

Psalm 46:10 (1984 NIV)
Be Still and Know that I Am God

- 1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
- 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.
- 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.
- 5 God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.
- 6 Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
- 7 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.
- 8 Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth.
- 9 He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire.
- 10 "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."
- 11 The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Introduction

Prayer can be defined as conversation with God. And in any meaningful conversation, there must be good communication. But as human beings, our attempts at communication can turn out wrong.

A wife asks her husband, "Could you please go shopping for me and buy one carton of milk, and if they have eggs, get six."

A short time later the husband comes back with six cartons of milk. The wife asks him, "Why on earth did you buy six cartons of milk?"

He replied, "They had eggs."

As human beings, our attempts at communication can turn out wrong.

One common thing that gets in the way of good communication is noise. Even in our conversation or communication with God, noise can still be a problem.

I. What is noise?

What is the difference between sound and noise? Sound has been defined by the dictionary as "transmitted vibrations of any frequency". However, not all sounds can be heard by humans. As an example, a dog whistle which the human ear cannot detect can be easily heard by dogs.

According to my wife, there are many sounds I can't hear ... like her voice when she is asking me to do something that I don't fancy.

There are some sounds we cannot hear (like that from a dog whistle). But what about sounds within our range of hearing? Not all sounds are disruptive. Many of the sounds of nature, for example, are created for our enjoyment and can be quite relaxing. Consider sounds like:

- The rush of ocean waves as they strike the shore
- The sound of birds singing in the morning
- The sound of the wind rustling through the leaves

I personally don't think these sounds hold anything that would hinder a communication with God, and I enjoy these sounds. These can even give me a better sense of God's presence.

Perhaps then it is just noise that might interfere with our communication with God. Noise is defined in the dictionary as "anything that interferes with, slows down, or reduces the clarity or accuracy of a communication". In short, noise can be ANYTHING that disrupts the communication of the intended message between the sender and the receiver of the information.

If God really does try to communicate with us in a "still small voice" as the Scripture indicates, what then are some examples of noise in life that can hinder us from hearing Him?

II. Examples of noise in life

First of all, there is physical noise (e.g. traffic noise, construction noise). Physical noise can certainly disrupt communication by simply not allowing us to hear what the other person is saying.

But it is not just physical noise that is the problem. We can close the windows or we can just go to a quiet place, yet we can still be unable to hear clearly. So what then are some other things that we can call noise that might interfere with good communication?

A second example of noise in life is noise in our minds. Sometimes, because of circumstances, problems, distractions, finances, etc. our minds can race from one thing to another or fixate on one particular thing. When our minds are jumping from thought to thought or dwelling on a particular thought, issue or problem, our minds are not available to hear messages from God. So our own thoughts can also be "noise" that interferes with our communication with God. We drift into selective listening rather than focused listening.

A third example of noise in life is noise of technology. I cannot deny that technology today has given us better connectivity with one another—you think of Email, What'sApp, FaceBook, Skype, and ZOOM. But better connectivity

often means greater demand and expectation of quicker responses from one another. If we are not careful, this can lead to greater preoccupation with these technological tools—i.e. we spend so much time with and on them that we don't have time to focus on other things, even time to focus on meaningful communication with God. So, what's supposed to save us time for other things becomes the very thing that takes our time away from other things.

For example, I still receive and reply to quite a fair number of emails each day. Some of these exchanges can take up a lot of my time because I have to think and pray through what and how to say so that I will not be misunderstood or misquoted. However, I often find such exchanges so mentally stimulating and engaging that I can keep going on and on. As a result, I can find myself thinking so much about the content of an email that I have read and how to respond to it, that I can lose focus in my connection with a significant other, even with the Lord. So, I have to intentionally remind myself to stop, change focus, and move on to other things.

Now, I am not against using technological tools in daily life. But I want to caution that they can create “deafening noises” that deter us from hearing the Lord clearly if we don't know when to say “enough is enough”.

Here is the BIG question—with all of the responsibilities we have, and with all of the communication options we have available ...

III. How do we hear the “still small voice of God”?

How do we hear God through the noise, or more precisely, how can we remove the noise so that we can truly hear God?

Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” The idea of stillness here is not so much stillness of action or motion, but stillness in one's spirit in the midst of all the noises around us.

Someone once said, “Praying persistently is not just so that God will eventually hear us, but that we will eventually hear God.” This is so true because there is this God-given instruction to us as we seek Him in life—“Be still, and know that I am God.” Indeed, we need to make and take time to still the noise around us, and be still to know that God is God so that we can hear Him in His still small voice.

Now, what might God have to say to us if we have stilled ourselves to listen? We might hear Him speaking and wanting to deal not with the people or situations we are praying for, but to deal first with ourselves before anyone and anything else. We might hear Him wanting to change not the people or situations we are praying for, but to change first the pray-er (i.e. the one who is praying) before anyone and anything else.

My late mother suffered a stroke in 2004. She became diminished in mobility after that. She could move around the house in a limited way using a walking frame. But being an active person who used to move about outdoors, she was very unhappy with her handicap. So, for a long while I had been praying that the Lord would help her accept her limitation.

One day, she said to me just when I came home, "Son, I have something to ask you."

I replied, "What is it?"

She said with great unhappiness, "Why does Jesus not heal me after all this time?"

I said, "He has already healed you. You are so much better off than many stroke patients who are bed-ridden. You must learn to accept your condition."

But she kept on complaining and complaining until I had to stop her by saying, "That's enough. I have a long day and I don't want to hear your complain any more. Let me pray for you."

She retorted, "No use praying. After all, it doesn't work."

I sensed myself chiding her, "How can you say that as a believer?"

The conversation then turned into some kind of heated exchange of words.

After that incident, I began to change the way I prayed for my mother. Instead of praying that the Lord would help her accept her limitation, I was praying, "Lord, if she is so unhappy in this life, please take her home to yourself in your sovereign will. Relieve her of her suffering."

One day, as I was about to pray, I intentionally took more time to be still and quiet before the Lord. I asked Him to speak to me and to reveal to me what He wanted to change in me. After some time, as I was about to pray for my mother in the same manner, I sensed the Lord saying to me, "Stop praying this way for her. I know your heart. Check your heart and ask yourself why you are praying for your mother this way."

And as I took time to check my heart, I sensed the Lord rebuking me, "You think you are praying spiritually because you are asking me to relieve your mother of her suffering. But I know your heart. You are praying selfishly because I know you are actually asking me to relieve you of your responsibility towards your mother."

And the Lord was right. I was getting very impatient, tired and even angry with my mother and her complaining. When I was so convicted, I repented, asked the Lord for forgiveness and a deeper love for my mother.

I thank God that when I take time to be still before Him, I often hear His words of reassurance, comfort, encouragement and hope. BUT there are and will be times when He speaks His words of rebuke to me.

Most of us are self-conscious rather than self-aware. We are more conscious and worried about what other people think of us than aware of our feelings/motivations and our struggle with them.

As we take time to be still before God, we might hear Him wanting to change not the people or situations we are praying for, but to change first the pray-er (i.e. our own self) before anyone and anything else.

So, how do you hear the “still small voice of God” in prayer? Don’t begin by opening your mouth to speak. But begin by being still and silent in your spirit, and then opening your heart so that you can be ready to receive what the Lord might be speaking to you. You might be surprised what a revelation and renewal of yourself this can lead to.

Conclusion

Maybe God wants to say something to you. Maybe He just wants to tell you how important you are to Him or that He loves you very, very much. Maybe, just maybe, He wants to tell you something that will change your life, that will change your priorities, and that will make you feel more at peace than you have ever been in your life.

God is here and He is speaking to us right now. But if we have too much noise in our lives, we will simply miss out on what He might be trying to say.

Prayer is not just seeking God to work in the lives of some people or some situations. It is also seeking God to work in us personally before anyone or anything else. In this sense, our prayer life is also our journey in personal discipleship—we become still and hear what God wants to change inside us, and we obey His still small voice so that we can walk closer to Him and with Him.

I pray that when we end our time today, we will not only have prayed for some people and some concerns, but also we will have sensed the Lord speaking to us in a personal way because we have been still and know that He is God.

Amen!