

What We Say to God When We Aren't Listening

You know that moment when you're the first one awake on a Saturday morning? Your phone isn't buzzing every thirty seconds, and even the neighbors haven't started their leaf blowers yet. You step outside with your coffee and suddenly realize: *Holy cow, it's actually quiet.* Even your phone is still asleep. No Amazon delivery trucks rumbling by. Just birds doing their thing and wind in the trees – the same sounds people heard thousands of years ago before Spotify.

It hits me that this might be the only five minutes all day when I could actually hear God if He wanted to say something. Which makes me wonder: maybe the reason we struggle to hear from God isn't because He's not talking, but because we've gotten really good at noise.

One of my favorite writers, Bob Benson was asked in a radio interview, (long before podcasts were invented) "What are you trying to say? What's the big message?" He had a seven word reply: **God has something to say to you.** The problem is that He most often speaks softly.

The story of young Samuel getting called by God in the middle of the night got me thinking about how we approach prayer today. Here are four ways we might be making it harder than it needs to be.

1. "God, I'll do the talking. You just nod along."

Samuel almost missed God's voice entirely because he wasn't expecting it. Sound familiar? We've turned prayer into this weird one-sided conversation where we dump our grocery list of

requests on God and then say “Amen” like we’re hanging up the phone.

But what if God actually has opinions? What if He’s been trying to get a word in edgewise while we’re busy explaining our five-year plan? The Bible shows prayer as this back-and-forth thing – less like leaving a voicemail, more like texting with a friend who actually texts back.

2. “Here’s my wishlist, God. Thanks in advance.”

We’ve got real stuff going on – bills, relationships, health scares, that acrimonious supervisor. But sometimes I wonder if I’m so focused on getting God to sign off on my agenda that I never stop to ask what His might be.

What if God’s more interested in changing me than he is changing my circumstances? What if He’s got plans that are bigger than my immediate comfort zone? Wild thought, I know. But I have to realize that God isn’t focused on how to make me comfortable. It’s quite the opposite! As C.S. Lewis taught us: *“I’m not sure God wants us to be happy. I think he wants us to love, and be loved. But we are like children, thinking our toys will make us happy and the whole world is our nursery. Something must drive us out of that nursery and into the lives of others, and that something is suffering.”*

3. “God, please bless this thing I’ve already decided to do.”

This one’s sneaky. We make our plans, get emotionally invested, and then ask God to rubber-stamp them. “Dear God, I really want this opportunity/relationship/thing. Please make it work out!” Maybe the better question isn’t “Will you bless this?” but “What do you think I should do?” and then actually

waiting for an answer.

4. “God, I’ve got seven minutes before my next Zoom call.”

We’ve gotten pretty good at compartmentalizing everything, including God. Twenty minutes of quiet time in the morning, check the spiritual box, now back to *real life*. It would be a shame for us to get to the end of our lives realizing that prayer and contemplation were actually the “real life” we were created for.

Maybe Try This Instead

Remember what Eli told Samuel? “Next time you hear that voice, just say: ‘Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.’” Not exactly rocket science, but harder than it sounds.

What if we started our prayer time with our mouths closed and our mental chatter on pause? What if we actually waited to see what God might want to talk about before launching into our presentation?

Try starting with something like:

“God, I’ve got seventeen things I want to talk to you about, but first – What do You want to say to me?”

“Lord, my brain is ping-ponging between my to-do list and that weird thing my boss said yesterday. Help me settle down here so I can actually focus. (Takes a breath) Okay, I’m listening.”

“God, I’m honestly pretty frustrated right now, but I’m here and I’m listening anyway.”

“Lord, take all the time you need with me. I’m not going anywhere. And when I do leave this spot, help me keep my ears

open throughout the day – even in the noise, even in the silence. I want to hear what you're really trying to tell me."

The world's only gotten noisier since Samuel's time, but God's voice hasn't gotten any quieter. Maybe we just need to remember how to tune in.

"Prayer is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us." Teresa of Avila

"Speak, Lord. I'm listening."