

Immanuel

The stillness of the softly cottoned wood remains comfortable, inviting, familiar. Yet mingled with the gentle voice of my God are the grating, earth-sodden voices that should have no part in this communion.

The roar of Satan is most often heard in the clattering cacophony of modern "civilization." He gives full voice to anything that might interrupt our communion with God.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8

Believe it, Satan and his minions are hard at work, night and day, to drown out with noise the quiet voice of God. From the blare of the thunderous Dolby 5.1 Surround Sound home theatre to the ringing of the nauseatingly ubiquitous cell phone; from the whining traffic of the freeway to the pre-worship nattering in the pews; from the sounds of commerce to the roar of construction, we are bombarded by Satan's noise.

Oh, to be sure, none of these things are inherently satanic. But they are convenient, earth-bound implements often put to use by supernatural evil. And all can insulate us from God's voice.



To live in this world it is often necessary for modern man and woman to develop a carapace—a hardened callus that helps them survive the rigors of a fallen world. But that same protective shell can insulate us not just from a toxic society, but to the ministrations of our heavenly Father, as well. And He is always seeking ways to cut through our self-constructed shell.

The abiding Spirit enters us at the moment of conversion and immediately begins the softening process. He begins to work on whatever callus is there that might insulate us from communion with the Father. He systematically chips away at our anger, impatience, self-centeredness and greed, softening the heart as He steadily shapes and molds us into Christ's image. But because we still live in the world, because we must survive in a land that hates what we now represent, we keep replacing the callus the Spirit has removed.

It's a risky business, letting one's callus soften. The world today is better suited to those wearing a tough suit of armor, and it can be a brutal environment for someone more tuned to the lilt of God's voice on a morning breeze. But when He speaks in the gentle snowfall that blankets the trees, when the crickets and cicadas sing His praise in the heavy summer dusk, He wants us to listen.

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. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

1 Kings 19:11-13 NIV



Our God has many voices, and He has the right to use any of His choosing—including a shout. More often than not, however, He speaks in the quietness, the softly spoken language of the heart. God need not shout: real power speaks softly. So when we wish to hear what He has to say, it is best to come away from the din of this world, to a quiet place of hushed reverence.

More than the quiet nature of the locale, it is our own heart that must be softened and still for this holy communion. We begin the conversation by permitting the resident Spirit to take charge, to break through our built-up callus so that there might be a free-flowing exchange with the Father. Save for the sanctifying blood of Christ, we need nothing to stand between us, no go-between, nothing to insulate us from His wrath. For He has no

wrath for us, but only compassion, affection, and grace.

Thus prepared, we step out of the abusive noise of the world and into the stillness of God's presence. There not only are we comforted, forgiven, and renewed, we are energized and equipped to reenter the world for Him.



The believer enjoys a sweet privilege of knowing God intimately. He is with us. This is the privilege forfeited by our parents, Adam and Eve, in the garden; they chose a passing earthly delight over the eternal delight of communion with the Lord.

As believers, every day we are given the opportunity to make a similar (if not so cosmic) choice. We can embrace the things of this world, building up our callus, and thus risking thicker insulation from God Himself. Or we can dare to let the Spirit remove the hardened callus, to soften our heart to the things of God.

When in the morning stillness He moves, and the world falls silent in anticipation before Him, God seeks those who have dared to remove their protective shell, those who have opened themselves completely to His tender touch.

And this privilege of meeting with our God and Lord all began, not in a garden called Eden, but in a village called Bethlehem.