

## LESSON

**3** Listen to God  
When You Pray

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Has God ever spoken to you? The Bible records several times when God spoke to different people. He spoke to a boy named Samuel, calling his name in the night and giving him a message for the priest, Eli. He spoke to a woman named Hagar, telling her not to be afraid and showing her where to find water in the desert. Samuel and Hagar both heard God's voice.

But though God does not always speak out loud as He did to Samuel and Hagar, He always speaks! He has many things to say to those who will listen.

Too often, our prayers are one-sided, where we do all the talking! We must learn to pay attention to God and what He might be saying to us when we pray. If we do this, we will discover how to become partners with Him. He will guide us and let us have a part in His work.

You belong to God's family! He has given you the wonderful blessing of His love and He wants to speak to you. In this lesson, you will learn about the ways God may speak and how you can hear Him.

## The Plan

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- A. God Wants to Talk with You
- B. How God Speaks to You
- C. How to Hear God Speak
- D. Do What God Tells You

## The Goals

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1. Identify the importance of listening to God in prayer.
2. Describe how God speaks to us in prayer.
3. Name several ways to hear God speak to us.
4. Act on God's leading in prayer.

## A. GOD WANTS TO TALK WITH YOU

**Goal 1.** Identify the importance of listening to God in prayer.

There are many Bible passages that tell us to listen to God. Most of them carry the idea that we are not only to hear what He says but also to do what He tells us.

**Isaiah 55:3** “Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.”

**Revelation 3:13** “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

## Application

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**1** Suppose that you are a father. Your son comes to you for help and tells you about his problem, but he does not listen to a word you say to him. You want to help but he runs away before you can answer. How would you feel about it? What would you do? Are your prayers ever like that? Talk with God about it.

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## B. HOW GOD SPEAKS TO YOU

**Goal 2.** Describe how God speaks to us in prayer.

God reveals himself—speaks to people and lets them know Him, in many ways. He speaks through nature, letting us know something of His wisdom, power, and goodness as we look at the world He has made. Our experience of His care brings us His message, “I love you.” He speaks through circumstances. He speaks through His church and its ministries. He speaks through visions, dreams, and messages spoken under the direction of the Holy Spirit. He speaks through the advice and encouragement that we receive from other Christians. He speaks through history and through what is happening in the world today. He speaks silently to our conscience and inner being that we call our spirit. He impresses His thoughts on our mind. And He speaks to us through His written Word.

**Isaiah 30:21** “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’”

**Matthew 3:17** “And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”

**Acts 2:17** “‘In the last days,’ God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.’”

Of course, not *every* thought that comes to our mind when we are praying is the voice of God. Neither is every dream or vision. Some of these are simply our own thoughts. Most dreams are just a mixture of the many impressions stored in our subconscious mind. But God *does* use these means sometimes to speak to us.

## Application

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**2** Suppose you have a friend who is praying for the Lord to lead him about whether or not to go to a certain city to work. Every time he thinks about it, he feels uneasy. What answer is the Lord probably giving him? Which Bible verse above does this illustrate?

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## C. HOW TO HEAR GOD SPEAK

**Goal 3.** Name several ways to hear God speak to us.

When you talk with God, expect Him to respond. Listen for the answer. Pay special attention to the first thoughts that come to your mind after you speak to God about a matter. Often these thoughts are from the Lord. They may be the words of a Bible verse and a flash of insight into how they apply to you. Or you may feel peace about a problem you have prayed about. God is assuring you that He has heard and will work things out. Thank Him for it and wait silently to see if He impresses on your mind something that you should do about it.

Pray and listen for God's voice whenever you read the Bible. You will find that the promises or instructions about what to do are found in the pages of this wonderful book. Ask God to speak to you through His Word. Sometimes as you think about a verse it will open up a message on the subject. This may be for your benefit, or it may be a message that God wants you to share with someone. Write down some of the thoughts God gives you. Keep thinking about them. God will use you as His witness or messenger.

The Word of God in the Bible is our final authority. God will not tell us something that is contrary to His written Word. So everything that we take as the voice of God must be examined and judged in the light of what the Bible teaches. This will help us to know the difference between our thoughts and the impressions or message that God gives us.

It is good to consult with mature Christians, too, about what we feel to be the leading of the Lord. Those who have more experience in interpreting the Word of God can help us. We need one another's help through the church. God often uses a sermon, a testimony, or someone else's advice to confirm what He has told us personally. This is all part of the Bible pattern. Even the apostles of Jesus consulted one another about the will of God and looked to Him for guidance until they could recognize clearly what God wanted them to do.

### ***Application***

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**3** Name the two main ways in which God speaks to us when we are praying.

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**4** What is the final authority by which we must test any revelation or message?

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## **D. DO WHAT GOD TELLS YOU**

**Goal 4.** Act on God's leading in prayer.

When we have heard from the Lord and He has told us what to do, our part is to obey! Only as we obey God is He really Lord in our lives. We honor Jesus as Lord by filling our minds with His teachings and doing what He says. Jesus said:

**Luke 6:46** "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

The Bible emphasizes two things we need to come to God with confidence and see our prayers answered: 1) Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; 2) Love everybody.

**1 John 3:19–24** "This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.”

The Bible gives general instructions from God about what we are to do. The Holy Spirit shows us how these apply to our circumstances. He brings to our minds the words we need at any particular moment. God is speaking to us, and it is our privilege to listen to what He has to say.

Let us act on the special instructions God gives us. They may be something like this: “Be patient and trust Me; I will work it all out.” Or, “Forgive and forget the harsh words of your spouse. Show her that you love her by fixing something special for her.” “Remember the quarrel that you had with your neighbor. Apologize to him.” “The bill that you owe at Ron’s store is keeping me from blessing you as much as I want to.” “Invite the Bakers to dinner and tell them about my love.”

As we listen and act on such messages from the Lord, it will be easier to recognize His voice in other matters too. We need both courage and humility as we learn to act on what God tells us. We have already mentioned that we test impressions or messages by God’s written Word. We also consult with other Christians, perhaps with our pastor or a mature, spiritual Christian who can pray with us and help us know what God’s will is. We must be humble and ready to take advice from others, or correction if we have made a mistake. God wants us to work together in harmony in the church and home. Sometimes, He tells us what to do but not when or how to do it. He leads us step by step. We prepare for what He wants us to do and then recognize the opportunity when it comes.

So, listen to God when you pray. Two-way conversations with Him can be enjoyed at any time, wherever you are. Life becomes a series of exciting adventures with God as you follow His instructions. You will see God do great things in answer to prayer.

## ***Application***

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**5** Write in your notebook something that you have heard God say to you through each of these: a) nature, b) the Bible, c) thoughts.

**6** Pray and listen to God now, then write down what He tells you. Act on what He says.

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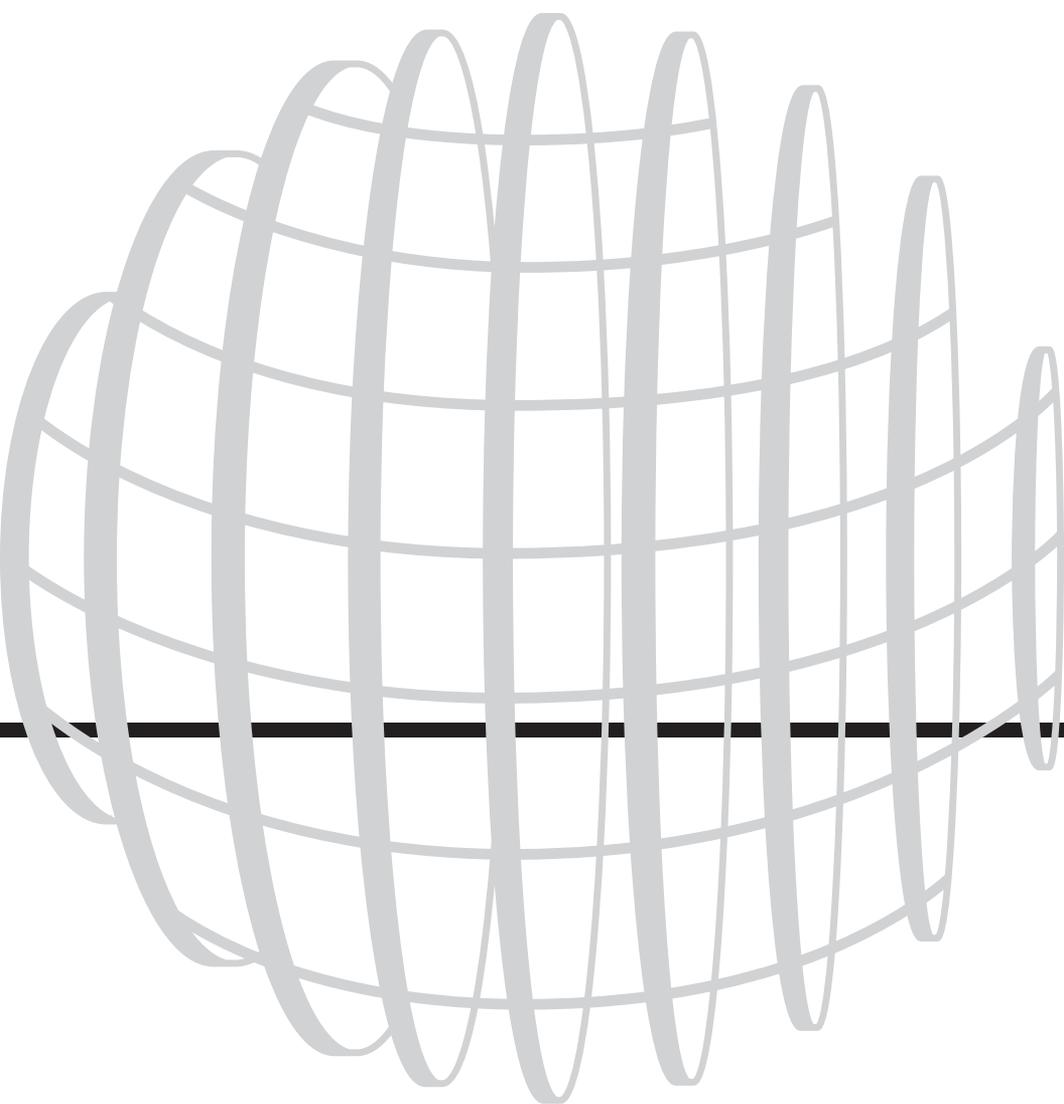
Now that you have completed the first unit, you are ready to answer the Unit 1 Evaluation. Review the previous lessons, then follow the directions on the Unit One Answer Sheet. You should complete and send your answer sheets to your instructor for corrections.

## ***Check Your Answers***

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### **4** The Bible

- 1** You would not like it, would you? You would call, “Wait a minute! Listen to me! How can I help you if you won’t listen?” Perhaps we are all guilty of praying and running.
- 5** Your answer. God has probably spoken to you through nature, showing you His wisdom, power, and care for His creation. If you have not already heard God speaking through the Bible or directly to you, begin listening each time you read the Bible and pray. Memorizing Bible verses will also make them available for the Lord to bring them to your memory when He wants to use them.
- 2** Probably, “Don’t go!” God often speaks to us through peace and assurance when something is His will, or in an uneasy and troubled feeling about it when it is not His will. This illustrates Isaiah 30:21.
- 6** Your answer. These lessons will help you to the extent that you put the truths into practice. May God bless you as you do.
- 3** By thoughts that He impresses on our mind and through something in the Bible



A large, stylized graphic featuring a grey number '2' that curves around the word 'Unit'. The word 'Unit' is written in a bold, dark grey sans-serif font. A thick black horizontal line runs across the middle of the page, passing behind the word 'Unit' and the lower part of the '2'.

# Unit

## **Lessons**

- 4 Use God's Word When You Pray**
- 5 Think About Others When You Pray**
- 6 Join With Others When You Pray**
- 7 Let the Holy Spirit Help You**