

THE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUAL RECEPTIVITY

The word, “receptivity” is simply a noun form of the adjective “receptive” and therefore it means the quality of being receptive. In the Merriam Webster online dictionary the first definition for the word receptive is this: able or inclined to receive *especially*: open and responsive to ideas, impressions, or suggestions. So what we want to explore over the next few weeks is how to be able and inclined and open and responsive to God’s communion and communication with us.

Four Topics:

1. The nature and importance of spiritual receptivity.
2. The scriptural and sensible basis for developing spiritual receptivity.
3. Developing and practicing spiritual receptivity.
4. Wisdom and discernment in spiritual receptivity.

Four Outcomes:

1. You will better understand the many ways God communicates with his children to convict, comfort and guide them.
2. You will develop an increased awareness of and appreciation for God’s communion with you in your daily life.
3. You will be given helpful tools for improving your practice of spiritual receptivity and listening to God.
4. You will be equipped to approach the issue of God’s guidance with wisdom and discernment.

My desire is that your prayers will more often include requests not just for the outcomes we desire but for wisdom, clarity, insight and guidance and that you will spend more time in quiet reflection on what God has said and is saying to you in Scripture and by his Spirit.

Four Guiding Concepts

1. The multifaceted nature of God’s communion with his children.

The Bible describes many forms of communication from God. God speaks in visions, dreams, through angels and prophets, through creation and through the inner work of His Holy Spirit. The language of “speaking” is used even of non-verbal and inaudible communication. Nehemiah writes of what God put in his heart. Jesus tells his followers that in times of persecution words will be “given” to them. (Matthew 10:19-20). Hebrews 1:1-2 says, *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.*

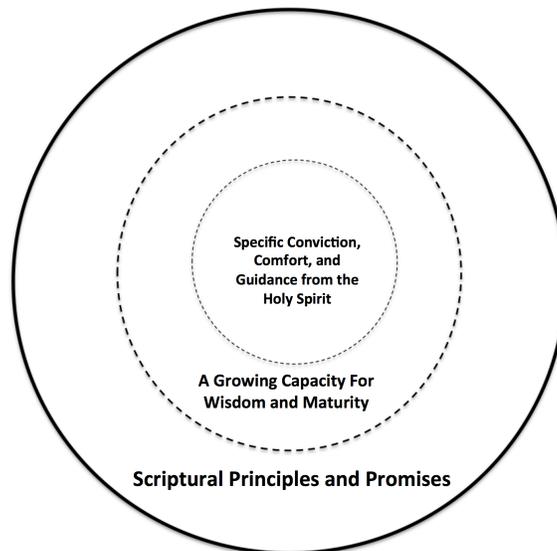
2. The mysterious reality of spiritual and inner life.

In Matthew 16 Peter answers a question from Jesus and Jesus tells him that it was God who revealed the answer. God “spoke” to him, or revealed truth to him. What was his experience and why did Jesus tell him. Galatians 5 tells us the flesh and spirit have conflicting desires that are at work within us. How are these experienced? Think of the many ways we describe our inner experience: I had a hunch, an inkling, a sense, a feeling,

an intuition, it occurred to me, it became clear to me, it seemed right to me, it came to me, I had an idea, I remembered. What if there are things that are real but not easily defined or measured, like love. How do you really know for sure if you are in love and should marry? Can you prove it rationally? Is it a reasonable but complex nexus of thoughts, feelings, observations and decisions. If we demand the inner work and leading of the Spirit to be simple, clear-cut and undeniable before we pay attention, we will not be receptive.

3. The maturity principle in spiritual life and growth.

What does a good father want in his children? Not infantile immaturity and robot-like obedience, but a trusting dependence that grows into maturity, character and wisdom. So, with God we need both growth in wisdom and guidance in many situations. We need to listen and to learn. Sometimes we must draw on Scripture and experience, but we can also always ask for specific gifts of wisdom and guidance, comfort and even conviction. Psalm 139:23- 24 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.



4. The middle-way as the higher path.

Overly Rationalistic Biblicist	Spiritually Discerning Disciple	Overly Impressionistic Charismaniac
Too dismissive of the mysteries of spirituality	Biblically Grounded And Spiritually Receptive	Too accepting of feelings and hunches.
Overly confident in the powers of rationality	Humbly relying on the work of the Spirit	<u>Emotionally dependent on spectacular experiences.</u>
Biblically rigid but selective	Biblical Integrity and Spiritual vitality	<u>Shallow emotionalism and And spiritual immaturity.</u>
1 Thess. 5:19-20 <i>Quenches the Spirit and despises prophesy.</i>	1 Thess. 5:21& 22 <i>“Test everything: hold fast what is good.”</i>	1 Thess. 5:19-22 <i>“Inadequate testing and holding fast to abuses.”</i>

The Heart of Spiritual Receptivity

"The first step in developing a more spiritually receptive life of listening to God is becoming convinced that listening to God is not something strange or sketchy. It is not something added or extra. It is the normal, natural, plain, pure, sweet, sane and sensible means by which God builds our relationship with Him and leads us in life. "

John 10:14-15 & 27 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

John 14:16-18 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

John 16:7-13 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. 12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

What action words are used in verses 12-13?

Does this mean that the Holy Spirit speaks to us in an audible voice?

It is normal and natural for God to speak personally to his children.

God spoke to Adam and Eve, to Noah, Abraham, Hagar, Sarah, Moses, Miriam, Aaron, and Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Deborah, Elijah and Elisha, Daniel, Ezekiel and Isaiah, and the other prophets. All through the Old Testament God spoke to all kinds of people about their personal struggles and sins and his plan for their lives and their role in His plans. And as God speaks people chose to listen or to ignore his words. God spoke to a twelve year old boy named Samuel in the night and Samuel said "Speak Lord for your servant is listening". God spoke to Elijah in what the Bible calls; "a still small voice", or you could translate it "a gentle whisper".

At a crucial time in the history of Israel the people were deceived by the Gibeonite tribe because they trusted in appearances and did not stop to pray and inquire of the Lord and listen to Him. God spoke to the wife of Monoah whose name is not mentioned. God often spoke to people whose names are not recorded - who were what we would call minor players in the great drama of the Bible. Those people were known and loved by God, he spoke to them and they heard his voice. They received his guidance and direction for their lives.

In the New Testament God spoke just as frequently and clearly as in the Old. He spoke to Jesus and his apostles. To Peter and Paul. He spoke to deacons like Philip and Stephan. Philip had four daughters and God spoke to them. Through the Holy Spirit God spoke to, and led, the followers of Christ as they selected leaders, provided for each other's needs and carried the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ wherever they went.

The stories of the Bible are so interlaced with direct, divine guidance and communication that their relevance to our lives today is greatly weakened if we do not believe that God still speaks to us. The promises of the Bible for comfort and guidance are so dependent on God being able to communicate to us conviction, correction, guidance and comfort that we can not experience them if God is not still speaking to us today.

The relationship that the Bible presents as basic - as essential to the Christian life – is a living, intimate relationship to Christ which is not possible if we cannot hear his voice and have fellowship with him today just as they did in the days of the Bible.

THERE ARE SEVERAL ESSENTIAL AREAS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE THAT REQUIRE US, WHETHER WE REALIZE IT OR NOT, TO LISTEN TO GOD.

First, Listening to God leads us to faith in Christ.

In John 6:44 Jesus says "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day". If you are here this evening and you have come to Christ and received Him into your life, you probably already know that you came to Christ because you were drawn by God the Father. There was an internal nudge, a pull, a gentle and sometimes not so gentle work of God going on in your heart that brought you to the point of receiving Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. That does not mean that no one can say the words; "Jesus is Lord" without the Holy Spirit. It means no one can truly embrace Christ as Lord of their lives in their hear and confess that truth with their lips unless God's own Spirit brings them to that place of faith in, and surrender to, Christ.

KEY THOUGHT

"It is possible for us to have listened to God and not even known that that is what was happening. When Peter made his great confession Christ in Matthew 16, Jesus had to tell Him that the Father had revealed that truth to Him. Matthew 16:17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

Second, Listening to God gives us assurance in our relationship to God.

Romans 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our Spirit that we are God's children. There are many promises in the word of God that tell you that if your faith is in Christ you have forgiveness and eternal life and Christ will never leave you or forsake you. There is a degree of comfort that can be obtained from those promises. But I have found that until the outward testimony of the word of God is echoed and confirmed by the inward testimony of the Spirit of God there is a depth of confidence and peace and assurance that is lacking.

Romans 5:5 says; "... God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." That verse is talking about an outpouring of an inward assurance of God's love for you. All of us here this evening have a deep need for the love of God.

Third, Listening to God enables us to see our sins and weaknesses clearly.

Psalms 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. When you pray that prayer you are asking God to speak to you.

In Philippians 3:14 -15 Paul says; " I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you."

Fourth, Listening to God enables us to be led by the Spirit.

Romans 8:14 ... those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Galatians 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. Verse 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Fifth, Listening to God enables us to receive God's wisdom and guidance.

James 1:5-6 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

2 Timothy 2:7 Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Sixth, Listening to God equips us to help others.

Isaiah 50:4-5 "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. 5 The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back.

