

Hearing God as Life
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 6
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1. Introduction

Jesus is the bread of life, and He's come to give us life.

He said so!

He said, *"I've come that you might have life and that you might have it abundantly."* (John 10:10)

Hearing God comes within the context of a _____. That's why the fully satisfying word for salvation in the Bible is life, life, life, life here, now, and life to come.

In this session, we will explore that larger context of life with God that frames for us a way of understanding divine guidance.

2. The With-God Life: The aim of God in history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons with God himself at the very center of that community as its prime sustainer and most glorious inhabitant.

In this part of the session, Richard asks Dallas to discuss the whole Bible and the whole of our lives and how it all fits together. Dallas, in previous work, has spoken of the *with-God life* as the unity of the Bible. Here he talks about that with-God life in terms of a "holy history" from Genesis to Revelation.

a. From the very beginning, God places human beings in positions of _____.

b. God gave Adam and Eve great responsibility and great power and distance. This is crucial to the whole story.

When we look at the woeful path of human history, we wonder is "Where is God?"

The real question is "Where is _____?"

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 (NKJV)

c. Man is away from God, and that's his _____. God hasn't left him alone; God hides himself from us so we can hide from him. This is crucial to the plan of God in human history – to bring that community of love indwelt by God out for cosmic and eternal purposes.

d. God was giving distance, but, after the fall, He still comes around. He spoke with Cain, then Enoch, then Noah. For a while it's hard to track – until you come to Abraham.

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- e. Abraham is the first one who is called the friend of God. A different kind of relationship is developing. We've gone from the individual to the _____ – a natural unit. This is God's way of being more fully in the human condition without standing over it. God has a covenant with the family, and the family grows into a _____ – a nation with, as yet, no place to be.
- f. In the life of Moses, you see an increasing *with-God* presence in the world. God is saying to Abraham that, through you and your seed, all the families, all the nations of the Earth, will be blessed.
- g. The Tabernacle becomes a part of that with-God sensibility. It gives a focal point for human beings to _____. God in relationship to _____. That's crucial to the whole story because, even today, you ask, "Where is God from here...wherever here is?" That's a crucial question in the spiritual life of people at the present. Overcoming distance, as they experience it, is really a major project.

But the way of preparation for dealing with that, which we now know through Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God as He brings it to Earth in an available form, is prepared by centuries, through which God is with people who aren't necessarily doing what He wanted.

- h. After the Exodus, God is present with the people of Israel through judges that are raised up, then the people of Israel say, "We don't want to do this anymore. We need a _____." God says that's not a good idea and tells the last of the judges, Samuel, to tell them what's going to happen: This king you want is going to make your lives miserable, and sure enough....
- i. God didn't _____ them. He uses the monarchy in many ways.

And the Lord said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."

1 Samuel 8:7

One was to establish a different kind of presence in the priests and in the prophets. The prophets remain outsiders, even if they're insiders in some sense. They were outsiders in terms of how they were operating with God in relationship. That was opposition often, and that's why so many of them got killed.

- j. The nation gets smashed and exiled, but God is still _____. They found out that there was a God in heaven. The idea of heaven now begins to intrude – but not as something far away.

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- k. The First Heaven in Hebrew cosmology is the _____. It is not far away. (Dallas says it goes all the way down to your socks.) They're learning the presence of God in the surrounding atmosphere. When you look back, you see how that happened over and over and over in the history of Israel.

*There is no one like the God of Jeshurun,
Who rides the heavens to help you, And
in His excellency on the clouds. The
eternal God is your refuge, And
underneath are the everlasting arms.*

Deuteronomy 33:26-27

everlasting arms refers to God's
presence in the atmosphere

- l. This is the learning that goes on and on. There's the restoration period (Nehemiah's story), and God is with them. They don't have a government, and God deals with them through Cyrus and the Babylonians and the Medes and the Persians. Now they learn that they can live with God without a _____. They can live with God without an impressive Temple. God was still present.

- m. John the Baptist shows up on the scene and says, *Rethink what you're doing because the _____ of _____ - the Kingdom of the Heavens - is right here.*

The foundation has been laid, and he establishes the connection between the old prophetic tradition and the new one with Jesus.

- n. Jesus then becomes the _____ of a with-God life. He is the Shekinah (the presence of God) in person.
- o. The life of Jesus is so important because it is helping us picture the with-God life. That's Emmanuel. He is it, and He comes in the form of a person. Now a face is put on God, and it is the face of _____. God is like Jesus.
- p. That moves into the Church, and that's the continuing incarnation. You get a body of people animated by the presence of the Spirit of God, enabling them to live like God.

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Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.

Ephesians 5:1

- q. So, God has become accessible in Jesus, and a body had been formed that is this _____ of loving persons with _____ at the very heart of the community.
- r. In the Bible, this projects into the future. The blow-up is on the day of Pentecost. That's the point at which everyone comes from all the nations, and they are imprinted and inhabited by this God that came in Jesus through his Spirit. And they spread out across the world and take that message out. It isn't just religion. It is a _____, and it's available without any cultural presuppositions. It comes out of one thing and that's Christ is all in all.
- s. John, in his Revelation, projects that on into eternity. They have started to understand who Jesus was, but they couldn't get their minds around it. By the time you get to the Revelation, they have got it.
- t. All through the Bible, God is saying to us, "I am with you. I am with you. I am with you...." Then that haunting question: "Are you willing to be with me?"

That's the great choice. It's a choice we make, and then we learn through _____ how to live in that. As we grow, we get a sense of something far beyond anything we know.

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

1 John 3:2

We get to be people living now an eternal kind of life wherever we are because we're really living from the Kingdom of God.

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3. *The Life of George Fox*: Key points from a conversation between Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, and John Ortberg

- George Fox had the experience of seeking God and not finding, seeking God and not finding.... Then he had an experience where he said:

"And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition', and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.... And this I knew experimentally."

- Christ as the Inner Light was something that Fox experienced constantly.
- When you were quiet as a Quaker, you were waiting to hear the voice of God, and the quietness was not for its own sake, but to give you a chance to hear from God so you could speak to the meeting. It always had that corporate sense of us together, listening together.
- Fox heard, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition." We want somebody who can speak to our conditions. Often, we don't think of ourselves as having a condition until somebody says it, and that's what Jesus does. He speaks right to our condition.
- Fox trained his friends that when they were being persecuted and badly treated, they would address Christ in the person who was mistreating them. One of the most powerful things about his teaching was that there's going to be Christ there. There will be Christ there. Every person has the Light of Christ in them because He is the Light that lights everyone who comes into the world and that changes the whole picture of human relationships.
- Another experience Fox had was *great temptations*. It led him to study the Bible - essentially studying all the sins of everybody. He wondered why he went through this experience and wrote:

But with and by this divine power and spirit of God, and the light of Jesus, I was to bring people off from all their own ways to Christ, the new and living way....

George Fox

"And the Lord answered that it was needful I should have a sense of all conditions, how else should I speak to all conditions; and in this I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness."

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- Once Fox was sitting by the fire, and it comes over him that all things come by nature. He sat for a while in a kind of depression, and then the Word came to him, "There is a God who is over nature," and he saw the greatness of the Kingdom and how it encompasses everything.

He and his friends took that into all of their lives, and they sanctified everything they touched.

4. Bonus Session: CONVERSATION . . . COMMUNION . . . UNION

We've been talking about zóé life coming in – born from above, initiating relationship, and, then, relationship developing conversation, leading us to communion, and leading us to union.

a. How do we get started in that?

- There are two cases.
 - There are those who don't know anything about Jesus Christ.

Their only option is to _____ to _____ to save me. It doesn't matter how smart they are, how well-informed they are. If they simply have the ability to cry out to God, He will come to them.

- If you know about Jesus, He has started the _____, and we _____.

Our first response is to begin to _____ on the things that _____ has said.

We take what we can of Jesus and step into it with our _____ and in our _____.

When we begin to step into that conversation, as best as we can, the new life begins to flow, and then that comes out in eternity.

b. Can you give us a little snapshot of how conversation moves to communion?

- Conversation moves to communion with the growing awareness that we're _____ to the person we're talking to.
- You come to the place where there's an awareness, an identity, a common interest that we share.

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- The dominating awareness is of *together*.
- The communion can grow into union if you begin to _____ a life. Genuine _____ is shared _____.
- Sharing is intimacy that creates _____.
- Union is the working together. Your lives are flowing in the same direction, and, usually, they flow without even having to talk because your lives are like that.
- It isn't by accident that Jesus takes up marriage in conjunction with Christ and his Church because, in terms of possibilities, it's the relationship among human beings that most represents the union that's the Trinity.

Additional Reading George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox* (Richmond, Ind.: Friends United Press, 1976).