

The Still Small Voice and Its Rivals
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 4
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1. Introduction

The poet John Greenleaf Whittier wrote:

*Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small Voice of calm.*

He was referring to that passage in the Bible (1 Kings 19:9-13) when Elijah was at the cave in discouragement and wanted to hear the voice of God. In the background of his mind was Moses on Sinai and all of the great fireworks. But, for Elijah, there was earthquake, wind, and fire, and God wasn't in that. God was in a _____ voice.

In this session Dallas is going to help us understand the still small voice of God: what it is like, the quality of the voice, the Spirit in the voice, the content of the voice, and how we can distinguish that voice from the enemy of our soul, Satan, or from our own human thoughts and desires.

2. There are various ways in which God speaks to people. Each time God speaks to people, there is a message.

- a. Sometimes people need to be addressed in one way or another in order to get the message, but, often, the _____ they are addressed confuses the _____.

 - The more dramatic the way that the message comes, the more _____ it is to get the meaning.
 - You have people who think that the more dramatic the message, the better the meaning. The teachings of the Scripture are plain: the less dramatic the form the message comes in, the _____ is the content and the more _____ is the condition of the person who is receiving the message. If you study the lives of Moses and Abraham and Jesus, you will see this is true.

- b. One phrase comes to be used about the usual form of the message and that is "still small voice."

 - It is difficult to translate that phrase (*still small voice*) in 1 Kings 19:12-13. It could mean no voice at all, a thought, or a whisper.

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- The question is always: *What does it mean?*
- It's the _____ that matters. We have to learn to pay attention to that.

If you have a pink elephant talking to you, you better get the thought that comes with it because that's what matters. The elephant does not matter.

3. The "Three Lights" are factors that you would consider in forming a responsible openness to God's teaching, but they are not indicators of God speaking to you.

- a. The three lights are important, but they are not adequate to understand the _____ relationship with God.
- b. The three lights are:
 - Circumstances
 - Impressions of the Spirit
 - Passages from the Bible
- c. In his book *The Secret of Guidance*, F.B. Meyer writes that you can know God's will when three factors ("Three Lights") line up.
- d. You should not disregard circumstances, impressions of the spirit, and passages in the Bible. But you need to recognize that these are not indications of God speaking to you. They may be there, but, without God's voice, you cannot _____ on them. They will not substitute for _____ with God.
- e. Bible study is great. You ought to do it. You ought to be sensible. You ought to be sensitive. These are conditions of responsible judgment. But they will not substitute for the _____ of _____ coming to you in a way that you will learn to recognize.

4. You learn to recognize the voice of God coming to you by its tone, spirit, and content.

- a. You do not automatically know it is God who is speaking to you. See the story of little Samuel (1 Samuel 3) who was spoken to by God.
- b. The voice of God will usually take the form of a special type of thought that you will learn to recognize by _____.

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- You do not learn the voice of God by getting a bunch of signs that you can put on it and test.
- God's voice will have a certain _____ or quality.
 - It has weight.
 - It comes with confidence.
 - It comes without thinking it up. Very often you are quite _____ by it, both in terms of it showing up and what it has to say.
 - You don't sense it as something coming from you or from any other person – although some other person may be speaking.
 - The voice of God does not try to convince you. It just speaks and is self-authenticating.
 - It has the feel of the voice of God within it. You experience it because of the weight of the person who is speaking.
- The Spirit of the voice is peacefulness and joy. There is a sweet reasonableness to it. There's good will.
 - It's warm, but firm presence in your life, as described in James 3:17 and elsewhere in the Bible.
 - It is not the voice of a _____. The Spirit that comes with God is not something that's going to run over you.

Perhaps the rough distinction is this; the voice of the subconscious argues with you, tries to convince you; but the inner voice of God does not argue, does not try to convince you. It just speaks and it is self-authenticating. It has the feel of the voice of God.

E. Stanley Jones

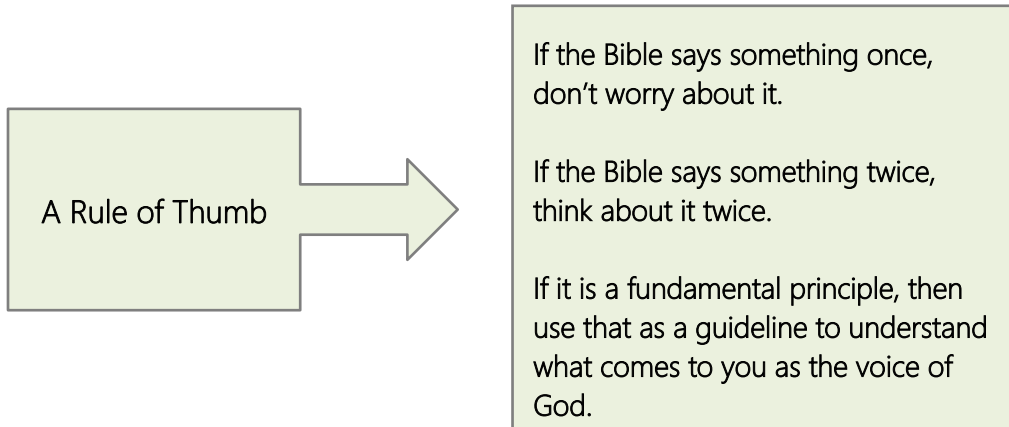
But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

(James 3:17 NRSVUE)

- c. If you're uncertain, you ask.
- You ask for more light, more talk, more conversation.
 - Being uncertain does not mean you lack _____.
- d. You have to distinguish the principles of the Bible from the periphery. **Keep to the principles.**

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- God will not tell you disregard the Bible.



- What you want to believe from the Bible is what is taught on the whole, on a fair interpretation, that interprets the Bible by the Bible. You should receive that to be God's teaching – to be respected and used as a standard for everything else that you have.
- e. While the One speaking is infallible, I am _____. You don't become someone who is telling everyone what to do because of what you have heard. Use what you hear from God in humility.
5. The voice of God is not a fix-all.
- a. It doesn't _____ all of our _____. It isn't meant to do that.
- In many cases we are expected to proceed in our conversations and in our lives and deal with problems for which no solution is proposed. We don't want to think we have to wait and follow the voice of God and not act, think, and consult with others and be guided by that.
- b. The voice of God is holistic and serves the purpose God wants it to serve.
- We can become very comfortable with it, but we don't force it to solve our problems.
- c. It is a _____, and a conversation is not something you want to try to force.

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6. Thomas Kelly and *A Testament of Devotion*: Key points from a conversation between Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, and John Ortberg

- Thomas Kelly was a published philosopher. He wanted to make his life a miracle, and he set out in that regard, but then had several huge failures. After two crushing events, he began to speak in a whole other way – of intimacy with God, of awareness of the still small voice of God.

I find God never guides us into an intolerable scramble of panting feverishness.

Thomas Kelly

If we're going to be attentive to the still small voice, we have to find ways to learn to let go of that intolerable scramble of panting feverishness.

- It's important to understand the connection between hearing the voice of God and practices such as solitude and silence and, also, service.
- Today one of the deepest problems we deal with as Christians is distractedness – that sense of constant agitation.
- We need to exhibit the calming effects of hearing God speak and encourage people to believe that that's for them. Normally that's a part of their feverishness – they don't think that anything can come to them from God and stabilize their world so that they don't have to carry on.
- It's a complex dynamic. We're so afraid of boredom. We have become so dependent on external stimulation that our capacity to manage our attention has become enormously weak.
- Part of listening to the still small voice is that I have to be willing to get to the other side of boredom. I have to be willing to go off and be bored.
- Once you begin taking yourself off of the outer stimulation, then you discover a whole different world. There are few things that help you more with that than learning to hear God's voice in your heart and in your mind. All of a sudden, with that kind of word, comes substance.

All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

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- Boredom is actually a reflection of emptiness.
- Activities and distractions don't cure the problem. They just put it off.
- When you begin to experience the substance of your own soul and of God speaking in your soul, then suddenly you're not empty anymore.
- We learn the voice of God by experience: the quality of the voice of God, the Spirit in the voice of God, and the content. You can isolate some factors in it, and it will help you distinguish God's voice from other voices. But, then, you simply come to know that voice by its overall quality. We don't have the physical with God, but we have the content and emotional tone and the effect that has on us to recognize him.

...Life from the Center is a life of unhurried peace and power. It is simple. It is serene. It is amazing. It is triumphant. It is radiant. It takes no time, but it occupies all our time. And it makes our life programs new and overcoming. We need not get frantic. He is at the helm. And when our little day is done we lie down quietly in peace, for all is well.

Thomas R. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*

7. Bonus Session: How I Hear God

In this bonus session, Dallas presents how he hears God, with the hope that it might be of use to us.

When I want to hear from God, I very straightforwardly _____ to speak to me, and then I watch.

- I _____ what's happening as I go through my days – when I'm studying or talking with others or reading a magazine.
- I watch for that special kind of Presence in thought to come to me.



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- Would you like God to speak to you about something? In this case, we're talking mainly about direction. It might be in terms of understanding something – not necessarily what you're trying to do. It could be just enlightenment that you're seeking.
- When you ask, you _____ it and you _____ for it. My experience is that it often comes when I'm not really obsessed with that problem.
- When I realize something is coming to me, then I _____. If I'm in doubt, I say, "Lord, would you make that clearer?" It's been important to me to realize that it is not a reproach to God to say I didn't understand. That's just the natural way we would relate to another person. We ask for clarity.
- I usually will put a limit – two or three days, saying, "Lord, would you please let me know in the next three days *such and such*?"
- Suppose I am given nothing, so far as I can tell. My next step is to say, "Is there anything _____ that is _____ you speaking clearly to me about this matter?" Then I _____. I don't just go on. I set time limits, and I believe that's what we should do because the Lord is able to speak to us, if He wishes to. If there is something in my attitude or something I'm doing that would seem to prevent him speaking to me, I expect him to _____.
- I don't believe God messes with our minds. He's very clear. He's very straightforward. He's not mean. He's not incapable. If He has something to say to me, He'll say it. That's my faith, and I believe that I have found in practice that that works well.
- Suppose, after that, there is nothing that I can identify as a word, then I take that as God's indication that I should _____ on _____.
- When God leaves you to decide on your own, that is your assurance that He will be _____ in your decision.
- You need to have a breadth of understanding of how God speaks and that will put you in a position to act.
- You have to be in a position to know well enough what it is for God to speak that you can respond to people who are trying to lay harmful things on you and others in your fellowship. The only way you can do that is by having a confident knowledge of how

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God works, even when He doesn't speak.

This has worked well for me, and I can recommend it to you on the basis of my experience and what I believe is the picture that comes out of Scripture – of God drawing people to maturity, both in the Old and in the New Testament.

It also fits in with what you can find out by reading the lives of those who have lived in the manifest presence of God.

It is a life lived in a _____. That doesn't mean He's talking all the time. No conversation is like that.

You can explore your own experience to test whether or not what I've said to you about the voice of God, how you come to know it, and how you live with it is true.

Additional Reading Thomas Kelly, *Testament of Devotion* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992).