

JESUS  
S P E A K S

SAMPLER



# JESUS

## SPEAKS



LEARNING TO RECOGNIZE &  
RESPOND TO THE LORD'S VOICE

LEONARD SWEET AND FRANK VIOLA



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*“My sheep hear My voice, and I know  
them, and they follow Me.”*

—JOHN 10:27 NASB



## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK



This book is a combination of storytelling and practical instruction. Within these pages, we'll be taking you on an exciting journey with the risen Christ found in Scripture while giving you practical handles on how to hear His voice today.

Our aim is threefold. First, we want to give you a firm foundation in the Scriptures concerning how Jesus spoke to His disciples. We want to introduce you to the scriptures that highlight Jesus' resurrection voice. Each encounter that Jesus had with His disciples in His postresurrection appearances is told in a story with multiple layers of meaning. We will unpack those for you.

Second, we want to dispel the myths and misinformation surrounding what it means to hear the voice of Jesus today. If you're like we are, when someone says, "The Lord told me . . .," it can be a bit unsettling, even mystifying. But the truth is that Jesus speaks to all of His followers today—even you. And He speaks in many different ways. We want to demystify those ways for you. We also want to explain how you can cultivate a rich experience and a growing relationship with Jesus simply by hearing His voice.

Lastly, we tell stories because Jesus told stories—stories filled with narratives and metaphors (Len calls them "narraphors") that speak directly to the heart. The stories surrounding the resurrected Christ, the people He encountered, and what He said and did for

them before ascending to heaven are informative, purposeful, lyrical, and sacred. The way Jesus continues to speak today from heaven is no less inspired.

## Two Volumes Under One Cover

With those goals in mind, we've divided *Jesus Speaks* into two volumes.

In volume 1, written by Leonard, we'll hear the stories of how Jesus Christ spoke to His followers after His resurrection. Because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8), the various ways He spoke in the New Testament are the same ways in which He speaks today. This section is full of transforming insights and reflections based on the gospel material and the book of Acts.

In volume 2, written by Frank, we bring the discussion closer to home with a nuts-and-bolts analysis of *how* to hear Jesus today. With so many people claiming to hear the voice of God, and countless others who feel frustrated in trying to hear Him, we believe a clear, scripturally based application that dispels the fog on this issue is in order. So volume 2 is highly practical. And our instruction goes way beyond the not-so-helpful canned answer, "Just pray and read your Bible."

In short, volume 1 gives you the big picture of how the resurrected Jesus spoke in the New Testament and why this knowledge is critical today. The chapters are robust, poetic in style, and filled with metaphorical language.

Volume 2 gets down to brass tacks. The chapters are deliberately short, actionable, and filled with scriptural quotes and references, so that readers can see that we're rooting our conclusions in timeless truth rather than imagination or armchair philosophy, as some authors have done in the past.

While both volumes are different in content and style, they are complementary, working together to elucidate how to recognize and respond to the voice of Jesus today in our own lives.

## Three Reading Plans

Given the way we formatted the chapters, there are three different ways—or plans—in which you can read this book.

*Plan 1:* Read it like any traditional book, from beginning to end. So you'd read volume 1 and then volume 2.

*Plan 2:* Reverse the order. There's no harm in starting with volume 2, especially if you want to begin with the shorter, practical chapters. You can then read volume 1 afterward.

*Plan 3:* At the end of each chapter in volume 1, you'll find a reference to the corresponding practical chapters in volume 2. So you can switch between reading volume 1 and volume 2 by following the references at the end of each chapter in volume 1.

Regardless of what plan you use, our hope is that by reading this little book, you will be better equipped to hear the voice of the Lord for yourself. And thereby, your relationship with Jesus will deepen, your service will be informed, and your life will be enriched.

Let's begin the journey . . .

—Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola



## INTRODUCTION



# The Whispers of God's Voice

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*“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”*

LUKE 10:23–24 ESV

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A youth group leader took his kids to a ski resort, where he saw two people skiing down the slopes one behind the other. They were so close it was almost as if they were tied together. When he got closer, he heard the one in front saying in staccato fashion, “Left.” “Right.” “Straight.” “Right.” “Left.”

He thought it was a little funny, and his kids were laughing at the sound of what looked like a ski instructor giving lessons to a student. So he thought he’d have a little fun with the student skier. He started yelling out different commands that contradicted the ski instructor. When the person in front said, “Left,” he’d yell, “Right!” When the person in front said, “Straight,” he’d yell, “Curve!” But no matter what the youth leader said, the student in back seemed to be able to ignore his voice and fix on what the ski instructor was saying.

Suddenly the skier stopped and turned around. Much to the

embarrassment of the youth leader, on the chest of the second skier was a sign: Blind Skier.

Even though he could see nothing, since he knew his instructor's voice, the blind skier could ignore all other voices—even those tempting and tormenting him—and go safely down the slopes.

## The Voice

A large segment of Christians claim that God speaks to them. One of us grew up in a movement where the phrase *The Lord told me* was the order of the day. “The Lord told me to call my friend.” “The Lord showed me whom to marry.” “This morning I was in my kitchen and the Lord said to call my mother.” And similar reports.

The result is that an even larger segment of the Christian community is left feeling, “Why doesn't the Lord speak to me like that?” Or worse, “What's wrong with me? Why can't I hear the Lord like these other people do?” The result: We have people claiming that the Lord speaks to them constantly. And we have others who feel God is giving them the cold shoulder.

Either way, countless Christians today desperately want to know how to hear the voice of their Savior. But if they are honest, they will admit they don't quite know how. If this describes you, then this book was written for you.

In this volume, we aim to make one simple yet critical assertion: Jesus Christ is always speaking to His followers. It is up to us to learn how to recognize His voice. And when we do learn to identify His voice, it becomes as familiar as our own heartbeats.

If you are one of the Lord's true sheep, your heart is already attuned to hear His voice. Now you just need to learn how to distinguish it from all of the other voices jamming your frequencies. Radio stations are constantly sending their unique signals through the airwaves. But unless a person's radio is tuned to a particular frequency, he will never pick up the signals.

Hearing the voice of Jesus Christ is much the same. Because Jesus dwells within every genuine believer through the Holy Spirit, He is always speaking, always leading, always revealing. And He speaks in many different ways.

Sometimes Jesus speaks in a whisper.

Sometimes Jesus speaks in a still, small voice, easy on the ear.

Sometimes Jesus thunders and shouts, beating hard on the eardrum.

Sometimes all you hear is the sound of silence.

But Jesus is always speaking.

Job talks about the whispers of God's voice like this: "And these are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the thunder of his power?" (Job 26:14).

At times in life you may be a sitting Job, crushed with grief and pain, struggling to believe in a God you can't hear anymore.

At times in life you may be a jumping Jehoshaphat, barely able to contain the "Hallelujahs!" of your soul.

At times in life you may be a weeping Jeremiah, bent over and wanting to quit, because you have heard a message you didn't want to deliver to a people you are sick and tired of serving after a lifetime of talking to a brick wall.

The registers of Jesus speaking record the seasons of your soul.

## The Ear

The psalmist asked, "He who planted the ear, does he not hear?" (Ps. 94:9 ESV). The primary gateway to the soul is the ear. By definition, the disciples of faith are first and foremost listeners. The very word *disciple* means "the one who listens and learns." The very word *faith* is based on hearing, not seeing: "Faith comes from what is heard" (Rom. 10:17 HCSB), "the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1 KJV). Our ears need opening if we are to hear Jesus speak.

In India, there are street ear cleaners. Standing in line at the theater,

you might be approached by such a peddler promising to give your ears a good cleaning. Imagine if everyone could get their ears cleaned before worship. What if everyone had someone to let them know when their ears were blocked to the voice of Jesus and needed a good cleaning out?

What if there were a place you could go in which your ears could be especially attuned, ready to receive the voice of God?

The word that gives its name to “cathedral,” *cathedra*, refers to a seat or chair, specifically the chair of a bishop, a seat of learning and listening. In some traditions, the *cathedra* is a holy place of learning and listening. In those traditions, to speak *ex cathedra* is to speak with the full authority of the chair on which one is sitting. Something spoken *ex cathedra* means the whole weight of one’s office is behind what one is saying.

Every follower of Jesus needs a chair, a “seat,” of learning and listening. Have you cleared a space in your life where you can put the chair? A spot where you can stop, sit, and listen? It is hard to hear Jesus when we are living such busy lives and our hearts are filled with noise, not silence or stillness.

And it is hard to hear Jesus when we are always talking.

Inuit artists from the top of the Arctic Circle, a place known as Repulse Bay, are famous for their ivory carvings. One of the most collected Inuit artists, Mark Tungilik (1913–1986), was once asked why the figures in his carvings had gaping mouths. Tungilik said that they represented white men, who are “always talking.” You can’t hear God if you are listening to yourself.

The first mission of love is to listen.

If you listen, you will hear.

## Two Kinds of Hearing

Scripture presents a paradox when it comes to hearing the voice of Jesus. In John chapter 10, the Lord plainly said, “My sheep hear my voice” (v. 27 κτν). So the Good Shepherd speaks to His sheep, and His sheep unfailingly



hear His voice. But Jesus also said this to His beloved sheep, “Whoever has ears, let them hear” (Rev. 2:7). Here Jesus says that the one who “has ears” must “hear” His voice. If Jesus asks us to hear, then it is not automatic.

How do we resolve this conflict?

It's the difference between having a sound wave hit your eardrum (hearing) and discerning what's being said and who is saying it (recognition).

Imagine you're talking to a friend who is reading an e-mail on her smartphone. As you are talking, she interrupts you saying, “Can you repeat what you just said? I wasn't listening.” Your friend heard that you were saying something, but didn't really hear what you said. So she didn't discern what you said because her attention was focused elsewhere.

Every minute, we are bombarded with signals from television and radio moving through the air we breathe. But unless we have a tuner that picks up those signals, we won't recognize them. Along these lines, the fundamental action word in the Bible as it concerns the voice of the living God is not *obey* or *submit*.

It is *listen*.

So while the Lord frequently speaks to us and we “hear” His voice, we don't really hear it unless we recognize it. This book is an exploration of what it means to listen with both sets of ears. Our goal is to teach you how to recognize the voice that's always speaking.

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*“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

—REVELATION 2:11

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PART TWO

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*Hearing Jesus Today*



## What the Forty Days Teach Us

After Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples at various times and places over a space of forty days. There are two critical lessons we can learn from this time period that will help us recognize the voice of Jesus today.

### A New Way of Hearing

Through His postresurrection appearances, Jesus taught His disciples a new way to know Him. He trained them how to know Him according to the Spirit, rather than according to the flesh (2 Cor. 5:16 NKJV).

After Jesus came out of the grave, His disciples learned to recognize Him, not by His physical appearance, but by His voice. Whenever they saw Him, they didn't recognize Him by His physical appearance. Their recognition was either voice-activated (Luke 24:32; John 20:16) or activated by something He did (Luke 24:30–31).

Jesus made Himself visible to His disciples just enough so they would become used to and confident in His speaking to their spirits. In this way, He was giving them “training wheels” to learn to hear Him without seeing Him, which would happen after He ascended to the Father.

Jesus was teaching His disciples that there would be a new way to “see” Him—not with the physical eye, but with the eyes of the heart.

Today, we serve a Lord who is no longer visible. When Jesus ascended into heavenly realms, He returned in the Spirit—who is invisible. Consequently, Christ is now known, heard, and even “beheld” with spiritual eyes and spiritual ears.

... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the *eyes* of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. (Eph. 1:17–18 NKJV)

But we all, with unveiled [open] face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, [even] as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:18 NKJV)

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of *the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*. (2 Cor. 4:6 KJV)

While we *look not* at the things which are seen, but at the things which *are not seen*; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:18 NASB)

But *we see Jesus*, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. (Heb. 2:9 NKJV)

By faith he [Moses] left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as *seeing him who is invisible*. (Heb. 11:27 ESV)

*Looking unto Jesus* the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy

that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12:2 KJV)

Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29 ESV)

I keep my eyes always on the LORD.

With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (Ps. 16:8)

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness. (Ps. 17:15 ESV)

In God’s order of things, the spiritual is supreme over the physical, the unseen greater than the seen. The infinite is contained within the invisible; consequently, that which is superior is not visible to the naked eye (2 Cor. 4:18).

Faith is the gaze of the heart upon the Lord Jesus. It’s the lifting up of our inward eyes to behold Him. In this regard, beholding is believing (compare John 3:14–15 with Numbers 21:9).

## An Elusive Lover

But there is yet another lesson that the forty-day period teaches us.

Jesus Christ is the greatest Lover in the universe. But He’s an elusive Lover. You’ll never get to the place in your walk with the Lord where you have Him figured out, where you can predict His moves, where you can fully explain Him, box Him in, or hold Him down.

In fact, just when you think you’ve got ahold of Jesus, He’ll slip through your fingers. He might even appear as a stranger. But upon second glance, you’ll discover that He’s no stranger at all. Emmaus will repeat itself in your life.

Remember Mary Magdalene, the first person to witness the resurrected Christ? When she recognized Him, the first thing she did was grab Him—and she wouldn’t let go.

Jesus responded to her by saying, “Don’t cling to me” (John 20:17 NLT).

Why did He say this? Because He had somewhere to go. He was on the move.

Jesus was, in effect, saying to her: “Mary, stop holding on to Me. There’s a new way to know Me that’s different from what you’ve experienced thus far. Let Me go, for I must move on. And I want you to follow Me wherever I go.”

Jesus is always moving, and the Holy Spirit is beckoning us to “follow the Lamb wherever he goes” (Rev. 14:4). Our tendency is to cling to Him and keep Him where we are.

Like the the maiden who searched for her monarch in the Song of Solomon, our true bridegroom, Jesus, wants us to keep searching for Him.

My dove in the clefts of the rock,  
in the hiding places on the mountainside,  
show me your face,  
let me hear your voice;  
for your voice is sweet,  
and your face is lovely. (Song 2:14)

All night long on my bed  
I looked for the one my heart loves;  
I looked for him but did not find him.  
I will get up now and go about the city,  
through its streets and squares;  
I will search for the one my heart loves. (Song 3:1–2)

Where has your beloved gone,  
most beautiful of women?  
Which way did your beloved turn,  
that we may look for him with you? (Song 6:1)

The first problem the disciples had was in recognizing the risen

Christ. And this is still our problem today. Indeed, the Lord wants us to seek Him. He desires that we seek His face (His person), not just His hand (His blessings).

The fact that we must keep seeking Him keeps us humble and hungry. It's the pathway to staying desperate for Him, which is what He desires. Thankfully, He has promised to be found when we seek Him with all our hearts (Jer. 29:13; Matt. 7:7), and His voice will lead us according to His will (Isa. 30:21).



## The Lord's Voice in Scripture

**W**e (Frank and Len) both have a high view of the Bible. We believe it's fully inspired, fully authoritative, and fully reliable. And as we made the case in *Jesus: A Theography*, we believe all Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, tells the story of Jesus Christ.

To be more specific, the Bible reveals a Person who is searching for and reaching out to you, a Person—Jesus—who wants to have an intimate relationship with you. So when we read the Bible, we should read it in a way that helps us search for Christ.

Properly understood, the Bible is God's speech, God's voice, preserved in written form.

The God of creation, embodied in Jesus Christ, spoke directly to the authors of Scripture. And today, He still speaks to His people through both the Old and New Testaments. But the Bible doesn't replace the Lord's personal voice to us.

For instance, the Spirit of Jesus told Philip to walk beside a chariot (Acts 8:29).

He told Peter to go with three men without doubting (Acts 11:12).

The Spirit spoke to Paul, forbidding him to go into certain regions during one of his church-planting trips (Acts 16:6–7).

He told Paul to speak in Corinth and encouraged him not to remain silent (Acts 18:9).



All were cases of specific guidance that couldn't be found in the Bible.

However, the Lord's leading in your life will never contradict the teachings of Scripture. It will *always* be in alignment with them.

Unfortunately, some Christians have used the slogan "The Lord told me . . ." to do things that were clearly sinful and selfish, contradicting the clear teachings of the Bible.

On the other hand, getting immersed in the teachings of Scripture, particularly those of Jesus and the apostles, will help you to better discern the Lord's voice when it comes.

In Scripture, we have a revelation of God's ways, His purpose, and His heart. And in the New Testament, we have an explanation and an illustration of how a person acts and reacts when he or she is living by the Lord's indwelling life (walking in the Spirit).

For this reason, God's Word is a lamp for our feet, a light on our path (Ps. 119:105).

The more familiar we are with God's written Word, the more familiar we become with how the Living Word—Christ—speaks and acts. This is true for three main reasons:

1. The written Word of God is an expression of God's mind and heart, which is embodied in Christ.
2. Jesus, the Living Word, speaks in the Scriptures—from Genesis to Revelation.
3. The same Spirit that communicates to you (via the Lord's voice) is the same Spirit who inspired the Scriptures (Rom. 8:9–11; 2 Tim. 3:16).

The process whereby our minds become more in tune with God's will is called the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10). And the means of this renewal is the Word of God.

According to Romans 12:2, the renewal of our minds allows us to discern the Lord's will. In like manner, Hebrews 4:12 describes the Word of God as being sharper than a two-edged sword (ΝΚΙΥ), *dividing* the

soul from the spirit. In other words, the Lord's Word separates what comes from us (the soul) from what comes from Him (the Spirit). The "sword of the Spirit"—which is God's written and spoken Word—brings this separation about (Eph. 6:17).

As we digest Scripture, which contains the words of the living God, we come to understand how God thinks, feels, and wants in contrast to what we think, feel, and want.

Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. (2 Tim. 2:7)

Our attitudes are shaped by this understanding, making it easier for us to hear the Lord when He speaks to us.

Under the new covenant, the law of God is written in our minds (Heb. 8:10). But our minds still need to be renewed because we have been affected by the fall.

If we offer ourselves to God as living sacrifices, He can renew our minds and we can know the perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1–2). Like a power cleanser, God's Word cleanses our faulty thinking and ideas, setting them in concert with God's will.

The Bible reveals God's ways that are embodied in Christ. The Holy Spirit's job is to show us how to apply those ways to our own lives and situations.

It's also the Spirit's job to *reveal* the message that's contained in the Scriptures to our hearts. For it's possible to read and even memorize parts of the Bible without "hearing" the voice of Jesus within them.

In Acts 13, we are told that the leaders in Jerusalem didn't "know" who Jesus really was (even though they met Him numerous times). Nor did they "know" the voice of the prophets, even though those prophets were read to them every Sabbath.

For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are

read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. (Acts 13:27 NKJV)

This text demonstrates that it's one thing to hear the Bible but quite another to "hear" the voice of Jesus in the Scriptures. Or to put it in Paul's language, it's possible to learn the "letter" of the Bible while missing the "Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:6).

Jesus scolded the religious leaders of His day, saying, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). Even though the people Jesus was speaking to here had an academic knowledge of the Scriptures, they didn't really "know" them. Nor did they know God's power, which is another way of describing the Holy Spirit.

So we need both: a knowledge of the Scriptures that is given by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit's power in our lives.

Some use the word *illumination* to describe the experience of hearing the Lord's voice in Scripture by the Holy Spirit. Suddenly, a text you've read for years takes on a new, wonderful, and personal meaning. In such cases, the Spirit of Jesus has "spoken" to you through His Word.

While it's possible to go off the deep end and confuse the Lord's voice with your own emotions and carnal desires, it's also possible to go off the shallow end and restrict the living voice of God to the letter of the Bible. Both positions are unscriptural and will lead to spiritual loss.

The Lord's voice will always be compatible with the Lord's life that dwells within us and the revelation of God contained in Scripture.

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*Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me,  
As Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea;  
Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord;  
My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word!*

—MARY A. LATHBURY<sup>1</sup>

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## Spiritual Instincts

**T**he voice of the Lord is like a voice, but it's not really a voice.

It's more of an impulse, instinct, or guided intuition.

In the old covenant, God's people responded to Him by trying to follow His law in an external way. This, of course, resulted in failure and condemnation (Rom. 7:1–25; 1 Cor. 15:56; 2 Cor. 3:1–18; Gal. 3:21).

In the new covenant, however, God has written His law on the hearts of His people (2 Cor. 3:3). And we can respond to Him by the inward promptings of the Spirit given to us by the Lord Jesus Himself. Those inward promptings supply the life and the grace to carry out what He says (Rom. 8:1–4).

When we walk in the Spirit of Christ, the moral requirements of the law are fulfilled in us (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 7:4–6). However, “it is not I, but Christ who lives in me” who is doing the work (Gal. 2:20, author's paraphrase).

In that regard, when the voice of the Lord comes to us, it most often comes in the form of our own conscious thoughts, inclinations, and impressions.

The life of Christ within you, then, has a consciousness that either prompts or forbids you to take action. This is what we mean by “spiritual instinct.”

In fact, it can rightly be said that when we were “born anew,” we heard

“the voice of the Son of God” for the first time: “The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God” (John 5:25 KJV). In another place, Jesus said that we come to Him because the Father draws us and we *hear* Him speaking.

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me *draws* him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD.’ Everyone who has *heard* and learned from the Father, comes to Me.” (John 6:44–45 NASB)

You may not have recognized it to be such at the time, but there was an inward “ring” of truth when the gospel message pierced your ears. You “heard” the word of the living God inwardly, which brought your dead spirit to life and gave you new birth.

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. (1 Peter 1:23)

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. (James 1:18)

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. (Rom. 10:17 NASB)

When God speaks to us in Christ, eternity breaks through time. Beyond the audible, natural, and earthly, the voice of the Son of God—which may or may not employ words—has spoken to us and we inwardly know. Faith is generated in our hearts (Rom. 10:17).

## Our Union with Christ

In 1 Corinthians 6:17, Paul made this dramatic statement: “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (NKJV).

Imagine a tea bag being placed into hot water. Slowly, the tea begins to mix with the water, making the tea and the water one.

The same thing happens when the Spirit of Jesus enters your inner being. He joins Himself to your spirit—the deepest part of you—and His life envelops your mind, will, and emotions.

So as a person who has been born from above, you have another life living inside of you. And with that life you have another mind, another feeling, another will, and another consciousness. You have Christ's entire personality dwelling inside of you.

Consequently, when Jesus speaks, what He says typically comes through our own thoughts and judgments. Some refer to this as “a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12 KJV).

An example is found in 1 Corinthians 7. There Paul said that the Lord didn't give him a specific command on a particular subject, yet he offered his judgment on the matter. And in the process, he was writing inspired Scripture (see 1 Cor. 7:25). Later he made another judgment on a matter, ending his point by saying, “I think that I too have the Spirit of God” (v. 40). In other words, the Lord was speaking to Paul through his own thoughts and judgments.

But that's not all. When Jesus feels, He feels through our emotions.

God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:8)

And when Jesus wills, He wills through our volition (will).

For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Phil. 2:13)

Since the Lord is so connected with your human spirit—the deepest part of you—His voice comes through your thoughts, your feelings, and your desires.

The trick, therefore, is to discern when your thoughts, your feelings,

and your will are reflecting the Lord's mind, feelings, and will rather than your own.

## The Simplicity of Hearing the Lord

Unfortunately, when some Christians speak about how God communicates with them, they give the impression that He talks audibly or by some other spectacular method.

The truth is that even among the most mature believers, the Lord most often speaks through the still small voice of our thoughts, emotions, or desires.

Since Christ indwells the deepest part of your being by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is nearer to you than the breath is to your mouth (Rom. 10:6–13).

In fact, Paul said that if you say, “Jesus is Lord” in true faith, the Holy Spirit inspired you to say those words: “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3).

The Lord's speaking, then, usually doesn't come with fireworks, explosions, thunder, lightning, or any other dramatic and spectacular event, as we can learn from the experience of the prophet Elijah:

The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. (1 Kings 19:11–12)

While the Holy Spirit sometimes comes to us like a rushing mighty wind (Acts 2:2–4), most of the time He comes in much less assuming ways, like a gentle dove (Luke 3:22). In our observation, those who insist that God usually makes Himself known in spectacular ways

## SPIRITUAL INSTINCTS

are revealing their spiritual immaturity as well as their doubt (Matt. 16:1ff.).

In short, when we are following our spiritual instincts, we are following the Lord's voice. And in so doing, our very steps are ordered by Jesus Himself.

The LORD directs the steps of the godly.

He delights in every detail of their lives. (Ps. 37:23 NLT)



PART THREE



*The Challenges of  
Listening for the Lord's Voice*



## The Price of Following the Lord's Voice

Sometimes the voice of the Lord will land you in trouble.

Consider this: Jesus lived by His Father's life. He had the mind of His Father, operated by His spiritual instincts, and followed the Father's voice.

Where did the voice of God eventually lead Jesus? *Up a hill to be crucified.*

But it was also the life of the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. (Perhaps the Father said to Jesus, "Come forth," just as Jesus said to Lazarus.)

Recall that what the Father was to Jesus, Jesus Christ is to all of us. So where will the voice of Jesus lead you? To lay your life down. To take up your cross. To die to your self. But the life of Jesus will also raise you from the dead.

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. (2 Cor. 4:10–12)

Indeed, there is a danger in following the voice of your Lord. It very well may land you in trouble. Some of the greatest saints in history paid a high price for following the voice of Jesus.

It got Paul of Tarsus beheaded.

It got Peter crucified.

It got John Huss burned alive.

It got William Tyndale strangled.

It caused John Wesley to be slandered mercilessly.

Why?

Because each of these men followed the voice of his Lord and it caused him to challenge the status quo.

Yet for all who lay their lives down, there's always a resurrection.