

Designed
TO HEAR
GOD



VISHAL JETNARAYAN

FOREWORD BY WILLIAM D. HINN

DESIGNED TO HEAR GOD

Vishal Jetnarayan

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Please note that pronouns in Scripture that refer to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been capitalized. Also take note that the name satan and related names are not capitalized. The author has chosen not to acknowledge him, even to the point of violating grammatical rules.



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Paperbook ISBN 978-1-936554-02-7
(formerly self-published 978-0-615-21710-9)
ebook ISBN 978-1-936554-03-4

For Worldwide Distribution, Printed in the U.S.A.

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 / 14 13 12 11

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book to a generation hungry after God's own heart, a generation who yearns for intimacy with the Lord. May the supernatural become a natural way of living. And to Jadon, Ashria, and Jesiah, I learn much about the Father's heart from the both of you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Words cannot describe my gratefulness to my amazing wife, Selena, who inspires me to be a better person through her encouragement, patience, kindness, and love. I would also like to thank my mother for her years of devotion and sacrifice. To the eldership team at World Harvest Outreach, thank you for continuing to challenge me, and for your guidance, as well as believing in me. In addition, there are several other leaders, too numerous to mention, who I will always remain indebted to. You have impacted my life greatly, and I look forward to learning a wealth of knowledge from you in the years to come. My heartfelt thanks to Becky Helman, who has done an incredible job editing this book. You are a phenomenal gift to the Body of Christ. And to Ben and Jen Delgado, I am grateful for your listening ear and for sharing your thoughts. I value both of you.

ENDORSEMENTS

This book is timely, considering the world's fascination with the supernatural—proof that we all are desperate to hear the voice of God. However, the Church has been driven to perform for God, unaware that God longs to know and speak to each of us personally. Therefore, the people of God have wandered aimlessly and without purpose. We must come to the understanding that the desires God has already placed in our hearts and minds are really His intentions for our lives.

Vishal Jetnarayan is a gift to believers and nonbelievers alike. I have seen him work with a group of people who thought they were just ordinary folks and train them to hear the voice of God for themselves and others—bringing change to our local church as well as the entire community. Vish walks in great integrity, hears God and prophecies accurately, holding himself to a high standard. My personal life, as well as my ministry, have been tremendously influenced by his spiritual insight.

—Gene Strite
Senior Elder, World Harvest Outreach
Director, SentForth Ministries

Vishal Jetnarayan cares deeply about young people. His heart for this emerging generation is the driving force behind this helpful book, *Designed to Hear God*. The biblical truths and simple wisdom this book contains will empower you with greater faith and practical insight to hear God's voice clearly, which is your destiny.

—Steve Thompson, Associate Director
Morning Star Ministries
Author, *You May All Prophecy*

Designed to Hear God

Part of my heart is in the nation of South Africa. Especially in the last ten years, God has raised up many fresh voices of men and women in that country who are hearing from Heaven. One of those up-and-coming voices is that of my friend and colleague, Vishal Jetnarayan, raised in Durban, and now residing in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Vish has a strong prophetic spirit; and as is evidenced by the work before you, *Designed to Hear God* also bears the mantle of a scribe.

This new book is sound and biblically sensible. The sons of God must be led by the Spirit of God, ever energized by the mind of Christ (see Rom. 8:14; Phil. 2:5). Vishal takes us on a journey through the Word of God to establish and to illustrate his theme, and then encourages us with practical admonitions for intimacy with God.

If I had but one message to share with another person, it would be this: You must learn to hear the voice of the Spirit of God in your spirit! Vish has made that easier for all of us. I highly endorse his ministry and recommend this book to every believer, especially to leaders, young and old, who have been *Designed to Hear God*.

—Dr. Kelley Varner
Praise Tabernacle
Richlands, NC

In every generation God raises up fresh, relevant voices who are tailored for that generation. Vishal is one of those young voices God continues to prepare as a trumpet with a clear sound for this 21st century. This book addresses some of the most important subjects essential to qualify one in the prophetic ministry: *learning to hear and discern with accuracy the voice of God*.

Many modern believers struggle with hearing God's voice other than through someone else, and that genuinely reveals a weakness in modern prophetic function. Jesus made it very clear that His sheep hear His voice and will not follow a stranger's. Many very practical areas are discussed in this book, from having the mind of Christ to intimacy with the Bridegroom. As we develop greater intimacy with the Almighty, we provide ourselves with a more discernible position to hear God's voice.

I encourage each believer to read this book with an open mind and remove the novelty of hearing God's voice in your personal life. Become familiar with the many ways in which He speaks, and you will be very grateful that you did.

—Dr. Stephen Everett
Author, *God's Kingdom and
The New Testament Principle of Kingdom Stewardship*

In the midst of a world filled with manifestations of witchcraft, mysticism, and divination, the Body of Christ needs to return to God's original intent—to be in constant communication with Him.

The word and voice of the Lord, imprisoned by past traditions and leadership, are being challenged in this book, to meet the reality that God still communicates with man beyond the boundaries of our mind, intellect, and rational thought. It is refreshing when a writer clearly describes something he is actually practicing; moreover, it is easy to catch hold of the terminology when one dwells in the practice—and this is certainly true of Vishal. I have watched as God has tremendously nurtured his gift, from the tender age of 12, when he was first stirred by the Spirit to go out into the nations.

I recommend this book to leaders and all Kingdom saints as a tool to propel you into a greater and more intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus.

—Dr. Robert Munien
Grace Outreach Ministries
Durban, South Africa

Prophecy, in its simplest terms, is hearing God and speaking. All the children of God are capable of doing so...but not many do. A prophet's gift is to equip the saints to distinguish the voice of the Spirit of God from all other voices.

There is much prophesying today, but people are still dependant on others to tell them what God is saying. The season has changed, however; and a new type of prophet is arising in the Church—one who pursues the original mandate for the prophetic calling: "For the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry..." (Eph. 4:12).

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Vishal Jetnarayan is one of this new breed of prophets. He is bold and practical. He came of age in South Africa during the difficult days of transition from apartheid to liberty, and his maturity evidences this training.

This book is a clear articulation of the fundamental need to hear God together with practical helps to achieve that result. It is not designed to make everyone a prophet. It is, however, an excellent foundational work of instruction for the new believer and as a tool for teachers. I highly recommend it.

—Dr. Sam Soleyn
The Kingdom of God Ministries

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FOREWORD

THE law of creation is: Everything reproduces after its own kind; each seed contains the source of itself in itself to propagate its own kind. A coconut tree can produce only coconuts; a cow can produce only cows—no exceptions—after their kind; after cattle-kind, after bird-kind, etc. The standard was set. Then the Lord said something astounding, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26a)—after His kind—the God-kind of creation.

God being Spirit, and man being first and foremost a spirit-being must return to his own genesis to encounter God. Jesus, being the Way back to God the Father, becomes the reconciling experience of our journey.

Jesus said, “*It is the spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. **The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life***” (John 6:63). Imagine words that are Spirit, words that carry life. Obviously, Jesus was not describing letters with wings, but vital, living words that spark activity in the spirit of man.

Whereas, man without the voice of God is an aimless wanderer in the dark fields of his own imagination.

In this book, Vishal Jetnarayan shines the Light upon the path that exposes the original plan of man’s design. His words ring of the Spirit that awakens man to the voice of God. Designed to Hear God is in itself a design to hear God.

Jesus said, “*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me*” (Revelation 3:20).

—Dr. William D. Hinn
Senior Pastor, Resurrection Life Center International

INTRODUCTION

OVER the past several years as I have traveled to different parts of the world, I've witnessed the desire and hunger in the lives of people who often ask, "Can I hear the voice of God?" This hunger is not just limited to the saints in the Church, but has become a recognized need among people of various religions and even people who don't claim to practice any specific religion at all.

The spirit realm has become a quest, and people are eager to tune into this dimension. Tapping into this desire, the television, movie and media industries constantly promote more and various programs related to the supernatural and depict increased paranormal stories that have become a new attraction to the masses. In addition, television and radio talk show hosts often invite psychics and mediums to lead discussions on how to access the spirit realm, talk to the dead, and know your future.

Moreover, the occult has attracted thousands of people, especially young people who want to engage the spirit world. Mysticism fused with new age teaching seems so Christian-like that even believers find it difficult to discern the difference. Meanwhile, astrologists continue to intently study the stars and planets and use their findings to relate to people through horoscopes and to give description to future events. Governments use witches, psychics, and mediums to tell them of their nations' futures and global affairs. Furthermore, technology has shrunk the world so that now there is easy access to volumes of information on the spiritual realm. Yet most of this information can be false or misleading.

All the examples above present a picture that describes humanity's hunger for God, but much of humanity have no idea who the true and living God is. Consequently, they go astray looking for the right thing but influenced by the wrong powers. Repeatedly, they ask, "*Does a living God really speak, and can we know His voice?*" The answer is...

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absolutely. We all have been designed to hear God's voice. And as long as individuals are willing to take the time to listen, our amazing and all-wise God does speak.

While all of creation has been crafted, designed, and brought into existence by God, the human species is the only part of creation who has received His image and of which He has breathed His life into. Each individual upon the face of the earth possesses a body, soul, and spirit. This spirit provides all of mankind with the ability to communicate naturally with the Father, for "God is Spirit" (John 4:24a). Thus, hearing God is not a special gift, talent, or function. There is no specific program that can teach a person how to hear God; rather, it's simply having a willing heart and a desire to listen to Him. Hearing God's voice cannot be learned through mechanical means; instead, His voice is recognized through our spirit.

The divine intention of the Father has always been to be our friend, yet there are many people who doubt that God speaks personally or that He sincerely desires to have an individual relationship with each of us. Instead, for much of our lives, we concentrate on the devil and his domain, about his temptations and his conniving ways, so much so that it has provoked the Body of Christ to communicate more about the voice of the devil than God's. How peculiar that we would understand and be more familiar with the voice of the enemy, a creature that God created, rather than the voice of God the Creator. If a son or daughter of God hears more from the devil than from God, his or her relationship with the King of kings becomes questionable. Indeed, the devil does have a voice, for he tempted the Lord Jesus Christ who overcame him (see Matt. 4:1-11). But we must acknowledge and realize that the devil is a defeated foe and has no place in the life of the believer (see Isa. 40:1-2; John 19:28-30; Col. 2:15; Eph. 4:27).

We must refocus and recapture the essence of our being—to be Spirit led. Just as we communicate in the natural and are understood, so can spiritual thoughts be spoken to those who are spiritually minded. Some would describe these thoughts as *intuition*, but this does not give the appropriate value to the Holy Spirit who is a reality. God makes His voice known to us through the Holy Spirit as He inhabits our spirit (see Rom. 8:10). The voice of God can be fully recognized by a believer when he or she pursues a personal relationship with Him.

Chapter One

IS THERE A LOGICAL EXPLANATION?

THE introduction of the Renaissance in the 17th century was the dawning of a new era. This movement provoked reason, which in essence might sound good; however, there have been negative impacts that we need to consider. Reason sparked the trend of a magnitude of questions asked by man regarding almost everything around him; consequently, an overwhelming response of theories was birthed, which in turn provoked rationalism. Moreover, we as humans have been conditioned by many of these theories. We tend to listen with our mind instead of listening with our heart.

For example, the present-day culture promotes that man is the center of all things, encouraging people to believe that *rationalism*, which substitutes the supernatural with the natural, is the only way that proves effective in living daily life. This analytical belief structure and approach is the foundation that is taught in many schools and universities and is widely propagated in the corporate world. Yet this mind-set traps God in a box and supports the concept that God might speak to us, but only if it makes common sense to us. Hence, often this reason overshadows God's voice; and consequently, many people don't believe that He speaks at all.

What is *rationalism*? According to the Webster's Dictionary, *rationalism* is defined as:

Reliance on reason as the basis for establishment of religious truth. a: a theory that reason is in itself a source of knowledge superior to and independent of sense perceptions b: a view that reason and experience rather than the non-rational are the fundamental criteria in the solution of problems.

I prefer not to present reasoning as outright wrong, because in actuality it's not; rather, it's when reasoning supersedes the Spirit that

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errors start to form. In fact, good reasoning leads to appropriate and proper questions, and it would be foolish not to make use of our God-given inquisitive minds; but we must remember that in the supernatural, there are occurrences, healings, and miracles that take place that science cannot explain and where human reasoning cannot be applied. Money cannot purchase the outcome nor can any solution be provided. We must accept that there is no “reasonable explanation.” It is simply “God.”

WHERE HIS VOICE LEADS

The Western world can tend to challenge any believer who professes to have heard God, because many people, including believers, need to be presented with empirical evidence to demonstrate that what God is saying is really genuine. Indeed, acquiring facts and knowledge is vital; however, intellectualism does not lead you to experiencing God. It is Spirit that leads you.

Consider the story beginning in Genesis 12:1 where God spoke to Abram and told him, “Get out of your country...to a land that I will show you.” Perhaps Abram, at 75 years of age, had been quite comfortable where he was living and had not been entertaining any thoughts about moving. Personally, if I had been in Abram’s circumstance, my immediate response to the Lord would have been, “But where do You want me to go to?” And then, I would have continued to seek more answers. “Where is this land? How do I get there? What obstacles are on the way? How am I going to find food? Where am I going to stay?”

Yet although Abram might have had questions, he did not try to reason; instead, he obeyed what the Lord said and departed from his homeland (see Gen. 12:4). Later, in the New Testament, we read that Abraham obeyed the voice of God without hesitating and it was accounted to him for righteousness (see Rom. 4:3).

When God speaks, rationalism can get the better of us, thereby diluting God’s voice with our “reasonable” questions and answers. Let’s consider the story of Nicodemus in John chapter 3. Nicodemus was no ordinary man. As a Pharisee, he was a well-recognized rabbi and leader in Israel. In our day, he would be considered well qualified and known as a very intellectual man.

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After hearing about this Christ and the great deeds that He had been performing among the people, he personally visited Jesus during the night. At that meeting, Jesus informed him that he needed to be born again in order to see the Kingdom of God (see John 3:3). Let's consider Nicodemus' intellectual response.

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4).

The discussion continued.

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:5-8).

Nicodemus then asked:

"How can these things be?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?" (John 3:9-10).

Although there are many references to the Spirit in the Scriptures, we can still have difficulty defining "Spirit." Here we learn from Jesus that you must be born by the Spirit in order to understand spirit. Jesus Christ contradicted Nicodemus' intellectual understanding of the Kingdom. (Read more about the Spirit in Chapter Two, "Led by the Spirit.")

Another example is the story of Naaman in Second Kings chapter 5. Naaman was a man of authority, stature, and valor. Unfortunately, though, this great captain had been struck with a contagious, deadly disease—leprosy. Having this hideous-looking infirmity meant eventual and sure separation from society, and its end result was death. Upon hearing what Elisha the prophet had to say through a messenger, Naaman's response seemed appropriate and reasonable.

But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy'" (2 Kings 5:11).

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Naaman had been instructed to go and dip himself seven times in one of the filthiest rivers in Israel—the Jordan. However, in his mind, he had already pictured what should have taken place. But God voiced the contrary through His prophet. After experiencing difficulty in comprehending the link to his healing, Naaman eventually followed through with the instructions and was healed.

Personally, I can often be analytical and find myself rationalizing situations and outcomes. For example, a lady in our congregation had been diagnosed with throat cancer, and subsequently, many of our people prayed over her during one of our intercession meetings. After that day, she went in for her checkup and reevaluation to discover that the results remained positive for cancer. She was a mother of three beautiful children and too young to die.

I then decided to ask one of the prophetic team members to accompany me to her house to pray over her again. As we anointed her with oil and prayed, I felt the Lord say to me, *Spit on your hands and lay your hands on her*. This sounded really strange to me, and my rationality kicked right into gear. I immediately thought, *What is her husband going to say? Surely, they will be insulted*. Still, I followed through with the command from the Lord.

Today, after having gone through surgery, this lady has been totally cured from cancer, even though there had been a 100-percent chance of it spreading through her body. Credit is due to the joint initiative of our body of believers. I state this example only to demonstrate how our rationalism can possibly quench the voice of God if we allow it to.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD REVEALS THE WISDOM OF GOD

The apostle Paul stated that the wisdom of this world is foolishness to our God (see 1 Cor. 3:19). He previously wrote in First Corinthians:

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the *wisdom of God* in a mystery, the *hidden wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor

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ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” But **God has revealed them to us through His Spirit**. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God (1 Corinthians 2:6-12).

The wisdom from above is always pure; it's God's viewpoint. The word “wisdom” in the Greek is *sophia*, and is defined as:

...skill, tact, expertise in any art...skill in the affairs of life...wise management as shown in forming the best plans and selecting the best means, including the idea of sound judgment and good sense...deep knowledge, natural and moral insight, learning, science, implying cultivation of mind and enlightened understanding (see *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* by AMG International, Inc. Revised Edition, 1993).

Wisdom is a key element in hearing God's voice, even though not everything will be revealed or answered. Wisdom is the ingredient that assists us in communicating what God is saying to us and also helps us to know what is to be revealed at a later time.

The Spirit of God in us leads us to spiritual experiences with Him; and only the Spirit of God can reveal spiritual wisdom to you. Indeed, He has already revealed things through His Spirit, according to First Corinthians 2:10a quoted above. But because we are not accustomed to learning about these experiences, we remain unaware or disbelieve that God can really speak to us as He pleases. The natural eye and ear cannot recognize Him or His voice; whereas, the eyes and ears of our hearts must focus on truth that comes from Spirit and not the mind. Being led by the Spirit (see Rom. 8) brings to light that which has been revealed.

It is wise to learn how to *hear God's voice*. He has consistently spoken in the past, and He continues to be and always will be a speaking God. Make sure you pay attention to your thoughts! Even through the midst of those dark ages that occurred between the Books of Malachi and Matthew, it has always been His intention to speak to His people.

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QUESTIONS...BUT NOT ALWAYS ANSWERS

As I previously mentioned, it makes good sense to ask questions, although there are times when you will have to accept that there are no “reasonable” answers. Asking questions can result in a cultivated mind and enlightened understanding, which can lead to dethroning man-centered ideas and philosophies that deny the power of the Spirit. Even Jesus asked questions. Consider the following Scripture:

*Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and **asking them questions** (Luke 2:46).*

As human beings we are faced with daily struggles and seek answers to difficult questions that waver in our minds. Interestingly, though, logical approaches to answering these questions often do not provide us justice, but create more confusion than solution. In order to defeat rationalism and what is seemingly reasonable in the natural, you will need to believe in the Spirit without being able to see Him. Yet, many people still continue to struggle with an understanding of the power of the Spirit.

Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there. When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?” So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.” Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief (Matthew 13:53-58).

The people in the synagogue asked six questions in the Scripture above pertaining to Jesus and His message, yet still they neglected to hear Him and enjoy His presence. To top it off, they were offended by Him. Consequently, no great works could be done amongst them because of their unbelief. Our minds can prevent us from having some of the most awesome encounters with our Lord.

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BELIEVING IS SEEING

Following is a chart that clearly depicts the differences between the rationalism of man versus acknowledging the Spirit of God.

Reasoning has paved the way for logic to enter into the mind. In essence, everything needs to make sense. If it does not make sense or appease our understanding, then we have every right to discard it. Yet we cannot afford to limit God in how He speaks. Our entrance into the Kingdom is not based on seeing is believing, but rather believing is seeing.

*Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' **do you believe?** You **will see** greater things than these." And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (John 1:50-51).*

Rationalism	Spirit
Led by reason based on evidence of things seen.	Led by Spirit based on evidence of things unseen.
Seeing is believing.	Believing is seeing.
Intellectualism—filled with head knowledge.	Experience—filled with divine truth.
Philosophies and theologies.	Supernatural is reality.
Logic.	Faith.
Works of the flesh.	Works of the Spirit.
God is finite.	God is infinite.
Conscious-driven mind.	Spirit-driven heart.
Outward lawful relationship.	Intimacy.

The intense hunger in the world of people wanting to know a true God and to hear Him speak will not happen through logic, doctrine, philosophy, theology, or religious sacrifices. The only way that you and I will ever hear our wise and loving God is through a personal experience that we share with Him.

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CHAPTER ONE

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. What benefits can be derived from questioning and reasoning?

2. Describe a Spirit understanding of the Kingdom according to John chapter 3.

3. In this chapter, what wisdom has God revealed to you through His Spirit to your spirit?

4. Describe an experience where there was no “reasonable explanation” except to say that “it was God.”

Chapter Two

LED BY THE SPIRIT

AFTER God created man, He breathed into man the spirit of life.

*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the **breath of life**; and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7).*

The word breath in the Scripture above comes from the Hebrew word *rûah*, meaning “spirit” or “wind.” The word here is used to refer to the Spirit of God or the Lord (see *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*. Copyright 2003 by AMG Publishers).

Created in the image of God, we must somehow be like Him. So then, what characteristics of God do we exhibit? Because God is not flesh, but *God is Spirit*, then our resemblance to God must be spirit (see John 4:24).

There are two observations when it comes to man’s being; one is the dichotomous view, and the other is the trichotomous view. The Scriptures support both these views. A dichotomist views man as spirit, soul, and body; but he believes that the spirit and soul are synonymous, which means that man has only two parts—a spirit/soul and a body (see 1 Cor. 7:34; Matt. 26:41). A trichotomist views man as a tripartite being. Each person is made up of body, soul, and spirit (see Gen. 2:7; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12). In simple terms, the body is your physical flesh. The soul, according to Leviticus 17:14, is the invisible entity that saturates the body like blood does; but the soul does not exist in the blood. After life was breathed into the first man, Adam, he became a living soul (see 1 Cor. 15:45-47). The spirit is the God part of man (see John 4:24; 1 Cor. 2:11; Eccl. 12:7); and the spirit is

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also described as the lamp of the Lord (see Prov. 20:27). Obviously, the body and soul of a person have important value. However, in this chapter, I would like to address the spirit of our beings, because *God speaks from His Spirit to our spirit*.

BORN OF THE SPIRIT

We were born into this world with the nature of our first father, Adam; and in this state, we did not know Christ or what He did for humanity. Thus, we were alienated from the Kingdom of God. But when we received Christ into our lives and acknowledged that He died for us and rose again to be seated at the right hand of the Father, we went through the process of regeneration.

Many believers equate salvation to being born again, but there is a difference. Salvation means to be delivered (see 2 Cor. 1:10), and leads us back to what we originally were before Adam sinned, which was *new, generated, formed, and stored*. After sin, the “re” was added, creating the words *renew, regenerate, reform, and restore*. Salvation leads us back to our originality of who we were before sin had entered into humanity. This is an experience that is threefold: We are saved, we are being saved, and we shall be saved (see Rom. 8:24; Eph. 2:8; Titus 3:4; 1 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 5:9-10).

Being “born again” is a process that moves us from being babies into becoming mature sons. It is the beginning of our heart-change experience. First Peter 1:23 describes it in this manner: “Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” We were first born under the first man, Adam; but being “born again” is being born of Christ, the life-giving spirit (see 1 Cor. 15:45).

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8).

A good example of the difference between salvation and being born of the Spirit can be seen in Exodus chapter 12 when God spoke to

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Moses and Aaron, telling them to instruct the children of Israel to sacrifice a lamb and smear its blood on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. Later that night, the death angel would pass over those houses that were covered by the blood, and their firstborn males would be saved from death. Yet throughout Israel's exodus from Egypt and even after several miraculous events, they still continued to complain and be ungrateful. As we read further in the story, we have to agree that the blood of the lamb saved the nation of Israel from death, but still there was no transformation in their hearts, because not all of them entered the Promised Land.

The blood of Jesus Christ is surely powerful and indeed saves us from sin which leads unto death, but it takes "being born of the Spirit" to completely deliver us and give us a heart change. The blood of Christ cleanses us from our sins, but it is the Spirit that energizes us.

When you accept Christ into your life, you receive His Spirit, or the Holy Spirit, into your life. You become born from above, or born of the Spirit. Consequently, your state of alienation from the Father is automatically annulled, and you begin to understand what a true union with the Father is. Jesus likens this birth to the wind, which can be felt but cannot be seen. *Through the Holy Spirit, you draw closer to the Father; you are able to hear Him more clearly; and you learn what true intimacy is.*

In the Old Testament, not everyone was able to hear the voice of God. During this time, God commonly used certain individuals to speak on His behalf to the rest of the people. Accordingly, the people had to trust who they heard; and even if they didn't, the hand of God would still manifest. Whereas, in the New Testament, specifically in the Book of Acts, there is a clear description of what first occurred within the first-century Church. There was no longer a void between man and God. To as many who received Christ, they were able to access God and have perfect communication with Him through the Holy Spirit (see John 1:12).

The Holy Spirit is given to every believer without measure. Age, sex, race, or color will never be a barrier in tuning into the voice of God. God speaks to anybody who has an ear to hear and a heart that is willing to receive.

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For it is through Him that we both [whether far off or near] now have an introduction (access) by one [Holy] Spirit to the Father [so that we are able to approach Him. Therefore you are no longer outsiders (exiles, migrants, and aliens, excluded from the rights of citizens), but you now share citizenship with the saints (God's own people, consecrated and set apart for Himself); and you belong to God's [own] household (Ephesians 2:18-19 AMP).

WHAT OR WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The Holy Spirit is more than the gifts listed in First Corinthians chapter 12 and He is more than the fruit referred to in Galatians 5:22-23. In fact, the Scriptures start with the Spirit and end with the Spirit.

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. **And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters** (Genesis 1:1-2).*

*Then God said, "**Let Us make man in Our image**, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 1:26).*

***And the Spirit and the bride say**, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).*

The Spirit is mentioned in the Old Testament 90 times with 18 various titles. He is mentioned in the New Testament 260 times having 39 different titles. He is mentioned in all 27 Books of the New Testament, except Second John and Third John. Simply put, there is no way possible that you as a believer can avoid Him.

John 14:16-26 defines who the Holy Spirit is. Specifically, He is *a person* and is called a "Helper" who lives with us forever. He is the "Spirit of truth" who lives with you and in you. He will teach you all things and remind you of truths taught in the Scripture.

The Holy Spirit is also known as the "Spirit of God." The word "spirit" in the Greek is *pneuma*, which means "breath" or "wind." This implies unseen force (see Isa. 40:7; John 3:5-8). Some people view the Holy Spirit as being mystical or invisible, yet He is a real person and

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not a figment of our imagination. There are symbols that we know the Holy Spirit by, such as “oil,” “water,” and “seal.” While these words might seem to negate the fact that the Holy Spirit is a person, they actually are characteristics or descriptive words of His Person, just as we can be described as a “ray of sunshine,” a “breath of fresh air,” or a “rose between two thorns.”

In John chapters 14 and 16, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit, who would soon come; and in Acts chapter 2, the people were first filled with the Spirit. We usually call it the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and other people who wanted to receive Him.

Today in Christendom, some believers have difficulty thinking of the Holy Spirit as an actual person. They consider Him more as a concept, with thoughts of reservation, preservation, and disillusionment. There are some people who have a definite set of ideas about the Holy Spirit and resist learning additional information about Him, even if that information is scriptural and factual. There are others who think that the Holy Spirit can move upon their lives, but only based on how they want Him to move and how they view Him. They choose to live within their own small circle of life and within their own comfort zone. They do not have much faith in Him, which is based on their limited understanding of Him.

The apostle Paul, however, has some important information to share regarding the Holy Spirit:

For those who are according to the flesh and are controlled by its unholy desires set their minds on and pursue those things which gratify the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit and are controlled by the desires of the Spirit set their minds on and seek those things which gratify the [Holy] Spirit. Now the mind of the flesh [which is sense and reason without the Holy Spirit] is death [death that comprises all the miseries arising from sin, both here and hereafter]. But the mind of the [Holy] Spirit is life and [soul] peace [both now and forever]. ... But you are not living the life of the flesh, you are living the life of the Spirit, if the [Holy] Spirit of God [really] dwells within you [directs and controls you]. But if anyone does not possess the [Holy] Spirit of Christ, he is none of His [he does not belong to Christ, is not truly a child of God]. But if Christ lives in you, [then although] your [natural] body is dead by reason of sin and guilt, the spirit is alive because of [the] righteousness [that He imputes to you]. And if the Spirit of Him Who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, [then]

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He Who raised up Christ Jesus from the dead will also restore to life your mortal (short-lived, perishable) bodies through His Spirit Who dwells in you (Romans 8:5-6,9-11 AMP).

The type of Christianity that diminishes the importance of the Holy Spirit equates to a life that sadly fails to realize the dynamic power and authority that God wants you to have. The apostle Paul also confronted the inward nature of believers who possessed an outward form of godliness, but denied the real power of Christ.

Having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (Second Timothy 3:5).

How true in our day that we too can get caught up in demonstrating the same kind of lifestyle that denies the power that we actually have when the Holy Spirit fills us.

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

At one time in my life I did not believe there was such a person as the Holy Spirit. Growing up with a Hindu background, I actually despised Christianity, and the only reason I went to church was because my mother was the final authority. (She and my dad were divorced.) In her rule book, there was no freedom of speech.

When we moved to another neighborhood and started to attend a different church, we discovered it to be livelier than the previous one we had attended, and I found more friends to hang around with outside the building on Sunday mornings.

Each year, this church would host a family retreat away from the area, and it so happened that my family was able to attend one year. During one of the worship meetings on a Saturday morning, hands were lifted up, people were singing and worshipping, and tears were rolling down cheeks. At one point, the pastor said, "If you would like to receive the Holy Spirit, please raise your hands," and immediately I thought, *I'm going to see if this stuff is real or not.* Then I went to the front of the room.

As soon as I raised my hands, it felt like a fireball hit me in my stomach. I fell to the ground and started to yell because my body felt like it was burning up, but no one could see any flames. Heat waves

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began to penetrate through my hands, and a surge of electric current moved through my tongue. I had had no teaching on the Holy Spirit, the gifts, or fruit of the Spirit. Not that it wasn't available. I just had a negative attitude for the spiritual and refused to learn. So, at this point, I had no inclination of who He was. After rolling on the ground for about a half hour, I was finally able to stand up.

There was still an electric current running through my hands, and I kept thinking of the words, "headaches" and "back pain." Again, I was totally ignorant of what was occurring. When I communicated these thoughts to my pastor, he handed me the microphone and told me to address the people about these physical problems. I followed his advice and stated to the crowd, "Anyone who is having these problems, please come forward for prayer." Subsequently, there were many people who were healed on that day. This was my first encounter with the Holy Spirit.

A FRIEND WHO IS WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES

As a young man growing up in South Africa, I also often witnessed numerous Hindu prayers and sacrifices. During specific times of the year, it was a custom for Hindus to fast. Normally, after the fasting period, people would congregate at the temple where music was played, people sang and danced, and sweet meats were served. At this same time, individuals would fall into a trance and take on different spirits or manifestations of their gods and goddesses. Some of the most horrific acts took place, like the drinking of blood, consuming of drugs, climbing bamboo trees without falling, and walking on fire. In addition, some of their backs were pierced with huge needles, attached by a strong thread, with which they pulled chariots while walking barefoot on asphalt. When these individuals were in a trance-like state, they had no idea of their surroundings, and when they returned to reality, they discovered that they could not remember what had occurred.

I learned that demonic spirits come and go, along with their power. Their presence is no guarantee. Whereas, when the Spirit of God visits His children, He does not come to them for only a season and then depart.

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One of the Greek words in the New Testament used to describe the Holy Spirit is the word *parakletos*. *Para* means “the one called to a new life and joyous destiny,” while *kletos* means “the divine calling of a person.” John Wycliff translates *parakletos* as “comforter.” The word *parakletos* refers to a special friend, an advocate in a legal setting who has come to stand in the place of a person found guilty, and pleads his case. Likewise, we all have been found guilty, but we have a Friend and Advocate—a *Parakletos*—who represents us at all times.

The Holy Spirit is given to us to be our comforter, healer, protector, and most of all, to communicate with at all times. The Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus when He said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). It is impossible for us to be “in the Spirit” at one time and then “out of the Spirit” at another time, unless perhaps we choose to constantly live of life of carnality. In this case, a life in the flesh will hinder our walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. But a life in the Spirit means that God dwells in you at all times, and you enjoy hearing Him speak to you through an intimate and close relationship with Him.

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3. There are 57 titles of the Holy Spirit used in the Bible. List several of them.

4. How does being filled with the Spirit enable you to hear the voice of God?

Chapter Three

THE BATTLEGROUND OF THE MIND

THE natural mind cannot comprehend the things of the Spirit; and hence, the battle begins. One of the greatest battlegrounds is not wrestling with the devil but is located within the mind. The issue of self is a pestilence to deal with; and the mind is an open haven for arguments, theories, and reasonings—those attitudes and thoughts that set themselves up against the true knowledge of Christ, especially if we don't have a Spirit-led life. Our thoughts, ideas, and images must come under the obedience of Christ.

Let's read what the Scriptures say about the battle between our natural mind (or the life of the flesh) versus the mind of God or mind of the Spirit:

[That is] because the mind of the flesh [with its carnal thoughts and purposes] is hostile to God, for it does not submit itself to God's Law; indeed it cannot. So then those who are living the life of the flesh [catering to the appetites and impulses of their carnal nature] cannot please or satisfy God, or be acceptable to Him (Romans 8:7-8 AMP).

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law (Galatians 5:17-18).

As believers face adverse situations or perhaps when things don't go accordingly to plan, there is often a tendency to automatically shift the blame to the devil, which, believe it or not, gives him honor; yet he has been nothing more than a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies (see John 8:44). Historically, it is difficult to point out where this trend of thought came from, yet it does exist among many believers. Present circumstances, however, whether positive or

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negative, are more often than not a result of the decisions that we make; and those decisions can prevent us from hearing the voice of God.

THE ENEMY'S FOOD

Upon eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve had sinned and violated the command of God (see Gen 2:17; 3:6). The enemy's subtle approach of deception had not been ugly, scary, or in any way repulsive; because if it had been so, Eve would have immediately ignored and rejected the serpent. Instead, deception is attractive to the eye, which is often the enemy's mode of operation. The Scripture explains that it was "pleasant to her eyes" (see Gen. 3:6). Even though the enemy tempted Eve, she made the choice to partake of the tree. Likewise, most of what we experience today cannot be blamed on the devil, nor should we elevate the devil by giving him such credit, because in all honesty he does not deserve an ounce of it.

Nevertheless, based on the enemy's deception, God's judged the serpent, and as a result, his food was dust for the rest of his life (see Gen. 3:14). We also know that man is made from the dust of the earth (see Gen. 2:7), and dust is a representation of man's carnality or his flesh. When we produce the works of the flesh, we give the devil an open invitation to our lives. However, if there's no dirt in us, then he has no food to eat and no place to stay. We must consider the power and importance of our thoughts. Are they filled with dust for the enemy to consume? Whatever we entertain, whether spiritual or fleshly, will be processed in our minds. For example, Jesus said if a man looks upon a woman lustfully, then he has committed the act of adultery (see Matt. 5:28). Remember, the enemy is hungry to eat our dust.

DOING WHAT THE FATHER SHOWS US

In the battleground of our minds, we must realize that when we live by the law of the old covenant (see Heb. 8:8-9), we live by the energy of our flesh, which leads to labor. The law definitely produces works, but works in and of themselves are lifeless (see Heb. 6:1). On the other hand, as we live and move in Christ (see Acts 17:28), we give control

Chapter three The Battleground of the Mind

to the Spirit; consequently, the Spirit of God begins to deconstruct legalism, ideas, thoughts, and man-centered philosophies and theories that contradict living by the Spirit.

The nature of the first man Adam has to be consistently dealt with in our lives, which includes the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (see 1 John 2:16). But how do we deal with so great a challenge? By assessing the life of Christ—which leads us to ask another question: How was Christ victorious in this area of His life? He was led by the Spirit and did only what His Father showed Him.

Like us, He was made up of body, soul, and spirit. He faced the same battles that we face, and one of His greatest challenges was confronting legalistic and traditional mind-sets. The religious people in His day were caught up in a system of the past, which became a hindrance to their present and future. Everything that Christ did seemed to go against the grain of what they believed in. We must, like Him, abide in and by the Spirit, which will cause us to desire to do only what the Father shows us. Not everything He shows will make sense, but true obedience will defeat illegal thoughts.

DEMOLISHING THE ENEMY'S FORTRESS

*For the weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood], but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of **strongholds**, [inasmuch as we] refute arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the [true] knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One) (2 Corinthians 10:4-5 AMP).*

The Kenneth Wuest version reads:

*For the weapons of our warfare are not human but mighty in God's sight, **resulting in the demolition of fortresses, demolishing reasonings and every haughty mental elevation** which lifts itself up against the experiential knowledge [which we believers have] of God, and **leading captive every thought into the obedience to the Christ** (2 Corinthians 10:4-5 Wuest).*

The word “strongholds” in the Amplified version above refers to a fortification or a fortress. It can mean to hold fast, and it is used

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metaphorically to relate to any strong points or arguments in which one trusts (See *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* © 1992 by AMG International, Inc. Revised Edition, 1993). A fortress is an impenetrable wall usually combined with the presence of armed forces on guard around the clock. An example of a fortress in the Bible is the walls of Jericho (see Josh. 6:2-5).

In Second Corinthians 10:4-5, the apostle Paul exhorts us that our weapons in God demolish strongholds. These strongholds are within our minds and are namely thoughts, thinking patterns, and images, which administrate the daily operation of our lives. There is a weapon armory that the Lord has given us access to; and at any given time we can use these weapons to demolish fortress weapons (see Jer. 50:25). These include awesome weapons of righteousness, joy, peace, and love. In John 14:30, Jesus declared that the prince of this world had nothing in Him. The word *prince* is the short form of the word *principles*. The principles of the world, which are not God-centered but are governed by the enemy, can find no bearing nor can they form a stronghold in the person's mind who is rooted in Christ and the Father. There was no hidden carnality within Jesus, which could become an invitation for the enemy to inhabit. He gave the enemy no place at all.

THE DOWNFALL OF LOGICAL THINKING

The King James Version of Second Corinthians 10:5 says:

*Casting down **imagination**s, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God...*

The word “imagination” in the Scripture above is derived from the Greek word *logismos* from which come the words “logical thinking,” or thinking analytically or rationally. (See *Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*. Copyright © 1994, 2003 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.) Once again, thinking in and of itself is not wrong. But when thinking goes against the knowledge of Christ, errors form.

In 1998, I traveled with a team to Kenya, Africa, where we spent three weeks. This was my first missions trip, and I was really excited! Nairobi was our central base, and from there we traveled into vari-

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ous rural areas. During the second week, we traveled about ten hours north of Nairobi to a conference at which another leader and I would be keynote speakers. My friend recommended that we provide prophetic ministry to all the pastors who would be present. At his suggestion, I sighed and said, "Let's see what happens."

At the foremost of my mind was the thought that I was in a foreign country and among these leaders for the first time. As I continued to dwell on this matter, my battle of logical thinking began, and I became a nervous wreck. I prayed, worshipped, and read my Bible (see John 6:63; 8:36; 1 John 3:20-21; Jer. 4:14); but my mind and spirit were at odds with each other. I felt like I would not be able to hear from God for these leaders, and I wanted to run as far away as possible. I did not feel adequate enough to hear God on their behalf, and my battle intensified. Later, after I revealed what I was thinking to my friend and poured out my heart to him, he said, "Vishal, we prophesy by faith." Those few words was all it took. My reasoning as to whether or not I should prophesy no longer mattered because I knew that the Lord wanted to bless these leaders, and I was able to bring my thoughts under the obedience of Christ.

THE FIGHT OF FAITH AND FORGIVENESS IS WITHIN THE MIND

At another time in 2005, I traveled with a team of 12 young adults to South Africa to participate in humanitarian work in several AIDs hospices. One of my friends hosted our group while we visited in Pretoria, and there we led a meeting for about 45 children, some of whom were HIV positive. There was one particular toddler, about 3-4 years old, who was infected with the virus, and we prayed together with him and his mother, who was also HIV positive, extremely undernourished, and helpless with a bloated belly. We believed in God for both of them to be healed. As I prayed with her, the Lord told me to tell her, "I have forgiven you, and it is okay to forgive yourself" (see John 20:23). Tears streamed down from her eyes as she realized God's love for her.

Many believers walk around with guilt, condemnation, and shame attached to their minds. The enemy will use these three devices to discourage believers into inactivity, convincing them that they will never amount to being precious before God. This deception causes

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individuals to think that they must work hard in order to convince God to love them. However, God already loves us and will continue to love us. We all have sinned and God is faithful and just to forgive as long as we are willing to confess our sins (see 1 John 1:9). We are no longer “poor ole sinners,” but we are sons and daughters of the King. Our position is royalty (see 1 Pet. 2:9). While there is no denying to what has happened in our past, yet we become righteous, holy, and just, because of Him.

You must acknowledge when you do something wrong; then ask God for forgiveness; then forgive yourself. This requires you to believe. Believing has no formula; rather you are persuaded beyond any shadow of doubt that what you believe in is genuine. Our war is a fight of faith and this fight is within the mind. Faith allows you and me to believe in Christ and His written Word, which is the Sword of the Spirit; and we use the Sword to cut through vain imaginations, false images and beliefs.

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (Hebrews 4:12-13).

No believer today can say that he or she is outright perfect, for we all continually deal with thoughts that try to make us captives. Purifying our minds and taking on Christ’s mind is a daily process. Consider the story of Peter in Matthew 16:14-16. Peter received a revelation of who Christ was and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Christ blessed Peter and told him that flesh and blood did not reveal this information to him, but it was revealed through the Father. (This truth was not recorded in the Old Testament; therefore, Peter could not have learned this information by reading it.) Then in verse 23 of that very same chapter, Christ rebuked Peter sharply by saying, “Get behind Me, satan.” Obviously, Peter was not possessed by satan; however, upon hearing Jesus talk about His death, even Peter was influenced by the enemy. Therefore, like Peter, we must constantly and daily take care to discern our thoughts and make sure that we hear the voice of God and speak from the Spirit.

Chapter three The Battleground of the Mind

We set our minds on things that are above so that we can hear the voice of God. We posture ourselves like Daniel, who although he was in Babylon—a place of confusion, did not partake of the king's table (see Dan. 1:8). Likewise, we learn about the systems in the world but do not allow worldly principles to govern us.

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Chapter Four

LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU

“For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?” “Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?” For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever (Romans 11:34-36).

IN this chapter, our discussion of the mind continues with an emphasis on acquiring the same mind of Christ, so that we can hear God speak to us. According to The Complete Word Study Dictionary, the word “mind” comes from the Greek word *phroneo* (# NT5426) and means, “to think, have a mindset. The activity represented by this word involves the will, affections, and conscience.” The Vine’s Dictionary describes the “mind” (#NT 5426) as “moral interest or reflection, not mere unreasoning opinion or to be mindful of.” According to these definitions, the word “mind” relates to thinking, a mind-set, a person’s will, affections, conscience, interests, and reflections. So, in order to have a mind like the Lord’s, we need to discover His thoughts, will, affections, interests, and reflections.

CAN WE KNOW THE MIND OF THE LORD?

*For “Who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?” But we have the **mind of Christ** (1 Corinthians 2:16).*

The apostle Paul begins the second chapter of First Corinthians by stating that his presentation of Christ was not done under any human pretense but by the manifestation of the Spirit and power. He wants us to understand that the mysteries of God are no longer kept secret but have been revealed to us by the Spirit. Yet the natural man has no inclination of these things because it makes no sense to him. When Paul poses the question, “Who has known the mind of the

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Lord?” he infers that no human being, in his or her own power, has fully understood God or His nature, plans, purposes, will or ways, except Christ when He was manifested in the flesh. Yet the believer who is led by the Spirit is able to distinguish and perceive the heart of the Father and know His mind.

If Christ came in our likeness, how did He have the mind of the Father? The answer is that “He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8b). The mind of the Father in Him was developed through His obedience and the things that He suffered. Just like all of humanity, He was tempted in all things, yet He did not sin (see Heb. 4:15). It was a process.

Allow me to explain by giving a personal example. My son Jadon, a toddler, has quite an imagination, as do most youngsters. When it comes to playing with his toys, it seems as though a tornado sweeps through our house. After he is finished playing, my wife or I will ask him to put his toys back in their proper place. At first his mind refuses to accept responsibility. Then he might make up some amusing excuse in order to further neglect his duty. Eventually, he will begin the task, but perhaps still not according to our expectations. He is a child and thinks with the mind of a child. As he begins to grow and continues to learn obedience with the help of parental guidance, Jadon will begin to take on a more mature mind.

Jesus was human made in the likeness of His brethren and experienced the same things that we go through. As He grew, the mind of the Father became more and more of His desire. He became a true Son who was led by the Spirit (see Matt. 4).

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:2).

A MIND OF HUMILITY

*Let this **mind** be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but **made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant**, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself** and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8).*

Chapter four Let This Mind Be in You

In the Scripture above, the apostle Paul reminds us that Christ should be the pattern, model, or blueprint for our mind and lives. He did not come to seek His own interests but was driven by the Father's purpose, which was to see humanity redeemed. He exhibited the Father's desires, took on the affections of the Father, and also became a servant. Likewise, Christ's desires should become our desires, His thoughts our thoughts, and His love our love. We imitate Him by walking in His image in humility and not in selfishness.

*Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be **like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus** (Romans 15:5).*

CARNAL AND CORRUPT MINDS CAN BE RESTORED

We live in an individualistic opinionated age where man's mind is regarded higher than God's. Many people make up their minds to do things their own way through the process of reasoning, and often they adamantly refuse to consider another way. Their carnal and corrupt minds resist the truth. While they might profess to know God, their works deny Him (see 1 Tim. 6:5; 2 Tim. 3:8; Titus 1:15-16; Col. 1:21-22).

"To be carnally minded is death but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. The carnal mind is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God" (Rom. 8:6-7). However, there is hope. Notice in Romans 12:1-2, the apostle Paul urges us to present ourselves active and alive to God "through the renewing [exercising] of our minds."

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:1-2).*

In this Scripture, Paul states that a life can be transformed or changed when a person's mind is renewed. The process of renewing has to do with making a person different than he or she was in the past. The very fact that the apostle Paul mentions "renewing" means that there had to be an old mind present in order for it to be renewed. A person cannot renew anything that he does not first possess.

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In the beginning, Adam had the Father's mind and could hear Him clearly. Unfortunately, he then "lost his mind" to sin; consequently, the entire human race was impacted, and all minds were darkened and alienated from the Father due to Adam's choice.

Now, fully evident in our time is the fruit of a godless mind. While there are minds that have been restored through Christ, all of us, at one point in time, had "lost our minds." However, being lost does not mean that we never, ever had the mind of the Lord to begin with. Rather, being lost denotes that we were once in the original place before we deviated through the hardenings of our hearts and with the help of the enemy's tactics.

Confusion is a deception that the enemy uses to pervert all minds on the earth. Furthermore, confusion leads to doubt, which challenges the very fabric of our being and who we are in Christ. This ongoing, internal battle prohibits us from understanding that God wants our communication with Him to be normal and nothing out of the extraordinary, because God has restored our minds.

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening [blindness] of their heart (Ephesians 4:17-18).

Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them (2 Corinthians 4:4).

But just like the prodigal son, we can come to our senses and make a decision to return to our Father, and He will welcome us. Through His grace, Christ, the last Adam, brought restoration and redemption to every mind in humanity, yet not everyone chooses to possess this victory and take on His mind (see Eph. 2:8-10).

Even now in this age of advancement, there continues to be temptations that can lure a believer to become conformed to the patterns of this age. Not being conformed to the world does not mean believers should shun the world or refuse to have anything to do with the world; instead, a person is not to fashion himself according to the patterns of the world, which has to do with beliefs, mannerisms, and routines.

Chapter four Let This Mind Be in You

To be transformed means to change or a change of nature, and this change must take place internally. Subsequently, there is a change externally in the believer's character, which is obvious to everyone else, and demonstrates the newness of life in Christ because he now has His nature. Transformation comes by the "renewing of the mind."

Once there is a renewing of the mind, the Spirit of God brings to remembrance what He has placed within us.

These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you (John 14:25-26).

Chapter four Let This Mind Be in You

3. How should you combat the ongoing, internal battle of confusion, deception, and doubt that the enemy uses to attack your mind?

4. The author states, “Not being conformed to the world does not mean believers should shun the world or refuse to have anything to do with the world.” In your own words, what does “not being conformed to the world” involve? Name some specific examples.

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Chapter Five

IN THE BEGINNING

WHAT IS “THE WORD”?

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (John 1:1-3).

TRADITIONALLY, we have been accustomed to referring to the Bible as the Word of God, the Holy Word of God, or the Holy Scriptures. However, I respectfully submit that the Bible is not the Word of God, and it is not holy just because some author stated it is holy. The Word is a Person; this Person is Holy; and this person's name is Jesus Christ. You and I need to experience this Person; and when we experience this Person, we are then able to hear and understand the Word.

It is rare to find individuals who have had a direct, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. Many people read the Bible, yet have not met or experienced the Word. The fine black and white print has become knowledge only without realizing the fullness of Jesus Christ. And those who have come to know Jesus Christ usually do so via intermediary experiences. Even so, these experiences create a panting within our hearts to desire and know Him more intimately.

The life of Jesus Christ and the obedience that He learned by the things which He suffered (see Heb. 5:8) is the ultimate example for us to follow. He was not born having already memorized the Scriptures; rather, He too had to learn about who He was, His purpose, and His mission for humanity.

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Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17).

There came a day as He was growing up that Joseph and Mary sat down with Him and fully disclosed why He was here. This provoked Jesus Christ to study the scrolls where He would learn about Himself. We are not aware that the Father ever talked to Him prior to the age of 30, for it was not until Jesus was baptized at the Jordan River that the Father made a declaration over His Son for the very first time (see Matt. 3:13-17). These were the primary sanctioning words that forever changed the course for Jesus Christ. Thereafter, He was led by the Spirit.

CHRIST IN YOU

So then, if Jesus is the Word, then what is “Scripture”?

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The apostle Paul presents a very weighty statement when he specifically states, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” It would be unwise for any believer to challenge that Scripture is not from God. But when the apostle makes this statement, what is he really talking about? He could not have been referring to the New Testament or New Covenant as we know it today, because it had not yet been written. Likewise, when Jesus Christ spoke in synagogues, He surely did not use any Scripture from the New Testament.

Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul, and other apostles always referred to the Old Testament when speaking of the Scriptures and used them as a pattern to describe the picture of Christ and His Kingdom. The Old Testament is Christ concealed, and the New Testament is Christ revealed. I would like to take it a step further and state that the Scriptures are about “Christ in you” (see Col. 1:27).

In order for us to have an understanding of God’s voice, we have to know who we are in Him. There are many questionable views re-

Chapter five In the Beginning

garding who man in God is. For example, after being saved, many people still consider themselves as “poor sinners.” However, according to God’s point of view, we are “kings,” “priests,” “ambassadors,” “sons or daughters,” and “saints” (see Rev. 1:6; 2 Cor. 5:20; 6:18; Col. 1:26). If you and I choose to walk in a sinner mentality, or another inferior type of thinking, then we violate the principle of the written Word.

BEFORE THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WORLD, WE WERE CREATED TO HEAR AND SPEAK WITH GOD

The beginning of an individual’s life has always been in God (see Eccl. 3:15; Isa. 43:7).

Whether a man or woman is Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Mormon, he or she is from God. *In fact, you and I are older than the devil.* You and I were in Christ before the foundations of the world (see Eph. 1:4). And God wants our lives to always evolve around His will and purposes.

In Genesis chapter 1, God created man; and in Genesis chapter 2, He formed him. I believe that the formation of man brought the heavens and the earth to a standstill. Why? Because an invisible God finally brought Himself into an image called “man.” Consider that out of all the most beautiful species created by God in the earth, man is the only species of creation that looks like God, resembles His image, can think like Him and speak like Him.

I said, “You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High” (Psalm 82:6).

Everything that was created by God in the earth had to be in awe as God created and formed man. All of creation was finally privileged to see what God looks like! Yet God did not stop there; He produced in man the ability for him to speak to his Maker. They had a close and intimate relationship until man was deceived and fell in pride. Relationship with Him was never a monologue and should never be that way.

My introduction to church life was at a Pentecostal church and I remember how people used to get into some serious worship. During this time, they would go on worshipping and speaking to God; yet I

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don't really remember them giving God the chance to respond. I was very young, and I did not care much about Christianity at that time. I suppose that God is merciful to us even during our times of naivete.

A one-sided source of prayer pattern is highly visible among the diverse heathen religions in the world, and they seem content serving their idols, with no expectation of a response. Whereas, a developed relationship with Jesus Christ includes a dialogue, a conversation between two people, for He is a hearing and speaking God. He is driven by relationship, one in which we are not ignored, unappreciated, or considered unimportant; and He desperately wants to communicate with us on a daily basis.

Chapter Six

DOES GOD SPEAK APART FROM THE WRITTEN WORD?

I know a man who has served in the ministry for a number of years and who still continues to pastor. In fact, according to ministerial experience and background, I would say he is exceptionally qualified. As I was having lunch with him one day, he began to share some of his views with me, and at one point, he said, “Now, I have my reasons for not believing in progressive revelation.” His statement somewhat baffled me, because I understood him to mean that he believed that God limits Himself to speak only through what is written in Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. Any other message of God outside the canon of Scripture would be regarded as heresy. Frankly, I couldn’t understand how a Christian minister, pastoring a church, could make that statement and still be comfortable with himself; yet I also immediately recognized that he had been influenced by the theory of *cessationism*.

Sadly, I think of the people whom he has led and continues to lead and the people whom those people impact daily in the marketplace. Needless to say, there are many within the Body of Christ who are influenced by the belief of cessationism. Consequently, it is no wonder why people are confused and continue to question if there is a real God who wants to speak to them.

WHAT IS THE THEORY OF CESSATIONISM?

According to the Encarta Encyclopedia, cessationism means “to stop” or a “permanent discontinuation.” In the Webster’s Dictionary, the definition includes “to cease” or a “final ceasing.” Advocates of cessationism believe that the supernatural, which includes signs,

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wonders, and miracles, ceased with the first-century Church in the Book of Acts, especially after the canon of Scripture was concluded. They believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12) are not operative in the Church today. Some cessationists even go so far to claim that speaking in tongues (one of the gifts—see 1 Cor. 12:10) is of the devil.

To their credit, cessationists are strong in their zeal for preserving the authenticity of the Bible, the written Word. However, in their sincere interpretation of the written Word, they erroneously believe that the only prophecy that can be given is what has already been written in the Bible. As a result, they deny themselves a precious gift that we should desire from the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 14), along with the promises and blessings.

Declaring that prophecy and other spiritual gifts have ceased, cessationists rely on four common arguments to substantiate their reasonings. First, some of them declare that the written Word, the Bible, teaches that the gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased after the apostles died. Second, some believe that prophecy was used only as an alternate during a time when the Scriptures or teachings by the apostles were not available. Third, there are those who claim that there is no historical confirmation of the continuance of the gifts. And fourth, some believe that prophecy and other spiritual manifestations are unsafe and should be eschewed because they are prone to be misrepresented or distorted.

Some of the Scriptures that cessationists use to base their arguments on include Romans 15:18-19; First Corinthians 13:8-13; Second Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 2:20; and Revelation 22:18-19. Let's take a closer look at one of these Scriptures to examine the proper interpretation and discern why the premise of cessationism is incorrect and denies believers the blessing of hearing from God and functioning in the fullness of the power of the Holy Spirit.

First Corinthians 13:8-10 says,

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

Chapter six Does God Speak Apart From the Written Word

First Corinthians chapter 13 is known as the love chapter. Notice verse 9, which says that prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will cease. We understand and acknowledge these things will end someday. So the important question becomes: When do these gifts cease? The answer is found in verse 10: “But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.”

There are two issues to address here. First, there are people, even cessationists, who believe in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. If this event is considered to be “when that which is perfect is come,” then surely, the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will remain in effect until then. Second, there are those who believe that the writings in the New Testament completed the tenet of Scripture, which might also be recognized as “that which is perfect has come.” Thus, they might claim there is no longer a need for prophecy. However, this denies Revelation 19:10, which declares, “And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’” If prophecy had ceased with the canon of Scripture, then this would mean that Jesus’ voice ceased with the Church in the Book of Acts and the only way that Christ can communicate with people today is limited by what is canonized as the written Word.

To realize what the apostle Paul is really saying in First Corinthians 13:8-10, we must look at the entire three chapters of First Corinthians 12, 13, and 14, which continue with one thought and address the same subject matter.

My friend, Dr. Steve Everett, explains it in this manner: In Chapter 12, Paul discusses the spiritual gifts, which are administered by the Holy Spirit. Then in chapter 13, the apostle discusses how the gifts must be exercised, which is in love. And in chapter 14, he shows us how to practically apply the spirituals in love. This becomes beneficial to both the believer and the unbeliever.

After reading First Corinthians chapter 14 and realizing how the gift of prophecy blesses people, it is obvious that believing that prophecy has ceased is certainly a wrongful and sad conclusion.

If spiritual gifts have ceased and are no longer necessary, then there are countless people worldwide in need of healing and other

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supernatural miracles, yet who would have little hope that a miracle will come from God. A cessationist's belief diminishes our heavenly Father's love for mankind. But the truth is, our heavenly Father continues to give good gifts to us and will give the Holy Spirit to them who ask Him (see Luke 11:13). Our God is strong and all-powerful; and He communicates and cares for us, even today, in a multitude of ways.

GOD STILL SPEAKS AND YOU CAN HEAR HIM TODAY

During youth meetings at our church, I normally like to conduct an activation session in hearing God, while also providing a platform for prophetic ministry. I enjoy when visitors attend these meetings because this gives our youth an opportunity to minister to their friends.

One time, a young girl brought a friend who was a borderline atheist, and during our time of activation, I asked her whether we could pray for her and hear what the Lord was declaring over her life. When she agreed, many people in the circle shared some really encouraging words from the Lord with her.

Usually speaking at the end of these times, I like to sum up what has been said and make sure that the person receiving the word is not confused. So, as I was concluding the prophetic word to her, I declared that the number eight was very significant to her and it seemed to be related to her age. I also stated that God loves her and He is covering her. After the meeting was over, she made a quick exit.

When she got into the automobile with her friend, she said, "I don't know who these people are or why you brought me here, but on my eighth birthday, my mom gave me my birthday gifts and then packed her bags and left for Texas. I have not seen her since." This young lady started to understand that there is a God who loves and cares for her soul.

HOW CAN YOU NOT BELIEVE?

In Jesus' day, it was the religious order who disbelieved in the powerful work of the Spirit in His life. They were the high-ranking official

Chapter six Does God Speak Apart From the Written Word

priests of Israel known as the sadducees and pharisees. They were stuck on the letter of the law and had a very difficult time accepting the signs, wonders, and miracles that Jesus performed. They were more focused on the traditions of men rather than the commandment of God (see Mark 7:8).

Succumbing to the belief of cessationism is to be ambushed by the enemy, who wants to rob you from knowing that a true and living God does speak. Nevertheless, it is refreshing to realize that all over the world, multitudes of people are hearing God and experiencing healings and miracles in the name of Jesus Christ in our day. It is impossible to deny the power of God working in lives.

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CHAPTER SIX

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Some of the Scriptures that cessationists use to base their arguments on include Romans 15:18-19; First Corinthians 13:8-13; Second Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 2:20; and Revelation 22:18-19. Using these Scriptures (or any other Scripture you might want to add), attempt to write an argument to support the theory of cessationism.

2. If Jesus had only preached without performing miracles and wonders, few people (if anyone at all) would have repented and believed. Now read Mark 16:15-18; Matthew 28:19-20; John 14:12; and Second Timothy 3:5. Then read First Corinthians chapters 12, 13, and 14. Based on these Scriptures (and any other Scriptures you might want to add, including the Scriptures in #1 above), write an argument against the theory of cessationism.

Chapter Seven

ADAM, WHERE ARE YOU?

GOD WANTS TO TALK TO YOU NO MATTER WHAT YOU'VE DONE

FOR some reason, we often concentrate more on God's harsh judgment rather than about a God who judges in grace, mercy, and compassion. For instance, we learn that legally speaking, God's judgment upon Adam and Eve (who had sinned in the garden, consequently saw each other's nakedness, and were hiding) was surely death.

*And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it **you shall surely die**"* (Genesis 2:16-17).

Man's punishment was death. However, we find that God did not kill Adam or Eve when they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In fact, Adam lived to be 930 years old. In the meantime, soon after they disobeyed God's command, God still desired a relationship with the first couple.

*And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "**Where are you?**" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden..."* (Genesis 3:8-10).

Could an all-knowing God not have known where His creation was? Of course not. He knew exactly where they were and what they were doing. God's question to Adam allows us to see how much He really loves and cares for us. God even went to the extent of finding an animal and sacrificing it on behalf of them. Moreover, God would eventually sacrifice His own Son for the entire human race.

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What the first man Adam lost, the last man Adam restored. The first Adam was a life-breathing soul, but the last Adam was a life-giving Spirit. You are no longer looking for God; He is looking for you. As much as you are following God, He is following you. You are no longer in search for His will; you have become His will. As much as you praise Him, He is praising you. This is what the last Adam, Christ Jesus, did for the universe.

Now, consider another question: *Can a man or woman who has sinned still hear God?* Absolutely. Even after Adam had sinned and violated God's command, God still spoke, and Adam heard His voice.

I would like to suggest that far too many people possess a wrong mind-set attached to constantly carrying a weighty feeling of unworthiness and inferiority when they make mistakes. It is a common reaction to feel that we need to run away and hide from God when we do things that are contrary to His nature and character. And it is during these times that we deceive ourselves into thinking that we can no longer hear God and He no longer wants to speak to us. But don't get caught up in this kind of belief pattern.

If my son or daughter disobeys my directions, I, as a father, would be cruel and vindictive to stop talking to them. I would not want to do such a thing. Moreover, God, in His wisdom and ways, is far more loving, forgiving, and compassionate than me or any other person. God will never abandon you! He poses the same question to you as he asked Adam: *Son/Daughter, where are you?*

Many times, we think that God speaks only to special people, especially prophetic people. However, God talked to Adam, who was not an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher. Adam, the son of God, was a normal man, and communication between Adam and God was not anything extraordinary or spectacular. For example, the skies did not open; there were no earthquakes; the seas did not split apart. Rather, communication between God and Adam was natural. It was an everyday, regular occurrence for Adam to communicate with his Maker.

Moreover, Adam did not have to conjure something up in order to hear or converse with God. Too many times we are given a programmed list of ways on how one can hear God. On the contrary, God is simply asking you to be normal. Indeed, the letter of the law kills,

Chapter seven Adam, Where Are You

but the Spirit gives life (see Rom. 8:2-3; Gal. 2:20-21). In other words, we should no longer live by the law of the Old Testament, but we live by the law of the Spirit. Attempting to hear God using a technical or mechanical mind-set is a task that will “lead you around the mountain” to the point of becoming exasperated.

THERE IS NO PATTERN WHEN IT COMES TO HEARING GOD

We can learn much as we consider the ways in which various men and women in the Bible heard God. And while we often find ourselves in similar situations that they experienced, we must realize that there are no particular patterns that God has ever used to speak to individuals. In fact, although it might be a challenge for us to accept, He can use a different method each time He speaks.

Consider Moses, who was the only man to encounter “the burning bush” experience, which was revealed as the glory of God.

But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10).

Many of us marvel at Moses’ experience and wish that we could live through something similar. However, throughout the passages of Scripture, we never again read of another person hearing God through a burning bush. Not even Joshua, who was a spiritual son to Moses, had such an encounter.

In another example, we read of the stories of Elijah in the Books of First and Second Kings, and we can imagine what a great man he was as he confronted an ungodly system in Israel. When he prayed, clouds listened to him. When he called down fire from Heaven, it not only consumed his sacrifice and that of the enemy, but also the wood, stones, dirt, and buckets of water in the trenches. Moreover, Elijah was responsible for slaughtering 450 prophets of Baal in one day (see 1 Kings 18). Eventually, he would not suffer death, but would be taken by a whirlwind into Heaven (see 2 Kings 2:11). What manner of man was this?

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit (James 5:17-18).

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Please pay attention to the word “man” in the Scripture above. We all would agree that Elijah was a tremendous servant of the Lord, but just like you and me, he was still a man who had a nature like ours. Some translations say that Elijah was “subject to like passions as we are.” In other words, he dealt with similar things that we face today.

Elijah was able to hear God and perform some outstanding supernatural endeavors. Yet there was a time in his life when he became full of despair and ran for his life (see 1 Kings 19). Because the wicked Queen Jezebel had ordered his capture and execution, Elijah was severely depressed and even wished that he might die.

Even so, God spoke to him as he was hiding in a cave at Mt. Horeb, “and He said to him, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” (1 Kings 19:9b). After Elijah responded, God continued to speak and asked the same question again:

*Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire **a still small voice**. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. **And suddenly a voice came to him, and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”** (1 Kings 19:11-13).*

A strong wind, an earthquake, and fire are quite impressive acts of God to see and experience. But...the Lord was in none of them. Instead, God chose to speak in a still, small voice. God might use anything around you in order to speak to you. However, if we decide to believe that God speaks only in spectacular types of ways, then we will be greatly limited in hearing God. Furthermore, you need not labor to hear God. You simply must be a willing vessel, and He will surely speak to you.

Hearing God is not a special gift; it is something normal and natural through the spirit that is within you. Unfortunately, our traditions and belief structures can at times limit our understanding of God and how to hear Him. Believing is a key ingredient.

Chapter seven Adam, Where Are You

CHAPTER SEVEN

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. In this chapter, we learn that God speaks and often asks, “Where are you?” However, write about an occasion or circumstance in your life when you thought (or someone else thought) that God was judging you, did not care where you were or what you were doing, or refused to speak to you.

2. Now, write about an occasion when you knew God, in His mercy and compassion, cared about you and was asking, “Where are you?”

3. Some people think that God speaks to only “special” people or in only “spectacular” ways. List some ways that you, or others you

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know, have personally experienced God speaking to them in natural, normal, or everyday types of ways?

Chapter Eight

YOUR SERVANT LISTENS

GOD SPEAKS TO A BOY

ONE of the most powerful prophets in the Old Testament was Samuel who had a unique relationship with God, which was developed at a young age. The Bible declares that Samuel had such an intimate and personal closeness with the Lord that not one word out of Samuel's mouth was said in vain.

And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground (1 Samuel 3:19 KJV).

Before Samuel was born, his mother had spent time in deep intercession, crying out to God for a child. She even made a vow that if God would bless her with a son, she would give him to the Lord and not allow a razor to come upon his head (see 1 Sam. 1:12).

Samuel's mother, Hannah, had been unable to conceive children, a disheartening situation, especially because her husband, Elkanah, had another wife, Peninnah, with whom he had children. Moreover, Peninnah took the opportunity, year after year, to taunt Hannah about her barrenness and make her miserable. Nevertheless, Elkanah loved Hannah more. Yet Hannah would go into the house of the Lord year after year only to suffer the disappointment of receiving no miracle from the Lord (see 1 Sam 1:7).

Finally, one year, through deep travail, Hannah again revealed her heart to the Lord at the tabernacle in Shiloh. As Eli the priest watched her mouth move without any sound, he concluded that she was drunk (see 1 Sam. 1:13); but she was not drunk with alcohol but with agonizing prayers of intercession. God listened to Hannah's prayer (see 1 Sam. 1:19), and a baby boy was born.

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Hannah called him Samuel, saying, “Because I have asked for him from the Lord” (1 Sam. 1:20b). Samuel’s name means “heard of God,” or “to hear intelligently.” When he was weaned, his parents took him to the tabernacle at Shiloh and dedicated him to the Lord. From that time, he lived there, ministering unto God, under the supervision of the priest, Eli. The Bible says that “the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the Lord and men” (1 Sam. 2:26).

One night, while Samuel was lying down to sleep, he heard a voice calling out to him three different times. Each time that Samuel heard the voice, he ran to Eli, thinking that it was the older priest who was beckoning him. It was not until the third time that Eli perceived what was really happening and told Samuel how to respond if he heard the voice again.

...the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, “Here I am!” So he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” And he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” And he went and lay down. And the Lord called yet again, “Samuel!” So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” And he answered, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” (Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.) And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you did call me.” Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, ‘Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your servant hears” (1 Samuel 3:4-10).

How many times has God called your name and yet you had no knowledge of how to respond? Then compound that issue with the busy schedule of living in a noisy, mundane world and encountering so many different types of responsibilities. Have you ever been like Samuel and taken the time to respond, “Speak, Lord; for Your servant hears”?

Let’s notice what Samuel learned about God’s voice through this experience:

1. God’s voice sounds fatherly and familiar. Samuel first thought that the voice belonged to the priest, Eli, who was his spiritual father.

Chapter eight Your Servant Listens

2. Samuel did not recognize God's voice automatically (without effort or instruction). He had not heard God's voice before; this was his first encounter. He needed to be taught how to listen for God's voice.
3. In order for God to speak to you, listening and responding with an open heart is vital. Samuel responded to the Lord and let Him know that he was listening.

YOU MUST LEARN HOW TO LISTEN FOR GOD'S VOICE

There is a difference between *hearing* and *listening*. According to the Webster's Dictionary, *hearing* is "the process, function, or power of perceiving sound; specifically, the special sense by which noises and tones are received as stimuli." Whereas, the definition for *listening* is "to pay attention to sound, to hear something with thoughtful attention; give consideration...to be alert to catch an expected sound."

In the midst of a busy, noisy, or chaotic lifestyle, it is imperative to train your ears to listen intently to what is most important. Good listening is a skill that takes great effort and time to develop. It involves patience. It doesn't happen automatically or in an instant. It is an act that often involves a process called "selective hearing," determining what is and what is not important to listen to.

Imagine yourself in a waiting area of a large airport. Plasma screens blare sounds of news channels and advertisements. Voices with a variety of accents loudly announce information over the sound systems. There is the beeping of motorized carts carrying passengers, and many people are walking and talking everywhere. But even still, you will be listening and paying attention, especially for the announcement of your flight departure. You will be applying the process of *selective hearing*.

If you tried to pay particular attention to each and every sound in the airport, most likely you would become distracted and miss your flight. Remember you value the sound you are listening for. In selective hearing, you as an individual choose to block out what is not important and listen for what you consider to be of consequence to your life or situation.

In his book, *Between the Words, The Art of Perceptive Listening*, Dr. Norm Wakefield states that listening inhabits 45 to 53 percent of our

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communication behavior. This exceeds speaking, writing, or reading (Revell, Division of Baker Book House Co., 2002, p. 15). People in general appreciate a listening ear. If we all talked at the same time, there would be chaos, frustration, and disappointment. Remember, the art of listening is appreciated universally and is required in every facet of society. Therefore, if this principle is a requirement in the natural, should it not likewise be of significance and relevance on a spiritual level?

Although we might hear God, are we actually listening to Him? Just as our natural ears automatically hear noises and sounds that we don't pay special attention to or process, so too can our spiritual ears function in the same manner. There might be sounds or words coming from God, yet we do not make a deliberated effort to listen to His voice.

Consider a story about one of King David's sons—Solomon, another famous king in Israel, who walked in the favor of the Lord. People from all over the world came to see his kingdom, one that was administered with excellence.

Upon being inaugurated as king of Israel, Solomon had a visitation from the Lord.

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" (1 Kings 3:5).

Solomon's response was:

*"Here's what I want: Give me a **God-listening heart** so I can lead your people well, discerning the difference between good and evil. For who on their own is capable of leading Your glorious people?"* (1 Kings 3:9, The Message). (Other translations state that Solomon asked God for "an understanding heart"—see KJV and NKJV.)

Solomon desired to rule his kingdom well, and in order to do so, he asked for a listening heart or an understanding heart that was tuned in to the Lord's voice, as well as to his own people. He wanted to have the ability to hear, to listen, to obey God, and to understand what God wanted for his life as well as for the lives of others. It was through him hearing God that he could make wise decisions and raise a powerful people. He asked God for a listening ear, which God granted to him, along with extraordinary riches as well.

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ALL TALK AND NO LISTEN

When my son was two years old, I read a book to him entitled, Dolly the Dolphin. In this story, Dolly the Dolphin talks so much that she eventually loses her friends because she does not know when to pause and listen. Fortunately, toward the end of the tale, she realizes that she has been self-centered and inconsiderate. As a husband and father, if I behaved like Dolly the Dolphin, always monopolizing conversations with my family, they would begin to feel ignored, unimportant, and unappreciated. In like manner, does God ever feel ignored or unappreciated when we do all the talking while seldom listening to what He has to say?

Many of us would rather talk than listen. But just as we should not dominate our conversation with others, so should we not talk all the time to God without pausing to hear from Him.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath (James 1:19).

I remember in my earlier years of attending church, the segment of praise and worship was a priority. A person would lead the congregation in worship and hands would be lifted up. People would kneel down, cry, and continue to praise God. This sounds like the right thing to do and would happen for about 25 to 30 minutes. We would finish and then it was time for the pastor to preach his sermon. We talked to God for that entire time; but did we allow Him to communicate with us? Unfortunately, this is a trend that continues to happen in church today, as well as during our own personal devotional time.

Many scholars believe that Jesus Christ spent close to 14 hours a day before the Father. I don't believe Jesus talked during this entire time. I'm sure He took enough time to hear the Father speak, because He was able to say:

...“Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel” (John 5:19-20).

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Jesus listened to the Father, which is what drove Him to fulfill His purpose. He knew that He could do nothing without the Father and He was obedient to what the Father showed Him.

Although the Scripture above refers to Jesus “seeing” what the Father does, it speaks also to His time spent with the Father, which includes listening. The “eyes” and “ears” of His heart were opened up to seeing and hearing a whole new dimension, which has always been in existence. Yet, because of our old belief patterns or the way we have often viewed Scripture, we develop mind-sets that limit us from realizing these truths. It is not the Father’s desire to hide anything from us. Yet if we don’t spend time with Him, listening to Him, we will never really know or understand His heart.

LISTENING MEANS RESTING

Often, people feel the need to work at hearing God. There is the attitude that we should labor or strive, that we should accomplish a certain amount of steps or complete a number of requirements in order to hear from Him. However, God has never intended for us to run in a maze, so to speak, trying to locate Him. There is a rest in Him that we must embrace.

There are different meanings of rest in the Scriptures. The example of rest by God after the completion of creation on the seventh day (see Gen. 2:2) has set the standard for rest that He desires for us so that we might live lives pleasing to Him, full of worship and adoration. This is a sabbath, or a time to be set aside for rest.

There are two other rests mentioned in the Old Testament that Jews are acquainted with and these are namely:

1. The Sabbath of the Lord (see Exod. 20:10).
2. The Sabbath of rest unto the Lord (see Exod. 35:2).

However, the author of Hebrews is not referring to either of these rests when he states that there is “a promise...of entering His rest” (Heb. 4:1), and “There [is] a rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). This refers to a place that you come to, a determination, a choice where you cease from labor; a quiet abode. And God says that we should “be diligent to enter that rest” (Heb. 4:11).

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God did not remain in a state of inactivity after He created the earth, neither was He idle. His providences never cease, and He continues to govern. Resting means to be at peace, to be still, knowing that Christ will never leave you or forsake you.

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the **peace of God**, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).*

***Be still**, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! (Psalm 46:10).*

If there is any character in the Bible who sets a precedent for talking about being still, it is King David from whom we can learn much. He is known as a man after God's own heart (see 1 Sam. 13:14).

The establishment of his kingdom had not come easily. There were many years of hardship to be endured with no physical rest in sight, while he suffered through battles, wanderings, mere escapes, and other great exploits. And yet, in the midst of all this, David knew what it was to remain still before the Lord. For many years, his home had been among the fields and caves, while he was constantly on the run from his vindictive and cruel father-in-law, King Saul. During this time of intense stress and fear, he learned to be still before God, praising and blessing Him, and seeking His comfort, protection, and guidance. His Psalms are not based on theory; he had a firsthand experience of the Lord's goodness and favor toward him.

In being still, we must remember to be patient, a difficult task in our world of busyness. Outward distractions can easily try to subvert our time of being still, but we must remember that we cannot hurry or coerce God into speaking to us. Through being still, our inner man finds peace and solitude and is able to center in on the pure thoughts of the Lord.

DRAWING CLOSE TO HIM IN QUIET TIME

As was previously mentioned, most of our lives are filled with numerous daily responsibilities. And whether they include family, school, work, church, or extracurricular activities, these obligations

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can be demanding and can quickly accumulate and overwhelm us, making it difficult for us to focus. It is understandable, then, that in order to hear your heavenly Father speak to you, you must make a concentrated effort to spend time with Him. This might be early in the mornings, midday, or late at nights, when you choose to devote time in meditation and prayer, getting to know Him.

And don't for a minute let this Book of The Revelation be out of mind. Ponder and meditate on it day and night, making sure you practice everything written in it. Then you'll get where you're going; then you'll succeed (Joshua 1:7-8, The Message).

Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation. Give heed to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to You I will pray. My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up (Psalm 5:1-3).

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer (Psalm 19:14). (For other Scriptures regarding meditation, also read Psalm 64:1; 104:34; 119:37.)

Everything else must become secondary during your quiet time, and the Lord must become priority.

The apostle James also lists some specific actions that are required on our part so that we can become better acquainted with our Lord.

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded (James 4:7-8).

1. Submit yourself to God.
2. Resist the enemy.
3. Come near to God and He will come near to you.
4. Cleanse your hands.
5. Purify your heart.
6. Don't be double-minded.

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While spending quality time with the Lord, He can speak to us however He chooses. I have already stated that we can never limit God. He can speak to us in various ways, including a still soft voice, an audible voice, through nature, imagery, visions, dreams, books, or music; but one of the most consistent ways is thoughts.

Writing your thoughts in a journal is an excellent habit to develop. It is necessary to write down what we hear Him say because our minds can soon forget what has been said and lose the authenticity of God's word or message to us. We are responsible for that which we receive from the Lord; accordingly, if we are faithful in a little, He will make us ruler over much (see Matt. 25:21).

If journaling or writing is somewhat of a chore or too difficult for you, you might want to use a digital recorder and tape the message verbally.

Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote on a scroll of a book, at the instruction of Jeremiah, all the words of the Lord which He had spoken to him (Jeremiah 36:4).

*I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch to see what He will say to me, and what I will answer when I am reproved. Then the Lord answered me and said: **“Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it”** (Habakkuk 2:1-2).*

Learn from Habakkuk's wise example in the Scripture above and apply the advice given to him from God.

Habakkuk says:

1. “I will stand my watch....” Likewise, we should watch and wait on the Lord.
2. “And watch to see what He will say to me.” We are to embrace spiritual sight and hearing.
3. “I will answer....” Accordingly, we should respond to the Lord in a dialogue.

Finally, the Lord responds to Habakkuk, “Write the vision and make it plain....” And so, we should also write or journal what God is saying to us, writing it clearly and in the detail that God provides.

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Chapter Nine

MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE

WE must always be attentive to the words of Jesus in Scripture, for He is our pattern to follow. And we should especially pay careful attention, with a heart attitude of obedience, to those words He repeats a second time or more. In these cases, He is not being redundant or possibly sarcastic, but is conveying a serious message that will bring a breakthrough to our lives. Realizing the importance of Jesus' words, let's take a careful, specific look at John chapter 10, where Jesus refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd.

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the **sheep hear his voice**; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the **sheep follow him, for they know his voice**. ... I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ... I am the good shepherd; and **I know My sheep, and am known by My own**. ... **My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me**” (John 10:1-4,11,14,27).*

THE SHEEP KNOW AND FOLLOW HIS VOICE

In this unique chapter of John, Jesus refers to His followers as “sheep.” He compares them to natural sheep and Himself to a natural shepherd. There are several points to emphasize here.

1. God knows His sheep.
2. His sheep hear His voice.
3. He calls His own sheep by name.
4. His sheep follow Him because they know His voice.

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At times, shepherds in the East will gather together with other shepherds while leading their sheep to pastures. This mixing of their sheep might seem to make it difficult to know to whom each sheep belongs. Yet when it is time for each shepherd and flock to return to their respectful areas, the shepherds call their sheep in their own unique way and the sheep follow their voices.

Knowing God's voice is based on having a relationship with Him. We need to remember that our relationship has been in Him before the foundation of the world was made. We have come from Him; therefore, His voice was once familiar to us. Today, when we desire a relationship with Him, we will discover that His voice is not a new voice but one that you and I must become reacquainted with.

When I teach on the prophetic, one of my favorite demonstrations is called "the chair principle." I set up two chairs facing each other. I sit on one, and the chair opposite me is for the Holy Spirit. To the natural eye, this is foolishness because it does not seem like anyone is sitting on the other chair. But in reality He is. My communication with Him is based on a dialogue, and my language is typical, everyday, normal conversation, as if I'm talking to a friend. It is not flowery, formal, or religious. This can be done anywhere—in a living room, business office, playground, bedroom, gymnasium—anywhere. My aim is to get to know Him in an intimate way. Remember, He is not a figment of our imagination; the Holy Spirit is absolutely genuine. And you can know Him based on how much you are willing to get to know Him.

Some people attempt to know God based upon their traditional or religious views, and they follow a formalized pattern of approaching Him. Some examples are using a formal style of speech, such as the King James Version language to address God, or perhaps feeling the need to sing three songs before speaking to Him. Yet attempting to know Him should never be a tedious, rigid approach. Remember, first and foremost, God is love (see 1 John 4:8), and He wants to develop a loving relationship and personal communication with us.

ONLY ONE VOICE THAT MATTERS

Returning to John chapter 10, you will notice that Jesus also mentions a robber, thief, robbers, thieves, and a hireling in this Scripture passage. Often, Christians have determined these words to be de-

Chapter nine My Sheep Hear My Voice

scriptions of satan, and might tend to focus more on the devil rather than on the Shepherd. Consequently, they steer away from knowing the Shepherd's voice because they are spending so much of their time focused on what the devil has to say and what he is doing.

There are two issues to address here. First, does satan have a voice? Yes, he does; he spoke to Adam and Eve when he tempted them in the garden (see Gen. 3). He also had a conversation with Jesus Christ and tempted Him as well (see Matt. 4). Likewise, we are able to hear and know the enemy's voice. Each and every one of us is tempted by satan, who wants only death for us. The Scriptures say:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death (James 1:13-15).

The devil is a murderer and a liar; he has been since the beginning and always will be (see John 8:44). Thus, we should never give him a place of importance (see Eph. 4:27). Rather, we should concentrate only on knowing the Good Shepherd's voice, Jesus Christ who has defeated the tempter completely, and follow Him. Consequently, we will not follow any other voice because it will be strange to us (see John 10:5).

Second, the thief in John 10:10 is actually not the devil. If you go back to John 10:1 and 10:8, you will learn who Jesus is talking about in this chapter—"he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs up some other way." This Scripture is referring to those who try to enter God's flock through means other than "the door," which is Jesus Christ (see John 10:9). "The thief" is not referring to the devil.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD LOVES YOU

The most important point to remember from this chapter is to understand that the Good Shepherd knows you; He does speak to you; and He calls you by name. As you inwardly obey and outwardly follow your Shepherd, His voice will become a governing and natural part of your life and lifestyle. His desire is for you to have a direct, close, and intimate relationship with Him.

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CHAPTER NINE

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Shepherds often use a unique way in calling their own sheep. What do you think are some of God's unique ways in calling His "sheep"?

2. Some people have been taught that the only acceptable way to communicate with God is by using a traditional, formal, or religious approach. While there might not be anything necessarily wrong with these styles of communication (depending upon the attitude of the heart), describe a more personal and intimate way to talk to God.

3. Using the author's "chair principle," have a conversation with the Holy Spirit. Then write down the main points of your conversation.

Chapter Ten

FROM FOLLOWERS TO FRIENDS

Without friendship no one would choose to live, even if they had all other good things in life.

—Aristotle

FRIENDSHIP. Everyone needs a friend—someone with whom we share affection and esteem, someone we are interested in and desire goodwill towards, someone we favor and who we can be cheerful, comforting, and amicable towards. But while most of us seek friendships with others, we are not always naturally inclined to desire a friendship with God, and this is for various reasons. To begin with, we don't necessarily seek His ways. If we did, then the world around us would be a much more pleasant environment. At other times, we approach God the same way we approach some relationships in our lives— using control, manipulation, or self-interests. We attempt to exploit God, while lacking understanding of His affection for us.

Nevertheless, it has always been the intent of our heavenly Father to be our friend, as we are able to determine from the first chapter of Genesis when He created man. Yet there was a change in Adam and Eve's relationship with God because of their disobedience and rebellion, which caused them to subsequently hide from God, become distant, and obviously put a strain on their friendship. Later, in the Book of Exodus, when the law was introduced through Moses and punishment for disobedience included death, people regarded God as a God of judgment. He was to be treated with fear and apprehension. Thus, they concentrated on being His followers and servants rather than His companions.

Everything about the Old Testament was “do.” When the children of Israel came out of a life of slavery and bondage, they still viewed

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life based on how they had been treated in Egypt. People came before God not because of love but in order to do that which they thought was necessary to please God, such as sacrifices. Yet the intent of God's law, as introduced in Exodus 19 and 20, was never meant to produce slaves, but sons.

My father-in-law says, "People read the Bible through the lens covering their eyes," meaning that if you believe in total judgment, then all Scriptures become God's judgment. If you consider God as a God of mercy, grace, and compassion, then you will read the Scriptures with that mind-set. Everything falls in alignment with how you already view Him. There are those people who consider God as an angry God who demands justice and who is waiting to knock the living daylights out of them for not living right or for doing something wrong. Many people relate to God from fear of being punished or struck dead rather than loving and worshipping Him as a friend.

Fortunately, there were men in the days of old who were able to go beyond the law and who became known as friends of God.

GOD CALLED THEM "FRIENDS"

Before there was the law, Abraham was visited by God, and he had a relationship with God. The Bible says that God did not hide what He was doing from Abraham (see Gen. 18:17), but communicated His thoughts to him. The driving force behind Abraham's relationship with God was that he was obedient to the Father and followed His voice (see Rom. 4; Gal. 3; James 2:23).

But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend (Isaiah 41:8).

Moses, another great leader, was able to establish a friendship with God that would change God's heart from destroying the nation of Israel (see Exod. 32:10-15).

So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11a).

And then, there was the king who was known as a man after God's own heart. David had a very special relationship with the Lord (see 1 Sam. 13:14). During most days, before he would finally be placed

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on the throne, he was on the run for his life from his jealous father-in-law, King Saul; and it was during these times that he grew much closer to the Lord. Throughout the Psalms, we read about his experiences and of his friendship with God.

WE ARE IMPORTANT TO GOD

What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:4-6).

In this Scripture, we learn that God is “mindful” of man. In other words, He remembers us; He mentions us; He thinks of us. We are important to Him. The psalmist David reminds us of the Father’s love and His craving for us. Verse 5 says that He made us a little lower than the angels. But in fact, the correct interpretation should read that He made us a little lower than Elohim, which being interpreted is “God, the many breasted one.” He considers us, remembers us, and calls on us to come to this everlasting friendship that He will not walk away from. He is a friend who sticks closer than a brother (see Prov. 18:24).

In all of mankind, no matter who you are, there is that innate response to want to have a relationship with a “being” higher than man. But indeed, we are no longer on a search for Him because He has come in the flesh (see 1 Tim. 3:16), and His name is Jesus Christ. We don’t have to labor to have a relationship with Him, for His friendship is freely offered to us. He confirmed this friendship when He declared:

No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you (John 15:15).

We are considered His friends, people who He is fond of, who are dear to His heart.

John chapter 15 begins with Jesus stating that He is the vine and we are the branches. In order for branches to produce fruit, they must first receive life from the vine. Symbiotic relationship is essential for this to take place. There are two types of people that are in Him—

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those who profess to know Him but who do not have a personal relationship with Him; thus, they don't bear fruit. The second kind of branch knows that life comes from Him; these people have a genuine friendship with their Maker; and they bear His fruit.

A NEW COMMANDMENT

In the Old Testament the standard of love was “yourself”—“Love your neighbor as yourself” (see Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:34-40). However, Jesus Christ gives us a new commandment and declares that we should “love one another as He loved [past tense] us” (see John 13:34; 15:12). The standard of this love is unconditional. In the Old Testament, love was based on ourselves, along with requirements and regulations. But the standard of His love has no regulations or stipulations. Remember, we only are because of who He is. Jesus states that with His type of love, a man can lay down his life for his friends, which was representative of what He would do for the whole universe (see John 15:13).

But then, Jesus also declares that we are His friends if we do what He commands (see John 15:14). Ironically, this sounds like there are regulations or stipulations. However, we need to realize we are truly free only when we live under command. In the Kingdom of God, we definitely have been given free choice, but we also live under God's rights. Living a life of individualism can lead to an illusion of control and liberty. Whereas, true freedom entails living under the command of our King and relinquishing self. Obedience always leads to life. Remember, submission to Him is not restriction, but protection.

Jesus' proclamation of His followers being called friends is a paradigm shift. It's a change of mentality and the entering in of a new way of life. Servants do not freely live life but are governed by their master's ordinances. They have no choice and follow their tasks by obligation and not freedom. There is no democracy as they are bound to regulations and stipulations by those they serve. This kind of relationship is one-sided and presents no place of friendship that can lead to intimacy.

Servants labor and rarely know their masters' hearts. Friends, on the other hand, are able to share thoughts. They listen to each other

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and understand one another's feelings, be it joyful or sad. Think about when Jesus Christ was about to be betrayed. With His disciples, He shared the information of His death and His third-day resurrection (see Matt. 17:22; 20:18). He also relayed the promises of the Father to them. These were awesome secrets being revealed. As Jesus communicated with the Father, He was totally transparent and declared that His own will would not be done, but the will of the Father's (see Matt. 26:39). And everything that the Father revealed to Jesus, He in turn has made known to us.

His friendship is not demanding but is a matter of mutual affection. I long for Him and He longs for me. As we desire to take on His characteristics, vision, and purpose, His friendship with us will lovingly convict, correct, instruct, and change our lives.

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CHAPTER TEN

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Why do some people think that it is not possible to be a friend of God's?

2. The Lord Jesus Christ has shown and continues to show friendship toward us. List several ways that He does so.

3. How can we show our friendship for Him?

Chapter Eleven

DREAMS, VISIONS, AND TRANCES

THROUGHOUT my life, there have been many times that I have had dreams, but because of my lack of spiritual knowledge and immaturity, I paid no attention to them. After learning of their importance, however, I anticipated having a dream through which God would deliver a message to me, and it first occurred while I was attending Bible school.

Living in Durban, South Africa, I had received a scholarship to study at a school in Virginia; and because I would be a foreigner in the United States, I was required to obtain a student visa. When I first applied for my visa in July, 1995, I was given a six-month stay and would have to renew my visa every six months thereafter, which I continued to do while staying in Virginia.

Prior to the third time of renewal, I received a letter from the Immigration Department informing me that this would be the last time that a visa would be renewed; thereafter, I would have to leave the United States. Meanwhile, a teacher at the school, who was a prominent lawyer in the community, had taken on my case and was making the necessary inquiries in order for me to obtain an extended stay on my visa.

During the fall of 1996, I had a dream in which I received a letter from the Immigration Department. I opened the letter and read that my visa was granted until February 1998. In my dream, I was really excited and told one of my friends from Jamaica what had occurred.

Then, in reality, in January 1997, I did receive a letter from Immigration, and when I opened it, I discovered that my visa had been extended until February 1998. Although the Immigration Department informed me that I would have to leave in six months (the usual amount of time granted—which would be July 1997), they had

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inserted that my date of departure would be “February 1998,” which gave me seven more months past the six-month limit. The dream I had earlier in the fall of 1996 was God communicating to me that I would find myself involved in an unusual predicament, and He gave me His assurance that everything would be okay.

A PROPHECY HAS BEEN FULFILLED

In the Old Testament, God informed Job that He speaks to people in dreams and visions.

For God [does reveal His will; He] speaks not only once, but more than once, even though men do not regard it [including you, Job]. [One may hear God's voice] in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men while slumbering upon the bed, then He opens the ears of men and seals their instruction [terrifying them with warnings] (Job 33:14-16 AMP).

Also in the Old Testament, Joel prophesied that God would pour out His Spirit in dreams and visions:

*And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, **your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions**; and also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).*

This prophecy was not only for the people who lived during the Old Testament days. The apostle Peter quoted this same Scripture on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:17-18) after the Holy Spirit had come upon the people waiting for the promise (see Acts chapters 1 and 2). Today, we read this Scripture and realize that we are not still waiting for the Spirit to be poured out on all flesh in order for us to have dreams and visions; this prophecy has already been and continues to be fulfilled!

Dreams and visions are common ways that God continues to use to speak to us, and we should desire to have them. Anyone can receive dreams from God, which come in an encoded language when one is asleep. They can come in the form of images, symbols, patterns, illus-

Chapter eleven Dreams, Visions, and Trances

trations, stories, metaphors, similes, poems, thoughts, emotions, and whatever else God chooses to use. When these forms are decoded, they reveal the secrets of God. Moreover, it is fascinating to realize that the nine gifts of the Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12) can be directed through dreams. A dream is not just limited to the night only; the antenna of our spirit is what receives the picture at any time, which is then conveyed into the mind for understanding.

A vision is seeing something in a dream or trance, especially a supernatural appearance that brings a revelation. It is a manifestation of something immaterial. There are many people who hear God through dreams or visions, but because of lack of knowledge, they are not able to understand what God is saying to them.

OUR SPIRIT DOES NOT SLEEP

*For what man knows the things of a man **except the spirit** of the man which is in him? (1 Corinthians 2:11a).*

In the subject of general psychology, we learn that there are various levels of physical sleep patterns that can be described in the natural; however, there are no spiritual definitions for these stages. During sleep, the physical body and mind can reach a level of complete rest in which a person does not recollect what takes place within that timeframe of sleep. Yet during that time, the spirit of an individual does not sleep. Instead, the spirit acts like a filter and seeks out our minds and thought processes.

The spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths of his heart (Proverbs 20:27).

Our mind is affected when we are awake by what we see, hear, touch, smell, and taste. Our thoughts, whether negative or positive, are retained within our mind, which in turn, impact us. Our spirit recognizes these things, provides energy for the mind, processes our thoughts, and acts like a filter with regard to these thoughts. When we dream, some information, which is not required, diminishes as new thinking patterns form and change takes place. Dreaming cleanses the mind and reforms our thought processes.

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INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS

Dreams are mostly impressions made on your spirit and mind, and 99 percent of the time, a dream is a message for the dreamer. You should never be afraid of personally understanding your own dreams because God wants to reveal His message in it, but the interpretation should be conducted with wisdom and counsel from experienced leaders. Why? A misguided interpretation can easily lead you astray.

It is important that you do not use a logical approach to interpret the dream literally. For instance, let's say you have a dream that a devastating tornado sweeps through your city and destroys almost everything within the environment. If your dream is interpreted literally, then it is suggested that a tornado will in reality take place, possibly along with details of how, when, and where it is coming from. But, actually, this dream might have nothing to do with a literal tornado coming to your location. It could mean one of many things and is subject to interpretation.

There are two examples in the Old Testament that immediately stand out when it comes to dream interpretation—the stories of Joseph and Daniel. Both Joseph and Daniel were presented the opportunity of interpreting various dreams, including the dreams of two ungodly kings—Pharaoh of Egypt and King Nebuchadnezzar, respectively, who had received spiritual dreams concerning the status of their nations.

Interpretation of a dream requires wisdom and understanding. These were the two key ingredients that Daniel possessed when he came before the king (see Dan. 1:20), as did Joseph when he came before Pharaoh (see Gen. 41:39-40). The greatest help that we can have when it comes to interpreting a dream comes from the Holy Spirit. He is our teacher and will show us all things (see John 14:26). A good, solid development of relationship with Him will lead us to a place of clear communion with Him. As we practice interpreting dreams, the more we learn and the more understanding we acquire. Dream interpretation is an art that takes time to develop. In fact, this skill was developed in Joseph for about 17 years before he became a dream interpreter in prison and to Pharaoh.

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In Joseph's interpretation to Pharaoh, he revealed that cows and ears of grain represented years. Daniel's interpretations to King Nebuchadnezzar revealed that parts of a statue represented various kingdoms; and for another dream, a tree represented Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, which would eventually fall. These interpretations provided solutions to the national problems that each government was facing. (See Genesis chapters 40 and 41; Daniel chapters 2 and 4.) In both instances, the ruling power of the day was evil. People worshipped heathen gods and goddesses, yet Joseph and Daniel were able to demonstrate the power of the Spirit, standing out among the magicians and sorcerers as children of the most high God.

In Joseph's case, before he interpreted the Pharaoh's dreams, he was the only one able to also interpret the dreams of the butler and the baker of the Pharaoh of Egypt, and he gave honor to God for the interpretation.

*And they said to him, "We each have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it." So Joseph said to them, "**Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell them to me, please**" (Genesis 40:8).*

Likewise, no other one, except Daniel, could be found to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

*Because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and **understanding to interpret dreams**, clarify riddles, and solve knotty problems were found in this same Daniel, whom the king named Belshazzar. **Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation** (Daniel 5:12 AMP).*

When it comes to interpreting a dream, there are a very limited number of people who can truly discern the spiritual meaning of a dream. This is evident when considering that Pharaoh and King Nebuchadnezzar called on their soothsayers, astrologers, and magicians to come and interpret their dreams, yet none of them could give a precise meaning, which cost some of them their lives (see Gen. 41:8; Dan. 2:2-13). Whereas, Joseph and Daniel received favor from God; they were well respected and were subsequently elevated into high positions in their kingdoms (see Gen. 41:39-41; Dan. 2:46-48).

Tony, a man who is a member of our prophetic team, has been given the ability to interpret dreams. He has not attended a Bible school, neither has he been mentored by a person who has had many years of

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experience in dream interpretation; yet God has entrusted him with a special ability to interpret dreams.

Once, he and I attended a pastors' gathering overseas at which time I ministered to the leaders. Thereafter, the rest of the team provided prophetic ministry over several of the leaders. Later, on our way to lunch, Tony rode with the chairman of the gathering.

As they were talking, the pastor began to share a dream he had, and he asked Tony for an interpretation. In his dream, he found himself floating by his own weight, in the middle of a lake, surrounded by mountains. He did not feel troubled or scared. As he was floating, he noticed one of his leaders swimming out to him. Then he saw a second leader also swimming toward him but at a much faster pace than the first man. Then he awoke. After he shared his dream, Tony asked him what he thought the dream meant.

The pastor thought that both leaders were trying to save him from drowning because they thought that he was not doing well. Then he mentioned that one of his other leaders was not in his dream at all, and this bothered him because he had confidence in this leader and considered him to be a spiritual son. Because the third man was not in the dream, the pastor felt that God was trying to tell him that this man was not in unison with him and that he was fading away. Based on his thoughts, the pastor was considering removing this spiritual son from leadership in due time.

Then Tony shared a different interpretation with him. The first man who was swimming toward him was on track following after him steadily. The second man who was swimming much faster was trying to pursue him and learn from him. He was hungry to have a relationship with the pastor. As for the man who was not in the dream, he was already doing the work and carrying the vision. The Lord was asking this pastor to become a father to this man.

Even though this pastor was a seasoned minister, by his own interpretation, he could have made a grave mistake and consequently regretted his decision by removing one of his leaders. What he saw and interpreted was not the spiritual meaning. Fortunately, after Tony shared with him, this pastor's heart was receptive to receiving the word of the Lord.

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One misconception regarding dream interpretation is suggesting that frightening dreams are not of God and are of the devil, and good dreams are only from God. This is like saying white is of God and black is of the devil. The fact is, deception has never been ugly and will never be ugly; it's often presented as a fine-line truth and is inviting, yet it is false and destructive. On the other hand, spiritual dreams are not always joyful or peaceful, but can be startling. Therefore, discernment is important.

I have only briefly touched on the subject of dreams and dream interpretation. For a more in-depth discussion, there are many outstanding books on interpretation, especially those books that give a detailed account on meanings of symbols, names, animals, colors, and several other objects. (See a list of recommended reading at the end of this chapter.)

I will simply say at this point to remember that the symbol for one dream might not mean the same thing for another dream. Don't confuse or limit yourself with a so-called "special formula," because it can dishearten you. Furthermore, you cannot force or coerce a person into believing the interpretation of a dream. There must be a witness within that individual so that he or she can take responsibility and be accountable for what they have received.

VISIONS

We read in Daniel 4:13 and 7:13,15 that both King Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel saw visions in their heads or in their minds. In fact, the Old Testament and the New Testament provide ample examples of many people who have received visions. Likewise, God wants us to encounter Him in every way possible.

A vision is when the eyes of our hearts are opened up to "seeing" into the spirit realm, and the picture is as clear as if we are seeing things in the natural. It is being able to understand revelation or supernatural occurrences. Visions in our day, especially among believers, should not be a less likely occurrence. However, there are many people who are not as hungry for the demonstration of supernatural activity; consequently, regulators are inserted on the eyes of their hearts.

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Visions are more literal than dreams (which are more symbolic) and can occur when one is alert. Visions do not require as much interpretation as dreams do, but much prayer should still be given over what is seen before it can be proclaimed. People sometimes wonder what the difference is between a dream and vision. Looking at the definitions of both, one would have to agree that they are of a similar nature. A dream occurs when individuals are asleep; however, both dreams and visions can interact (see Dan. 7:1-2; Acts 16:9-10; Num. 12:6).

SEEING INTO THE SPIRITUAL REALM

In the study of organizational behavior, we learn to assess and understand which styles of learning best work for each individual in order for that person to better understand and communicate. So it is when it comes to receiving information from God. He has created us with senses that need to be governed by the Spirit. Some of us are more auditory oriented; some of us are more feeling oriented; and many people are prone to be more visual oriented. Thus, God might determine that you will best receive and understand a message from Him by “seeing” that message, rather than hearing or feeling it. But this should not stop us from learning how to hear God through each sensory organ that He has placed within us.

Visions have to do with “seeing” in the spiritual realm. We must have faith and believe in the supernatural realm, which is beyond what the natural eye sees.

But without faith it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus also learned through “seeing,” but it was a different realm of seeing and not by what He saw in the natural. His eyes were fixed on the Father and filled with faith.

Jesus answered and said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel” (John 5:19-20).

Jesus is our greatest example of “seeing.” In the Scripture above, we can learn several lessons:

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1. Jesus acknowledged that He could do nothing based upon Himself.
2. He “saw” what the Father did, and He was dependent upon the Father.
3. He followed everything that the Father did.
4. The Father showed Him all things.
5. Jesus would be shown even greater works.

We can become just like Jesus. Indeed, there are many things that the Father wants to also show us; we simply need to first desire to see it. We must fix our eyes upon Him (see Heb. 12:1-2).

WHAT PREVENTS US FROM “SEEING”?

There are three attitudes or thoughts that prevent us from seeing spiritually. First, a rationalistic, analytical, or logical approach, based on reason (discussed in Chapter One) will hinder what we see spiritually. Remember, not everything we see spiritually will have a human explanation. Second, whatever we think about or dwell upon will affect how we see spiritually. If we sow seeds of lust and sin into our hearts, then we will produce the fruit of what we sow. Third, and that which impacts so many people with an ungodly fear, is spending more time learning about the devil and his strategic works than the good, pure, and righteous works of God. While I do believe that there is a devil, his darkness and works of deception should have no place in our body, soul, or spirit, if we are walking in the light of Christ.

To turn from this life of doubt and blindness and receive the mighty spiritual promises and blessings that God wants for your life, you must follow through with these positive thoughts and actions:

1. Repent for disbelieving and pray for the eyes of your heart to be opened.
2. Desire to have visions.
3. Study biblical characters, such as Joseph, Daniel, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and John. Consequently, your faith will be stirred.

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4. Journal your dreams and visions so you are accountable for what you receive.
5. Don't dominate your prayer time with your own talking; be quiet, focus, and let the Lord show you the supernatural realm.

TRANCES

A trance (Greek: *ékstasis*) is a state of a person where he or she is dazed or stunned, is not aware of their surroundings, and unable to respond to stimuli. From the Greek word, *ékstasis*, we derive the English word "ecstasy." According to the Webster's Dictionary, ecstasy occurs when one is beyond reason and control. There are not many examples in the Scriptures where we read about a trance. It seems to be an infrequent experience. However, let's look at a few instances where men experienced trances in the Bible.

1. The apostle Peter.

Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance (Acts 10:10).

2. The apostle Paul in his Damascus experience (see Acts 9:3-9); and at one other time afterward—"*Then it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance*" (Acts 22:17).

3. The apostle John.

I entered into a different experience in the sphere of the Spirit [His absolute control] on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a voice, a great one, like a trumpet, saying, "...That which you see, write at once in a book and send it directly to the seven [local] assemblies..." (Revelation 1:10-11, Wuest).

All these servants were in direct relationship with the Lord. Both apostles Peter and Paul were in prayer before they fell into a trance, and neither of their encounters was self-induced. Moreover, God Himself appeared in each trance. No Scripture admonishes us to desire to have a trance, yet a trance is one of God's ways of communicating with us and can take place anytime the Lord chooses to move upon you.

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RECOMMENDED READING

Understanding the Dreams You Dream, Ira Milligan

Every Dreamer's Handbook: Simple Guide to Understanding Your Dreams, Ira Milligan

Understanding Dreams and Visions Audiobook on CD, John Paul Jackson

Hear God Through Your Dreams, Mark and Patti Virkler

Dream Language, James Goll

Interpreting Symbols and Types, Kevin J. Conner

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. What words in Joel 2:28-29 signify the importance of dreams and visions? Why are these words important?

2. Write out the steps regarding how to “see” like Jesus saw, according to John 5:19-20.

3. Choose and read about a dream (vision or trance) in the Bible. Write a description of the dream (vision or trance). Who was it given to? Who was the interpreter? What was the interpretation?

4. If you have had a spiritual dream, write the details of the dream. If you have had an interpretation given to you, also write the interpretation here.

Chapter Twelve

DOES HEARING GOD MAKE YOU A MYSTIC?

WHEN people hear God speak to them in any one of a number of ways, they can sometimes convey an attitude, whether knowingly or unknowingly, that their experience with God is above the knowledge or experience of other believers. Then there are other people who think that hearing God makes a person seem strange, mysterious, or mystical, such as is thought of the religions of the East. Some people even believe that utilizing the gifts of the Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12) or receiving a revelation of the Scripture also indicates that a person is strange or mystical. These attitudes can create a competitive mentality or misunderstanding in the Body of Christ.

As sons and daughters of Jesus Christ, we are definitely indwelt with the Spirit of God; consequently, the supernatural realm should be a natural everyday lifestyle. To the world and even to some believers, we might seem like mystics, and actually, we might even be described correctly as such, because part of the definition of mysticism has to do with believing that spiritual truth or direct knowledge of God can be attained through some subjective experience; or it is having to do with direct communication with an ultimate reality, which is not apparent to the natural senses or obvious to our intelligence.

In actuality, one who is called a “Christian mystic” is one who understands that there is an inherent nature from the Father that is infused into one’s being, that our spirit is connected to the Spirit of Christ, and His very flow of life, whether it be words, visions, dreams, or however else He chooses to communicate, comes from a relational intimacy with Him. The truth of the matter is simply that we have been restored, reformed, and reconciled to our Father (see 2 Cor. 5:18).

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Hearing God's voice then becomes a normal everyday occurrence. It is called communion with Him.

To people who are not accustomed to or who have not been reared in hearing God or encouraged to see His marvelous acts, this type of communion or relationship with God seems mystical. From a rationalistic and logical mind-set, they view people who hear God as spiritual mystics.

DISCERNING THE SPIRITS

Usually, the word mystic has been associated with spiritual people who practice counterfeit acts of the truth, yet who are pursued by many who are hungry and intrigued by the supernatural. Witches, mediums, channellers, and new agers are capable of reading cards, discerning auras, casting out demons, healing and performing miracles upon the sick, walking on coals of fire without harm, impeding themselves with swords, levitating, and much more. These things sound farfetched, but they are reality. The symbols they use, such as cards, charms, stones, or crystal balls have no real power, but are used solely as focal points for meditation. Through this process of meditation, without the Spirit of the Lord, they begin to channel evil spirits through their soul, being led by a demonic realm. Sadly, often their supporters include many Christians.

But we must remember, that just as there are physical limitations, such as time and space in the natural world, there are also such limitations in the spirit world as well. How do we know this? In the story found in Job 1:6-8, satan came among the sons of God and presented himself as well. When God asked him a question about where he had come from (see Job 1:7), satan responded that he had been roaming the earth to and fro. His response implies that he could not have been everywhere at the same time, so there is obviously a limitation in the spirit realm. Satan is not all-knowing, all-powerful, or all-present. In addition, Job 1:6 begins by stating, "Now there was a day when the sons of God," which denotes a specific day and involves time in the spiritual realm.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:24 that there would be "false Christs" and "false prophets" who would arise and mislead many with their ability to demonstrate the supernatural. He went on to state that there is a possibility that even the very elect would become deceived. With this

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in mind, the saints must become sensitive to know what spirit is in operation, and this can be accomplished through discernment.

Consider Acts 16:16-18, where we read the story of Paul and Silas who were followed by a girl possessed with a spirit of divination. Even though she was possessed, for many days she continued to declare the truth that they were the servants of the most high God who were proclaiming salvation. She was stating a fact; however, it was coming from an evil source. Paul and Silas were able to discern the spirit from which her words were being declared and cast it out.

In another case, when Simon the sorcerer saw that the Holy Spirit was being given to people when the apostles laid hands on them, he offered them money, attempting to buy this same power. Even though he was desiring something good, he was rebuked by Peter who said that his heart was not right with God and that he should repent of his wickedness (see Act 8:18-25).

We must also be able to discern the spirit in operation when people talk about hearing God. The truth might be declared; however, an evil source can be attempting to draw you in and then lead you astray with deceptions and lies.

MYSTERIOUS AND STRANGE, BUT TRUE

While we can read various biblical accounts of false prophets and deceiving spirits, there are also many stories that reveal the awesome power of the Spirit of God at work through many people. In Matthew 14:22-33, we read where Jesus instructed His disciples to board a boat and sail to the other side of the sea while He sent the crowds of people away. Later, as He was praying alone on the mountain, a storm arose, and out on the water a little boat was being tossed to and fro by the wind and waves. So... Jesus went to the disciples who were in trouble.

When the disciples saw a figure walking on top of the water, they became frightened because they thought it was a ghost. They had never seen such a profound demonstration against the laws of gravity and nature. Most likely, this was quite a mystical scene, especially because it occurred during the fourth watch of the night (early dark hours of the morning). And yet, Peter was able to accomplish the very same miracle, although for a short time; had he had more faith, he could have continued to walk on the water for who knows how long.

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There are many other so-called mystical stories in the New Testament, including Philip preaching to the Ethiopian eunuch who had been reading the Book of Isaiah while riding in his chariot. The angel of the Lord had commanded Philip to talk to this man who was in a position of great authority. And after Philip explained the Scripture to him and baptized him, the Spirit of the Lord translated Philip to another place, or in other words, Philip disappeared before their very eyes in the desert and was found immediately preaching at Azotus (see Acts 8:26-40).

Other strange stories can be found in Acts 5:12-16, when the shadow of Peter's body fell upon the sick in the streets, and they were instantly healed; and in Acts 16:25-26, when Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns at midnight, suddenly there was a great earthquake that shook the foundation of the prison, opened the locked doors, and loosed every prison chain.

There are Old Testament examples of mystical feats as well, such as Elijah who outran a chariot (see 1 Kings 18:46), Joshua who commanded the sun to stand still during the battle at Gibeon (see Josh. 10:1-15), and the ten well-known plagues that fell upon the Egyptians when the Pharaoh refused to allow Moses and the Israelites to leave (see Exodus chapters 7-12). These stories seem extreme, yet they involve men who simply heard God and obeyed Him. And in their day, as they followed God, they were probably considered strange or mystical as well.

THE REALITY OF THE UNSEEN REALM

In Colossians 1:16 we read that God created everything in our entire universe, both visible and invisible. This includes all living creatures (see Gen. 1:20-26), angels, demons, and satan himself. Some of these creatures are quite powerful and are described in the Scriptures as providing service to God and man (see Ezek. 1:5-22). There is an invisible world that was created before natural man came into existence.

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible (Hebrews 11:3).

Chapter twelve Does Hearing God Make You a Mystic

There is a kingdom of light of which Jesus Christ is the head. There is likewise a dominion of darkness, which includes satan and his demons. The dominion of Christ rules over every other kingdom (see Col. 1:18; 2:10), because He has destroyed the enemy and his works (see Eph. 1:20-22). In the visible realm, there are elements and substances that are tangible. The same is applicable in the unseen realm. Elisha prayed in Second Kings 6:17 for his servant's spiritual eyes to be opened. Subsequently, he saw horses, chariots, and fire all around. The spiritual world is just as real as the natural world. The servant was able to witness the unseen realm become a reality.

MAN'S HABITATION IS ETERNITY

In order to understand the mysteries of the spiritual world, we also need to have a better understanding of eternity. The thought of eternity is usually placed as futuristic; however, eternal life is now (see John 17:3). God does not live in a time space world like us humans; He lives in a realm called eternity (see 1 Tim. 1:17), although He chooses to move in a time space world upon His children. Nevertheless, because we have been made in God's image and likeness, we have inherited His DNA, and eternity is in our hearts as well.

*He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also **He has put eternity in their hearts**, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end (Ecclesiastes 3:11).*

We have always been in God and have come from God (see Eph. 1:4; Eccl. 3:15). Although God is not bound to time, He has finished all things even before they began, and everything has already been completed. Yet we as humans manifest in a fullness of time so that we can encounter what He has done (see Gal. 4:4). Remember, God is Spirit. We have had a spiritual experience in God and it continues in Him. This has been His intent from the beginning before we became manifest in the flesh; we were finished in Him. Because man is not accustomed to seeing the eternal physically, it makes it difficult for his mind to grasp this truth. Yet our hearts possess eyes to see into the invisible (see Eph. 1:18).

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished [to consummate or to bring to completion]. And on the seventh day God

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ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done (Genesis 2:1-2).

HOW DO WE OVERCOME OUR UNBELIEF?

When God created man and woman, He designed them in His image and likeness (see Gen. 1:26). Thus, through our human race, we are able to see and know His attributes. Man is a direct representation of everything that God is, including love, righteousness, peace, and joy. Yet there are people who have a difficult time believing in the power of God's supernatural realm in their own lives. Consequently, their unbelief prohibits them from walking in and demonstrating the fullness of God.

However, we must have faith in God and His Word. Hebrews 11:1 states:

Faith is the substance of things hoped for but the evidence of things not seen.

Normally this verse is used to refer to God meeting our earthly needs, or we use this verse as a fervent prayer to God to move on our behalf when we are desperately seeking a breakthrough in some specific area of our lives. But as we carefully examine this verse, we find that the author is laying out a challenge for us to believe that the "evidence of things that is unseen" really does exist. The unseen is the eternal, which is difficult to describe in the natural. But God grants us an abundance of evidence to prove that it does really exist. Things that are seen are temporary, but things that are not seen are eternal (see 2 Cor. 4:18).

Even as Abraham was strong in his faith, we should likewise be fully convinced at all the promises of God; consequently, we are considered righteous by God, just as Abraham believed God, giving Him glory, "and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (see Rom. 4). Indeed, God says that we have no excuse for not understanding and believing in the invisible attributes of God, for even though they are invisible, God has made them to be clearly seen and understood.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1:20).

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CHAPTER TWELVE

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Look up the definitions of “mysticism” and “mystic.” Would you describe a person who is indwelt by the Spirit of God and who walks in the supernatural realm as a “mystic”? Why or why not?

2. How can you discern whether a spirit is from God or not?

3. Name some characteristics of the unseen world.

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4. What are some of God's invisible attributes that are clearly seen?

Chapter Thirteen

MAKING MISTAKES

IS it possible for us to make mistakes when it comes to hearing God? The answer is yes. But I want to clarify that it is not God who has any difficulty with communicating or who gives us wrong information. Rather, the problem lies with us and how we hear or neglect to hear Him.

There are many reasons why we make mistakes in hearing, and sometimes we won't be able to come up with an explanation. Even prophets in the Bible made mistakes; but does that mean they were any less effective? Certainly not. We must realize that during a time of learning and growing into maturity, there will be errors. But often, we learn more of life's lessons whenever we fail or make mistakes rather than when we are doing well or succeed.

ONE OF MY OWN PERSONAL ERRORS

Several years ago, the worship leader who had been serving faithfully at the church I was attending in South Africa felt that it was time for him to move on to another area together with his family. There were no church-related issues of offence; he simply felt that the time was right for him and his family to relocate. During this time, I pondered about his decision and personally felt that he should not go, but stay. And I assumed it was God prompting me to feel this way. I told my pastor about my feelings, and together we approached the gentleman so that I could share my thoughts with him.

He kindly received what I had to say and expressed his appreciation for my openness. He then explained that he had been interviewed for a job in the area he was moving to. He was well qualified for this particular position and was subsequently offered an appointment in

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management. He considered this job offer as a “green light” and as affirmation that the move was right. Today, he is a very successful man, with a great family, who has started a ministry that is impacting many people in his area. I thought that I had heard from God...but I was wrong.

SAMUEL DISCOVERED HE WAS WRONG

As we mentioned in Chapter Eight, Samuel was one of the most incredible prophets in the Old Testament. He was revered by the nation of Israel (see 1 Sam. 16:4), and as long as he remained alive, the enemies of Israel were subdued (see 1 Sam. 7:13). But even so, when he went into Jesse’s house to anoint one of his sons as king, he did not automatically know exactly which son the Lord had chosen. Let’s read a small part of the story.

And the Lord said [to Samuel], “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; you shall anoint for Me the one I name to you.” ... Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen these.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all the young men here?” Then he said, “There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep” (1 Samuel 16:2-3,10-11).

Samuel had to first meet seven of Jesse’s sons, and then still, he had to inquire if there were any other sons to be considered. At the beginning, he was certain that God would choose the eldest son, Eliab, because of his physical stature and appearance (see 1 Sam. 16:6-7). Then Samuel realized he was wrong and went on to follow the Lord’s instructions and anoint David, the youngest son, as future king.

ANOTHER PROPHET WHO MADE A MISTAKE

In David’s life, there would be another prophet who would misunderstand God’s intentions.

Now it came to pass when the king [David] was dwelling in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies all around, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains.” Then Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you” (2 Samuel 7:1-3).

Chapter thirteen Making Mistakes

King David had a desire to build the Lord a house because he loved the Lord and he wanted to honor Him. The thought was noble, and King David would have gone out of his way to ensure that it was the best of the best. And when he consulted with Nathan the prophet about his idea, Nathan encouraged him to go for it, saying, “Do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you.” Later that night, the Lord told Nathan to go back and tell David that he would not be the one to construct a house for Him because he was a man of war and had blood on his hands (see 1 Chron 28:3). Instead, David’s son, Solomon, would be the one to construct the house (see 2 Sam. 7:12-14). The prophet Nathan had also made a mistake.

JOHN THE BAPTIST WASN’T SURE, NOR WERE THE DISCIPLES

In another example, we consider John the Baptist in the New Testament, who was filled with the spirit of Elijah (see Matt. 11:11-14). This dynamic man led people to repentance and courageously confronted the religious order of the day. Even while in his mother’s womb, he immediately recognized Jesus Christ, who at the same time was in the womb of Mary when their mothers met and he heard Mary’s voice (see Luke 1:41).

John would embrace Jesus Christ as the one who would take away the sins of this world and baptize people with the Holy Spirit and fire (see Luke 3:15-17; John 1:29); yet John, like many others, believed that the Messiah would dethrone Roman rule and set up His kingdom to rule forever. Christ would be their King, and they would be His people. It was not comprehensible that their King would have to die in order to reign and rule. Furthermore, John would still experience doubt that Jesus Christ was the Savior, as we realize in the following text:

And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:2-3).

Even the disciples did not understand everything about Jesus or what He was talking about at various times. Among the many examples we could give, let’s consider one occasion. Jesus mentioned that He would die and rise again on the third day, but the Scriptures say that the disciples were afraid to ask Him about it. Moreover, they were

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soon arguing among themselves about who would be the greatest (see Mark 9:30-37). At another time, the apostle Peter boldly brought forth the first sermon in Acts chapter 2, quoting Joel 2:28 about God pouring out His Spirit upon “all flesh.” Yet Peter had to be reprimanded by Paul in Galatians 2:11-16 for not realizing that God said “all flesh,” which included the Gentiles who Peter had a difficulty in accepting. Indeed, the disciples also made many mistakes.

WE CAN OVERCOME FROM OUR MISTAKES

I believe strongly in the local church and am a firm believer in church government. There have been many moves, from the days of Pentecost throughout the centuries, even to the 1900’s and to the restoration of ministry functions, such as the apostles in the 1990’s (see Eph. 4:11). Yet often, God’s pure moves eventually become contaminated by impure vessels. As church leaders have assessed these moves years later, they have been able to determine what went wrong along the way and advise the Body of Christ how not to make the same mistakes again. Just as the apostle Paul wrote guidelines for deacons and elders (see 1 Tim. 3:8-13; Titus 1:5-9), our spiritual leaders can teach us to recognize the difference between the counterfeit and the genuine.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth (see John 16:13). When we hear God, it’s good to discuss what we hear with counselors. These counselors are leaders who are able to give us advice and direction.

Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14).

There will also be times when you hear God and He will not permit you to share the information you received. This is when you have to take time to pray and seek the Father for the next part (see 1 Cor. 13:9); therefore, journaling is vital. If you are wrong, gracefully apologize and go back to hearing God, learning to recognize His voice and know Him, without blaming Him for your misunderstanding. I once heard a man say that having a perfect heart does not mean having a heart that is the most upright, but it’s making mistakes and knowing how to admit and repent. We must remember that we have

Chapter thirteen Making Mistakes

an awesome, loving Father who values compassion, mercy, and grace, and who understands we are not perfect and we will make mistakes.

WE HAVE CONFIDENCE IN HIM

*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and **greater works than these he will do**, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it (John 14:12-14).*

Have you considered that the “greater works” mentioned in this Scripture are not described in detail but will far exceed what Jesus Christ ever did? Furthermore, the only way to become a participator of these works is to believe. As you hear God, you cannot doubt Him or whatever He says to you.

You might ask yourself, *What if I’m wrong?* Be assured that the Body of believers will balance you out. Jesus never asked the Father, “What if I’m wrong or I’m not hearing You correctly?” He was confident about hearing the Father and believed in whatever the Father said to Him. Likewise, you and I can also hear and believe.

Jesus is our pattern, and He is challenging and cheering us on! We must have faith, for by faith we believe in a true and living God (see Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:1,6). We need not fear, which brings us to our next chapter, “Intimidation.”

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. What types of attitudes or circumstances can cause us to hear God incorrectly?

2. Describe what you can do to ensure that you hear from God correctly.

3. Do you think there has ever been anyone who has always heard God correctly all the time? Explain.

4. As soon as you discover that you have made a mistake in hearing God, rather than get discouraged, what steps should you immediately take?

Chapter Fourteen

INTIMIDATION

FOR many people, the mention of communicating with a holy, almighty God can be quite intimidating. I can clearly remember one of my first encounters hearing God. It happened several years ago as I was praying.

I had been living with my older brother, and behind his house there was a large open lot of ground where people would come to drink and where couples would make out. And I also would often go there to walk around late at night to pray.

One particular evening, as I was praying and interceding, a car drove to the center of the area. As it came to a stop, the Lord revealed to me that there was a man in the car who was lonely and having relationship problems. He was tired of life, even to the point of committing suicide. Then the Lord told me to go and talk to him.

Immediately, thoughts starting to go through my mind, and I became more and more intimidated. I did not know whether the man was alone in the car or not. I assumed he was a complete stranger, and I was concerned that he might consider me a threat, and do something like pull out a gun and shoot me. Or he might be a whole lot bigger than me, get offended, and beat me up. These types of thoughts continued, and I became fearful to the point of losing all confidence.

After about 15 minutes of wrestling with this fear and intimidation, I threw all hesitation aside and decided to go for it. As I drew close to the car, I could see that there was only one person inside, and as he saw me approach, he wound down his window just a few inches. I greeted him and told him who I was, and he likewise introduced himself. I then delivered a personal word to him, which God had given to me.

He was totally amazed by the message and asked how I knew these things. I replied that Jesus Christ cared for him, and these words were

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from the Lord. He explained to me that he was married and that his relationship with his wife had deteriorated. He felt he had done everything he could to restore the relationship, but it had all been in vain. And now, he was contemplating taking his life. Nevertheless, hearing the word of the Lord assured him that God cared for him and caused him to reconsider his self-destructing intentions. Instead of thinking of taking his life, he was now moved to consider the abundance of living life.

Many believers face intimidation when it comes to hearing God. They become frightened or fearful, feel weak or inadequate, and lose their spirit. If you've ever felt intimidated, then you are not alone. There are many people, even in the Scriptures, who have felt fear and intimidation. Yet you can have victory over this trick, this device, which the enemy uses to spiritually paralyze you and prevent you from gaining an intimate relationship with God. In my own personal story, if I had given in to intimidation, I would have lost a perfect opportunity to minister God's love to a man who really needed it at that very moment.

THE MAN WHO DID NOT WANT TO TALK

Not too many people in the world live through a burning bush experience such as Moses did and then subsequently be placed with the responsibility of leading almost three million people. Moses was privileged to have had an encounter with the glory of God and was assured by the Lord Himself that the Lord would be the power behind his voice. Even so, Moses was not convinced that he wanted the job.

Then Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." So the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say." But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send" (Exodus 4:10-14).

Moses declared, "I am not eloquent...but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." God had to talk to him for a bit and remind him that

Chapter fourteen Intimidation

He was the one who had created man's mouth. No one could ask for a better teacher than the Lord Himself, but still, Moses was afraid to return to Egypt and speak to Pharaoh and to the children of Israel.

How could Moses have thought so little of himself, especially after having been adopted into royalty and raised in the king's court? Surely he would have had been educated by some of the best private tutors in the land and would have lacked nothing. Still, Moses was intimidated, which drove him to make excuses to the point of making the Lord angry. Do you find yourself doing the same thing when hearing God? Many of us are equally lacking when it comes to confidence in God's word to us.

THE MAN WHO NEEDED TO BE REASSURED AGAIN AND AGAIN

And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, "The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!" Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Eypgt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites." Then the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?" So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:12-15).

Gideon was a peculiar man who eventually became one of the judges of Israel in the Old Testament. When the Lord first spoke to him, He began affirming him as a "mighty man of valor" and commissioned him to save impoverished Israel from the hand of the Midianites. But because the children of Israel had been so oppressed and intimidated by the enemy for several years, Gideon was likewise consumed with thoughts and feelings of negativity and inferiority, declaring his family as "weak" and himself as the "least" in his father's house.

I find it interesting that he was courageous enough to argue with the Lord, even while he feared the enemy. When he received the instruction from the Lord to destroy the altar of Baal and the wooden image of his father's household, he obeyed the command, but because he was afraid of his father's household and the men in the city, he performed the task at night (see Judg. 6:25-27). Gideon had previously received a

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visitation from the Lord, saw Him consume a sacrifice of meat, bread, and broth with fire coming out of the stone, yet he was still afraid of mere men. This is what intimidation can do. A person might receive several confirmations from God; nevertheless, fear and intimidation can stop him in his tracks, to the point of disobeying God.

God would have to reaffirm His word to Gideon several times before Gideon would be completely assured of success. Gideon used the fleece, asking God to wet the fleece with dew overnight but allow the ground to remain dry; and then the next night, God would wet the ground with dew and cause the fleece to be dry, as Gideon again challenged Him to do (see Judg. 6:36-40). Later, Gideon gathered and led a large army, even after God told him that he would defeat the Midianites as one man (see Judg. 6:16; chapter 7). God would instruct Gideon to reduce the army from 22,000 to 10,000 and then reduce it again to 300 (see Judges 7:1-9). And still, the Lord had to confirm Israel's victory one more time by allowing Gideon to overhear two men in the enemy's camp talking about a dream and an interpretation of the dream, which established Israel's victory (see Judg. 7:13-14). Finally, Gideon would realize that this word from the Lord was a genuine commission and guarantee for victory. Intimidation sought to weaken him and almost won the day.

THE MAN WHO FEARED RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION

Prior to his conversion, Saul was a serious religious force to be reckoned with. His sole purpose was to inflict torture upon the believers and disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ (see Acts 9:1-2), and his wave of terror infused the atmosphere with intimidation. Nevertheless, the Lord commanded Ananias to find Saul and lay his hands on him in order to heal him from his blindness.

So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name" (Acts 9:11-14).

Chapter fourteen Intimidation

Needless to say, Ananias was not in a hurry to follow the Lord's command and reminded the Lord of Saul's reign of abuse and persecution against the believers. In the end, Ananias followed through, and as a result, we are able to understand more of Christ through the writings of Paul, which happen to make up almost two thirds of the New Testament.

HOW DO I OVERCOME INTIMIDATION?

When the apostle Paul sent a second letter to the younger Timothy, he stated:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7).

There are three weapons to combat the spirit of fear. They include: *power, love, and a sound mind.*

Notice that the apostle mentions the word "us" in the Scripture above. Fear can attack anyone, any person, young or old. It is the spirit of fear that causes you to lack confidence, that seeks to break up a courageous attitude, that convinces one to feel minute. Nevertheless, God has supplied us with an armory (see Jer. 50:25), and we are able to access those weapons that are stocked within this armory.

In order to defeat intimidation, we first need to have power. Power is the enabling by the Holy Spirit (see Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). It is a power beyond what we have in the natural. As the Holy Ghost enables us, we are able to confront every enemy, to excel beyond every form of pessimistic belief, to see mountainous obstacles removed, and to witness the reality of phenomenal miracles. This Holy Ghost power gives us courage to withstand and defeat every opposing force against the knowledge of God. Even as David arose with the power of God in his spirit to defeat the enemy, Goliath, who mocked the army of Israel and intimidated them with his words, size, and past victories (see 1 Sam. 17:22-31), Christ has also defeated the enemy totally, including the evil power of intimidation (see Col. 2:15).

Next, the apostle Paul refers to love—the unconditional love of God. We move beyond our capacity of human love and take on our Father's heartbeat of love, realizing that we are not battling against

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flesh and blood. The more we grow in His love, the more we will find ourselves becoming optimistic.

*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ... No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. ... **There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear**, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love (1 John 4:8-9,12-16,18).*

Thirdly, God wants us to discipline our minds to make sound and wise decisions. God is the author of wisdom, and He possesses all answers. Having a sound mind is being able to confidently believe that what you have heard from God is genuine, and there can be no wavering or double-mindedness. In order to cultivate a sound mind, spend ample time in prayer getting to know Christ the Word. Consequently, your mind will become open to understanding and retaining the Scriptures (see Ps. 77:12; 119:15).

Chapter fourteen Intimidation

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. In this chapter, we learned that even with God's almighty strength on our side along with His constant reassurances, we can still be fearful and intimidated. What excuses do you give God for your fears that prevent you from doing what He asks?

2. Just as Gideon received several confirmations from God, you might have also received confirmations from God after hearing His voice. Give a personal example(s).

3. Research and list several Scriptures about confidence and courage, which God gives as confirmation to you.

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4. How can you use the three weapons—power, love, and a sound mind—to conquer your own personal fears?

Chapter Fifteen

INTIMACY WITH THE BRIDEGROOM

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:32).

ONE of our most important human needs is the need for intimacy— sharing a personal, close relationship with someone, a familiarity of the deepest nature. When you think of intimacy, you think of private communication and a warm association, one that develops over a period of time. Ephesians chapter 5 expresses this type of closeness between Christ and His Bride, the Church; and in verse 32, the apostle Paul describes it as a “great mystery.” In attempting to explain this extraordinary relationship, Paul uses the analogy of a marriage between a husband and his wife and how they should relate to one another with submission, love, sacrifice, and respect, even as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it.

INTIMACY TAKES TIME

John 17:3 says, “And this is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Normally the thought of eternity is always placed as futuristic, but this is not true; it is now. Eternal life is to know God now; the word “know” in the Greek is *ginosko*, which means acquainting yourself with another. It is experiencing a close relationship and having an internal knowledge of God...now.

God wants us to explore and experience Him, know His heart, and understand His presence today. Establishing intimacy with the King of kings does not lead to religious monotony; rather, it is a relationship of quality time that is exciting, challenging, liberating, and unifying. And like any other close relationship in the natural, intimacy with God is not an instant achievement, but involves a significant amount of time.

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Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (James 4:8a).

OBSTACLES TO INTIMACY

The opposite of intimacy is individualism, a concept strongly promoted in our Western culture, along with personal rights, personal opinions, and the right to privacy. Individualism might sound promising, but it dissuades humanity from understanding our God's intention stated in Genesis 2:18: "It is not good that man should be alone." The culture of God's Kingdom values community life and a coming together rather than moving further apart. As we begin to value intimacy, we realize that our own life is really not ours because we live for the other.

Secondly, the spirit of religion has created a gap between God and man. God seems far away, which in turn, causes man to go on a search for Him. For example, when we praise and worship, or pray, we often look toward the skies where we think God lives and might be found. Is this an indication that we think that God is far away and impossible to recognize? It certainly does not speak of something close or intimate, but rather of a performance-oriented relationship that leads to labor and striving. The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind (see Matt 22:36-38). However, how can we love someone who we have never encountered or who seems unreachable?

A third obstacle that prevents us from getting to know Christ is the issue of busyness. The affairs of this life keep us occupied to the point where we don't have time to develop an intimate relationship with the Lord.

Consider the following Scripture:

*Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and **heard His word**. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42).*

Many believers today are also confronted with distractions just as Martha was. While some people might have a love for the Lord, they

Chapter fifteen Intimacy With the Bridegroom

choose to work for Him instead of establishing a relationship with Him. While He can often be found in our midst, we are so caught up in doing good works and winning the world that we miss on a divine opportunity of sitting at His feet, loving on Him, and listening to Him, just as Mary positioned herself at His feet where she was able to listen to His word.

According to some scholars, Jesus Himself spent as much as 12-14 hours a day with the Father in prayer, getting to know Him. After some of His most spectacular miracles, He would shun the limelight and go to a private place to be with His Father (see Matt. 14:22-23). Likewise, you can also go to a private place to meet with Him. Whether it is but a few seconds, minutes, or several hours, His word will supersede every care and concern you are experiencing.

THE HEART OF INTIMACY

Any person can obtain knowledge of who God is and learn some information about Him. However, there is a more intimate dimension called heart, out of which proceeds life (see Prov. 4:23). For example, I love my wife dearly, but if I have only a head knowledge of her or simply know facts about her without understanding her heart, her likes and dislikes, her desires, her values, what drives her and her endeavors, my relationship with her is simply superficial. I must be able to comprehend her heart and what is within it.

Let's also consider the children of Israel who were witnesses to some of the most spectacular miracles and recipients of some of the most awesome provisions from the Lord. Before they departed Egypt, they saw plagues come upon the Egyptians (from which they were spared), and as they traveled through the wilderness, they saw God protect and provide miraculously, including food as well as clothes and shoes that never wore out. Entering into the Promised Land, they then witnessed God conquering their enemies. God was their King. Yet although they experienced His many mighty acts, only a few knew of God's heart.

Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near to Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men" (Isaiah 29:13).

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The acts of God alone did not change their hearts nor did His works draw them closer to the Father. We too can become caught up in seeing God's great acts, and we can even testify of what He has done; but can we really say that we know and understand His heart and ways?

ABIDING IN HIS LOVE

God is love (see 1 John 4:16), and because He is love, we who are created in His image and likeness are also able to love. Intimacy is part of our DNA. This love and intimacy enables each of us to relate to Him with a closeness of the deepest nature.

If you love Me, keep My commandments. ... He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. ...If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him (John 14:15,21,23).

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love (John 15:10).

True intimacy and love for the Father leads His children to a place of obedience. In other words, our obedience reveals our love for Him. And as we establish intimacy with our Lord, we will hear His voice even more clearly. On the other hand, if we disobey, there will be no pleasure on our part when we hear His voice, because sin always directs us to a place of hiding in shame and embarrassment, eventually experiencing the consequences of spiritual blindness and deafness.

However, we must remember that God is not a mysterious being who wants to make our lives difficult, nor is He trying to make us guess who He is, challenging us or baiting us with intricate clues. His desire is for us to come to Him willingly and know Him intimately. He is our heavenly Papa whose intention has always been to be our friend. Yet He will never force a relationship upon you, for He is a loving, gentle Father who adores you, who wants to share His secrets with you, and who wants your love in return. Indeed, there can never be a more satisfying experience than developing a close and long sustaining relationship between His Spirit and your spirit. Take the time to listen, because He wants to talk to you.

Chapter fifteen Intimacy With the Bridegroom

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Read Ephesians chapter 5. According to this chapter, how does Christ love you? How should you love Christ?

2. How much time do you think it takes and what does it cost to establish a relationship of intimacy?

3. The concept of individualism, the spirit of religion, and the busyness of life are three obstacles to intimacy. List some other obstacles that prevent you from acquiring intimacy with God.

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The voice of the Lord is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders; the Lord is upon many (great) waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; yes, the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion (Mount Hermon) like a young, wild ox. The voice of the Lord splits and flashes forth forked lightning. The voice of the Lord makes the wilderness tremble; the Lord shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord makes the hinds bring forth their young, and His voice strips bare the forests, while in His temple everyone is saying, Glory! The Lord sat as King over the deluge; the Lord [still] sits as King [and] forever! The Lord will give [unyielding and impenetrable] strength to His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace (Psalm 29:3-11 AMP).



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