yet will I seek You." Other times I restate the words Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego spoke to their king and say to the devil "Even if He does not speak, yet I will listen". It's at times like these, that God is testing my devotion,
my whole heart, soul, and mind, and the primacy of my seeking Him first.

**Are there things that God will not speak to me about?**

This is a difficult question, because to answer it to everyone's satisfaction would require me to build a box too small for God to fit in. God never ceases to surprise me. But let me give it a try.

First and foremost, He will never contradict His written Word. There are things that are expressly forbidden in Scripture and He will never go against these. If you think God is speaking a word to you that expressly goes against the Word of God, it is not God's Word. For example, if God seems to give approval to an adulterous relationship, we know that He has not spoken.

However, many of us are like Peter, and respond to God's Word with "No, Lord I would never ... [kill and eat these unclean animals]". We have to know when the God is speaking temporally or timelessly. Sometimes, God is speaking in His Word to a specific time and place. Oftentimes, He is communicating an over-arching principle that will endure beyond time. In all cases, every word is inspired and useful for our growth. Many times, however, we have to hear the heart of the law to fully understand what He has said. Is our theological perspective limiting us from hearing God? If for example, we don't believe that God still raises people from the dead, we will definitely reject any such direction in prayer. As we become more experienced in hearing and discerning, we need to be very careful before we reject something on theological grounds. Maybe it is our theology that needs changing as it did in Peter's case.

This position (accepting things we hear in listening prayer that go against our theology) can lead us to some very dangerous
ground since we live in such a relativistic climate. Many claim for example, that homosexual behavior, though clearly forbidden in the Scriptures, is to be treated like the laws of the unclean animals of the Old Testament. However, there were good reasons for the dietary laws during that time in Israel and the New Testament clearly gives us further light on the subject. Jesus taught that all foods were now to be considered clean (See Note 9). We cannot abandon the great principle of Biblical interpretation which requires us to first see where Scripture interprets Scripture. This can be applied to the issue of homosexuality. Fortunately, God in His wisdom, saw this relativistic age coming, and clearly addressed the issue of homosexual behavior under both the covenant of the Law and the covenant of grace. Unfortunately, those that interpret the Scriptures by dismissing whatever is not to their liking, err because they do not know the Scripture nor the power of God (See Note 10). Our call is to know both the Scriptures and the power of God. Unfortunately many of us know only one or the other (or even neither).

Secondly, listening is never an excuse for not doing our homework, either in the field of understanding the Scriptures or in life. For example, when exegeting a difficult and controversial passage, God may illumine our understanding as we study, but I have never found Him to end run around the obstacle of rightly dividing the Word of truth. Imagine God speaking the following word to you while studying the subject of infant baptism:

*My son. Infant baptism is clearly not my will. I want you to teach only believers' baptism.*

I would reject such a word. Not because I disagree with it, but because the answer is in His word, which I must study, search through, and pray over, while asking the Holy Spirit to lead me into truth. The reason for this is simple. Our job is to proclaim
the true Gospel in the midst of many false gospels. The world is rapidly becoming a global village with a central market place where ideas are debated. This applies to the Christian community as well. What place in the market place of biblical truth would my private revelation have? None! No private revelation should ever be used to convince another concerning a truth revealed in the Scriptures. Only my insights from the Scriptures, illumined by the Holy Spirit, will help the eyes of others to be opened in these areas.

When seeking guidance concerning obstacles in relationships, sometimes He is silent as to the cause of the problem because He wants us to get it from the other person. In business dealings, I have found God giving extremely specific direction concerning a business contact. With one simple contact, several years of business came in. Yet at other times, He has been strangely silent while calling us instead to much hard labor. In these areas, there are no simple guidelines. We must diligently seek until we hear, recognizing that the answer may require some very hard work. Imagine if by my listening to God, I could completely avoid all of the pain of running a small business or raising a family or ministering to others. This would run contrary to my understanding of God's revealed word.

**What is the relationship between intercessory prayer and listening?**

I believe that the central role of the intercessor is to bring people, situations, relationships, etc., before the throne of God. There, we are to seek God's heart. Then, we are to fervently "pray in" that which is on God's heart which He has spoken to our heart. This requires listening prayer. I have seen this over and over again in my life. Sometimes, God will tell us what to pray about and the prayer will be immediately answered. Other
times, God requires us to "speak of things that are not as though they were". (See Note 11)

"Lord, thank You for the _____ in so and so's life. I have brought them before you. You have revealed to me that this _____ is on Your heart. I have asked You to provide that which You have revealed. I trust you to accomplish it."

The ___ could be healing, provision, good friends, etc. He may have us pray this for years. There are things that God has had me praying for in this way for years. When the answer is not forthcoming, it is good to double check on the direction. "Lord, is this really how I should be praying?" If the answer is in the affirmative, practice the persistent widow's prayer and keep on knocking. There is an interesting injunction to intercessors in a passage concerning prayer for Jerusalem:

*I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.*

Isaiah 62:6

Our job as intercessors is to not give God any rest until He does what He wants to do? If this is the way intercessory prayer works, you might state the following:

"So, what you are saying is that we are to ask God what He wants to do and then ask Him to do it? That's crazy! Why doesn't He just do it Himself?"

That my friend is both the miracle and mystery of creation. God, in His wisdom has chosen to give man causality in the cosmos. We can change things. Generally we change things by doing. We affect people for good or ill by the way we treat them. We both
give and take life. But, mystery of mysteries, God has also given
us causality through the realm of prayer. Jesus tells us to ask the
Lord of the Harvest to send out workers. If the Lord of the
Harvest knows we need workers, why doesn't He just send them
without our asking? Because of the miracle of the human role in
causality in the cosmos. We are called to change things both
through doing and through prayer.

**How often can I expect Him to speak to me? Can I expect
periods of silence?**

Dallas Willard describes our intimate communications with our
Creator as "intermittent." Perhaps I would describe it as "never
quite enough" for our liking but always "just enough" for what
we need. The not quite enough part of it falls under the category
of our fallen natures, the "seeing through a glass darkly" portion
of creation. In God's wisdom, it always leaves me just a little bit
off guard and on edge. I believe if our communications were
continuous, I know I, at least, would become complacent. Yet
there are times in my life that silence is the norm. This is
unbelievably frustrating. So far, I can always trace it to one of
three things; lack of serious and uninterrupted time with Him;
circumstances I don't like or understand; or lack of faith. Many
saints have given accounts of this silence (or the "dark night of
the soul") wherein these three were not lacking so I don't want
to make these criteria definitive. In these cases, these saints
have all given account of the deep work God performed during
this time of His silence. I can simply thank Him that I have not
experienced this. My experience is that when I take time apart
(greater than four hours) specifically to seek Him and listen, He
has always spoken. And, when I am at peace with my
circumstances, at peace with my neighbor, and at peace with my
God, He speaks morning by morning during a shorter period of
time (one to two hours). Sometimes only one or two short
words, but just enough.
How do you prepare to Listen to God?

Let me share what I have found works for me. I have found that it is important to prepare for the listening time. I do this with a combination of one or more of the following:

1. Become fully awake by taking a walk (10-20 minutes) and praying quieting in the Spirit. Practically this may involve getting enough sleep.
2. Spend some time worshiping Him in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
3. Reading a portion of Scripture (not as study but just beginning with the simple prayer - "Lord speak to me through your Word").
4. Spend some time in confession and silence

When this routine is followed, I am usually ready to begin to listen. If I rush this or skip this regimen (which happens more often than I would like), I almost always come up short.

This methodology is not intended as a rule or even a guideline for others. Rather, it is what I have found works for me. The reasons are very simple. Without being fully awake, my time of silence almost always turns into what I call "prayer sleep" (start out praying and end up sleeping). Usually the prayers are ineffectual and the sleep ends in guilt. Worship helps focus my eyes on the Lord. The Scripture tends to "prime the pump" and often leads me into some specific listening prayers. The silence allows my churning mind to spew out any additional random synaptic firings concerning topics of the upcoming day. Lastly, the confession helps bring me into a place of peace with my God and my neighbor.

Let me finish this question with a story. When our dog was a puppy, I would take him on these early morning wakeup prayer
walks. He wasn't on a leash and would run all around as I plodded down the dark and deserted streets; up to this house, around that bush, sniffing and smelling everywhere. He always went much farther than I went. I found, that on these walks, my mind often wandered to every imaginable person, place, or activity in my life. One day God informed me that my mind, during the walk, was like my puppy. I wasn't staying with the Father (keeping my mind on Him). At first, I felt guilty. But, He also showed me that this was necessary for releasing my burdens to prepare me for my listening time. So, I don't needlessly worry about this wandering anymore. I keep praying in tongues and let my mind run "unfruitfully" about. When the time comes to listen, I am able to focus all of my attention on Him. This is why listening prayer takes me so much time.

Chapter 4 - Two techniques for Hearing

Before beginning this section, it is important for me to clarify the role of "technique" in listening to God. We must always remember that there are no sure-fire techniques that connect our ears to the Master's voice. Unlike the old RCA ad showing the dog with his ear attentive to the horn of an old Victrola "listening for his master's voice", ours is not a mechanical "turn the crank" kind of exercise. That aside, there are things that can prepare our hearts and minds to become attentive to what God is saying. It is two such aids that I would like to introduce.

The first provides more structure and involves hearing God through His word. I find this technique most valuable when I have been struggling or when the amount of time I have to quiet down is limited. The second technique is more open ended. I have found that it takes more time but has personally been more fruitful. It involves hearing God through journaling.
We know that all of Scripture is God's revealed word. In that light, as we thoroughly immerse ourselves in His word, we cannot help but be washed by the cleansing power of His presence. However, many of us, especially in this 20th century Western culture, read the Bible for information only. This is, without question, important. Paul encouraged Timothy to careful study of the Scriptures. In my definition, study is primarily for information and intellectual understanding. If, however, this is the end of all of our encounters with God's Word, we will be missing a major purpose of the Scriptures. The Bible is also intended as a means for encountering the living Word. In relating to the Pharisees, who spent hours studying the Bible, Jesus upbraided them for not using the Scriptures to commune with the living Word (See Note 12). Paul said that "All Scripture is God-breathed" (See Note 13). The technique that I would propose has been used throughout the history of the church to allow the Scripture to be a vehicle whereby we encounter the living God.

Basic Approach

Basically, this method consists of the following:

1. Select a portion of Scripture (not more than ten verses). I would recommend the Psalms, Proverbs, the Gospels or the pastoral (versus the doctrinal) epistles (see the appendix for sample Scriptures with which to begin).
2. Ask God to speak to you through this passage.
3. Read the passage through one or two times very slowly. As you read, ask God to highlight one thought or one word to you as you read. Sometimes, it is helpful to write
the passage out in full. Write this down in a prayer journal as well as the word or thought that came to you.

4. Read the passage again slowly, asking God to show you how your life is touched by this passage. Again, record your thoughts in a prayer journal.

5. Read the whole passage at least one more time. This time, ask God to show you if there is an invitation for you in this passage. Again, record your question and what you believe God may be showing you in a prayer journal.

6. Using the Scriptures as a springboard, pray about whatever God has brought to mind. The prayer could be for you, for others, or for a situation. It could be a petitionary prayer (i.e. asking God for something), an intercessory prayer (i.e. standing in the gap for another person), a prayer of confession, a prayer of thanksgiving, or even just a cry for help.

Examples

Let's imagine that you have been reflecting on Psalm 1. What strikes you in the passage is the phrase "Whatever he does, prospers". After asking God to personalize it, this verse can be turned into any number of prayers:

| **Petitionary prayer** | Lord, you have said in Your word, that the person who delights in you, who meditates daily on Your law, will prosper. Father, I have followed you the best I know how in this. Yet Lord, there are some bills that aren't getting paid. I don't seem to be prospering. Lord, I seek your face and I ask you to prosper the work of my hand. |
| **Thanksgiving** | Thank you Father for prospering us beyond what we have deserved. Lord, we have only done what you have commanded. We deserve... |
nothing. But You, by Your grace, have prospered us. Praise Your name!

**Intercessory prayer**
Father, Mike is a faithful father and husband. He daily seeks Your path for His life. Lord, prosper his business. Prosper his relationship with his family. Prosper his relationship with his wife. He has chosen not to walk in the counsel of the wicked. He has chosen to not stand in the way of the sinners. His delight is in Your way. May he be like a tree that is richly fed.

**Confession**
Father, I have failed you. I chose to follow a path that I knew was wrong. Now, I am bearing the consequences. Lord Jesus, forgive me. I desire to turn and to follow in Your way. I don't want to be like the chaff that blows away. I entrust myself to your mercy to spare me from that and your grace to prosper me as I start again.

**Cry for help**
Oh Lord! Help me. My heart is thoroughly empty of any desires expressed here. Soften my heart. I believe that the heart of our financial difficulty is due to my unfaithfulness to you. Hosanna Lord!

**Historical Precedence**

This method of reading the Bible for the express purpose of encountering the one who breathed life into the written word is called by different names in different traditions. Time does not permit me to list even a fraction of the saints who have practiced this technique. Called "Lectio Divina" (lex-ee-oh di-vee-nuh) in the early church tradition, we find it described in the middle of the third century:
Be constant as well in prayer as in reading; now speak with God; now let God speak with you, let Him instruct you in His precepts, let Him direct you. (See Note 14)

Madam Guyon (17th century) called the method "Praying the Scriptures" (see the Appendix for a short excerpt of her method). John Wesley (18th century) called it "Spiritual reading":

Be sure to read, not hastily, but slowly, seriously and with great attention; with proper pauses and intervals, so that you allow time for God to enlighten through His divine grace. ... Read those passages over and over that more nearly concern yourself, and more closely affect your inclinations or practice. (See Note 15)

**Hearing God through Journaling our Prayers and God's responses**

Without question, no other technique has been more valuable in aiding me to hear God's still small voice than journaling my dialogues with God. Prior to learning this technique, I could count on one hand, the number of times I heard God's still small voice during my quiet times each year. This technique has enabled me to increase my ability to hear more than tenfold.

**Basic Approach** - The approach is very simple.

1. **Preparation**

Begin by spending some time quieting and preparing yourself to hear Him. For each person, this will be different. I find that first I need to be alert and awake (by going for a walk), to unload my burdens of the day, and then to spend some combination of time in worship, praise, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and Scripture reading.
Experience has shown that I require a place with absolutely no distractions. I do not need to be alone (I have encountered Him in this way on airplanes while seated alone), but everyone needs to recognize what distracts them. Your place of work is generally very distracting. You'll know an acceptable place when you find it. Remember, Jesus told us to pray in our prayer closet, closing the door behind us. Jesus was primarily speaking metaphorically here, since almost no one in Jesus' day had a closet with a door on it.

2. Turn your prayers into questions and write them out (what is on your heart)

This is very important. Although it takes much longer, it is essential for me. Often I say to myself, "I don't have time to write all these out. I can cover much more ground by praying silently". Always and without exception, my private prayer times are more fruitful when I take the time to write out the prayers. Even with such a strong affirmation, I still am strongly tempted to skip this part.

3. As you pray, formulate some additional questions that you desire to ask and write them out.

Your prayers will generate many questions. For example, this week's prayers have raised the following questions for me:

- Lord, what am I doing wrong? ...
- Lord, show me what to do in this situation.
- Lord, teach me how to humble myself.

4. Wait in silence and begin to write the first thoughts that spontaneously begin to come in reply to the question.
Very simply, as I described earlier, God is eager to speak to us. He longs to pour out His heart to us. As we wait in faith, He is speaking. As we are open to Him, those thoughts are very often Him speaking to us. Allow the Lord to speak. You may be surprised at what He will say. Try not to worry about discerning if it is Him right now. This will become apparent as you move on. Just allow the thoughts to flow and record them as best you can.

The thoughts may not be limited to words. Be open to God providing not just a series of words but a picture. For some, this is more normative than others. God rarely speaks to me through a picture or image yet I have been very blessed when it happens.

Continue your "dialogue" with follow-up questions. Very often, I have more questions than when I began. Be very careful not to doubt. There will be plenty of time to let the words be tested. Faith is essential to our hearing.

Very often, God will answer a different question than the one we asked. Jesus did this all the time while here in the flesh. He is the same today! Allow Him to lead.

Very often, God will answer with a question for us (again, Jesus was a master at this). Answer Him as best you know how. Again, follow His lead.

5. **Honor the words you have received.**

God will speak to you about many things in these times. It is important to keep these words in a special and accessible place for two reasons. First, I am amazed how quickly I forget what God has clearly spoken to me about. You need to continue to be obedient concerning what He has already spoken in order to be available for more.
Second, having the words written and accessible provides the surest means to test the words God has spoken. I find that I need to continually review what He has said to me. Three things are gained from this. First, I am reminded of those words I have not obeyed. In addition, I find that God has already accomplished much of what He said He was going to do and this is cause for great rejoicing. Last, from reviewing what you have heard, it will become apparent which words are from Him and which are not.

I record these prayers and God's response in a note book specifically for this purpose. Later, I transcribe it into my computer for a permanent reference and so it can be more easily searched. This re-entry is an excellent discipline for reviewing and testing what has been heard.

How will I know the words are from God?

First, as you go along, you will recognize His voice more and more clearly. The enemy becomes very easily discernable ("we are not unaware of his schemes" See Note 16). Our own delusions also become more easily recognized.

Second, nothing He says will ever go against the revealed word of God.

Third, a mature brother or sister who also hears His voice will aid you in discerning God's voice. Do not attempt to hear Him without this check. Find others who can aid you in this process. If God tells you to do something radical, do not act on it without the prayers and assurances of others. This is the heart of what it means to be the body of Christ, all connected to the head.

Last, as the Scriptures were attested as being the very words from God by standing the test of time, so will these. Several
years from now, look back at the words He has spoken. Almost every word He has spoken will stand out as though marked with a yellow highlighter. Those vain imaginings will also stand out like sore thumbs. Give God time. It is very rare for God to say "Do such and such immediately - I need your immediate obedience" in things involving major life decisions (marrying, buying a house, choosing a career, starting a ministry, etc).

**Historical Precedence**

Writing out our dialogues with God is at least as old as the Psalms. Throughout the history of the church, God's people have recorded their prayers and what they thought was God's response.

In the book of Psalms, we find the Psalmists pouring our their praises, their fears, their hopes, their confessions and their hearts throughout. Occasionally, we find God speaking right in the midst of the Psalm. For example, in Psalm 12, David, after sharing his heart with the Lord, hears the Lord say in verse 5:

"Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise," says the LORD. "I will protect them from those who malign them."

The book of Habakkuk is basically a prayer journal. The prophet records a series of questions and the Lord responds. Even the book of Revelation is a written record of John's questions and God's answers.

One of the foremost works in the history of the church is Augustine's *Confessions*. Written in the 5th century A.D., this book records Augustine's dialogue with God. Although primarily one directional, occasionally God speaks and Augustine listens. For example, in book VII chapter 10, he writes:
Eternal Truth, true Love, beloved Eternity - all this, my God, you are, and it is to you that I sigh by night and day. When first I knew you, you raised me up so that I could see that there was something to be seen, but also that I was not yet able to see it. ... I realized too that you have chastened man for his sins; you made my life melt away like gossamer, and I asked myself "Is truth then nothing at all, simply because it has no extension in space, with or without limits." And, far off, I heard your voice saying "I am the God who IS." I heard your voice as we hear voices that speak to our hearts, and at once I had no cause to doubt.

Although the term journaling is new, the concept is old. God has been waiting for a people who would learn to seek Him with their whole heart and allow Him to open their ears.

**Why it works**

I cannot leave this subject without providing my perspective concerning why journaling our dialogue with God facilitates our ability to hear Him. Although this is purely speculative on my part, it at least provides one plausible reason why this technique has worked for me as well as for so many others.

My reasons are based on two basic assumptions. First, God is very interested in communing with us. Second, we are normally too occupied to take the time to do what it takes to quiet ourselves, shut out other distractions and concentrate on listening. In other words, we are like the teenager whose parent is desperately trying to communicate something over the din of our stereo.

Writing our prayers out does two things in facilitating listening. First of all, it slows us down without completely shutting off all mental activity. We must concentrate on the words that we are
composing. This tends to focus just enough of our mind so that it does not wander. Left to its own, my mind wanders terribly. One of the reasons most of us have such difficulty praying, is that when we shut down our normal activities and begin to pray, our mind wanders like my little dog. Writing out our prayers is immensely helpful in keeping our mind and our heart directed towards Him.

Second, the very act of writing, keeps our minds mentally alert enough to pick up what God might be saying to our spirit. Again, our minds are focused on Him with just enough to do to keep them from wandering away and missing what He is saying.

No other generation has had the myriad of distractions that we face. In simple terms, the prayer journal helps us to shut out the distractions that so easily overwhelm us and makes a straight path from our heart to His.

**Chapter 5 Conclusions**

I have a dream. That dream is to see every one of God's people freed to commune with Him at the deepest level that God has for each of us. Communion with God occurs in many ways: through the Lord's Supper, through reading His word, through listening prayer, through silent contemplation, and through fellowship in His body. I long to see the entire church experiencing Jesus in each of these ways. Listening prayer is one of these forms. That dream is to see fulfilled what Peter spoke of at Pentecost. Now that the Holy Spirit has been made available to the church, all God's children, (young and old, male and female) are in a place to hear God's voice through dreams, visions, and prophetic expressions of His word. Church, it is your calling.
I trust that this introduction will whet your appetite to take the time to seek Him. In all the years that I have been encouraging people to take the time to seek Him, very few have come back disappointed. Most have experienced God in ways that, as one young women remarked, "I have been waiting for this my whole life". Commit yourself today to begin this quest.

Appendix A Sample Lectio Divina Texts

This is only a minute sampling of the passages in the Scripture with which to begin. If you are not familiar with the Scriptures, start with these. After you have sampled these, other passages can be found by simply reading the Scriptures. Begin your time by asking God to highlight a section as you are reading. Then, take that small portion, and practice the discipline of "Praying the Scriptures."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exodus 20:1-20</td>
<td>These are the ten commandments (known in Hebrew as the ten words). Take them very slowly. Do not attempt to use more than several verses at a time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Kings 19:9-13</td>
<td>Elijah was very discouraged after God had accomplished a great victory over the enemies of God. Shortly after the victory, the enemies made a very strong counter-attack. Elijah had fled from the place where God wanted him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 1:1-6</td>
<td>This Psalm contrasts the way of the world with the way of the man or woman of God. This Psalm has ministered to me many times as I have converted it to prayers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 5:1-5</td>
<td>One of my favorite prayers is &quot;Oh God, oh God help!&quot;. This Psalm expresses this prayer very well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 91:1-14</td>
<td>Break this up into at least two parts. Notice how, as the psalmist journals the prayer, God breaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Matthew 9:35-38</strong></td>
<td>Jesus demonstrates His compassion for the crowd and implores the disciples to enter into a life of prayer and action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Isaiah 55:1-13</strong></td>
<td>Again, take this in at least two parts. Take your time. Not too long ago, I spent several weeks with verses 6-9. God revealed Himself to me as the &quot;untamed Lion&quot; that C. S. Lewis described in the <em>Chronicles of Narnia</em>. &quot;Is He safe?&quot; asked Lucy of Mr. Beaver. &quot;Of course He's not safe. But He's good.&quot; he answered. Allow God to show the extent to which His thoughts and His ways are not yours. Then bask in the warmth of His faithfulness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Matthew 17:14-21</strong></td>
<td>Jesus reprimands His disciples for not being able to do what He did. He directs them to the true source of His power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>John 21:15-19</strong></td>
<td>Jesus' first and last words to Peter were &quot;Come follow me.&quot; Allow these final words to the one who had denied Him to speak to your heart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I Cor 13:1-13</strong></td>
<td>Paul's Psalm of Love. Allow the searing and healing light of God's truth and His call to penetrate your heart. This passage took me more than two weeks the first time I converted it prayers. It is a gold mine of truth waiting to be unearthed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I Peter 1:13-16</strong></td>
<td>God's call of holiness as recorded by Peter.</td>
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**Suggested Reading and sample excerpts:**

The following books have been helpful to me on my journey in listening prayer:
Chambers, Oswald - *My Utmost for His Highest*, Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1935. Packaged as a year long devotional, I can read this book over and over. There is no devotional more used by God to speak to me than this. For years, I tried to use it and it was as dry as toast. Now, it is a stream in the desert to me.

"The measure of the worth of our public activity for God is the private profound communion we have with Him. Rush is wrong every time. There is always plenty of time to worship God."

"Do not look for God to come in any particular way, but look for Him."

"The meaning of prayer is that we get hold of God, not of the answer."

"My worth to God in public is what I am in private."

"I know when the proposition comes from God because of its quiet persistence."

"God never gives us discernment in order that we may criticize, but that we may intercede."

de Caussade, Jean-Pierre - *The Sacrament of the Present Moment*, Harpers, 1741. This was very difficult reading for me but is an introduction to incorporating listening into your daily life. The first chapter is entitled "How God Speaks to Us and How We Must Listen to Him"

Foster, Richard - *Prayer, Finding the Heart's True Home*, Harpers, 1992. Foster has played a pivotal role in teaching us about prayer and listening. This book covers many different types of prayer and Foster's wisdom shines through each one. What we
call listening prayer, he calls Meditative and Contemplative prayer.

"Remember, in Meditative Prayer, God is always addressing our will. Christ confronts us and asks us to choose. Having heard his voice, we are to obey his word. It is this ethical call to repentance, to change, to obedience that most clearly distinguishes Christian meditation from its Eastern and secular counterparts."

"Contemplative Prayer is the one discipline that can free us from our addiction to words. Progress in intimacy with God means progress towards silence."

"The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people."

"My Lord and my God, listening is hard for me. I do not exactly mean hard, for I understand that this is a matter of receiving rather than trying. What I mean is that I am so action oriented, so product driven, that doing is easier for me than being. I need your help if I am to be still and listen. I would like to try. ... Help me to try now."

Guyon, Jeanne - Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ, 1685, Christian Books. This book was given to me by my pastor over 15 years ago. Only in the past few years have I begun to understand it. It is the premier introduction to lectio divina. The follow excerpt lays out the foundation:

Let me ask you, do you desire to know the Lord in a deep way? God has made such an experience, such a walk, possible for you. He has made it possible through the grace He has given to all His redeemed children. He has done it by means of His Holy Spirit.
How then will you come to the Lord to know Him in such a deep way? Prayer is the key. But I have in mind a certain kind of prayer. It is a kind of prayer that is very simple and yet holds the key to perfection and goodness - things found only in God Himself.

"Praying the Scripture" is a unique way of dealing with the Scripture; it involves both reading and prayer.

Here is how you should begin.

Turn to the Scripture; choose some passage that is simple and fairly practical. Next, come to the Lord. Come quietly and humbly. There, before Him, read a small portion of the passage of Scripture you have opened to.

Be careful as you read. Take in fully, gently and carefully what you are reading. Taste it and digest it as you read.

In the past, it may have been your habit, while reading to move very quickly from one verse of Scripture to another until you had read the whole passage. Perhaps you were seeking to find the main point of the passage.

But in coming to the Lord by means of "praying the Scripture", you do not read quickly; you read very slowly. You do not move from one passage to another, not until you have sensed the very heart of what you have read.

You may then want to take that portion of Scripture that has touched you and turn it into prayer.

After you have sensed something of the passage and after you know that the essence of that portion has been extracted and all the deeper sense of it is gone, then, very slowly, gently, and in a
calm manner begin to read the next portion of the passage. You will be surprised to find that when your time with the Lord has ended, you will have read very little, probably no more than half a page.

"Praying the Scripture" is not judged by how much you read but by the way in which you read. If you read quickly, it will benefit you little. You will be like a bee that merely skims the surface of a flower. Instead, in this new way of reading with prayer, you must become as the bee who penetrates into the depths of the flower. You plunge deeply within to remove its deepest nectar.

I am quite sure that if you will follow this course, little by little, you will come to experience a very rich prayer that flows from your inward being."

Huggett, Joy - The Joy of Listening to God, InterVarsity Press, 1986. This is a well written chronicle of one woman's pursuit of God. There are some particularly good chapters on how God speaks. In addition, Huggett is very honest about her mistakes. Thoroughly helpful.

"On a visit to our home [a good friend] said, 'If you want to be certain that you are truly listening to God, you must know the Father-heart of God.' I was glad that there were others in the room when he turned that statement into a question. 'Do you know the Father-heart of God'?

Lewis, C.S. - Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer, Harcourt Brace, 1963. What more can I say about this great man of faith that has not already been said. It was Lewis who helped me see my core unbelief in regards to prayer.
"The gnat-like cloud of petty anxieties and decisions about the conduct of the next hour have interfered with my prayers more often than any passion or appetite."


The Way of the Heart, Ballantine Books, 1981. Every time I read Nouwen, I am encouraged to spend more time in the silence and the solitude of listening prayer. These small little books are just a sample of his work on prayer. Here are a sample of some of his thoughts:

"Solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude, we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self."

"Solitude is not a private therapeutic place. Rather, it is the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born, the place where emergence of the new man and the new woman occurs."

"The very first thing we need to do is set apart a time and a place to be with God and Him alone."

"The desert fathers did not think of solitude as being alone, but as being alone with God. They did not think of silence as not speaking but as listening to God. Silence and solitude are the context within which prayer is practiced."

"One of our main problems is that in this chatty society, silence has become a very fearful thing. For most people, silence creates itchiness and nervousness. Many experience silence not as full and rich, but as empty and hollow."
"We need to say them [our prayers] in such a way that we can listen better to the Spirit praying in us."


"A book devoted to discussing silence is something of a contradiction and should be treated with great suspicion! Books also have a way of invading spaces for God and filling them with second-hand ideas. Let's be honest, one of the surest ways to avoid silence and solitude is to read a book about it."

"Anything else [but silence and solitude], would be easier, wouldn't it? 'Go and read this marvelous book', 'go and talk to ...', go and do anything. But to stop - this is death. It involves letting go of our usual sources of meaning and value and security. It is stopping the world. It means being willing to sit in emptiness. It means, by our own standards of measuring life, being "useless" and 'wasting time'."

Virkler, Mark - Dialogue with God, Bridge Publishing, 1986. This book was my first introduction to journaling. It lays the foundation for opening us up to 2-way prayer. His description of how God speaks to us through our thoughts was particularly helpful. It is definitely a good book to begin with.

"Why didn't God give up on me long ago? Why does He keep leading me to know His voice? And why is it that I want so desperately to hear His voice? In fact, why is this the almost universal cry of Christians? Quite simply, it is because the deepest desire of God's heart is to have communion with His children".
Willard, Dallas – *Hearing God*, Harpers, 1993. Without question, the clearest defense of two-way prayer I have ever read. Impeccably precise and methodical, Willard's work was foundational to my being able to defend what I have experienced.

**Notes**

1. Jonathan Edwards, who was not noted as being a mystic, practiced a form of listening prayer. Although, his understanding of Scripture precluded him from hearing words, hear how he describes his experience:

   *Once, as I rode out into the woods ... as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that for me was extraordinary, of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure, and sweet grace of love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception - which continued as near as I can judge, about an hour, which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud.*

   *Jonathan Edwards - A New Biography*

   Iain H. Murray pg 100.

   Clearly this experience falls under my broad definition of listening prayer.

2. I am indebted to David Runcorn (*A Center of Quiet - Hearing God when Life is Noisy*) for this insight.
3. In Search of Guidance, Dallas Willard, pg 9

4. Ibid. pg 45

5. The Soul's Quest for God, R.C. Sproul page 39

6. Ibid., page 39.

7. Willard, pg 104

8. I am deeply indebted to a friend of mine, Peter Attwood, for his insight in this area.

9. Mark 7:19

10. Matthew 22:29

11. Romans 4:17


13. 2 Timothy 3:16

14. Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth, R. Kenyon, pg 36

15. Ibid. pg 102

16. 2 Corinthians 2:11