

HEARING GOD

DISCERNING HIS VOICE (PART 2)

LIFE GROUP STUDY • WEEK 8

WEEK OF MARCH 10



READING ASSIGNMENT

Hearing God by Dallas Willard – pages 221b-232a; and *The Perfect Will of God* by G. Campbell Morgan (PDF)



GETTING STARTED

This weekend, we continued our series, *Hearing God*, by focusing on the topic of discernment.

As you begin this study, spend a few minutes reflecting on the *qualities* and the *impact* of God's voice. As you read this Psalm, ask the Holy Spirit to help you recognize when God is speaking to you—in whatever way the message may come.

The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. Psalm 19:7-9



STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Over the last two weekends, Michael introduced seven key questions that can help us discern God's voice in our lives. Which of these questions have you found to be the most helpful or insightful? How so?

- *The Message... Does It Align With Scripture?*
- *Spiritual Intuition... Do I Have Peace About This?*
- *The Qualities... What Are Its Characteristics*
- *Staying Power... Does It Last?*
- *Repetition... Does It Reoccur?*
- *Confirmation... Are There Multiple Sources?*
- *Success... Does It Work?*

2. Michael taught about the qualities of God's voice and how we can discern the difference between God's voice and the voice of the enemy. Refer to the chart in your message notes and pay attention to the effect that each voice has on us.

- a. Have you ever experienced confusion when it comes to discerning God's voice versus the enemy's voice? If so, explain
- b. How have you learned to discern the difference between the enemy's voice and God's voice?

3. Beginning on page 227 of *Hearing God*, Dallas Willard describes three factors of God's voice:

- *The Weight of Authority*
- *The Spirit of God's Voice*
- *Content*

a. Regarding the “*weight of authority*,” Willard quotes E. Stanley Jones on page 229:

The voice of the subconscious argues with you, tries to convince you; but the inner voice of God does not argue, does not try to convince you. It just speaks, and it is self-authenticating. It has the feel of the voice of God within it.

When God speaks there is a sense of weight or authority or gravitas. Have you experienced this “weight” when God speaks in your life?

b. Regarding the “*spirit of God's voice*,” Willard writes on page 230:

The voice of God speaking in our souls also bears within itself a characteristic spirit. It is a spirit of exalted peacefulness and confidence, of joy, of sweet reasonableness and of goodwill. His voice is not the voice of a bully. It will not run over you and your will. It is, in short, the spirit of Jesus, and by that phrase I refer to the overall tone and internal dynamics of his personal life as a whole.

If you were trying to explain to a friend what the “spirit” of God's voice was like, what would you say based on your own personal experience?

c. Regarding the “*content*” of God's voice, Willard writes on page 231:

The content of a word that is truly from God will always conform to and be consistent with the truths about God's nature and kingdom that are made clear in the Bible.

Have you ever experienced Scripture protecting you from misinterpreting or misunderstanding God's voice in your life? If so, explain.

4. When it comes to hearing God, the Scriptures are full of examples of people who sought God and were led by His voice. King David often inquired of the Lord for direction and wisdom, and we can still learn from his example today. Read 1 Samuel 23:1-14.

- How many times did David inquire of the Lord in this passage?
- What were the circumstances in David's life that prompted him to repeatedly inquire of the Lord?
- How did God show His faithfulness to David in verse 14? How does David's example of listening and following God's voice encourage you personally?

5. According to G. Campbell Morgan in *The Perfect Will of God*, there are three factors we need to take into consideration to help us discern the will of God:

- *The Word of God*
- *The Illumination of the Spirit*
- *The Combination of Circumstances*

How have you seen all these three factors working together to reveal God's will in your own life?

6. Take a moment and quickly review the seven key questions (see #1 above). What steps can you take to get into a regular practice of using these questions to help you discern God's voice in your life?

7. Hearing God takes practice. When it comes to asking the Lord for wisdom or direction in your life, is it something you do on a regular basis, or only when certain circumstances arise? How might God be challenging you to grow in this?

EPILOGUE

All life's urgency is concentrated on the present moment. to-day is all that we possess. Yesterday has passed from us. To-morrow is not ours. God's time for His people is indicated by the two words "now" and "to-day." Our study, therefore, of the subject of the Will of God is of practical and immediate importance in its bearing on the interests of the present. If we remember "all the way which the Lord our God hath led us," it is only in order that, taking warning from our failures, and deriving encouragement from the unfailing faithfulness of God, we may "forget the things that are behind" in our devotion to present duty. If we contemplate the coming glory, it is only that its light may be a source of inspiration to us as we "run with patience the race that is set before us." The Will of God is the supreme subject in every life. The Old and New Testaments alike testify to its importance. Within that Will man finds perfection, pleasure, permanence. It is practicable because of its nature, its revelation, and the fact of its being accompanied with the gift of life, which makes it possible to obey. It is glorious, indeed, for heaven itself lies within the compass of its thought. There remains one subject of immediate practical moment. How may we know the Will of God for to-day, in all the details of the hours as they come and go; and how may we discover it in any crises that may arise?

Two preliminary conditions must be fulfilled, those,

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namely, of desire and devotion. The desire must amount to readiness to obey. The devotion must be of that practical nature that seeks to know and at all cost follows to do. These conditions being fulfilled, light may be expected in three ways:

From the Word of God.

From the immediate illumination of the indwelling Spirit.

From the combination of circumstances.

Let us examine these separately, and then in their inter-relation.

I. The Three Indications.

(1) The Word of God. For the most part, the Bible does not lay down rules of human conduct; it enunciates principles. There are exceptions to be found, arising out of some local circumstances that demanded clear and explicit statement of duty. But as the Bible is a Book for all time and habits and manners change, the framing of rules, which must necessarily change with change of local conditions, would have defeated the high end in view. The enunciation of principles, on the other hand, which never change with changing circumstances, calls forth on the part of man, in every successive generation, his reasoning and reflective powers, and answers the purpose of righteousness.

In coming to the Word of God, therefore, for understanding of the Will of God, we are not to search

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for texts to defend private judgments. Nor are we, on the other hand, to play tricks with the Bible, in order to discover accidental messages to help us in forming judgments. We are regularly, and devotionally, and intelligently, to study, in order that we may discover the revelation of principles. Where this is done as a habit of the life, the mind will act under the power of these principles, and the conclusions arrived at will be in harmony with the intention of God.

(2) The Illumination of the Spirit. The doctrine of the inner light is not sufficiently taught. To the individual believer, who is, by the very fact of relationship to Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, there is granted the direct impression of the Spirit of God on the spirit of man, imparting the knowledge of His Will in matters of the smallest and greatest importance. This has to be sought and waited for. It is at this point that it may be well for the seeker to take counsel with some fellow-Christian, who in prayer and conversation may be enabled to throw light upon the problem.

It should, however, be remembered that others can only give testimony as to their view of the problem suggested. Such testimony is of great value. It cannot, however, be final, and should only be given as contributing thought, which may aid in solution. No Spirit-taught man or woman will pretend to be able to decide for a second person. Each must at last, having received help, it may be, from conference with other Christians, pass into some place of utter loneliness,

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where only the voice of the Spirit is heard. To such waiting, a clear and definite answer must come.

(3) The Combination of Circumstances. In the fact of the Divine government, this may be spoken of as the opening and shutting of doors. There is no room for doubt that God does, in infinite wisdom and power, manipulate the facts and details of all human lives, in such a way as to make "all things work together for good to them that love God." The open door does not necessarily mean the easy pathway. This is a common mistake. One has often heard persons say the way is made plain, and by "plain" they mean easy. And yet, those who know most of the immediate government of God, will confess that the most plain pathway has often been the most difficult.

The open door is an opportunity created, which is in harmony with the principles of the Divine government as declared in Scripture, and the desire for which has been created in that fellowship with God into which no other interest has been allowed to enter. This is a most solemn consideration, and needs the severest caution. There is no realm of human life into which the enemy more successfully passes, and in which he works more destruction, than that of motive. Desires based upon motives other than the highest will often discover open doors which are quite other than those which God would open.

II. The Threefold Indication.

The value of the three indications dealt with, lies in the fact that not in any one of them is to be discovered the warrant for action, but in their combination.

(1) With regard to the Word of God, many principles of action therein recognized are not meant for all men at all times. There must also be the inner light and the open door.

(2) With regard to the leading of the Spirit, it cannot be too constantly reaffirmed that such leading is never contradictory to the truth of Scripture. There is so much idle talk to-day about the leading of the Lord, that at this point one would desire to speak most strongly and solemnly. Some awful instances of gross immorality have resulted from people following what they imagined to be the guidance of the Holy Spirit, even though the action was in direct disobedience to the most emphatic statements and requirements of the law of God. This is blasphemy of the worst kind. Whenever, therefore, it is supposed that the Spirit is leading, it is of the gravest importance that such leading should be tested by the principles of the Word.

And again, the Spirit never leads without opening the doors sooner or later. There may have been the waiting of long discipline-and abiding in the Will of God means rejoicing in all such discipline-and patient waiting for His opening of the door, even when the light is clearly shining as to the Spirit's ultimate

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intention.

(3) The open door that necessitates departure from Scriptural teaching is the work of the devil; and no matter how remarkable the success that appears to follow efforts ostensibly made in the interests of the kingdom of God, if the base of operation is not loyalty to the revealed Will of God in Holy Scripture, the fabric erected is but “hay, wood, stubble,” to be destroyed in the cleansing fire at last.

And yet again, the open door, in harmony with the principles of Scripture, is not to be entered, save as a personal call is heard, and one is able to say, I do this because I have the witness of God’s Spirit with my spirit that He so wills it.

Thus to summarize. We have ever the threefold test, which is invaluable as to everyday details, and in the crises of life; the truth of God, contained in the Word of God; the purpose of God indicated by the Spirit of God; the government of God exhibited in the opening of doors by God.

One perpetual condition remains, that of obedience. This word, it will be seen, is not here lightly used. It presupposes a desire to know and to do, expressing itself in devotion to seek and to obey. Such obedience will ever be based on the perfect confidence of the spirit of man in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

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Where this confidence exists, the obedience will be unquestioning, immediate, complete.

The tendency of the age is to softness. Some may read this final message, and turning from it say, This is not easy. Easy! When did Christ suggest ease to men in the method of their own making? Did He not solemnly warn those who would follow Him to count the cost, and indicate that the pathway of His footprints necessitated the denial of self and the taking of the Cross? If the perfection of character, and pleasure of life, and permanence of being for which we profess to be desirous, are ever to be realized, it will be by strenuous action; time, thought, energy, are all, necessary.

Let the end be as the beginning. There is but one thing that matters. It is that God's Will should be done. To that end let every one cast sloth away, and, "girding up the loins of the mind, be sober and set the hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." The ultimate issue will be perfect compensation for all the toil of the pathway that leads thereto.