

LIFE CHANGING PRAYER – PART 2

Listening for the Voice of God

How can we recognize the voice of God?

This question has been asked down through the ages. Samuel heard the voice of God, but did not recognize the voice until he was instructed by Eli (*1 Samuel 3:1–10*). Even when Gideon received a physical revelation from God, he still doubted. It is easy to identify with Gideon asking for a sign, not once, but three times (*Judges 6:17–22, 36–40*). Keep in mind that we have a blessing that Samuel and Gideon did not have. We have the complete inspired Word of God – His Voice for the ages to guide us. God will never lead us contrary to what He has taught in His Word.

God's Word does not contain a specific question and answer list for all our concerns; however, do not be surprised when specific answers are revealed to us through His Word. When you recognize scripture as being God's personal answer to you, it is a powerful and humbling experience.

In our day we have come to expect the dramatic and the colossal in all that we do and experience. God does not necessarily speak through the dramatic and the colossal although He can. Sometimes we may hear a 'voice in our head' or have a certain 'feeling' that we have heard from God. But, how do we know for sure? Some people may quote word for word what God has said to them and yet it never contains an ounce of scripture. I know from personal experience that our own **will** can be very strong and suggestive. Also, we need to remember that the voice of Satan works to distract us from the Lord's will. In fact, the old deceiver will do anything he can to get us off track and out of fellowship with our Savior. So back to that question, how do we know for sure when we hear the voice of God? Let's turn to an experience that Elijah had and see what we can learn from that.

Elijah had just experienced a 'spiritual high' that is recorded in *1 Kings 18*. God had manifested Himself through fire and rain all in one day and Elijah's prayers had played a part in that manifestation! Almost immediately, however, after rising to his spiritual mountaintop, Elijah was plunged into the valley of the shadow of despair. It is wise to remember that:

We are never closer to defeat than in
our moments of greatest victory.

Read 1 Kings 19:9-10 (ESV) ⁹ *There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"* ¹⁰ *He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away."*

Elijah was fatigued and depressed. Exhaustion often leads to "pity parties." He felt like giving up! It suddenly struck Elijah that nothing had really changed. Evil had not been defeated. He felt an overwhelming sense of personal failure. Probably, he felt as though he had won a battle but was losing the war.

David Jeremiah says, “In answering God’s question, Elijah did what discouraged people do. He selectively and inaccurately reported the facts, magnifying the problem and minimizing the good. In this case, he underestimated the strength of God and overestimated the strength of the enemy.” If we are honest with ourselves, all of us have done the same thing at one time or the other in our lives – that is distort the facts for the purpose of enjoying our pity party. Nevertheless, notice that Elijah in his discouraged state was in the Presence of the LORD.

The LORD ignored Elijah’s whining and did what it took to get Elijah’s focus off Himself and on the glory of God.

Read 1 Kings 19:11-12 (ESV) ¹¹ *And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.* ¹² *And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.*

God’s children associate the wind with the Spirit of God. On the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to earth to dwell: *Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. (Acts 2:2)* Now, we read, the LORD was not in the wind... I don’t know how Elijah knew that the LORD’s answer for him was not in the wind – but he did know that the Spirit was in the wind.

Believers associate earthquakes with the Power of God like when Paul and Silas were miraculously freed from prison after an earthquake shook the jail. God’s Word does not reveal how Elijah knew that the LORD’s answer for him was not in the earthquake – but the earthquake did refocus Elijah’s attention to the power of God.

Elijah, like us, would associate fire with the Presence of God such as when God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush and when a fourth man walked with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. **Deuteronomy 4:24 (ESV)** ²⁴ *For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.* Elijah was getting the picture that the God of heaven is in control – no matter the circumstances.

When we are seeking a Word from the Lord, we have the tendency to think that the Lord’s will for us would be easier to understand if He spoke to us in a dramatic way. Those are the times that we need to go back to scripture and remind ourselves that everything in nature is obedient to Him: the wind, the foundations of the earth, the fire—and He does not lack the ‘power tools’ to get His work done.

What Elijah needed for renewed service was a fresh wind and fresh fire. He needed to experience again the power and glory of God. Someone has said, ‘Great doors are swung on little hinges’. All of us need to remember at times that God uses small things to open mighty doors. And Elijah was about to learn that he must listen for something still and small speaking to his heart – it was what the KJV calls the still small voice.

Read 1 Kings 19:13-14 (ESV) ¹³ *And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here,*

Elijah?”¹⁴ He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”

It is interesting that the LORD repeated the same question to Elijah that he had asked while Elijah was inside the cave: *What are you doing here, Elijah?* Today, we might call the repeated question a ‘sacred echo’. When we find ourselves stepping away from our place of service in the Lord’s work, we might hear the same words – what are you doing here? It might just be a whisper since God speaks more often in persistent whispers than in shouts! The God who whispers reveals Himself through His faithful people.

Even after the mighty display of God’s power, Elijah was still stuck on his same whiny reply to God’s question. Notice how Elijah ‘echoed’ his same complaint to God’s question, but his echoes were not sacred. He was still on his pity party.

The still small voice speaking to Elijah’s heart was about to answer. And Elijah would continue his walk with the LORD. Some of the things that God said to Elijah were specific to his coming personal ministry. Though interesting, we will not cover that portion of God’s reply. However, we must look at the LORD’s answer to Elijah’s whining concerning him being the only one left serving God. It is easy for us to fall into the trap of coming to this same conclusion. The Lord’s answer to Elijah is relevant for all believers transcending each generation. We are not alone in our work for the Lord.

Read 1 Kings 19:18 (ESV)¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

When Elijah thought he was the only servant of God left, the LORD informed him that there were 7,000 who had not bowed down or kissed Baal! Kissing Baal meant kissing some object representing him to show loyalty to him. No matter how wicked our world scene may appear, God always has a remnant that is faithful to Him. Paul speaks about God’s reply to Elijah in the New Testament.

Read Romans 11:3-5 (ESV)³ “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.”⁴ But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”⁵ So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

When the Messiah born of the Jews came to earth, the nation of Israel for the most part rejected Him as the Promised One and denied Him as Savior. Yet, it was a remnant of God’s chosen people who shared the good news of Jesus with the lost and dying world as they were called by God to do. That remnant brought salvation to the Gentiles (that’s us) because they listened to the voice of God.

We most often think of listening for the voice of God concerning answers to immediate physical and personal problems and every believer does experience the blessing of receiving those answers.

However, never forget the ‘bigger picture’ of the calling of God.

Read Ephesians 2:10 (ESV) ¹⁰ *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Today, each of us who has accepted Christ as Savior has the calling to make Him Lord of our life and carry out the work that He has prepared for us to further His kingdom just as He had a purpose for the life of Elijah.

When it is our desire to hear a word from the Lord, there are several ways to hear from God.

Hearing begins with our listening.

How do we listen for the voice of God?

1. **Study scripture.** *2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)* ¹⁶ *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.* We do not have to hear an audible voice since God reveals Himself through His Word. He also reveals Himself when we pray.
2. **Prayer.** *Jeremiah 33:3 (ESV)* ³ *Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.* This is a well loved verse but we frequently overlook that the LORD gave Jeremiah this promise while he was in prison during the Babylonian crisis reminding us that in the midst of our problems our Lord will lead us in His way when we ask. He leads us through the power of the Holy Spirit.
3. **Holy Spirit.** *John 14:26 (ESV)* ²⁶ *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* As we study God's Word and pray, we can trust the power of the Holy Spirit within us will plant His truth in our heart, convince us of God's will, and remind us when we stray from it. Then comes peace.
4. **Peace of God.** *Philippians 4:7 (ESV)* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* When we yield to God's will His peace will follow. *John 14:27 (ESV)* ²⁷ *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*

Elijah is remembered for having his prayers answered and yet God ignored Elijah's prayer request to die. He prayed this before he arrived at the cave. *1 Kings 19:4 (ESV)* ⁴ *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."* If God had answered that prayer, Elijah would have missed his whirlwind ride into heaven on a chariot of fire! The Lord of heaven was not ready to bring Elijah home when Elijah thought He should. With the Lord when we reach the end of our resources we have only come to the beginning of His. *Deuteronomy 31:6 (ESV)* ⁶ *Be strong and courageous... for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."*