

HEARING GOD'S VOICE

Introduction

Psalms 19:1-4a

¹The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. ²Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. ³There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

Syllabus:

The class you are about to participate in may be a little different than others you have attended. Your facilitator should not be considered as a “sage on stage”, but rather, a “guide on the side”. The success you have in ‘hearing God’s voice’ will be more dependant on your own level of involvement and participation in the process than on any insight your teacher might have to offer.

This will be an experiential class. If you have the patience and will take the time to draw near unto the heart of God, you WILL hear Him speak to you. God WANTS to speak to you. After all, if He did not want to be known, if He did not want to be intimately involved in your life, what hope would any of us have of hearing God?

To be experiential, the class will be structured as follows:

Percent	Activity
20%	Weekly attendance and participation
20%	Expository study of the Book of Jeremiah, journaling*
20%	Word study on “Heart”, journaling*
20%	<u>Hearing God’s Voice</u> , by Henry and Richard Blackaby, journaling*
20%	Paper* to be turned in near the end of the class summarizing your reflections and experience in hearing God’s voice throughout this course of study. Include a discussion of God’s methods of speaking to you, what He said, and the context in which he spoke.

* A Comment on the Benefits of Journaling: It is not uncommon to anthropomorphize God – that is, attempt to apply human characteristics to God – which is to limit who God is. In short, men attempt to ‘create God in *man’s image*’. So, when you think of how God might speak we imagine He is limited to the methodologies that men apply when speaking to one another. However, we know that “*My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord*”. [Isaiah 55:8-9] This verse has very broad application and includes how God chooses to speak to men and women.

It seems likely that one of the obstacles to hearing God’s voice is the busyness of life. Scripture tells us that the ‘examined life’ is a worthy



undertaking [1. Cor. 11:28; Gal. 6:3-6]. To *slow down*, taking time to reflect and listen for God's voice represents a spiritual discipline that may be lacking in many Christian lives.

One method to bring this discipline into your life is to journal your interaction with scripture, prayer, study of books by Christian authors, and reflecting upon and writing down 'chapters in your life story'. These disciplines will facilitate examination of your life, reflection on God's already present action in your life, and sensitize your hearing, giving you 'ears to hear' [Mt. 11:15].

The exercises (noted above) are a filter through which God will pull you to test your mettle. How serious are you in your desire to hear God's voice? Are you willing to bring spiritual disciplines into your life that heretofore have not been a part of your Christian experience?

These exercises (including journaling) – spiritual disciplines – are of course voluntary. But they will likely prove helpful in "*Hearing God's Voice*".

You may want to purchase a journal or some type of notebook where you can record your experiences from the disciplines you add into your life as you seek to hear God speak to you.

Each week you will have an expository reading assignment, a word study reading assignment, and a chapter from Hearing God's Voice by Henry and Richard Blackaby. You will find that this private study will contribute greatly to your drawing close to God's heart, and in building a relationship with Him. This represents a significant portion of the *experiential component* of this class. Plan to share your discoveries at the opening of each class. We will be able to learn a great deal from each other.

Look at the end of each Lesson to identify the exercises for the following week.

Class Objective:

Hearing God's voice does not call upon special techniques, but rather, is a natural outcome of a *relationship* with God. You may prefer that learning how to hear God's voice did depend on a technique, or set of techniques. If this were so you could simply acquire the knowledge, learn the skills, and quickly achieve your goal. You would then be done and could move on.

However, building a relationship with God is not built upon a library of techniques – relationships are derived from the *heart*. Relationships take time to develop. Relationships need to be nurtured. Relationships need to be passionately pursued. Relationships require constant attention or they begin to disintegrate. Think in these terms as you listen for God's voice.

Strangers do not really have all that much to say to each other. Close, intimate friends, on the other hand, those with a vibrant and growing relationship seem to always have something to talk about. Talking, and listening, just seem to come naturally to close friends.

How well do you know the Savior of your soul . . . really? Would you characterize your relationship with Christ as that of a ‘friend’? [Jn. 15:14-15]. The better two individuals know each other the more they have to say to each other and the better they understand each other.

Hearing God’s Voice is intended to equip you to passionately pursue a relationship (friendship) with your Heavenly Father so that hearing God’s voice is a natural outcome (an overflow, if you will) of your proximity to God’s heart!

An Important Closing Point From Your Teacher

Caution shines her penetrating light. *“The words you speak directs the thinking of your listener and creates in their minds a whole string of ‘logical conclusions’ derived from the premise you present. Be careful with your words, my son.”*

As a student, never loose sight of the fact that you are, in truth, a child of God and a brother or sister of Jesus. Always seek the wise counsel of the Spirit who indwells you. Like you, your teacher is also a student, no less so!

Build your relationship based on your experience with God and not your experience with your teacher. For your teacher is a fellow traveler seeking a relationship with God, just as you are.

John 10:3-4



LESSON ONE

Does God Speak to People Today?

³The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

The Conundrum:

Does God speak to people today?

Though this is indeed an intriguing question, there are a number of related questions that are equally important in our investigation of this matter of hearing God's voice. For example:

1. It is often suggested that Scripture is the principal means (perhaps the *only* means) by which God speaks today. *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness* [2 Tim. 3:16]. Is Scripture the *only* means by which God speaks today?
2. It has been said that in the busyness of life, mankind has become unaccustomed to listening for God's voice. If God were to speak, would you be able to recognize His voice? Scripture suggests that you *should* be able to recognize His voice [John 10:3, 14-16, 27], but can you personally make this claim?
3. Scripture suggests that God speaks through a number of means in addition to His written Word, i.e. prayer, visitations, voices, dreams, fire, circumstances. If this is true, is Scripture somehow diminished, or has its authority been placed in question if these other means are given (equal) credence?
4. It is widely held that the Holy Spirit played a key role in inspiring both Old and New Testament authors to write down the words spoken to them by God. Was the Holy Spirit's involvement in speaking with men concluded long ago and does He no longer play a relevant role for believers today with respect to hearing God's voice?
5. Perhaps, if we accept that God DOES speak today, does He speak to just a few? How likely is it that you can expect to hear directly from God? After all, can you say that you regularly hear from Him today in your Christian journey?

These are not just esoteric questions for seminary professors to ponder, but are intensely personal and speak to the very core of our being. Can I, a broken, struggling, searching soul looking for peace in life, and peace and direction from my Creator, dare to hope to hear God speak to *me* in matters that profoundly affect my life?

As is so often the case when searching for the knowledge of God, when reaching out for wisdom and understanding, when seeking to find some

satisfaction for the yearning of heart and soul, and to hear God’s voice . . . I ask . . . the *wrong question!*

I ask for a sign. I want to hear a voice. I want God to open the doors of my understanding and flood me with the knowledge of Him. I need an injection . . . of something . . . I seek, I want, I need . . . I ask the wrong question! The right question is, “*What does God want?*” God desires a **RELATIONSHIP!**

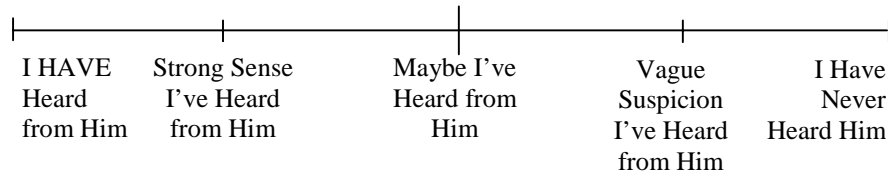
I want to know:

- Should I take this job offer
- Should I buy this car
- Should I send my child to xyz school
- Should I confront my boss/spouse/parents

There are a million and two day-to-day questions upon which I seek counsel from God. But what God desires is a relationship. From that relationship comes an ‘ear to hear’, ‘discernment to understand’, ‘eyes to see’ the already present action of God in my life.

Why did God create man, ‘In the Beginning’?

John 17:3;
 1 John 1:1-4
 Genesis 3:8a



Q. Have you ever heard God’s voice? What did He say?

An American Indian in New York City –

A story is told of an American Indian who was visiting a friend in New York City. While standing on a busy, noisy street corner in the middle of Manhattan, a man’s pocket tore open and all his change fell to the ground. In spite of the traffic noise, people waiting on the corner for a bus heard the falling coins and turned to look.

Walking across the street with his friend, the Indian reaching into an ivy-filled planter box and withdrew his hand, lightly holding a cricket! “*How in the world did you ever hear the chirping of a cricket in the middle of this noisy city?*”, the friend asked. The Indian replied, “*It is all just a matter of what you are accustomed to listening for.*”

Are you *accustomed* to listening for God’s voice?

Isaiah 55:8-9

Read Isaiah, listening for God’s voice! Quietly, reflectively, meditatively consider these verses. Look for God’s heart on this matter. What do you think God might be saying?

Communication is Essential in a Relationship –

Consider the religious leaders of Jesus' day – the Priests, the Scribes, the Pharisees and Sadducees. Would you say they knew the Mosaic Law? Would you say they could quote 'chapter and verse'? Would you say that *intellectually* they were knowledgeable?

Few would argue that when it came to doctrine, the religious leaders of Jesus' day were quite capable. So how is it they completely missed Jesus? What was missing?

(The religious leaders of Jesus' day had no personal relationship with God. Religion was purely an intellectual exercise and a commitment to obey the Mosaic Law. Justification to a holy God was accomplished by works of the Law.)

What would be the implications to your Christian walk if your life were NOT principally based on a set of doctrines (as were the religious leaders of Jesus' day) by which you tried to live your life, but was fundamentally based on a RELATIONSHIP? How would this change of view (this shift in paradigm) alter your perception of how you interact to God?

Are you more comfortable learning ABOUT God than relating TO God on a personal / relational basis? Why do you think this might be?

What if God were to speak to you with absolute clarity, how would this make you feel? Do the prospects of this possibility make you feel:

- Really ready to hear from God
- Excited
- Anxious
- Fearful
- Other

Do you think the *genuineness* of your desire to clearly hear from God might impact your *ability* to hear from God?

How confident are you that you would obey God without question, no matter what He might require of you? Do you think this level of commitment might impact your ability to hear from God?

What are you going to do about these two questions?

Closing Questions for Reflection –

1. Prayer is often thought of as a method by which believers communicate with their heavenly father. Yet can it be said that the saying, "*First, seek to understand, and then to be understood*" is any less relevant in

Q. Why did the religious leaders of Jesus' day not recognize Him?

communicating with our Heavenly Father than with other men? When is the last time you *listened* to understand as you prayed?

2. Has God spoken to you in different ways in the past? Explain.
3. If you have not heard God speak to you recently, why do you think that may be?
4. What are the times in your life you feel you need to hear from God?

One mistake that is sometimes made is that we only want to hear from God during crisis periods or critical decision points in our life. Do you think you will be 'accustomed' to hearing God's voice if you dialog with Him this infrequently?

God seeks a 24 X 7 X 365 day relationship. This kind of relationship will enable you to hear God's voice, not just during times of crisis or decision, but at all times.

5. What adjustments do you think you need to make in your life to hear God more clearly when He speaks to you?

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read Hearing God's Voice, Chapters 1-2. Listen for God's voice as you read. Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Read Jeremiah, Chapters 1-5. Listen for God's voice to speak to you through your reading. How (in what ways) did God speak to Jeremiah? Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Begin a word study on "heart", meditating on at least 5 occurrences. Be certain to examine each occurrence in context. Listen for God's voice and journal your thoughts.
- Close your time in prayer, and listen for God's voice.
- Be prepared to share your insights at the next class meeting.

LESSON TWO

For the Record, God Speaks

NOTES

1 Sam. 3:10

¹⁰*Speak, for your servant is listening.*

Reflections from expository reading of Jeremiah.

Reflections from word study on “heart”.

Reflections from reading Hearing God’s Voice.



The Conundrum:

We live in New Testament times, and I haven’t seen God in a pillar of fire (Exodus), nor have I seen writing on the wall (Daniel), nor have I had an angelic visitation (that I know of!), nor have I had a vision, et cetera, any time recently! Have the rules changed in the middle of the game?

Q. Does God speak ‘differently’ today than 2000 to 4000 years ago?

Or, perhaps a better way to phrase the question is, does God speak at all today . . . other, perhaps, than through Scripture?

Hebrews 1:1-2
John 14:26

For the record – God speaks! However, God’s approach has changed. Why was the change necessary?

(No one is justified by works of the Law. In Old Testament times God was directing His people to conform to the Law. The Law, however, only served to underscore man’s sinful nature and was unable to save him.)

How do you account for so many rejecting God’s new approach to speaking to mankind?

(Throughout human history there is a long pattern of rejecting any and all of God’s efforts to speak with mankind. What the Law was unable to do – restore the relationship between God and man – Jesus was able to do. The one who was ‘offended’ paid the price for the ones giving ‘offense’. Who but God could have come up with a solution like this?)

What are the implications to the Christian today with respect to how God now speaks?

(God’s change of methods suggest that an individual may now dare to approach God directly, interact with Him directly, and be in His presence perpetually by virtue of His presence in the form of the Holy

Spirit. I need not turn outwardly to seek God's face, but inwardly to listen for the Holy Spirit's counsel.)

The Old Testament Record

For perspective and context there is value in examining the history of God's communications with man. We will begin with His Old Testament methods.

In order to hear God's voice recall Isaiah 55:8-9 – our ways and God's ways are NOT the same! This principle should be at the forefront of your mind as you endeavor to hear God's voice. If you can imagine a means by which one person might communicate to another, you should quickly consider that God very likely will NOT speak in that way.

Creation – Psalm 19 is one of the most compelling descriptions of how the creation itself declares God's presence, and through the creation, God speaks!

(God's message to mankind, delivered through His creation itself, speaks to the omnipotence and omniscience of God. The creation also speaks of God's holiness and helps man to understand how great are the differences between God and man. It is right that man should stand in awe of God.)

Angels – Angels were sometimes larger-than-life awe-inspiring beings, while at other times they may have been indistinguishable from a common man. Hebrews 13:2 even suggests that from time-to-time angels may be among us.

Prophets – Prophets relayed God's message, not unlike the role of angels. See 2 Samuel 12:7, 1 Kings 12:22-24, and 2 Kings 1:4.

(Jeremiah was a prophet that may be representative of many who were called by God to this service. Jeremiah's relationship with God was so intimate that he could relate to God on a heart-to-heart basis. With the confidence and boldness so typical of Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah would declare the word of the Lord because of the continuous closeness of his relationship with God. This relationship is something today's Christian should strive to attain.)

As you proceed through this study it may prove valuable to come back to this question to see if your perceptions of how a prophet received God's message changes as a result of your personal experience throughout this study.

Dreams and Visions – Dreams occurred during periods of sleep and visions occurred during a period of being awake.

Q. What can be heard from God via His creation?

Q. What was unique about a prophet's ability to hear God's voice?

Lot Casting – Proverbs 16:33 indicates that the Lord controls the results of a casting of lots. This method was used in both the Old and New Testament for determining God’s will in a matter.

Gentle Voice or Still Small Voice – Two well know examples of God speaking in a ‘whisper’ are 1 Samuel 3:4 when God spoke to the young Samuel calling him as a prophet, and in 1 Kings 19:11-14 when God spoke with Elijah.

(These two prophets had an intimate relationship with God. They had ‘an ear to hear’. Could I pursue such a relationship, draw near the heart of God, and hear Him speak to me?)

Fire from Heaven, a Pillar of Fire by Day, or a Burning Bush – Demonstrating God’s presence in a dramatic and powerful way God sometimes used fire to demonstrate His presence to deliver a message.

Judgments/Circumstances – Judgments are a form of God speaking through *circumstances*. One of the most compelling use of ‘circumstantial’ events are what have been termed ‘double confirmations’ (Robert Clinton). Believers should be sensitive to circumstantial occurrences of events with an eye toward listening for God’s voice. Coincidences may be nothing more than just that . . . or they may be an affirmation of God’s intervention.

Symbolism – Scripture incorporates symbolism liberally throughout the Bible. Often the symbolism is explained and thus may shed a clear light on other symbolism found in Scripture.

Signs and Miracles – Events that demonstrated God’s presence and affirmation.

The New Testament Record

John 1:1-14 opens a new chapter in God’s effort to reach out to man in a new way! Jesus personified the love of God in a way the Mosaic Law could not possibly do. In Jesus the fullness of God lived in human form (Col. 2:9) permitting men to experience God as never before.

(Though exceedingly religious, Israel failed to look past the ordinances found in the Law to the heart of God. Israel failed to see the purpose of the Law, which was to drive a hopelessly sinful people to repentance from their heart. By continuing to see themselves as righteous by virtue of adhering to doctrine, Israel failed to find God’s heart.)

The Risen Christ – The New Testament records numerous episodes of Jesus speaking to men and women following his resurrection. One of the most confounding encounters is reported in Luke 24:13-35. Cleopas and one other disciple were walking the road to Emmaus. On the way they encountered the risen Jesus who had a lengthy conversation with them, yet these disciples did not recognize Jesus!

Q. What enabled Samuel and Elijah to hear God’s gentle whisper?

Q. Why did so few recognize Jesus for who he was?

Q. What kept the two men from recognizing Jesus?

(This is a hard question to answer. Scripture records other occasions where Jesus was not recognized following his resurrection – John 20:14-16 and John 21:4-7 where Mary Magdalene did not recognize Jesus at the tomb and a group of disciples did not recognize Jesus as he stood on the shore. Some suggest that there was divine intervention that prohibited Jesus from being recognized, yet the blindness was lifted later during the encounter and these same disciples soon came to recognize Jesus. So the question is not so easily resolved.

In many of Jesus' parables he closes with words to the effect, 'let those who have ears to hear, hear'. The same was often said about 'eyes to see'. Could it be that the message for believers today is that in just the same way that we are not 'accustomed' to hearing God's voice, we are also not accustomed to 'seeing' God's active presence in our lives?

The disciples eyes were eventually 'opened' because of their recent close fellowship with the Lord and their hearts were sensitized to the love of their Savior, so they soon recognized Jesus!

Do you have this kind of sensitivity? How regularly do you see God clearly at work in your life?)

Nature, Angels, Dreams, Visions, Prayer, Prophets, Lot Casting, Signs and Wonders – God did not abandon many of His methods for communicating with men from Old to New Testament times. However, He did implement a few new methods . . .

Preachers – Unlike the prophets of old, preachers have received a more complete revelation of God's Truth. In Romans 10:14 preachers are specifically identified as a key means by which God's word is shared with an intended purpose of hearing God speak through His word.

Scripture – Following the resurrection, Jesus continued to depend on Scripture as a source of truth. In Luke 24:27 and 45 He used scripture to identify Himself to His disciples.

(The Scriptures hold more truth than we may at first understand. A case is made for continual study and prayer to God to reveal new truth about Jesus and God's purpose for His followers (collectively through the Church, and individually for us all) through His Word).

The Church – The Church is a truly new method for God to communicate His purposes in New Testament times. Just as Jesus was the visible manifestation of God's presence during His time on earth, the Church now fills that role. How important it is that the believers that comprise the Church function as they are intended (1 Corin. 12).

Q. The Luke passage underscores what important principle?

The Holy Spirit – The Spirit’s presence indwelling all believers is a truly new effort on God’s part to communication with His own. Where the Law failed to deliver a heart-felt conviction for sin, the Spirit succeeded. Where the Law failed to teach about the heart of God, the Spirit drew believers to the very threshold of God’s heart. The Holy Spirit is Counselor, Comforter and Teacher.

(The Holy Spirit is given to all who come to Jesus. The Spirit speaks and applies God’s Word delivered from one believer to another in the same way God’s Word is applied when heard from the pulpit on a Sunday morning.

A case is made for the value of discussing the Word with others one-on-one and in public as God will use this opportunity to speak! We never know how God will use our words to reach another with a Truth that God has for them.)

Q. Can God’s voice be heard as one believer shares with another?

Closing Questions for Reflection –

6. What conclusions can you draw about how you might hear God’s voice, based on how Scripture reports God spoke in earlier times?

(Though the setting may be public, the message that is often delivered is private, personal and intended for an individual. Seek to acquire ‘ears to hear’, acknowledging that you may not be accustomed to listening for, or hearing God’s voice at this time.

At times the message was understood some time after it was delivered. Reflection and meditation on events in our lives may bring to life a message delivered earlier, but only now recognized and understood.

In the New Testament, God’s method of communicating is generally available to all and not mysterious, miraculous or supernatural in an extraordinary way.)

7. What ways might God speak to you that you have not considered?

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read Hearing God’s Voice, Chapter 3. Listen for God’s voice as you read. Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Read Jeremiah, Chapters 6-10. Listen for God’s voice to speak to you through your reading. How (in what ways) did God speak to Jeremiah? Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Continue your word study on “heart”, meditating on at least 5 new occurrences. Be certain to examine each occurrence in context. Listen for God’s voice and journal your thoughts.

- Close your time in prayer, and listen for God's voice.
- Be prepared to share your insights at the next class meeting.

Psalms 37:4



LESSON THREE

God Speaks His Way

⁴*Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

Reflections from expository reading of Jeremiah.

Reflections from word study on “heart”.

Reflections from reading Hearing God’s Voice.

The Conundrum:

(READ: Blackaby, pg.40, para.1-2. Oswald Chambers comments, “No man by mere high human wisdom would dare undertake a step for Jesus’ sake unless he knows that the Holy Spirit has directly spoken to him.”)

Honestly, genuinely, without giving it any thought . . . what is the desire of your heart? Compare/contrast your answer with Solomon’s reply to God in 1 Kgs 3:5-9 and 2 Chron 1:7-10 – “Ask for whatever you want me to give you (what is the desire of your heart?).”

Without hesitation in his dream state, Solomon replied, “. . . give your servant a discerning heart . . .”. Solomon answered from his heart.

What is the desire of your heart? (After giving this careful thought, how do you think God might regard your request?)

God’s Pattern of Speaking

God Speaks Uniquely – There appears to be a pattern by which God speaks with His sons and daughters. He speaks ‘appropriately’ to each individual, based on his/her individual character and perhaps circumstances. Consider the different approach He had in speaking to Saul of Tarsus versus the young Samuel, for example.

Personal Application - Consider your character (how you are wired), circumstances, and perhaps other variables that may be unique or specific to you.

(Nothing God does is without purpose. Even the WAY He does it has purpose. How might God want to develop your character, or how might He want to develop your relationship with Him? Might He draw you in THAT direction in the way He chooses to speak to you?)

Do you have any experience hearing God’s voice? How did He speak to you in the past? Your past experience could offer insight into how God

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Q. Through this lens, how might God choose to speak to you?

might speak with you in the future. Consider the context in which He spoke. What were the circumstances? Did He use others to communicate His message to you? Did He speak to you while you were reading scripture? While you were praying? What was the topic He addressed?

God Speaks Personally – The truly incredible truth to grasp is not the way or methods God uses to speak, but that He chooses to speak at all! Our desire is to hear a word from God so that our confidence in His very existence might be strengthened and with that confidence we might build a relationship with Him. God seeks *first* the relationship, and then from an overflow of that relationship, you will hear God speak!

(God’s speaking is secondary to His first purpose, which is to build a relationship with you. This is even more profound than the fact that He speaks! Imagine, the infinite, all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the universe wants a deep, personal and intimate relationship with YOU! Isn’t this beyond comprehension?)

God Speaks Progressively – Consistent with many other examples of progression in the way God interacts with men, He also *speaks* progressively. For example, it is likely you have experienced *growth* in your Christian life. Growth suggests that in the early stages you likely had less understanding about God and His ways that you do today. This reflects a *progression*. The Apostle Paul talks about some believers needing the ‘milk’ of the Word, not the ‘solid food’ of deeper spiritual truth (1 Cor. 3:2, Heb 5:12). This too reflects a sense of progression.

So how might God speak progressively? It is the experience of some that when God initially approaches, the encounter is more extraordinary than successive meetings. As the relationship develops God seeks a more intimate form of speaking. In Scripture, miraculous encounters are typically rare. Closer, more intimate contact is normative.

Consider how Jesus revealed himself to his disciples. First, He revealed who He was, and only later how He was to be God’s sacrifice for the sin of the world. Jesus revealed this understanding in a progressive fashion.

(There are steps in the process of hearing God’s voice. There are no short cuts. If I devote time to learning to hear God’s voice it is likely that in time I will become more accustomed to hearing Him. If I do not invest the time and effort, though He is speaking it is less likely I will hear Him.

The same concept may apply when you DO hear God’s voice. What he says may be clear, as far as it goes, but His direction may be incomplete, lacking details for next steps. You may hear God

Q. What does it say about God that He speaks to men?

Q. What does the concept of progressively revealed truth mean to you?

call you to service, but not hear the when, where or how of that calling! God is speaking progressively. Wait for His complete direction!)

God Speaks Consistently – It is easier to know what God clearly did NOT say than to be certain what He did say. It is clear that God would not say anything that was inconsistent with His character. God would not direct you to do something that is specifically condemned in scripture, for example.

John counsels believers to ‘test the spirits’ to see if they are from God (1 Jn. 4:1). To test what you believe God may have spoken to you is to seek confirming evidence, or to search the Scriptures for support. God will never contradict Himself.

God’s Purpose for Speaking

Too often we approach this matter of hearing God’s voice as if it were a matter of discovering some method or technique that we have not yet uncovered. But, as has already been discussed, hearing God’s voice is more dependent on a *relationship* with God, which will result in our becoming more accustomed to hearing His voice, than on technique.

If you think in terms of ‘relationship’, God’s purpose can be discovered.

God Speaks to Reveal His Character – God is holy. God is powerful. God is forgiving. God is many more things, as well.

(To experience God’s character is to create a desire from the heart to emulate God’s character in your life. To experience God’s character pre-supposes a relationship exists. For example to know that God is forgiving informs me about who God is, to experience God’s forgiveness personally compels me to be forgiving of others. To experience God’s character drives me to make His character, my character.)

God Speaks to Reveal His Purposes – In Lesson One we discussed how Christians often (desperately) seek answers from God. “Lord, give me a sign!” “Lord, let me hear your voice!” “Lord, should I go left or should I go right?” We seek answers to questions that we hope will make our lives go more smoothly.

God’s purpose in the world is not necessarily to make our lives go more smoothly! His purpose is to save lost souls who are traveling with increasing speed into a Christless eternity! It turns out, we may be *asking the wrong question altogether*.

(There are many scriptures that support the concept that God seeks to bless and prosper those who love Him. A father loves to bless his children. This occurs most often in the context of a loving and intimate *relationship* between the Father and son.)

Q. What are the implications of knowing God’s character vs. experiencing God’s character?

God Speaks to Reveal His Ways – Many years back a friend asked if I would like to assist him in distributing Christian tracks to members of a non-Christian denomination. His plan was to do this during an evening service, leaving tracks on car windshields . . . under the cover of night!

Psalms 25:4-5

Why did David pray this prayer? Can you say that you know God's ways? Will God honor a worthy end if the means to that end do not honor God?

Reaching out to those who have been lead astray is honorable. Reaching out with the Gospel is honorable. But reaching out "under the cover of night" is not God's way. No matter how honorable the end, it does not justify a dishonorable means.

God Speaks Disclosing Specifics

You may say, "God has NEVER spoken to me revealing anything specific." Do you measure the validity of Scripture base on your experience, or based on internal supporting evidence from Scripture?

Did God speak specifically to Noah on how to construct the ark? Did God speak to Moses on the details for constructing the Tent of Meeting or how sacrifices were to be performed? Did God speak specifically to Philip, Peter, Ananias, and others about how the Gospel was to be spread?

In truth, you may never have heard God speak to you with great specificity, but that does not mean that He can't or won't do so. Scripture indicates that He does. Strive to hear Him do so!

God Requires Faith

Acts 12:1-5, 11-15

How would you characterize the faith of those who had been praying for Peter's release?

(It is less likely that you will hear God's voice if you really don't expect Him to respond to you. If your heart is hard or unbelieving why would you even expect to hear Him? Remember, hearing God's voice is strongly tied to your relationship with Him. Having a relationship pre-supposes that at some level a dialog continues between the believer and the Father.)

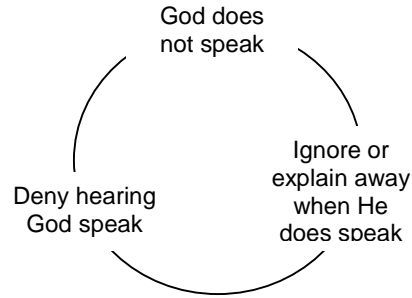
God may answer our prayer in spite of our lack of faith, but will we hear His reply? If we hear "a" reply will we accept it as from God or will we attribute it to some other source – coincidence for example, or just 'good fortune'? Or, will we simply forget that we even approached God on the matter?

(Passionately pursue a relationship with your Heavenly Father so that faith is a natural overflow of your proximity to the heart of God.)

Q. How does *faith* play into hearing God's voice?

Q. How should a Christian address this 'faith in prayer' issue?

If we claim that God does not speak to men today, then we are not inclined to accept His direction when He does speak to us. Thus we continue to deny that He speaks, confirming our position.



God Requires That We Follow . . . EXACTLY

There may be many reasons why, in our enthusiasm to follow God's call, we fall short of God's full intentions. Due to our impatience in waiting for God to give us the details, we may set out before God intended – 1 Sam. 13:8-11a – in Saul's case, it cost him a kingdom.

Or, due to circumstances, we may feel that God's directions can be modified slightly and our plan is more reasonable, given conditions. Due to our lack of respect for God's way, results may not turn out as God intended – Num. 4:15; 2 Sam. 6:6-7 – in Uzzah's case, it cost him his life.

Or, who knows what we are thinking, we take action that completely frustrates God's intentions – Mk. 9:2-8 – Peter, speaking out of turn, not understanding the holiness of the moment, ended the communion Jesus was having with Elijah and Moses and his Father at Jesus' transfiguration!

Christians who draw close to God in an intimate relationship grow in their understanding of the holiness of God. As that holiness is fully appreciated all we can do is be completely humbled in His presence.

(At this point you should be ten chapters into Jeremiah and coming to realize that Jeremiah's heart beat as one with God. He was perfectly on the same page with God. Jeremiah had a close on-going relationship with God which may have been the principal reason Jeremiah could so clearly hear God's voice.)

Re: Jeremiah – Characterize his hearing, his relationship and faithfulness to God.

Closing Questions for Reflection –

8. What is more important, hearing God speak to you, or building a relationship with Him? Why?
9. When you ask God to guide you, do you REALLY believe He will? Why or why not?
10. Could it be that God has been speaking to you but you have not recognized his voice? Why or why not?

11. What happens to the clarity of God's voice, when in the past you have heard from Him, you know His heart on a matter, and yet you did not follow through as He said?
12. Are you currently waiting for God to fulfill His word to you in some way? How are you working through this period of waiting?
13. Do you view God as a 'fireman' and only seek Him in an emergency? (Clue: How many relationships do you have with firemen?) Without an intimate relationship with God, how likely is it you will recognize His voice when He does speak with you?

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read Hearing God's Voice, Chapter 4. Listen for God's voice as you read. Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Read Jeremiah, Chapters 11-15. Listen for God's voice to speak to you through your reading. How (in what ways) did God speak to Jeremiah? Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Continue your word study on "heart", meditating on at least 5 new occurrences. Be certain to examine each occurrence in context. Listen for God's voice and journal your thoughts.
- Close your time in prayer, and listen for God's voice.
- Be prepared to share your insights at the next class meeting.

LESSON FOUR

God Speaks Through His Holy Spirit

NOTES

Ephesians 1:13-14

¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.



Reflections from expository reading of Jeremiah.

Reflections from word study on “heart”.

Reflections from reading Hearing God's Voice.

The Conundrum:

Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 15:44b-49 that we are born with a ‘natural’ body, that is, of the earth. While of this earth, we look forward to a time when we will have a ‘spiritual’ body, bearing the likeness of Christ. In our natural bodies, with our natural minds, we struggle and have an incomplete understanding of the spiritual nature of God and the spiritual nature of the creation that God designed and brought into being.

Though we have an incomplete understanding of the spiritual component of God's creation, we nevertheless accept its existence, partially by experience and partially by faith. One of the most well documented evidences of the spiritual realm is the existence and role of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity.

We understand that upon conversion we are given the Holy Spirit. Among many other things, a principal purpose of this gift is to guarantee that our new relationship with the Savior is firm and irrevocable.

If you think in terms of the Holy Spirit being Himself God, and He indwells you as a believer, this is a fairly remarkable and perhaps under-appreciated aspect of your position with respect to God the Father and Jesus the Son of God.

Since the Holy Spirit is ‘not of this earth’ and therefore is not something with whom we can claim an experiential relationship in the earthly sense, might ‘God with us’, or ‘God in us’ represent a heretofore personal closeness and intimacy that we have not seriously considered? Might we have access to God in a more significant way than we have ever considered, and might we be able to hear God's voice (the voice of the Holy Spirit!) more clearly than we have ever imagined?

Q. What role does the Holy Spirit play juxtaposed to the Father and the Son?

(The Holy Spirit takes the will of the Father and the work of the Son and seeks to make them a reality in the believer's life – Blackaby, pg. 63.

It is common to think of the Holy Spirit as a 'power' or a 'force'. To think of Him in this way actually diminishes the Spirit's identity and removes those characteristics that give Him unique personal qualities.

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The Holy Spirit was an active participant in the creation of the heavens and the earth, first mentioned in Genesis 1:2. (See also Psalms 104:30 and John 1:1-4). Following the creation, the role of the Holy Spirit was primarily to deliver Godly wisdom (Numbers 11:17, 25), discernment (1 Kings 3:5-9), some times specific skills (Exodus 35:30-36), and often prophecy (2 Peter 1:21) to those who received Him.

Zech. 7:8-12

In the Book of Zechariah it is clearly stated that the prophets of old received their direction from God through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

Q. Might the Holy Spirit play a similar role today among believers?

(There is no question the Holy Spirit indwells the believer today in a manner not that different than in Old Testament times. So at the very least, there is the potential for a believer today to be led by God's Spirit in much the same way. The question that begs to be asked is, "Why are most believers NOT so led today?")

The matter may come back to the point of whether or not we are 'accustomed' to listening for the Spirit's voice.

Only a man truly knows his own heart (Proverbs 14:10). Can you say that your heart and the heart of Zechariah, for instance, are alike in proximity to God's heart? What was unique about the heart of the prophets that enabled them to hear God's voice (His Spirit) so clearly? This might be worth further personal study of the Old Testament prophets with a focus on their RELATIONSHIP with God, for we know that out of that relationship we can all expect to hear God speak.)

The presence of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life, prior to Pentecost, was conditional and sometimes granted only for a specific purpose. At God's direction the Spirit could be withdrawn (1 Samuel 16:14, Psalms 51:11).

The Holy Spirit in the New Testament

- 1 Peter 2:9
(Since all believers now serve as the Father's Holy Priests, the Spirit permanently indwells all who claim the name of Jesus.)
- Mathew 28:20
(The Holy Spirit will remain with the believer always, even until Christ comes again.)
- John 14:15-17
(The Holy Spirit serves as a Holy Counselor to believers.)
- Acts 1:8
(The Spirit provides power to be effective witnesses of the Gospel.)

The Holy Spirit is Active in the Lives of Believers – Before Conversion

A case is sometimes made that the Holy Spirit is uninvolved in the lives of non-believers. In Proverbs 15:26 and 29 we understand that "The Lord detests the thoughts of the wicked" and that He "... is far from the wicked". John 8:43 and 47 indicates that without the Holy Spirit a non-believer is not even able to comprehend the words of Christ.

(Robert Clinton, in his model of a Generalized Timeline, suggests that the Holy Spirit may be very actively involved during a person's Sovereign Phase. In fact, Clinton's Sovereign period of a person's life is entirely about God's active presence prior to conversion.

Scripture describes how the sins of the father can be trans-generational (Exodus 20:5). Is it not reasonable that the righteousness of a father can also be trans-generational. Consider God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:11b-12, 16. Certainly God's presence in the house of David continues even to this day, though there have no doubt been many non-believers in David's line.

John 16:8-11

The Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in the unbelieving world today. If he did not, would anyone acknowledge their sin before God and seek repentance?

Hundreds, if not thousands of non-believers witnessed Jesus' many acts of healing and other miracles. Yet for the most part, He was rejected. Why?

Q. How did the Holy Spirit's role change following Pentecost?

Q. Does the Holy Spirit interact with men prior to their conversion?

Q. Why did only a few believe in Jesus?

(Mt. 23:37 – They were not willing to accept Jesus.

John 10:4-5, 14 – The unbelieving crowds did not recognize God’s voice. They could not hear God’s voice!)

Rom. 3:10-18 – They had completely lost sight of God.

1 Cor. 2:14 – The things of God are foolishness to men for they are spiritually discerned.

2 Cor. 4:3-4 – The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers.)

The Holy Spirit is Active in the Lives of Believers – Following Conversion

“It is inconceivable that God would draw people to give their lives to Him, only to abandon them to live out their Christian experience independent of His direction” – Blackaby, pg. 68.

(Consider that the conduct of those who identify themselves as Christians is often indistinguishable from those who make no such claim.)

Q. Why do so few believers today faithfully obey Jesus?

1 Peter 2:1-3
1 Corinth. 2:14

(Because we are ‘born again’ does not suggest that our ability to hear God’s voice is any keener than before our conversion. The POTENTIAL is there, unlike before conversion, but the reality of that potential is yet future, hopefully. God does not condemn being a ‘newborn baby’. In fact He accepts this as a given fact – just like physical birth and development, spiritual birth and development is a process that occurs over time.

Infants are able to hear and see, but they are weak in understanding. This is true generally in life, as well as in spiritual matters. If a believer does not pursue a relationship with God, listen for and become accustomed to hearing His voice, obedience will not follow. A ‘believer’ will be indistinguishable in his conduct from the carnal society around him.)

The Holy Spirit speaks to believers to:

1. Bring assurance of salvation – Romans 8:16
2. Bring conviction for sin – Romans 8:8-9
3. Provide guidance into truth – John 16:13
4. Bring comfort – John 14:16
5. Exalt Christ – 1 Cor. 1:18-25, 12:3
6. Reveal God’s will – 1 Cor. 2:12
7. Call believers into service – Acts 13:2-3

Q. What is the distinction between a ‘general’ call to

(Compare/contrast Acts 1:8 (general call to all believers) with Acts 13:2-3 (specific call to individuals) relative to how a believer may be 'called' into a specific service for God. Hearing God's call (voice) for a specific form of service is highly dependent on an intimate RELATIONSHIP with God, and will likely be progressive as the call is revealed in detail, over time.)

8. Protect from sin – Gal. 5:16
9. Prepare them to produce fruit – Gal. 5:22-23

(The Christian life is not an event, but a process. It is unlikely that the fruit of the Spirit is exhibited ALL the time. The fruit of the Spirit is an end-point vision. A goal to strive for. It is God's expectation for us. It is good to know the objective, or have the end in mind, as you try to live faithfully for Christ.)

10. Place believers within the Body, to serve and equip the Body – 1 Corin. 12:18, 12:7
11. Produce unity – Eph. 4:3

(Believers must have real-world expectations about those who make up the church – the Church is made up of the same folks that work with us, go to school with us, live at home with us. We all suffer from pride, personal ambition, disrespect for others, poor leadership and communication skills, character issues, and other all-to-human frailties.

What is key is how WE respond? It all depends on our RELATIONSHIP with God. If our walk with God is close, the overflow from that relationship will not yield divisiveness, but unity.

12. Provide words to speak at the appropriate time – Mt. 10:19-20.

(It MAY be a common experience to not be particularly well tuned in to God's voice in the 'heat of battle'. As a result, the words that

service and a 'specific' call to service?

Q. How is spiritual fruit production achieved?

Q. In a real-world situation, how can you call on the Holy Spirit to produce unity within the Body?

Q. What is your experience in hearing God's voice when you need the right words?

come out of our mouth tend to be our own words, not those of God spoken with love and grace.

A good way to tell if the words we speak are God's or our own is to observe the response from your listeners and/or the conviction (or peace) you feel in your heart delivered by the Holy Spirit following your conversation. Note Exodus 4:10-12.

13. Sharpen our minds – John 14:26

(Perhaps the principle expressed by the scripture you are trying to recall is adequate for the moment. Applying scriptural principles are often more effectual than quoting them. Your listener may place no particular value in your ability to quote chapter and verse, but rather, is interested in learning truth. The Holy Spirit is there to assist you.

There is a caution here – be sensitive to attributing scriptural truth to God and not fall into a pattern of 'sharing your opinion'. We ALL have a right to our opinion. That doesn't mean that our opinion aligns with God's word!)

The Believer's Response to the Holy Spirit's Presence

Ideally, you will always be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This sensitivity is directly related to the RELATIONSHIP you have with God. The prophets of old could faithfully speak for God because they maintained an intimate relationship with their Heavenly Father. But, there are other ways we might respond:

- A believer may resist or grieve the Holy Spirit – Eph. 25-30
- A believer may quench or stifle the Holy Spirit – 1 Thess. 5:19
(The ultimate end to quenching the Holy Spirit is a loss of sensitivity to His leading. In the end, His voice can no longer be heard. There are many examples of how a hard (or calloused) heart deafens us to hearing God's voice.)
- *A believer may blaspheme the Holy Spirit – Matt. 12:31-32*
(Blaspheming the Holy Spirit is attributing to Satan the work of the Holy Spirit. This is unlikely to be a part of a Christian's experience. An act of blaspheming the Holy Spirit is an overt act of rebellion against God. It would be very intentional.)

Closing Questions for Reflection –

14. In what ways is the Holy Spirit presently working in your life?

Q. How important is it to be able to accurately quote scripture when called upon to speak for God?

15. Is the Holy Spirit convicting you of changes he wants to make in your life? Are you resisting him?
16. Are there sins in your life that are grieving the Holy Spirit?
17. What attitudes or behaviors could be quenching the Holy Spirit in your life?
18. Is anything happening in your life that could only be explained by the working of the Holy Spirit?

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read Hearing God's Voice, Chapter 5. Listen for God's voice as you read. Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Read Jeremiah, Chapters 16-20. Listen for God's voice to speak to you through your reading. How (in what ways) did God speak to Jeremiah? Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Continue your word study on "heart", meditating on at least 5 new occurrences. Be certain to examine each occurrence in context. Listen for God's voice and journal your thoughts.
- Close your time in prayer, and listen for God's voice.
- Be prepared to share your insights at the next class meeting.

LESSON FIVE

God Speaks Through His Word – The Bible

NOTES

2 Peter 1:20-21

²⁰*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

2 Timothy 3:16

¹⁶*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*



Reflections from expository reading of Jeremiah.

Reflections from word study on “heart”.

Reflections from reading Hearing God's Voice.

The Conundrum:

God speaks when He chooses, and His voice can come from the most unlikely sources or unexpected directions. God has an unlimited number of resources at His disposal from which to speak. What does this say about the likelihood that you will hear Him when He does speak if you are unaccustomed to hearing His voice – the many ways in which He speaks?

(R. Hearing God's Voice, pg.90, para 1-2)

The Bible – God's written word – is a powerful source for hearing God's voice. In fact, this is the very purpose for our expository study of Jeremiah. You are seeking to hear God's voice through Scripture, listening and learning through Jeremiah's experience, listening intently and intentionally for God to speak personally to you, in your context.

In addition, the Scriptures are an unqualified standard by which we evaluate the spirits to see if they are from God (1 John 4:1) and to measure the clarity of God's voice. Any ‘word’ received that is in conflict with Gods’ written Word should be viewed as highly suspect.

Gods Written Word

The written Word is more than a text that transfers intellectual knowledge, though it does this also. Scripture has a unique component of ‘mystery’ to it. Perhaps Scripture could be viewed in the same way that faithful Jews today view the Western Wall of the former Temple in Jerusalem. They approach it with reverence and awe, it is the last remnant of a glorious holy place where God Himself, once abode. Approaching the Western Wall may be viewed as a matter of the heart as it is the last physical remnant of a place where ‘God once was’.

Scripture is not unlike the Wall in some respects. It is holy, it is unique and awe-inspiring, and between its pages the mystery of God is revealed, if we have the 'ears to hear' and the 'eyes to see'. In addition, not only are the words unique in that they were inspired by God, they are one-of-a-kind, as they impart the wisdom of the ages, and fundamental and absolute truth in the context of everyday life.

Isaiah 55:10-11

In these verses we discover something more than 'intellectual knowledge'. We sense power and authority, wisdom and a sense that there is something new to discover.

(Preceding v.10 are verses 8-9 which should also be considered when interpreting this passage, to place it in context. The verses begin with wisdom, if we have the 'ears to hear'. We are counseled that God's thoughts and ways compared to men are higher than the heavens are above the earth – infinitely higher!

Now we read about rain and snow. We read about how the earth is thereby watered and by that watering the earth brings forth seed, and it flourishes. From the flourishing earth comes grain for the sower, from which bread is made . . . for men to eat.)

This metaphor is used to describe how God's Word proceeds from God (as does the rain and snow) and for man's benefit, but not with physical food, rather, with Spiritual food. And it achieves God's ultimate purpose for sending it in the first place, just as did the rain.

R. Blackaby,
pg. 92, 'Next Door
to Death' – pg. 93.

God's Message in a "Coincidence" – Do you ever pause to give 'coincidence' a second thought? Recall that God's ways are not man's ways. What are you inclined to do with life's coincidences?

(Was it a coincidence that Moses, placed in a basket to float down the Nile River, found his way into the Pharaoh's palace? And coincidence that Moses' mother became his nurse?

Was it coincidence that Samuel was dedicated to God before his birth, and that he found his way into the Temple to sit under the tutelage of Eli, the Chief Priest, only later to become God's prophet who would anoint a king?

Was it coincident that David, though not even present when Samuel was sent to anoint a new king, nevertheless became the anointed one?

Was it coincidence when the Sumerian woman and Jesus arrived at the well at the same time? Or that Zacchaeus was in a tree on the route

Q. How does God's metaphor add insight into these verses?

Q. What message does this historical event deliver?

that Jesus took? Or that Peter and Judas were both selected to be Disciples? No. All of these events were orchestrated by God.

Do you suppose God orchestrates events in your life?)

Q. What do you think God's divine appointments in your life might look like?

Isaiah 55:8-9

HINT:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

"Coincidence" (or perhaps "circumstance") will be explored in greater detail in an upcoming Lesson.

God's Word Brings Life

You may be inclined to pass over this concept rather quickly. After all, we have heard these words many times in our Christian experience.

Deut. 30:15-16

Read these verses as though God were speaking them directly to you. Read them through a 'Spiritual lens', with 'ears listening' for the message God has for you.

Q. What is God saying to you today?

(God sets before you a CHOICE. There are just two options from which to choose. One choice is "self-focused" and the other choice is "God-focused". One choice might seem to offer visible, tangible earthly benefits, but in the end, results in "death". The other choice appears somehow less tangible with less visible benefits, that is, obey God. The result of that obedience is a promise from God that you will receive His blessing.

UPON WHAT WILL YOU MAKE YOUR FREE-WILL CHOICE?"

(Faith – A voluntary trust, not an intellectual state!)

God's Word Speaks to the Heart

God's Word drills down deep within the soul and evaluates *motives*. The Holy Spirit within you will connect previously unconnected scriptures and uncover the intent of your heart so that you may examine what is deepest within . . . what God sees!

Hebrews 4:12

Viewing again through a 'spiritual lens', how does God view the intent of your heart in this context?

Q. How does this verse 'look' in

personal
application?

Eph. 4:29;
Mt. 12:30; Ps. 51:10

Processing God's Word in this fashion is life-changing because it deals at the heart-level. God's Word is far more than an intellectual exercise where believers attempt to acquire the order and content of historical events.

This is what makes Scripture so unique. There IS value in understanding content and context in God's Word, but this is only the first layer of understanding. Who knows how deep are the insights God has offered to men to discover?

Prov. 25:2

*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter;
To search out a matter is the glory of kings.*

R. Blackaby, pg. 98
para.2 – pg.99
para.1

Response Patterns

As you read Scripture, through His Word God directs your heart in some area, and you know you need to change. Perhaps in the past it has been your habit to quickly move on through the passage, making a mental note that you really should do better in this particular area. However, by the end of your study time, or maybe within the next hour or two, you have completely forgotten about the Spirits prodding.

Do you suppose this response might influence how God speaks to you in the future? Do you suppose this response might affect how well you hear God speak the next time He has something to say to you?

Q. What is your typical response to God's 'gentle whisper'?

There are times when the depth of understand of another believer can stop us in our tracks. We recognize the fundamental truth of the words being spoken and we gain a new respect for the relationship that that brother or sister must have in order to have such understanding.

Jer. 29:13;
Deut. 4:29

As you consider these verses, how might you apply them in a practical sense?

R. Blackaby,
pg. 108-109,
How to Meditate

Closing Questions for Reflection –

19. What passage of Scripture has God recently drawn to your attention?
What might God be trying to say to you through those verses?

20. Are you obeying all you know God has already told you through His Word? How likely will it be that He will continue to speak with you if in your response pattern from earlier communications you have not followed His direction?
21. What command in Scripture are you having difficulty obeying right now? Take the verse to God in prayer. Ask God to help you apply it to your life. *Be prepared* to do whatever God tells you to do next. (If you are *not prepared* to follow God's direction, how likely do you think it is that He will continue to speak with you in a clear way?)
22. 1 Thess. 5:18 – How are you doing obeying this command? Why should you be thankful?

(Life is God's classroom. We are ALL students in training. Every event is a learning/growing opportunity, and how we respond to it is a measure of our spiritual growth and maturity.

Do you really believe this? If yes, what are you in training for?)

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read Hearing God's Voice, Chapter 6. Listen for God's voice as you read. Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Read Jeremiah, Chapters 21-25. Listen for God's voice to speak to you through your reading. How (in what ways) did God speak to Jeremiah? Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Continue your word study on "heart", meditating on at least 5 new occurrences. Be certain to examine each occurrence in context. Listen for God's voice and journal your thoughts.
- Close your time in prayer, and listen for God's voice.
- Be prepared to share your insights at the next class meeting.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE END OF THIS CLASS

We are now at the half-way point in our study on Hearing God's Voice. If you have been disciplined in journaling your interaction with your study of Jeremiah, your word study on "heart", and your reading in Blackaby's book, you have recognized the value in writing down how God's Spirit has been moving as you seek to draw closer to His heart.

It is now time to begin to put some thought to bringing together what you have discovered into a single place, in an organized fashion. You may want to begin to think in terms of major themes that are beginning to emerge for you. It is too early to actually start writing just yet – we are only half-way through our study after all – but if significant themes in hearing God's voice are beginning to stand out in your mind you may find it valuable to note them down, with an eye toward writing a paper as described at our first meeting.

If you have not already discovered that you are involved in a PROCESS, then begin to think in these terms now! God's method in relationship-building is ". . . *precept upon precept . . . line upon line . . . here a little and there a little.*" (Isaiah 28:10, KJV) It is a process. So will be the writing of your paper, it will be a process that begins by identifying major themes. We will 'process' this further next week.

LESSON SIX God Speaks Through Prayer

NOTES

2 Chron. 7:14-16

¹⁴. . . if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. ¹⁵Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to their prayers offered in this place. ¹⁶I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.



Reflections from expository reading of Jeremiah.

Reflections from word study on “heart”.

Reflections from reading Hearing God’s Voice.

The Conundrum:

We pursue many relationships as we live out our lives – family, friends, co-workers, fellow believers. We enjoy the human touch, the camaraderie, the fellowship. To one degree or another (some more, some less) we enjoy a sense of community.

One relationship, the most important relationship in our lives, does not have a ‘human touch’, rather, it has a *Godly touch*! God desires a one-on-one relationship with you. As in all relationships, participating members in the relationship must be willing. The relationship must be pursued. And, the relationship must be maintained if it is to be a quality, personal and long-lasting one.

The challenge comes in two area: 1) Establishing the relationship in the first place; and, 2) maintaining the relationship over the course of a life-time. Assuming that the first challenge has been addressed, we are left with how a mortal, fallible, fallen individual can maintain a relationship with an immortal, infallible, holy God! Not a menial task, one might think!

Prayer

In Lesson Five we discussed Scripture as having a *mystery* component to it. The same might be said of prayer. Imagine approaching the Creator of the University in person dialog! Does this seem like a *reasonable* proposition?

Q. How do you characterize prayer?

(Monolog)

(Dialog)

(Activity)

(Spiritual Discipline)

(Communications)

(Obligation)

(Habit)

(Period of Refreshment)

Suppose that prayer is viewed through a different lens – one of enhancing a RELATIONSHIP, though not between equals!

(Seeking fellowship, intimacy)

(Based in love – please/serve God)

(Openness, WANT God to know me)

(Desire to be more like Him)

(Reorient focus – less my needs,
more God's holiness)

(Know God more intimately,
Blackaby, pg. 115)

“Prayer is the process by which God helps us re-arrange our priorities.”

---Blackaby, pg. 114, para. 1.

Why Pray?

A common application for prayer is to solicit God to address concerns in our life. These concerns may be for our selves or they may be for others. Intercessory prayer is well documented in Scripture. Even Jesus exercised intercessory prayer on behalf of his Disciples and the Church.

However, how might it change your view of prayer if prayer were viewed as a means by which you could discover what was on *God's heart*?

Ephesians 3:20

In the vernacular, Scripture is asking you to ‘think out of the box’! This Ephesians passage might be a great candidate for meditation. Imagine what it would mean if it were God’s purpose to do MORE than we could ask . . . or even THINK! What has entered Christ’s mind has not even ENTERED my mind! It is ABOVE AND BEYOND anything that has even *entered* my mind!

EXAMPLE: What do you think the content of Abram’s and Sarai’s prayers were *before* God supplied his answer?

(God’s answer was “above and beyond”. Blackaby, pg. 117, para. 2)

EXAMPLE: What do you think the content of Moses’ prayers were as he was herding sheep for his father-in-law *before* he encountered God in the burning bush and God supplied *His* answer?

(God’s answer was “above and beyond”. Blackaby, pg. 117, para. 3)

Q. If enhancing a relationship is the purpose of prayer how does this change your view of prayer?

Q. If discovering what was on God’s heart was

**the purpose of
your prayer, what
would be the
implication?**

(When thinking in terms of RELATIONSHIP with God, approaching prayer with a desire to know what is on His heart seems intuitively 'right'. If God wants to provide more than our minds can even ask for or imagine, would it not make more sense to seek out God's purpose for our lives rather than to ask Him to bless what WE have purposed for our lives?)

The Ephesians scripture suggests that we are not even capable of 'thinking out of the box'! We are so completely 'paradigm constrained' that entire universes of options are available out there that we cannot even imagine – but God CAN and DOES imagine these for us . . . if we would just ask Him to reveal them to us. "Lord, what is on YOUR heart? What is YOUR purpose for me?)

Prayer is Not

"(Prayer) is not a ritual formula we recite with the hope of stumbling upon the right words that will mysteriously open the vaults of heaven."

---Blackaby, pg 119

While prayer is both a relationship and a means of communication, it is not conducted between equals. Recall Job's interaction with God in Job 38:1, 40:6, 42:5-6.

Is. 64:4

What are you attempting to achieve when you pray – to influence God to cause events to take another course? How do you know if the current course of events is not intended for your benefit? Can you say that you know? Do you think (and trust) that God knows?

John 11:1-15

Consider how Mary and Martha must have been praying for their brother, Lazarus. As Lazarus continued to slip deeper into his illness, Mary and Martha must have become desperate waiting for Jesus to arrive. But what did Jesus do? In v.6 we are told that He waited . . . two more days, intentionally! In v.15 Jesus explains the reason for His waiting.

(The course that events were taking in Mary, Martha and Lazarus' life, from their perspective must have looked terribly discouraging! Think of the emotional pain they must have all suffered. Lazarus may have been suffering physical pain as well.

We also know that Jesus was particularly good friends with Lazarus and his sisters, having spent much time with them, eating at their home, and as Scripture tells us, Jesus was particularly close to Lazarus. But Jesus KNOWINGLY permitted Lazarus to actually die! Why?

**Q. How might you
apply v.15 in your
own life?**

Jesus had a higher purpose in mind – Verse 15! Look for God’s higher purpose in the difficult parts of your life!

(In a prayer relationship, God is expressing His love of us. He expects us to listen. He interacts with us at the deepest level.

We should not think that we have “rights” or “demands” that we can bring before the Throne of God – consider Job’s efforts and how God responded to his inappropriate challenging of God’s methods/purposes! We have no right to express anger toward God. And we have no right to disobey for our own reasons.

Q. How should God be approached in prayer?

Eccl. 5:2

“The more the words, the less the meaning” Eccl. 6:11.

What Prayer IS

When your relationship with God in prayer is as it should be, you are not asking God to change the course of events in your life – you are asking God to change your heart! As your heart comes into alignment with God’s heart, prayer becomes more aligned with God’s heart – we seek what God seeks. The relationship is like that of Jeremiah’s and we *hear God speak!*

Prov. 21:1

We are accountable for the condition of our heart. In our heart we plan our course in life (Proverbs 16:9). Yet we should be aware that God knows what we hold in our heart (Psalms 44:21; Jer. 17:10). And with a bit of ‘mystery’ here, God is able to ‘direct’ our heart ‘wherever He pleases’!

Q. How do you feel about this concept of God ‘taking over the con’? Directing your heart?

How does it make you feel . . . in your heart . . . to turn over full control of your very being – your heart – to God? Is this something that is easy for you to do? Or is it difficult? Why might it be difficult?

Hearing God’s Answers to Prayer

Have you ever considered answered prayer as a means by which God speaks?

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| > Jer. 33:3 | > Mt. 21:22 | > Lk. 11:9 |
| > Jn. 15:7 | > Jn. 16:23 | > 1 Jn. 3:21-22 |

Are these verses a reality in your life? Take one or two verses and meditate on them in private for an extended period – perhaps 30-45 minutes. Listen for God to speak to your heart. Journal what you hear Him saying.

R. Blackaby,
pg. 124, para. 1

Q. How good are you at handling “No”?

Our perspective is ‘here and now’, and maybe we can see with some clarity into the *past*, but how good are you at looking into the *future*? God’s perspective is eternal. He knows what is in our best interest in the future . . . *way into the future!*

There were times when God the Father even told his Son, “No” (Mt. 26:39). God had an eternal perspective, and Jesus knew that.

There may be times when what appears to be “No”, is really “Yes”, with a caveat – “Yes, but wait”!

- Abraham received a “Yes”, and waited 25 years for a son (Isaac).
- David received a “Yes”, and waited many years (to be made king).
- Hannah received a “Yes”, and waited many years for a son (who later became the Prophet Samuel).

Q. When did God answer the prayers of Abraham and Sarah?

(Gen. 16, 18 and 21 – Abraham and Sarah had been without a son for many years. They had prayed for a son to fulfill the promises of God when they were 75 years old (Genesis 15:4-6), but it was not until Abraham was 100 years old that God fulfilled His promise to Abraham. Is God’s “Yes, but wait” answer found in Genesis 21, or much earlier in Abraham’s life?)

And what of Hannah, she had been praying for a son for many years just as Abraham and Sarah had. Was God’s “Yes, but wait” answer when Eli pronounced his blessing (1 Sam. 1:17), or much earlier in Hannah’s life?)

“Silence”, the Hardest Part

The word “silence” is in quotes because what may appear as silence may not be that at all – only our inability to hear. Or, perhaps God is silent for good cause. If there appears to be silence from God when we seek him out in prayer, one step to consider is to examine your own heart and life.

Isaiah 59:1-2;
Mt. 5:23-24;
1 Pet. 3:7

As we have discovered, Scripture speaks of the importance of relationships, both in terms of how we interact with God as well as how we deal with others.

Mt. 6:12-15

If there appears to be silence from God when we seek him out in prayer, a second step we can consider is to examine our relationships. Do you need to restore a relationship with some one whom you have offended?

Mt. 14:25-31;
Mrk. 4:35-40;
Lk. 9:37-41

God places a high value on *faith*. We know that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). In Jeremiah 17:5-8 we discover how God views faith. Faith will even dispel fear.

Do you harbor fear in your life? Many believers do. Some may claim they are even fearful to ask for the faith to dispel fear, as they are fearful about the means by which God might bring about the faith to address their fear! (Something similar to asking God for 'patience'. Often He accomplishes this by responding with circumstances that require the seeker to '*be patient*'!

In the above example of trying to deal with fear, God may just place us in a fear-inducing situation [what we 'fear most'] to provide us with an opportunity to respond in faith, and NOT fear! How hopeless we are without a compassionate and long-suffering Father!

If there appears to be silence from God when you seek him out in prayer, a third step to consider is to examine your faith.

(Return to Jesus' response in the verses noted above. A lack of faith on the part of believers seems to almost be a 'sore subject' for God. Faith is foundational. It is a critical component in our relationship with God. We ALL need more faith.

Recall Jesus response in John 11 in the raising of Lazarus. Could part of Jesus' anguish have been as a result of the lack of faith on the part of those present? Jesus intentionally 'remained silent' as He delayed his arrival on purpose! He had a higher purpose for the events that were unfolding. Does God have a higher purpose for the events unfolding in your life?)

Preparing for Prayer

If you were invited to meet with an important or influential leader in your community, would you prepare in any way in advance of that meeting? Suppose you were invited to meet with the head of a company you hoped might employ you, would you prepare yourself in anticipation of that meeting? Suppose you received an invitation to the White House to meet the President, might you make certain you dressed appropriately, learned the proper protocol for meeting a head of state, and be as thoroughly prepared as possible?

Suppose you were invited into the presence of the Creator of the Universe! How would you prepare yourself?

Exodus 19 describes how Israel was to prepare themselves for *three days* before the priests could present themselves to God for offering sacrifices.

Q. How do you think a lack of faith on the part of a believer affects God?

R. Blackaby,
pg. 131, para. 2-4

Psalms 24:3-4 indicates that only those with “cleans hands” and a “pure heart” may approach God.

(Prayer is possibly the most intimate part of a believer’s relationship with our Heavenly Father. While you have access to God in prayer, you should not forget that the relationship is not between equals! If you believe you would prepare to meet with a distinguished leader, you should certainly prepare to meet with God.)

If prayer is part of an intimate relationship with your Heavenly Father then it would make sense that you should set aside some time to meet with Him. A five or ten minute “quickie” is an inappropriate way to approach God! He deserves the best you have to offer, not something you ‘fit in’ to your busy schedule.

If you are seeking to hear God’s voice in prayer, you must ‘be still’. Listen. Set aside the distractions in our life and ‘wait on the Lord’. Earnestly seek God (Jer. 29:13; Heb. 11:6) and you will find Him.

Quiet your mind, meditate upon a verse of scripture, seek God’s deeper truths for you. Turn your heart over to the Lord (Prov. 21:1) and let Him shape you for His purposes.

Closing Questions for Reflection –

23. Do you ever feel God has summoned you into His presence when you pray? How is this experience different than at other times?
24. Do certain Scriptures ever come to mind as you pray? Do you take time to reflect on those Scriptures?
25. Do you ever make adjustments in your life as a result of your prayer experience? Does prayer ever bring about change in your character?
26. Have you ever associated hearing God more frequently and more clearly with obeying what He says when He does speak?
27. Have you considered preparing in any way before entering God’s presence in prayer? What preparations do you make, if any?
28. Is listening ever a part of your prayer time?

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read Hearing God’s Voice, Chapter 7. Listen for God’s voice as you read. Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Read Jeremiah, Chapters 26-30. Listen for God’s voice to speak to you through your reading. How (in what ways) did God speak to Jeremiah? Reflect on what you have read this week and journal your thoughts.

Q. How should believers prepare to meet with God in prayer?

- Continue your word study on “heart”, meditating on at least 5 new occurrences. Be certain to examine each occurrence in context. Listen for God’s voice and journal your thoughts.
- Close your time in prayer, and listen for God’s voice.
- Be prepared to share your insights at the next class meeting.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE END OF THIS CLASS, PART 2

Many who seek after God’s heart find that journaling their thoughts and interactions with God is helpful. Some have found that God often speaks:

- When reading Scripture
- Following Scripture reading, during a time of reflection
- During journaling
- During prayer

Preparing a paper on hearing God’s voice, drawing upon your experience in this class, is a natural extension of the journaling process and brings similar benefits to the seeker.

Read back over what you have journaled these past several weeks. Are you able to identify any themes from your study? You may be *very successful* and identify a great number of themes, or you may have drawn a complete blank. In either case, seek God’s heart in this matter and try to come up with (or net out) three to five key themes. Head each theme section in your paper, “Key Theme: [theme]”.

Begin to develop a narrative on your themes. View this initial effort as a rough draft – no need to develop a finished product at this point. Your narrative may be as brief as half a type-written page for each key theme, or perhaps a full page in length. Try to remain focused – go for quality, not quantity.

If you are the type of person who likes to have ‘the end in mind’ before undertaking a project of this sort, then know that following the development of your narrative on each of your key themes you will want to add a subsection for each theme titled “Personal Application”. As you might have concluded, in this section you will want to comment on the personal application of the theme you have identified.

So, your paper might look like the following:

Key Theme: [theme description]

Personal Application:

Key Theme: [theme description]

Personal Application:

... and so it goes.

At the end of your paper you will want to draw some conclusions and overarching personal applications.

Next week we will discuss an option to consider for your completed paper.

LESSON SEVEN

God Speaks Through 'Devine Appointments' (Circumstances)

NOTES

Acts 8:26-31

²⁶Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. ²⁷So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹The Spirit told Philip, "Go to the chariot and stay near it." ³⁰Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. ³¹"How can I," he said, "unless some one explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with Him.

Reflections from expository reading of Jeremiah.

Reflections from word study on "heart".

Reflections from reading Hearing God's Voice.

The Conundrum:

Have you ever proceeded through the course of the day and then something very 'curious' occurs, it catches your attention, it registers for a moment . . . and then you move on. "Oh, well. Kind'a odd, but . . ."

What you may have encountered was a curious coincidence. The event was somehow connected to another event, or conversation, or intuition, or *something*. At least it was significant enough that for a fleeting second you acknowledged it as a 'curious coincidence'.

Perhaps you unknowingly experienced a God-initiated circumstance that was really *not* so coincidental – perhaps it was a 'Devine appointment'. However, if you are unaccustomed to hearing God's voice, the event may pass relatively unnoticed.

How do we distinguish between Devine appointments and true coincidences?

Distinguishing Between Devine Appointments and Coincidence

Events in your life may have either a positive or negative appearance (from your perspective), or perhaps you assign no particular value to the event at all. If you are unaccustomed to hearing God's voice in the many ways He may choose to speak to you, the event may go unnoticed altogether, it could easily hold no spiritual value for you. However, if you have 'ears to hear', some circumstances can be very significant and may be used by God as opportunities to speak directly and specifically to you – a Devine appointment, if you will.



Q. Have you ever had a Divine appointment?

(Divine appointments may include: Meeting a particular person who eventually has some influence on the course of your life; being present at an event where an unexpected opportunity is presented; NOT being at an event where something negative or what could have been detrimental to you occurred; an event where you reacted unusually quickly or in ‘just the right way’ resulting in your life being saved; participating in some form of Christian service where you experienced God’s pleasure; being present at a particularly UNchristian meeting or event where you had an overwhelming sense of God’s presence and peace, and felt secure and safe; other.)

Is it possible to distinguish between coincidental circumstances and God-initiated circumstances? Part of the answer may be in understanding the role of the circumstance itself. The actual circumstance is infrequently God’s message to you, but more often is the *tool* God uses to alert you to ‘listen-up’ and ‘pay attention’ to what He is already doing in your life, or is about to do in your life!

Trying to dissect your circumstance may prove to be fruitless, as God’s message is often not there. When a coincidental circumstance presents itself it is time to *slow down* and *listen!*

Open Door / Closed Door Policy

Many Believers adhere to the Open Door/Closed Door policy of determining God’s will for their lives. Open doors are viewed as God’s okay to proceed where a closed door is assumed to be God saying, “No”, or at least, “Not now.”

Q. What cautions are there for using the Open Door / Closed Door Policy?

(Focusing on an open or closed door focuses attention on the circumstance as though IT were the message. It is more important to look for God’s ACTIVITY within the circumstance to determine what God is up to in your life! Open and closed doors may actually be JUST THE OPPOSITE of what you might conclude from a surface assessment.)

1 Sam. 24:3-7
1 Sam. 26:7-11

Consider King Saul’s pursuit of David. Saul’s intent was to kill David at his earliest opportunity. David was offered TWO open doors! But he did not walk through them. Why?

Q. Why didn’t David walk through these open doors?

(David was sensitive enough to God’s voice that he recognized that the open door to kill Saul was NOT of God. Think about this.

Acts 16:6-10

David responded out of WHAT? It was one of God's methods of speaking! David's character? David's love for God and knowledge of His ways?)

The reverse is also true. A closed door does not necessarily represent God saying "No". It will always be important to look beyond the circumstance itself and look and listen for God's activity *in* the circumstance.

Paul had two doors closed in his face – Asia and Bithynia. As we read 'the rest of the story', it becomes clear that God had another plan! What makes this particular event of special interest is that God had to overcome Paul's stated intent to go to Asia!

(This may be somewhat speculative, but it is not out of reason that God may have used circumstances to frustrate Paul's plans and direct him toward God's plans.)

As you encounter open and closed doors in your life, how have you typically responded to them? What might God have been saying to you?

- > YES, but (*not now*) _____
- > YES, but (*you are not ready*) _____
- > YES, but (*there is some one else I am preparing*) _____
- > NO, (*I have something better for you*) _____
- > NO, (*your skills lie elsewhere*) _____
- > NO, (*you have lost this opportunity*) _____
- > NO, (*this is not my purpose for you*) _____

The Chicken or the Egg Model

What comes first, our circumstances, or God (the chicken/egg model)? Do you evaluate your circumstances and draw conclusions about God, or do you seek out God to interpret your circumstances? This may require patience as you seek to hear from God.

There is no evidence in Scripture that God is in constant (continuous) communication with His followers. God speaks when He wishes. Jesus sought out discrete periods of time to commune with His Heavenly Father. Even Jesus was not in constant, 24/7 communication with God. So, if God chooses not to immediately respond when you speak to Him, a proper response from you would be to (patiently) wait for His reply. Waiting does

Q. How did the Holy Spirit 'prevent' Paul from going to Asia?

Q. How do YOU interpret the open and closed doors in your life?

not imply inactivity, just that no decisive action should be taken on the subject at hand until you have received clear direction.

As you work through this process of waiting to hear from God, do not lose sight of the fact that God dearly loves you – Romans 5:5 and 8:31-32. Having created a means to restore your relationship with Him, is there anything God will not do for you – anything that is in your *eternal* best interest?

Preparation Time

QUESTION #1: When do athletes prepare for a competition – during the game or before the game? The answer is obvious.

QUESTION #2: When is the best time for you to prepare for the many challenges you are sure to face in life – when you are in the midst of difficult circumstances or before?

(When you are overwhelmed by the circumstances of life is NOT the time to begin the process of building a relationship with God, or to begin to learn how to hear His voice. It is during the ‘quiet’ times of life, with the distractions at a minimum, that time and focus can be applied to drawing closer to God’s heart and learning to listen for His voice.)

(As the question implies, the pursuit of God is NOT a passive activity. It is a perpetual seeking, a striving, a pursuit. It requires effort – a lot of effort. The effort requires discipline to demonstrate to God your sincerity.

Recall Jacob as he wrestled with his all-night visitor – this to receive a blessing from his Guest. This continuous seeking is a process that God uses to test your mettle (your heart). “If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me.” (!))

Q. What does your relationship with God look like when things are going well?

Q. What are you doing now to pursue a relationship with God?

Blackaby, pg 157,
“Understanding
Your
Circumstances”

Closing Questions for Reflection –

29. Are you in the midst of difficult circumstances? How are you processing this with God?
30. Have you ever entered a door you should not have, or missed an opportunity because the door appeared to be closed? How will you deal with the open/closed door differently in the future?

31. How will you recognize God's hand in the midst of your circumstances?

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read Hearing God's Voice, Chapter 8. Listen for God's voice as you read. Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Read Jeremiah, Chapters 31-35. Listen for God's voice to speak to you through your reading. How (in what ways) did God speak to Jeremiah? Reflect on what you have read this week and journal your thoughts.
- Continue your word study on "heart", meditating on at least 5 new occurrences. Be certain to examine each occurrence in context. Listen for God's voice and journal your thoughts.
- Close your time in prayer, and listen for God's voice.
- Be prepared to share your insights at the next class meeting.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE END OF THIS CLASS, PART 3

At this point in your study of Hearing God's Voice you should have a good start on your paper. For timing purposes, plan on having your work completed by the final week of class – more on this in a moment!

Do you have three to five themes identified? You should have a rough draft of your narrative completed by this time. It is assumed that you will spend time doing some 're-writes' both as part of your authoring process as well as to incorporate any new insights you gain as you conclude your study over the next three weeks.

Just a reminder, strive for quality not quantity. Your final product may be from three to five type-written pages in length, maximum. Font size should not be smaller than 11 point.

Your paper should be structured as follows:

Key Theme: [theme description]

Personal Application:

Key Theme: [theme description]

Personal Application:

Conclusions and Applications:

HERE IS A THOUGHT (AND AN OFFER)!

The primary benefit for completing this exercise is to bring focus to your experience in hearing God's voice. The very act of writing this paper will provide substance and opportunity for God to speak with you. But perhaps there is a further opportunity!

As a 'fellow seeker' in hearing God's voice, as your teacher I would like the opportunity to discuss your experience with you, one-on-one. With your

paper as a launch pad for our discussion, there will likely be discoveries that will come out of your experience over the past several weeks. I would enjoy exploring your discoveries with you.

This is ONLY an offer. Feel no obligation of any kind. However, if you find the idea interesting, please be prepared to turn in your paper at our last meeting and include:

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY, ST ZIP

PHONE NUMBER

EMAIL

Your teacher will get in touch with you to arrange for a meeting.

LESSON EIGHT

God Speaks Through People

NOTES

Acts 9:10b-12

^{10b}“Ananias!”. “Yes, Lord”, he answered. The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

Reflections from expository reading of Jeremiah.

Reflections from word study on “heart”.

Reflections from reading Hearing God’s Voice.



The Conundrum:

Have you ever considered that God might have a word specifically for you, delivered by another person? If we have learned nothing else over the course of this study, we know that God’s ways are not man’s ways. The possibility that God might choose to deliver His message by means of another person may be so intuitively reasonable as you think about it that you may have completely overlooked the possibility.

If God can speak to us through a pastor’s message on a Sunday morning, why couldn’t He speak to us at other times through other people? Are you listening for God’s voice when others speak, particularly other believers? (But not *exclusively* other believers!)

God’s Voice Through Other Believers

In Old Testament times the prophets declared they were speaking for God in a very straightforward fashion, so perhaps a case could be made that in those days God alerted His people directly. In modern times messengers are not so declarative about their speaking the very words of God.

Believers should be sensitive to the fact that all believers have the Holy Spirit indwelling them. The Spirit could direct you to speak a word to another believer (or non-believer!) that represents a specific message from God, intentionally delivered – though we may or may not be completely clear of the intentionality.

John 13:20
2 Cor. 5:20

Because you may not always *feel* like an ambassador for Christ, does not, due to your lack of feeling, make you any less an ambassador!

God Speaks Through the Church

God has a purpose for each body of believers (a local church), and by extension, every believer in that body. When Jesus walked among us He

was God's representative to mankind. Today, the local church fulfills that role.

As you think about this, there are rather profound implications to a local church and to the individual members of that body.

(If you sought God's lead at the outset when you made a decision on what local church you would attend, it is likely God directed you to that particular church because He had a purpose for you to fill there. Your voice, among all the others, needs to be heard as the entire church works together to 'hear God's voice' and fulfill His purpose.)

1 Cor. 12:12-14

As a believer in a local body you are a unique member with a unique and specific gift and skill set. Have you considered what God's purpose for you is in this local church?

(This is obviously a loaded question. As we serve God where He intends for us to serve we find ourselves closer to God's heart and in a place where He is more likely to be heard as we fulfill His purpose for us.)

Prov. 11:14, 15:22

Whose wisdom and counsel is being applied in these verses? God's of course. God speaks through others to your specific situation – if you will seek out His counsel.

(It is important to seek God's purpose in any situation before responding to a request for counsel. Be cautious about offering your own opinion and insight. Be a tool in God's hands!)

God Encourages Interdependence

Everything God does, and the way he does it, fulfills His purpose. In an earlier Lesson we referred to Proverbs 25:2 – “*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.*” This verse

Q. Have you considered that you were “called” to serve at the church you now attend?

**Q. Are you clear where God would like you to serve?
Q. Are you more likely / less likely to discern God's voice if you are serving where He intends?**

Q. How should a believer respond when approached for counsel?

applies here as well! It is the glory of a believer to search out and understand God's methods for achieving His purposes.

God could easily speak directly and audibly to each believer today, but He typically uses other methods. Why is that? God is not capricious, so it is reasonable that God applies the methods He does for a very specific purpose.

Acts 9:10-19

Why did God direct Ananias to speak to Paul and not speak to Paul directly?

Acts 10

Q. Why did God send an ambassador to speak to Cornelius and not speak to him directly?

(There may be any number of explanations in these two examples why God chose to use other believers to deliver His message. God may very well have been doing a work in the messengers life as well as the one receiving the message. But one thing is certain – Scripture consistently delivers the proposition that the church body functions ideally as a community of believers.

Paul creates the metaphor of the Church as a body of many parts (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). We are informed that within the body there are many different spiritual gifts, all working INTERdependently to maximize the benefit to the health of the Body.)

Perhaps at least one of the reasons God so often speaks to us through the voice of other believers is to encourage a sense of community and interdependence among believers. Solo artists in God's service are not following God's model for service, and as a result are not likely to be nearly as effective as they could be if they were to function as a *member* of a body of believers.

A Word of Caution

As many believers as there are, there will be that many unique and distinct Christian journeys. Your own special walk as you seek to draw closer to God's heart is unlike any other, just as it will be unlikely that someone you counsel can expect for their experience hearing God's voice to mirror your own. *Take care to leave room for the Holy Spirit to freely direct others, just as He directed you.* Leave space for others to walk their own personal journey as the Spirit leads.

The fundamentals of the Faith are more easily transferable than the meatier issues of hearing God's voice. To insist that some one else reproduce your experience in his/her own life may actually hinder the working of the Spirit more than help Him. In a community of believers, with a variety of inputs, a seeker will be in the best position to discern the Spirit's leading.

1 Kings 13:1-24
esp. vv.15-22

In this story, fellow servants, prophets of God, found themselves cross-ways with the Holy Spirit.

(A. We should all “test the spirits”, from whatever source they may come [Mt. 16:23].

B. As ‘givers of instruction’ (counselors or mentors) we should take great care in what we say to a seeker! How would you feel if the advise you gave turned out to be in opposition to God’s purposes for that person?)

Q. What caution is highlighted in this story?

Acts 21:10-14

Paul recognizes in this passage that the counsel given was not from God, though delivered by well-intended friends. Even the most spiritual can be driven by purposes or motivations other than those of the Holy Spirit.

Blackaby, pg 186,
“Encouraging at the Stake”

Closing Questions for Reflection –

- 1) Why do you think that the Holy Spirit led you to this church? Are you presently involved in the ministry here at the level Jesus wants you to be?
- 2) What is the Holy Spirit trying to tell you during these days, either through fellow believers or through other means available to God?
- 3) How is the Holy Spirit currently using other believers to help you to become more Christ-like? (If none are, perhaps you have just uncovered an opportunity where you could seek God’s heart through this venue!)

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read Hearing God’s Voice, Chapter 9. Listen for God’s voice as you read. Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
 - Read Jeremiah, Chapters 36-40. Listen for God’s voice through your reading. How (in what ways) did God speak to Jeremiah? Reflect on what you have read this week and journal your thoughts.
 - Continue your word study on “heart”, meditating on at least 5 new occurrences. Be certain to examine each occurrence in context. Listen for God’s voice and journal your thoughts.
 - Close your time in prayer, and listen for God’s voice.
 - Be prepared to share your insights at the next class meeting.
-

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE END OF THIS CLASS, PART 4

At this point in your study of Hearing God's Voice you should be well on the way to completing your paper. Major themes should be identified at this point with a close-to-final narrative for each theme. You may or may not have a good grasp on personal application of each theme, but you should at least have some general thoughts written down. It is very likely God will have spoken to you about personal application. If you are struggling with this part, *listen!*

Have you created a "Conclusions/Summary" section? Try to sum up your experience as you have pursued your relationship with God. Just two weeks to go before your paper is due!

SPECIAL OFFER!

As noted last week, the primary benefit for completing this exercise is to bring focus to your experience in hearing God's voice. The very act of writing this paper will provide substance and opportunity for God to speak with you.

There are times when processing your experience with someone else is helpful to solidify and test your own ideas. Just articulating what you believe helps to cement your ideas and prepares you to defend your beliefs in the future.

Would you like some one-on-one time (or maybe two-on-one, you can bring your spouse if you like – in fact, this is recommended if you both have an interest) to process your ideas and experience?

This is **ONLY** an offer. Feel no obligation of any kind. However, if you find the prospects of such a meeting of interest, please be prepared to turn in your paper at our last meeting and include your:

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, ST ZIP
PHONE NUMBER
EMAIL

LESSON NINE

Lies and Half-Truths

John 10:14, 27

¹⁰My sheep hear my voice and they know me . . .

Reflections from expository reading of Jeremiah.

Reflections from word study on “heart”.

Reflections from reading Hearing God’s Voice.

The Conundrum:

There is only one known as the “Adversary”. He is neither omniscient, omnipotent nor omnipresent. He is not able to read your thoughts, and in fact, he is not even able to approach you unless God Himself permits it (Job 1:2; 2:6; Luke 22:31-32). What is important to know is how to recognize the Adversary when he approaches.

Ephesians 1:20-23 clearly states that Satan is in subjection to the authority of Jesus. As powerful as he may be, a Christian will always be able to appeal to Jesus when he feels he is under the influence of the enemy.

Many of Satan’s tactics are recognizable, albeit not necessarily *easily* recognized or easily addressed. How does a Christian properly filter the messages he receives?

The Adversary’s Tactics

Lk. 4:1-13, esp. 9-11
John 8:44

You would think it should be fairly easy to recognize a lie. Right? Wrong! Just because Satan is subject to Christ’s authority and not all-knowing does not mean he is not clever, creative and knows where you are the most susceptible to his influence, where you are the most vulnerable.

2 Cor. 11:13-15
1 John 4:1

A. Satan Lies -

1.

(Satan draws out the pride in men, leading us to believe we are self-sufficient and have no need of God.)

2.

Category:

PRIDE

NOTES

Q. In what ways does Satan successfully deceive men?

<p>(Satan redirects our curiosity, intellect and thought process to devise religious models, or belief systems, marginalizing God or eliminating Him altogether.)</p>	FALSE DOCTRINE
<p>3. (Satan leverages man's prideful nature to devise philosophic and ethical/moral models based on humanist principles not Godly ones.)</p>	PRIDE
<p>4. (Satan deceives men through respected authority figures who espouse non-Biblical principles. Examples include some areas of science, i.e. evolutionism and cosmology theory; some areas of medicine, i.e. abortion rights; and some areas of human behavior theory, i.e. 'alternative life-style' preferences. There are, no doubt many other examples.)</p>	PRIDE
<p>5. (Satan introduces subtle errors in theology that set believers off course as they seek to know God better.)</p>	FALSE DOCTRINE
<p>6. (Satan causes men to seek out humanist standards of conduct first, and marginalize or not consider Biblical ones.)</p>	PRIDE
<p>7. (Satan introduces doubt into our thought process, causing believers to question previously held convictions.)</p>	DOUBT
<p>8.</p>	
<p>9.</p>	
<p>10.</p>	

B. Satan Offers Shortcuts –

God sets a very high standard. In fact, He expects perfection! Do you ever say to yourself, "This is *good enough*" when it comes to carrying out the Lord's work? For the record, anything short of perfection is never 'good enough'.

Having set the bar at the proper height, we now know what our goal should be when doing anything for the Lord. We are, however, flawed. We are sinful and NOT perfect, and it is unlikely that much of what we do would be the way Jesus would do it. But we must remember we are not yet 'like Jesus' (though some day we will be!).

When we have done the very best we can do, THAT will be good enough, anything less is not. Jesus wants and deserves the very best of your time, resources, gifts, and talents. Having the mind that what you bring is “good enough” is nothing more than a shortcut!

C. Satan Justifies Sin –

How many times have you excused your sinfulness by thinking:

“No one in my circumstances would have done anything differently.”

“I am a product of my upbringing. I can’t help being who I am.”

“God will excuse this failure to follow His instruction because my situation is *truly unique*.”

Or a favorite . . .

“God made me this way!”

Fall back to the previous lie – Shortcuts. God expects PERFECTION. Anything short of this is sin. There are no excuses . . . only *forgiveness!*

D. Satan Causes Division –

“I don’t mean to be hurtful, but . . .”. Consider how your words will be received by your listener. If they bring unity and harmony they are of the Lord. If your words create divisiveness, they are not!

E. Satan Makes Us Prideful –

Pride is Satan’s favorite tool, and arguably the one he is most familiar with as pride was the cause of his own downfall. Pride is the taproot of most human sin. Pride sinks deep into our character and is the source of most unchristian behavior.

We are often most susceptible to the sin of pride on the very heels of greatness! Even in the moment of success we are most susceptible! At the moment you stand on the highest peak of the highest mountain – STOP – and acknowledge that the moment belongs to God! You are but His servant, a tool in His hand, clay that He has molded. Praise the Lord that He has found you worthy to use you so!

F. Satan Excuses the Means –

Ungodly means never justify Godly ends. When your purpose is honorable, but your methods are not, God is not in it!

Distinguishing Between God’s Will and Your Will

Sometimes our desire to serve God is quite genuine and heartfelt. It is possible to feel so passionate about an area of service that you are convinced that God has surely called you to this particular area of service.

Q. When are you the most susceptible to pride?

Q. How can you be assured of

having heard
God's voice?

A. Is the decision God-honoring?

(Jer. 17:9 – As noted earlier, God is as concerned with your means as He is with the end result of your efforts. God will never ask you to accomplish a Godly objective through dishonorable means. If you are inclined to do so, the inclination is either from Satan or of your own heart.)

B. Am I looking for an excuse to bail?

(Phil. 1:6 – There is a principle here that can be of benefit – once you have made a commitment, you are obliged to fulfill that commitment whether it is to God or man! There are no examples in Scripture when God failed to complete what he started. There are MANY examples of finishing a difficult task, even when the difficulties were not anticipated at the outset. God always finishes what He starts. So should you.)

1. “I must have been mistaken when I originally decided this was God’s direction for me! Its okay to bail now.”
2. “I never signed up for this mess, its okay to bail now!”
3. “I confess. I’m weak. I can’t do this. Cut me some slack. I’m going to bail now!”
4. “I must remain steadfast and finish the course – for Jesus sake.”

C. What do the Scriptures say?

(Eccl. 1:9 – Ecclesiastes tells us there is nothing new under the sun. How you live your life is founded on basic principles. It is unlikely that your situation is unique in all of time and space. A Biblical principle must surely apply. Your context may be different, but Godly principles are universal.)

God’s Word Falsely Proclaimed

Christians are always eager to hear a word from the Lord. You long to know God better, learn from Him and be pleasing to Him. But when you hear a word that is unsettling in your spirit and causes you to question the truth of what is being presented, how do you authenticate it’s the truthfulness?

Q. What do you typically do when the ‘going gets tough’?

Q. How would you characterize the openness of the Bereans?

Acts 17:11

The Bereans were genuine in their desire to clearly understand the word of God presented to them through those claiming to be God’s spokesmen. But they also required that the message proclaimed conform to what they already knew of the character of God, so they tested what was spoken

1 John 4:1

against their understanding of scripture. This discipline is attributed to the Bereans to their credit! Believers today should do likewise.

- (1. *Scripture*)
- (2. *Other believers*)
- (3. *Prayer*)
- (4.)

God's Voice v. the World's Voice – The world's voice is loud, insistent, and often compelling. The world's voice appeals to our nature, our appetites and our intellect. The world's voice can be subtle and it is sometimes difficult to know if it's appeal is due to our own fallen nature or the influence of the Adversary.

The World Says . . .	God Says . . .
Look out for "Number One".	<i>(Strive to save your own life and you will lose it! – Mt. 10:39)</i>
"A man has to know his limitations" – Clint Eastwood. (Implications are, do not exceed them.)	<i>(God will exceed anything you can accomplish in your own strength -)</i>
Focus on your strengths.	<i>(God focuses on your weaknesses)</i>
Adrenaline rush → "Is that all there is?"	<i>(Serving (giving) to others brings joy)</i>
Demand your rights!	<i>(Love your neighbor – a heart-level experience – Mt. 5:43-44)</i>
"How much does it pay?"	<i>(You cannot serve two masters – Mt. 6:24)</i>
Advancement, achievement, prestige.	<i>(Take up your cross and follow me – Mt. 16:24)</i>
Use 'common sense'.	<i>(Apply divine wisdom – 1 Cor. 1:18-25; Col. 28)</i>
Management Theory.	<i>(The Good Shepherd)</i>
Seek power and influence.	<i>(Submit to others – Eph. 5:21)</i>

Blackaby, pp.202-208

Missing God's Voice

When approaching God for counsel you must understand at the outset that when God speaks, the only (legitimate) response open to you is to obey! If you are not prepared to respond in this way, it may be better not to seek God's counsel in the first place. But, how wise is this? (Proverbs. 1:7)

Q. What resources do you have today to be 'Berean'?

Balckaby, pg. 214
 para.2

Q. Have you ever hesitated to approach God for fear He may respond?

“Lord, send me some one with whom I can share my faith, and I will!”

“Lord, let this business deal close and I will give you the whole commission!”

“Lord, get me out of this predicament I’ve gotten myself in to and I will . . .”

How do you think God feels about unkept promises . . . little deal or big deal? It is a BIG DEAL! The chances of hearing God’s voice are reduced each time we fail to obey when we hear God speaking.

Closing Questions for Reflection –

- 4) What do you think God wants you to do so you can better recognize His voice when He speaks?
- 5) What “voices” are currently filling the airwaves of your mind? How will you filter out these other voices so you can hear God’s voice more clearly?
- 6) Is there some one in your life from whom you can seek Godly counsel as you seek to discern God’s purpose for you? If not, have you considered asking God to bring just such a person into your life – a mentor?

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

- Read Hearing God’s Voice, Chapter 10-11. Listen for God’s voice as you read. Reflect on what you have read and journal your thoughts.
- Read Jeremiah, Chapters 41-45. Listen for God’s voice through your reading. How (in what ways) did God speak to Jeremiah? Reflect on what you have read this week and journal your thoughts.
- Continue your word study on “heart”, meditating on at least 5 new occurrences. Be certain to examine each occurrence in context. Listen for God’s voice and journal your thoughts.
- Close your time in prayer, and listen for God’s voice.
- Be prepared to share your insights at the next class meeting.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE END OF CLASS, CLOSING THOUGHTS!

YOUR PAPER IS DUE NEXT WEEK (if you plan on turning one in)! – At this point in your study on Hearing God’s Voice you should have nearly completed your paper. Major themes should be clearly identified and your narrative on each theme complete. Personal application for each theme should be well developed, if not also complete.

Your “Conclusions/Summary” section should be at least in draft form at this point, though you may also have this completed by now. This would leave the coming week for polishing up your paper. Remember to keep your effort to no more than 3 to 5 pages in length (11 pt. font minimum, standard margins).

Be sure to keep a copy for yourself if you turn in a copy.

Have you given any thought to processing your experience over these last several weeks with some one else? There could be substantial benefit for you to do so. If you already meet with some one who you view as a mentor, your paper will make a great topic for discussion and a lens through which you both can examine your relationship with Jesus from a whole new perspective.

If you would like to meet with your class facilitator, I would enjoy that opportunity very much. We will look at where you think God may be speaking with you plus explore how to ‘pay attention’ to God’s already present action in your life and where you think He may be leading you. When you turn in your paper make certain to include the following:

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY, ST ZIP
PHONE NUMBER
EMAIL

Your teacher will get in touch with you to arrange for a meeting. Be prepared to let him/her know if you would like a “one-on-one” or “two-on-one” (with your spouse) meeting so he/she can schedule time appropriately. If you and your spouse are completing this assignment together (you should each have written your own paper as your experiences are almost certainly different), it would be beneficial for both spouses to meet together with your teacher.

God bless you as you seek to draw nearer to God’s heart and listen for His voice to direct you in your role as a servant leader.

Jeremiah 6:16



LESSON TEN

God Speaks Consistently and Progressively

¹⁶*Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.*

Reflections from expository reading of Jeremiah.

Reflections from word study on “heart”.

Reflections from reading Hearing God’s Voice.

The Conundrum:

Does it ever seem that in your spiritual journey you find yourself in a “learning loop”, experiencing a certain *déjà vu* ‘all over again’, as it were? Over the years, as you look back on your life in a retrospective and *reflective* way, you see that response patterns to certain situations persist – patterns that do not necessarily reflect what you might consider a Godly character quality.

Could it be you are dealing with a God-initiated learning and growing opportunity, the full benefit of which you have not come to realize? Since the lesson has not yet been learned, knowingly or unknowingly you find yourself repeating the same type of testing/trial/learning “opportunity”!

Scripture suggests that God does not provide Spiritual Water to drink through a fire hose, but rather, through an eye dropper – precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little (Isaiah 28:13 KJV). Fortunately for believers, much learning goes on in parallel-fashion allowing us to learn and grow spiritually in some areas (thankfully), though we may remain somewhat spiritually stunted in other areas.

Those lessons not yet learned are destined to repeat! After the foundation is constructed, God builds upon that base in a progressive fashion, precept upon precept! Are you listening for God’s voice during the trials and tribulations of your life?

History Matters

Since we know that God starts with your spiritual foundation in forming your character, there is benefit to be derived in reflecting upon your ‘personal story’, or as Robert Clinton has called it, your Generalized Timeline.

The more confident you are of *how* God has spoken to you in the past, plus *what* He has said in the past, the more assurance you will have in evaluating what He may be saying to you today. We know that God will never contradict what He has told you earlier.

2 Samuel 7:11b-16;
1 Kings 11:4-8;
1 Kings 11:12-13,
34-36

Being confined to the stream of time as we are, it is not difficult to overlook the trans-generational influence God may have had, and how that influence may be affecting you today . . . and your children tomorrow!

In David's family timeline scripture highlights God's trans-generational involvement. As a way of uncovering God's influence on your family, and by extension you, have you ever explored your personal timeline, including your family's experience with God – parents and grandparents?

COMMENT: If you are interested in a more structured effort to construct your personal timeline as a means of seeing where God has *already* been at work in your life, consider joining a ten-month class beginning in September. The class will follow curriculum adopted by the North American Baptist Conference and implemented locally through the Leadership Center initiative in your Association.

This unique servant leadership development initiative will devote several weeks to create a well-developed personal timeline. This is just one of many exercises that will facilitate relationship-building with God. You will construct your own timeline based on Robert Clinton's six-phase model.

If you are interested in more detail on the Leadership Center in your area, please see your teacher.

Spiritual Markers

There are many occurrences in the Old Testament where God's people would erect a stone marker or alter to commemorate a special encounter with God. These structures often remained for many generations and served to remind the nation of God's special care for them.

Israel also established special feasts or days of remembrance (holidays) as spiritual markers. The custom of circumcision was also a unique spiritual marker.

(An event, positive or negative, that God has interpreted for you.)

To neglect the opportunity to reflect on significant events in your life and seek God's voice and His involvement in the event is to miss (waste) an important opportunity to hear God's voice speaking directly to you.

Consider Peter as a New Testament example of some one who could no doubt recount a number of spiritual markers in his life. Can you name a few that you think may have been particularly meaningful to Peter?

1. *(One day on the shore, "Come, follow me!")*

Q. How would you define a modern-day spiritual marker?

2. (Name change from Simon to "Peter" by Jesus.)
3. (The day he walked on water!)
4. (The time he saw Jesus transfigured)
5. (The time Jesus washed his feet)
6. (The night he denied knowing Jesus)

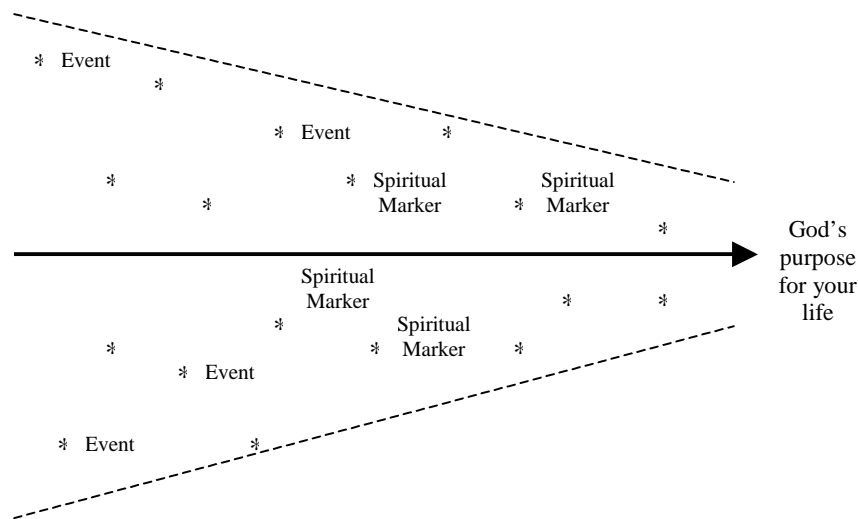
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Q. Name some spiritual markers in your life.

One way you might consider identifying the spiritual markers in your life is to set aside a significant portion of time, and with pencil and paper in hand, begin to think back over your Christian journey and note down important spiritual events that come to your mind. Do not be too quick to close out this process. Let God bring to your memory those long-forgotten times when He may have been at work in your life.

Once you have developed a list of important spiritual markers, try to put approximate dates to each event. (Can you see how this exercise might contribute to the effort to develop your personal timeline?)

Identifying the spiritual markers in your life is another important exercise that will help you to hear God's voice and you will find continuing value if you choose to explore participation in NCLC already discussed above.



Do you suppose that as you are able to identify more and more important events in your life as being, in truth, spiritual markers, you may learn to hear God more clearly as you become accustomed to hearing His voice and recognizing His ever-present activity in your life?

Q. How might journaling help to keep track of your spiritual markers?

(Note your spiritual markers in a special way or special place in your journal. Include the dates. God's words to you may seem disconnected at first. Over time themes will begin to emerge. These themes (there should only be a few) will help you discern God's direction in the future. It is unlikely God will change direction with respect to His purposes for you.)

Blackaby, pg.226,
para 4 – pg.227,
para 1

Responding to God's Voice

Do you suppose it would be possible to know God if He did not want to be known? This question borders on the absurd! We would absolutely have no hope of discovering God if He chose to be unknown! However, knowing what we do know of God, we can be certain of one thing – He DOES want to be known, AND He so very much wants to be known that *He takes the initiative* to draw us to Himself!

Permit me to propose a hypothesis . . . could it be that God's purpose in the world, when it is all said and done, is to establish a RELATIONSHIP with you? Or perhaps it might better be said, RE-establish the relationship that He originally intended at the creation but was lost due to sin. Could it be that what God is all about is restoring what was lost?

Is it possible to build a relationship without communicating? Not!

Lets review:

1. God wants to be known
2. God initiates contact
3. God communicates with those He loves
4. God builds (back) the relationship that was lost due to sin.

Q. Why is God so intent on being known?

Isaiah 55:8-9

It is possible to miss God's words as it is likely we are not accustomed to hearing (or listening for) His voice. Recall the cricket in NYC! As God is not our servant, He is unlikely to speak on demand, or on your terms. Yet how could He have spoken more clearly than in the person of Jesus?

John 10:3-4, 27

Jesus has clearly said that we are able to hear His voice! The closer the relationship you have with God the more easily you will be able to hear His voice. Your prayer might better be, "*Lord, help me draw closer to you so that I might learn to know you and know your heart*", rather than, "*Lord, help me out of this pickle I have gotten myself into!*"

Learning to hear God's voice is not about solving our problems in this world so much as it is about building a relation with the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Once that relationship is established, your heart's desire will find itself increasingly aligned with God's desires for you! And problems will take on less significance as you focus more on your relationship with God and less on your problems (which, by the way, you will *never* be without!).

Deut. 32:46-47;
Jer. 4:3;
Mt. 13:5-23

(If you think these words are written to the unbelieving or those in open rebellion to God, perhaps some meditation is in order, for at some level these words apply to all of us.)

These verses speak to the condition of your heart, or collectively, to the heart of all mankind. Do you suppose the condition of one's heart might have some influence on the ability to hear God's Voice?

('Heart' speaks to the essence of our character. Heart will drive our behavior. Heart is what God sees, much more than what we do. God distinguishes between our actions and our heart. Like Paul, we often act contrary to our heart (Romans 7:14-25). Fortunately God recognizes this and credits more for our heart than our conduct – fortunately, unless your heart is the problem!)

Jer. 29:12-13

There is that word 'heart' again! Does God wish to speak to you about your heart?

"... with all your heart" = the quality of your relationship

Q. What do these words say to you?

Q. From your word study on "heart", can you comment on hearing God's voice?

Q. What does it mean to seek God "... with all your heart ..."?

Questions for Reflection

1. Are you purposefully seeking God to build your relationship with Him?
2. How well do you know God's ways? How will understanding His ways help you to hear His voice?

3. How do you plan on recording spiritual markers in your life so they will be available for your to refer to as you seek to discern God's voice in the future?
 4. In what ways do you think God would have you cultivate your heart to make you more responsive to His direction? (How do you suppose you came to the answer that you did to this question!!!?)
-

YOUR PAPER IS DUE!

A NOT SO FICTIONAL STORY Once Upon a Time . . .



NOTES

Imagine yourself participating in a high adventure camp. Maybe you don't think of yourself as an outdoor sort, and you would *never* consider 'camping' at anything less than a four-star resort . . . so work with me here! We know by now that God DOES work miracles! :o]

You and your team have the opportunity to participate in an exercise that goes WAY beyond anything you have ever thought, or even imagined. You will participate in a High Ropes Course as part of your attendance in a Christian camp in the Sierras. From this experience you will learn spiritual lessons in numbers and in substance far exceeding anything in your previous experience . . . and you may hear God speak more clearly than at any previous time!

The day is warm. You seek out the shade provided by majestic Ponderosa Pines and redwoods. The smell of the mountain air and the clear blue sky makes you feel good to be alive!

You observe long woven steel cables stretching between trees within the activities area and a thought quickly passing through your mind, "Gee, I wonder what those are for?" never suspecting that in very short order you will be WALKING on those cables, 40 to 50 feet in the air, listening to the faint, distant cheers of encouragement from your team members!

In preparation for what has suddenly become a heart-stopping discovery, you practice walking on a 12-foot long 4- by 8-inch beam about 16 inches off the ground. "Hay, this is not bad", you think. "I can do this", as you walk the length without much difficulty.

A few minutes pass and you now find yourself standing on a narrow platform, maybe 18-inches wide, attached to a tree, and you are hugg'en that tree! That same 4- by 8-inch beam is now 50 feet above the ground and is positioned between two Ponderosa Pines about 30 feet distance apart!

A 6-inch step down separates the platform from the beam. "Lobster claws" attached to your safety harness ensures you will not fall far should you lose your footing, but this somehow doesn't make you feel any less uneasy. A sweet young lady is standing on the beam in front of you, reaching out her hand inviting you to walk with her the length of the beam – you forward and she *backward!*

Placing one foot on the beam you marvel at your accomplishment! You stand there, heart bounding . . . in your throat, eyes like saucers, throat dry, hands sweaty, legs weak and shaky, all courage GONE. You whimper as the young lady smiles sweetly and continues to reach out her hand inviting you to take another step. If you ever in your life imagined that you were courageous, or macho, or had 'NO FEAR', that has all long since gone!

You couldn't care less there is a young lady standing in front of you, smiling and reaching out her hand. You are scared to death!

"Come on, you can do this", she says with a warm and welcoming smile. One foot on the beam and the other still on the platform, you can't speak. "Come on, this is a piece of cake, you can do this", she says. Your personal guide waits patiently and continues to smile. Pleasant talk and patience is having no affect on your quivering leg resting on the beam and your trailing foot that seems to be permanently affixed to the platform.

Then comes an unexpected and bold declaration from your still smiling personal guide – "STEP ... OFF ... THE PLATFORM". Without much further thought you step off, walk the distance, and step up onto the platform at the next tree. Still 50 feet up, you are on to your next challenge. Your guide smiles as she heads off back down the beam to encourage the next adventurer on your team, just to repeat the process again. With this accomplishment under your belt, you are not hugg'en the tree quite so tightly, glad to be alive!

But the *real message* from this experience has not yet sunk in. That evening, sitting quietly and reflecting on the day, God speaks! "I have been preparing you, equipping you, and training you for some time now. It is time . . . STEP OFF THE PLATFORM."

It *is* time. Nothing more needs to be done before stepping off the platform in your life. Certainly much will continue to be done afterward, but for the moment, you have received equipping and it is time!

Is it time for you to step off the platform, trusting God to be there to hold you up? He will not ask you to do anything He has not prepared you to complete. He is faithful. He loves you beyond anything you can even imagine. He "will never leave you nor forsake you".

Is it time for you to **STEP OFF THE PLATFORM?**

Q. Personal Application: What does it mean to you personally to "Step off the platform"?

1 Sam. 3:10

LEADERSHIP CENTERS

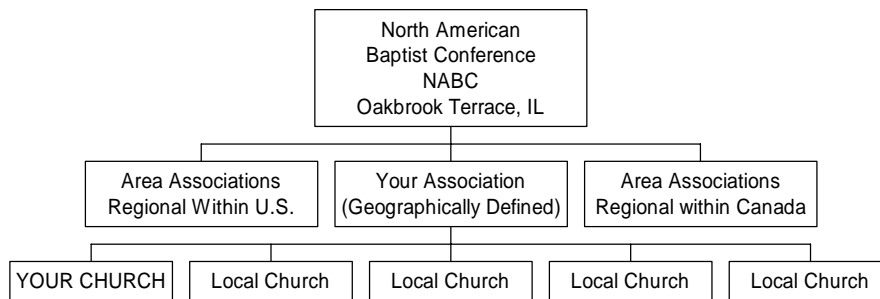
Continuing What You Have Begun

¹⁰*Speak, for your servant is listening.*



First, A Little Background

The Leadership Centers are a loose affiliation of local churches, all members of your local Association of churches. Your Association represents the church you attend to the North American Baptist Conference (NABC). The relationship graphically looks like the following:



The Leadership Center's Main Focus

The ten-month leadership development class begins in September and runs through June of the following year – a typical academic year. Year One of the Leadership Center curriculum is known as the Emerging Phase of spiritual leadership development and focuses on the following four areas:

1. Biblical Foundations of Spiritual Leadership
2. Personal Foundations of Spiritual Leadership
3. Relational Foundations of Spiritual Leadership
4. Functional Foundations of Spiritual Leadership

Two optional additional Phases follow the Emerging Phase, each representing an extra ten months of study. In the Equipping Phase (Year Two) there is an option to participate in a seminary track with the objective of receiving a Masters of Divinity degree. More will be shared on this topic at an upcoming informational meeting.

These four topical areas define four quarters of study. Within each eight to ten week quarter participants will study one recently published book on spiritual leadership as well as participate in an in-depth study of scripture through a lens of spiritual leadership. One retreat per quarter is typically scheduled with participants from Association churches all attending together as a single cohort. Guest speakers typically lead these retreats.

The Leadership Center's Main Purpose

The purpose of the Leadership Center is to equip believers to develop a closer relationship with their Lord. There is a very intentional methodology to achieving this purpose that is based on the curriculum defined in the four quarterly classes listed above.

You may recognize a relationship between the class you have just completed and the purpose for the Leadership Center. Hearing God's Voice just barely touched on a number of elements in the Leadership Center program. If you found Hearing God's Voice helpful, the Leadership Center should be on your list of classes to check out for this coming Sunday school year.

How to Apply to Participate in the Leadership Center

Class sizes are intentionally kept to no more than 10 to 12 at the most, so you can see you should give this matter of committing to a 10-month course of study some serious thought. If you are interested you are strongly encouraged to let your interest be known.

During the summer we will offer an introductory workshop (one evening) on the Leadership Center that will be informational in nature. You will be able to meet the facilitator(s) for the coming year, ask questions and if interested, pick up an application form.

As you might have already guessed, the Leadership Center is not your typical Sunday school class. Hearing God's Voice was constructed to give you a taste of what the Leadership Center is like. The Leadership Center will include regular weekly Bible study, outside reading, some special projects – like developing your Generalized Timeline, and as already mentioned, on off-site retreat from time to time.

ACTION ITEM: If you are interested in being notified when the Leadership Center informational workshop will be given, add your name to the signup list and you will be contacted when a date is set.
