

The Voice of God

by Thom Gardner

One of the tools we have found indispensable in growing our relationship with the Lord is the spiritual discipline of journaling. Journaling is an important way of capturing God's personal word to us whether through reading the scriptures or by what God is speaking to us in our devotional life with Him. To journal is to write down what the Lord speaks to us in order to evaluate and apply it. Habakkuk tells us to write down what we see in order to be able to respond to it.

I will stand on my guard post And station myself on the rampart; And I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, And how I may reply when I am reproved. Then the LORD answered me and said, "Record the vision And inscribe it on tablets, That the one who reads it may run. Habakkuk 2:1-2

This text tells me that my part is to “stand guard” and to “keep watch” in expectation that the Lord is

going to speak to us. It also tells us that we must “reply” or respond to what is spoken. In short, I listen, God speaks and then I must respond to whatever I hear. Our response is the proof that I have heard Him.

What shall we journal about? What is our jumping in point? There are many starting places. We can journal what the Lord speaks to us as we read the scriptures. We can journal the ways we have seen the Lord's presence manifested through circumstances and events in our daily lives. Sometimes there are questions and issues that we place before God. In all cases we follow the same steps: We keep watch or listen for God to speak, and then we write down what God speaks to us. We must add another step and that is to keep track of how we respond to what God says. *We listen* — we write down what God speaks — we respond to what He says. If you journal in a notebook of some kind you may want to mark three columns:

My Question or issue	God Speaks	My Response
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This is a basic place to start. I believe journaling is a spiritual discipline and that implies that we need to do it on a consistent basis. Make journaling part of you quiet time and a part of your life. Never open your Bible without some kind of journal near by. The Lord will speak beyond words and make His presence alive and personal to you.

The Chief Requirement of Hearing God

There is an implicit requirement in the scripture text listed above for hearing God which is that I must be thirsty to hear Him. Our hearts need to become dry sponges awaiting the refreshing saturation of His voice which we drink in like a thirsty deer whose one goal is to find refreshing.

As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God... Psalm 42:1-2a

Just as the thirsty deer puts aside everything else to find water, all other desires and passions need to become subservient to our thirst for God. We don't merely want God to download data to us. Our thirst is for God Himself—to be wrapped in and saturated with His presence.

Our hearing from God is more intimate and innate than it is a cognitive activity. God may express Himself in words, or pictures or whatever means touch our souls. (I commend the reader to Dr. Mark Virkler 's articles of the “Four Steps to

Hearing God” at www.cwgministries.org.) But He will speak to us.

God yearns to speak with us beyond a superficial, informational level. He wants us to draw near where “*Deep calls to deep*” (Psalm 42:7) and to fill us with intimate knowledge of Himself. If we are to hear God it must be out of our thirst for the Person of God, not just for what He says. God is far more interested in communion than mere communication. Communication is the transfer of information, but communion is the transfer of heart. The goal of God's speaking and our hearing must be the same, which is nothing less than a heart transplant; His heart replacing ours.

The Sound of God's Voice

The question arises, How do I know if I am hearing the voice of God or not? I know God wants to speak to me, but how do I know if what I am hearing is God? To be sure, we need to have those spiritual mentors around us who can hear along with us. But the best way to recognize God's word to us is by what it sounds like and what it leads us to do. We know God's voice by its character and its content, both of which reflect God.

Each of us has a distinct voice—a pattern of sounds that are unique to us. From the sound of our voice to the gate of our walk we are all unique. There is something specific in the way you and I were put together that stands out to those who are attuned to our frequency. For example, a nursing mother can hear the sound of her own infant's cry above the din of many others. There is a connection between them that takes place beyond the mere sonic level in a realm of attachment at the level of the soul. It is a connection that goes beyond sounds and words—a nexus in the heart.

There is a similar connection between God and His children. The Bible tells us that Adam and Eve “heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” (Genesis 3:8) There must have been a particular cadence to the steps of the Lord that Adam and Eve looked forward to.

Psalm 19:7-10 provides a description of both the character and content of God's speech to us.

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;

The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;

The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.

10 They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;

Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

This is as Biblical description God's voice and what He is likely to say to us. Psalm 19 is a description of the Torah, and uses several different words such as law, or testimony, but for our purpose here, each one is just another way of saying...

“God's voice is.”

Perfect, restoring the soul.

This word for perfect is the Hebrew word *tamiym*, which describes a state of wholeness. When God speaks it is meant to bring wholeness. God does not speak in a way to tear me down but in words that will ultimately lead to my healing and restoration. Yes, God speaks to us to discipline us when we need it. But even those words are tempered with mercy. In his wrath He always remembers mercy. (Habakkuk 3:2) God's words to us always draw us back to His bosom. If we hear words that push us away from His heart then they are not God's words. The words of God are the words of a perfect Father who has a perfect love for His children. He does not speak to us out of some kind of insecurity and try to manipulate us with threats and fear.

God's voice leads us to restoration or perhaps conversion. He is inviting us into His heart and presence. It doesn't seem likely that God would

invite us by greeting us with a stick. I would sum it up by saying that the words I hear from God are healing words that invite me to greater intimacy with Him.

Sure, making wise the simple.

When God speaks He does so with clarity. “.. *God is not a God of confusion but of peace...*” (1 Corinthians 14:33) If we agree that God leads us through what He says then what possible purpose would there be in speaking with confusion. God speaks in clear and uncluttered language not shrouded in darkness and mystery.

God will not speak in a way that paralyzes me and prevents me from moving toward Him or into His purposes. He speaks in a way that gives me confidence enough to respond to His voice. Imagine getting an invitation in the mail that doesn't tell you what you are invited to or where. Again, God's desire is that we draw near to Him. He is not playing mind games with us. His word has been compared to a light to us. “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*” (Ps 119:105) To be sure, God does not always give us the whole picture and all the details, but He will always lead us to at least the next step.

God is inviting us and leading us to Himself. When He speaks to us His words and meaning is clear and gives us confidence to respond to what He says.

Right, rejoicing the heart.

God's voice has a kind of resonance about it. Anything that the Lord speaks to us is has a right ring to it. The word “right” here is the Hebrew word *yashar*, which is a kind of ethical and moral rightness. The literal meaning is straight. When God speaks to us He is leading us in simplicity to what would please Him. It's that kind of feeling we may get if we studied hard for a spelling test and knew that we had the whole list down cold. There is a confidence in what we hear—that it is right.

The Lord's voice leads us in a way that agrees with

His nature. He speaks to us in a way that reflects the needs and hearts of other people. God does not compromise Himself or His word; indeed, He cannot contradict Himself. He is the Lord God; the Creator! He does not change His nature on a whim. He is not intimidated by our opinion of Him. He is completely holy and above our opinions.

There is a resonance in our hearts when God speaks—a feeling of joy which is not dependant on circumstances. When we are hearing God, the Lord brings us to a place where we are settled and at rest. Our heart rejoices with His heart because we agree with Him that we belong to Him.

Pure, enlightening the eyes.

When we say that God's voice is pure, we are saying that it is obviously free of any impurity, but, also, and perhaps more importantly, we are saying that God's voice is free of any mixed motive. God has chosen to love us and when He tells us that He loves us, He is not leading us on. We need not wait for the other shoe to fall.

The effect of the purity of God's motives and love toward us helps us to see ourselves as He sees us. When the Bible uses the phrase “enlightening the eye” it is talking about our mind. When God tells us what He thinks and feels about us our hearts and attitudes change. We live as the beloved of God, and so we are.

Enduring, true, righteous, clean | Giving me confidence and peace.

When God speaks to us He is not interested in the mundane. He does not go through our sock drawer or put on a white glove to see how often we dust. God is an eternal God and speaks to us about eternal things. What He says to us is solid, enduring, eternal, and righteous. There is an unchangeableness about the voice of God.

When God speaks to me He draws me into the realm of eternity with Him. The Psalmist said, “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness continues throughout all

generations; You established the earth, and it stands.

They stand this day according to Your ordinances, For all things are Your servants . (Psalm 119:89-91) God speaks out of His faithfulness and everything leads back to and holds together in Him. He is not going to change His mind. All of this gives me peace and confidence to believe all He says about Himself or me.

Desirable, Sweet I Drawing me close to His Heart

Finally, the voice of God carries with it sweetness. It is milk and honey to me. God promised to bring us to the land of milk and honey. My good friend,

Dr. Donald Wright has said that this is the place of intimate worship of God. "*Your lips, my bride, drip honey; Honey and milk are under your tongue*" (Song 4:11) That worship is our response to heart of God.

The Psalm also tells us that his word is "desirable." Desirable means that there is a receptivity of the word. The tenor of God's word does not lead to a pit of despair where we wallow in our sin and separation from God. He always brings us back to Him. If what we hear does not lead us back to God, it is not God! God doesn't condemn us, though He will frequently confront us. When God does confront us, it is because He wants to remove anything that separates us from Him. We are drawn back again to His sweetness as honey.

SUMMARY:

Character of God's voice Effect of God's voice

Healing Inviting me to God Himself

- Clear Allowing me to respond
- Right Giving me joy
- Pure Enlightening me about myself
- Enduring, true, righteous, clean Giving me confidence
- Desirable, Sweet Drawing me close resulting in worship

We may use this passage to summarize what we are saying from another passage in the word...

But the wisdom (Whatever God speaks to us) that comes from heaven is first of all pure . It is also peace loving , gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others . It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere. 18 And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness . James 3:17-18 NLT

When we have listened , and God has spoken in a way that agrees with the indications we have listed, then we are free to respond . And anything that God is leading us into will bring glory to Him and enrapture our hearts to fall more deeply in love with Him.