
Surprise the World! Chapter 5: Listen

I will spend at least one period of the week listening for the Spirit's voice.

Scripture

"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. —Matthew 6:5-6, NIV

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. ¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." —Acts 10:9-13, NIV

Chapter Summary

The challenge this week is to find one period of time, preferably at the beginning of the week, to listen to the Holy Spirit. Like trying to hear in a crowded coffee shop, we must turn everything else off. How do we bless and eat with others giving into fear and laziness?

"[F]ear and laziness will motivate you to come up with dozens of reasons why you can't or shouldn't open yourself to others. It is the countermanding voice of the Spirit that will help us resist our worst impulses." —Pages 58-59

We are prone to talking to God in prayer or to others in witness. We also must listen to the Spirit in secret so that we can listen to Him when we're with others.

"[I]t is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers.... Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are, not for what they say." —Thomas Merton, quoted on Page 61

To begin solitude and silence,

1. Set aside a designated time.
2. Eliminate distractions. He adds here that it takes time—20 minutes is ideal—to let silence and solitude have its effect.
3. Let God in. Enjoy God's presence. No agendas.

To focus, you may use a Christian practice called centering prayer. You might repeat a verse or phrase from Scripture. This is not a mantra to chant, but a prayer which helps bring all of your thoughts and nerves settled before the Lord.

"Remember that centering prayer is different from classic Eastern meditation, which is attempting to empty your mind by pushing thoughts away or by having no thoughts." —Page 65

In your times of listening to the Holy Spirit, he may bring to mind a person to bless or eat with. He might prompt you to follow up with someone, convict you of sin, or encourage you.

Frost gives a spectrum of extremes of engagement versus withdrawal, saying that neither end is good.



Our goal is to be somewhere in the middle with Spirit-empowered, holy engagement.

Questions

Use whichever questions you like. Some are taken from the book; other questions can be found starting on page 109.

1. Matthew 6:5-6 is part of Jesus' instructions of doing our acts of righteousness in secret. What is Jesus guarding against? What reward might we miss out on if we practice these missional habits for the applause of others?
2. Frost does not mention the story of Peter in Acts 10 in the chapter, but it is a great example of someone praying alone and then hearing from the Holy Spirit. Do your best to recall what happens after verse 14. How does Peter know this is the Spirit's voice? (see Acts 10:15-16) What comes as a result of the Spirit speaking to Peter (and going with Peter to Cornelius' home)?
3. Solitude and silence are disciplines of abstinence—they take us out of the world and away from rush and hurry. Why do we need disciplines of abstinence to assist us in or fuel us for disciplines of engagement?
4. Have you ever practiced centering prayer before? If so, tell the story. If not, what questions do you have about it?
5. Where do you find yourself on the spectrum between missional engagement and withdrawal?
6. As we "listen for the Spirit's voice," what kinds of things does the Bible tell us the Spirit might say? List as many as you can. Are you able to trust that God can say and do the same things for you as he did in the Bible?
7. The focus of this chapter is a solo practice of listening to the Spirit. Have you ever been part of a church service or leadership group where, together, the focus was listening to the Spirit? What did the group do in order to listen? What happened?

Prayer

If your group is comfortable, pick one of the phrases below to practice centering prayer together.

Holy Spirit, send us out
Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy
In calm and quiet we hope in the Lord

Then enter (or simply start with) a time of 3-5 minutes of silence. Close with a prayer of your own.

Challenge

Spend at least one period of the week listening for the Spirit's voice.

