

## Session 2

# Intimacy with God: The Foundation for Hearing His Voice

### This session covers:

- The truth that God often speaks in a still small voice
- How God's servants heard His voice
- Why intimacy with God is so important to hearing His voice
- Five keys to developing an intimate relationship with the Lord

### This session corresponds to:

- *Session 2 of Learning to Hear God's Voice CDs*

## The Whisper of God's Voice

### 1. God usually speaks in a quiet, soft voice—much like a whisper.

- Most of us desire to hear the voice of God in powerful and dramatic ways. And sometimes God does speak in a spectacular fashion.
- However, God usually speaks in a quiet, soft voice—much like a whisper. Notice how Elijah heard the voice of God:

And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces 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; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the

fire; and after the fire *a still small voice* (1 Kings 19:11-12, NKJV).

**2. Our ability to hear God's voice depends upon how close we are to Him.**

- If we are distant from God, preoccupied with other things, it is very easy to be deaf to His whispers.
- Sometimes there are obstacles that block our ability to hear. In such cases, even though God may be speaking to us, we often can't hear His voice.
- It is much like two friends trying to carry on an important conversation. If they are far apart, they must shout to be heard. If the distance is far enough, it is difficult to hear even the shout.
- On the other hand, if they are close to each other, even a whisper is clearly heard.
- We have been given many promises offering us a lifestyle of intimacy with God. As we act on these promises and draw near to God, we position ourselves to hear His voice—whether it comes as a shout or as a whisper.
- We are told in the Scriptures that the veil of separation has been torn asunder through the work of Jesus on the cross. Because of this, we can come boldly before His throne, have fellowship with God and be a friend of God in Christ.
- Because we are promised intimacy with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, we can live so close to God that we even hear His still, small voice.

**3. Throughout Scripture, we see that God's servants performed amazing exploits only because they obeyed His voice.**

- The only way that they could obey God's voice was to hear His voice.
- The only reason they heard God's voice was because they were close to Him. This powerful principle is summarized below:

To accomplish much in God, we must obey His voice regularly.  
To obey His voice regularly, we must hear His voice repeatedly.  
To hear His voice repeatedly, we must have an ongoing lifestyle of intimacy with Jesus.

- We see this principle lived out in God's servants throughout the Scriptures.

## **Six Biblical Examples of Those Who Heard God's Voice**

### **1. Jesus**

- Throughout the Gospel of John, we see that Jesus only did what He heard or saw His Heavenly Father doing. For example, note the follow-

ing verses:

Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than these, so that you will marvel” (John 5:19-20).

I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I *hear*, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me (John 5:30).

And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed (Mark 1:35).

- Jesus, the sinless and perfect Son of God, had an intimate relationship with the Father. He spent many hours in the presence of His Father in prayer.
- Out of this relationship, He heard the voice of the Father for ministry and for direction. As He heard God speak, Jesus obeyed and performed powerful miracles.

## 2. Mary of Bethany

- In Luke 10:38-42, we read the story of Mary and Martha. Both of these women loved Jesus and welcomed Him into their lives. However, we see one major difference in the way they related to Him.
- Martha was busy—she was distracted from Jesus by doing things for Jesus.
- On the other hand, Mary took time to sit at the feet of Jesus to listen intently to His words.
- Because both of these women had different levels of spiritual intimacy, they also operated in different levels of spiritual power. We see evidence of this in John 11 when Lazarus died.
- Both Martha and Mary pleaded with Jesus to raise him from the dead. Jesus responded to Martha by giving her a great teaching about the resurrection. However, Jesus answered Mary’s request by giving her a resurrection!
- It was Mary’s plea that broke the heart of the Lord Jesus and motivated Him to raise Lazarus from the dead. The cry of one who had a lifestyle of intimacy with Him inspired the Lord to action.

## 3. John the Baptist

- As recorded in Matthew 11:11, Jesus said that John the Baptist was the greatest of all people born up until that time. This was because of his role in preparing the way of the Lord.

- John's ability to prepare the way for the Lord's first coming was empowered by a lifestyle of intimacy. Read John's own testimony:

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the *friend* of the bridegroom, who stands and *hears* him, *rejoices* greatly because of the *bridegroom's voice*. So this *joy* of mine has been made full (John 3:29).

- Note the emphasized words in this verse. These words express John's lifestyle of intimacy with Jesus. John regularly heard His voice. This was John's greatest joy. He even called himself a friend of the Bridegroom.
- Because John was so intimate with the Lord, his ministry was powerful and effective in making ready a people prepared for the Lord. John's ministry was successful because he heard Jesus' voice regularly.

#### 4. King David

- We all know of the powerful ways that King David was used in the nation of Israel. He was a king after God's heart. He brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Zion. He established continuous worship before the presence of the Lord. He wrote many of the Psalms.
- Among his many outstanding characteristics, there were two that defined his life and positioned him to be used greatly of the Lord. First, he inquired of the Lord regularly and he obeyed what God said:

Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Please bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this band? Shall I overtake them?" And He said to him, "Pursue, for you will surely overtake them, and you will surely rescue all" (1 Sam. 30:7-8).

- Second, David had an intimate relationship with God. David said:

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His temple (Ps. 27:4).

- David longed to be in the courts of the Lord. He hungered for the presence of God. Even though David made major mistakes, he had an intimate relationship with the Lord. Out of this relationship, he heard God's voice, and he obeyed.

#### 5. John the Apostle

- John the Apostle had an extremely close relationship with Jesus. We see this from the intimate snapshots that are scattered throughout John's Gospel.

- For example, in John 13:25, John is seen leaning against the heart of Jesus. In John 19:26, John refers to himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved.
- Out of this position of deep intimacy with the Lord, John received profound and powerful revelation. It was years later, when John was exiled for preaching the gospel, that his intimate friend visited him in an extraordinary way.
- John saw Jesus Christ unveiled in a way that no other human being has ever seen Him. John saw Jesus in His glorified, resurrected body. John saw the God-man in all of His majesty.
- Because John was intimate with the Lord, he was chosen to write one of the greatest books in history: The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

## 6. New Testament Church

- Intimacy with the Lord, hearing His voice, and being used to advance the kingdom of God with power also characterized the early church. Note the following passage:

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were *ministering to the Lord* [intimacy] and fasting, *the Holy Spirit said*, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away (Acts 13:1-3, emphasis mine).

- The first century church had an intimate relationship with the Lord. They ministered to Him regularly through worship, prayer, and fasting.
- Out of this lifestyle, they positioned themselves to recognize God's voice. When God spoke to them, they obeyed and took the gospel throughout the earth.

**From these six examples, we see the following principle:**

**To accomplish much in God, we must obey His voice regularly. To obey His voice regularly, we must hear His voice repeatedly. To hear His voice repeatedly, we must have an ongoing lifestyle of intimacy with Jesus.**

## Developing Intimacy with God

### 1. Understanding the way that we are made helps us to develop intimacy with God.

- We are comprised of body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23). With our body, we contact the physical world through our five senses. With our soul, we think, feel, and act. With our spirit, we relate to the Spirit of God.
- When we are intimate with Jesus, our spirit-man rises above our soul and we become more sensitive to the voice of God.
- A strong, sensitive spirit is important in deciphering God's voice from the many voices that speak to us.
- For example, our senses speak to us through *cravings* for fulfillment, our mind speaks to us through *thoughts*, our will speaks to us through potential *choices* and our emotions speak to us through *feelings*.
- All of these areas pull us one way or another. It is very easy for us to believe that the cry of our senses or soul is the voice of God into our lives.
- However, the Word says that our spirit is the place where God speaks to us: "The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the innermost parts of his being" (Prov. 20:27).
- To discern properly the voice of God for our life and ministry, it is essential that we learn to distinguish the voices of the senses and soul from the voice of God in our spirit-man.

### 2. Strengthening our spirit-man is the key to developing intimacy with God.

- Paul showed us the importance of our spirit-man becoming sensitive to God's voice when he wrote:

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:14-16, NKJV).

- This passage tells us that we have the mind of Christ and that the things of God are spiritually discerned. How does intimacy with God fit into all of this?
- Intimacy with God feeds our spirit-man—nourishing our spirit and making us strong. As we pursue a lifestyle of seeking and abiding in the presence of God, our spirit-man arises.
- As our spirit-man arises, we begin to think more with the mind of Christ, and we discern the voice of God with greater clarity.
- A lifestyle of intimacy with God causes our spirit-man to be nourished and strengthened. In turn, this causes our spirit-man to arise above our soul and body.

- When our spirit-man arises, we become more sensitive to the things of the Spirit and thereby hear the voice of God more clearly.
- Since our spirit is the place where God speaks to us, a strong spirit helps us discern between the voice of God and the voices that come from our mind, will, emotions, and senses.

### **3. Developing intimacy with Jesus is a lifelong process.**

- Developing intimacy with Jesus begins at the point of our salvation when we are declared to be in right standing with God through the blood of Jesus.
- From here, we are invited to come freely and boldly before His throne of grace. As we continue to come before God's throne on a regular basis, we will develop a lifestyle of intimacy with Jesus.
- Developing intimacy with Jesus is a continuous process that will be refined and cultivated throughout our entire life and walk with God.

**Though intimacy with God is a lifelong process, there are some disciplines presented in the Bible that are necessary to cultivate this relationship. We will look at five of these now.**

## **Five Disciplines to Develop Intimacy with God**

### **1. Unconditional and ongoing surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ**

- The concept of unconditional surrender is spoken of throughout the Old and New Testaments.
- Jesus said that we cannot be His disciples unless we deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Many other passages speak of similar calls to surrender.
- Let me illustrate the importance of surrender in the development of intimacy in this way.

Think of a man and woman who are dating. In the initial stages of the dating relationship, they may have many friends with whom they are equally open. But, as the relationship progresses toward engagement, they begin to confide in each other in a much deeper way, sharing the deep secrets of their hearts. Their relationship begins to take on a much higher degree of closeness, far surpassing any other relationship. As they enter the marriage covenant, their level of intimacy progresses to an even deeper level, as they become one in body, soul, and spirit. Although the emotional aspects of love are a major reason why the two have become so close, commitment is what actually binds them together. As both parties to the

relationship become secure in the other's commitment to them, they begin to open up to the other in progressively deeper ways.

- We also see this concept expressed beautifully in the Book of Esther. Esther was selected as a candidate to be the bride of King Ahasuerus.
- Because of her commitment and surrender to the leading of the king's eunuchs, she said "yes" to every part of the preparation process. Ultimately, this attitude caused her to be selected as queen.
- Because of her lifestyle, she was given the privilege to come freely into the king's presence and request anything she needed.
- Just as Esther grew closer to the king, we grow more intimate with the Lord as we continually surrender to the will and purposes of God. As we obey His voice, we grow closer to Him.

## 2. Ongoing separation from the world's ways

- Throughout the Scriptures, Babylon is presented as a picture of what man is like apart from God. It often represents the independence and rebellion of man. It also symbolizes the ways of the world.
- In Revelation 18, Jesus tells His Church to come out of Babylon. At the time of His return, Jesus says that the voice of the Bride will not be heard in Babylon any longer. The Church as the Bride of Christ is a picture of how we relate to Jesus intimately.
- From this picture, we can draw this principle: To grow in intimacy with Jesus, we must develop a lifestyle of progressive separation from worldly ways.
- James speaks along the same lines when he writes, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).
- The Apostle John described worldly ways as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:16).
- Intimacy with the Lord grows as we separate from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.
- As we become those who are in the world but not of the world, our intimacy with God is enhanced.

## 3. Continuous separation unto God

- Separation is a two-fold process. It requires separation from worldly ways as we discussed in the previous section, but it also requires a separation unto God.
- We are to not just separate from evil in order to be good. Rather, we are to separate from evil in order to be consecrated unto God and His purposes.
- Separation unto God is another important key to developing an intimate relationship with the Lord. Exodus 30:30 reads, "You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that *they may minister as priests to Me.*"



- Many times in Scripture, before God allows His people to minister to Him, He first calls them to a life of consecration.
- The Hebrew word translated *consecrate* means to be set apart for, to sanctify, to prepare, to dedicate, to be hallowed, to be holy, to be sanctified, to be separate, to devote.
- As we dedicate ourselves to God and His purposes, a deeper level of consecration comes about in our lives. As we embrace deeper levels of consecration, our intimacy with God grows.

#### **4. Regular times of sitting at the feet of Jesus**

- After Martha complained to Jesus about Mary's inactivity, Jesus told her that *sitting at His feet and listening to His words* was the only thing necessary in life (Luke 10:42). He told her that this one thing would never be taken away from her.
- Taking time to sit at the feet of Jesus—with a heart that seeks to know and respond to His Word—is an extremely important discipline that helps facilitate a lifestyle of intimacy with Jesus.
- Waiting on the Lord for Him to speak, with an attentive heart toward His voice, is vital if we want to grow closer to Him. If we want to know Jesus' voice better, there is really no short cut. It takes consistent times of sitting at His feet—with the Bible in hand—reading, meditating, and listening for His voice.
- To be intimate with the Lord, we must regularly break away from our busy schedules in order to wait on Him.
- Out of the practice of sitting at the feet of Jesus—reading, studying, meditating, and listening for His voice with a heart to obey—intimacy with God is developed.

#### **5. Routinely ministering to the Lord**

- Ministering to the Lord is such a broad concept that it encompasses the four previous keys.
- Studying this truth throughout the Scriptures, we find that ministry to the Lord involves consecration—both separation from sin and dedication to God—along with the disciplines of worship, prayer, fasting, meditating on the Word and waiting on the Lord.
- In many cases, ministering to the Lord is set in the context of the Tabernacle of Moses or the Temple. In either case, ministry to the Lord is associated with progressing from the outer court, where ministry is focused on the people, to the inner court, where ministry is focused on the Lord.
- The Tabernacle of Moses paints a beautiful picture of how we move toward the Holy of Holies and minister to the Lord. Each piece of furniture in the Tabernacle can symbolize an aspect of our relationship with God.
- The golden lampstand represents the Holy Spirit giving us light and revelation. The table of showbread is symbolic of the Word of God. The altar of incense typifies prayer and intercession. And the Ark of the Covenant is the place of God's glory and majesty.

- To minister to the Lord effectively, we need the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, worship and prayer. As we practice these disciplines, we will grow closer to the Lord and abide in the presence of His glory.
- We also see continuous ministry to the Lord around God's throne. As we glimpse the heavenly throne room pictured in Revelation 4-5, those that are closest to the Lord are continuously ministering to Him through praise, worship, and thanksgiving.
- Along the same lines, Acts 13 reveals how the early church ministered to the Lord and out of this, the Holy Spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul for ministry.
- Again, we note the relationship of intimacy to hearing God's voice. Through routine times of private and public ministry to the Lord, we develop intimacy with God that positions us to hear His voice.

**As we establish these five disciplines in our lives, we will see results quickly. We will hear the voice of God clearly for devotional purposes, personal guidance, and ministry effectiveness.**

## Review Questions

### True or False

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. God often speaks to us loudly in order to get our attention.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Our ability to hear God's voice depends upon how close we are to Him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Our soul is the primary place that God speaks to us.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Intimacy with God is a lifelong process.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Jesus only did what He heard His Father say.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The furniture in the Tabernacle of David is a picture of how we move towards the holy of holies.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Martha was known for sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to His voice.

### Fill in the Blank

8. Strengthening our \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ is the key to developing intimacy with God.
9. If we are \_\_\_\_\_ from God, preoccupied with other things, it is very easy to be deaf to His \_\_\_\_\_.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ on the Lord for Him to speak, with an attentive heart toward His \_\_\_\_\_, is vital if we want to grow closer to Him.
11. A \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ spirit is important in deciphering God's voice from the many voices that speak to us.
12. Jesus said that we cannot be His disciples unless we \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves, take up our \_\_\_\_\_ daily, and \_\_\_\_\_ Him.
13. We are to separate from evil in order to be \_\_\_\_\_ unto God and His \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Throughout Scripture, we see that God's servants performed amazing exploits only because they \_\_\_\_\_ His \_\_\_\_\_.

Match the statement on the left with the correct discipline on the right (You can use an answer more than once).

- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. To be intimate with the Lord, we must regularly break away from our busy schedules in order to wait on Him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. We are to separate from evil in order to be consecrated unto God and His purposes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Jesus said that we cannot be His disciples unless we deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. In Revelation 18, Jesus tells His Church to come out of Babylon.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. The Tabernacle of Moses paints a beautiful picture of how we move toward the Holy of Holies. Each piece of furniture in the Tabernacle can symbolize an aspect of our relationship with God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Many times in Scripture, before God allows His people to minister to Him, He first calls them to a life of consecration.

Possible Matches for 15-20

- a. Unconditional and ongoing surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ
- b. Ongoing separation from the world's ways
- c. Continuous separation unto God
- d. Regular times of sitting at the feet of Jesus
- e. Routinely ministering to the Lord