

Hearing God in the Context of the Kingdom of God
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 5
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1. Introduction

We hear God best in a certain kind of life – life within the kingdom of God. That comes, first, in the context of a sense of worship, adoration, praise, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Second, it comes in the context of a loving community - life in the Kingdom of God together.

In this session, Dallas Willard and John Ortberg are going to help us think together about this kind of life and what it looks like in the practicalities of our day-to-day existence.

The soul, light as a feather, fluid as water, innocent as a child, responds to every movement of grace like a floating balloon.

Jean-Pierre de Caussade

2. What does sleep, our need for it and our fitfulness in it, say about our vulnerability and about the broader context in which we live?

- a. Sleep is primarily a soul phenomenon, and the ability to sleep primarily depends upon our capacity to turn loose of the _____. That's what happens when you sleep, and, if our souls are disturbed, then we have to find a way of dealing with that.
- b. I find myself often praying for people about their sleep. What I think I've learned about it is that you have to find the alarm in their soul and turn it off. You do that by hearing _____ while you're hearing them. Very often it's helpful for a person to find out when you first found it difficult to sleep because that will give you some clue as to what set the alarm off.
- c. I've learned is stop trying to go to sleep and stop thinking, "Oh, I need to go to sleep." I just say, "You know, it's perfectly all right. Here I am." I will use this time to _____ in the Lord, and _____ for good things. If there's some particular need, then I will hold it up before him.
- d. It's interesting how alarm piles up on alarm because a person winds up being alarmed that they're not going to sleep, and so, you learn a little bit about _____.

Sometimes that means to take a hold of something else and to take a hold of the goodness of God - that you've got a bed to sleep in and you're warm. Sometimes you can't turn loose without taking hold of something else.

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Unless the Lord builds the house,
they labor in vain who build it;
Unless the Lord guards the city,
the watchman keeps awake in vain.
It is vain for you to rise up early,
to retire late,
to eat the bread of painful labors;
For He gives to His beloved even in
his sleep.

Psalms 127 (NASB 1995)

There is a problem with sleep in our society today.

Why are we chronically short on sleep?

It's because we are not leaving it to the Lord to keep the house and guard the city.

This is the context of the *Divine Conspiracy*.

3. What is the *Divine Conspiracy*?

- a. It is God's plan to overcome evil with good in human history, and He's going to do it.
- b. Our immediate connection is with the Kingdom of God and the glorious message that the _____ of the _____ is _____. The good news: God makes "up there" come "down here," and God is nearer to you than your breath.

4. What is the broader Kingdom of God – that range where God has his say? What is that like? Is it a scary thing to live in?

- a. If you think you've got to make it work, it is scary. And there are a lot of other people who have ideas about how *you* should work – that is scary. In Ephesians [2:12], Paul says of the Gentiles that they were without hope and without God in the world. That's where you live if you don't _____ and _____ the Kingdom of God.
- b. The most obvious expression of the Kingdom of God is _____. When we think about that, we realize that our bodies situate us in nature because our bodies are a part of nature.
- c. We also have the part of ourselves that is not nature, but _____. In that part we have _____, limited by what we have seen, what we have learned, what God has spoken in our minds and in our hearts, and by all the stuff we have experienced in the world that is not good. That affects the spiritual side and makes us "dead in trespasses and sin" (Ephesians 2:1), living out the world's order under the guidance of an evil presence.

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That's where the Kingdom of God begins to emerge, and we are given the great possibility of seeking that.

d. Jesus tells us (Matthew 6:33) to seek above all the Kingdom of God.

5. What does it mean to seek the Kingdom of God? How do I know if I'm finding it?

- a. You have to think of what you do if you seek your keys. If you seek your keys, you _____ for them. They may be where you don't think they are. In seeking the Kingdom of God, you have to understand that what you're seeking is what God is doing. You're seeking what _____ is _____.

There are a lot of different places you can find that. You can find that if you read the Ten Commandments or you read what Jesus said and what He did.

Is there anyplace where God is not doing something?

- b. No. Unless you have rejected him from your own life, and, even then, He doesn't give up on you. He does respect your capacity to try to go it on your own. But, if you turn there and said you were open, you would see him at work and you would find that He's *been* at work.

The idea is to look for God's _____ everywhere.

- c. Jesus says *Seek the Kingdom of God and its kind of righteousness*. Those go together.

What is it's kind of righteousness?

It's kind of righteousness is basically _____, _____, and _____.

**The Righteousness
of the Kingdom is
Kindness,
Tenderness,
Love**

6. Jesus was crucified, not so much so that we don't have to be crucified, but so that we can be crucified with him. To be relaxed like Jesus lies on the other side of the crucifixion. I want the relaxation. I'm not sure I want the crucifixion.

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- a. I think, as you come to understand it, you welcome the crucifixion as the great door of _____ because it takes you off of your kingdom. When the cross is on you, you're _____. We think it's terrible. It doesn't sound like good news.
- b. By example and precept, we need to help people understand what good news it is because beyond that lies the life we're seeking. It's a terrible thing because you think this is the only life I've got. Well, it's the life you complain so much about. Maybe you should give up on it. Trade it in. Upgrade it.
7. In talking about God speaking and how we listen, John Ortberg reads from Psalm 121 and asks Dallas to listen for God's word in the Scripture and asks him to talk a bit about what God might be saying to someone who is listening.

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills —
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot slip —
he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord watches over you —
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all harm —
he will watch over your life;
the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

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- a. I am listening in the moment.

What I am hearing comes to me in the way of a certain kind of thought. What God says when you read to me is there's something greater than the mountain. It's not praising mountains. I look at this mountain, and I see how great and wonderful it is. But the One who made the mountain is _____ than the mountain, and He is the One who's in charge of my life.

He doesn't doze off.

- b. As we read the Scripture, that's the kind of thing that God gives us, and we have to be sure to not lose it in a careful exposition of the text.

- c. *He that keepeth thee will not slumber nor sleep....*

...So I can go to sleep.

8. Julian of Norwich: Key points from a conversation between Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, and John Ortberg

- Julian of Norwich had an experience [16 revelations of the Passion of Christ] on her death bed. She recovered and gave the rest of her life entering into that and moving into the depths of that experience. [She wrote about this experience shortly afterwards.]

It was at that moment that I saw red blood running down from under the crown, hot and flowing freely, just as it must have been beneath the crown of thorns that pressed upon his head. I fully perceived at that moment that it was Jesus, both God and man, who suffered for me, for I now knew it directly without anyone telling me.

In that same revelation, suddenly the Trinity filled my heart full of the greatest joy, and I understood that it will feel like that in heaven. For the Trinity is God; God is the Trinity. The Trinity is our maker, the Trinity is our protector, the Trinity is our everlasting lover, the Trinity is our endless joy and bliss, by our Lord Jesus Christ and in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Julian of Norwich

She is meditating on this experience in the crucifixion, and it led her to a whole contemplation on the Trinity. A meditation on the crucifixion led her to this larger picture – in the sense of meditation on the Trinity and how the members of the Trinity relate and her participation in that.

She was caught up in admiration of the Son on the cross, that the blood represents his life, and that then brings out the other members of the Trinity because they are close together and looking at the sacrifice on the cross brings out admiration.

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- The members of the Trinity admire one another. They are filled with joy with the other members of the Trinity. Through the Kingdom of God, they reach out to include Julian of Norwich and us. It never stops expanding.
- Julian has this phrase: *The Trinity is our everlasting lover.* We get into debates about the Trinity; she brings that into this circle of love.
- Julian meditated on these things and that allows the things you've been meditating on to begin to fill your heart and your life.

And in this he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed to me, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought: What can this be? I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that because of its littleness, it would suddenly have fallen into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasts and always will, because God loves it; and thus everything has being through the love of God.

In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, the third is that God preserves it. But what did I see in it? It is that God is the Creator and the protector and the lover.

Julian of Norwich

9. Bonus Session: Listening to God is More than a Discipline

a. Should we think of listening to God as a spiritual discipline?

- A discipline is something you do in order to be able to do what you _____ do on your own.
- Hearing God, like prayer, of which it is a part, has a disciplinary effect, but it is _____ than a discipline.

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- The importance of hearing God in the Divine Conspiracy is _____ between you and what you are doing and the One who's running the show.
- Kingdoms always work by communication.
- Hearing God is an absolutely vital thing in practicing disciplines.
 - When you go into a discipline, go in with your Teacher and go in _____ because that's the only way that you can get the best advantage from a discipline.
 - Speaking with God and praying to God is absolutely crucial, not only in the disciplines, but in the really big deal in the Kingdom of God, which is living your life.
 - Listening to God is not so much a spiritual discipline as a way in which to do spiritual disciplines.
 - **You never want to do disciplines without listening to God.**
- b. Is there a connection between hearing God and finding out what practices [spiritual disciplines] I should do? Could I say to God, "*What do I need to be doing?*" and find out what practices I should be involved in?
 - Yes. If you say that to God, He will probably whisper in your ears something that you're not doing well with, and He will suggest to you some disciplines that will help you.
 - We've slipped into a period when people think that spiritual transformation is about disciplines. It's not about disciplines.
 - Disciplines are like _____ for _____. They're not righteousness. You're not righteous because you do a discipline anymore than you're righteous because you take medicine. You take medicine to help with a specific difficulty and where you want to get is where you don't need any disciplines. It's living the life that's the deal.
 - The spirit of the disciplines is the _____ of _____. That's the *spirit* of the disciplines. You do the disciplines because you _____ and you want to live with him in the Kingdom of God.

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- Hearing God, listening to God, ought to be a part of our practice. At the same time, in a deep sense, the practice of the disciplines is to enable us to _____ to God _____ the _____ – even when we’re not practicing it.
 - There are many things that have a disciplinary effect that are not primarily disciplines.
- c. Hearing God is _____ something that you have in _____ _____ to do and that’s the fundamental reason why it’s not a discipline. **A discipline is something in your power** that enables you to do what is not [in your power].
- d. In *The Divine Conspiracy*, one of the classic expressions about the gospel is that, in the presence of the Kingdom, this universe is a _____ _____ place for you to be.
- Dallas says, “When I, in the morning, arise, one of the things I will routinely say is ‘*God is here.*’ ...And when I say ‘*God is here,*’ normally I am told, ‘*Yes. I am.*’ And then, in that issue of stepping out into the world which has scared most people out of their wits...I’m perfectly safe because I’m living in the kingdom of God beyond crucifixion.”

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When that’s the message, then a life of conversation with God is something I actually want to have.

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The key to peace is surrender.

Additional Reading Julian of Norwich, *Showings* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1977).

Excerpts for Julian of Norwich taken from *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (Richard J. Foster & James Bryan Smith, Editors. HarperCollins, 1993).

Originally from *Showings*. (Translated by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh. New York: Paulist, 1978).

