

Hearing the Voice of God

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DEDICATION

There are many seekers after God who have challenged my own pursuit of Him, some of whom are named in these pages. None are more significant than my parents, Archie and Elaine Olson. From my birth they have pointed me toward God the Father by their life and their words. To them I dedicate this book in gratitude for their influence in my life. What I value most is that they themselves are perpetual seekers and learners. I expect that they will take up this book with the attitude that they will learn something new about the Lord they love and serve.

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My child, do not let the fine-sounding and subtle words of men deceive you. For the kingdom of heaven consists, not in talk but in virtue. Attend, rather, to My words which enkindle the heart and enlighten the mind, which excite contrition and abound in manifold consolations. Never read them for the purpose of appearing more learned or more wise. Apply yourself to mortifying your vices, for this will benefit you more than your understanding of many difficult situations.

Though you shall have read and learned many things, it will always be necessary for you to return to this one principle: I am He who teaches man knowledge, and to the little ones I give a clearer understanding than can be taught by man. He to whom I speak will soon be wise and his soul will profit. But woe to those who inquire of men about many curious things, and care very little about the way they serve Me.

I am He Who in one moment so enlightens the humble mind that it comprehends more of eternal truth than could be learned by ten years in the schools. I teach without noise of words or clash of opinions, without ambition for honor or confusion of argument.

I am He Who teaches man to despise earthly possessions and to loathe present things, to ask after the eternal, to hunger for heaven, to flee honors and to bear with scandals., to place all hope in Me, to desire nothing apart from Me, and to love Me ardently above all things. For a certain man, by loving Me intimately, learned divine truths and spoke wonders. He profited more by leaving all things than by studying subtle questions.

To some I speak of common things, to others of special matters. To some I appear with sweetness in signs and figures, and to others I appear in great light and reveal mysteries. The voice of books is but a single voice, yet it does not teach all men alike, because I within am the Teacher and the Truth, the Examiner of heart, the Understander of thoughts, the Promoter of acts, distributing to each as I see fit.

THE WORDS OF CHRIST

Thomas a' Kempis

The Imitation of Christ

Book III, The 43rd chapter

HOW I BECAME A LISTENER

The first time I clearly heard the voice of God was when I was seventeen. The voice came in a Swedish brogue. That's because it came off the lips of Emil Johansson. I was doing some work that summer on the farm where Emil lived, and one afternoon he called me into his living room. "David," he said without any preliminaries, "I think you should be a pastor." The words reverberated with more than just Emil's thick Swedish accent. They cascaded quickly over my mind and into my spirit. "Yes," I sensed, "that is just what He intends for me."

It helped that Emil spoke this, for I knew that he was close to God, closer than any person I knew then. Whenever Emil spoke it carried the weight of one who listens faithfully to God. Yet, what I heard deep within was the call of God, not the words of a man. I count that day as the beginning of the journey that took me on to ordination and service as a pastor.

From my youth I have known that God speaks through individuals. My parents are godly people, and while my father expressed his faith in actions more than words, my mother was able to speak words that touch my soul. I received her counsel as words from God. There were a few others through whom I heard God's words: Gladys, a Sunday School teacher, John, a

retreat speaker and mentor, Arvid, my pastor in a pivotal season of my life. I received guidance, correction, and motivation from God through their words. They did not think they were speaking God's words. Nor would they claim so today if I pressed them. As far as they knew they were just sharing their wisdom with me. Wisdom it was, but by very personal impact on my life it was as the voice of God. Still, I did not recognize then that it was God Himself speaking to me.

My God didn't speak. He wrote. I had adopted the Bible as the only way to hear God. The words in the Bible were sure, and any other source was suspect. So, I did not consider any other form of hearing God. The words that I received from Emil, my mother, and the others were explained as, "We are just showing you what the Bible says." I measured spiritual maturity by how well one knew the Bible. The only answer I had to anyone's question of how to know God was, "Read the Bible."

That I relied on the Bible is surely not bad. My training and study caused me to love the Bible. It gave me a foundation of assurance in the written word of God that has served well in knowing God more deeply and understanding His ways more clearly. But it left me with no way to hear God besides reading and thinking about the words I read. I resigned myself to be satisfied with that, but really I wasn't.

The sound of God's voice in Emil that hot summer day when I was 17 gripped me to a depth that thoughts cannot reach. I longed for the deep resonance of that voice. I did hear the sound of that voice in the preaching of key figures in my life during those years. Donald was a radio preacher I listened to as a youth. In his words I heard the compelling voice of God saying, "This is important. Listen." David was a seminary professor whom I first heard at a college retreat. In his messages I heard a song of glory in which I not only heard

about God but could feel God's heart. Paul was my pastor during my seminary years. He always spoke with deep insight into the Bible, but it was his penetrating applications which sank the word of God into my heart and will. The voices of these men stirred in me a desire to hear God speak now, not just to read words spoken long ago.

I was becoming familiar with seeing God's word in circumstances. As I tried to walk out my Christian life and my course toward becoming a pastor, many events helped direct my path. Finances came in just at the time I needed them for school, transportation, and the basics of living. I encountered people who had gone ahead of me at just the moment I was considering a step, helping me confirm my choice. Books I read, conversations I had, opportunities for work, these and many more circumstances moved me along the way.

I prayed about all these decisions and needs. I prayed and others who supported me prayed. But I didn't expect that God would answer me within. I did not expect that He was someone with whom I could have a conversation and receive immediate replies. I was familiar with thinking and with looking, but I was not aware of listening.

By God's mercy, my discipline of prayer and listening to counsel kept my feet on a straight path, and I was able to grow in faith and to reach out to others and help them grow in faith. I lived a very personal relationship with God, but there was one dimension of relationship that we did not have: dialogue. For me, prayer was reaching out to God in praise, questions, requests, thanks, and then hanging up to await his response in what I read or saw. In my prayers I did not feel like I was expressing my heart to an earnest listener, nor was I anticipating his quick response. I was delivering my thoughts and leaving them with him.

There was one person in my life who carried on a dialogue with Jesus. My wife Linda had been listening to God's voice for years and had made many of her decisions from what she had heard from Him. I knew this about her, yet, although we had been friends several years before our marriage and by now were married over two decades, I only envied her conversational relationship with Jesus. I did not adopt it. Linda's style of listening to God stirred a longing deep inside me, but since I attributed her dialogue to her temperament, I did not pursue listening myself. I relied on my reading-thinking-looking method.

Then the challenges started to come. In my role as pastor I faced things for which my training had not prepared me. In my personal life there came moments of decision which demanded immediate response. First, people came to me, their pastor, with personal problems that I had no experience in and that could not be answered with simple rules. What was God's will in decisions where multiple possibilities had biblical support or biblical uncertainty? Decisions about church programs could be well thought out, but when was the right time to implement them? In my personal and professional life I was questioned about motives and abilities which I judged sound. How was I to confirm these challenges?

Things moved from challenges to crises. In quick succession God pushed me into a more radical way of needing and expecting Him to work, shaking up my settled perceptions, and then yanked me out of my pastoral role, rocking my self identity. Reading-thinking-looking was not going to bring all this into order. I needed to hear what God would say.

And I did hear. In the desperation of that time I was able to hear Him. The first few times God spoke to me was still with the words of the Bible. Yes, I was reading the words, but I was hearing Him as I did read. He said to me, "This is about you.

This is my promise to you.” This was different. The Bible was not there for me to study and figure out. It was a letter from my Father telling me how He felt.

Then I began hearing His voice apart from the Bible, while I was walking, when I ran out of prayers to say, sitting quietly while someone else talked. Spontaneously, words, or thoughts, or a “sense” of something flowed into my mind or my heart. The voice of God came into me.

I began asking God about specific things and waiting to hear His answer. And specific answers came. I learned to just present myself to Him in a sentence like, “Here I am, Father. What do you want to say to me?” As I waited, there came into my mind words of answer. Or there would come into my heart an awareness of his love or of a truth I could rest on. I began to write these down. As I wrote, more words came, and I would receive more assurance, more direction, or a word confronting my motive. I had entered into dialogue. I moved from praying about to talking with. My relationship with Father God became one of direct and immediate receiving from Him. I did not have to wait to see something to know that he was leading me. I did not have to wait for a circumstance to know his love for me. I heard it.

Now I am a regular listener and a regular writer. My prayer journal is not a list of requests followed by dates marking answers. It is a record of my dialogue with the Father. It contains my words and his response. It is my personal book of psalms.

Here is a selection from my prayer journal. I am including several of these in this book so you can know me better and come to know Father God more personally. The passages are not chosen to make a point. They are windows into God’s

heart. I want to let you know as clearly as I can what my dialogue sounds like.

Journal Entry

Jan 26

Lead me, bring me to the day when I will know that you, Jesus, are in the Father and I am in you and you are in me. Teach me your commands - even by revelation to my heart - and strengthen me to keep them and so to love you. I desire earnestly to be loved by the Father and by you and to have you show yourself to me. (John 14: 20-21)

David, know that I love you and my Father loves you. It is I who have put this desire in your heart. I have shown myself to you, for you have come to desire me. He who sees me does desire me. Your heart has come to tenderness toward me. That is why you are more vulnerable. To be strong in your relationship with me is to be tender, receptive, pliable, even vulnerable. It requires constant sustaining in intimacy with me, with the Father, and with our Spirit. You must draw near - I have invited you - and come again and again into communion with us to sustain this life.

O Lord, I want this strength, this tenderness. Hold me in by your Spirit.

LOOKING FOR DIRECTION

This journey into dialogue was now several decades long. As I implied earlier, as a young child I knew of God's words coming through my mother and his character being displayed by my father. As a youth and a student I was drawn toward the voices of men and women who were hearing from God. Jesus was escorting me on a journey of the deep desire of my heart, yet I was training myself to settle in my mind. The challenges and crises I wrote about started after I had been a pastor for about six years and continued over a dozen years. The final professional crisis brought with it a word from God, "I am the One making you quit." Then I went through a couple of years of intense training in dialogue as God renewed my identity in Him and taught me to walk by his voice.

When I reflect on why it took me so many years to hear the Father's voice, I realize that I was primarily looking for directions from Him. I see the same expectation in other Christians also. It seems that the most frequent item that we bring to God is the question, "What should I do?" Whether it be a small matter like which road to take on a trip, or a major decision like career or marriage, questions about what action we should take dominate our visits with the Lord. Why does this block us from hearing his voice? Because He is first our Father, a father who wants relationship with us. He is not first our life-manager to make us successful. The invitation Jesus spoke in Revelation 3:20 shows one interested in relationship,

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one
hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to
Him, and will dine with Him, and he with Me.

I have found that what the Father most likes to talk about is his love for me and his appreciation of my love for Him. He

demonstrated this to me in my early days of listening by not answering with directions when I was desperate for them.

One time I was asking where the near-due house payment was to come from. At the time I was without steady work. We had been learning how to live on his provision directly, and he had been teaching me to ask Him about every bit of money that we received. As money came in I would ask, "Lord, what do we do with this money?" He would answer, and we were even having fun with the exercise. But this time he had not answered about the house payment. I waited. What I heard was, "My son, I love you." "Yes," I responded, "but what about the house payment?" Again I waited. "I am glad that you are here with me, son." "I know," I said back, "but what about the house payment?" "I want you to rest in my love," he said. Through my frustration I was beginning to understand his priority. He wanted me to understand more deeply how serious he is about our relationship, and for me to see my own priority that was usually more on taking care of my needs. Somehow the house payment got taken care of either that month or the next, and I learned just how important it is to the Father for me to be with Him, without an agenda.

Journal Entry

July 27

Father, I praise you that you are Lord and that your will is being done in my life, in our lives, in the lives of our close friends, in your church. I rejoice in your Kingdom and ask that it be revealed on earth even as it is so in heaven.

What is your concern for me just now? My concerns are Linda's fear and trouble this weekend, my next step for work, paying the bills I have, loving and honoring Jim for his birthday. What are you doing

David, my child, what I am doing today is prepare the way for you. You are learning to walk by faith and not by sight; more and more in daily obedience. I am showing my ways to you although they remain hidden from your understanding yet. I want you to learn to follow me, and not to depend on your understanding of what I am doing. This always limits me to the boundaries of what is acceptable to you.

Do not fear. Continue to affirm that my promise is complete in the heavenly realm. Wait to receive its supply in the material.

Lord, how do I wait for the house payment? I waited last month and then had to borrow money and got hit with the late charges. How is this your provision? How can I walk in faith, expectation and receiving when there is nothing to receive?

You are bitter. You feel that you must depend on yourself because I will not come through?

- Yes, Lord. -

Stand and see the salvation of your God. What is done in the heavnlies will be manifest in the earth, even in your life.

RELATIONSHIP IS THE THING

Listening is for relationship. That is what God started with Adam and Eve in the Garden. That is what he demonstrated in his relationship with the Children of Israel. That is what Jesus showed most of all when he was on earth. Relationship comes first with God. As we seek Him for the sake of our relationship, we receive Him more and more.

Jesus answered Satan's temptation with the promise, "Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4) God's words are life (John 6:63). Relationship with Him provides our needs more than house payments and material goods. Being able to receive his spoken words into my heart and mind brings the assurance of his other provision more deeply than "exercising faith" in what I read, even though what I read is also true.

Although it may seem subtle, there is a big difference between asking God for food and clothing and conversing with the Father over his way of providing these things. Asking comes from a heart set on these things and impatiently awaits some action. Conversing comes from a heart set on knowing the Father and eagerly looks for the new revelation of Him that will come with his provision, when and how he chooses to give it.

We may think that we want dialogue with God when what we are really after is direction or provision. We ask Him to speak or act so we can hear or see Him. However, what we are really looking for is how he will take care of us. It is the bane of parents to feel that they are nothing more than a checkbook or house cleaner to the expectations of their adolescent children. The parents are yearning for some personal interaction with their teen, but the youth is busy with other things and uses the parents for what they can provide. When we treat God the way

adolescents treat parents we may find that he ignores our requests. He does so in devotion to his priority of calling us into relationship. When we give up our preoccupation with our needs and just seek Him we will find Him ready to “come in and dine” with us.

DO I STILL READ MY BIBLE?

I have been asked whether I believe that what I hear in my dialogue with God has the same authority as the Bible. My answer is simple. No. The Bible is God’s gift to his people. It is the infallible, tested, sure word of testimony to his work, his plan, and our salvation. It is never wrong, although we can be wrong in how we interpret it. It is true absolutely and it is binding on every believer. I must keep reading it.

However, I do consider that my accountability for obedience to what I personally hear from God is the same as to what I read in the Bible. God’s words to me are authoritative in my own life. What he speaks to me is what I am to trust and to act upon. Should what I hear ever conflict with what is taught in the Bible, I need to check my hearing. God does not go against his own word, nor will he contradict Himself. So it is right for me to be current in the Bible as well as constant in my dialogue. Staying in both disciplines, I know his will and am able to apply it to my life daily.

If Noah or Abraham or Jesus or Paul had not obeyed what they heard in the voice of God, salvation would never have come to us. If these had protested that they only did what they read in the Scriptures, they would not have stepped out into the way God was calling them and extended his Kingdom forward. I believe that I am to adhere to all that is commanded in the Bible. I also believe that if I am to do my part in extending the

Kingdom of God, I must equally obey the words he speaks to my heart.

The words he speaks to my heart are not doctrine. They are application. They are not given to declare some universal truth to the church. They are spoken to help one learner, me, believe and walk in the truth. They are the personal words that say about a truth, "This is for you, my son," and so encourage my heart to believe. They are the daily directions that point out a godly practice with, "This is what I am doing in you, son," which give me confidence to walk. It may well be that I can share what I hear with other believers and encourage them, but the Father's talks with me are primarily about Him and me.

GO ASK DAD

God has given us many ways of knowing his will and of receiving guidance from Him. The words of the Bible are often clear enough to need no other direction. The wisdom we gain in walking the Christian life builds in us the ability to know what the Lord would direct. The counsel of godly friends and sacred writings help. We discern God's guidance in signs and circumstances. However, our seeking for God's way often appears like a family exercise. We are like siblings discussing what we should do. We review the family traditions and what these suggest. We share our ideas with one another and weigh these in discussion. We check the economics or the circumstances that may impact the decision we are evaluating. We choose the best option. Yet, no one ever just goes in and asks father. We act as if father has died and we must figure it out on our own. Our heavenly Father is not dead. He may indeed want us to work some of the matters out with each other, for he does want us to be a loving family. But he is available. He wants to be consulted. He will speak about our concern. We have a Father who waits to talk personally with us.

Before I close this chapter I want to share with you that Linda, my best teacher and example of dialogue with God now has an even more personal relationship with Him. In August, 1999, she received an invitation from Jesus to quit the fight she had waged with disease for several years and come Home. She was released into Eternity where she continues to inspire me toward more intimate conversations with our Father. When I imagine their dialogue, I get more excited about my own.

LISTENING PRAYER DIFFERS FROM OTHER FORMS OF PRAYER

The term prayer covers many aspects of our response to God. We praise Him in prayer. We petition Him with prayers. We thank Him through prayer. We carry his healing power to others by prayer. We work to make his Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven by means of our prayers. What wonderful, dynamic work we do in prayer! How awesome it is that we get to partner with the Eternal God through our words and actions in prayer.

The prayer that I am describing in this book, listening prayer, is part of this vast resource we have been given. It is different from the forms of prayer described above in that dialogue prayer is not about doing but about relationship. It is conversation between friends.

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I have learned from my Father I have made known to you.
John 15:15

Listening prayer is the personal interaction into which Jesus has invited us. It is the vehicle of our intimacy with Him. It is

the whispered sharing of bridegroom and bride. It is one of the ways in which he is most personal with us.

Journal Entry

April 12

David, my son, I love you. All that has come upon you is of my love. I use despair to deepen the yearning of my sons for myself. I strip away all things to purify your desire for me. It is a time to cry out, to lament. My withholding is not punishment, nor is it because of some barrier in yourselves. It is the barrenness of the wilderness, the provision of manna - which sustains only - so that you might come to desire only the Promised Land. I do not want you witnessing - even to yourselves - of my material provision in this world, but of my Promise. You will be witnesses of the abundance of the Promised Land, and I do not want you to distract from this by giving your stories of "wilderness provision," for they take away from the spiritual blessing of the Promised Land.

So, what do I do Father? Just keep going on pushing off one bill after another?

My son, do what you receive to do in each day and rest the future with me.

Father, that is so hard. I can do it, but you will have to send me grace by your Spirit to make it an act of faith. (See Romans 15:13)

I think most Christians are more comfortable with a working relationship with God than an intimate one. We do OK with tasks and assignments from Him. We can accept correction and guidance about doing his work more effectively. Yet, when he speaks from his heart of love into our heart of need, we inwardly blush and turn away. For many of us this is just like it was with our earthly fathers. Our fathers could talk to us if it was *about* something, a job or a project or a trip. But they were silent or awkward about feelings and could not put their love for us into words. So we became most comfortable talking about tasks and trips and would ourselves become uncomfortable when the subject approached personal feelings.

We have projected this onto God. We see Him as primarily interested in getting a job done and we understand our relationship more in terms of servants or employees than sons and daughters, or friends, or lovers. This is who I was, both as a son and as a father. I did not know how to speak or listen to words of endearment. As a result, I came to fear intimacy. Having not learned the security that comes through genuine intimacy, I learned to fear it. Intimacy exposes me to others and I fear how they will receive me. Yet, more than this, I fear the exposure that comes to myself, because I do not like what I see within myself. Intimacy forces me to deal with myself as I am, not as I pretend to myself who I am. With another, intimacy makes me really dependent on that person, on that relationship, because intimacy means needing the other in order to be complete and offering yourself to the other that they might be complete.

But this fear keeps me distanced from what God Himself wants most to give me. Listen to his desire for intimacy with us.

I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. I will build you up

again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel.
Jeremiah 31:3-4

I will delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. Isaiah 61:10

As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. Isaiah 62:5
How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!
How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice! Song of Songs 4:10

Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.
Revelation 19:7

This is the invitation our Father gives us. This is the promise of intimacy prayer. In order to enter into intimacy prayer, we must let the desire for true relationship push us past our fear and our doubt. We must risk coming into the open with Jesus Himself, moving toward that which he is promising to do in us by calling us friends.

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN LOVERS

What are conversations of intimacy like? What do lovers talk about? They talk about anything and everything. The subject does not matter as much as the sound of the beloved's voice.

Conversations do not focus on doing tasks, rather they are just opportunities to speak affectionately to one another.

When do intimate conversations occur? Anytime two are together. If there is no privacy, they make some by whispering or moving to the side of the room. They set their attention on each other and find a way to communicate. Intimacy conversations can be lengthy or brief. They can be serious or light. They can end with a decision or just close with a tender look.

Journal Entry
January 18

O God, I would seek you. I would be filled by you and you only. Set me free from the bondage and weakness that needs the affirmation of man. I yearn for you, your filling, your consolation. Cause the touch of men to be as nothing in comparison to your touch. Let me become so accustomed to the taste of your filling that none other satisfies.

I thank you, O God, for revealing to me my need. I do need affection. I do need to feel of value to another. I do yearn for intimacy. Open these up as wide as you will, but only that they may be filled with yourself. Guard me from seeking or accepting filling in any other way, yet do not let me shut again the doors to my need for you.

David, my son, when will you know me as I am? It is not the prodigal's return that I rejoice in, nor the elder brother's steadfast service. It is in the boy that I rejoice. You are my son. It is not what you

do to honor me or to dishonor me that I care about. It is not your going and coming again - however many times - nor your staying and seeing it through - whether once or numerous times, that keeps me loving you and attentive to you. It is because you are my son and I love you. I love. I will love you. I have loved you. You are welcome in my presence. Bring something or bring nothing, you are welcome. Say something or say nothing you are welcome. Stay long or stay short, you are welcome. Give to me or take from me, you are welcome.

Father, no one loves like that. I do not know how to believe it. But I will, because you say it, and because Jesus knows it.

This is the way of intimacy prayer with Jesus, with the Father. God has recorded a sample of his intimacy conversation in Song of Songs. Sit down with this book, alone and in quiet, and let the exchange between the beloved and the Lover stir your heart's need for hearing from Jesus. Then take a blank journal page and ask, "Jesus, my Lover, what words are you saying to my heart?" Write what flows into your mind.

Since listening prayer is a conversation between lovers, we relate to God differently in dialogue than in other ways of praying. Three different perspectives become readily apparent.

One is in the way we see ourselves with God. We come to Him not as a supplicant, but as a welcome child. We are not workers reporting for orders, but friends of the Master entering into dialogue about the business. We are not strangers hoping for favor, but the beloved coming near to our Lover. We come expecting close and familiar conversation.

Second, in listening prayer the initiative comes from Him, not me. It is not I who present the subjects of our conversation. It is the Lord. I wait for Him to begin. I let Him open the discussion. Yet, because I know that I am loved and wanted, I have the freedom to bring up any concern of my heart. I have learned that when I do start a conversation or try to inject a concern, the Father waits until I speak from my deep heart need. If I bring up a job that needs to be done he may be silent until I admit to Him what my heart is feeling about the job. Like two lovers conversing, it is only matters of heart and soul that are important.

Finally, in listening prayer I do much less talking. I do not recite my many concerns to God. Nor do I offer many words of thanks or praise. I am there to listen, so I listen more than I speak. What I do need to say, I speak or write in one sentence or one paragraph. Then I listen for his response. I will often reply to what he has said, then I wait for more. In this way prayer is conversation, but with the Father having the right of the most say.

If you are like me, you will be uncomfortable in the early stages of listening prayer. You will find it hard to be silent, to restrain yourself from offering up your prayer concerns. You will think you do not know what to talk about with God on an intimate level. You will be self-conscious about being in the position of friend or beloved. You will not trust the words that are forming in your mind. Beginning to listen is a lot like the beginning stages of a love relationship. You feel self-conscious, awkward, tongue-tied, and shy. Yet, the desires of love press you on. The sweetness of your beloved's voice and presence draw you past these feelings. So, with the same motivation that keeps you risking the attempt with a new love, risk listening to the Father. Because he is like Jesus you can be sure that he will meet you and draw you gently yet surely into intimate dialogue.

LEARNING TO DIALOGUE WITH GOD

Often the first reaction I encounter when presenting listening prayer to an audience is, “Oh, I can’t do that. I am not able to hear God’s voice.” But you *can* hear his voice. Hearing his voice is not a skill you have to learn. It is an ability given to you that you develop.

Describing Himself as the Good Shepherd and us as his sheep, Jesus assures us that, “his sheep follow Him because they know his voice,” John 10:4. The way you have been able to follow Jesus in your Christian walk thus far is evidence that you have been hearing his voice. Granted, you may not recognize that it is his voice you have been following, but you have been responding to his inner guidance.

Have you found yourself in just the right place at the right moment for a special experience or a divine encounter? How did you get there? Have you had an answer pop into your mind just when you needed a response to someone? Was that just your subconscious talking? Have you remembered where you put something or recalled some needed information just as you were “asking” about it? Have you received a specific word of truth while reading the Bible in a time of need? In these and many other ways the Lord has been speaking to your heart or mind. Learning to dialogue is simply beginning to treat these as conversation starters instead of random events. When my wife Linda would share her dialogue with God, I used to say to myself, “I can’t do that.” My wife Linda was a

good listener. She was in constant dialogue with Jesus about anything and everything. I thought she had special spiritual ears that I did not have because I could not hear his words the way she could. As I pursued listening myself, I came to realize that I was bound by several wrong beliefs.

SPIRITUAL EARS

I believed that I did not have the ears for it. I thought that I did not have the spiritual sense of hearing. But each of the Good Shepherd's sheep has ears to hear. Each of God's children has the sense needed to receive his words. "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us," I Corinthians 2:12. When we are born anew into the family of God, we receive the sense of hearing his Spirit. That sense may be undeveloped or dominated by other spiritual senses, but it is in you. It can be stirred to life. You can hear for yourself.

HEARING MY WAY

I believed that I had to feel and think like Linda in order to hear God's voice. Each of us knows a Christian who seems to flow easily in her relationship with Jesus and her conversation with Him. We see qualities in that person's temperament or lifestyle that are very different from our own, and we are not even sure we want to be like them. Well, you don't have to be. Once I let go of my fear that I would have to be like Linda in order to hear the voice of Jesus, I could accept the tone and way his voice came to me.

TRUST HIM

I doubted that I would be able to trust what I heard. Linda seemed to have such confidence in what she was hearing. I am skeptical about everything, including my own thoughts and feelings. I did not think I would have strong confidence in what I would hear. The answer to this lie is that it is not an "it" that we are hearing, it is "Him." Jesus is a person. He is personally interested in speaking to us. He wants us to hear and believe even more than we do. It is Him that we are to trust, not what we hear. He will get through to us. I had fear because I placed the responsibility for hearing and getting it right on me. When I decided to rely on Jesus, the Good Shepherd who knows his own (John 10:14), I was able to accept who I was hearing and so trust what I was hearing.

Journal Entry
August 23

Do not mark the time. I work in seasons. You are in the season of dryness. You have learned to go deep for the water, and that the water you find there is satisfying. Have no regret for this season, nor fear that you have failed to follow my way.

You have not yet come through the desert. Yet, you have learned to see the little flowers that are marks of my love, my attention.

A husband who is constrained by circumstances from providing what he wants, what his family needs, can still show his love in gifts of “tiny flowers.” So have I with you. The circumstances of my purpose constrain me from providing all, but my love and attentiveness are shown in the tiny flowers of my care - like the time you have in this place.

WHAT DOES THE VOICE OF JESUS SOUND LIKE?

There are many ways to commune with God: reading the Scriptures, meditating on what we read, absorbing life and truth from nature, expressing ourselves in worship, thinking through the personal application of what a teacher is presenting. These and many other ways can bring us into meaningful contact with God. The way that I am presenting

here is listening to his voice. What I mean by that is accepting and responding to impressions from God. It is having a conversation with Him.

The voice of God can come in many forms. It can be audible. Moses heard the audible voice of God. So did Samuel. So did Paul. I have not myself (yet) heard God with the clarity of an audible voice, although I have heard several speakers acknowledge this of themselves. God can and does speak audibly. This seems to be rare in human experience, however, and seems to involve a very demanding assignment from the Lord.

One way I recognize his voice is when my attention is drawn to someone or something. It can be when I am in a spiritual setting, like worship, or just the daily activity of life. I sense my attention pulled in a direction and when I look, there is a message for me. The message may be, "Pray for that person," or "Go encourage that person." It may be, "I am inviting you to trust me like that child in his father's arms." The message may be simple and tender or deep and compelling. When I recognize that the Lord is saying something to me in this, I respond by thanking Him and asking for more direction. I receive what I see and turn it into conversation. Then I receive more from Him.

Mark Virkler¹ taught me to catch the spontaneous thoughts that often surge through my mind as likely words from God. He says that the voice of God is not routinely a long monologue, like what we read in Jeremiah or Isaiah, but flashes of insight that open up a thought more. They may be reminders of a person to whom we are to be loving or praying for or ideas for our life or family that he wants us to pursue. When I started

¹ Mark Virkler, *Dialogue With God*, Bridge Publishing, Inc., South Plainfield, NJ, 1986

catching these spontaneous thoughts and asking more about them, instead of dismissing them as distractions from what I was trying to concentrate on, I entered into dialogue with the Lord that brought me into his ways more than my own.

The voice of Jesus in me also came as new conclusions or ideas as I would teach or talk with someone. I would be sharing something, trying to help another understand it, when something new about it came into mind. This may have been an illustration to clarify it or an application I had not thought of before. It is just like what happens when I am discussing a concept with another person and the two of us develop the idea as we share. Well, the Lord is in on every discussion I have, and when I receive the thoughts and conclusions that come while I am speaking, I recognize his voice.

Journal Entry
February 26

Father, I rejoice in you today. I praise you for yourself and your faithfulness. I thank you for your work in me. I did not continue in the depression of Saturday and now feel accepted in you. Although the sickness remains in my body, my spirit knows joy and my soul is praising you.

I do wonder about being here at the Census office. Is this your gift to me for now? It will take so much time and give so little money that I do not see how it answers our need/cry. Yet, I have no other way to turn.

Father, I want to walk before you, not at a distance. I want to know your leading, not just do what "I must." My soul does not know which this job is. Would you speak to me?

David, David, do not fret. I have shown you that it is the walk that matters in this time, not the activity. You are still in your time of relearning, of coming into relationship, rather than living in responsibility. You may do this, because it is not important. If you don't want to do it, that will be fine too. I want you to walk with me. You will know when a choice is critical to my purpose for you, and you will be able to make it. I will strengthen your faith just as I did with my friend Abraham.

WAIT FOR AN ANSWER

The voice of the Lord comes as answers to questions that I ask. This is the most direct form of dialogue. I ask my question or offer my concern, then I wait. I keep my mind open but not in figure-it-out mode and I wait for an answer. I expect to hear words or to be reminded of Scripture or to sense in my emotions an understanding of what I am to know. And answers come. The words of the Lord rise up in me, either in my mind or my emotions. I choose to receive these as his voice and I continue the conversation. Sometimes the words are familiar, part of my normal usage. Sometimes they are words that are not common to me. I accept them all, and stay in dialogue until the conversation ends.

PICTURES

More and more for me now, the voice of the Lord is coming in pictures. This seems remarkable to me, because even after I let go of my resistance to hearing the way Linda and others would hear, I remained convinced that I would never see like they did. I consider myself a logical thinker and an analytically minded person. Pictures and visions are for artistic types. Yet, as I have practiced accepting what I “see” in my spirit, I have seen more often and more distinctly. The mental pictures I get seem to strengthen my understanding of the subject the Lord and I are considering. My pictures have also been very encouraging to others I am praying for when I share what I see, along with what I hear God saying for them. Clearly God speaks through visions (Acts 2:17-21), and when I accept my pictures as from Him, I grow in understanding and in appreciation of his ways for me.

DANGERS WE FEAR

There are strong fears against listening to God and following what we hear. Who has not heard some horror story of a person who did something awful or stupid and claimed, “God told me to”? We do not want to be gullible and get ourselves in trouble or bring shame on our family by acting out some supposed command of God that is contrary to good sense. This is a real fear. The evidence is there that people have acted foolishly or with cruelty because they thought they were hearing God’s voice.

However, is there any way of seeking God that does not carry the risk of hurting others or leading us astray? The Pharisees were the most careful and logical interpreters of the Bible ever, and they persecuted and killed Jesus. The leaders of the Inquisition were supported by church teaching and tradition. The practice of slavery was confirmed by quoting Scripture. The teachings of seemingly trustworthy prophets have been used to oppress peoples of different classes or values. There is no way of following God that guarantees the person will be faithful to God’s own intentions. I have made the argument that listening prayer is a Biblical practice elsewhere in this book (chapter 4), so I will not repeat it here. I am just addressing this fear by saying that every sound practice of receiving from God can be distorted, so this should not deter us from pursuing each one.

Another fear is that you will hear something and be wrong. Yes, you will. But again, what practice is without this risk? Will you always be right in your understanding of the Bible? Will you always receive the counsel of friends accurately? Will following the tradition of your family or group prevent you from making mistakes? The answer to this fear is not for me to set out ways of guaranteeing accuracy in your hearing. There are no guarantees. What we know is that we have a God

who desires to speak with his children and when their desire is to sincerely receive from Him, he will make Himself known.

I have also heard the fear that if we depend on people hearing the voice of God within they will neglect the Bible and the church. “If everyone can hear God for themselves,” it is feared, “then why would they need the Scriptures and other Christians?” This fear comes from worrying about people instead of looking at God. Will the Author of the Bible and the Bridegroom of the church turn his followers away from these sources? Will hearing personally the voice of the Lord make people want less of Him and those who love Him? Will satisfying the deep thirst in our souls to hear the Father’s voice make us less hungry for the food of his teaching in Scripture? Will having a personal visit with the King make us uninterested in those who love and serve Him? It will not happen if the Lord is the one speaking and sincere followers are listening.

SAFEGUARDS

I have shared that there are no guarantees that will protect us from mistakes, because I want to push you to rely on God Himself for protection, not on any formula or discipline. Looking down the history of Christianity we see that every formula designed for protection has been used as a weapon for coercion or for the destruction of others. Every discipline for supporting a way of truth has also been used to compel conformity to ways that are less than the truth. Only God and his merciful judgments keep his people in the truth.

However, I do want to offer what I believe are three relationships that will help us stay centered in truth as we receive the voice of the Lord. The first is, have a relationship of familiarity with the Bible. God will speak no word that

contradicts what he has already spoken. If you listen to his written words you will recognize more readily his spoken words. When you are familiar with his ways, as described in the Bible accounts, you will not be easily deceived by ways that your own mind or emotions may suggest as you listen. With someone I love, I hold both what they write to me and what they speak to me as treasures. I use their letters to direct my understanding of what they say, and I use their words to fill out what they write. The relationship is all the richer for both communications.

The second guiding relationship is with the Body of Christ, the church. It was never God's intent that we should be separate from other followers of Him. In teachings given from Abraham, to Jesus, to Paul, God makes it clear that he intends us to be in a believing community, receiving from each other. When we are in community, we share. When we share, we correct each other. This does not require structure as much as it requires openness and honesty. When we live genuinely before other believers we will be held in the Way that is the way of Jesus (John 14:6).

The last relationship I suggest is one with yourself. If you cultivate a humble, teachable spirit you will not easily be led astray. It is our pride that sets us up to be deceived. It is our self-protective arrogance that blocks us from receiving guidance when needed. It is by focusing on our very fear of being wrong that we will most likely miss the truth. This is because the focus is on self and "getting it right." Focus instead on Jesus the Teacher who works hard at helping us understand. Remain humbly trusting in Jesus for the truth, and you will receive it.

I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. As for you, the anointing

you received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as it has taught you, remain in Him.

I John 2:26-27

INTERFERENCE TO LISTENING

There are, of course, innumerable things that will try to interfere with listening to the voice of Jesus. You have already encountered many of them, like not being able to find a quiet moment, demands of the day, strong emotions gripping you. I want to address three that may not seem so common but are, I believe, the primary issues that prevent us from listening for the voice of our Father.

Your Mind

Your mind is used to being in charge, and when you are listening to God it is not. I am not saying that you disengage your mind, but it does take a secondary role to your spirit. It is in our spirit that we hear the voice of the Lord, and the spirit place is deeper inside us than our mind. Contrary to what most of us were taught, our mind is not the exclusive agent of knowledge and understanding. The mind is given us by our Creator for very useful and powerful functions, but these do not give it priority in knowing God's ways or his voice. We receive truth in our spirit (I Corinthians 2:14) and then process it in our mind and heart. This processing increases our understanding of what God is saying and helps us apply it.

However, for most of us, our mind wants to be in control, dictating what we take in, what we let affect us, where in our inner being a matter will settle, and how we will respond. This

control actually resists hearing God's voice in simplicity and acceptance. Listening is the activity of lovers and in this relationship, the mind does not have control. Do you remember listening to your lover in the early days of your relationship, before you let it become predictable? (I give sincere congratulations to those of you who have not allowed this.) Do you remember how you just gathered in everything she said, how you absorbed everything he shared? You received with wonder and gladness, correcting nothing, accepting everything. Your heart was more in charge than your mind and so, what was spoken affected you in mind, feelings, and imagination. Without your mind editing and limiting the information, you were able to absorb it with depth and richness. You were able to hear things that your mind probably would not allow. This is the way we are to listen to Jesus, as eager, absorbing lovers.

Journal Entry
August 14

Lord Jesus, I wait for your word. I would ask that my vision be renewed, that I might know that to which you have called me.

My son, you are yourself the thing I am doing. Your calling is to live. It is to know me and increase in knowledge of me. It is to bear my love deep in your soul; to be enlarged in your capacity and strengthened in your ability to hold my love. I have made you steady.

Our trained minds need to be transformed (see Romans 12:1-2). We need to let the Lord Jesus, who redeems our will and behaviors and emotions, work also in our minds to bring them into conformity to his ways. We need to ask God to reorder our being so that spirit rules, being filled with His Spirit, not our mind. It may not seem like much happens immediately after you pray this (which you can do right now), but I can testify to the wonderful effect it has. I prayed this, and I am much more integrated in my whole being, and I more and more easily hear and know the Father's voice.

What I prayed is based on Hebrews 4:12. I asked, "Lord Jesus, I confess that I have set my mind in the highest place in my being. I see that you have made me spirit first, then soul and body. I choose to set my spirit over mind, will, emotions, and body. I ask that my spirit rule in my being, and that it be filled with your Holy Spirit."

Preferring Other Things

A second interference to listening to Jesus is our tendency to prefer other things. We find more security in doing tasks and pursuing entertainment than risking a visit with the Almighty One. Most of us have built habits of activity and diversions to help us feel significant, or so we do not have to face our inner fears. These habits can be so strong, that as soon as we try to tune into our spirit or to become still and listen, they start to clamor and demand our attention and activity. How can we hear his still small voice with all this activity around us?

I do not recommend that you force yourself to stop such diversions. Strenuously resisting these temptations just gives them more power to distract us. Instead, just admit them to Jesus. Tell Him that you have preferred the safety of what you can do to his unpredictable voice. Ask Him to bring you out of this habit and restore your desire for his voice. He will work

the changes in you that are needed, and you will soon find yourself wishing that you had stepped into quiet instead of into business.

Accuser

And of course there is the old accuser always nearby to interfere with listening to the Lord. Satan or his demons always have some objection to what we are hearing or some doubt whether it is really God. They use many approaches to try and make us give up listening. Just as he tries to obstruct other ways of living in obedience to God, Satan obstructs this one. In our first book, Listening Prayer, Linda addresses the question of what Satan's voice sounds like², so I will not do that here. I will just say that the best way to deal with his chatter is to say, "Go away!" As you learn to distinguish Satan's voice from your own and from God's, you gain courage in telling the accuser to be quiet. What gives his voice power is paying attention to it. Do not let his tactics prevent you from pursuing your heart's true desire to hear God's voice in your own spirit.

BEGIN LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF THE LORD

What can you do to begin listening to the voice of the Lord?
Here are the steps that I took.

Ask

Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek,
and you shall find; knock, and it shall
be opened to you.
Matthew 7:7

² Listening Prayer, Dave & Linda Olson, 1997, Chapter 5

Ask to hear the voice of the Lord. Ask the Father to open your ears to hear his voice. Let yourself desire this. God longs to give his good gifts to his children, but he also waits for their desire to be expressed. My first prayer journal was a record of Scripture verses that the Holy Spirit highlighted to me as I was reading, indicating that these were things God wanted to do in me. One of these was Psalm 27:8, "My heart says of you, 'Seek his face.' Your face, Lord, I will seek." This was the Lord's invitation to me to ask that I might see Him and hear Him. I recorded this verse and began to pray it back to God regularly. I also began to let my heart want to hear Him. I no longer contented myself with just reading and thinking about his words. I wanted personal words from Him.

Journal Entry

July 11

Psalm 119

"My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word. My eyes fail looking for your promises." Lord, I have often felt this "faint," it comforts me to see that the psalmist did also. I am willing to wait for the fulfillment of your promises, but I am desirous of immediate answers to my prayer to know you.

David, you are my son, and I have taken you aside for just this to learn to know me. It had to be this way, for no other time would have stirred the longing in your heart nor prepared you to listen. I will be with you - close to you. Walk with me and listen...

You must ask before you will hear, at least on a consistent basis. In a loving relationship one waits for the other to show she wants to hear before he speaks. The Lord looks for ready hearts, and your part in readying your heart is to ask Him to do for you what he promises he will do.

Agree You Can Hear

You prepare also by thanking God for making you able to hear his voice. The natural tendency is to say something like, "God, I really don't know how to do this, so it may be tough, but could you speak to me loud enough for me to hear?" That may sound humble and dependent, but it is really unbelief and resistance. How would you feel about responding to your son if he came to you like that with something? Rather, would you not like your son to say, "Dad, you have said that our family can do this kind of thing. I am ready to learn. Would you help me tonight?" It is much easier to teach an eager mind than a reluctant one. Believe what the Bible says, that his sheep can hear his voice. Thank Him for making you like his other sheep and tell Him you are ready to learn to hear Him.

It might follow from this step that you need to repent of scorning and neglecting the gift for listening that he has given you. If you have disdained this practice by criticizing those who say they hear from God, if you have ignored or denied those occasions when his voice has risen briefly in you, or if you have refused to believe that he was prompting some action, then you have hardened your own heart against his voice, and you need to repent of doing so.

You are asking God to restore and develop your own ability to hear Him, so ask again and again. Be an eager child in learning this way of relating to the Father. Ask every night,

like a child would who is eager to learn to play baseball. Show Him your readiness by pestering Him with your desire. He is not reluctant, but he does test our desire by moving slowly sometimes.

Live From Your Spirit

Since hearing the voice of God takes place in your spirit, begin to be deliberate about living from that place. Ask Jesus for his help. Practice being aware of life from your spirit rather than just from your mind or emotions.

Learn to distinguish impressions in your spirit from thoughts in your mind. We sometimes call what we are perceiving in our spirit intuition. Or you might know it as a sense of something, as a sense of excitement without knowing why. Your spirit is trying to tell you that something is important, or dangerous, or precious. You know this as a sense before you have words for it. This is where your mind comes in. Your mind gives language to what your spirit is sensing. It is interpreting what is happening in your spirit. This is the way mind and spirit are to cooperate: spirit becoming aware and knowing the value of something; mind describing and cataloguing it so that you can deal with it. As you practice, you will become alert to things moving in your spirit before they become clear thoughts in your mind in the same way that your eyes start seeing something before your mind identifies it.

Learn also to distinguish spirit from emotions. Emotions are an important part of receiving the full message the Lord is communicating. They give color and intensity to the words you are receiving. Your emotions move the message into your heart more quickly and increase your motivation to act on it. But emotions are not spirit. In our spirit we can feel, but these are the gentle stirrings of the Holy Spirit. They are reflections of how God Himself is feeling about someone or something.

He is sharing something of Himself with us, and we are privileged to carry it in part.

Am I telling you to “listen to your heart?” No, not in the popular sense of that phrase. Just listening to our heart can get us in trouble because of lusts and our ability to deceive ourselves. I am telling you to listen in your spirit. Our heart is usually self-centered, even when it is telling us to reach out to another, often because doing so will make us feel good. However, our spirit is God-centered. It responds to Him and wants to follow his will. Listening to your spirit will move you in the direction of God’s heart for yourself or another person. You will know this, not because it makes you feel good, but because you feel the affirmation that comes with obedience.

Am I telling you to just “go with your emotions?” Obviously not. Your emotions are even more selfish than your heart. They are trying to satisfy your needs. While emotions have a vital role in understanding what God is saying to us and in our ability to move with this, they are not the place we receive his voice. Feeling your emotions moves you to be very aware of yourself and your needs and wants. Sensing in your spirit moves you to desire what God is saying or beginning to do.

Journal Entry

June 10

Father, I do not even know what to say. I love you. I am enjoying the deepening knowledge of your love for me - like the love you have for your only Son Jesus. I am accepting many thoughts as your voice, yet I still doubt. Thank you for peace even in doubting. I know that you are my Father and I am your child.

I love you too and I am with you in all this. I will not abandon you nor forsake you. I will give you what to speak. You do not need to defend yourself but only speak of your obedience to me, your life and growth in me.

Now, start exercising listening in your spirit. Pay attention to the promptings that sneak into your awareness. Follow them up and see what God is trying to tell you. Once when I was working through my grief over Linda's death I went back to one of our favorite cities. There I did many of the things that we liked to do together and found comfort in remembering our times there. Then, toward the end of my visit I saw a road that we had never taken on our visits. I sensed (heard in my spirit) an interest in following that road, so I did. I came to a park overlooking the ocean just as the sun was beginning to set. There I had a new experience of life and God's goodness. It was, to me, a message that while I had much to treasure in my

life with Linda, I also had much ahead in my own life. God spoke his peace and hope to me.

Take in, rather than push aside, those words that come into your spirit which make you say, "I wonder if that could possibly be true." Most of us have trained our mind to quickly dismiss thoughts that are too grand so we do not get disappointed. However, God's thoughts are grand, and he does share them with us. Take them in and ask Him more about them.

When we were asking God whether we should invest the money to publish our first book one of the answers we heard was, "It will take the message around the world." For me, that was too expansive to tolerate. I mentally reduced the message to something more within my faith, and we printed a small number. That printing sold out in less than a year, and the book has indeed gone around the world, into four languages (so far) and over 30 countries.

Accept the ideas that come to you which challenge you. Your heart can give you grandiose ideas which are just impossible dreams, but in your spirit, the Lord births ideas that he wants to accomplish through you. These come with a promise that he will do it through us, and the awareness of this promise is an indicator that your spirit is hearing rather than your heart. The times the Lord urged me to write this book came with a sense of his empowering that gave me the courage to proceed, even though I felt that it was too much for me to attempt.

Practice

These are preparation exercises. They are things you can do to bring to your awareness your life in the spirit and to call your attention to what the Lord is trying to speak to you. The next

step in listening to his voice is to engage in listening practices. Here are three exercises.

Dialogue

The first practice is what I call dialogue with your spontaneous thoughts. When a word or a thought comes into your mind on its own, that is not because you went searching for it as part of a problem you were thinking about, say, “Father, what are you trying to say to me?” Now, not every spontaneous thought you have is from God. However, if you give attention to these and ask the Lord directly if he is speaking, he will give you more (Mark 4:10-11). I used to dismiss such spontaneous thoughts as an interference to my train of thought. Now that I have asked Jesus to be part of all my thinking, I accept such interjections as part of the process and ask Him to tell me more. While watching the ocean waves one day I was thinking about a sinful pattern that had just emerged in me again. The thought came to me, “How are things cleansed in nature?” So I responded, “How are they, Lord?” Then I heard, “By the washing action of moving water, like waves and streams.” I now knew that he was talking to me about my sin and how to be clean again. I wanted cleansing to be a one time thing that leaves the vessel permanently pure. However, that is not God’s way. He washes a thing over and over again. Cleansing is a continual process. That was what he was offering me right then. I put my sin in his flowing stream and was cleansed, knowing that this would happen again when needed.

By asking for more or saying, “Lord, do you mean this?” you will be drawn into the dialogue which God Himself is starting with you. You will find that it grows and deepens. At first my dialogues were short, but they have expanded as I keep practicing, keep dialoguing. God really does have thoughts

that are not my thoughts (Isaiah 55:8). What is more wonderful to me is that he will share them with me.

Stillness

The second way to increase hearing is to practice stillness. Find places and take time to just be quiet. I do this in a quiet spot in my house or yard, or going to the ocean or another place I know will be quiet. I sometimes walk to be still inside. It does not have to be a long time, although the more I practice stillness the more time I want to give to it. This is not a time to pray by saying things to God, other than, maybe, "Father, what do you want to say to me?" This is not a time to plan or think through a problem. It is a time to listen. It is like when a loving parent or grandparent has said to you, "I want you to come along with me." You try to stay quiet so they will tell you why you have been asked, excited about what the adventure will be.

Stillness draws us into our spirit and makes us ready to receive there. The emotions are brought under control and allowed to rest. The mind is disciplined and instructed to be at idle. (An engine at idle is still running. Your mind is never off, but it can run slower.) A simple scene like the ocean or a mountain or a tree can help bring you to quiet. I need to be out of earshot of the familiar, like the telephone, because even though I have decided not to respond, the sound distracts me.

When you first practice stillness you will probably not hear God's voice or anything significantly different. Yet as you keep practicing, you will become more accustomed to the quiet and your inner ears will begin to pick up his presence and his voice. It is like when you first go into the forest or the back yard on a summer evening. At first you do not hear anything. Then you start to pick up a few sounds, then more and more

sounds. As you continue coming out to this place, you begin to recognize the sounds as ones you heard before. Then you begin to be able to identify them. So it is with being still in the presence of God. At first you may not hear his still small voice. As you become accustomed to being in that place you will begin to hear “something,” then his voice. Then you will be able to distinguish his words. It is more wonderful than a visit to the forest!

Write

You must write what you hear. Learning to journal your dialogue with God is a necessary discipline for receiving his word. I say this as a reluctant journaler. Remember how I prize doing things in my mind. I considered my mind to be an adequate place for listening, dialoguing, and keeping words from God. However, I have found that writing helps me hear better.

Writing opens the flow of his voice. When I take up my journal and pick up my pen, it cues my senses, both natural and spiritual, to attention for listening. When I write my question or statement to the Father, it focuses me on what he will say in response. When I write out the first word I hear in my spirit, it seems to release those that follow, and I receive many rich words from Him.

Writing also adds surety to what I am hearing. I find that writing does the same thing that speaking does for my thoughts: it helps me recognize the significant ones and gives them strength. I can run all kinds of thoughts around in my mind, but the ones I say aloud are the ones I own and stand on. In the same way, the words I write down in my listening prayer journal are ones which have more certainty than those that come into my mind and stay there.

Writing gives me the opportunity of going back over the words later. I then evaluate how they sound. Those which are God's voice to me remain sure and helpful. Those which were just my own or the enemy's show up also, and I can mark those out. I will not try to tell you how you know the difference. Discovering that is part of the learning process. Ask the Lord Himself to show you.

Having God's words written down allows me to go back much later and see how they have been carried out. What I hear from Jesus is always encouraging or instructive on the day I hear it. Yet, often it also has a meaning that does not come clear until weeks or years later. As I go back over what I have heard in previous years, I am much encouraged to see his care of me and how he has fulfilled his promises to me.

Writing also honors the words of God. God's words are valuable. They are treasures. My listening journals are the most precious books I own. They are my personal love letters with Jesus, and I treasure them for what they represent of our relationship. These journals are not for anyone else to read, but they are valuable enough to preserve. Sharing excerpts from my own journals with you in this book was very hard for me to do because they are so precious to me. Yet, I am glad that I have them recorded so that I can tell you these things about my Lover.

IS LISTENING REALLY GOD'S WAY?

SPEAK, Lord, for Your servant is listening. I am Your servant. Give me understanding that I may know Your ordinances . . . Incline my heart to Your ordinances . . . Let Your speech distill as the dew.

The children of Israel once said to Moses: "You speak to us and we will listen to you: let not the Lord speak to us, lest we die."

Not so, Lord, not so do I pray. Rather, with Samuel the prophet I entreat humbly and earnestly: "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening." Do not let Moses or any of the prophets speak to me; but You speak, O Lord God, Who inspired and enlightened all the prophets; for You alone, without them, can instruct me perfectly, whereas they, without You, can do nothing. They, indeed, utter fine words, but they cannot impart the spirit. They do indeed speak beautifully, but if You remain silent they cannot inflame the heart. They deliver the message; You lay bare the sense. They place before us mysteries, but You unlock their meaning. They proclaim commandments; You help us to keep them. They point out the way; You give strength for

the journey. They work only outwardly; You instruct and enlighten our hearts. They water on the outside; You give the increase.

They cry out words; You give understanding to the hearer.

Let not Moses speak to me, therefore, but You, the Lord my God, everlasting truth, speak lest I die and prove barren if I am merely given outward advice and am not inflamed within; lest the word heard and not kept, known and not loved, believed and not obeyed, rise up in judgment against me.

Speak, therefore, Lord, for Your servant listens. "You have the words of eternal life." Speak to me for the comfort of my soul and for the amendment of my life, for Your praise, Your glory, and Your everlasting honor.

Thomas à Kempis
The Imitation of Christ
Book Third, The Second Chapter

How often have you pictured the scene? Adam and Eve newly created, walking and looking at the garden with awe on their faces, Father God watching with delight. They keep running over to Him with words of wonder and questions about what they see next. Father God receives each exclamation with joy, answers each question with satisfaction. Their questions and His responses develop their maturity. Under His personal guidance and instruction they begin to understand His purpose and what they and their offspring are to be and do as part of this wonderful thing called life.

Does this represent God's desire of how it should be today in His relationship with the sons and daughters of the Last Adam, Jesus Christ?

Noah was a righteous man, the only righteous one in the entire race. How did he maintain his righteousness? He had no scriptures to instruct Him. He had no written code to follow. He lived by his knowledge of God, from his personal communion with Him. This communion was strong enough to keep Noah pure in the midst of the most pervasive show of evil the human race has demonstrated. It was clear enough to direct him to do what had never been done before - build a boat - and to act on what could not be imagined - preserve all living creatures.

Does God's way with Noah represent His desire of how He wants to guide all His followers?

Abraham is called the friend of God. He is the one God called personally and designated the father of nations. He is the one with whom God entered into solemn covenant and shared identities and all His wealth. He is the one of whom God said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (Genesis 18:17). Abraham received personal promises from God. He took direct counsel with God. Like Adam and Eve he was privileged to walk and talk with God.

Does God's way with Abraham represent His desire of how He wants to talk with us? The prospect is exciting, isn't it?

HEARING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

“But,” you say, “God gave the Law to Moses, and that is the way He guides us now; that is the way He talks to us. He knows that we are not able to receive direct words from Him and live our lives in righteousness. He had to give the Law so we could study it and be sure of how we are to live out His ways.”

Before I address the revolution that came to law-keeping with the advent of Christ and the impartation of the Holy Spirit, let’s look at this matter of the giving of the law to Moses and Israel. Immediately after coming out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites camped at the oasis of Marah. However, the water there was bitter and they could not drink it. God directed Moses to throw a piece of wood into the spring so that it became sweet and satisfying. God then said to the Israelites, “If you *listen carefully to the voice* of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you *pay attention* (Hebrew: listen) to his commandments and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you” (Exodus 15:26, italics mine). This is the first incidence we have in the Bible of the Lord asking His people to keep His ways, and the criterion was listening to His voice. When the people arrived at Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God, the Lord said to Moses, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel, ... Now if you obey me fully (Heb.: listen to) and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession” (Exodus 19:3,5, emphasis mine). Again, the key to obeying God is hearing His words. It seems that God’s intention was for conversation with His people. There is talking and listening. There is room for questions and further explanations.

However, the response of the people to this invitation to dialogue was fear. Upon hearing the sound of the voice of God speaking to Moses, “They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die’” (Exodus 20:19). Right there comes the breakdown in what I believe is God’s first choice of how He will reveal to us Himself and His ways. At the critical point, when they were invited to be God’s own people in dialogue with Him, they backed away - literally - and asked for another way of receiving His word. What they got was the written law.

Yet, even the law as originally given was spoken and heard. “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell the Israelites this...’” (Exodus 20:22). “The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them ...’” (Leviticus 1:1). The law was delivered to Moses in spoken language, and he was to deliver it to the people by mouth. “Moses summoned all Israel and said: ‘*Hear* Israel, the decrees and laws I *declare in your hearing* today’” (Deuteronomy 5:1, italics mine). When the law was written down, the directions were that it be read out loud to the people.

So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. Then Moses commanded them: “At the end of every seven years, in the year for canceling debts, during the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people - men, women, and children, and the aliens living in your towns - so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and

learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”
Deuteronomy 31:9-13, emphasis mine

We may be tempted to say that this is just because the Israelites were an illiterate people. However, there seems to be a clear intention by God that the message be spoken and heard. (This intention is repeated at the end of the Bible in Revelation 1:3, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near.”) The emphasis on hearing is so strong that we must submit to it, just as God expected the Israelites to.

Journal Entry
January 17

Father, it has been a hard night and day. Last week and then Sunday you guided me, brought me to your holy mountain, near to your dwelling place. You taught me of myself and gave me your promises. Yesterday it seemed as if they were all put off - again. Today I have nothing except the promises.

Yet, these have become so precious to me that I would rather have the promises with their hope and the spirit to pray them without material evidence than to have the material security without the promise.

This is my encouragement now. That you have given me precious and great promises. Just like you said to Nathaniel, you shall see...., so he followed you. I have heard you say the same, so I follow. Let me see

your Son, Father, so I can follow. Give me your Spirit, Father, so I can follow.

David, my son, it is my way to test the followers of my Son. The testing is so that you will discover what you have just written, that it is myself you desire, not anything else. I am in the promise more than in the thing. The promise is my heart, my love; it is where your spirit receives my Spirit. In the thing you got your satisfaction from the material: the works of people, the dollars, the work and result of ministry, These are my gifts, and so you receive and honor me in them. But the promise is me in you, Spirit in spirit. Receive the promise and dwell in it; for in so doing you dwell in me. Abraham learned this. The years of promise were more precious than the years with Isaac. So it will be with you. Receive and treasure the promises and do not hurry their realization. This is my love for you, my gift to you.

Further evidence of the importance of listening comes in the very language of obedience to what is heard. Everywhere in your English Bible, Old Testament, (or Spanish, or Korean, or whatever translation you are reading) where you read the word “obey,” you are reading the Hebrew word *shamea* (or *shama*), “hear.” Thus, when you read in Deuteronomy 6:4, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord, is one,” and in verse 24, “The Lord commanded us to *obey* all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God,” you are reading the same word. Hebrew has no separate word for obey. To hear is to respond in accordance with what is spoken. Now read through the Law and Prophets and insert “Hear” or “Listen,” wherever you see “Obey.” See what a difference it makes in your response?

Discover how much more importance comes upon your attentiveness to what is being said.

This is true not only in the Old Testament. The New Testament was written in the Greek language, and here too there is no separate word “obey.” The word most often translated obey in the New Testament is *hupakouo*, which is a combination of *hupo*, a preposition meaning “under” or “to,” and *akouo*, “to hear.” To obey is to hear under, to pay attention to what is spoken and carry it out. How strong is the connection between hearing and obeying! To hear is to obey. To obey is to hear. We had better be listening carefully. By the way, “obey carefully” in the Bible is simply the word “hear” doubled: hear, hear.

By now, you may not be surprised to learn that the English word “obey” is derived from the word “to hear.” “Obey” comes to us from Latin through Old English. It is the prefix “ob,” meaning “to” and “oedire,” from the Latin “audire” (from which we get audible), meaning “hear.” The pattern is consistent. We know what to “obey” by hearing, and our hearing is not complete without obeying. It seems that God built us to learn obedience by listening.

It is clear from Jeremiah 31:33 and Isaiah 51:7 that God wants His law imprinted on our hearts so that living it is the natural response to life. The law given to Moses and the prophets is the family value system of Father God. In its specifics, it describes how true children of the family will respond because of the honor of the family and the mission it has been given. Children learn family values by living in the family, watching, listening, testing their own understanding. Any writing down of the values is commemorative or as a check for future generations. Parents understand that something is lost - indeed it is already missing - if the values must be written for children to follow them. The “law” of the family is only a description

of the relationships in it, and the members who must depend on written items to know their role or response are the ones most distant in relationship. So it is with Father God. We know His values most intimately by being in close relationship with Him, which must and does include familiar dialogue. We live these values most freely and fully when they flow out of the relationship. It is when we are distant from Him that we must resort to the written code.

This imprint of the law on hearts and the intention of God that we live it from this inner place - the place of listening - is demonstrated profoundly in the event we call Pentecost. The account is in Acts, chapter two. The day on which the Holy Spirit is imparted to the believers - when He makes His home in their hearts - is the very day on which the Jewish community was commemorating the giving of the Law to Moses. The Pentecost holy day is the day of celebration of the giving of the written law. It is on *this* day that God chose to visit His people with His Spirit, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33). It is now abundantly clear that God intends for us to live by the value of the Law as it emerges from our hearts filled with and attuned to His Holy Spirit.

In Psalm 40:6-10 we read:

Sacrifice and meal offering Thou hast not desired;
My ears Thou hast opened; Burnt offering and sin
offering Thou hast not required. Then said I,
"Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written
of me; I delight to do Thy will, O my God; Thy Law
is within my heart.

The Psalmist is reflecting the interpretation that keeping the law flows from the heart, and the heart receives because the ear has been opened. Sacrifice and offerings are indeed

required by the Law, but here we see that they are not “desired” by the Lord - at least not in the same way that he desires a heart and ears closely bound to Him. Those who depend on “sacrifice and meal offering,” that is, those who rely on how well they keep the code, will find that they are not doing the will of the Father. Only those whose “ears Thou hast opened” will know what He desires and so walk in His way.

Journal Entry

February 5

David, my son, you still have not learned to rest in me. Obedience is not striving - even to do what I ask. It is walking in faith where I lead. I have led you to this place, so walk here. Do not strive after what you are to do. Do not be anxious about tomorrow.

I confess, Lord, that I am anxious and I cannot turn away from it unless you fill me with the knowledge of yourself and your care.

Walk through today with what you have. I will be with you. I will bring to you what is for today and tomorrow. It is enough. Rest. Walk with me.

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

I have used Old Testament figures to build my case for listening as God's primary way of knowing His heart and will for us. The most complete example we have is Jesus Himself. His was a life lived out of dialogue with the Father. He says that he knew what to say and do because the Father spoke with Him.

... the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world. ... I speak these things as the Father taught me. John 8:26, 28

See also John 12:49-50, 14:10, 15:15, 16:13-14, 17:8

While Jesus was undoubtedly well-learned in the Law and the Prophets, his understanding of them and application of their teaching was the product of his conversations with his Father. Because he knew the Father's heart so well, he could even contradict by his actions the law as it was taught. He could treat people the way Father God saw them, not by how they seemed to fit into a system. He could treat the Sabbath as a day for doing the works of God rather than a rule-bound day given to fear of offending Him. He knew that the Law is fulfilled in love that is expressed person to person, not in careful enactment of details of daily life. He walked in freedom because he listened to his Father. His way is our way. By listening to the Father, we will know His heart and His ways, and our attitudes and actions will flow out of these.

The life of Jesus is our example. The death of Jesus is the way we enter into this. Paul makes it clear:

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that

was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. ... Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink ... (the Law). (Anyone who does so) has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.
Colossians 2:13-15, 19

The Law as requirement was done away with at the cross of Christ. In the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, all that the Law demanded is accomplished (see Matthew 5:18). Obedience to the values of the Law now comes as we recognize that we “have been raised with Christ (and) set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1). Then the ways of God in Christ will flow out of our being. (See also Galatians, chapters 3-5). The Law “was added because of transgression until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come” (Galatians 3:19). When Christ, the promised Seed (Galatians 3:16), came, he restored to us the way of direct, personal, intimate fellowship with the Father and through His Spirit gives us the ability to know His voice and keep His word. “But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth ...” John 16:13

Journal Entry
January 22

Lord, I want to live by the faith and openness that, through me, you are urging others to live. I want it to be true of me, as came out in talking with Alex yesterday, that what I teach/counsel comes forth from my own need/healing. This is what makes it genuine to another. I know that You, by your Spirit, meet another and reveal truth to their heart. I want this above all. Yet, I believe that a pure vessel is best for bringing this to another, and I want to be a pure vessel.

My son, it will always be a process I am working in you. This is part of keeping you authentic with people. Do not fear or run from the process, but be always immersed in it.

True wisdom is not accumulated knowledge but knowing me. As you know me and my heart, you will open the door to truth for others. Knowing me is a relationship which is process.

Dialogue, which was our way of knowing God and His ways at Creation, is the way demonstrated in the lives of Old Testament servants, is the way Jesus lived, and is what is restored to us by Christ's death and resurrection and sending of His Holy Spirit. Listening, dialogue, is our heritage and our legacy. It is God's primary and essential way of communicating with His children. It belongs to us.

WHY THEN READ THE BIBLE?

Now you may press me by saying, “Why have the Bible at all? Why don’t we just rely on our ears to hear God and do what He says?” You know, one day it will be this way. “But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.” (I Corinthians 13:8-10). “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law *until everything is accomplished.*” (Matthew 5:18, italics mine). In the meantime, we are of the same humanity as the Israelites, ever prone to draw back from personal listening and ask someone else to do it for us. The Bible is the trustworthy record of God’s speaking to us, and it calls us back to the center of obedience when our hearing is dulled. The provision is complete, but there is still in us, both individually and corporately, the power of sin and self which distorts our hearing and will lead us astray. We need the Bible, not as law to bind us, but as the record of family values and ways by which we are assured that we are hearing correctly.

Can we live without the Bible? We do not have to, and we would be presumptuous to do so. I surely must rely on the Bible. What I am objecting to is the tendency to substitute the Bible and the interpretations of others for the necessity of personal listening. There is an idea present in the church that one can just study the Bible and know what God wants. This was not Jesus’ practice. It is too limiting to be our only way. The Bible is a precious and essential gift to the church. It is not, however, a replacement for the way of dialogue.

I believe that Israel's big mistake was when they promised to do all that the Lord said. The people said to Moses, "Go near and listen to all that the Lord our God says. Then tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you. We will listen and obey." (Deuteronomy 5:27). By putting Moses between themselves and God they denied to themselves the very power and intimacy they needed to keep His words. They put in an intermediary to whom they could complain and with whom they could argue. They put themselves in the position which still holds in Jewish faith today: obeying the Law comes before relationship. It is God's clear intention that relationship comes first, relationship that includes dialogue. It is out of this relationship that obedience flows naturally. Israel missed this. Many Christians today make the same mistake. Do not be one of them. Choose to be as Moses who said after he had received the law, "If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you" (Exodus 33:13).

For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, "Obey (Hear) My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you."
Jeremiah 7:22-23

THE POWER IS IN HIS VOICE

Then God **said**, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

Then God **said**, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear;" and it was so.

Then God **said**, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with seed in them, on the earth;" and it was so.

Then God **said**, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth;" and it was so.

Then God **said**, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth after their kind;" and it was so.

Then God **said**, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over

the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

These statements from the Creation account in Genesis 1 reveal where the creative power of God is expressed: in his words. God creates by speaking. When God wants something done he declares it. Everything that exists is a product of God’s spoken word. Everything and everyone is created to respond to his voice. That which makes something come alive and fulfill its destiny is the capacity to hear and receive God’s voice.

In these last days (God) has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.
Hebrews 1:2-3

It is by the word of his power that Jesus upholds the world and sustains his Kingdom. Jesus, the Word of God (John 1:1), speaks and people respond. To the disciples he says, “Follow me,” and they leave all and do so (Luke 5:2-11). To dead Lazarus he says, “Come forth,” and he comes out of the tomb (John 11:43). To a frightened Ananias he says, “Go .. to a man ... named Saul ... and place hands on him to restore his sight,” (Acts 9:11-12) and Ananias releases a miracle. The power to do the will of God comes in hearing his voice.

You have seen this happen in human relationships. A child runs out into the yard and says to his siblings, “Mom says it is time to come in now.” What happens? Nothing, or maybe some protestations and ridicule. Then mom steps to the door and calls, “It is time to come in now.” What happens (or

should happen)? Immediately toys are put down and feet move to the house. Why is the response to mother's voice so different from the response to a sibling's? Is it just because mom is bigger, or because she can punish or reward? While this is true to some degree, I see that mother's voice carries in it a power to obey that is not in the voice of a peer.

You have felt the difference between orders communicated to you from a fellow employee and when the assignment comes from the boss directly. Your motivation to do the assignment is much stronger when you hear the boss's voice. Is this just because you want to impress the boss? I believe that in the tone of the boss's voice there is an element of power that is transmitted to your will.

The voice of one in authority communicates more than coercion, more than threat. It carries power to your will. It creates in your spirit a desire to fulfill the word spoken, just as God's voice creates life in what he speaks on the canvas of the world.

If you know Jesus personally, then you have a desire to do his will. Yet you are probably painfully frustrated in your ability to do so. You try, succeed for a time, then fail. You read the commands of the Bible and resolve to do them, only to find after a few days that you have neglected the very ones you promised to keep. You hear a sermon and say in your mind, "Yes, this is the way I want to be," yet the message slips from your awareness within hours.

What is behind these frustrations? You are depending on your will to give you the power to keep the word. And your will cannot do so. It may give you the capacity to improve somewhat, or to sustain obedience for a time, but you know that sooner or later it lets you down. Our will is a good thing, but it is not meant to operate in its own power. Just as with all

our faculties, it is meant to work in cooperation with the will of God. We receive his will into our own and let Him bring the motivation and energy that sustains us in obedience. This is what Jesus did: “the Son can do nothing by Himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does,” John 5:19, NIV.

Journal Entry

July 21

My questions, Father, are what am I to do about next week's bills? What is your answer to Robert's request? What do I pray about Linda's time and job? Will you answer, my Father?

My son, I hear your cry and I know your heart. I am purifying you to seek me above all things, to know that

I am your provision, The Answer. I am disciplining you to seek first my Kingdom and to let all these things come to you as my gifts. You may not cling to anything, even what I give you today. No thing is given to you forever - not goods or role or relationship - only myself. Receive what I give today, and let it go if I ask, for I will bring what you need for tomorrow.

HEARING IS THE FUEL

It is not just knowing the word or work of the Father that empowers us to do it. It is hearing it within, or seeing it, as Jesus said of Himself. Just as all creation is sustained by the continual word of the Son (Hebrews 1:3), and just as Jesus lived only by continually hearing words of his Father, so we too do the will of God by continually hearing his voice within. His voice is the fuel that powers the engine of our will.

This is demonstrated dramatically in the experience of Israel at Mt. Sinai. After setting the nation free from bondage in Egypt and delivering them through the Red Sea, God brought them to the mountain.

And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey (Hebrew: hear) My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel."
Exodus 19:3-6

So Moses brought the people to the mountain that they might hear God speak his commandments. However, they pulled back when fear came upon them.

And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said

to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die." And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin." So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.
Exodus 20:18-21

The people were close enough to see and to experience the wonder and fear of seeing the Lord's presence, but they were not able to hear the words of his voice themselves. They felt the power of his will and could sense the threat of his judgment, but they did not learn the sound of his voice. There was nothing instilled within each Israelite to confirm the word of the Lord. They gave away the ability to listen to what he said. Instead, they depended on Moses to tell them what God wanted.

This was, I believe, their biggest mistake. The people promised to keep the commandments.

Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!"
Exodus 24:3

Yet, how were they to do so? They felt that by their own will power they could do it. Did they? How long was it before the people turned away from the very first commandment? It was just a few days!

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us a god

who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."
Exodus 32:1

They could not keep the commandments, even a little, by their own will power. And the history of Israel is a record of failure to consistently keep the Lord's law. The nation which was called to represent God's law to mankind (Deuteronomy 4:5-8) instead became a demonstration of his judgment on those who do not keep it.

This was, in part, because the people fled from the very power they needed to keep the word God spoke. They fled from his voice.

And you said, "Behold, the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire; we have seen today that God speaks with man, yet he lives. Now then why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? Go near and hear all that the LORD our God says; then speak to us all that the LORD our God will speak to you, and we will hear and do it." And the LORD heard the voice of your words when you spoke to me, and the LORD said to me, "I have heard the voice of the words of this people."
Deuteronomy 5:24-28

The fire that the people feared would consume them was the fire that would empower them to walk in the way that God said. The power that frightened them away from his voice was

the energy for fueling their obedience. Was it scary? Sure. How could the presence of the Almighty God not be terrifying? Did it feel like they were in danger? Obviously. Look at their words. Was it evident that they were giving up their hope for carrying out what God was saying? Probably not. But God was testing their hearts, looking for the courage and desire in them to stay close enough to know Him. Did they want God's power or were they only interested in getting a little reinforcement of their own strength?

To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him. Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire." Deuteronomy 4:35-36

There is fire around God. There is power in his presence. It is more than we can take in, and it does bring fear upon us. Yet, this is the power we need. The fire is what our souls need to burn with passion for his law.

My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times. Psalm 119:20 (NIV)

God's voice is not the exclusive way this power is communicated to us. He has also given us his Holy Spirit, the community of believers, the faith and heritage of the church, and the transforming of our minds (Romans 12:2). Yet, from the beginning, his voice carries more than words; it brings power to obey. Listening is crucial to obedience. Without hearing, we are left severely diminished in our capacity to carry out what he says.

This has been true in my own experience. When someone instructs me in the will of God, I want to do it, but I must

struggle to find the motivation to follow through. But when, in my listening, I hear the Father speak the same thing into my spirit, I have motivation and zeal to follow. When I study the Bible and see its instructions, I have a commitment to fulfill them, but I am not always faithful to my desire. When my reading is enriched by the Father's voice within saying, "David, this is my promise for you. I will do this in your life. Receive it from me," then the obedience flows forth readily. Hearing his voice within has transformed my walk. I now find both the desire and the motivation coming stronger. His word in my spirit brings power to my soul.

It has been true in those I counsel. Before I helped people hear the voice of Jesus for themselves, I would give them the wisdom I had for their need. Usually they received this gladly, yet often they would not follow it. When they came back for another session I would learn that little had changed and they had not carried out my advice. When I began counseling with listening prayer, I asked Jesus what he wanted to say to the person and they heard his word, his instruction, his promise. This they would do, or let Jesus do in them. This brought change. It was clear that hearing his voice brought an ability and desire into the person that my own words did not. His word has power.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, And making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

Isaiah 55:10-11

Journal Entry
October 25
Philippians 3:10

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings.

Jesus, brother, I have known about you. I have followed your teaching - your recorded word, and I have kept company with your people. I have practiced the disciplines of the faith. I have experienced the characteristics - fruit of the Spirit - that it promises. Yet, I feel that I do not know you, or the Father, or the Spirit. I want to experience the heart intimacy of your presence; the power that works resurrection, the empathy in suffering with you; the joy that comes with knowing the Father and his ways. I understand that there has been a beginning: burden is prayer, power in prayer, at ease alone with you, suffering rejection; and I thank you for these. Let there be an increase, especially that I might see.

David, my friend, and whom I have made brother, I have waited for your desire to turn from serving me to knowing me. I have been gently calling you out to this, and you have been responding. I have had to deal with your fears and heal you from judgments to make your confession this morning. This has set you free even more. I am drawing you closer to myself. Do not chafe at the pace I choose.

I do what is right for each of my own, and I do it this way also for me. I treasure the careful walk, the journey. Just as a father values the steps a child makes in understanding and growing like himself, so do I value your steps, your growing. I enjoy you in the process, just as you enjoy Tim and Laurie in their growth. I do not want you to become me, but to be yourself filled with me. I want to receive from you, to know you also. I want to know you in the exchange that is a relationship. I know about you too, but as you grow I am able to bless you. Remember how I dialogue with my friends?

KNOWING AND NURTURING YOUR PERSONAL SPIRIT

God is a Spirit. They that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.

John 4: 24

May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I Thessalonians 5:23

The place where we hear the voice of God is in our spirit. Most of us are not very aware of our inner spirit and so may be undeveloped there. Learning to strengthen our spirit is essential to confident listening to God's voice.

WE ARE PEOPLE OF SPIRIT, LIKE GOD.

Our relationship with God has its source and foundation in our personal spirit. It is as spirit beings that we bear the image of God, that we are most like Him. We will hear Him and respond to Him first and most deeply in our spirit, yet, most of

us are hardly aware of our personal spirit. We try to draw close to God in our mind by thinking about His word, in our emotions by getting certain feelings, or in our will by shaping our behavior certain ways. Yet we never really get there. That is because these ways of relating follow spirit.

It is this way with human relationships also. When you are put in a classroom or office or on a team, you may work at getting along with most people, but there will be one person with whom you just connect, and that relationship flows and grows easily. You communicate easily. You readily discover common areas of interest. You sense the other's feelings accurately. That is a spirit connection. You have found someone of like spirit.

It is like this with God. He is Creator of each of us, imparting something of His Spirit into each of our spirits, so we connect with Him through our spirit. It is in that place we find the ease, commonality, and understanding we desire.

Have not your most meaningful moments with God come when you slipped out of control and suddenly found Him close? A severe illness or death in your family happens, and you know God is there. A worship song pulls deep emotions out of your heart, and in these feelings you experience His touch. As you are waking, panic tries to take over, then God covers you with His peace. These are moments when mind and will are caught off guard and spirit can reach through and find God's presence.

Journal Entry

Oct 10

Psalm 113, 114

Praise is due unto you, O Father. You are mighty, enthroned above the heavens. Your glory and power exceed that of all the gods. [The "gods" no longer have personalities and proper names, but they have characteristics and cultural names] I believe in your eternal power and final triumph. I acclaim your works in the lives of others. I am able to wish that you would act particularly for me/us, but I am tormented with doubt and so am reluctant to live boldly in expectation: Hope. I can thank you for the spiritual growth in me, and I do expect it to continue, but I am depressed of hope that you will give the sign of material blessing and of anointing power on ministry. Here I am, Father. Teach my heart to trust you in joy and in peace. (Romans 15:13)

David, David, my son, my beloved son - remember your name. I know your heart. I know your desire and your weakness and the fear that attends your weakness. I want to cause you to fear me and to serve out of my indwelling. I want to empty you of self so that my anointing fills you, not just adds to your ability.

Thank you, Father. I want this too, and I do want to walk in the path that will bring this about. Is there anything more I am to do about my circumstances?

My son; I have said that I will bring to you the place I have for you. This test is now in the waiting. I am teaching your heart to trust me and I am showing you that you can rest in me. You may follow the leads you find, for in doing so you will know how to discern my voice and my leading. Do not be anxious, but trust, rest and enjoy the way.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MY SPIRIT AND MY HEART?

We often speak of matters of our personal spirit as being in our heart. We ask Jesus “into our heart.” We love God “with all our heart.” We obey Him “from the heart.” Heart is the common term for the place of deep feeling and conviction, and that is right. But, like the word “love,” heart carries a wide range of meanings, from very shallow to very deep feelings. I want to use “personal spirit” to describe our deepest and core experience of God.

“Heart” in Scripture can be used for both our soul and our spirit. Yet it is not the same as our personal spirit. Consider Psalm 78:8, “And not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not prepare its heart, and whose spirit was not faithful to God.” I interpret “heart” in Scripture to be the part of our soul (soul being mind, will, and emotions) where our thoughts and emotions come together in agreement, and so express a conviction. Luke 6:45, “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.” We can have many thoughts, some not even our own. We can experience a range of emotions, and some of these may be influenced by others. When thoughts and

feelings come together in agreement, then they settle in our heart and form a basis for attitude, speech, and action.

My personal spirit is more primary than my heart. It is the core of who I am. It is the creating, generating source of my life. It is the self of whom my personality (in my soul) and body give expression. When the Scriptures speak of spirit in a person, they are speaking of the most intimate part of the person, that which makes one both a unique individual and abeing in the image of God. It is because we are spirit that we can meet and know God in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:23).

WHAT IS MY PERSONAL SPIRIT?

It is in my spirit that I have my life in God. It is the Spirit of God that animates life in us. Genesis 2:7, “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” (See also Psalm 104:29-30 and Job 33:4.) Adam had all the components to be human when he was fashioned by the hand of God, but he did not have life until God’s breath, His Spirit, entered. It is the gift of God’s Spirit that becomes our personal spirit and brings life. It is in your personal spirit that you have life. Death comes when the spirit departs (Psalm 104:29-30). It is because you have personal spirit that you are living.

It is in our personal spirit that God Himself meets us and dwells with us.

Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk in it.
Isaiah 42:5

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Romans 8:15-16

It is by imparting spirit to us that God made us able to relate personally and directly to Him.

We encounter many people every day. As long as we keep them in their various roles - clerk, policeman, garage attendant, driver, etc. - we do not have a personal relationship. However, when we discover, by chance word, possibly, that the person has something in common with us, we immediately enter into a relationship. We connect because something in their life is also part of ours. It is spirit that makes these connections with God. It is part of His life that is also part of me, and I have relationship.

Journal Entry
October 20

Father, I have gotten myself into a place where I am worried that I am not being obedient to you enough, that I am neglecting spiritual things that would release healing, provision, and ministry in our life. I fear that it is somehow my fault that we are not flourishing. What do you say?

My son, you are thinking the thoughts of one who hears about Me. Come into My presence and hear Me, feel my heart, know My love, see My direction. I am calling you to dwell in My presence - to quiet, solitude, listening. In My presence the other things will fall away.

IN OUR SPIRIT WE KNOW SPIRITUAL TRUTH.

But it is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding.
Job 32:8

Knowing in our spirit is more specific than finding a common ground for relationship. It is in our spirit that we know truth. In our spirit, in contrast to our mind or emotions, is where we know the truth of our salvation. Romans 10:10, "For with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, ... (note, "heart" here means spirit)., Often called assurance of salvation,

the conviction that we have crossed from death to life, that we are held forever secure in the love of God, is a sense we have in our spirit. The mind may argue it. The emotions may try to reject it, but in our spirit this truth holds fast.

But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

I Corinthians 2:14

It is in our spirit that spiritual truth makes sense, that it convicts us of its validity and power. Our mind and emotions help us to understand and apply spiritual truth, but it is in the place of our spirit that we own them. Most of us have had the experience of questioning and arguing against a spiritual truth until God “revealed” it to us and we then accept it easily. (If you ask me why God doesn’t do that immediately with all spiritual truth, I will remind you of His desire that we seek Him and grow in our knowledge of Him.)

Finally, it is in our spirit that we truly know another person. I have mentioned before that it is by our spirit that we connect intimately to another. It is also our spirit that knows when the other is being genuine. We can be fooled (mostly because something in our soul wants to be fooled) by another’s facade, but that within us which is disquieted or feels concern when another is being less than honest is our spirit. Also, it is because we are spirit and know truth there that we can trust another immediately without knowing anything about them - or fear them. (Most husbands have encountered this with their wives “feeling” about someone, to our great consternation.) This is not to say that we should disregard knowledge that comes through mind and feelings, but only to affirm that the primary place of knowing another authentically is in our spirit.

WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF MY PERSONAL SPIRIT?

I have defined personal spirit as the source of life and truth in a person. Now I want to describe the functions of spirit: what we do through our spirit. (I am indebted to John & Paula Sandford for much of this description, which they have set forth in Healing The Wounded Spirit.)

Since it is in our spirit that we know God, it is through our spirit that we relate to Him. We enter into corporate worship (praising and honoring God with other Christians) through our spirit. Because we are spirit, worship becomes meaningful and personal. We become more than observers of action, watching other people experience something. It is in our spirit that we become personally engaged in the expression and know we belong. I liken it to the “team spirit” we feel when the team we play on goes into competition. We feel more than our own emotions. We are pulled up by the corporate attitude of the team - in our spirit.

Personal devotion - worship, prayer, reading - is also a function of our spirit. We can read the Bible with our mind and get little out of it. We can pray with our emotions and feel nothing happens. Yet when our spirit is engaged, we receive truth into our inner being, and we know that we are giving something to God which He gladly receives.

Revelation from God comes to us in our spirit. When you “know” something without having processed it through the channels of reason and reflection, you have received revelation in your spirit. When you receive words of knowledge, when you see truth in dreams, you are receiving communication from God in your spirit.

It is also our personal spirit that is the source of our inspiration, vision, and creativity. These may be corrupted by our sin and brokenness, as are all our faculties, but these expressions are from our spirit. We know that these take a special kind of nurturing to develop, nurture that lets the spirit flow freely.

Since it is in our spirit that we know the truth about another person, it is from our spirit that we relate most personally with people. It is our spirit that “tunes into” another and guides us into empathetic, supportive communication. It is our spirit that welcomes another’s concern and resists their disingenuous offerings.

It is our spirit, coming from the Creator of all, that transcends self and opens us to see another for who he/she is and to feel what they feel. It is our spirit, being from the Eternal God, that allows us to transcend time, to evaluate life in more than the present moment, taking strength from good moments of our past and finding hope in the promise of the future. Because you can do this, you know you belong to eternity; you know you are spirit.

Journal Entry
February 19

Father, I am loving you . I am praising you. I am adoring you. I am submitting to you. I am enjoying you. I am receiving life. I am responding to you. I hurt. I hope. I want my desire fulfilled now. I want to wait until it matures more. I reach back to caress my past. I stretch forward with open hand to be drawn into my future.

What does my heart need to receive?

Receive all. Receive. Drink. Bask. Indulge yourself in me. Do not turn away from the flood of my passion. Do not disdain the ebb when it comes. You must have moments to breathe. There will be respite. Accept these in peace, and wait in gleeful expectation for the return of the flood.

The deepest intimacy we can know as humans is that of marital sexual union. It is in our spirit that we experience the glory of this. It is into our spirit that we receive the love and affirmation of our spouse, and it is from our spirit that we pour forth the same.

Since it is in our spirit that we have life, it is the function of our spirit to sustain health. Romans 8:11, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.” Physical

health is not just a function of the body - as numerous studies and our own observations show. A strong, vibrant spirit helps throw off disease and increases energy for living. This is why prayer is critical to healing. Prayer speaks to and strengthens the spirit.

It is also the strength of spirit within that enables a person to overcome tragedy and loss. However, circumstances may work to take away from life, it is possible to recover, to surmount this, and to prosper in life. It is not education nor heritage, not wealth nor physical ability that determines how a person overcomes. It is the strength of spirit (sometimes called strength of will) that does so.

HOW TO NURTURE YOUR PERSONAL SPIRIT.

Most of us have had little understanding of our personal spirit, so we have done little to develop ourselves in spirit. We know how to nurture mind, body, and emotions, but building up spirit has probably come only incidentally. Since it is in our spirit that we will hear the voice of God, it will serve us well to become strong and clear in spirit.

Four things that nurture us in spirit are: 1) open relationship with God; 2) rich relationships with people; 3) taking in what serves the best in us; 4) experiencing nature deeply.

Practicing an open relationship with God simply means to engage in those practices in which our spirit meets God: corporate worship and personal devotion. Our spirit is nurtured when we seek God for relationship, not for answers or healing or help. Choose to open up to the Spirit of God. Do so in formal times, like worship services, and in personal prayer times; do so also in spontaneous times, turning your attention to Him at the sight of a bird in flight; or an infant in its father's

arms, at the sound of a loved one's voice or the feel of the fresh wind in your face. A simple, "Thank you, Father," can draw from these moments a surge of life into your spirit.

Relationships with people will nurture the spirit when they are healthy and include mutual sharing. Appropriate yet lavish affection - both given and received - may be the single most important element in building up personal spirit. Being respected and receiving just discipline strengthen the spirit. We usually know when relationships are good for us, but truly good ones are essential for developing a strong and healthy personal spirit.

Taking in what serves the best in you means giving time and attention to reading, music, art, play, hobbies, etc. that enrich and expand you. The world has invented forms of each of these that are destructive to the spirit, but healthy forms are part of God's provision for our spirit life.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.
Philippians 4:8

Nature is also God's provision for nurturing our spirit. When we touch nature - long enough to sense it - the touch goes through to our spirit, stimulating and feeding it. I mean things like working in the soil with your hands, playing in the mud or working in the garden, walking barefoot on the sand and in the surf, swimming in lakes and rivers, or sitting on a log watching the stars. I do not believe that artificial nature - parks, zoos, and the like - do as much for our spirits as even a small patch of undisturbed nature where we can feel it quietly and deeply.

These suggestions are minimal, but I intend them to show you how to take in life in ways that nurture your spirit and how to provide what will nurture the spirit in others, particularly your children and grandchildren. Strengthening the personal spirit is THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE DO beyond receiving salvation in Jesus Christ. Our growth in spiritual life and true humanity depends on the health of our personal spirit. It is important to practice those things that develop this core of our being.

TESTING WHAT WE HEAR

It was the invitation we had been dreaming about. We were being invited to move to another state and join with a ministry we deeply admired. God had already reduced our lives in San Diego to a minimum and our local relationships to the barest few. This would be an opportunity to learn and grow and maybe be used in a larger way than we could see for ourselves where we were. We had already visited the area and had even found a house.

We went to listening prayer. “Lord, should we sell our house and move?” The answer we heard was, “Yes, this is my way for you.” We listened with some others. We did not get full confirmation from them, yet we still felt that the Lord’s word to us was “Go ahead,” so we did. We put the house up for sale. We cleaned out the closets and garage and had a garage sale. We waited for a buyer for the house, but none came.

For three months we waited and prayed and waited. No buyer. We asked if we were to go anyway, and to this the Lord said, “No.” Finally we took down the For Sale sign and turned our attention to building a ministry at home. When I asked the Lord what that was all about, I understood that it was a test of our willingness to sell the house we loved so much. If he had spoken in any way other than he did to our question of moving, we would not have known our own hearts and willingness to be obedient in this area. As it turned out, nine months later

Linda was diagnosed with cancer, and we knew that San Diego was the place we were to be.

What is happening when we hear wrong? Is God not clear? Do we confuse what we hear? Does God change his mind and not tell us?

I do acknowledge that we can be just plain wrong in what we think we hear from God. Because of our human frailty, our willfulness, our fears, other personal interference, and demonic intrusion, we can indeed get it wrong when we listen for the voice of God. This is no different than any other way of receiving from God. We can be wrong in our understanding of Scripture. We can misunderstand the counsel of friends. We can be confused by Christian tradition. In all of our ways of knowing God's will and character, our sin-distorted human nature can lead us astray.

I cannot say that you will never be wrong. I have been wrong. Everyone I know who does listening prayer has been wrong. Right or wrong is not really the issue. Our life in God is not determined by being right, it is a relationship with a Person, and that Person is full of mercy and grace. He is interested in developing this relationship with us, and he will use even our mistakes in doing so.

Journal Entry

May 12

My Father, I listen for your counsel totally. I would understand my present physical symptoms: tightness & extreme weakness/weariness. Yet, even more would I hear your word to me as you would speak.

My son, when you see little happening, you look for the cause in you and also for what you can do to remedy it. I am the cause. I am the remedy. Cease striving and know that I am God.

Your inner drive mechanism checks all systems, over and over again. You seek for something to do to get under way again.

Can you compel the wind? Can you stir up the seas? Would you stare at the sails and have them fill? Will you affect anything by standing watch at the wheel?

Yours is not a power ship but a sailing vessel. When the wind is low and the seas calm, it takes no effort to continue in the way. Let me captain the vessel, and trust me to sound the call to work.

We tend to be problem oriented with God, but he is relationship oriented. We focus more on getting directions while he wants us to experience his love. This can cause us to be off in what we hear from God. When Linda would ask,

“Can we go out to dinner tonight?” I would immediately go into problem solving: Where will we go? Do I have the money to pay for it? If not, is there a way I can get some extra money now? When do we need to leave? What needs to be done before we go? Can I fit in any errands on the way?” What did I miss here? I missed her heart. I did not read that she was desiring some special time with me, for conversation, for feeling our togetherness. I did not leap in to say, “O, dear, I would love to take some special time with you. I have been thinking all day about how to get out. I have an idea. Would you like to go there?”

It is like this when we go to God with our problem. His heart has been waiting for some special time with us but we jump immediately to how-to-get-it-done questions. In the example of going out to dinner with Linda, sometimes I blew it completely by not reading her heart and we didn’t even go. I got right answers to my questions, but the wrong answer about her heart. Sometimes when I “get it wrong” from God, it is just that I have taken in facts when he was communicating feelings. I interpret the facts as an answer when really they were just clues to keep seeking his heart.

I find also that God sometimes lets me get it wrong so he can reveal a better way later. Once I was given just a few hours notice for a talk. I thought the group would be small and made up of people interested in how to counsel with listening prayer. I quickly asked the Lord what I should teach and I thought I heard, “Just go through the booklet on counseling a friend.” “Good,” I said, “I can do that.” When I got to the place for my teaching I found a much larger group and of different make up than I expected. I knew that what I had planned to do was not appropriate, so again I asked, “What now, Father?” “Just listen to me and share how you do this,” was the reply. That was God’s voice. For when I started, the talk went smoothly and right to the heart of their needs. What I thought I heard

earlier was not the Lord but my own voice telling me what would make me feel secure. The Lord did not interrupt, I believe, because he wanted me to be in the position I was in with the group: utterly relying on Him in that moment.

This is not so much a case of being wrong, as I see it, as a case of the Father keeping my mind quiet and my heart secure while he prepares to do a better thing. It is like a parent letting a child think he knows where they are going so as to not spoil the surprise when they get someplace better. Is this a trick by God? Not to me. It is dealing with us at the level that best suits us.

June 9

Father, thank you for the stirrings in my heart of love for you, desire for you, longing for more of you. Increase these stirrings. They are my joy and peace now.

I do not feel burdened or anxious nor am I thinking of what I want to say. It seems that I should be though. What should I do in preparation for these coming days?

Rest in Me. Wait. In time I will show you what to say. Your planning is a way of control and protecting the others. Let me be in control. Let me judge as I will. All is well. I love you.

We can make wrong assumptions about timing. A well-known brother who is recognized for his prophetic gifting heard the Lord say one day that the man would receive a visitation in July. He waited expectantly during the next July and nothing happened. He wondered if he had heard wrong. The next July came and went with nothing. The third year in July he did receive a visitation from God. It is quite natural for us to attach our time frame to what we hear and think we have missed God when the thing does not come about. But God is not limited to our time frame, nor our way of counting time. The Scriptures are full of examples of God promising things that come to pass long after the hearers thought the time had ended. God's time is also more governed by "fullness" than by chronology. The fullness of time, in the Bible, refers to when all things are in place. The factors that make ready fullness are dependent on events and obedience, as well as God's wisdom. We cannot assume that we have the same time that God does. When what we heard does not come to pass when we expected, we can go back to the Father and ask why, or what else we need to know before he can fulfill the word.

Sometimes we miss what the Lord means when he speaks to us because we are not seeing a big enough picture. When I come to God, it is myself and my needs that concern me. Even when it is another person or group or nation that I am asking about, it is my own involvement with these others that motivates me. I receive his answers in terms of my need or my understanding. Yet, he might be describing something much bigger. He is probably only giving me a small part of the work he is doing. If I run too fast with my part I may miss his meaning. We were once given an opportunity to participate in a large conference in another city, but doing so meant giving up an event in San Diego that had been a mainstay of our ministry. We asked other members of our team to join us in listening. I heard that we were supposed to give up our event and accept this invitation. Other team members heard words about how the

Lord was going to use this to extend our ministry and how he was going to impact nations with listening to the voice of God. I was glad to have these team members listening with me, or I would not have gone with full perspective, full confidence, and full faith. I would have been less than right.

Journal Entry
September 15

Father, I want your word, whether rebuke or change or revelation.

My son, be joyful in what I am doing. I am working your heart. I would have you heart to heart with me. Just as when cheek to cheek with a loved one much is said, much felt, identity formed, so is heart to heart with me.

There is pain and sorrow at what has been and what must be. Yet, there is security and comfort sharing it. There is promise and hope of what will be, with joy overflowing. It is the touch of the Eternal Now, when all is real in the present. Here you are in the present and so real.

Heart to heart with me is time. It is solitude. It is being with others. For you, it is not in choosing to pay appropriate attention to another, rather being always attentive to me, feeling my heart. This will draw your attention to my heart in, and for, the other.

Stay true to me only; to what I am doing in you. The measure is not the expectation or needs of

others, nor the potential you have in my Kingdom. The only measure is the beat of my heart; feeling it. You are near my heart. Your moments of truth come from there. Your moments of compromise draw you back. The times you reveal my heart open a window of truth for others. The times you are turned away let people press in for themselves. Your blindness, your failure is no loss to me. I use it all.

Rejoice and bless my name, my ability, my healing for each one. You are to fulfill no one else's expectation or need. You are the fulfillment of my desire for you.

Our own experience, mind, and emotions will influence what we hear. You can count on it. The Father is a Person eager to build a relationship with us. You and I are persons too. We bring our full selves into this relationship building with the Father and our self will affect it. That is natural, and it is good. No one wants a relationship with a being without personality. Does this mean that we are not hearing the voice of God but our own? God's promise that he will speak to us remains, and we can continue to expect to hear Him, and know that it is Him. However, when we become aware that our own needs and priorities have shaped our hearing more than simply taking Jesus' word, we can still take heart.

The thing you want to hear from God is not bad. If it is your own need and you are hearing according to this, God is not going to punish you. God is the one who gave you needs and desires (most of them, anyway). He wants to honor you as you are. When a child brings a strong self-driven request to a parent, the loving parent does not dismiss her abruptly because

the request is inappropriate. The parent tries to accommodate the need in a way that will work. Or, the parent gives an answer that helps the child understand why it cannot be done now. God is a good heavenly Father who wants to give good gifts to his children (Matthew 7:11). He will honor your need and help you see it in his perspective.

I was once desperate to find a job so that we could support ourselves. I kept asking God how and where I should look for work. My own desperation was getting in the way of being able to hear clearly. I was afraid that if I didn't get it right I would miss the job he had for me. When I came to Him, it was more like I was pressuring Him to give me an answer than like a friend who trusts that he will be cared for. One day I heard, "You do it right, you do it wrong, it's all the same to me." I took that to mean, if I misunderstood God's word and made a mistake, he would work that mistake into his plan for me. If I understood correctly, he would use that also. He could do it either way just as well. I relaxed, moved out with what I thought I was hearing, and God did take care of us. That particular day I had enough freedom to hear Him say, "Take the day off (from looking)." I did and had a nice day.

Can we influence what we hear in a negative way also? I said above that our own needs and desires can affect what we hear, but God will still take care of us. What happens when our fear, revenge, or bitterness affects what we hear? What does it mean when we think we are hearing words of rebuke against ourselves or judgment of another? Let me say that surely the Lord does rebuke and correct his children (Hebrews 12:7). He may indeed speak words to us that challenge our attitude or behavior. He may allow us to know something of his anger at another person's sin or a nation's behavior. Yet our own sin-driven demands on ourselves or others can distort what we hear. God's judgments are always true and righteous (Deuteronomy 32:4). His wrath is always directed at that

which distorts his work. It comes with the burning desire to bring not punishment but salvation. Our hearing will carry this hope when it is Him. When it is our own heart or Satan's voice, the condemnation sounds final. We need to thoroughly test what we hear of judgment so we are receiving his ways and not pushing our own. This is an area where we do need to be familiar with the Bible so that we understand the ways God speaks and acts in judgment.

People who hear the voice of God have been wrong in crucial areas. Linda and I heard answers that did not go as we thought and ended in desperate conclusions. Being wrong in what we hear can have serious consequences. Yet nothing can pull us out of the Father's love and care (Romans 8:38-39). He will turn serious consequences into good for his Kingdom and for those who trust Him. I say again, listening is not about getting life right. It is about staying in relationship with the Father. When our needs, our fears, our rebellion, our stubbornness, our confusion get in the way, he still works all things together for good (Romans 8:28).

Because we have chosen to trust these principles from Romans 8, we have seen every word we heard from God do us good and open the ways of the Kingdom to others. We have had to wait for further words or for events to make things more clear. We have had to trust that people who have been hurt by our mistakes will find their way to God for restoration. We have learned to see life more from God's perspective and his Eternal dimension. We know Him to be utterly faithful, and in dialogue with Him, we have the privilege of sons and daughters to know his heart more. It has always worth the risk.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Hearing the voice of God is stimulation to your spirit. Hearing the voice of God is power to your soul. Hearing the voice of God is life to your body. Hearing the voice of God is vital to a full and effective Christian life.

Dialogue with God is your right as a son or daughter. It is your privilege as the beloved. Conversation with Jesus deepens intimacy with Him. Listening to His voice opens His heart to you.

It has been my purpose in this book to encourage you to enter into dialogue with God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Hearing from God is not reserved for patriarchs, prophets, and apostles of the Bible. It is not a special gift for certain spiritual types. It is the natural experience of every child, the expectation of every sheep.

God speaks to us so that we can follow Him. His laws and decrees reveal how we are to follow, but it is His voice that empowers us to do so. Jesus talks with us so that we will receive His love. His gifts in creation and His blessings on our lives show His love for us, but listening to His voice brings His love into our hearts.

Hearing from God and responding in dialogue is for relationship with Him. This is the key that releases us into

dialogue. When we come to Him in the simple confidence that a child has coming to His father, we will find ourselves welcomed and able to hear His voice. When we trust the words of love we sense in our spirit, we open the way for more to flow. Now we can respond, with a, “Thank you, Father,” or “Tell me more,” or “Why are you saying this to me?”

When you respond to the words you hear, continue to listen. God wants to say more. He wants to draw you closer to His heart. He wants to declare to you His ways (Psalm 25:14). Hearing from God is simply engaging in a dialogue just as you do with a person whom you love.

It may not come easy to you. Even natural abilities have to be developed, and sometimes we stumble a lot or feel very awkward when doing so. Try, and keep on trying. When you hear a word, jot it down. It will become a valued entry in your prayer journal. When you sense an instruction, act on it, asking the Lord to show you how He wants you to do so. When you feel a prompting toward God, express it right then, and listen for His response to you.

When you are unsure that you are hearing from God, tell Him. Ask, “Lord, is this you speaking to me?” Wait for His answer. Or carry on the conversation you are hearing. Even though it may seem like you are answering yourself, His promise is that if you seek Him, you will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13). If you write the dialogue you can read it another time and discern where you were hearing His voice.

When you are hearing something that invites you to action, show God your intention to obey. I find that clear certainty follows obedience; it does not precede it. Remember, God is seeking relationship with you, not trying to get you to do things. Relationship involves taking initiative, showing a

desire to fulfill what the other is asking. God waits for us to move before showing that His hand is there for us.

When the action you are being instructed to take pushes you beyond the familiar or comfortable, and obeying God will always take us there eventually, ask Him what confirmation you should seek. The God who sent Aaron to Moses and answered Gideon's request for a sign will not leave you stranded. If the action means dramatic change for other people, invite them to listen to God with you. God wants to draw them closer in relationship to Himself through this also, and their dialogue is part of doing so.

Hearing from God is not a formula for better living. It is not a strategy for getting things done. It is sons and daughters loving and growing in relationship with the Father. You will risk doing things that you have not done before, just as when growing up you risked new things at your parents' urging. Just as their urging included the promise of being with you while you tried (at least healthy parents do so), so you will hear your heavenly Father promise to be with you (see Exodus 33:14, in context). Look and listen for the power to obey in His voice. This is what you rely on, not some pressure insisting that you "Do it now!"

In my experience I have encountered two basic attitudes against personally hearing the voice of God. One is that the Bible is enough and if we simply do what it says we will live well and know all that we need to about God. But, the Word of God is not a book, He is a person (John 1:1). He is Jesus. From the beginning, God did not set us up to have a relationship with a book nor a code. He made us for relationship with Himself. The writings we have in the Bible, and they are the true and trustworthy words of God, are there to lead us into relationship with Him. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in

various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,” Hebrews 1:1-2. “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!” Mark 9:7. We dare not let the words of a book substitute for a living relationship with God Himself. The Bible is vital to a healthy relationship with God and to understanding His words to us. It is our invitation to come as sons and daughters and know the Father, and hear His voice.

There is associated with this attitude a fear that listening will lead us astray and the Bible will keep us on the right path. I agree that the Bible is given to teach us the truth about God and His ways. I read it to know this. I teach it so that others can understand it well. However, it is not the Bible that is our guide, it is the Holy Spirit. “When he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth,” John 16:13. It is the Holy Spirit whom we must trust to keep us in the way, and to keep others in the way.

It is not listening that leads us astray. It is arrogance, deception, isolation from the body of Christ, stubbornness, believing the lies of the enemy, etc. These are in us because of our sinful hearts, and they will affect any way we try to know and follow God. Letting the Holy Spirit examine and convict our hearts will open us to His truth from every source He is communicating. “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,” Psalm 139:23-24.

The second basic objection I encounter sounds like this: “You know, _____? Well he/she is always saying, ‘God told me this,’ and won’t listen to anyone else. The stuff he/she gets into, or the ways she/he won’t cooperate because she/he hasn’t heard from God, drive me crazy.” We find people like this offensive, to ourselves and also to others. We do not want to be offensive ourselves, nor do we believe in the kinds of things

their “listening” leads them into. So, we stick to our safe, proven ways of knowing God’s will.

I grieve deeply when people do damage to themselves, their families, others, and the church based on what they have supposedly heard from God. I cringe when I read an account of someone who has acted violently and says, “God told me to do it.” I have to check my resentment when I feel that someone is making an excuse for not being involved by claiming that God has not spoken to them about it. I am dismayed by teachers who lead people astray with the claim that they have heard some special word from God. And I used to be one who let this resentment block me from listening for His voice myself.

But I will not do so any longer. His voice is too precious to me to let those who misuse the privilege deter me. The confidence I have in my obedience has been too much strengthened to depend solely on other means of knowing His will. The understanding of His ways through His words to my spirit is too rich to drop just because I might hear incorrectly.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, a church which indulged in many excesses with spiritual gifts and practices, Paul said,

I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in Him you have been enriched in every way - in all your speaking and in all your knowledge - because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ***He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** God, who has called you into

fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
is faithful.
I Corinthians 1:3-9, emphasis mine.

He then went on to correct them in some of their excesses. When we discern excesses, by the clear word of Scripture and insight from the Holy Spirit, we are to correct them where we can. But we dare not use these as an excuse for failing to pursue a deeper relationship with God and more obedience for ourselves.

It will happen that you will try listening and not hear Him. I have people say to me, “You make it sound so easy, but I just don’t hear anything.” I believe that hearing God’s voice is simple, that is, not complicated nor requiring sophistication, but it is not easy. Walking and talking were not easy when we first learned them. Yet, the effort to practice came readily and we now “do it naturally.” If you do not hear His voice, I encourage you to practice. And just like developing these natural abilities, trying too hard can get in the way. Do not try to hear His voice. Set your heart on receiving His love and reach toward Him with your spirit. Cock your spiritual ears toward His mouth. Catch whatever you sense coming from Him.

When Emil said to me, “David, I think you should be a pastor,” it was not the first time I heard that. The idea had come to me before. God had whispered it into my spirit, but I did not recognize that it was Him. In Emil’s strong voice I heard Him and I was moved to respond. When you listen deliberately, like I am encouraging you to do, you will realize that much of what He speaks He has already whispered to you. He has been speaking. You have been hearing. Now you can move into dialogue. Now you can live as friend instead of servant (John 15:15). Do not stop yourself because of what you can’t hear. Grasp what you do hear. Accept what you have heard as His

personal conversation with you. Respond from your own heart. He is waiting to hear.

Journal Entry

May 9

Father, what do you have prepared for me?

My son, you do not know how much I love you, how much I have for you. I have prepared Eternity for us. There you will find fullness which you cannot even imagine until you receive it. Fullness flows into you now, too. It is but a trickle of what is flowing in Eternity. Yet this trickle is for you, to refresh you, entice you, invite you. The work of the elixir increases your capacity for fullness. It enlarges your desires and your spirit to hold fullness.

The gravity of this world restrains desire and pulls against hope. This is necessary now for stability. It is not so in Eternity. There you soar unbounded.

Revel now. Even when gravity pulls against your spirit or causes you to waver or fall. The ground is not your destiny, but the limitless sky of Eternity. Accept desire. Allow the burning. Yield the things of the past, both the holy and the profane, as sacrifices of kindling to the fire. I will burn as desire in you. I will burn as holiness in you. Flesh is consumed. Spirit lives.