The Voice in My Head

I love my husband's recent Christmas gift to me: a hearing aid. (Actually, he appreciates it about as much as I do, since I'm not daily asking, "Excuse me?" and "What?") A number of years ago I had been diagnosed with a 25% hearing loss in one ear, but it had grown to 45%. That's a lot of missed words in conversations, sermons, and TV shows.

Mine is a little device that sits in my ear canal, pretty much invisible. Because it's so small, the battery is teeny tiny and needs to be replaced every five days or so. I know it's time to swap it out when a little metallic voice suddenly says "Battery" in my ear. That means I have maybe two minutes before a final, second "Battery"—then a small click that means my wonderful restored hearing is gone and I'm back to the world's sounds being muffled till I put a new battery in.

I am grateful for that little voice because it tells me something very important about something I need to do, and fast.

And every time, I am reminded of Isaiah 30:21—"And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." My immediate prayer is, "Lord, please teach me to hear you as clearly as I hear that little voice in my ear!"

Hearing God's voice is a realistic part of being in relationship with him. In the Old Testament, Jeremiah 33:3 records God's invitation: "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known." In the New Testament, Jesus promises, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

So how do we hear God's voice?

1. **Choose to listen.** It starts with being intentional. We need

to believe that God speaks to His children, and act on that belief by putting ourselves in “listening mode.” That’s not about sitting down with a demanding spirit that says, “OK, Lord, you have five minutes to talk to me or I’m outta here.” In my experience, the God of the universe does not respond to self-centered demands like that. It’s more like turning on a baby monitor and leaving it in the “always on” position. And keeping one ear “open” for any sounds coming from the monitor.

The primary way God speaks to us is through his word. Sometimes as we read the scriptures, a verse seems to leap off the page, right into our hearts, and burn with a personal application. Even as a new believer in college, I knew that when I read Isaiah 55:2, the context was God speaking to his people Israel: “Why do you spend your money on that which is not bread, and your wages on that which does not satisfy?” But in 1973, struggling with a holy discontent about my college degree plan, God spoke to me through this verse, giving me the freedom to stop college at the end of my junior year. And sure enough, in the 43 years since, I have never once regretted not earning a degree in elementary education because being a classroom teacher was never God’s plan for my life. Teaching, yes, but not in a school classroom.

But God also speaks to us in our spirit. My friend Bob was a pastor. One morning he felt impressed to drive to a nearby lake to meet with God. He sat there on a picnic bench waiting to hear from God (and, frankly, expecting some direction on what to preach the following Sunday). After 45 minutes of just quietness, hearing nothing, he sensed God say to him, “OK, Bob, you can go to your office now.”

Eyebrows raised, he said, “I thought maybe you were going to give me some instruction on what you want me to preach this Sunday . . .? What’s the point of sitting here for almost an hour, Lord?”

In his spirit, Bob heard, “I just wanted to spend some time

with you."

It takes time and practice to learn to hear God like Bob does (and he learned over time and by practicing). But that's what friends do. They talk with each other.

2. **Expect God to speak.** Who knows how many things in life we miss simply because we weren't expecting them, so they blow right by? When we live with an attitude of expectancy, it's a lot easier to hear that "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) when God does speak to us.

I learned this while at a conference a number of years ago. So many of the conference attendees lived with this attitude of expectancy that it was common mealtime conversation to share what people had heard and experienced from the Lord that day. I wanted that for myself! I went from one session to the next "with my ears on" (in old CB-radio lingo), hopeful to hear from God.

I was in one breakout session about fifteen minutes when I suddenly became aware of a strong impression—a pressure on my heart—that I was supposed to call my husband. Right then. It came out of the blue, connecting to nothing I was hearing in the breakout, so I left the session and walked to my dorm room to get to a phone (oh, how things have changed with the invention of the cell phone!) When my husband answered, I learned that he was very sick and was feeling even worse because there was no way to contact me and he was feeling not just miserable, but *alone* and miserable. He was quite surprised to learn that God had told me to call him. There wasn't anything I could do from the other side of the country, but it was comforting to both of us that God intervened so that we could talk to each other.

3. **Predecide to focus on God's voice** despite what other voices you're hearing. It takes time and experience to learn to recognize his voice, but I can promise you this: it will never

contradict his word, and his peace will be attached. We hear the “voice” or sounds of what matters to us. I once read a story about a native American who accompanied a city dweller to New York City. As they walked down the sidewalk, the native suddenly stopped in the midst of all that concrete and said, “I hear a cricket!” His city dwelling friend scoffed: “Are you kidding? How can you hear such a small sound with all this racket?” At that, the native pointed to the soil surrounding a small tree growing out of a concrete planter in the sidewalk; sure enough, there was a cricket rubbing its legs together. His friend shook his head, amazed. The native said, “It’s not so amazing. We hear what’s important to us. Watch this.” He reached into his pocket, pulled out a handful of coins, and threw them on the sidewalk. Instantly, scores of people around them stopped, swiveling their heads at the sound of money hitting the ground. “See? What’s important is money to them, and nature to me. We hear what’s important to us.”

We need to filter out the sounds and voices of the world, which would call us away from intimacy with God, and “keep the first thing, the first thing.” When God speaks, we want to be found listening.

Because when he speaks, it’s something far more important than “Battery.”

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