



INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE

A Seminary Program for Training Christian Leaders

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For several years I have desired to write a series of newsletters on how to hear God, but knew I had to wait. As the desire grew into a burden, I studied the scriptures preparing my notes. Over this past year, I felt the time would soon come. Now is that time.

Recently, I listened to a series of messages from a man who believes all divine revelation comes only from the Bible. Everything we need to guide us, what we are to do and how we are to live, can be found in the Bible. He presented a very well thought out rational argument, with passages from scripture, that God does not, and will not give direct personal or individual guidance for our lives. He did not rule out special occurrences of God stepping in at crucial parts of the church's development to bring instruction or guidance. Nor did he rule out prophecies; although he did state that he had been around Pentecostal churches and heard many prophecies, not one of which he thought was genuinely from God. He believes God no longer speaks to us directly, but only through the scriptures. This teaching is prevalent in many denominations, but *is not found in the scriptures*. This doctrine is simply an invention of men to rationalize their own belief and justify their lack of hearing God.

On the other hand I have been around Christians who take any sign as direction from God about what His plan, purpose, or path is for them. Expecting God's divine personal interjection in each step or decision they make throughout their day, what they should have for breakfast, or which color shirt to wear. They interpret any feeling, "check in the spirit," impression or circumstance as direction from God. Most of us are somewhere in the middle between these two. We take our day to day instructions on how to live a Godly Christian life from the Bible. We realize that the

scriptures were given by God so that we could know Him, His thoughts, His nature, and His ways in a much closer and more detailed way. Through it we learn to understand God; we learn how to live our life in a way that is pleasing to Him. It is His gift to us, revealing Himself to us, through it. The Bible is not merely a book about God. It is His book written by Him (divinely inspired men) about Himself and His dealings with man. Everything we need to know about Him is found in the scriptures.

However, we also believe God is not some distant god, sitting on a throne somewhere in heaven, watching each of us struggle to find purpose and direction for our life. He is a loving God who desires a relationship with each of us, becoming personally involved in our lives, guiding us. By removing our sin, on the cross, He opened the way for each of us to have that relationship.

However, because most of us have never been taught how to hear God, nor instructed how to discern when it is God speaking, problems and misunderstandings soon arise. Many confuse their own thoughts and desires with God's voice. Others have heard God but do not realize He was the One speaking. Some do not even realize they can hear from God.

I am frequently surprised when a Christian brother or sister, who has known the Lord for years, asks me how to hear God. They cannot remember God ever speaking to them, and now have become desperate to hear. I usually start from the beginning, building step by step, teaching them to hear and know God's voice.

This is the first in a series of articles explaining basic principles of how to hear God. I will attempt to address this subject in its entirety from foundational basics to in-depth practical how-to-do applications. Hearing God is a multifaceted and complex issue. If handled lightly, it could lead to imbalances, causing some to err instead of helping them. Therefore, I am not limiting the number of newsletters we will devote to this subject. (We will produce newsletters on other subjects intermittently.) My goal is to give biblically based, practical answers for those having trouble hearing God. If any reader has a question about a specific aspect of hearing God they are welcome to write and ask. I will then try to address the subject of their inquiry in subsequent newsletters. If I brush over a point too quickly, please feel free to ask for a more detailed explanation.

“Can all Christians hear God?” The answer is *Yes!* All Christians can hear God. Whether we are new believers who have just accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, or someone who has known the Lord all his life, each of us can come directly into God’s presence.

“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)

This passage describes not only a salvation experience, but also indicates the beginning of a personal relationship. When we open our heart, to Jesus, He develops an interrelationship with us. Jesus comes into our heart, lives with us, and dines with us.

When God created man and placed them in the garden, He spoke freely with them. However, after they sinned man’s relationship with God was broken. When God called to them, as He walked in the garden, they hid themselves. (Genesis 3:8-11) No longer did God and man talk freely with each other. Sin had become a barrier between them. In the Old Testament God spoke to His people primarily through His prophets. (Heb 1:1 ff) Since the cross, our sin that had separated us from God has been removed, allowing us to be reconciled to Him, and have a relationship with Him.

“...Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” (John 18:37)

This is the key difference between Christianity and all the world’s religions. None of the world’s religions offer free unmerited forgiveness of sins. They have no way to remove the barrier between God and man, no way to have a relationship with their god.

The Hindus with their thousands of gods do not hear from them, nor have a relationship with them. Buddhist do not even recognize the existence of God. In Islam, Allah is far away and communicated last through his prophet Mohammed.

Only Christians have an individual relationship with God. We, as Christians, can come directly before God and are responsible to hear and follow Him. This is a key component unique to Christianity.

The Shepherd & His Sheep

In John Chapter Ten, Jesus describes His relationship with us as that of a shepherd and his sheep. Shepherds would often pen their flocks together at night, for protection. In the morning, they would separate their sheep, each shepherd would call to his sheep, and they would come. “. . . *The sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*” (Vs 3) The shepherd knows each of his sheep, and they know him.

After the shepherd calls together his flock, he leads them to pasture. His sheep do not bolt and run ahead of him, nor does he have to drive and push them. Instead the shepherd gently leads by walking and talking to them. “*The sheep follow him, for they know his voice.*” (Vs 4, see also 14 and 27) As he walks, they stay near their shepherd. His voice gives them comfort. When he arrives at the pasture, the sheep are with him.

How this relationship between sheep and shepherd develops

- The shepherd spends his life with his sheep. When a lamb is born, it does not know who its shepherd is. Sheep come to know their master through experience. From the day they are born, lambs are around their shepherd. He is there when they are injured and need salve on their wounds. He is there to protect them when predators attack. They depend on their shepherd for protection, food, guidance etc. It is a relationship of love, trust and security. Hearing their shepherd’s voice brings them comfort.

In the same way, the moment we accept Jesus as our Lord and savior we are born in the Spirit. We become sheep of the true Shepherd, Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus is based not just on believing in Him for salvation, but through spending quality time with Him, the way sheep do their shepherd. The more time we spend with Him the better we know Him and the easier it becomes to hear and know His voice.

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (John 10:27)

It is important to take time each day to spend with God. It doesn't matter which part of the day you pick. *Just do it!* Choose a time when your mind will not be cluttered with other things, and you can put your focus solely on the Lord. I find it easiest in the morning when I first wake up, before I do any thing else. Others are groggy when they first wake up, and choose late in the evening after the rest of the household is asleep. Some separate themselves from their coworkers and spend time with God on their lunch hour. No matter what time of day you set aside, try to be faithful.

Begin with praise, worship and thanksgiving. (Psalm 100:2-4) Come with a heart of expectancy. Focus your heart on Him, who He is, and all the wonderful things He does. True worship is all about God not about us, our needs or our desires. In worship, we express our heart of awe, adoration, love, respect, and fear toward Him.

Once you come before the Lord in praise and worship, take the next step. Go further! Offer yourself to Him. Humble yourself before God. Bare your heart to Him. Ask Him to expose your heart, and show you anything He wants you to change. Wait, allow Him to begin showing you any area of your life He wants to change.

While waiting on the Lord, enjoy spending time in His presence. It is during these times we begin to know God's voice and learn to determine when He is talking to us. While we worship, God often envelops us with peace, and joy. This is a gift from God, reassuring you of His love. *Enjoy it!* Just as the baby feels its parent's love when cradled in their arms, so as we spend time with the Lord we can feel Him enveloping us with His peace and love (Psalm 103:13.) The more time we spend with Him, loving and adoring Him, the more a bond grows between us and we know His voice. When we worship, we feel His love and relax in the security of His arms as He holds us tight.

***When I was a child,
I spake as a child,
I understood as a child,
I thought as a child:
but when I became a man,
I put away childish things.
(1Corinthians 13:11)***

Like a Child - We Must Grow in Our Understanding

Our communication with God is also like a mother and child's communication. Many of you who are mothers know that your newborn baby first communicates with you emotionally. A baby feels the love, joy and peace emanating from her mother's voice and touch. She understands the heart and emotion behind the words spoken to her, but not the words themselves. She has very little understanding of the world into which she has just been born. Each day, as the mother and child

communicate, the child begins to comprehend language, ideas, and thought patterns. As she grows up

her mind will understand more complex reasoning, each concept building on what was learned before. By the time she is fully grown and ready to leave school she will have a full grasp of language, thought and reason.

Before we Accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are spiritually dead. When we become Christian, we come to life spiritually. The Bible refers to this as being born in the spirit. (John 3:1-8) New believers are babies spiritually. (1 Peter 2:2) Baby Christians understand only basic Christian concepts, not deep spiritual principles, truths or insights. They have just begun the transformation process and still think with the world's logic, not in the spirit. (Hebrews 5:12-14)

God knows each of our hearts. When God speaks to young believers, He gives simple life changing words that are relevant and specifically designed for them. He knows what we will and will not understand. Just as a mother does not try to explain algebra to her two-year-old child, likewise God speaks to us in ways we understand.

Just as a child has to build its knowledge step by step in stages, so too, the more we learn, the greater our ability becomes to understand and our capacity to learn grows. We become transformed by the renewing of our mind. (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 1:21,22; 3:10)

Malnutrition Stunts Our Growth From the time of conception onward children need proper nutrition to develop correctly. If at any point in a child's early years it does not receive adequate nutrition, its growth will be stunted both physically and mentally thus permanently affecting the child's abilities and potential the rest of its life.

Over the years, the Lord has sent me to many impoverished nations, where I have witnessed firsthand the effects of malnutrition on its people. I have seen afflictions and suffering among the adult population that could easily have been prevented by proper nutrition in their early years.

The same is true spiritually. If we do not receive proper nutrition as we develop spiritually, it will affect us the rest of our lives. It breaks my heart when I see Christians that were spiritually malnourished in their youth, who have never attained the maturity, wisdom, and depth God desired them to have.

***As newborn babes,
desire the pure milk of the word,
that you may grow thereby.
(1 Peter 2:2)***

We need food each day to be healthy. The same is true spiritually. God's Word is the food that feeds a Christian's spirit. When we are young, it is our milk. As we grow older, it becomes our meat. (See: Hebrews 5:12-14 and 1 Corinthians 3:1,2) If as young believers we do not feed on God's Word, if we do not get enough spiritual food, it affects our Christian life. Many Christians wrestle trying to hear God's direction for their life in areas that would not be a problem now if they had fed on God's Word when younger. They were spiritually stunted in their growth due to spiritual malnutrition.

It is not too late to begin feeding on God's Word. For many years I read and studied the scriptures because I was supposed to, out of a sense of duty. At times God would bring something to life in my heart, but mostly, it was pure drudgery. Do not read simply in an academic sense because you think you ought to gain only head knowledge. Instead feed on it. Allow it to be the spiritual nutrition needed to help you grow.

Studying God's Word is the primary tool He uses to talk to us. If you want to hear God, learn to recognize and understand His voice, you **must** study your Bible. The Bible is not just a book about God and what He has done and said, it is His direct Word to us. As you read your Bible ask God to speak through it to you. Ask God to make the words alive in your heart. Ask Him to put a desire to read the scriptures in you. Soon your love for the scriptures will grow. You will begin looking forward to time spent studying; as time spent with the Lord.

When this happens, your Bible reading will become transformed into a wonderful time of feeding. As God gives you a desire to read His Word, you will find that parts seem to jump off the page straight into your heart. Passages you may have read before and wondered about suddenly take on crystal clarity. This is God talking to you, feeding His Word directly into your heart. Reading the scripture becomes a joy because it is a time of communing with God.

In this article we have discussed the two primary ways to know God's voice and will for our life. The First is coming before the Lord through our worship, praise and thanksgiving. The second is feeding on (studying) God's word. Both are essential for a healthy spiritual life.

Doug Heil

Other related issues we will discuss in upcoming newsletters include: The difference between hearing and listening. Why don't I hear Him? What does God's voice sound like? What are the different ways God speaks? How do I know it is really God's voice I hear? Discerning between false and true words. What if I am not sure? Are there things that can block me from hearing God?