



# Hearing God

## Living in Conversation

We began our series on [Hearing God](#) with a positional emphasis, a north star calibration if you will, which stated our intention for developing the confidence and competencies in speaking with and listening to God was to **cultivate a conversational companionship with our heavenly Father**. We desire, even need, God's guidance for decisions, opportunities, and necessities as we navigate daily existence. Yet, we desire, need even more, God's intimacy. **More than a word from God, we need a life in-step with God.**

In a daily communicative journey, which we call living, we strive for "a life of free-hearted collaboration with Jesus and his friends in the kingdom of the heavens."<sup>1</sup> Our goal is to [become like Jesus](#) in the kingdom of God, to be people whose words and actions are not dictated movements but rather the free initiative of loving daughters and sons who understand their Father's character and desires. And, who, through the Spirit of Jesus, are active participants in the transformative work of our Father continuing to unfold today.

*Hearing God* is a part of a more abundant life, a life greater than trying to use God to get what we want or solve all our problems. It is the life of the kingdom—the rule and reign of God now and forever. A joyous and willing submission to the reality of who God is and how God has ordered existence and salvation, the very way of daily and eternal life. "Our concern for discerning God's voice must be overwhelmed by and lost in our worship and adoration of him and in our delight with his creation and his provisions for our whole life."<sup>2</sup> It is this daily, experienced reality of God's person and order in and through our lives, we call the *Kingdom of God*.

Today, at this moment in our history, amid a stifling pandemic, repeated videoed injustices, festering unattended and perpetuating civil wounds, economic imprisonments, a looming educational depression, and a political climate that fosters division through selfish vicious and venomous rhetoric; in this, our cultural moment we need—with unrestrained desperation—God's kingdom to come, God's will to be done on earth as it in heaven. We need to strive after a different world, a better world. Not the ideal of a different world, but **a world that is actually different because God is saving, redeeming, bringing justice, overcoming evil, and speaking to his children who hear him and respond in-step with his voice.**

So, we wrap up our focus on *Hearing God* with the reminder that it is the abundant life of the kingdom to which the Good Shepherd's voice leads and guides us. A lifestyle in which we [do not reduce God](#) to a genie or spiritual ATM or a divine mystery to decipher or even a cosmic master whose delight is only in proper and productive service. Instead, we cultivate a lifestyle in which we affirm that God has spoken and continues to speak to you and me [from love to love](#)—from his love for us so that we might mature in our loving relationship with him, one another, and our neighbors.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *Hearing God*, 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

As we have argued throughout this series, the testimony of Scripture and our faith history is that,

“While God’s communications come through [experiences of many kinds](#), their detailed content or meaning always takes the form of the inner voice, [[God’s distinguishable voice in union with our spirit](#)]. Without [the still, small voice, as we have called it,] the [means by which we try to decipher God’s will, those potentially shaping or enlightening] events [and] (circumstances), [spiritual intuitions, and seemingly significant-in-the-moment] biblical passages remain puzzling, mystifying and open to conjecture.

God may, of course, direct us mechanically, *without* speaking to us and guiding us through our own understandings and choices. He *can* guide us just as we guide our car, without speaking. But whenever he guides us in our conscious cooperation with him as friends and collaborators, he does so by speaking to us, by giving to us thoughts and perceptions that bear within themselves the marks of their divine origination [through their quality (weight), spirit, and content [as we discussed last week](#), and as [Prov. 20:27](#) and [1 Cor. 2:9-16](#) describe].

[[God’s](#)] [speaking most commonly occurs](#) in conjunction with study and reflection on the Bible, the written Word of God, [his union with the human voice, and especially in conjunction with the actions, spirit, and teachings of Jesus written in union with human authors]. Less commonly, though still often, it comes in conjunction with a [living] human being who is speaking to us. But [of course, and as Scripture and history testify], it may come in any of the [other ways](#) God chooses.

Our ability to recognize God’s voice in our souls and to distinguish it with practical certainty from other competing voices [of the stranger, the thief, the robber, or even our subconsciousness] is acquired by effort and experimentation...It does not come automatically [but must be [learned with others](#) who are following the voice of the Good Shepherd with us].

Those [of us] who want to live under God’s guidance [live well in his kingdom]...who [are] convinced that he will speak and...*is* speaking to [us] can learn through experience the particular quality, spirit and content of God’s voice. [We can]...distinguish and understand the voice of God; [though our] discernment will not be infallible...[as we said in the very beginning of this series, ‘Hearing God does not make us right or righteous,'] but [nevertheless, we can] discern his voice clearly and with as much accuracy as [we] discern the voice of any other person with whom [we] are on *intimate terms*.”<sup>3</sup>

Through time together listening and talking about our hearing, we can experience clearly if not infallibly, communication from our heavenly Father. Assuming, of course, that we maintain [a proper perspective](#) of why and how God communicates, and [an honest assessment](#) of why we are seeking his communication and what we intend to do with it. All of which we have discussed [previously](#).

So the final question we must answer as we conclude is, ***how then do we go about living in a conversational companionship with God?*** What do we do to stay engaged and deepening the conversation?

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 255-256.

Dallas Willard<sup>4</sup> provides, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, what he calls ‘a formula for living with God’s voice.’ If you have read Willard at all, you know how opposed he is to formulas, gimmicks, incantations, and the like that he believes “the church” has implored over the centuries—and especially in our modern market—to get God to speak to us. And, as we said last week, there is no three-step process or mystical coin to insert to get a word from God. Any person or process that tries to tell you otherwise is one of those entering the sheepfold some other way than through the front gate.

However, **there is a way of living that adds up to a life surrendered and brought to maturity in God’s kingdom through hearing God speak to us.** And, it will be this “formula” or “rule” as others might call it, by which we conclude our series today. As we allow the components or commitments of the rule or formula to shape our attitudes and habits over time, we find that hearing God becomes second nature, or, if you prefer, *a new nature*.

Now, the first two components of our *rule of conversational living* with God are what Willard describes as ‘foundational, since they provide the basis for hearing God’s individual word to us but do not exclusively and specifically concern [his particular words to us] as the others do.’ For the other commitments to be effective and fruitful, they must be rooted in the practice of the first two ‘foundational’ commitments.

#### **FOUNDATIONAL COMMITMENT #1 | DO WHAT WE KNOW TO BE TRUE**

‘We intend, plan and make provision to do what we know to be morally right and what we know to be explicitly commanded by God—so far as it lies within our understanding and conscious will.’ We have been gifted the Holy Spirit ([Jn. 14-16](#)) by which we are “born again” ([Jn. 3:3-8](#)) into a new life. And so, we are committed to finding out as much as we can about how to live this new and abundant life as “children of light” ([1 Thess. 5:5](#)) through the written Word of God and history of our faith. It is our responsibility to knock, seek, and ask ([Matt. 7:7-11](#)), to take the initiative in growing in the knowledge of God and what life in God’s kingdom entails; *and* acting upon that knowledge. There is so much that God has made know to us through Scripture and history about what is right and good, that we should never feel as if we are without a clue on how to live. We can choose not to know or disregard what we do know, but, as the apostle Paul said, “the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:15-16)

#### **FOUNDATIONAL COMMITMENT #2 | BE OBEDIENT WHENEVER AND WHEREVER LED**

‘At the impulse of the Spirit of God, we do service to the good wherever it may appear.’ Having life through the Spirit, we are led by the Spirit and guided by the Spirit, as Paul explains in [Galatians 5](#). We commit to being obedient to the Spirit’s leading to “doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God” ([Michah 6:8](#)). Given Spiritual eyes and ears ([1 Cor. 2:9-16](#)), we not only take the initiative to grow in the knowledge of kingdom living but also to put that knowledge to good use for the sake of others. Hearing God’s voice does not diminish our responsibility to “sow seeds to the Spirit” ([Gal. 6](#)),

---

<sup>4</sup> The following quotation can be found in *Hearing God*, 276-280.

nor does it preclude the significance of our conscious choice to be responsive to the responsibilities and relationships right in front of us—wherever “in front of us” might be. If we are going to live in a conversational relationship with God, we must be willing to follow when and what he speaks.

Having established and combined the base elements of the formula, the elements of being a faithful person who is ‘moving from faith to more faith’ through knowledge and obedience—we are now able to add to the mix the particular components related to hearing God individual or specific words to us.

### **COMMITMENT #3 | DAILY MEDITATE ON GOD’S WRITTEN WORD (Ps. 1:1-3)**

‘We meditate constantly on God’s principles for life as set forth in the Scriptures, always striving to penetrate more deeply into their meaning and into their application for our lives.’ This means we do not only study the Bible, but we meditate upon it.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones reminds us of the fact that,

“It is possible for us to read the Bible in such a mechanical manner that we derive no benefit from doing so...It is a good thing to read the Bible daily, but It can be quite profitless if we merely do so for the sake of being able to say we read the Bible daily...

Bible study [can become a hobby], and that is the ting of which I am afraid. You can be a Bible student in the mechanical sense. As people spend their time in analyzing Shakespeare, so some people spend their time in analyzing the Scriptures. An analysis of Scripture is all right as long as it is in a very subordinate position, and as long as we are careful it does not so grip us, that we become interested only in an objective, intellectual sense. [The Bible] is a unique Word, and it must not be approached just as any other book is approached. I do increasingly understand those Fathers [and Mothers] and saints of the Church in the past who used to say that we should never read the Bible except on our knees. We need this constant reminder as we approach the Word of God, that it is indeed and in truth the Word of God speaking directly to us.”<sup>5</sup>

We must contemplate both its meaning and implications in our daily living. We can do this best through the contemplative listening exercises of [Lectio Divina](#). We also do this through [common worship](#) in the Word. That is, through the teaching and preaching of others who have started the contemplation process for us, with us in mind. Through sitting under the spoken and sung and shared in speech word with those we share life. We have discussed both of these in other places, so I’ll link some resources for you in the sermon notes.

---

<sup>5</sup> Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 6, 16.

#### **COMMITMENT #4 | TEND TO OUR OWN MIND & SOUL (Lk. 15:17)**

‘We pay close attention to what is happening in our life for God’s communications in our mind and in our heart...purposefully, humbly and intelligently cultivat[ing] the ability to listen and see what is happening in our own souls and to recognize therein the movements of God.’ We “come to ourselves,” as the prodigal is said to have done ([Lk. 15:17](#)), examing our soul and situation and determining that what we need most is a restored and right relationship with the Father. In simpler terms, we [pray the Examen](#), journaling as we do so, and regularly talk through this with our [DNA group](#), a trusted, godly, mature friend/mentor, or spiritual director/pastor.

#### **COMMITMENT #5 | PRAY HONESTLY & ALWAYS (1 Thess. 5:17 & Heb. 4:14-16)**

‘We pray and speak to God constantly and specifically about all matters that concern us.’ We do this by learning to [pray the psalms daily](#), letting them springboard us into a candidness before our heavenly Father and great high priest who can identify with our most profound struggles ([Heb. 4:14-16](#)). We willingly bringing to God our entire self—emotional, intellectual, physical, sexual, economic, communal, relational, etc.—giving voice to everything we are in an address to God. Nothing can be off-limits in our conversations, from the most mundane to the most hidden.

#### **COMMITMENT #6 | TREASURE & APPLY HIS WORDS TO US (Ps. 119:10-11)**

‘We listen carefully and deliberately for God, paying close attention to what we hear [wherever and in whatever way we hear it]...we meditate on it until we have thoroughly assimilated it.’ We expect God to speak, and when he does, we treasure his words and let them breathe life into our souls and power and purpose into our behaviors. We hide his Word and words in our hearts that we may not veer off path ([Ps. 119:10-11](#)).

Before we discuss commitment #7, let m say something about how we go about daily life with the assumptions and practices of the first six commitments. Speaking about discovering the will of God on his national radio show in the ‘80s, pastor James Dobson gave this very practical advice,

“I get down on my knees and say, ‘Lord, I need to know what you want me to do, and I am listening. Please speak to me through my friends, books, magazines I pick up and read, and through circumstances.’”<sup>6</sup>

**He then goes about his day, expecting God to speak as God sees fit.** When God does, because he is listening—setting aside time to talk with God and meditate on his word—and expecting something—both

---

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Willard, 260.

believing God speaks and intending to be obedient to whatever God reveals—he recognizes God’s voice; however it comes. He is both paying attention and ready to receive—walking with God—and is thus able to assimilate into life the words of God for him. ‘If we maintain this general habit,’ this “conversational rule” encourages Willard, ‘then, when we are aware of a need for a particular word from God, we will be able to listen for it with greater patience, confidence, and acuteness [perceptiveness].’ We are ready to hear and respond—to be a true co-labor and friend.

Now for the final commitment in Willard’s ‘formula for living with God’s voice,’

### **COMMITMENT #7 | NOT BEING PARALYZED BY SILENCE**

‘In those cases where [God does not speak](#) to you on the matter concerned, take the following steps:

1. Ask God if some hindrance is within you, informing you in whatever way he chooses...But do not endlessly pursue this.
2. Take counsel from at least two people whose relationship with God you respect, preferably those who are *not* your buddies.
3. Correct any causes for why God’s word could not come.
4. Act on what seems best to you if you cannot find such a cause.

## CONCLUSION

'If we proceed in this way, [applying this rule for conversational living], **we will come to know God's voice as a familiar personal fact**, which we can both comfortably live with and effectively introduce to others. We will know what to do when God speaks, but will also know what to do [when he does not speak](#). We will know how to find and remove any hindrance [or [ear plug](#)] if there is one and how to move [confidently] but restfully onward, in loving peacefulness, when there is none. We will know that God is inviting us to move forward to greater maturity, [depth of love], relying on his faithfulness alone. We will know, in short, how to live in our world within a conversational relationship with our Father, who is always there [, and ever] for us.

At a certain point in [our], progression toward spiritual maturity, [living well in and for God's kingdom] [we] can be assured simply that 'the one who sent [us] is with [us]; he has not left [us] alone' ([Jn. 8:29](#)). **It should be the hope and plan of every [apprentice of Jesus] to come by gracious assistance [from the Spirit and fellow sheep] to this place of rest in God's companionship and service.** Then we will, as [the humble example] Brother Lawrence advises, 'not always scrupulously confine ourselves to certain rules, or particular forms of devotion, but act with a general confidence in God, with love and humility.' We will simply 'stand fast...in the freedom which Jesus has made us free' ([Gal. 5:1](#)). **The freedom is not an opportunity to indulge the flesh but the arena within which we 'serve one another in love'** (Gal. 5:13, NIV), precisely because 'the one who sent us is with us.' The branch [[remember](#),] abides [grows from and is intertwined with] the vine. The branch and the vine share a common life and together produce abundant fruit for God [our Father. Fruit that lasts forever in the kingdom of God] ([John 15:1-8](#)).'

Let's pray.

## COMMUNION

We desire to grow in our confidence and competence in Hearing God so that we might live our lives in “free-hearted collaboration with Jesus and his friends in the kingdom of the heavens.”<sup>7</sup> Our goal is to [become like Jesus](#) in the kingdom of God, to be people whose words and actions are not dictated movements but rather the free initiative of loving daughters and sons who understand their Father’s character and desires. A goal achievable only by the gracious and generous assistance of new life in the Spirit through the sacrificed life of the Son on the cross.

So, as we receive upon our lips the and tongues the favorable reminder of God’s love for us, let us honestly confess together our collective and individual shortcomings, and receive together the collective and individual grace of our Father...

Father, your Son died and was raised up in power.  
Now enable us to die to our sin in repentance so we may rise to  
new life in Him. We confess to you, together:

Father, though you should guide us by your Spirit, we inform ourselves;  
though you should rule us, we control ourselves;  
though you should fulfill us, we console ourselves.

We think your truth too high, your will too hard,  
your power too remote, your love too free,  
your voice too obscure. But they are not!

And without them, we are of all people most miserable,  
biting and devouring one another.

Now heal our confused minds with your Word,  
heal our divided wills with the law of Christ,  
heal our troubled consciences with your love,  
heal our anxious hearts with your presence,  
heal our broken systems, nation, and relationships  
with your Kingdom’s coming upon earth as it is in heaven,  
all for the sake of your Son,  
who loved us and gave himself for us,  
so that we might love and give ourselves for others.

Amen.

---

<sup>7</sup> Dallas Willard, *Hearing God*, 14.