



Session 5: Listening



Dallas Willard says 'Prayer is talking to God about what we are doing together'.

It's often trying to hear what God is saying to us that seems to cause the biggest problems – but is also key to an intimate relationship with him.

Previous session review

- Recap on your experience of the previous challenge. How did it go? Was it helpful?
- If you weren't able to try the challenge, explore the question: Where and how did you experience God last week?

Read

Read the passage several times through, slowly and prayerfully. It might help to use your imagination to picture the scene. At the end of the text you will find helpful background information in our 'Setting the Scene' section.

As you read, look out for shockers and blockers.

Shockers – a phrase, word, image or something from the text that resonates, stands out or connects with you.

Blockers – something from the text that raises questions for you.

John 10.1-16

Jesus said: I tell you for certain that only thieves and robbers climb over the fence instead of going in through the gate to the sheep pen. But the gatekeeper opens the gate for the shepherd, and he goes in through it. The sheep know their shepherd's voice. He calls each of them by name and leads them out.

When he has led out all of his sheep, he walks in front of them, and they follow, because they know his voice. The sheep will not follow strangers. They don't recognize a stranger's voice, and they run away.

Jesus told the people this story. But they did not understand what he was talking about.

Jesus said: I tell you for certain that I am the gate for the sheep. Everyone who came before me was a thief or a robber, and the sheep did not listen to any of them. I am the gate. All who come in through me will be saved. Through me they will come and go and find pasture. A thief comes only to rob, kill, and destroy. I came so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest. I am the good shepherd, and the good shepherd gives up his life for his sheep. Hired workers are not like the shepherd. They don't own the sheep, and when they see a wolf coming, they run off and leave the sheep. Then the wolf attacks and scatters the flock. Hired workers run away because they don't care about the sheep.

I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and they know me. Just as the Father knows me, I know the Father, and I give up my life for my sheep. I have other sheep that are not in this sheep pen. I must bring them together too, when they hear my voice. Then there will be one flock of sheep and one shepherd.

Setting the scene:

- Most Jewish families owned a few sheep and they were kept in small walled courtyards. Several households would share a communal shepherd. In the morning the shepherd would move from house to house and take the sheep out to the countryside to graze. As the shepherd was known to the doorkeeper of each house they would open the door to him and allow him to call out the sheep. The sheep would recognise the voice of the shepherd and follow him to the open land to feed.
- In the UK, sheep are driven from behind, but in the Middle East the shepherd walks in front and the flock follows.
- The first parable (v. 1–6) takes place in a village. The second parable (v. 7-16) is in open countryside where the shepherd would stay overnight with the sheep and sleep across the entrance of the fold to protect them.
- 'Other sheep not in this pen' is a reference to the Gentile people (non-Jews). Jesus' desire is that all people would hear his voice and become one community.

Reflect

After you have all had time to read the text, pause and be still to listen to God through the Scriptures.

Begin your reflection time by each naming your shockers and blockers. Listen carefully to each other, share your thoughts and reflect on this passage together.

You might also like to explore these questions:

Q1. In what ways have you sensed God speaking to you in the past?
How did it happen?

Q2. What thrills you or daunts you about listening to God?

Respond

This session looks at the importance of learning to listen in order to develop a two-way relationship with God. As a group, try to create a challenge to help you to create opportunities to listen to God this week, or choose one of the following.

Challenge ideas:

1. Talk Talk

Be open to the possibility of God speaking to you through other people this week. Listen carefully to the advice of others, throwaway comments, conversations over the phone or discussions over lunch. At church pay careful attention to the message, sermon or the preaching. Be attentive to God this week and ask 'what are you trying to tell me?' It may be useful to carry a note book or use your phone to make note of anything that may seem like God communicating to you.

2. Hear the Music

Whenever you hear music playing this week, listen carefully to the lyrics and see if you can recognise God's voice speaking to you.

3. Meditation

Meditate on a piece of Scripture this week – read a Psalm (or some other verses) through several times slowly and then wait in silence to see if God speaks to you through the reading.



'A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realised that prayer was listening.'

S Kierkegaard



Group Prayer

You might like to commit to praying for each person in the group this week – that they might begin to experience a richer relationship with God as they create time and space to listen as well as to speak.