

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

ZAREPHATH WIDOW LESSON TWENTY-TWO

by Sandy Harber

"And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah." I Kings 17:22a

Alone in his room with the body of the widow's son, Elijah called out to God, entreating his Lord to restore the boy to life. Along with his prayer Elijah covered the child's body with his own, apparently identifying with the boy. Three times Elijah cried out for the restoration of the widow's only son. And Scripture says, the Lord heard his voice.

The Hebrew word translated "heard" in this verse is not referring to the physical sense of perceiving sound. It means "to hear intelligently," implying attention. It is active listening. The words of Elijah's prayer are invoking a response. They are producing activity on the part of God.

Prayer is two-way communication with God. It involves speaking and listening on the part of both participants. If you think of prayer as only one-way communication where you tell God your problems and then wait to see what He does about it you are cheating yourself out of a beautiful part of your relationship with God. Be silent and let God speak to you during your prayer session. Yes, He speaks to us through His word when we read it. But He also speaks in the silence of prayer when we focus on Him. How does He speak? The Holy Spirit brings to our minds the words of God. Often it is framed in the very words of Scripture that we had previously memorized. This is one reason that we memorize verses. The more we have hidden in our hearts the more material the Holy Spirit has to work with when He communicates with us.

What about the times that God seems to be silent? We anticipate an answer but none is forthcoming. There are a number of reasons that this can happen. It might just be a matter of timing. God's immediate answer is "wait a while" but His long term answer is the action that He takes in response to our request. Remember, His timing is perfect. Sometimes there are things going on behind the scenes that we don't know about, as in the case of Job (Job 1:6-12). Job never did understand why God allowed Him to suffer, but he did learn that God is sovereign. God does whatever He wants to because He is God and we must trust that His ways are best. Sometimes personal sin interrupts the lines of communication with heaven. All of our sins were forgiven when we accepted Jesus as Savior (Heb. 10:14, 17; Ps. 103:12). But we continue to sin after we have been saved because we still possess the old nature. We are still saved (Jn. 10:27-29) but feelings of guilt can impact our relationship with God. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin we experience sorrow and a desire to change. The remedy is confession (I Jn. 1:9), that is, agreeing with God that we have sinned, thank Him that we are already forgiven (remember Jesus died for all our sins - past, present, and future), and repent (turn away from the sin and focus on following Jesus). Fellowship is restored.

Elijah had a relationship with God. He laid his request before His throne and anticipated a response. Elijah knew that God actively listened to his prayers. And he believed that God would respond in His time and in His way. Sometimes, God's response is exactly what the petitioner requested, as in Elijah's case. But sometimes God responds with a different outcome than we expected. That's okay. God knows best. Many times He gives over and above what we ask for. How is your prayer life? Do you allow time for two-way communication? Don't neglect those silent times when God is speaking to you.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I John 1:9