

Be Still and Listen

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On a recent walk at the farm I startle at the quiet of the morning. Squirrels chatter with one another over the last hickory nuts of the season. Birds sing above me as they swoop into the field for remnants of the crop. In the far-off distance the murmur of a mower chops the last of the fallen leaves.

The sky is a brilliant sapphire, and the wind blows a cold gust from the north. Perhaps the silence emphasizes the chill in the air, a reminder that winter will soon arrive. I fasten the top button of my jacket, grateful for the gloves in my pocket.

This rare moment of stillness is profound. Most mid-morning walks are accompanied by the rattle of scaffold wagons traveling to and from the field. Then, there's the traffic of the tractor-trailer as it lumbers back from the field, full of beans. The harvest season winds down, and the vibrant colors of auburn and orange turn to winter's dreary grey and brown.

The push to finish is now complete.

The hush of the morning reminds me that my own days of busy-ness often doesn't allow for quality time spent in true conversation with God. While I try to pray every day, this moment of quiet jars my realization that I have not heard His voice in a while.

I'm pretty sure He didn't go anywhere. He's patiently waiting for me to reconnect with Him.

It was about a dozen years ago that my conversations with God took an amazing turn. As a church leader, I attended a district training event hosted by the Methodist Church titled, *Listening for Heaven's Sake*.

The greatest benefit of that training was meeting a minister of prayer. At the end of the training event, he asked if he could pray over me. His prayer was as though he knew me personally though we'd only met the day before. The words of the prayer sounded as though God was talking directly to me. The words nailed many things going on in my life, addressing many concerns that were in my heart.

That prayer was mesmerizing. It was exciting. I wanted to pray like that – to pray and feel that God is speaking directly to me. Over time, the pastor shared with me how to open my heart to listen for what God is saying.

It shouldn't be surprising that we mere mortals can have this access to the Lord. In the Bible, God speaks through people, animals and inanimate objects. A few examples,

- Exodus 3 – a burning bush gets Moses' attention

- Numbers 22 – God uses an angel to speak through a donkey
- Acts 9:3 – the Lord speaks directly to Saul on the road to Damascus

Our heavenly father finds all kinds of ways to get his point across to His children.

I've since learned that for me to hear His voice, I need to be still and focus on our conversation. If I'm too busy with other tasks or worries, I'm not paying attention; I'm only giving God a part of me – not the full measure He desires and that I need.

Scripture tells us in John 15:4, "Remain in me," says Jesus, "and I will remain in you." The King James version uses an old-fashioned word for remain, the word is "abide" – which means to live or dwell. If I will dwell in him, He will dwell in me.

When I'm too busy to talk to God, there is no communication in our relationship. Just as it is for my marriage, family relationships, and friendships, if I don't take time to be alone with Jesus, our relationship suffers.

Getting close means He knows my faults and inadequacies. He knows where I'm falling short and the devil loves to remind me of those failings. And yet, I cannot get my spiritual act together unless I come close to the father.

For some, that intimacy with God may be too scary. Some may find that closeness to the Holy Spirit is too emotional. Perhaps they're more inclined to be intellectual in their approach through study or doctrine. Others of us may have difficulty being still or simply finding the time for silence and reflection.

Regardless of our temperament, we must find our place at the feet of Jesus; to abide in Him so we can hear His voice.

Jesus describes the relationship we're supposed to have with him – He described the bond he has with his children in a beautiful passage of scripture in John 10:22-28:

² Then came the Festival of Dedication^[a] at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.** ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

During this season of thanksgiving, I invite you to join me; let's be still and listen for the word of God. Let's reconnect with the one who is always available. Ask for His blessings, His greatest desire is to share His abiding love with you.

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For more of Bobbie's essays, visit her website at bobbiesmithbryant.com