

A Stop by Quiet Waters

By

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Hearing God Speak

In my last Quiet Waters message I asked this question: “Wouldn't it be great to go through each day knowing you were doing the will of God for that day? And, wouldn't it be great to come to the end of the day knowing you had done what God asked you to do even though there were many other things left undone?”

Two things in particular led me to believe this could be my experience on a regular basis. The first was John 10:27, which says, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” NIV I was a young Christian attending Moody Bible Institute when I was introduced to the Navigator's Bible memory program and encountered this verse. Up to this time I thought that the only way to hear God was through reading the Bible.

I had come to Christ as a teenager in the early 1950s. There was a small Assembly of God church in our little town, which my new Christian friends referred to as, “Holy Rollers,” and told me to avoid them. They said they did funny things in church and listened to voices other than the word of God, etc. My friends warned me against listening to voices within because they would mislead me. I had been taught (correctly) that the Bible was God's word, and was told I was to read it, study it, and listen to it, for this was how God would speak to me. I was also told that on very rare occasions an individual might actually hear God speak to them, for it happened in the Bible, but that this was not the normal experience of most believers.

When I encountered this verse it hit me forcefully with the realization that the Lord Jesus was saying that I could actually hear His voice. But how, if I could not trust Him to speak to me through my mind or spirit, and if very few Christians ever heard Him actually speak to them?

During this same period of time I began to occasionally have impressions build within me that I was to do or not do a particular thing, go or not go to a particular place, and so forth. I thought these might be of the Lord, but feared following them for two reasons: one, because of the warnings given me about such things; and two, because deep in my heart I wanted to be able to choose what to do and not do, where to go and not go, etc. I wanted very much to be in control of my life and was not willing yet to face that issue. I repeatedly resisted these impressions, and gradually they died away. What did not leave me was the message in John 10:27 telling me I could hear my Savior's voice. It kept gnawing on me.

The second thing which helped me came after I had entered pastoral ministry and began to experience schedule overload and the incessant stress which accompanied it. There was always more to do than I could get done and so I would work harder, run faster, and spend more time in pastoral work. But no matter how hard I worked, I still ended most days frustrated and stressed because I had not done all there was to do.

Then one day the thought hit me that my schedule could not be of God because He would not deliberately give me more to do in a given day than He knew I was capable of doing. If this was so, and I became convinced it was, then I had to be doing this to myself because I was not seeking what God wanted of me for that day. Therefore, I was running my life and ministry, not God. It was then I realized I needed to hear Him speak to me so I could get my life and ministry under control, and be led by Him as the Scripture teaches. I also realized that He had tried to teach me how to recognize His voice years earlier but that I had shut Him down because I would not listen and learn in the early years of my Christian life.

I began each morning to ask God to impress on me clearly what He wanted me to do first that day. I knew I had to be brutally honest with myself about my own desires and interests for they would always rise to the surface, and it would be so easy to convince myself that was what God wanted me to do. I asked God to make it very clear to me, then I boldly (fearfully sometimes) stepped out in faith to do that thing, reminding myself it was better to think God said to do this and be wrong than to decide beforehand, on the basis of my own understanding, etc., that this was not of God. I believed He would honor my desire to recognize His voice, and so would teach me. I also believed He would not allow me to be deceived and go in the wrong direction or make a mess of things. Little by little I began to hear Him more and more clearly.

When I had finished the first thing I would then ask Him to show me what's next. Slowly but surely my life and ministry began to change, and I would go home with peace in my heart knowing I had done what the Lord wanted me to do that day. Things did not always go perfectly from that point on, but I have grown and grown in my ability to recognize His voice. And, I have experienced great joy in the realization that I have done what my Lord Jesus wanted me to do, not just what I wanted to do. There are other things I have also learned to do, which have helped me hear Him more clearly, but those are for another letter.

In closing let me assure you that I still read my Bible and study it earnestly. In fact, I have encountered the Lord more powerfully through the Scriptures in the last several years than I have done in all of my earlier Christian life. But the Bible cannot be used as a detailed worksheet for what God wants of you each day as you face the myriad challenges before you. For this, you need to develop an intimate relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ, which is what He yearns to have with you.

God bless you as you pursue Him with all your heart.

Scripture Resources

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” John 10:27 NIV

“Teach us to make the most of our time, so that we may grow in wisdom.” Psalm 90:12 NLT

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit’s fire. . . “ 1

Thessalonians 5:16 – 19a NIV

“After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.” 1 Kings 19:12 NIV

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” 1John 1:7 NIV

“So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert,’ ”

Hebrews 3:7-8 NIV

“The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.” John 10:3 NIV