

## Growing In Your Ability To Hear God's Voice

Notes from Pastor Jim Laffoon's Leadership Development  
Training Workshop on March 8, 2014

For the purpose of this message, I have chosen to use an analogy of cellular communications. Unlike earthly cellular companies that promise us limitless coverage and perfect reception but rarely deliver, God has the ability to transmit the heavenly signal of his voice to us no matter where we are on the planet.

### **John 10:4-5**

***<sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."***

### **John 10:16**

***<sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.***

### **John 10:27**

***<sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.***

Furthermore, it is clear from these verses in John that part of being a "sheep" or Christian is hearing and recognizing His voice. If the heavenly signal is as strong as I am suggesting, why do we have so much trouble hearing his voice?

### **Power Problems**

No matter how good a cell phone is, it must be turned on. For humans, this process involves both regeneration and the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

### **Perception Problems**

**-Feelings and Sensations-** The most elementary way that God communicates with His people is through feelings and sensations. All of us have either heard or used expressions like, "I felt God's presence," or, "God was really here today." These expressions are all examples of this kind of communication. Sadly, many of us never leave this elementary form of experiencing God. We are satisfied with simply feeling His presence when we could be talking to Him. After all, if God has gone to the trouble of coming to visit us He probably has something to say. In fact, He's probably been saying a lot of things to you but you simply don't recognize them, because as a Spirit being God rarely communicates audibly. The fact that all of us can fail to recognize God's voice is described in Job 33.

*For God does speak— now one way, now another— though man may not perceive it.  
In a dream, in a vision of the night,  
when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds.  
Job 33:14-15*

In light of this verse, it is critical we learn how to both see and hear what God is saying to us.

**-Visions and Dreams-** A form of communication through which God communicates with His children through images and pictures. Although some visions can almost seem material, typically they are simply images and pictures on the screen of a person's imagination. Unlike imagining something, however, they are not conjured up by the person, they are initiated by God. As for dreams, they are simply divine visions that come while a person is sleeping. Whether it was Paul who saw the vision of Ananias coming to minister to him (Acts 9:12) or Joseph who was warned by God in a dream (Matt 2:13), Scripture is filled with accounts of God speaking through these forms of communication.

**-The Voice of the Lord-** Although God can speak audibly, typically He speaks to His children through the internal voice of their conscious mind. In I Kings 19:12, this form of divine communication is referred to as a "gentle whisper." This internal voice of the Holy Spirit or "His gentle whisper" is probably the very thing the apostle Paul is referring to in Romans 8:16 when he says, "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Other than the written Word of God, this is the primary way that God communicates with His people. In order to help you understand how these forms of communication work, let me use an example from how I taught my own children how to hear the Lord. As a parent, it did not take me long to realize that if I did not teach my children how to hear the Lord's voice, sooner or later they would stop talking to Him. After all, talking to a person or a being who never talks back doesn't feel any different than bouncing your voice off a wall. When it came to hearing the Lord's voice and seeing visions, I would ask my children what their favorite food was. Once they had identified it, I would have them close their eyes and either picture that food in their imagination or say the word in their mind. This enabled them to easily grasp both how to use their imagination and recognize the internal voice of their conscious mind. Once they had grasped the concept, I taught them to ask God what was on His mind every night before they feel asleep. While they were in that place of reflective calm that normally precedes falling asleep, they would simply focus on the Lord and wait for Him to speak. Through this process, all four of my children learned how to hear the voice of their beloved Savior and friend. It's no different for you. No matter how old you are, if you will come to God like a little child in simple faith, He will speak to you like a man speaks to his friend.

## **B. The Message**

### **Signal Strength**

Within the cellular world, signal strength can be affected by proximity to a cell tower, obstructions such as buildings or trees, destructive interference from other communication towers and the condition of the cell phone.

### **Proximity Issues**

Just as cellular reception is affected by proximity to cell towers, so our ability to hear God clearly is directly related to our proximity to God's person and God's people (the Church).

### **God's Person**

Hearing God is not just a skill; it is a relationship.

#### ***Numbers 12:6-8***

***He said, "Listen to my words:  
"When a prophet of the LORD is among you,  
I reveal myself to him in visions,  
I speak to him in dreams.  
<sup>7</sup> But this is not true of my servant Moses;  
he is faithful in all my house.  
<sup>8</sup> With him I speak face to face,  
clearly and not in riddles;  
he sees the form of the LORD.  
Why then were you not afraid  
to speak against my servant Moses?"***

Therefore, the more quality time we spend with God, the better we will hear him. The word "quality" here is critical because without discipline and focus, your time with God will be a waste. When I say discipline, I am not just describing the classical spiritual disciplines. I am talking about the discipline it takes to deal with all the distractions and attractions of our media-driven world. David uses the word "weaned" to describe the process of dealing with the distractions and attractions in his own life.

#### ***Psalms 131:1-2***

***"My heart is not proud, O LORD, my eyes are not haughty;  
I do not concern myself with great matters or things too wonderful for me.  
But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother,  
like a weaned child is my soul within me."***

Once we have dealt with our distractions, we are free to focus on God through His word, worship and waiting on Him.

## **God's People**

Our proximity to God's people is also vital. Without the discipleship, mentoring, fellowship, equipping and accountability provided through a healthy local church, we will not have the foundations necessary to develop an authentic, sustainable relationship with God.

### ***Ephesians 4:11-16***

***<sup>11</sup> It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.***

***<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.***

There is also the corporate dynamic of worship and prophecy. Through corporate worship and prophetic gatherings heavenly signal of God's voice is greatly increased.

### ***Psalms 22:3***

***3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.***

### ***1 Samuel 10:10-12***

***10 When they came to Gibeah, behold, a group of prophets met him, and the Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied among them. 11 And when all who knew him previously saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, "What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" 12 And a man of the place answered, "And who is their father?" Therefore it became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"***

### ***1 Samuel 19:20-24***

***20 Then Saul sent messengers to take David, and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as head over them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied. 21 When it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they also prophesied. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they also prophesied. 22 Then he himself went to Ramah and came to the great***

***well that is in Secu. And he asked, “Where are Samuel and David? ” And one said, “Behold, they are at Naioth in Ramah. ” 23 And he went there to Naioth in Ramah. And the Spirit of God came upon him also, and as he went he prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah. 24 And he too stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel and lay naked all that day and all that night. Thus it is said, “Is Saul also among the prophets? ”***

## **Condition of the Cell Phone**

Even as the internal condition and quality of a cell phone can determine call quality, so the condition of our souls is vital to the whole process of hearing God. In my own life, I have discovered that the following factors play a critical role in my ability to hear God:

**1. Natural Factors:** Am I stressed, fatigued, physically sick, exhausted, distracted, or overwhelmed with busyness? We cannot forget that our spiritual life is deeply impacted by how we are doing physically, emotionally and intellectually.

**2. Conscience Factors:** Have I injured my conscience through unconfessed sin or condemnation? At this point, I take inventory of possible sin and soul patterns in my life. If they are not the issue, I address what I am feeling as condemnation.

## **Destructive Interference**

Even as cellular communications can be affected by other electronic signals, so the enemy, as the “prince in power” of the air, does everything in his power to impair our ability to hear God’s voice.

### ***Ephesians 2:2***

***<sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.***

Unlike the sense of defilement created by sin, or the simple absence of God when He is playing Hide-and-Seek, demonic resistance normally comes in the form of a wave or a wall. As a wave, it is typically an overwhelming sense of accusation, defilement, fear, despair or weakness. As a wall, it feels like an impenetrable barrier.

When I face demonic resistance, I will begin to worship God in many forms, but especially in tongues. Tongues are critical because they have the ability to bypass

intellect and allow your spirit to express itself in a spiritual language. This enables you to more easily connect with God and the spiritual realm.

**1 Corinthians 13:1**

***<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels...***

**1 Corinthians 14:14**

***<sup>14</sup>For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.***

**2 Kings 3:15**

***<sup>15</sup>But now bring me a harpist.”***

***While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came upon Elisha***

**Dead Zones**

Dead zones are areas where cellular service is unavailable because of architectural and geographical barriers, like tall buildings, hilly terrain or thick foliage. Although technically there are no spiritual “dead zones,” there are definitely times and places in the life of every Christian where it seems almost impossible to hear God’s voice.

**Geographical Dead Zones**

In my experience, there are definitely certain places on the planet where it is harder to hear God’s voice. Typically, this reality is based on the level of demonic strongholds present and/or our operational experience in that place.

**Spiritual Dead Zones**

Spiritual dead zones are those seasons in our lives when it is simply harder to hear God’s voice because of where we are on the road to maturity and transformation. Whether it is a series of spiritual mountains that need to be moved or crossed or an area of brokenness in your soul, it is simply more work to hear God during these periods of time. There is, however, another form of “spiritual dead zone” that some Christian mystics have termed “the dark night of the soul.”

“The Dark Night of the Soul” is a poem written by St. John of the Cross, a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish poet and Roman Catholic Mystic. In this poem he describes the painful pathway to spiritual intimacy with Christ. The poem is divided into two books which discuss the two phases of the soul’s dark night: the purification of the soul and the purification of the spirit. “The Dark Night of the Soul” as a concept has re-emerged in popular thought through the book “Mother Theresa: Come Be My Light” which was published in 2007. This book consists of 66 years of previously unpublished correspondence between Mother Theresa and her confessors. In these letters Mother Theresa agonizes over the decades of terrifying dryness, darkness, and loneliness she experienced in her relationship with God.

*“Matter of confession*

*In the darkness...*

*Lord, my God, who am I that You should forsake me? The child of your love-and now become as the most hated one-the one you have thrown away as unwanted-unloved. I call, I cling, I want-and there is no One to answer- no One on Whom I can cling-no, No One. -Alone. The darkness is so dark-and I am alone. -Unwanted, forsaken. -The loneliness of the heart that wants love is unbearable. -Where is my faith? -Even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness and darkness.-My God-how painful is this unknown pain. It pains without ceasing. -I have no faith. - I dare not utter the words and thoughts that crowd in my heart- and make me suffer untold agony. So many unanswered questions live within me- I am afraid to uncover them- because of the blasphemy. -If there be God, please forgive me. -Trust that all will end in Heaven with Jesus. -When I try to raise my thoughts to Heaven- there is such convicting emptiness that those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul. -Love- the word- it brings nothing. - I am told God loves me- and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul. Before the work started- there was so much union-love—faith-trust-prayer-sacrifice. - Did I make the mistake in surrendering blindly to the call of the Sacred Heart? The work is not a doubt- because I am convinced that it is His not mine. -I don't feel- not even a single simple thought or temptation enters my heart to claim anything in the work."*

Although I do not agree with much of the validity of St. John's comment, it is clear in scripture that serious Christians can experience periods of darkness and struggle.

***Deuteronomy 5:22***

***These are the commandments the LORD proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.***

***Psalms 88:18***

***You have taken my companions and loved ones from me;  
the darkness is my closest friend.***

***Lamentations 3:1-8***

***I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long. He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains. Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer.***

Although I have gone through extended periods of spiritual darkness for the purpose of testing my faith and building my character, I question whether the decades of darkness

experienced by some Christian mystics were diabolical or divine. For example, the decades of darkness experienced by Mother Theresa began the moment she left her cloister to tend the poor and sick of Calcutta.

*“Your Grace,*

*... Please pray specially for me that I may not spoil His work and that Our Lord may show Himself-for there is such terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead. It has been like this more or less from the time I started “the work. “ Ask Our Lord to give me courage.”*

Could it be that much of Mother Theresa’s suffering was diabolical in its origins “spiritual warfare”? After reading her letters I believe it was. It is important for us to remember that Jesus, not St. John or Mother Theresa, is the person we are called to emulate. Although he had his own dark nights (the wilderness, Gethsemane, and the Cross) the life of Christ was characterized by joyful intimacy with His Father. It should be no different for you and I today. Times of deep darkness should be the exception, not the norm in our lives. Even when they come, unless we are in sin or facing some form of diabolical resistance, I do not believe it is ever God’s will for us to be without His presence for an extended period of time. Be that as it may, there are a few critical principles involved in surviving these dark periods of time.

First, your trust in the written Word of God is paramount. If you live by your feelings, whether or they are emotional or spiritual in nature, you will end up deeply confused and/or tormented.

***Isaiah 50:10-11***

***Who among you fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant? Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. But now, all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment.***

Second, your commitment to maintain transparent relationships is also essential. If you choose to disregard the few, God-given friendships and relationships that keep you self-aware and encouraged, the pain you experience during this time will be compounded. Even Jesus, when he entered His dark night of the soul at Gethsemane, asked his closest friends to accompany Him.

***Matthew 26:36-38***

***Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”***



The proper balance between how much time we spend alone with God versus time spent with our friends is especially hard to achieve during these dark periods. In my own experience, when people hit crisis they tend to spend all of their time with one at the expense of the other. Jesus, however, was able to beautifully achieve this critical balance.

**Luke 22:41**

***“He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed”***

The phrase “a stone’s throw” captures the balance I am describing. Jesus was close enough to His disciples to stay in contact with them, yet far enough away to maintain His intimacy with God.

No matter which of these problems you are facing, these three principles will help you grow in your ability to hear God’s voice:

### **Worship**

Worship is absolutely essential to hearing the voice of God. This is the case because it creates an atmosphere for the manifestation of God’s presence as well as sensitizing us to the reality of the spiritual world. Although all forms of worship are vital, I want to take a moment to discuss the place of tongues in worship and waiting on the Lord.

Four of the reasons that tongues are important are as follows:

Tongues has the ability to bypass the confusion of our soul

**1 Corinthians 14:15**

***So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.***

Tongues allows us to clearly articulate the pain and wounds of our hearts, even when we do not understand them.

**Romans 8:26**

***In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.***

Tongues brings connection with God

**1 Corinthians 14:2**

***For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.***

Tongues builds our faith

***Jude 1:20***

***But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.***

The building aspect of praying in tongues cannot be underestimated. I have discovered that it is essential in building up the spiritual stamina necessary to move in the Spirit's gifts for extended periods of time.

## **Wait**

Whether it is seconds or hours, waiting on God is absolutely essential to hearing His voice.

***Isaiah 40:30-31***

***Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD. Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.***

***Psalms. 40:1***

***I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.***

***Psalms 130:5-6***

***<sup>5</sup> I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. <sup>6</sup> My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.***

In my own life, I have discovered that over the years, my ability to hear God more quickly has increased. This increased ability, however, can also negatively impact my relationship with God because once I hear His voice I typically quit and go about my business. Unfortunately, when my relationship with God is reduced to this form of utilitarianism, I miss out on the other aspects and benefits of spending time in His presence. For example, it is clear in Scripture that the presence of God has a positive impact on our emotional state.

***Psalm 16:11***

***“You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”***

Whether it is this promise or others like it, only extended time in the presence of God will bring their fulfillment. Without this, our souls will begin to wither and dry up.

***John 15:6a***

***“If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers”***

Fortunately, when we refuse to spend extended periods of time in His presence, God will invite us to play his favorite game: “Hide-and-seek.” When we are prideful, lazy or simply cavalier, God will resist us by hiding Himself. The prophet Isaiah agonized over this phenomenon.

***Isaiah 45:15***

***Truly you are a God who hides himself,  
O God and Savior of Israel.***

I have also found that God is not typically hard to find. Once I have humbled myself, I usually find Him very quickly.

## **War**

When the enemy is interfering with your ability to hear God’s voice, worship and waiting on the Lord are not enough. You must make a counter-attack on the enemy. Although there are a number of effective strategies to use against the enemy, let me comment on one of them: angelic warfare.

Some of the best examples of angelic warfare can be seen in the life of Jesus.

***Matthew 4:11***

***Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.***

***Luke 22:43***

***An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.***

When we consider the promises of Psalms 91:11-12 it is clear that angels play a vital role in our lives as well.

***Psalms 91:11-12***

***<sup>11</sup> For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;  
<sup>12</sup> they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.***

Like Jesus, I have learned to ask the Father to send angelic help when I am in times of darkness, torment and battle.

**Matthew 26:53**

***Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?***