

RANSOMED
HEART
ministries

April 2007

Dear Friends,

I was reading this week in chapter ten of the Gospel of John. Listen to the offer:

The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice (2-4).

We are invited to become followers of Christ. Not just believers in Christ. *Followers* of Christ. There is a difference. Jesus leads, we follow, *because we hear his voice*. I know that many Christians have never been taught how to hear the voice of God. Some have even been taught that we can't hear the voice of God. But Jesus says we do.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me (Rev 3:20).

Who is the offer for? "Anyone." That would include you. What does Jesus say will happen? "Hears my voice." As in, hear his voice. Now, I know, I know – the prevailing belief is that God *only* speaks to his people through the Bible. And let me make this clear: He does speak to us first and foremost through the Bible. That is the basis for our relationship. The Bible is the eternal and unchanging word of God to us. We know right off the bat that any other supposed revelation from God that contradicts the Bible is not to be trusted. So, I am not minimizing in any way the authority of the Scripture or the fact that God speaks to us through the Bible.

But many Christians believe that God *only* speaks to us through the Bible. The irony of that belief is, that's not what the Bible says. Consider John 10 and Revelation 3.

The Bible is *filled* with stories of God talking to his people. Abraham. Moses. David. Gideon. Noah. And lesser characters like Hagar, and a disciple simply called Ananias who gets a few paragraphs in Acts 17. Now, if God doesn't *also* speak to us, why would he have given us hundreds of stories of him speaking to others? "Look – here are inspiring and hopeful stories how God spoke to his people. Isn't it amazing?! But he doesn't speak like that anymore." That makes no sense at all. The Bible is not a book of exceptions. It is a book of *examples* of what it looks like to walk with God.

Learning to hear the voice of God is such a beautiful thing, and so essential to becoming a follower of Christ. As Jesus himself said. Now, like anything that really matters, it takes time and practice. To help you on your way, let me offer a few thoughts.

Step One in learning to listen to the voice of God is, *Ask simple questions*. You cannot start with huge and urgent questions like, "Should I marry Ted?" or "Do you want me to sell the family business tomorrow?" or "Do I have lung cancer?" (paranoia rarely enables me to hear God's voice). That's like learning to play the piano by starting with Mozart, learning to ski by doing double black diamonds.

There is way too much emotion involved, too much swirling around in our heads. I find that to hear the voice of God, we must be in a posture of quiet surrender. As we grow in our personal holiness, we can be quiet and surrendered even in the major questions. But that takes time and maturity.

Don't ask that of yourself as you are starting out. Begin with simple questions. I can sit quietly with the question, *What do you want for this weekend? Should we go to the ranch, or stay home?* It's not a life and death matter. I am not desperately hoping to hear what I secretly want to hear. What I'll do is sit with the question before God for several minutes. To help me stay present to God and not begin to wander I will repeat the question quietly in my heart. *God – do you want us to go to the ranch, or stay home?* I am settling myself before God. *Do you want us to go, or stay home?*

Next, am I willing to hear whatever it is God wants to say? That is critical. If I can only hear a "Yes," then I am not in a posture of surrender to God's will, and it will be hard for me to hear him at all. Or to trust what I do hear, especially if it is "Yes." There is no more decisive issue when it comes to hearing the voice of God than the issue of surrender. Which is beautiful, really. We are drawn to God in search of guidance, but we come away with a deeper holiness because we are learning surrender. Sometimes I will even say, as I am listening, *Lord – I will accept whatever it is you want to say to me.* It helps me bring my soul to a posture of surrender.

Now, if I don't seem to be getting clarity on the matter, sometimes what I will do is "try on" one answer, and then the other. Still in a posture of quiet surrender, I will ask the Lord, *Is it Yes, you want us to go?* Pause. In my heart, I am trying it on, letting it be as though this is God's answer. *We should go?* Pause, and listen. *Or is it, No, you want us to stay home?* Pause, and let this be his answer. Try it on. *We should stay home?* Pause, and listen. By "trying on" the possible answers, I find it enables me to come into alignment with his Spirit. And, it enables me to hear a simple *Yes* or *No*.

By the way, I heard, *Yes – go. It will be good.* It was.

If we will enter into a conversational intimacy with Christ, we will say with David, "You have made known to me the path of life" (Psalm 16:11). I can't tell you the number of times he's rescued me. *Don't send that email. Don't go to Dallas. Call your mother.* After all, he is the Shepherd. We, the sheep. His is to lead, and ours is to follow. If you want to learn more about hearing God's voice, I think Dallas Willard's book *Hearing God* is really good. We also have a CD called, *Developing a Conversational Intimacy with God*. You can find it on our website, along with lots of other resources designed to help you walk with God.

In his love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'John' written in a cursive, flowing style.

John