

This is Mary Ethel Eckard, Speaker and Author of, “The Making of a Dragonfly”, available on Amazon.

and this is my first podcast.

Today I want to share with you a little of what I have learned about Drawing Near to God.

Scripture says in James 4:8, Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

I became a believer at the age of 8. By the time I reached my mid-30s, my prayer life and Christian journey had been stagnant for many years.

The first time I earnestly approached God in prayer, I felt foolish, vulnerable and dependent.

But rather than running away, I pressed in because I needed a major overhaul in my spiritual walk and I had an inkling that changing my prayer life would change me.

And it did.

When my prayer life changed, my heart began to change.

Prayer opened the way for me to know God at a deeper level and to hear His voice.

People often ask how I learned to recognize and discern God's voice.

Let me tell you, it was not an overnight accomplishment nor was it magic.

I had a deep desire to know God intimately, so I began a journey to discover who HE is based on scripture.

I learned to come into His presence through prayer and worship.

Then I learned to talk with Him as I would a friend.

After a while, I realized talking to Him was easier than talking to even my closest friend.

Often, I would sit in His presence and "just be" without speaking words, allowing my spirit to soak in the knowledge that I was in the presence of my Creator and Father.

Once we realize how often God speaks and the wisdom and love in which He speaks, our lives change for the better.

We become fully aware that we are not alone, and we are of great value to Him.

Our desires and passions change as does our outlook on life.

To help others learn to recognize God's voice, I developed "quiet time helps" to equip believers in developing a quiet time.

In this podcast, I share a few thoughts on ways to begin to discover and discern God's voice.

Now listen, you don't need to write all of this out – it's also on my website, maryethelecard.com under my blog titled Drawing Near

Before you begin, prepare your environment

Make sure you have a Bible, journal and pen in your Quiet Time kit.

To clear your mind, make a list of to-do items that try to distract you.

Go for a walk, or sit in a quiet place, with the purpose of clearing your mind.

Speak any negative or distracting thoughts out loud to release them from your mind.

Spend time preparing your heart to welcome a guest.

Do a thorough cleansing by confessing known sin and asking God to forgive those sins.

Ask Him to remind you of any sin you have not confessed and seek His forgiveness for those sins.

When the heart is filled with sin, there's no place for God to dwell.

In cleansing your heart, you prepare a place for Him to come and stay.

Extend the Invitation

To prepare your heart and spirit, listen to worship music.

Breathe and relax.

Meditate on the words, listen to the flow of the music.

Engage your imagination to see Jesus sitting next to you, dancing with you, holding you as you relax.

Sit, relax, breathe, and "just be".

Invite the Holy Spirit into your space - physically, spiritually, emotionally and mentally.

Pray, "Holy Spirit, come into my home. Live within my heart where I worship you. Speak to me through my spirit, my mind, my emotions. Come and be with me."

Practice listening. What do you hear inwardly and outwardly? Sit in the quiet and listen.

Allow yourself time to become comfortable in the quiet, just enjoying the moment.

Tune in to the sounds. Enjoy. Relax. Breathe. Listen.

Once your spirit is calm and relaxed, read from God's love letter, the Bible.

Each time you read scripture is an opportunity for Him to speak directly to you.

Start with small portions of scripture.

Proverbs or Psalm is a good place to start.

Read a small section and meditate on what you have read.

Think about it, sing it, draw it, move to it. Make it part of your creativity and imagination.

Bring it to life through your passions and outlets. God's word is alive just as you are!

Ask God to open your spiritual eyes to see the deeper meaning of what you have read and to show you how to apply His word to your life.

Engage your imagination to picture what you have read.

As God reveals truth to you, journal what you learn.

Use the concordance in back of your Bible to find scriptures with any key words that you highlighted.

Sometimes God speaks through a single word or a short phrase.

Sit still and listen.

As you read the Bible, repeat verses several times, concentrating on the words.

Still your heart and listen to the silence.

Getting accustomed to the silence prepares you to hear God's voice when He does speak.

Sometimes He whispers, sometimes He nudges, sometimes He speaks scripture. If our spirits are not accustomed to being quiet, we may miss His voice.

Talk to Him.

As I said earlier, the first time I **earnestly** approached God in prayer, I felt foolish, as if talking to myself expecting someone else to hear and respond.

Earnestly seeking God was new.

But I pressed in, pushed the feelings of foolishness aside, and "went for it."

As I let down my pride and opened myself up to Him, I began to sense His love and presence.

He took away my self-consciousness and replaced it with confidence in Him.

In your prayer time, I encourage you to share everything with God:

your dreams, fears, secrets, weaknesses and strengths, failures and successes.

Tell Him your worries and ailments.

Pour it all out.

Then, wait.

Engage your imagination - see Him sitting with you, pondering your words, silently praying for you and sitting with you in your emotion.

Wait for Him to respond.

Don't rush, don't give in to distraction.

Just be.

Keep your imagination focused on the One sitting next to you.

If your first few attempts to be still and listen prove difficult, keep working at it.

Learning to be still inside and out is truly a learned skill.

Keep at it.

I have a few more things to share with you about developing a quiet time and coming into God's presence.

Scripture teaches that God inhabits the praise of His people.

This means your act of praise invites the Holy Spirit into your environment.

Immerse yourself in worship music - whether alone or with others - several times a week.

You can praise and worship the Lord in your car, at work, in your home - and you can do this quietly in your spirit.

There doesn't have to be a big production team surrounding you in order for you to praise the Lord!

Another way to prepare for worship is to evict occupants of your mind that take up space but don't pay rent.

These occupants are named worry, anxiety, complaining, grumbling, negative thoughts, comparison with others – they are a big family that needs to go.

Remove them by retraining your mind.

Anytime negative thoughts or worries pop up, push them out by replacing them with thoughts that are good, with prayers, with praise music.

Retraining the mind takes a lot of work - the mind is indeed a battlefield and controls the path of our life - so make sure your pathway is clear and good.

Remove the debris by replacing negative thoughts with positive ones.

Consider keeping your journal, paper and pen with you.

Anytime God speaks is a unique experience.

Journaling what He says will help you remember how He ministered to your spirit.

Remember, God speaks to us in our spirit. You most likely will not hear him audibly but through your thought processes or through promptings in our heart.

Stay the course.

Overcoming a lifetime of habits that block God from our heart and mind takes consistent and intentional work.

It almost requires that you put a guard over your mind that will sound an alarm when the bad habits of worry, anxiety, negativity and hopelessness try to kick back into gear.

Scripture teaches we are to guard our heart and mind! Be vigilant. (Proverbs 4:23)

I will close with this blessing from Philippians 4:7, "May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

This is Mary Ethel Eckard, signing off.