

LISTENING

Ian Smith, The Toolkit – Wed 4.3.09

Hearing God's voice in Bible reading

'Normal' practices for 'hearing God's voice in Bible reading'.

Read the text – just read it

Study the text – Kenneth Bailey "Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes"; also Tom Wright 'x for Everyone' series from SPCK

Acknowledge **you may read looking differently to others:**

Do you come to the text:

For facts and information

SENSING

For ideas and imagination

INTUITIVE

For heart and relationship issues

FEELING

For logic and mental challenge

THINKING

Your personality type – Result?

- some may love Ignatian – living yourself into settings from readings – but is what you imagine what is there? We are church and not just individuals.
- some may love learning – but ours is a missional faith and practical one.
- Some may be emotionally involved but avoid the toughness and the statements
- Some may so enjoy the statements and clarity they avoid the fuzziness and openness

Why listen and not just read?

To read is to treat the Bible as a book. There is nothing in wrong in this and at times we treat it like that. But this is about something slightly different, it is reading but with the belief that here in these words is God's voice. We hear

what he said and says. We seek to make an ancient book audible to our inner selves.

Listen to what? To who?

There is a double listening – the surface of the book and beneath the words. Think of any conversation you have had recently; was there both the words spoken and also the tone, the unsaid, the tension or warmth of the exchange? These other things are beneath the words themselves yet essential to the meaning of those words for us. So with the Bible – there are the surface words we read but we also seek to hear God, author of the words, beneath the words themselves for us. This is not selfish or self obsessed unless we remove ourselves from the communal hearing of preaching and the wider community of faith in time and space. When a VIP visits a group the whole group participates and is honoured by the visit but for some the visit may have particular personal importance because of a word shared by that dignitary with them alone. The Bible is the Church's book, the congregation's book and your book.

Listening with filters/listening with blinkers

Some can walk through Meadowhall and see only possibilities and purchases. Some can walk through a wood and see so many varieties of wildlife and fauna. Someone can walk in Meadowhall and see crowds and something desperate. Someone can walk through a wood and see trees and mud. Our mood, personality, interests and knowledge can alter our view of things tremendously. We do well to acknowledge likes and dislikes, areas of strength and weakness, knowledge and ignorance. Can you read the Bible and see no judgement only love, or only judgement and little love? Do you move swiftly over some passages because they challenge where you are most confused or stay with those that most concur with what you think? If all are listening is with filters or blinkers

our vision will be narrowed and the colours at best muted if not distorted. A spiritual friend may help you discern the filters and blinkers. How you address that is another matter. But you cannot hear God truly if you have already decided what you will and wont hear. Perhaps compare food and music where we can have powerful views that shape our listening and eating.

Attentive listening – I can hear you but I'm not listening

The humility of listening – *I am to hear not speak*

The vulnerability of listening – *I may hear what I do not wish to*

The weakness of listening – *but I have so much to say!*

When nothing is heard – wait –

we are impatient and a circumstance may reveal more
we may need to chew it (cf Focolare) meditate = mutter

When what is heard is different from what was heard before

Cf – the difference of a reading of Psalm 130 – after opening a letter telling the results of a test are as bad as you feared, or after you come into an unexpected and large inheritance

The privilege of hearing – this is God speaking – perhaps, carefully, personalise – Isaiah 43 v 1

Responding to what is heard ... well that is where I stop and you take over.