



"But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers... I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me—"

(John 10:2-5,14)

# Listening *recognition*

The Spiritually minded person sees God all around, because everything bears His mark: the fingerprints of the Creator.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

(Romans 1:20)

We are free to disregard the signs of His influence, but we do so by our own choice—and at our own risk. God has spread Himself around so liberally that we have no excuse *not* to discover Him.

He is in the breeze that cools us in the midst of summer heat. He is in the soft cooing of the baby, happy and content within its mother's arms. He is in the rhythmic lapping of small waves on the shore of the mountain lake, and the burbling song of the stream traveling over and around water-smoothed boulders. He is found in the chatter and shared intimacies of old friends over a weathered picket fence. He is found in the crushing, incessant noise of the city as well as in the bucolic stillness of the country glen.

God is near us in every tragedy and joy, every sorrow and ecstasy. His life surrounds our own, holding us up, nurturing, coaxing, chastising and encouraging. He is there

when we are aware of Him, and He is there when we are not.

More than just a reassuring comfort, His presence actually describes God to us. He has left His fingerprints all about us not just so that we would know that He is there, but that we might come to understand *who* is there. It is God's nature, His personality, His very essence that is there for the possessing, and we will remain something less than what we could be, until we avail ourselves of that knowledge.

But while God is, indeed, all around us—there for the having—that is not to say that all means by which we listen to God are equal. There is a danger in listening for His voice on the wind before one can accurately

isolate His voice from the rest. Popular culture can paint glowing portraits of God that are grossly inaccurate, and voices have been assigned to the Lord which, in truth, have been manufactured in the bowels of hell.

For such men are false apostles,  
deceitful workers, disguising  
themselves as apostles of Christ. No  
wonder, for even Satan disguises  
himself as an angel of light.  
(2 Corinthians 11:13-14)

If Satan can dress himself in rags of righteousness to fool those unschooled in the ways of the true Light, then we must use caution when listening for God's voice in the instruments of this world. He is there, but so that we know that we are hearing only Him, we must first familiarize ourselves with the true sound of His voice.

## *in the beginning*

Today God's authoritative voice is found only in Scripture. Here is where the seeker comes to learn His personality, His ways, His motivations and methods. The Bible is where we hear His anger over sin and disobedience, and His deep compassionate love for those who call upon His name. The Bible is where we learn what happened to those who followed God, and what happened to those who turned Him away. God's character is painted with strokes both broad and finely detailed on the pages of Scripture, so here is where we must turn to learn of Him.

It may seem more romantic in this age of "feelings" to listen for God's voice on the whisperings of the wind, but without a keen familiarity with the true God of Scripture, it may not be His voice at all that is being heard in the many sounds of this world.

A few years back an acquaintance sat in our living room bemoaning his present unemployed status. He had had a good job, but because of circumstances outside his control, had been recently laid off. It was clear that this gentleman was troubled over the situation, but he was trying to remain positive and dependent on his faith. As he described to me his efforts to gain employment elsewhere he said confidently, "You know what the Bible says: 'The Lord helps those who help themselves.'"

Perhaps it was wrong of me, but, considering his downtrodden condition, I didn't say anything at the time. Actually the Bible

doesn't say anything like that at all. But this man had heard it said so many times in popular culture—perhaps even from the pulpit—that he believed it was there. Because he was not personally familiar with Scripture, he didn't know that the true God of the Bible would never say anything like that.

We must begin with what we know, and what we know of God is in His written word. This is where we must turn for the authoritative picture of who He really is.

One of the best ways to become acquainted with God is to read through the Bible from beginning to end. This is the best way to understand the flow of history, the passage of His mercy and justice through all the myriad people who have called upon His name; it is the best way to see the relationship the New Testament has with the Old—the relationship Christ has with the Law; and it is the best way to be inspired by the stories of those who have lived imperfectly under His condescending grace.

By daily listening to the historical, authoritative voice of God from the pages of His Book, we are then prepared to meet the day equipped with the knowledge of our Lord and His perspective on everything that will come our way.

## *listening*

O taste and see that the Lord is good;  
How blessed is the man who takes  
refuge in Him!

(Psalm 34:8)

Our heavenly Father is a creative, imaginative God. He has but one voice, yet that crystalline sound is manifested in myriad ways. No one can say that His voice cannot be heard, since He's given us so many different ways to hear Him.

Learning of God through His word—learning of His personality and ways from the one dependable authority—is like discovering a golden key that unlocks every treasure house there is.

Once we have found Him there, we suddenly find Him everywhere...

Lift your gaze into the glorious sky of a dying day, to the clouds painted in radiant pinks and purples and blazing reds, and you will hear His voice.

Linger in the sylvan quiet of the forest, and you will hear His voice in the gentle rustle of the leaves, the wind as it whistles through the pine needles, the chatter of the busy squirrel.

Listen to the chorus of the blue jay scolding the robin, the wren calling for a new mate, the chirping of the cardinal to his wife—listen to all the marvelous creatures He has made and you will hear God's voice.

Stand in awe of His might as the thunder rolls and quakes across as the land, as the lightning slices apart the night sky, and the heavens send forth their life-giving rain. Listen; it is His voice you hear.

Most of all, in the stillness and privacy of your prayer closet empty your mind and heart of every distraction, every consideration of self, and let your spirit rise above this temporal plane to the higher plane on which the Lord God dwells. Let all your senses absorb His communion, His gentle condescension to your spirit.

Remove all arrogance and pride, and in humility approach your God. In reverence bow before His throne, and once you have confessed, once you have declared His worthiness, once you have expressed your gratitude—quiet yourself. Speak no more. And listen.

*Listen.*

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*Lo, God is here! Let us adore,  
And own how dreadful is this place;  
Let all within us feel His power,  
And silent bow before His face;  
Who knows His power, His grace who prove,  
Serve Him with awe, with reverence love.*

*Being of beings, may our praise  
Thy courts with grateful fragrance fill;  
Still may we stand before Thy face,  
Still hear and do Thy sovereign will;  
To Thee may all our thoughts arise,  
Ceaseless, accepted sacrifice.*

(Gerhard Tersteegen)