

Are you listening?

Listen Up! Can you hear me? Come here so I know you are listening.

As a mom, one of the things I find myself doing a lot of is repeating those phrases. Asking multiple times for something to be done or just saying it again so that it can be heard over the noise of the tv or the distraction of electronics or even just noise. Sometimes I like to say something really quiet to see if anyone is listening and make up a funny story just to see. For example, “the other day I saw a blue alien and he gave me ice cream”. If the person nods, then I know they were not paying attention.

I wonder sometimes if God feels the same way about us? If He ever wants to say “are you even listening to what I am saying?”. I think if we are truly honest, we would have to say that we don’t take the time to listen. To give undivided attention and time to God from our day. We pack our day with so much work, and things to do that by the end of the day it’s a quick list of requests and a few heartfelt confessions and a good night before we pass out to begin the day all over again. I want to talk to you today about ways we can listen and tune our ears to hear what God has to say to us.

#### BE STILL AND KNOW

Psalms 46:10 tells us to Be Still and know that He is God. It can be hard to be still and quiet. We are often like toddlers who want to get up and go and run around. While this verse is often quoted when we are experiencing anxiety or feeling overwhelmed, I think there is something deeper to it.

Following that David writes “I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.” He is saying Be still first THEN you will see me exalted. Prepare in the stillness to see God work wonders. There are seasons in our life when we are told to be still so that God can move in our lives. While I was reading on what it means to be still, I came across something that stood out.

When Jesus told the waves and wind to be still in Mark 4, it is the same thing David writes in Psalms. The wind and waves knew His name and listened to what He said and became still. God is saying be still and I will remove the chaos and command it to be calm. I will show MY glory among the nations. Be still and remember who God is. Be still and stop fearing. Be still and see what God is doing. Be still and acknowledge His greatness. Be still and know God is with you.

#### LEAN INTO HIS WHISPER

A loud voice can easily draw a crowd, BUT it takes purposeful intention to lean into a whisper. Two main things come to mind when I think of a whisper. 1) it’s hard to hear with noise around and 2) you have to be in close proximity to hear it. His whisper is an invitation into His presence. If you are by a thundering waterfall, you could hear little else but the sound of the water rushing over the ledge and cascading into the pool below. If you walked about 50 feet from the fall, you would be able to hear the birds in the trees and the gentle brook. You have to remove the distractions and the noise from around you and draw yourself into your quiet place; into the close proximity of God’s presence. I love the passage of scripture from 1 Kings 19 where God is talking to Elijah.

*“God said “Go out and stand in front of the Lord on the mountain.” As the Lord was passing by a fierce wind tore mountains and shattered rocks ahead of the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake. But the Lord wasn’t in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire. But the Lord wasn’t in the fire. And after the fire there was a quiet, whispering voice. ”*

God is showing us that he doesn't need all the theatrics or noise to be heard. He wasn't in the fierce wind. He wasn't in the earthquake. He wasn't in the fire. He doesn't need the big "smoke show" or circus. He speaks quietly often without words. In the gentle breeze on your face when you step into the sunshine on a perfect day. In the quiet prompting in your heart or a thought that He puts into your head to help someone in need. He was there in a quiet whispering voice.

The other thing about a whisper is you have to be close to someone to be able to hear it. Intimate I couldn't whisper a message to someone sitting at the back of the room and expect them to hear me. In order for someone to hear a whisper they have to be in close union with you. Typically one would whisper right into one's ear. It is the same with God. To hear His whispering voice, we have to be close to Him. Sometimes to hear a whisper we have to reposition ourselves. Lend an ear so to speak. Often hearing His voice just requires a little repositioning. Put your phone down. Turn the tv off. Open up your Bible. Think of Samuel. In 1 Samuel 3:7 the bible states "Samuel did not yet know the Lord" or in the God's Word Translation "Samuel had no experience with the Lord"; but we know from v3 that he was positioned in the presence of God. He did not know what to listen for even though he was in the perfect place. The very ark of God was in the room he was lying in. He was in a position for an encounter as he was close to the very presence of God and had no distractions around him.

We also cannot rely on the intimacy of other's relationships with God to deliver the word of God to us. God wants to speak to each and every one of us something specific and unique to us. I think of the 5 wise virgins in Matthew 25 who had prepared extra oil. The foolish virgins hoped and pleaded with the wise ones to give some of their oil. How many times do we plead with others to tell us what God has said? We cannot thrive off the intimacy and prayer lives of others. We are responsible to cultivate our own personal relationship with Jesus. Just as it is your responsibility in a marriage to cultivate a relationship and always seek to know your spouse more. Jesus is longing for that relationship with us and He is more than willing to speak but we have to make sure we are ready to hear the whisper instead of listening to the loud thundering voice often expected.

#### LEARNING TO WAIT

I find this is the hardest thing to do. Wait. I heard a pastor state once that God is never early and He is never late, He is always last minute. We all know the scripture "BUT they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles" Waiting on the Lord renews our strength. The word for wait in Hebrew, QAVAH means "to wait, look for, hope, expect". It doesn't mean idle or do nothing. We are to wait with an expectant and hopeful heart. This is when God rolls up his sleeves and says "now watch what I can do". He loves to surpass our expectations with His glory.

Often time waiting means having faith and believing that God will keep his promises.

Have you ever had to stand in line with a child? Michael and I stood in line last week outside Cowan's in hopes of getting some delicious cow tongues and ice cream. We waited in the line for 2 hours. We sang and played games where you had to guess what song we were humming. The sun slowly set on the day and by the time we reached the door, they had sold out of cow tongues. Not wanting to leave empty, we ordered some ice cream and went home. In the line we were looking forward to the ice cream and the delicious cow tongue desserts. We expected to get them when we reached the door for our turn to finally enter the store. We could have got upset when we were told they were out, but in all honesty..... I loved the ice cream we received. I suppose what I am saying is sometimes after we wait for something for so long, we receive something else. We receive the blessing wrapped in a different package.

## WHEN IT SEEMS QUIET

There will be times also when we will feel that God has gone silent. That we cannot hear him. We strain our ears and jump on any little thing we believe to be a whisper and are eager to believe it is from God. This is where we must also remain vigilant as it is a time of testing and purifying.

We all know the game peek-a-boo right? Where you cover your face with your hands and go peekaboo when you move them? Did you know that this game teaches babies and children the lesson of object permanence. This basically means that even though you can't see something, in this case your smiling face, it still exists. That objects continue to exist even when they cannot directly be seen, heard or touched" I suppose sometimes we are in a spiritual game of peek-a-boo. What I mean by this is God continues to exist even when we don't see him. In the game, the pursuit of one another is extremely evident for someone from the outside looking in. However, one of the two parties is unaware, at times, of the pursuit until the manifestation of what they are searching for comes forth. Don't lose heart in the pursuit. When it seems like God has gone quiet and not speaking at all. Do not retreat or become stagnant BUT instead use it as an opportunity to dive deeper.

## THE SECRET PLACE

One of the greatest examples of listening to God is seen throughout the life of Jesus. His every move and decision hinged upon His union with the Father. The key to knowing and hearing God's voice is by slipping away to be with Him. It is in these moments we come to know God's voice. Even Jesus, God's son, still took the time to be in quiet place and to hear God's voice. We see several times in scripture when Jesus would go off by himself to have quiet times with his Father (Mark 1 and Mark 6 are just 2 examples). Luke 5:16 states "He would go away to places where He could be alone for prayer". If it's something that even Jesus did to maintain a relationship with his Father, then how much more so should we strive for the same?

I remember when I went on my mission trip to Venezuela, one of the things they stressed the importance was daily quiet time with God. Taking the time without any distractions to sit, be quiet and listen to the word of God. I found those were some of my most intimate times with God. The main thing for myself when I am trying to have time with God is to remove myself from things that can and will try to distract me. I have to put my phone in another room. I cannot lie down when praying or I will fall asleep. I find the best thing is to make a coffee in the morning and spend time in quiet place and read a devotional. If you do not have a routine start small. Set 10 minutes aside in your day and dedicate them SOLELY to God. Keep that appointment and guard your time with God. Things will try to get your attention and it is important to be diligent and intentional with your time with God. You will find that slowly your 10 minutes turns to 20 and then 30.

If taking time to be quiet with God was something even Jesus himself did regularly, even being God's son, then how much more do we need to take the time to tune our ears towards Him?