

YOUR EARS WILL HEAR

A Journal For Listening to God

Steve & Evy Klassen



*“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’”*

(Isaiah 30:21).



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To our kids who have become our teachers, we love each one of you very, very much. It is to you we dedicate this journal:

Josiah and Meagan

Jackson

Mia

Ellarie

Bethany

Malakai

Foreword

Psalm 119:105 says that God’s word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. It shows us two important parts of guidance. When I was 13 years old, God called me to go into all the world. I was to go and preach the gospel, and I understood that I was to go to every nation on earth. I had no idea how many countries there were, and I didn’t know what it would take to do it. But I said “yes” to God. At age 20 he gave me a vision, like a movie in my mind. I saw waves of young people, millions of them going from everywhere to everywhere, sharing the Gospel. The first part of guidance was personal, the second was corporate. Those words from the Psalm live with me today, and everyday, because I know that with each step I take (“a lamp to my feet”), I am simply moving in the direction of fulfilling the big picture (“a light to my path”).

When Steve Klassen was given the vision of the Mark Centre, it was something that was a “light for his path”—it would involve seminars, retreats, and refreshment for many people. When I stayed at the Mark Centre recently, I was so moved by the meticulous details that were there to serve people, to allow them to enjoy the beauty, the restful atmosphere, the added little extras everywhere. I could see that this was a vision that God had given, and it had its effect on me. The vision that God will give you, the big picture, will affect many others, and you won’t know how many, really, until you get to heaven.

The “rest of faith” that the Mark Centre exudes and that the Book of Hebrews talks about is what everyone needs. You too have something that everyone needs. We’re not going to have that same vision, but we have the same provision and that’s the relationship we have with the Lord. There is no true relationship without two-way communication. That’s listening to that still small voice of the Lord—or letting the Word of God come alive and be real to us in real time.

Steve and Evy Klassen have created this journal, *Your Ears Will Hear*. You will enjoy recognizing and listening to the voice of God while working through this book. Being able to hear and recognize God’s voice is God’s provision because of his love. This is his relationship extended to all of us through Jesus Christ. May you discover God’s provision which becomes a lamp toward the next step as you move toward the big picture, the path being lit by his vision. Don’t settle for anything less than the full purposes of God for your life.

Loren Cunningham

Founder of Youth With A Mission (YWAM) and author of *Is That Really You, God?*

Introduction

I am deeply honoured to be asked to write this introduction to Steve and Evy's book, *Your Ears Will Hear*. This book may just change the journey of your life.

My own journey has taken me everywhere except in a straight line or where I had planned to go! My life is, thankfully, still a work in progress. I have been a student, a learner, an adventurer, a labourer and union member, an ordained minister, a business owner, a senior manager, a professional river guide, a college professor, a business consultant, the president of a corporation, and a seeker of truth and wisdom.

One of the constants through all of this has been my wrestling with faith and God's place in my life and work. I wish I had Steve and Evy's influence in my life from the beginning. As my life stands now, I only have myself to blame!

When I first met Steve and Evy three years ago, I knew there was something special about them. It became evident the first time we met that they were vessels and instruments of God's love, work and word among us—their faith so strong, their conviction so real, their presence so authentic, their dream “To serve thousands who will inspire millions to embrace a lifestyle of listening to God” so bold.

This book is a part of their ministry and will take you beyond “God loves you” to hearing and understanding His words of love. This very practical, thoughtful and helpful book will inspire you, guide you, and may just create a transformational shift in your relationship with God. You will experience stories and tools that lead you to know a God of abundance, an active, gracious, loving and refreshing God whose presence and voice are all around us, often in the simplest and smallest of precious moments that can so easily pass by unnoticed.

I believe that God is using Steve and Evy. Their stories are intimate and instantly take you on a transformational journey, an adventure that becomes a very personal discovery—a lifestyle of listening to God.

May each of you find your way to God, a God who is closer than all our questions and all our fears. May God's promise that “your ears will hear” transform your life and bring you blessing, in this moment and always.

Robin Oldring
President of The Oldring Consulting Group

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Welcome



Evy's Story

(If you want to know how to pronounce my name, it rhymes with *Chevy*.)

When I first set out to write my stories for this journal I took my little notebook with me wherever I went so I would be prepared for whenever I had some snippets of time to write. About six stories into the journey of writing, I dropped our daughter, Bethany, off at soccer and headed off to find a quiet place to write. As I exited the parking lot, a telephone museum caught my eye and I decided to make a visit. The two-roomed building featured Aldergrove's original switchboard operated by Nan Gillet. When a call would come in, Nan would plug a cord into the incoming line, find out who the caller wanted to speak with, and then would plug a corresponding cord into the line they wanted to call. The two would then be connected. After the call ended, she would unplug the cords thereby disconnecting the two callers. If all the lines were in use, Ms. Gillet would connect about 16 people.

As I left the museum, I marvelled at the minds that could create technology like this that has advanced so much that people can now communicate from planes and boats to mountains on the other side of the world without an operator standing by to help.

People often remark that they do not hear God's voice. As I share my stories of how I believe God speaks to me, they usually respond like this: "That happens to me all the time; I just didn't think it counted." In that case, many of my stories are the kinds that don't count. Yet my experiences have impacted me enough that I remember them and my life has somehow been changed by them. I like to think of listening to God as becoming aware of the sweet nothings that change everything. It's the accumulation of the small things in life that make a significant impact. Throughout each day I try to keep my 'antennas' up as I have an ongoing dialogue with God. I am often asking "What are you doing?" or "What are you saying to me?" or "Why am I upset right now?" As I ask these questions I become more in tune with God's active presence in my life.

For those who are new to this lifestyle of listening to God, I pray that my stories will serve as the telephone operator who connects you to the One who knows and loves you as you are. And just as the operator's work eventually became obsolete, I hope that as you develop this sixth sense of listening to the Divine, you will soon be able to connect with God whenever and wherever you are, from the deepest ocean to the highest mountain peak.

Welcome into my world and into this lifestyle of listening.

Steve's Story

For me it all started in the summer of 1982 when I graduated from high school and spent three years with Youth With A Mission (YWAM). I traveled the world, but more than anything I was drawn into the adventure of hearing God's voice. I was captivated both by what I saw in the YWAM leaders all around me, and also by what I started to experience personally as I gave myself to listening for God's voice and following what I believed he was leading me to do.

As I learned to listen, one vision was birthed in my heart that you will read about as you work your way through this book. Though the dream was burning when I returned from YWAM in 1985, my timing was not yet in sync with God's. About twenty years later the MARK Centre (www.markcentre.org) finally opened its doors. Named after the gospel of Mark, our ministry celebrates the rhythm Jesus models as he serves people with great energy yet regularly withdraws for times of refreshment.

Our mission in recent years has focused on listening to God. We have identified one thing—a life-style of listening to God—which we are committed to embrace and multiply in the years to come. God alone knows exactly how this will unfold. Right now we believe the God who speaks is guiding us to do three things: facilitate listening experiences, train people to listen to God and lead others, and help leaders launch centres around the world where listening to God is a priority.

As listening to God has captured our hearts and become the focus of our work, writing this workbook has been a natural next step. We've seen people's lives transformed as they've opened their hearts to listen. Their stories need to be written down and cherished. A gentle whisper has broken through walls of fear and given peace. One word of life has brought lasting hope to a discouraged soul. An encounter with God in silence has allowed forgiveness to come and years of bondage to end. A few hours of reflection have been the occasion for significant life-changing decisions. As people look to God they are radiant. No matter where you are on the journey, we know it is God's desire to whisper living words into your ears. As you pay attention we believe you are going to notice God at work around you and in your heart. We believe Scripture will come alive and speak personally to you. The beauty and majesty of nature will calm you and inspire you. Silence can become sweet. The encouraging voices of people can be received as messages from God.

Now the adventure of listening awaits us all. The Creator who speaks has much more to say and the promise to you and to those you love is sure—your ears will hear.

A God Who Speaks



As you use this journal, listening for God's voice and activity in your life, we believe your ears will hear. What you and we are banking on is the hope that God does speak today. If this isn't true, you may as well close this book now and find something else to read. But if God does speak today, any investment on your end to develop a lifestyle of listening could impact the direction of your life significantly. Four truths undergird this book:

God speaks today.

Our ears can and will hear.

What God speaks transforms us.

As people listen to God it inspires others.

As we have given ourselves to embracing and multiplying a lifestyle of listening to God we have witnessed these four truths at work again and again; God speaks to people, they listen and hear, and as they believe and receive what he is saying, their lives are changed. Then, the miracle of multiplication goes to work; the words they hear inspire others around them. People who listen to God and allow his words to transform them are an inspiration wherever they go.

The parable of the Sower and the Seed (Mark 4:1-20) describes this process as clearly as any New Testament text we are aware of, which explains why Jesus said emphatically to his disciples, "*Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?*" In the telling and the explanation of the parable the words "listen" or "hear" (same word in the Greek) occur eight times. Jesus calls his disciples to a life of listening. What will they listen for? In the explanation of the parable it is something Jesus calls "the word" or "the message."

The link Jesus makes between seed and "the word" opens up our understanding and expectation for how a lifestyle of listening to God can transform us. The words we hear will be like seeds in our hearts and minds. It may start small, but it will grow into something beautiful. As we listen to God his words have the potential for amazing impact. Just as seeds have life packed into them, so do the words that God speaks into our hearts.

Jesus promised the disciples "*the secret of the kingdom*" (Mark 4:11) had been given to them, but what did he mean by that? Tim Geddert, author of an excellent commentary called *Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), has suggested that the *secret* of the kingdom is that the kingdom comes *secretly*. If he is right, then a lifestyle of listening is not only an appropriate but a necessary response to a God who speaks. If God is coming to us today in unexpected ways, like he has consistently done throughout history, then we are going to need ears to hear. If we don't learn to listen, we may miss or even oppose him.

As you listen to God and allow his words to transform you, you come to know his character more intimately. Just as friendships deepen through being together and speaking and listening to each other, your relationship with your Creator deepens as you hear God's voice. One of the reasons God speaks is because he wants to be known. As you listen there are different aspects of

God's character that are going to become real to you over time. Though we are not attempting to describe God exhaustively, there are several aspects of God's character we have been experiencing over the years as we have been listening. As you listen, it may be different aspects of God's character that emerge, but here's what we are thrilled about as we listen to the God who speaks.

INTIMATE BY NATURE

On one of the first day retreats we facilitated once the MARK Centre chalet in Abbotsford was established, a young woman went for a walk to a nearby park. A group of about 20 were together and we had devoted the afternoon to being alone and trying to listen for God's direction. At the end of the afternoon we were all back in our Great Room and the woman shared her experience.

"I was sitting on a bench in the park asking God to help me hear his voice, but all I could hear were condemning thoughts about me. These negative thoughts about me kept running through my mind, but I was determined to try to hear God so I kept listening. Then I thought I heard God speak to me and he said, "These condemning thoughts are not from me." My curiosity was piqued so I stayed on that bench in silence determined to hear more. If the condemning thoughts were not from God, then what does he have to say? Then I heard three words, "I love you" and I immediately began to cry."

When she conveyed the experience to the rest of us she broke down again right at the moment she tried to speak those three words. The whole group was moved by the young woman's encounter with God. It was as though God was coming near to all of us with the same intimate message—I love you.

God knit you together in your mother's womb (Psalm 139:13); he quiets you with his love and rejoices over you with singing (Zephaniah 3:17). God doesn't need to work at intimacy; it flows quite naturally for him. He cares deeply for his creation. He knows you by name and delights in revealing himself to you. As you hear his voice you will come to know a God who is intimate by nature.

ACTIVE AND INITIATING

Thomas Kelly, the Quaker mystic and author of *A Testament to Devotion* (San Francisco: Harper, 1941), understood something about God's initiating and active presence. About half a century ago he wrote the following incredible reflection:

"The sooner we stop thinking that we are the energetic operators of religion and discover that God is at work, as the Aggressor, the Invader, the Initiator, so much the sooner do we discover that our task is to call people to be still and know, listen, hearken

in quiet invitation to the promptings of the Divine. Our task is to encourage others first to let go, to cease striving, to give over this fevered effort of the self-sufficient religionist trying to please an external deity. Count on God knocking on the doors of time. God is the Seeker, and not we alone... I am persuaded that religious people do not with sufficient seriousness count on God as an active factor in the affairs of the world. "Behold I stand at the door and knock," but too many well-intentioned people are so preoccupied with the clatter of effort to do something for God that they don't hear Him asking that He might do something through them" (p.59).

How many people do you know who live with a daily understanding of God as Aggressor, Invader, and Initiator?

It is our conviction that most of the people we work with struggle with a similar temptation; it is a mindset Kelly identifies when he writes about people "so preoccupied with a clatter of effort to do something for God..." Many of us are living out of obligation and human effort rather than out of faith and delight. Our spirituality is based on our own efforts and achievements. It's on us. We need to perform better. We need to do more. The focus, and therefore our hope, is too often in us and our behaviour.

But Kelly points us to an active God who initiates. And because he is at work—all the time—we can rest. Because he initiates, we can respond to his lead rather than force our way. Our hope is in him. We can live by faith, trusting God to direct us and work on our behalf.

Faith is exactly what it will take to believe that God really is an active and initiating God. We will often be tempted to take back control of our lives and more often than not the reason we do this is that we don't truly believe God will initiate or act. But if we believe that God created the oceans and mountains, doesn't it make sense to believe he can act in the circumstances of our lives and others?

A REFRESHING PRESENCE

The following verses from Matthew in Eugene Peterson's translation, *The Message*, have been taking people by surprise. The invitation from Jesus is like a breath of fresh air for those who are stuck in obligation or stressed out.

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly" (Matt. 11:28-30).

This is good news! These verses point to a God who is both gracious and refreshing. Again and again

we have watched people hear these words and then realize they have been taking on concerns and burdens they have no business carrying. As they let go of their concerns, people are encountering a God who delights in treating people more generously than they feel they deserve. As people receive these words they are hearing a message that is light and free. In the face of obligation, human effort, striving and carrying burdens we were not meant to carry—this message is life-giving.

Could it be that this is really what God is like? Is he a God who doesn't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you but rather invites you to hang out with him and learn to live freely and lightly?

WHENEVER AND WHEREVER

The Creator we are learning to know is not limited by time and place. God works and speaks whenever and wherever. Surprises take place regularly. The more we pay attention and surrender to him, the more we begin to see him working and speaking at times and in places we previously hadn't noticed or expected.

Religion likes to keep God confined to certain times and places. We are tempted to figure things out and try to control almost anything we can—even God. But certain people have caught a glimpse of a refreshing and wild God whose kingdom is at work everywhere and all the time. One of those people is Richard Rohr, a Catholic priest who serves as the Director of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In his book, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* (New York: Crossroad, 2009), Rohr writes,

“In response to their question “When will the Kingdom come?” [Jesus] tells them that Ultimate Reality is “not here and not there,” taking us away from our typical attachment to time. “For the Ultimate Reality is ‘within you!’” (Luke 17:21) If you let people concentrate too much on special times, feasts, services, and seasons, they forget it is always now and here when God happens. They stop living in the naked now and wait for Christmas or Easter, Sunday morning, or some far-off future day of enlightenment (see Colossians 2:16-19). Then Jesus makes the identical point about place. When they ask, “Where should we look for the Day of the Coming?” He says, “Don’t look here and don’t look there” (Luke 17:23). Once you over-localize God’s actions in one place, church service, sacrament, or any other kind of event, we can easily conclude that it is not in another place—or even worse, that it is not available everywhere and all the time” (p.76).

Barbara Brown Taylor is another writer who beautifully illustrates how God is working and speaking everywhere and all the time. In her book, *Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), the invitation she gives at the beginning of her book is almost too good to be true:

“Whoever you are, you are human. Wherever you are, you are in the world, which is

just waiting for you to notice the holiness in it. So welcome to your own priesthood, practiced at the altar of your own life. The good news is that you have everything you need to begin.”

The Creator is present and at work; whenever and wherever. All over the world on seashores and mountains, in forests and deserts, where it’s snowing or dry, hot or cold, in busy cities or quiet countrysides, in the sky and in the dirt, God is working and speaking and revealing himself. *“The heavens declare the glory of God”* (Psalm 19:1).

God may come to you one day in gentleness as a faithful lover comes to his beloved. Another time God may come as a servant ready to wash your feet. Where you least expect it, God delights to dwell. The Creator will not be put into boxes, nor will God be limited by your ideas of how and when and where he works. As you listen you will be surprised.

ABUNDANT PROVIDER

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want” (Psalm 23:1).

The most well known Psalm in history begins with this line and continues to celebrate the personal presence and work of the Shepherd from start to finish. The verbs of this Psalm have little to say about the achievements of people, but much to declare about the activity of the Shepherd among his people. He leads, makes us lie down and rest, guides, protects, anoints, comforts, prepares, provides, and more.

The writer of Psalm 23 and those who welcome the work of the Shepherd in their lives are blessed. Their testimony is summarized in verse 5 with the words, *“my cup overflows”*. A cup that overflows paints a holistic picture of what it is like to relate to an Abundant Provider. The experience of being under the Shepherd’s care is nothing less than an abundant life.

Poets and hymn writers like Thomas Chisholm have captured this vision. Though Chisholm struggled with impaired health and an unstable income, he wrote the following words in the same spirit of Psalm 23:

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Each one of us is communicating something about God all the time. The way we live and breathe, talk and act is communicating something to those around us about God. How are you portraying God, as a God of abundance or a God of scarcity?

Naturally, we are tempted to link our convictions about God with our daily experiences. If things are working out for us, we are inclined to think God is faithful. But what about when we suffer or things don't go as planned?

I learned something about the theme of abundance from a poor Russian man named Feodor Mocan. In the same week that I met Feodor, I also had a phone conversation with a very wealthy man from Abbotsford. While the rich man conveyed to me a God of scarcity, Feodor led me to a God of abundance. The man from Abbotsford told me that it was a bad time for a project like the MARK Centre since there were limited resources in our city and other projects were already in progress. Feodor's story inspired me in exactly the opposite direction.

Feodor graduated from the St. Petersburg Christian University (SPCU) and was invited to return to his home by a pastor who had plans for his life. The pastor deduced that since Feodor had graduated from a Bible School like SPCU he should now be able to start one himself in his hometown. Feodor asked the pastor a few questions as he considered the challenge. "Do you have a facility for me to use?" The answer was no. "Do you have any teachers lined up?" Again the answer was no. "What about books?" No, nothing. "Do you have any money?" No. Finally, Feodor asked him, "What do you have?" The pastor replied, "We have you, and faith in a great God." Feodor went on to start a Bible School that would soon become the largest in all of the former Soviet Union.

In conclusion, God is speaking today. As you listen, your ears will hear. And the impact of God's voice will transform you. Others will be inspired and drawn into the adventure of listening to a God who is intimate by nature, active and initiating, a refreshing presence, a God who speaks and works whenever and wherever, and provides abundantly. What exactly will unfold for you is for God to determine, but developing a lifestyle of listening is the only way to respond appropriately to a God who speaks.

Listening to God is capturing the imaginations of people all over the world. You are not alone in the search for a life that is guided by our Creator. Many people are tired of going through the motions of a religion that is based on human effort and lacks true encounters with God. Some people are aware they are missing something, but they're not sure what it is. Our hearts long to experience the Living God in the day to day journey. We want to hear the still small voice. We have been created with ears to hear God. You have been given ears that are meant to hear.

And it is happening. God is speaking and people are hearing. This is not just a longing unmet. People of all ages are listening and discovering that God speaks today. The theme of listening to God has become high priority for many churches, schools and training programs. In numerous and diverse ways, people are hearing the voice of God.

Five Ways Your Ears Will Hear



We've noticed five ways people are listening to God and receiving divine direction. We are not attempting to be exhaustive (there are many ways to listen), but we have found it helpful to be aware of these five common areas as we embrace a lifestyle of listening to God. As well, there is often overlap between the different ways people are listening. When people pay closer attention to these ways of listening, they begin to notice God at work more often and receive guidance from a variety of sources more regularly.

Embracing a lifestyle of listening is an appropriate response to the Creator who speaks. *"My sheep hear my voice"* (John 10:27) is Jesus' promise for us today as it was when he walked the earth. Add the four words from Isaiah 30:21 that we chose for our title, *"your ears will hear"*, and you have strong promises from the Old and New Testaments telling us we can be guided by God.

As you take time to ponder the various ways that God has already spoken, is speaking and has promised to speak in the future, we believe your ears will hear more clearly.

1. Listening to God through Scripture

"The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught" (Isaiah 50:4).

Isaiah was a listener. He listened regularly (*"morning by morning"*) and what he heard (*"the word"*) he passed on to others and apparently it had a positive effect (*"the word that sustains the weary"*). We want our ears to be wakened like Isaiah.

The lifestyle of listening Isaiah embraced is one example of many from Genesis to Revelation. Identify a central character of Scripture and you will quickly find ways they listened and received divine direction. God spoke to people through nature, dreams, visions, audible voices, burning bushes, miracles, impressions of the heart and more.

People are hearing God's voice today through the Bible. It is living and active, and it heals and renews. Scripture is unique. It grounds us in the larger story of God and his activity in the world he created. As we immerse ourselves in the truth of the Bible we are regularly brought back to seeing all of life from a kingdom perspective. Stories of Scripture inspire us and shape our faith.

Though we practice studying, reading, singing, meditating on and memorizing the Bible, our favourite approach to Scripture is what some call *Lectio Divina*, which in Latin means, literally, Divine Reading. This is a refreshing and relaxed reading of Scripture that has been practiced for centuries by the church and is helping people today hear God's voice in personal ways. One of the strengths of this way of reading Scripture is the potential for all present to hear and respond. When people participate in *Lectio Divina* they expect to hear something from God.

As we practice Lectio Divina we read the Scriptures slowly, out loud and do so with an awareness that God is present and that he loves to speak to people. We have noticed that it is often a small word or short phrase that God uses to impact people. Less is more with this approach. We don't try to figure out a passage, but rather we seek to let God speak through the words and phrases. We give time for silence to let the Scripture settle into our hearts and stir us. We like to give opportunity for people to speak about what they are hearing.

2. Listening to God at work around us

Questions like, "What is God doing in my life?" and "How am I responding to him?" have a way of tuning us in to how God is working and speaking in the very circumstances of our lives. Little coincidences are taken seriously. As God was very active in the story of Esther, even though his name is never mentioned in the book, his orchestrating hand is at work in our lives. Are we paying attention to what God is doing in the circumstances of our lives?

"Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him" (Isaiah 64:4).

The simple idea that God is active brings refreshment to some who have been swept under by the waves of obligation and effort. Some of the people we are working with are tuning into this idea that God is actually working night and day on their behalf and the results are quite remarkable. Weary people are being refreshed when they realize they can actually take a short break and the world won't come to an end because of it. God is demonstrating his active presence. He is surprising people who seemed to think that if they didn't do something good, nothing good would happen in their world.

Does this mean we develop a lazy lifestyle that is so relaxed we just lie around enjoying God's love all day? No way! When we tune in to God as the Active One, our actions are grounded in our connection to him. We want to work hard at the things God is guiding us to do, not because everything depends on us but because we are acting in partnership with the God of the universe! Wow. We are a part of God's kingdom and our lives are linked with the Creator who is at work always and taking the lead in our lives. Slowly we learn to ask, "What are you doing Lord?" because our growing passion is to stay connected to the Initiator of all things. After all, why would we want to spin our wheels in human effort if God was not actually guiding us to do a particular thing?

"Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, its watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat, for he gives sleep to those he loves" (Psalm 127:1-2).

3. Listening to God through our hearts

One of the greatest aspects of parenting is the journey of discovering the identity of your child. From first sight, the question quickly changes from, “Who do you look like?” to “Who are you?” As we learn to listen to our hearts, this is also a question we will learn to ask ourselves. And as we discover our passions, listen to promptings and embrace our problems and pain, we will become more aware of the many ways the beautiful presence of God intersects our lives.

Here are some things to watch for on your journey of listening through your heart.

Passions: Howard Thurman, an American theologian, clergyman and activist (1900-1981) said: “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” When we tap into our essence we taste the deep joy of being. This joy ripples out, making an impact on those who encounter us.

Promptings: Sometimes God speaks to our hearts in a still small whisper. Sometimes promptings are directional and are to be acted upon immediately. Other times they come as promises to be held on to and waited for. Some are profound and require great risk while others seem very ordinary. Many times when we pay attention and follow through, our response becomes the answer to another’s cry for help.

Problems: Every problem, whether external or internal, is valid to bring to God for help. Scripture repeatedly challenges us to ask for help. Some of our struggles mask our true identity and calling and they deserve attention as part of our discovery of who God created us to be.

Pain: Difficulties and pain are part of living in a broken world. But God wants to draw near to us in our pain and longs to be included, rather than excluded, when life is rough. God delights in us and says that he will never leave us or forsake us. Our response is to ask, “How are you being present to me?” As we become aware of how Comfort is coming to us, we will be more able to receive God’s embrace, even if it comes differently than we originally expected.

As we do the hard work of being present to the promptings, grief and joy within, we get to take a step back and observe how God is being present to us. When we listen to God through our hearts we honour our Creator who made each of us unique.

4. Listening to God in times of silence and solitude

Mother Teresa once said, “The more we receive in silent prayer, the more we can give in our active life.” We have been amazed at the impact silence is having on people. Silent Retreats have become turning points in people’s lives on every continent. In 2010, while visiting Mongolia, a woman there told us, “Last summer my first Silent Retreat changed my life. It was the best thing

I've ever done!" A Chinese man encountered God in a profound way during a week of silence in Thailand, and told us, "I became overwhelmed with the one prevailing thought that God was absolutely interested in relating to me 100% of the time." Silence is helping people experience deep peace as they unravel the noise and start allowing God to really be God.

A young lady was uncomfortable with being silent and realized she really didn't want to be at the MARK Centre for her Silent Retreat. So she went to her room to sleep away the time. But she couldn't sleep. As the hours of silence went by, she realized she was afraid to be alone with God and two memories from her past were brought to mind. In the evening, in her room she began to recognize the presence of God. As she listened, she felt God was whispering something to her, "I forgive you. It's over. It's done." The experience in silence and solitude stayed with her. Six weeks later we took time to ask her about the retreat and her eyes lit up. Her recollection of the event was word for word what she shared at the debriefing of the retreat.

Often when people become silent they experience something profound in nature. Naturally when we try to become quiet we end up leaving cities and noisy centres to find solitude by the ocean or lakes or in forests or mountains. Creation comes alive for people like never before as they watch, listen and enjoy simple things like sunshine, rain, wind, water, plants and animals. As people become silent they are drawn to natural lessons of life displayed all around us in God's creation that breathes life and hope into our frantic and anxious lives.

We have been greatly encouraged by people like author, Paul Hawker, who have left family and friends for a period of silence and solitude with the intent to learn to listen to the inner voice. In his book, *Soul Quest: A Spiritual Odyssey Through 40 Days and 40 Nights of Mountain Solitude* (Kelowna: Northstone, 2006), his reflections are consistent with others who have found nature filled with life-giving lessons. What better place to pay attention to our own hearts than in the beauty of creation?

5. Listening to God in community

Many of the messages God is speaking to people come through other people. We listen to God with the help of family and friends, people we worship and work with locally and globally. We are in this together. God uses people to guide people.

Whom God chooses to speak through is often a mystery. Surprises occur regularly. People who don't seem qualified end up speaking a significant message to us. At times it's someone who is virtually unaware of our situation that speaks as though they are completely "in the know."

People we don't like could have a message for us at a key time in our journey. Are we open to hearing direction from the people God has placed in our lives?

A lifestyle of listening to God is strengthened as we tune into how God is speaking through the people around us. We need each other. We are accountable. Discernment flows as we bounce ideas off each other and ponder the various paths before us. Surrounding ourselves with a diverse group of trusted listeners and being prepared to heed their advice helps keep us on track and prevents us from leading others astray.

Transparency and humility will enable us to receive direction from God through others. We are not lone rangers or islands. Sometimes, Wisdom hides herself until we humble ourselves and invite help from others.

Enjoy the overlap

There is often overlap between the different ways people are listening. You'll notice this in the stories in this book and in your own life as you continue to listen. As we listen to God in community we are often also listening to God at work around us. Some of our stories could easily fit into two or three ways of listening. Overlap is great. The point of all this is that we hear God, not that we figure out categories of how he speaks. The Mysterious One will not be limited by our minds. God works in the world in ways that will always be somewhat unsearchable.

Still, we maintain that when you pay closer attention to these five foundational ways of listening, you will notice God at work more often and receive guidance from a variety of sources more regularly. Your ears tune in and hear as you become more and more aware that God is present and active.

For those who want to enjoy this as a regular discipline, there are 65 stories with corresponding listening exercises that could be worked through five days a week over a period of three months. Although we've arranged the stories somewhat chronologically, each story in this journal could stand alone. Feel free to work through the stories and listening exercises in the way that suits you best. Some of you may find this journal helpful as a guide for a group retreat.

A Journal For Listening



Do Not Fret

Steve Klassen



I was in Mexico listening to God with a few men when we read the beginning of Psalm 37. The phrase that caught my attention was “*do not fret*.” As I let that word settle into my heart during some moments of silence I felt God was saying to me, “Do not fret about a lack of money or about any other challenges you are facing. Do not fret.”

Ten days later I was back in Canada involved with an inspiring city-wide worship and prayer gathering in my hometown of Abbotsford. Just before the meeting I greeted an elderly woman who I recognized but had not seen for years. Within seconds of sitting down together she said to me, “I don’t know what you are going through right now, but whatever it is you are soon going to look back and laugh. Psalm 37 says, ‘Do not fret’.”

The next evening before I went to bed I picked up a book about faith and finances. Here’s what I read: “Read Psalm 37. Its key message is to not worry over finances. Three times this Psalm says, ‘Do not fret’.”

In the days that followed I tried to savour this word from God and allow it to impact me. You can imagine that God probably spoke this word to me because I needed to hear it. I was fretting and giving in to anxiety over money and other stresses. I was losing sleep over things that I knew I needed to let go of, but somehow I wasn’t able to do that. But when this little word came to me something changed. The way it came touched me deep in my soul. Then as I continued to go back to Psalm 37 I realized something else.

I found it helpful to read Psalm 37 out loud again and see that there are numerous positives to experience rather than fretting. It was transforming to write them out and see what God was truly inviting me to:

Do not fret so you can TRUST.
Do not fret so you can DELIGHT.
Do not fret so you can DWELL.
Do not fret so you can ENJOY.
Do not fret so you can COMMIT.

Listening To God Through Scripture

Am I anxious?

*Are you worried about something you can't control?
Maybe Psalm 37:1-11 would be a good place to hang out for a while.*

Date: _____

[illegible]

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Undeniable Synchronicity

Steve Klassen



Back in the days when you could smoke on airplanes, I was flying from Guam to Manila, Philippines. The gentleman sitting next to me was smoking a large cigar that would not go out. Early in the flight I had an impression that I was meant to talk with this man, but I procrastinated.

At the time, I was very interested in the history of spiritual awakenings and revivals. I was reading a book that my mother had given me called, *I Saw the Welsh Revival* by David Matthews (Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1957). As I read the book on the flight, I continued to have this nagging impression that I needed to talk with the man beside me.

Finally, I blurted out, “So where are you from?”

He quickly responded, “I’m from the place you are reading about in your book.”

If you know geography, you know that he was a long way from home. He began to tell me about his life and his family history that went all the way back to the Welsh revival in 1905. He admitted that his own journey with God was a difficult thing to talk about. He also let me know that his wife back home was praying for him, hoping that somehow he would reconnect with God.

Mr. Williamson started to tell me that he came from a family of preachers that went all the way back to the Welsh revival. “In fact,” he said, “my great grandfather was a prominent preacher in the Welsh revival.”

Then, as I paged through my book and Mr. Williamson smoked his cigar beside me, I actually found his great grandfather in my book! We both sat there in amazement.

I gave Mr. Williamson the book and he received it with gratitude and a renewed sense of God’s personal love for him. I was deeply impacted by the encounter at the time and the memory of it often stirs me to believe that God is active and incredibly caring for every individual on this earth.

“Your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

Listening To God At Work Around Us

Do I believe God is active in my life?

God the Initiator and Grand Orchestrator is actively present with each one of us. As you ponder the events of your life, take note of the ways God has been present with you. What is your response?

Date: _____

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

“O Sovereign LORD, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do?” (Deuteronomy 3:24).

Lunch Duty

Evy Klassen



When I lead sessions on listening with your heart, I often ask for words that describe someone who is obviously passionate about what they are doing. To contrast, I also want words describing someone who is doing the opposite of what they have been made to do. When we stop and review the lists as a group, it becomes clear quite quickly that no one wants to be described as tired, grouchy, dreary, pessimistic, etc. But it is quite attractive to see words such as contagious, passionate, full of life, and energized.

When I describe someone who is doing what they do best, I think of Malakai's preschool teacher. She is animated, present with the kids and full of exciting activities. It is obvious that she loves the kids and she has been at it for many years.

When I think of someone in the wrong place at the wrong time, I remember me as Lunch Duty at my kid's school. When I joined the team I thought, "How hard can it be? Forty-five minutes on a playground with kids. Easy! And I'd even make a little bit of cash!" Wow, was I in for a surprise! I couldn't stand it! I couldn't handle the whining about who hurt who. I couldn't even handle the pleasant chatter of cute little kids just wanting to hang out with me. And I'm a mother. I love my kids!

It was the same story when I would volunteer in the classroom. I used to run home at recess because I felt I needed to come up for air. It was suffocating! I used to compare forty-five minutes of lunch duty to six hours of working in a nursing home and the care home would win hands down. Finally, after years of trying to be the perfect school mom who serves on PAC, volunteers in the classroom, and works as a lunch duty, I quit. That's not to say I don't like helping out on field trips. My favourite was for Josiah's ski day to Whistler. My job was to watch a movie on the bus, enjoy the slopes on my own all day while the kids participated in a mandatory lesson, and watch a movie on the way home. I'm sure I even got invited to the parent appreciation tea at the end of the year!

Quite a few years ago I read a book on prayer in which the authors encouraged readers to daily ask two questions: "What was my high?" and "What was my low?" It was not until after I started paying attention to the rumblings and the joys within that I finally came to peace to be who I was meant to be and quit trying to be someone I'm not.

Listening To God Through Our Hearts

What gives me life and what drains me?

Take some time with these questions as you reflect over the past weeks. Moving forward, as you continue to ask about your highs and lows either alone or in community, take note of your answers.

Date: _____

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

“A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22, ESV).

The Throne Room

Evy Klassen



Many of the valuable lessons I've learned have been from the years of young motherhood. It was during the chaotic, hectic period of five kids in seven years that I first discovered my secret meeting place with the Divine. There was one room in our little farmhouse that I could lock myself into and exhale, "Oh God, I need you," or "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." It was during these years that the water closet (a.k.a. the bathroom, for us Canadians) doubled as the holy throne room of God. That is where I came to depend on a sanctuary where I could lock the door, fall on my knees and pour out my heart to God.

My experiences of pouring my heart out before God and receiving the relief of not carrying my burdens alone has taught me two important truths: one, I need to tune in to my heart so I can recognize and become aware when I am carrying stress; and two, there are many throne rooms available for me.

I remember getting that anxious knot in my stomach when I was shopping at Safeway. So I found some privacy in the shopping cart entrance and tuned in to what was causing me stress so I could lay it all out before God. Another time I escaped from a church and ran under the foliage of a tree in the middle of a city park. Other times I have found my refuge in the middle of a crowded church. Some other throne rooms that stand out in my memory are my car, my closet, my friend's closet, my neighbor's bathroom, the shower, a canoe, a labyrinth, and of course anywhere in rugged nature.

I love what Hezekiah did in the Old Testament after he heard the King of Assyria mocking him for trusting in God. *"Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house of the Lord and spread it before the Lord"* (2 Kings 19:14, ESV).

That's what happens for me in these throne rooms. I'm spreading the lies, the anxiety, the frustration, the pain before the Lord. And when I do this, my heart finds peace.

Listening To God In Silence And Solitude

Is something bugging me?

One way to listen to our hearts is by tuning in to what's unsettling us. As you and I learn to identify the stress we are experiencing, we will be much quicker to bring those concerns before the One who cares.

Is there something you need to bring today?

Date: _____

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

“Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you” (Psalm 55:22).

A Bag Of Books Or A Bag Of Tools?

Erik Toews



Sometimes God uses people around us to ask great questions at just the right time. At a time when I was waffling back and forth about future career choices my Dad came through with a fantastic question. I was studying at a Bible College and thinking about the possibility of becoming a pastor. But I loved working with my hands in construction and carpentry work. I knew a decision would need to be made soon.

At this significant crossroads, one day my Dad asked me, “Erik, what gets you more excited: a bag of books or a bag of tools?”

My response came easily and immediately, “A bag of tools.”

The very next day I received a strange gift from someone who had no knowledge of the conversation I had with my Dad. An expensive bag of power tools was given to me!

As you’d expect, I made my decision to work with my hands with clarity and conviction and a lot of joy.

What has unfolded since then has confirmed to me that I am working in the place that fits the gifts and passion God has given me.

Listening To God In Community

What is my unique contribution?

The more you listen to your Creator, the closer you will come to your personal destiny. St. Irenaeus was right when he said, “The glory of God is man fully alive.” What is your unique contribution?

Date: _____

[illegible]

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).

How Do I Know If God's Talking To Me?

In tuning in to my inner voice I didn't audibly hear "voices," rather I just monitored the random unconnected images, notions, and thoughts that floated through my head. Becoming aware of them I'd check them out using the following criteria. It's by no means a complete list, but for me it was an essential tool for discernment. I considered my random unconnected thoughts from God if they were:

peaceful, consistent, loving, patient, uplifting, instructive, comforting, clear, kind, welcoming of scrutiny, seldom needing to be responded to in a hurry.

I put them down as coming from myself rather than the spiritual realms if they:

- were in a logical processed outcome of things I'd learned or deduced
- appealed to my ego
- varied all the time depending on the information I'd received
- would eventually make me look good in front of others

However, if the spontaneous thoughts were along these lines, I ascribed them to the spiritual realms, but not the heavenly ones.

- an accusation, confusing, promoted fear and panic
- rejected scrutiny, produced guilt
- created anxiety and generally unsettled me
- were pushy, urgent, wanting to be done in a hurry—a driving compulsion to "do it now."

I'm human. I often get it wrong, but this was part of the exercise: to better discern where the messages were coming from before I acted on them. They didn't only occur when I was still. I could be walking, half asleep, deeply engrossed in something, or quite distracted and then slowly or suddenly become aware of a picture, phrase, scene, song lyric, snatch of conversation that seemed lodged uppermost in my consciousness.

Back in civilization, the spiritual realm sometimes becomes clear to me through "coincidences," remarkable synchronicity, the same thought or idea coming from a variety of unrelated sources. Occasionally I simply get a deep intuitive sense that a particular course of action is right, though on the surface it might appear quite illogical. It was such a perception that took me to the mountains.

I didn't do this alone. I constantly asked for help and guidance so that I could clearly discern The Voice. I also tried to judge my spiritual progress not by how I felt, but by how I acted.

Adapted and used with the author's permission,
from Appendix One of Paul Hawker's *Soul Quest* (Kelowna: Northstone, 2006).

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