THE DAILY BREAD

*The Acts of the Apostles*



# Listening to God

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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*The Everyday Apostle*

INTRODUCTION

# Speak, Lord

Most of us talk at God.

We bring Him our requests, our worries, our wish lists. We fire off prayers like text messages and wait, sometimes impatiently, for a reply. And then we wonder why our prayer life feels flat. Why God seems distant. Why the heavens feel like brass.

Six hundred years ago, someone asked Catherine of Siena why God seemed to speak so much in the Bible but so little in their own day. Her answer is sharper now than it was then:

> *In those days they prayed, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." Today we pray, "Listen, Lord, your servant is speaking." — St. Catherine of Siena*

Her words land harder today than ever. We live in the noisiest century in human history. Push notifications buzz from our pockets. Background music fills every store. Podcasts narrate our commutes. Even our quiet moments are crowded with the static of social feeds and unread emails. If God is trying to speak to us, He's competing with a roar.

But here is the heart of the Christian life: He is speaking. To you. Not just through ancient pages, though He speaks there. Not just through preachers, though He speaks through them. He is speaking in your heart, in your thoughts, in the events of your day, in the people He places in front of you. The question is not whether God is speaking.

The question is whether anyone is listening.

In the Scriptures, God speaks to His people over twenty thousand times. He has not stopped. He is still speaking. And learning to recognize His voice, really recognize it, is the most life- changing skill a Christian can develop.

This little book is about that. It is about learning to listen. Learning to discern, in a world full of competing voices, which one is His. And then, having heard, learning to say yes.

Pull up a chair. Get quiet. Let's learn together.

CHAPTER ONE

# A Life That Listens

Every spiritual hero in Scripture was first of all a listener.

Moses heard God face to face, the way one speaks to a friend (Num 12:8). Jesus said of His own life, "I do only what I see the Father doing" (Jn 5:19). Mary was called blessed because "she believed that what was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45). Samuel as a boy. Elijah at the cave. Paul on the road to Damascus. Strip away everything else and the common thread is the same, they all knew how to hear.

Most people don't realize that God is speaking to them all the time. You don't have to be a mystic or a canonized saint to hear His voice. The God who lives in your heart communicates with you constantly, in many ways, and learning to recognize Him changes everything.

Jesus made a string of specific promises to those who would abide in Him and let His word abide in them (John 15). Read them slowly, they are staggering:

What He Promised Your prayers will be answered "If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you" (Jn 15:7). The more we learn to listen, discern, and obey, the more our prayers line up with what God already wants to give. We move from a sometimes-yes to a more-often- yes to a forever-yes.

You will become His disciple Every one of us, all day, every day, worships something. We give our attention, our energy, our talk to what we love. Watch what fills someone's phone screen and you'll know what fills their heart. The sports fan can't stop talking about the team. The political junkie can't stop talking about the news cycle. The person who is into Jesus loves Jesus, follows Jesus, talks about Jesus, and over time begins to resemble Him. The fruit of that life is unmistakable: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

You will know, daily, that you are loved Jesus says, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you" (Jn 15:9). Think about that. Jesus can only love at a hundred percent, with all His mind and all His heart. And the Father

loves Him with all of His. Which means Jesus loves you with the exact same intensity that the Father loves Jesus.

If you get quiet and listen, you will often hear Him say, in your own thoughts: "I love you. Yes, you. You are precious in My eyes, and honored. Do not be afraid. I am with you."

You will have joy, even in trouble "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (Jn 15:11). Not joy after the storm. Joy in it. Corrie

ten Boom, who survived a Nazi concentration camp, used to say it like this: "Look within, and be depressed. Look around, and be distressed. Look at Jesus, and be at rest."

You will love people you couldn't love before There is a love that is the gift of the Holy Spirit, not natural human warmth, but a participation in the very love of Christ. It has length, breadth, height, and depth. It reaches the unreachable, forgives the unforgivable, and keeps going when human love runs out. It is Christ loving others through you.

You will not be a stranger to Him "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (Jn 15:15). This is the whole point of this little book. We are not meant to be strangers waiting for messages that never come. We are meant to be intimate friends to whom He tells what is on His heart.

You will be sent, and supplied "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit... whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you" (Jn 15:16). Every Christian has a call to continue Christ's redemptive, healing, loving work in their corner of the world. And in that calling, the Father supplies what is needed.

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All of this, every promise, depends on one thing. Abiding. Listening. Letting His word find a home in you.

So how do we learn?

CHAPTER TWO

# How God Speaks

There is a story in 1 Samuel 3 that ought to be every beginner's anthem. A boy named Samuel is sleeping in the temple. He hears a voice calling his name. He runs to Eli, the old priest: "Here I am, you called me." Eli says, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." This happens three times before Eli finally realizes what's going on and tells the boy:

*"Go and lie down, and if He calls you, say: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.""*
*— 1 Sam 3:9*

Notice the detail Scripture gives us: "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him" (1 Sam 3:7). He heard the voice. He just didn't recognize the speaker.

That is most of us. God is speaking. We hear something. We just don't know it's Him.

Learning to listen begins with learning the ways He speaks. There are many of them, some inside us, some around us, and they overlap and reinforce each other. Here are the ones I have come to recognize most often.

Ways He Speaks Within Through your thoughts This is His most common way, and the one we miss most often. The Spirit of God lives inside the baptized believer, and from inside, He drops thoughts into your mind. They feel like your own thoughts, because they pass through your mind. But they didn't originate there.

You're standing in line at the grocery store and suddenly think of a friend you haven't talked to in months. That's not random. Call him.

You're driving home and a fresh insight about a problem at work simply appears in your head, clear, peaceful, obvious. That wasn't a flash of your own genius. That was the Spirit of wisdom.

Paul prays for the Ephesians that "the eyes of your understanding be enlightened" (Eph 1:18). That's exactly the gift. The Spirit thinks His thoughts into our thoughts, and we begin to see what He sees.

Through your heart Sometimes it's not a thought but a tug. A heaviness when you're about to do something you shouldn't. A surge of compassion for a stranger. A nagging unease about a decision that looks good on paper. A quiet, settled peace about a hard road. Scripture calls these movements of the heart, and the Spirit uses them constantly.

The classical name for this is consolation and desolation. When the Spirit is leading you toward something, there is usually an underlying peace, even if the path is hard. When something is off, there is usually an unsettled, restless feeling underneath, even if the surface is exciting. Pay attention to your interior weather.

Through dreams God spoke in dreams all through Scripture, to Joseph the patriarch, to Joseph the husband of Mary, to Daniel, to Pilate's wife. He still does. Not every dream is a message; most dreams are simply your brain processing the day. But sometimes a dream has a weight to it. It keeps coming back. It feels heavier than the others. Ask the Lord to interpret it. Pay attention.

Through your weaknesses This one took me years to understand. I used to think my strengths were my assets and my weaknesses were my liabilities. I have changed my mind.

My weaknesses have been the doorway to grace. They drive me to my knees. They humble me. They make me compassionate toward other people's failures, because I know my own. My "virtues," by contrast, are often where I quietly run my own life and forget I need God at all.

*"Gladly will I glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." — 2 Cor 12:9*

Ways He Speaks Around You Through Scripture The Bible is His standing word for every believer of every age. It is the constant against which everything else is measured. If you go to it expecting to meet Him, not just to gather information, you will. Sometimes a verse you've read a hundred times suddenly lights up like neon. That is not your reading comprehension. That is Him.

Through the Church Christ left behind a Body, apostolic teaching, sacraments, the saints, the wisdom of two thousand years. The Eucharist is the deepest place where He still speaks, not in words but in self-gift. Confession is where He speaks His clearest word of forgiveness directly to you. The Catechism, the writings of the Church, the homily on a Sunday you almost skipped, these are real channels.

Through other people A friend says exactly the thing you needed to hear, and they have no idea. A pastor's homily lands like it was written for you. A stranger's offhand comment unlocks something you've been wrestling with for weeks. God moves through people constantly. The trick is to be the kind of person who notices.

Through circumstances Doors open. Doors close. Plans collapse. Plans come together against all odds. None of this is random. "All things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom 8:28). When God opens a door, no one can shut it. When He closes one, no amount of pushing will open it. Read your circumstances prayerfully. They are part of His vocabulary.

Through silence and creation Sit at the edge of the ocean for an hour. Watch a sunset slowly drain the color out of the sky. Look up at the stars somewhere the city lights can't reach. Creation is, as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it, "charged with the grandeur of God." Sometimes He doesn't need words.

Through suffering This is the hardest channel and often the clearest. Nothing breaks open the human heart like pain. Broken hearts are the vehicle of grace. Paul says we hold this treasure in clay pots, and it is precisely through the cracks that the light gets out. The valley teaches what the mountaintop cannot.

CHAPTER THREE

# Listening with Scripture

Now to the practical. There are three doorways into a listening life. I'll take them one at a time, and I'd encourage you to try all three. They each train a different muscle.

The first is praying with Scripture, sometimes called lectio divina, the ancient practice of reading the Bible the way one reads a love letter, not the way one reads a textbook.

*"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."*
*— Jn 5:39–40*

Jesus said this to the religious experts of His day. They knew the Bible cold. They could quote it backward. And they missed Him in the very pages that pointed to Him.

On the road to Emmaus, after the Resurrection, two disciples walked seven miles with the risen Jesus and didn't recognize Him. He opened the Scriptures to them, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets", and afterwards they said to each other:

*"Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" — Lk 24:32*

That is what He wants to do for every one of us. Open the Word, not as an academic exercise, but as a living encounter. Here is a simple method.

The Five P's Place Find a quiet spot. Same place each day, if you can. Phone off or in another room, not on silent, off. Notifications are designed to fragment your attention, and a fragmented mind cannot listen.

Presence Take a minute to put yourself in His presence. A simple act of consecration: "Lord, I am yours. Speak, your servant is listening." If something is weighing on your conscience, confess it briefly. You're not earning the right to hear from Him. You're clearing the line.

Passage Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to a passage. If you're working through a book of the Bible, pick up where you left off. If you're not, the Gospels are a great starting place, Luke or John for beginners. You can also pray, "Holy Spirit, where do You want me to read?" and see where your eyes land. Don't overthink this.

Point Read slowly. Out loud, even, if you're alone. Read until something catches you. A word will light up. A line will hit a nerve. A phrase will refuse to let you move on. That is the point. That is where the Spirit is highlighting something for you, today, in your situation.

Sit with it. Read it again. Let it sink in. Ask: "Lord, what are You saying to me here?" Then listen.

Practice Don't just read it. Do it. If He's telling you to forgive your brother-in-law, pick up the phone. If He's telling you to slow down, slow down. If He's telling you not to worry, stop worrying. Jesus said the wise man is the one who hears the word and acts on it (Mt 7:24). The foolish man is the one who hears and goes on with his life unchanged.

Read the Bible looking for what God is saying to you, not just what God said to someone else.

CHAPTER FOUR

# Listening with a Journal

The second doorway is journaling.

The first journaler in salvation history was Moses. We have five of his journals, we call them the books of the Pentateuch. The Bible itself is a collection of journals: seventy-two of them, written by some forty different authors over roughly fifteen hundred years, each one writing down what God put into their hearts. God is the primary author. The human writer is the secondary author.

You will never write Scripture. But the practice of sitting still, asking God to speak to your thoughts, and writing down what comes, that is ancient, biblical, and powerful.

Here is how I do it.

Six Keys to Journaling One: Quiet yourself Go to your quiet place. Sit comfortably. Ask the Holy Spirit to quiet the noise in your head, the to-do lists, the resentments, the worries, the running internal commentary. This may take three minutes. It may take ten. Don't rush it.

Two: Focus on Jesus Picture Him if you have a visual imagination. Sit at His feet. Watch Him on the shore of Galilee. Or simply repeat the name "Jesus" slowly, in rhythm with your breath, until your attention settles on Him. Then ask, simply: "Lord, speak to me."

Three: Notice the flow Be aware of thoughts that begin to bubble up. They will come quietly, often as if from somewhere lower than your head, from inside your chest. They will not announce themselves with thunder. They will feel almost ordinary. That's a feature, not a bug.

Four: Write Open your journal and write. Don't filter. Don't edit as you go. Don't worry about whether it's "really" from God or just from you. Get it on the page. You'll sort it out later. Just receive in faith and write.

Some days you'll fill three pages. Some days you'll write one sentence. Both are fine. The faithfulness is in the showing up.

Five: Discern After you've written, read it back. Test it against Scripture. Does what you wrote agree with the character of God revealed in the Bible? Does it produce peace? Does it lead to humility? Does it call you toward love or away from it? If something is unclear, sit with it. Bring it to a trusted spiritual friend or director. We'll go deeper into discernment in a later chapter.

Six: Obey Once you're reasonably sure something is from God, act on it. Even if it's small. Especially if it's small. God speaks more clearly to people who do what He's already said. Obedience is what unlocks the next message.

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A woman I know started this practice in her fifties after decades of "saying prayers" without hearing anything back. The first month, she felt silly. The second month, she got a few lines. By the third month, she was filling pages, pages of love, gentle correction, and surprisingly specific guidance. She told me later, almost in tears: "I had no idea He had so much to say to me. I was the one who wasn't talking."

That is what is on the other side of this practice for most people. Not fireworks. Just a quiet, growing intimacy with a God who has been waiting His whole life to be heard.

CHAPTER FIVE

# Listening in Silence

The third doorway is silence itself.

It is the hardest one, because silence in our culture is almost extinct. Even ten seconds of it in an elevator feels uncomfortable; we reach for our phones. We sleep with sound machines. We work with music playing. We can't drive five minutes without filling the car. Silence has become something we tolerate, not something we seek.

But God meets us there.

*"Be still, and know that I am God." — Ps 46:10*

Mother Teresa, now St. Teresa of Calcutta, used to say this, and I have never read anything better on the subject:

*If we really want to pray, we must first learn to listen, for in the silence of the heart God speaks. God is the friend of silence. See how nature, the trees, the flowers, the grass, grow in perfect silence. See the stars, the moon, the sun, how they move in silence. We need silence to be able to touch souls. — St. Teresa of Calcutta*

Think about that for a moment. Jesus spent thirty of His thirty-three years in silence. He began His public ministry with forty days in silence. He retreated, again and again, alone to silent places to be with the Father. The Word made flesh, the One who could speak with such authority that crowds were leveled by it, chose silence as the soil for everything else.

You and I will not learn to listen until we make peace with quiet.

The Two Layers of Noise There are two kinds of noise to get past. The outer noise is the easy one to spot. The inner noise is the one that defeats most people.

Outer noise • Put the phone in another room. Not on silent. In another room. • Turn off the TV, music, podcast, ambient sound, everything.

• Find a chair, a corner, a chapel, somewhere you associate only with this. • Go early in the morning or late at night when the world itself is quieter.

Inner noise This is the harder layer. The minute you sit down, your mind will produce a parade of distractions, things to remember, people to text, conversations to replay, problems to solve. This is normal. Don't fight it. Don't get frustrated. Try this instead:

• Keep a small pad nearby. When a to-do thought comes, "I need to email so-and-so", write it down. You've told yourself you won't forget. Now you can let it go. • When a sinful thought or resentment surfaces, hand it over: "Lord, I'm sorry. Take it." Don't ruminate. Just give it. • When your mind wanders, and it will, over and over, gently

return. Repeat the name "Jesus" slowly. Or use a simple word like "Father" or "Yes" as an anchor. • Don't try to feel anything. Don't grade your prayer time. Just abide.

What Stillness Feels Like When you've settled in, stillness is not nothing. It is something. Most people describe it like this:

• Not striving or efforting, just resting and surrendering. • Being aware of His presence without needing words. • A quiet sense of being loved, simply loved, without performing. • An attitude of relaxed living, like a branch resting on a vine. "Abide in Me, and I in you." — Jn 15:4

Don't be discouraged if it takes weeks of showing up before you sense this. The early days of any silent prayer practice feel awkward and unproductive. You are retraining your nervous system. You are unlearning a lifetime of noise. Give it time.

CHAPTER SIX

# Praying the Our Father with Listening Ears

One of the disciples once said to Jesus: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk 11:1). His answer was the prayer we now call the Our Father.

Most of us say the Our Father. We don't pray it. We rattle off the words from memory while our minds wander to lunch. But Jesus didn't give us a script to recite. He gave us a framework, five movements that together cover everything prayer is for. And each movement creates a place to listen as well as a place to speak.

Here is the listening version.

Praise, Hallowed Be Thy Name Start with praise. Not because God needs it, but because we do. Praising God pulls us out of ourselves and up into Him. Try saying it slowly:

Father, You are holy. You are good. You are loving. You are merciful. You are mighty. You are wise. You are faithful. You are mine, and I am Yours. Then listen. Let Him remind you who He is. Often, praise is where the whole prayer suddenly shifts gears, because remembering who He is reorders everything you were going to ask for.

Plan, Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done This is the listening center of the prayer. Here, you stop talking long enough to ask, "Father, what is on Your heart today? What part of Your kingdom do You want me to step into right now?"

This is the place to use Scripture or your journal. Quiet yourself, ask, and listen. James 1:5 promises that if you ask Him for wisdom, He will give it generously and without reproach. He will.

Provision, Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread Then bring your needs. Real ones, plain ones. Not just "bless this and bless that," but the actual things, the bill that's coming due, the medical result you're waiting on, the conversation you're dreading. Be specific. He invited the specificity.

And then listen. Sometimes He answers with provision. Sometimes He answers with peace. Sometimes He answers with a clearer view of what you actually need, which turns out to be something other than what you asked.

Pardon, Forgive Us as We Forgive This is the dangerous part. Jesus tied our reception of forgiveness to our willingness to give it. He meant it.

Ask the Father to bring to mind anyone you are holding bitterness toward. Then listen. Names will surface. Faces. Old wounds you thought were sealed. As each one comes, say: "Father, I forgive them. Help me mean it." Forgiveness is rarely a single transaction; it's usually a process. But it starts with the willingness.

For Catholics, this is also the heart of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There is no clearer voice of God on earth than the words of absolution spoken in confession. If it has been a while, go.

Protection, Lead Us Not into Temptation Finally, ask for protection. Spiritual, emotional, physical. Ask Him to warn you of impending evil, and trust that when He does, you'll recognize it. The Christian life is not lived in friendly territory; the enemy is real, and he is not creative, he repeats the same traps generation after generation. But God is faithful, and He warns His children.

CHAPTER SEVEN

# Discernment: Is This Really God?

This is the question that matters most. And it's the one that scares people away from listening prayer altogether.

"What if I'm just hearing my own thoughts?"

"What if I think God is telling me to do something and I'm wrong?"

"What if it's not God at all?"

These are good, healthy questions. They are not signs that you should stop. They are signs that you should learn to discern.

The Christian tradition has been working on this for two thousand years. Saint Ignatius of Loyola wrote a small set of rules in the sixteenth century that the Church has been using ever since. Saint Teresa of Ávila gave us tests for visions. The desert fathers had whole catalogues. And underneath all of it sits one simple truth:

There are three voices speaking to your heart at any given time, God's, your own, and the enemy's. Discernment is learning to tell them apart.

The Foundations You Stand On Before we get to tests, here are the convictions that hold the whole practice up:

• God the Father has a wonderful plan for your life that He reveals step by step and moment by moment. • He is covenanted to watch over you, guide you, and protect you. • That plan is fully revealed in Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. • Christ left His Spirit to guide His Body, the Church, down through the ages. • The Spirit speaks externally, through the Church, the Bible, sacraments, people, events, circumstances, and internally, through your thoughts, feelings, dreams, and intuitions. • The final guarantor of truth is not your private experience. It is Christ working through His Body, the Church, which the Spirit protects from substantial error.

The Seven Tests When you think God may be saying something to you, run it through these. Not all will apply every time. But a real word from God will hold up under most of them.

1. Is it consistent with Scripture? God does not contradict Himself. If a "word" you receive says something the Bible directly contradicts, it is not from God. Period. This is the first and firmest test. The enemy quotes Scripture too, he did it to Jesus in the wilderness, but his use of it twists the whole. Read with the mind of the Church, in the context of the whole story, and let Scripture interpret Scripture.

2. Is it consistent with Church teaching? God is one. The Spirit who speaks privately to your heart is the same Spirit who has been speaking publicly through the Church for two thousand years. If your private "word" cuts against settled Catholic teaching on faith or morals, you are not hearing God. You may be hearing yourself wishing God said something else.

3. Does it bear the fruit of the Spirit? Paul gives us the list: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22–23). And he gives us the opposite list too: hatred, jealousy, anger, division, envy, drunkenness, and "things like these" (5:19–21). If what you're hearing leads you toward the second list, it isn't from God, no matter how spiritual it feels. Spirit-led decisions, even hard ones, leave behind the fruit of the Spirit over time.

4. Does it bring deep peace, not just excitement? This one needs care. The Spirit's peace is not the same as agreement with what you wanted to hear. Sometimes God says hard things, and there is still peace underneath them, the kind of settled, grounded peace that doesn't depend on circumstances. Pseudo-peace is a surface feeling that evaporates when challenged. True consolation is a deep current that holds even when the surface is rough.

Conversely, anxiety and urgency are often the enemy's signature. The Holy Spirit can give a sense of holy urgency, but rarely accompanied by panic. If a "word" comes with a pressure to act now, before you've checked, before you've prayed, before you've consulted, that pressure is not the Spirit. The Spirit is never in a panic.

5. Does it lead to humility or to pride? This is one of the most reliable tests. The Spirit's voice always humbles. Even when He's affirming, encouraging, or calling you to something great, He does it in a way that makes you smaller, not bigger. "It is the Lord, not me." "I can do nothing without Him." "He is great; I am small."

If a "word" makes you feel special, chosen, set apart from other believers, more spiritual than the people around you, be very careful. The enemy's masterpiece is religious pride. He gave it to Adam and Eve in Eden ("you will be like gods") and he hasn't stopped using it since.

6. Does it move you toward love? Specifically, toward love of God and love of neighbor. Real words from God increase your capacity to love the people in front of you, including the difficult ones. If a "word" pulls you away from your spouse, your family, your community, or sets you against other Christians, examine it very carefully. The Spirit unites; the enemy divides.

7. Is it confirmed? God rarely speaks important guidance only once and only privately. For big decisions, He typically confirms a word through multiple channels, a Scripture passage you keep coming back to, a friend who says something they couldn't have known, a circumstance that opens, a homily that lands. If something is from God, He has all of creation to confirm it. Ask Him to. He will.

Common Ways We Mishear Even with the tests, we make predictable mistakes. Naming them helps.

Mistaking my preferences for God's will This is the most common one by far. I want X. I pray about X. I sense that God wants X. Of course I do, I've been wanting X the whole time. The voice in my head is my own, dressed up in spiritual clothes.

The corrective: indifference. Get to a place where you would genuinely say yes to either outcome. Then listen. If you can't reach that place, name it honestly: "Lord, I want this badly. I cannot tell if I'm hearing You or hearing my own wanting. Show me."

Mistaking anxiety for urgency "I need to decide tonight." "If I don't act now, I'll lose it." "God is calling me to this, I can feel it." That feeling is often anxiety wearing a costume. Sleep on it. Wait a week. Wait a month. God is not afraid of time. If it's still clear and still peaceful in thirty days, you have your answer.

Mistaking spiritual highs for direction Retreats, conferences, intense worship experiences, these are wonderful, but the elevated emotional state they produce is not the same as God's voice. People make life-altering decisions on retreats that they regret a year later. The test is simple: does it still feel like God's word when you're back in your kitchen, doing the dishes, on Wednesday?

Mistaking trauma for God's discipline People who grew up with critical or abusive voices often hear those voices as God's. "God is angry with me." "God thinks I'm worthless." "God wants to punish me." That is not God. The Father revealed by Jesus is fierce in His love and unswerving in His mercy. If the voice in your head sounds like your worst critic, it is your worst critic, or the enemy, who plays the same notes. Run those words against Scripture: "There is no fear in love; perfect love casts out fear" (1 Jn 4:18).

Mistaking culture for the Spirit Whatever your tribe, political, social, intellectual, its voice will sound like God's voice to you. It will feel obvious. It will feel righteous. Be especially suspicious of "words from God" that conveniently align with whatever your peer group already believes. The Spirit is not a partisan. He often calls us against our own tribe.

A Worked Example Let's say you're considering a major move, a new job in another state. Here is what discernment looks like in practice.

Week one. You sit with it in prayer. You name it in front of God: "Father, I think I want this. I'm not sure if it's right. Show me."

Week two. You bring it to Scripture. You read slowly, looking not for proof texts but for the mood of God in your reading. A line from Isaiah 30:21 keeps surfacing: "This is the way, walk in it." You note it without overclaiming it.

Week three. You talk to two wise people, your spouse, your spiritual director, a trusted older Christian. You don't tell them what you want to hear; you tell them the situation and ask them to listen. One sees a yellow flag, the financial stretch. The other sees a green light, your gifts fit the role.

Week four. You sit with the yellow flag. You pray with it. You realize it's a real concern but not a dealbreaker. You can address it with a clearer budget.

Week five. Peace settles. Not euphoria. Not certainty about every detail. A grounded, quiet sense that this is the next step. You take it.

That is what discernment usually looks like. Not a thunderbolt. Not a vision. A slow, prayerful, communal weighing of the question in front of God until peace either settles or doesn't.

When God Says… And sometimes the answer, after all the listening, is one of these:

When the idea or event is not of God, God says NO. When you are not right, God says GROW. When the time is not right, God says SLOW. When everything is right, God says GO. Most of the impatience in the Christian life comes from misreading SLOW as NO, or GROW as NO. Stay at the table. Keep listening. The same God who said wait will eventually say go.

*"If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." — Jas 1:5*

CHAPTER EIGHT

# Seven Principles to Live By

If you take nothing else from this little book, take these seven. They are the bones of a listening life.

1. Trust the Lord to lead "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov 3:5). He wants you to follow Him more than you want to follow Him. Leading you is His responsibility, not yours. The more you rest in that, the more clearly you will see.

2. Delight in the Lord "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Ps 37:4). The deepest, truest, purest desires inside you, the ones underneath your fears and shallow wants, are God's voice within. The Kingdom of Heaven is inside you. As you praise Him, those deeper desires come to the surface.

3. Commit everything to Him Your mind, your will, your sexuality, your money, your relationships, your future. All of it. God is fully responsible only for a life fully surrendered. Reserve a corner, and that corner will be the place you get stuck. Make this offering daily, not as a formula, but as a fresh act of love.

4. Obey what He has already said God leads step by step. He will not show you step seven if you haven't taken step three. If there is known sin in your life, deal with it. If there is unforgiveness, release it. If there is a clear command you've been avoiding, obey it. Many people who feel they can't hear God are actually being asked to act on the last thing He said. Do that, and the next instruction will come.

5. Hold things loosely Saint Paul wrote: "I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content" (Phil 4:11). God gives plenty and want, fullness and emptiness, marriage and singleness, fruitfulness and frustration. From all of it we learn that He is the only enduring thing.

Give God the bad, and He will make it good. Give God the good, and He will make it better. Give God the better, and He will make it best. Often, our fear of what God might ask is greater than what He actually asks. Surrender that fear too. He usually takes only what stands in the way of His life in us. Much of what He takes, He returns purified and richer than before.

6. Be willing to fast "My ways are higher than your ways" (Is 55:9). Fasting is one of the ways God's people across history have made room for ways higher than theirs. It is not magic, but it is biblical and powerful. Moses fasted before receiving the covenant. Elijah fasted before the still small voice. Jesus fasted before His ministry. The early Church fasted before commissioning Paul and Barnabas.

Fasting clears the static. It says, with your body, "God, I want You more than I want my comfort." Start small, skip a meal once a week, or fast from your phone for a day. The point isn't the difficulty. The point is the dependency.

7. Read the Word daily "Like newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Pet 2:2). Most of what God is going to say to you, He has already said somewhere in Scripture. You are not going to outgrow it. The most seasoned saints I know read the same Bible all their lives and find new things every time.

Pick a Gospel. Read fifteen minutes a day. Underline what hits you. Pray it back. Repeat tomorrow. That practice alone, sustained over a year, will change you more than any program ever has.

CONCLUSION

# Speak, Your Servant Is Listening

So here we are at the end.

If you remember nothing else from these pages, remember this: God is speaking. He has not gone silent. He has not forgotten you. He is not waiting for you to be holy enough, smart enough, or skilled enough to hear. He is speaking right now, in ways that are simpler and quieter than you imagine.

The task in front of you is small and lifelong. Find a quiet place. Sit. Open the Word. Open your heart. Open your journal. Tell Him you are listening, and then actually listen. Test what you hear. Act on what is clear. Bring what is unclear to wise friends. Keep showing up.

This will not be easy. The world is louder than ever, and your own heart will resist the silence at first. But the same Jesus who said "My sheep hear My voice" will keep that promise. Sheep don't need to be experts at hearing. They just need to keep coming back to the Shepherd's voice until it becomes the one they know best.

*"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand." — Jn 10:27–28*

Speak, Lord.

Your servant is listening.

✦ ✦ ✦