

One of God's most delightful and predictable characteristics is *unpredictability*. I can never foresee when God is going to speak to me. Opening the newspaper last spring, I had no idea God was about to speak to me through the words I read on the editorial page. They were offered by one of my favorite syndicated columnists, [Leonard Pitts](#), who writes for the [Miami Herald](#). The headline read:

GOD SPEAKS TO US EVERY DAY, BUT FEW PEOPLE ARE LISTENING

So I was hanging out with God down at the park one afternoon, playing our regular game of one-on-one. As usual, he blanked me. It's not widely known, but God is unstoppable once he gets the ball in the low post.

Afterward, I asked if it was true what this Indian guy said about him. God hadn't seen the paper, so I showed him the story. It seems this fellow named T. John, an official in the Indian province of Karnataka, was forced to resign over remarks he made in a speech to some students. He told them last week's earthquake was an act of revenge by God for attacks by Hindus on the country's Christian minority. The quake claimed upward of 12,000 lives.

I asked God again, "Is it true?"

God sighed. A breeze rattled the tree leaves. "Does T. John know anything about these 12,000 people?" He asked finally. "Do YOU? Can you tell me which ones persecuted Christians and which ones were Christians themselves? Or Moslems or Jews? Can you describe the ones who stole from the poor or mistreated children? Can you name the ones who gave bread to the hungry or read to the blind?"

I shrugged and said, "Of course I can't"

God said, "I can. Those people didn't die for revenge."

"Then why..." I caught myself, remembering how teed off he got with Job for pestering him with questions.

But to my relief, God smiled. The sun glanced through the clouds. "I know," he

said. "You want a world without pain. A world without suffering and loss. But that would also be a world without healing, without joy and redemption. Each one gives meaning to the other."

God stood and went to practice his free throws.

"So," I said, "you don't bring calamity on people to teach them lessons?"

"I didn't say that," said God, lining up his shot. "I mean, I thought Chicago needed to learn humility, so I gave them the Cubs." The ball fell soundlessly through the net. "Adam Sandler movies," he continued, "are my way of saying, 'Support your local library.' I'm not above sending messages."

"Well if that's the case," I said, "why are you so bothered by this T. John?"

"It's simple," said God. "People like him irk me because they're always quoting me when I haven't said anything to them. Always ascribing their own petty motives to me. They're forever putting my name into some cockamamie thing that has nothing to do with me.

"It's not just him. It's the people who declare war claiming I told them to do it. It's that TV preacher who said I was going to kill him unless people gave him money. It's the crowd that claims I sent AIDS as a judgment upon some of my children. It's the ones who hate in my name.

"And the worst thing," said God, "is that the things I DO say, no one seems to pay attention. I tell you to take care of one another. I tell you to honor your parents. I tell you to stop stealing, killing and coveting. I tell you I love you."

"Yeah," I told him, "but you said those things centuries ago. People forget.

"I remind you every day," said God. He threw the ball to me, I threw it back and bodied up on him as he started his dribble.

"I remind you everyday," he said again. "In sunrises and silences, in breezes and in smiles, in poetry and jazz, in love and even in tears. Even in TEARS, I remind you of what is good, of how you ought to be.

"You know what the problem is?" he said as he backed me toward the hoop. "You people make so much noise, you hardly ever hear me. You talk so much I can't get a word in edgewise. You need to hush sometimes. You need to listen."

Suddenly he spun off me and put up this hook shot that hung in the air like possibility itself, then fell through the net without moving the cords. As I said, he's unstoppable in the post.

If you're as hungry for God as Leonard Pitts is, you long to hear God speak to you. The problem is: **How am I to listen?** Here are a few simple actions that you might want to try out to increase your awareness of God's speaking.

- **Gratitude and thanksgiving/momentary prayer.** Claim that 'little solitudes' already exist in your day, even if you don't always recognize them. Before getting out of bed, typically take a few moments to greet God with gratitude for waking you up and providing the gift of another day. The morning shower could become a time for asking God to keep your thoughts and actions pure throughout the day. Mealtime prayers can become a meaningful time not only for offering thanks but also inviting God to join the conversation that might occur around the table. If you're eating alone, invite Jesus to be your companion. Time alone in the car can become a special time of communion with God when you choose to turn off the radio and phone, and wait instead for the voice of God. Waiting for an appointment or at a traffic light can be an opportunity to "wait upon the Lord" in silence. At the end of the day, gently reflecting on the ways in which God has shown loving care for you is a great encouragement.
- **Words and music.** Sometimes it 'softens the soul' to read a few encouraging words from the scriptures or some other sacred



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writings, such as, [A Testament of Devotion](#), [The Practice of the Presence of God](#), [The Sacrament of the Present Moment](#), or [Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ](#). Other times, seekers find music helps. These words or the music are not intended for insight or analysis, but rather as a means of focusing ones attention on the One with whom you sit.

- **Alone at mealtime.** Taking a coffee break or lunch with the intention of being alone with God. You could use the time to reflect on one of the many stories in the scriptures that took place at mealtime.
- **Getting away.** Keep on the lookout for suitable places to be alone. Open, quiet spaces can be huge helps. Just a few blocks from our home is a city park that has become a great getaway spot. Many churches have adjacent chapels that are usually open and usually empty. Within an hour from our home are numerous retreat facilities that are available for a day, overnight, or extended retreat.
- **Focused prayer/centering prayer/Jesus Prayer.** When it begins to feel that nothing is happening or you're wasting your time, it helps to pray for patience and to focus on your desire for intimacy with God. If you feel distracted or frustrated, it often settles the soul to gently repeat a certain word or phrase (Abba, Jesus, love...God, I belong to You, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me).
- **Stop, sit, and wait.** Solitude and silence is more about what you "undo" than what you "do." I delight in the story Sue Monk Kidd tells about her experience on a retreat. After a failed attempt at sitting still in silence, she observed a monk enjoying apparent success. When she asked him how he could sit so

still, doing nothing, he informed her that the problem was she had bought into the "cultural myth that when you're waiting you're not doing 'nothing,' but rather, you're doing the most important something there is."

- **Use "off" times of the day.** Sometimes simply stay up a little later or get up a little earlier in order to find a few moments of solitude.
- **Schedule time.** When possible, try to schedule your day flexibly. It can be incredibly freeing to enjoy a few minutes between tasks or appointments. Use this time to reconnect with God's presence in the midst of a busy day, as well as to gather yourself for the next meeting or task. You'll find that in those few moments, your awareness of God's presence is much more keen.
- **Drop all expectations.** Try to avoid measuring results. Focusing your attention to results seems to often work against the results long for the most.
- **Slow down.** Often the pace of life pulls us away from my awareness of the Lord's nearness. Try to walk slower, drive slower, and eat slower. Try to pay attention. When you do this, you become more aware of the "little cell" of solitude and silence within yourself.
- **Exercise the body and the soul.** Use my times of physical exercise for silence and solitude. Taking time to notice the sights and sounds of God's creation can be an excellent help in maintaining your awareness of God's presence.

2003 Summer Calendar

June

1st Preaching at [Westminster Presbyterian Church](#), Greensboro, NC
16-20th Speaking at Nazarene Youth Conference for high school students from Arizona and Nevada

July

17-18th Directing retreat for [Wycliffe Bible Translators](#) at Mary and Joseph Retreat Center in Rancho Palos Verdes, CA

August

1-4th Personal retreat
22-24th Directing retreat for [First Presbyterian Church, Baton Rouge, LA](#)

Please visit our Internet Website at <http://www.journeyresources.org> for updates.

A Note From Fil

I have some great news! **Running on Empty**, my new book, is in publication and will be released February 2004 by [WaterBrook, a division of Random House](#). As information about its release becomes available, we'll pass it along. Thank you for your faithful prayers and interest during this long process.

I wish I could personally thank each of you, who read these quarterly letters, for all your interest, love and support. Many of you have given financially to Journey Resources making it possible for us to continue offering gifts we believe God wants given. As we enter into the summer season, would you pray for the finances of Journey Resources and for God's leading in your giving? We deeply appreciate your support!

On a more personal note, would you please pray for my family and me? We, like many of you, face many challenges in common. We have experienced a very significant school year of growth and change. We are grateful for God's love, mercy, faithfulness and provisions. And among those provisions is found your faithful friendship and support.