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Introduction

This is the story of my search for the voice of God. For the first ten years of my Christian life, I lived in a box of rationalism I had built for myself. My life was governed by the rules and principles for successful Christian living that I discovered through my study of the Scriptures. My prayers were monologues, never managing to break through to “the other side of silence,” to a place of two-way dialogue with God.

I always believed that Christians should be able to hear God’s voice. I knew He wanted to guide us continually and that one of the ways He guides is by His “still, small voice.” Jesus clearly stated that “My sheep hear My voice.” Yet no matter how hard I tried, I never could hear that voice speaking to me. I read books and attended seminars. I studied the Word. I questioned those who were able to hear from the Lord. But my searching seemed to be in vain. It seemed to come so easily and normally to those who knew the voice of God within them. They were naturally intuitive and mystical and couldn’t understand why I was having so much trouble with such a simple thing. They didn’t know what to say to help me.

But the Lord had seen the desire of my heart to know His voice, a desire that could not be crushed even by repeated failures and disappointments. He gradually led me to the right resources to teach me the skills I needed: inner stillness; spontaneity; vision; journaling. When all the pieces were in

place, I realized that I had received much more than I expected. I was looking for a voice; I found a Person. I was looking for guidance; I found a Shepherd. I was looking for the will of God; I found a relationship with the Son of God.

Since I have been able to discern the voice of the Lord in my heart, I have moved into a life of sweet fellowship with Jesus. I no longer live under law, for now I am governed by love. Rules have given way to relationship. Daily I am in immediate contact with my Lord, and my whole life has been changed. My personality, my family and my ministry have all been altered by the wisdom and compassion of Jesus now available to me. My heart has been convinced of the love God has for me and I will never be the same.

The deep love God expressed for His children and His great desire to communicate with each one compelled me to write down the skills I had learned. I shared the burden of the Lord that every Christian would enjoy the blessed communion with Him that I had found. I began sharing what I knew, teaching others how to hear God's voice and break through in two-way dialogue with Him. Many have joyfully entered this new way of living.

The Church is beginning to hear God's voice and see God's vision. The time for mourning has passed. The moment of renaissance and restoration is upon us. The prophets calling for repentance have done their work. The Church is awakening to her sins, her responsibilities and her kingdom authority. The kingdom of this world shall indeed become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. He shall reign through us in every aspect of life on this earth.

It is my prayer that the Lord will anoint this book, using it to bring people like me into a new dimension of Christianity, a place of two-way dialogue with God. I pray that the love and acceptance you receive from the Lord may heal you of all fears

and inadequacies, and transform your life. I pray that God's vision may be birthed within you, that you may discover your place in the kingdom of God. I pray that you may find life, as you talk with God "face-to-face, as a man talks with his friend."

1

Struggling to Hear God's Voice

A Divine Appointment

“Mark! Get up!”

The commanding voice woke me from a sound sleep and I sat straight up in bed. Though I had never heard it before or since, I immediately knew that I had heard the audible voice of God!

“What? What?” I said in confusion.

“Wake up! I am going to teach you to hear My voice!”

“Great!” I said, as I lay back down. “Okay, go ahead.”

“GET UP! Go to your office. I am going to teach you to hear My voice tonight!”

Finally grasping the significance of the moment, I quickly obeyed. That night, as I knelt at the altar of our little country church, the Holy Spirit gave me the precious gift I had been seeking for so long and launched me into the calling that would become my passion for the rest of my life. He drew together all I had learned during a year of intensive study on prayer and hearing God's voice, and showed me how it all fit together into four simple keys that were revealed in Habakkuk 2:1,2.

How I Got Here

When I accepted the Lord at age fifteen, my immediate hunger was to learn God's Word or, as I liked to put it, to become a biblical man. This hunger was deep and insatiable. Three years later, with great eagerness I enrolled at Roberts Wesleyan College to study for a Bachelor of Arts degree in religion and philosophy.

I found college exciting because I was learning the Bible inside and out. My hunger to become a biblical man was slowly being satisfied. I read and studied the Bible through and through, outlined and made graphs of each book, and taught it weekly as a youth pastor. This was the days before the Bible-on-cassette was available, so Patti made our own recording of her reading through the New Testament that I listened to while I worked.

Practical, biblical, logical—those words have always appealed to me. Having grown up on a dairy farm in a conservative rural community, my approach to life had always been practical, down-to-earth and sensible. When I first accepted Jesus, I joined a very conservative Baptist church and felt an immediate call on my life to become a pastor. Until then I had always intended to be a farmer; I enjoyed the practical lifestyle of dairy farming, especially seeing something tangible accomplished at the end of a long day's hard labor.

It was no surprise, therefore, when I found a passionate desire within me to make the Bible real, practical, and down-to-earth in my life. As I studied and taught, I began to see that the voice of God, or the "word of the Lord" as the prophets called it, was very real, and a continuous theme in Scripture. I noticed that from Genesis to Revelation, men and women heard God's voice speaking to them, and a hunger grew within me to hear God's voice in my own heart. A strong desire to become a spiritual man and to understand the ways of the Spirit began to

burn as I recognized that I could only be a biblical man if I, too, could hear the voice of God.

So I began searching for God's voice within my heart. I waited expectantly for the inner audible voice of God to speak to me and say, "Hello, Mark. This is God." He would have a deep bass voice, of course. Maybe there would be lightning in the sky, the wind would blow, and the windows would shatter. I would then jump in instant obedience and do whatever He wanted me to do.

But nothing happened. I listened and listened, but I could not discern any "voice of God." All I heard were thoughts rummaging through my mind until I eventually wandered off in aimless daydreams or, even worse, fell asleep.

It was extremely frustrating! Prayer simply didn't work for me and I couldn't understand why not. I thought that maybe if I read more of the Word it would help. Then I'd be able to hear God's voice, I reasoned. So I devoured the Bible, reading whole books in a single sitting. But I still couldn't discern that quiet inner voice.

I read in Isaiah 58 that if we would fast with the right spirit, we could cry out to God and He would answer. We would *hear Him say*, "Here I am" (Is. 58:9). Jesus' teaching also indicated that fasting would increase your spiritual power and authority. So I decided to try fasting to see if it would make me more spiritually receptive. I fasted for days and even weeks at a time, but I still couldn't hear a voice within my heart.

I hoped that when I graduated from a Christian liberal arts college that somehow, along with my diploma I would be endowed with the ability to hear God's voice. But I received my degree and still could hear nothing other than my own wandering thoughts. There just was no inner voice! No matter what people said or the Bible taught, I could not find a voice.

As I moved into pastoral ministry, I hoped and prayed that the voice would come with my ordination. I mean, how can you possibly be a pastor without hearing God's voice? It would be an especially embarrassing situation to be pastor of a full gospel charismatic fellowship! Just think: Someone was sure to give a message in tongues and if no one else gave the interpretation, it would be my responsibility to maintain proper order by giving it myself. But how could I speak a prophetic word if I couldn't hear from God? My church would find out I was a fraud! I would be ruined! Surely, God in His mercy did not want that to happen to me. Surely, He would use the opportunity of my ordination ceremony to break through the silence into my heart. Please, God? But my ordination came and went and still there was no voice. By now I was getting discouraged. I had tried everything I knew and still, nothing.

I went back to the Scriptures to make sure that the people of God truly heard His voice. Yes, God unequivocally reaffirmed that in every covenant from Genesis to Revelation He had spoken to His children. Here are a few of the hundreds of verses of Scripture that confirmed this truth to my heart:

And they [Adam and Eve] heard the sound of the Lord God... (Gen. 3:8).

Now the Lord said to Abram... (Gen. 12:1).

The Lord said to Moses... (Ex. 4:21).

Now the Lord said to Aaron... (Ex. 4:27).

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God... (Deut. 28:1 KJV).

The Lord spoke to Joshua... (Josh. 1:1).

Then the Lord said to me [Isaiah]... (Is. 8:1).

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying... (Jer. 7:1).

The word of the Lord came...to Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:3).

I [Jesus] can do nothing on My own initiative, as I hear, I judge... (Jn. 5:30).

And the Spirit told me [Peter] to... (Acts 11:12).

[Paul] having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to... (Acts 16:6).

I [John] was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, saying, "Write in a book what you see..." (Rev. 1:10,11).

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God...and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant...See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking (Heb. 12:22,24,25).

I just could not accept the premise that God would stop speaking in this dispensation of grace, especially when there was such a deep hunger within me to hear. That longing had to be placed there by God.

Around that time, God graciously placed in my life a co-elder in our local assembly who was able to clearly hear the voice of God and speak it forth in beautiful prophecy. I marveled at the purity, power, and accuracy of the way he spoke the word of the Lord. I decided to ask him what he did to hear the voice of God. I thought he could give me some clues that would finally throw open the door for two-way prayer in my own life.

I tried to evoke every bit of direction and understanding I could from him. He patiently shared his own experience, but he wasn't able to help me. I finally realized that he is naturally intuitive and that hearing God's voice comes easily to him. I am too analytically inclined to understand the naturalness of

the intuitive flow. For me, the spirit world was only found by following a detailed map of instructions. Instead, he told me what so many already had: “You just know that you know that you know.” Have you ever heard that explanation? I want you to know, if you don’t know it doesn’t help to be told that you know! I left even more frustrated than when I came. I also had extinguished almost all possible leads.

In total desperation, I examined the only remaining possibility I could think of: I checked to see if I was truly saved. It didn’t take much contemplation to decide that I was. I had definitely repented and confessed my sins. I had invited Christ in and asked Him to become the Lord and Savior of my life. The elders had laid hands on me to receive the Holy Spirit and I had been baptized in water. I believed the Bible to be the unerring Word of God, and held to all the truths of evangelical theology.

Okay—I was definitely saved. Well, what in the world was the problem? Maybe I was just trying too hard and being too practical about the whole thing. Maybe I was expecting too much of Christianity. Maybe I should just be content like so many other Christians seemed to be. I had the Bible—maybe I didn’t need His inner voice after all. I was weary and at my wit’s end. I had tried everything I knew, and nothing had worked. I listened as hard as I could and still had no inner voice in my heart. It just was not there. I was not going to enter deception and pretend it was there—if it wasn’t there it wasn’t there.

A short time later a nationally known Bible teacher whom I deeply respected was speaking at our church. I plied him with questions afterwards. “How do you hear the voice of God in your heart?” I asked. His answer astounded me: “What people call the ‘voice of God’ is merely the subterranean rumblings of the spiritual mind.” In other words, there is no such thing!

Part of me wanted to believe that. After all, it wouldn't be a weakness in my life not to have something that didn't exist, would it? But then I thought about the co-elder in my church who could prophesy so beautifully and others whom I'd heard speak forth the Word of the Lord. And I knew that the hunger in my heart would not be satisfied with anything less than a full two-way relationship with Almighty God.

I thank God that even when we are unaware of it His hand is leading us. Through all my hunger and searching He was leading me one small step at a time.

Most of the steps were not even noticeable at the time, just seemingly insignificant events or fortunate circumstances. Yet today I can look back and see how the hand of God moved. Through all my failures and depression and confusion, He was always working all things out for my good.

The Four Keys

The beginning of the revelation came in a quiet way. My wife, Patti, and I drove to a nearby town to attend some tent meetings and after the service browsed through the book tables. A book by Michael Scanlan on inner healing caught my eye, since it was a new ministry at the time and I knew almost nothing about it.

I bought the book and was very blessed by what I read. I thought of the many people I knew who had deep hurts and had not been helped by counseling. Perhaps this was the answer for them, I thought. Shortly thereafter Patti and I attended a retreat on inner healing by Fathers Dennis and Matthew Linn. Although we spent a lot of time dealing with theological questions, it was there that God affirmed in me the need for dream and vision in the adult Christian life.

I spent much of the next several months studying everything I could on prayer. I read about twenty-five books and everything I could find in Scripture concerning prayer. I experimented with different kinds of prayer. Near the end of that year, the Lord awakened me from sleep with the sound of His audible voice. That night God opened up Habakkuk 2:1,2, in which the prophet described what he did when he went before God to hear His voice, and in those verses He showed me several revolutionary keys that I had never seen nor heard taught before. Let me show them to you briefly now, then I will spend several chapters delving into each one individually, showing precisely how they can be developed and used in your prayer life.

*I will stand on my **guard post**...And I will keep **watch** and **see** what He will **speak** to me...Then the Lord...said, **Record** the vision.... (Habakkuk 2:1,2 emphasis added)*

Obviously Habakkuk could discern the sound of the Lord's voice in his heart. He said, "Then the Lord said." Also, throughout his writing, Habakkuk recorded what God spoke to him. Therefore, he knew the sound of God's voice.

The first key to hearing God's voice, then, is learning *what His voice spoken within sounds like*. Rather than being an inner audible voice, I discovered that God's voice in our hearts generally sounds like a flow of spontaneous thoughts. Yes, God graciously spoke to me in an audible voice that one night, but that is certainly not the norm. In fact, it is more likely an indication that I was too thick or too stubborn to get His message any other way! Like Paul on the road to Damascus, I had to be "hit upside the head" in order to hear what He had to say to me.

The Lord will take drastic measures if necessary, but He would rather we learn to discern Him speaking as spontaneous

thoughts from within our hearts. I will spend an entire chapter expounding on this idea, backing it up biblically and experientially, and then discussing the effect this truth has on our lives.

The second key found in Habakkuk is in the phrase, “I will stand on my guard post.” Habakkuk knew how *to go to a quiet place and quiet his own thoughts and emotions* so he could sense the spontaneous flow of God within. Most of us know we are supposed to quiet ourselves, but it is just so hard to do. Later on, I will present numerous biblical tools for quickly quieting our hearts and minds before God so that we can begin to sense the active flow of His Spirit within.

The third key is found in Habakkuk's phrase, “I will keep watch to see.” I asked myself why he said it that way. Why didn't he say, “I will *listen* to hear what He will speak to me.” It makes more sense to me that one would listen to hear spoken words than watch to see them.

By the time this question was answered in my heart and mind, God had opened up an entirely new revelation (to me at least) concerning the place of dream and vision in prayer. I had never even thought of looking for vision as I prayed. I had never considered presenting the eyes of my heart to God and asking Him to fill them, looking to see what He wanted to show me. However, as I began to search the Scriptures, I found that *dream and vision* were a regular part of all the prophets' prayer lives. I will unfold this revelation with Scriptural support and a careful examination of how dream and vision actually work in prayer.

Finally the fourth key demonstrated in Habakkuk 2: Then the Lord said, “Record the vision.” What an incredible idea—actually *writing out my dialogue with God*. And yet I soon saw that the whole book of Habakkuk is the story of a man who wrote down his prayer and the answers he received back

from God. And it was God Who commanded him to write it down.

I had never heard a sermon on the value of recording our dialogue with God; it had never even crossed my mind that I might write down my prayer and God's answer. I have come to call this process "journaling," and as I looked for a basis for it in Scripture I found not just one or two verses on journaling, but hundreds of *chapters* demonstrating this process. Many examples are found in the Psalms, the prophets, and the entire book of Revelation.

It always shocks me to find the Church spending so much time discussing doctrines based on just a few verses of Scripture only to neglect a doctrine that is commanded in Scripture and demonstrated in several hundred chapters. It makes me think we are out of balance sometimes. I will devote an entire chapter to journaling, examining the whole process biblically and showing what tremendous value it has in helping us hear God's voice. I will also describe how it works practically.

Safeguards

Now, before we go any further, we need to discuss some safeguards for this journey into the world of Spirit impressions.

When we talk about hearing the voice of the Spirit of Almighty God, people sometimes fear that they could get it mixed up with the voice of satan or the voice of their own hearts' desires. If that happened and they acted on it, it could bring real destruction into their lives, they fear. Too often, the solution they think best is to not seek the spiritual life at all—to simply live out of biblical law and ignore the possibility of hearing from God personally.

This is certainly one alternative, and many people have obviously taken this path, but it is clearly not the way of the

abundant life Jesus promised us. Instead, God has given us several safeguards in Scripture that, if we will follow them, we can live as Jesus did, comfortable and confident we are protected and in the Father's care in both the spiritual and physical worlds.

The Scriptures

Probably the greatest protection we have on our spiritual journey is the Word of God. A good knowledge of the Scriptures can save us from many errors and heartaches. At the Bible School where I taught, we required a certain level of biblical knowledge as a prerequisite to this teaching on hearing God's voice. When I teach in other churches, I recommend that those attending the course have at least read through the New Testament and be currently reading in the Old Testament.

This is not to say, of course, that God does not speak to new Christians who have not yet read the Word. Of course He does! But if they do not couple their prayer time with an intensive study of the Word and a relationship with a spiritual counselor, they will quickly run into danger.

There are two basic ways in which the Scriptures can help and protect us. First, every revelation must be tested against the written Word of God. If the revelation violates either the letter of the Word or the spirit of the Word, it is to be rejected immediately. There is no place for rationalizing, twisting or explaining away the truth of the Bible. There can be no strange, personal interpretations of some obscure verse. The Word of the Lord will stand forever, and any word to us from God will be in total agreement with both the letter and spirit of the Eternal Word.

We must not only test God's voice in our hearts against the Bible, but see any revelation as built upon the Scriptures. The Lord told Joshua to meditate upon, confess, and act upon the

law of God day and night so that He could give him success. If I have filled my mind and heart with the Bible, the Holy Spirit will draw forth the precise verses, stories or principles I need in a given situation. The spontaneous flow of illumined Scriptures will bring wisdom and insight far greater than my own mind could deliver if only I will pause and allow myself to be dependent on God.

The Body of Christ

The second important Scriptural safeguard from error and spiritual harm is a humble, teachable spirit. So often the ones who claim to hear from the Lord are arrogant and self-righteous. Their attitude is, “God told me and that’s all there is to it.” But God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Such an arrogant spirit will eventually cause them to fall into deception. All revelation should be tested. God does not speak to us so that we may lord it over anyone else. Rather, we ought to be known as the meekest of men.

We are a part of the Body of Christ. The full revelation of Jesus does not reside in us individually but only as we come together as a Body. We all need to be committed to a local expression of the Body of Christ, and anyone who wants to delve into the spiritual dimension of life should have a relationship with a spiritual counselor they respect.

We cannot survive if we try to walk alone. The Lord will show you with whom you are to establish an accountability relationship, if you ask Him. This is a powerful protection for your life: “In the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov. 11:14 KJV). I will discuss the concept of spiritual counselors in greater detail later on.

Humility

There are other basic safeguards as well. God gives revelation only for the areas in which He has given authority and responsibility. A wife will normally receive revelation for her home or her outside job. A husband will receive wisdom for his family and functioning in his business. A pastor will receive revelation for the church over which God has made him responsible.

Along with God-given authority comes God-given revelation to wisely exercise that authority. Therefore, you should expect revelation only in those areas for which you are legitimately responsible. Stay away from ego trips that seek revelation for areas in which you do not have authority. Don't look for a "word from the Lord" to the President or other world leaders. Don't even look for a revelation for your employer or pastor, unless you are responsible to him as a close friend or counselor. Revelation is given only for God-ordained areas of authority and responsibility.

Testing

Also, we should be sure that all revelation we receive is leading us toward greater wholeness and the ability to love and share God more perfectly. If at any time our attempts at dialoguing with God become destructive, we must stop at once and seek out our spiritual counselor.

You may be frightened by such a warning, and even tempted to ignore the spiritual world altogether, rather than risk the dangers. But only those who think they can make it all alone, those with a "just Jesus and me" attitude, need be concerned. If you are applying safeguards such as those I have mentioned and are sincerely seeking God's voice, you can confidently approach life in the Spirit.

Before continuing to read this book, I strongly encourage you to carefully examine your life to make sure these guardrails are intact. If they are not, please lay this book down, and take the time necessary to establish them in your life. Then come back, pick it up again, and go on.

The revelations the Lord gave me will be a great blessing to those who are walking righteously before God, but they could as well open up the foolish man to Satan's wiles. The Christian who has placed God's safeguards around himself need never fear deception, but all must be aware of our enemy, who "prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

The year I spent learning to hear God's voice has paid off with tremendous fruit. I learned that I needed to still my own mind and listen to the flow of God's inner spontaneous thoughts. I learned that I needed to open my heart to the flow of dream and vision that God placed within. And most of all I learned I needed to journal, to write down my dialogue with Almighty God.

I first made sure that the safeguards were in place. I knew the Word. I was willing to submit all inner revelation to the letter and the spirit of the Bible. I was willing to walk in relationship with the Body of Christ and with the counselors God had given to me. I made sure that all revelations led toward greater wholeness and the ability to love and share God more perfectly. Then I was ready to go on the greatest adventure of my life.

The Desire of God's Heart

Why didn't God give up on me long ago? Why does He keep leading me to know His voice? And why is it that I want so desperately to hear His voice? In fact, why is this the almost

universal cry of Christians around the world and down through the ages? In their desperation to hear from God, men and women have stripped their lives of every other comfort and distraction. They have given up all their worldly goods to live in starkest simplicity so that nothing could come between them and their God. They have made vows of silence so that the only voice they might hear would be the voice of God. Why have godly men and women throughout history been so consumed? Why was I so consumed?

Quite simply, it is because the deepest desire of God's heart is to have communion with His children. From the beginning of time His desire has remained the same. He calls us all gently, but persistently. He even lets us experience the dissatisfaction that life without Him brings. Though our spirits are cluttered and our minds confused, still we sense deep within us a longing for a special relationship, the special kind of love that will satisfy our hearts.

In the Garden

“Adam! Adam, where are you?”

When we hear those words we think of the sorrowful day when man's fellowship with God was broken. But let's think for a moment what it was like before that day. How many other days did the Father come to the garden in the cool of the day just to take a walk with the man and woman He loved so much. How often did He call, “Adam, Adam!” How many times did Adam respond joyfully, “Here I am, Lord!”

Can you see the three of them, perhaps hand in hand, slowly wandering through the lush flowers, sometimes stopping to pick a juicy fruit? Adam must have talked about his responsibilities of the day: how his pruning helped the peach

tree, and the strawberry seeds he had planted that were giving luscious red fruit. Father listened, a gleam of pride in His eyes.

Eve talked about her animal friends: the tricks the monkeys were doing and how the squirrels scolded them so furiously. Soon they all laughed at the picture she had painted with her words. As the sun set, they may have fallen into a companionable silence, enjoying the brilliant display of colors even more because they were enjoying it together.

That is communion. That is the sharing of love we were made to enjoy. Father wants us to come to Him with our joys and successes. He wants us to share our laughter with Him. And He wants to enjoy our pleasure in His creation. He wants to be our best friend, our companion, our lover.

How His heart rejoices when we take time to relax from our labors and devote ourselves wholly to conversing with Him! It was for this that He created us. He longs for someone with whom He can share His love. God is love, and as a song says, "Love isn't love 'til you give it away." God longs for us to come so that He may give that love to us.

For a long time I viewed a leisurely stroll in a garden in the cool of the day as essentially a waste of time. I wanted to be producing something. I didn't have time to spare for such unnecessary extras. But the Lord began gently and lovingly teaching me that a leisurely stroll and sharing love with someone are not unnecessary extras; they are the culmination of His purposes. That is what He desires. That is the purpose of creation and life.

He created me for the supreme purpose of sharing love with Him. He created me with the capacity to love so I could return His love. I had lost sight of this somewhere in the hustle of life. I thought that producing *things* was more important than producing *love*. As God reminded me of creation, He called

me to repent of idolizing work and asked me to put love center-stage again. I heard. I listened. And I repented and was healed.

His Chosen People

God has tried to restore the communion He enjoyed with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He established a covenant with the people of Israel in which He promised to be their God, and that they would be His people. At the mountain of God, He offered them His voice. He wanted desperately to talk with His children. After all, His whole purpose in creating them was so He could enjoy fellowship with them.

In Deuteronomy 5:22-31 Moses recounted what happened then. God offered His voice, but told the Israelites it came with fire, a common biblical symbol of purging and purification. Rather than embrace God's outstretched hand of love and fellowship, and endure the accompanying purging process, they came up with an alternative solution. Moses, the Israelites said, why don't you "go near and hear all that the Lord our God says; then speak to us all that the Lord our God will speak to you, and we will hear and do it" (Deut. 5:27). Rather than enjoying a face-to-face relationship with God as Moses did, they were content with a list of laws to live by (Deut. 5:31).

God has impressed deep within my heart that either I will accept living out of a relationship with Him or I will live out of a list of laws. Having already tried to live out a list of New Testament laws, I concur with Scripture: The end of the law is death. Trying to keep laws, no matter how good they are, ends up producing death processes of guilt, condemnation, depression, discouragement, and heaviness within me.

It finally began to dawn on me that if I am led by the Spirit, I am not under the law. If I will walk in fellowship with Almighty God, I will find myself spontaneously living the

demands of the law. Life would be so much easier this way, don't you think? The burden of trying to keep a host of commandments would no longer be on us. We would be living out of a person, the person of Christ.

I have now come to the point where I can sense the Father's initiative within and flow with it. I have moved from law to grace—continual, moment-by-moment grace.

David

God has continually offered communion and fellowship to His people, and they have continually broken His heart by refusing Him and choosing instead to live under law. Still, occasionally down through the history of the Old Testament someone was not content to live under rules and sought instead the relationship for which he was created.

Probably the man who achieved the highest level of communion with God in the Old Testament was David. He was not one to keep his thoughts or feelings under wraps. When he heard Goliath challenging the armies of Israel and their God, he didn't care who knew what he thought about it or what the consequences were. When the Ark of the Covenant was returned to Jerusalem, David was not shy about expressing his joy, and he danced with so much excitement and exuberance that his wife became embarrassed.

David approached his relationship with God with the same fervor and emotional freedom. No matter what he felt, he went straight to the Lord and openly and passionately expressed his feelings. When the guilt of his sin was heavy upon him, David poured out his heart to God:

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, I have

sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight...Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities...Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation (Ps. 51:2-4,9,14).

When the danger of his situation overwhelmed him with fear, David cried out to his deliverer:

I cry aloud with my voice to the Lord; I make supplication with my voice to the Lord. I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare my trouble before Him...I cried out to Thee, O Lord; I said, "Thou art my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Give heed to my cry, for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me" (Ps. 142:1,2,5,6).

When the injustice of his enemies became more than he could endure, David very honestly and vehemently called out to the Judge of all for justice and vengeance:

O God of my praise, do not be silent! For they have opened the wicked and deceitful mouth against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue...Appoint a wicked man over him; and let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged, let him come forth guilty; and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow (Ps. 109:1,2,6-9).

When joy and peace flooded David's soul, the earth could not contain his praise:

Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty expanse. Praise Him for His mighty deeds; praise Him according to His excellent greatness...Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord! (Ps. 150:1,2,6).

How does our Father feel about such an unbridled relationship? Acts 13:22 makes it clear: “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.” To say that God was pleased with David would be an understatement! God delighted in their relationship as much as David did. This is the kind of open and honest communication He longs to have with each of us. He wants us to come to Him with all of our lives: the joys and sorrows, successes and failures, highs and lows.

As I pondered David’s relationship with God, the Lord began showing me not to stuff my feelings down into my heart and cover them over with a “Praise the Lord!” He taught me to be totally open and honest with Him. He wanted me to express all my fears and angers and hurts, to invite Him into them, and to hear all He wanted to say to me about them.

So I learned to express myself fully and freely before God, then to quiet myself in His presence, and to hear and record what He spoke back. He replaced my anger with His love, my depression with His joy, my death with His life. As I listened, I truly discovered that He spoke words of life.

Jesus

Jesus told us a little of what His relationship with the Father was like. In His high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed that we may be one in Him as He and His Father are one. He declared that He did not speak on His own initiative but on His Father’s, Who abided in Him and accomplished all His works (Jn. 14:10). “I speak the things which I have seen with My Father” (Jn. 8:38). In fact, Jesus said He did *nothing* on His own initiative (Jn. 8:28). The unity and communion between Father and Son were so great that Jesus always responded according to the Father’s promptings. He always knew His Father’s will and He always obeyed. They were One.

Jesus prayed that we may be one with our Father also, that we may always hear and obey, that we may testify, “We do nothing on our own initiative, but as our Father speaks, His will is accomplished.”

What an incredible way to live! Doing nothing on our own initiative—is such a lifestyle possible for man? Was Jesus demonstrating to us how man should live, or was He showing us how God would live in this world?

I conclude from the *kenosis* passage in Philippians 2:5-8 that Jesus emptied Himself and took the form of a bond servant so that He could be an example of how *man* should live in this world. Therefore I have accepted the challenge to seek to live as Christ lived. It is clear from John 5 and 8 that Jesus lived out of the Father's initiative, vision, and spoken word. Truly this is the fullness of what God has always desired.

However, this was so foreign to the way I lived that it looked like an almost impossible task. Could I actually come to a place where I did nothing on my own initiative; where I only spoke the words I heard the Father speaking within; where I only did those things I saw the Father doing? Could I really cultivate this kind of openness to God's voice and vision?

With the keys God was unfolding before me concerning prayer and from my attempts to hear His spoken voice, I was convinced it was possible to live by divine initiative as Jesus did. Therefore I purposed to learn to be constantly tuned to God's voice and vision. I knew I was drawing away from my culture by seeking this way of life, but I believed that Christians are called to live as Jesus did, and I was willing to pay the price to change.

It took a long year to begin to establish these fundamental changes in my life. These are not changes you decide on one day and find fully in place the next, especially if you're analytically inclined like I am. It has taken many years for Jesus

to work this kind of alteration into my lifestyle, and it must continue to be a daily decision to maintain this way of life. I have found that God must take many of us through the same slow, painful breaking process He took me through. However, each of us who has taken a step of growth in the Lord Jesus Christ can gladly testify that the price has been well worth it.

Mary and Martha

Jesus and His disciples were invited one day to Martha's house for dinner. Making a meal for a crowd in those days was a very complex and time-consuming matter. You couldn't just take a roast out of the freezer, thaw it in the microwave, and pop it in the oven. You had to kill the calf, dress it, and roast it over a fire. You didn't bake frozen bread or whip up a cake mix. It took time and energy to prepare the breads and vegetables and sweets.

So, when Martha invited Jesus and His friends home she was willing to sacrifice herself for their comfort. Her sister Mary lived with her, so at least she would have help keeping the servants moving and assisting with all the preparations. After Jesus arrived, Martha made sure her guests were comfortably settled, then excused herself to get to work, surely expecting Mary to follow.

She selected the fatted calf herself and watched long enough to be sure it was quickly being prepared. As she hurried back to the house, she looked around for Mary to ask her to help with the bread, but Mary was nowhere in sight. Perhaps she was at the neighbor's, borrowing something, Martha thought. As her hands worked quickly, her mind raced even faster, making lists of things that had to be done.

As she passed the door, Martha thought she heard Mary's voice. She stopped and looked in the room where the guests

were lounging. There, sitting at Jesus' feet, was Mary! Just sitting there! Martha couldn't believe it. "Here I am, running all around, tearing my hair out to get a good meal for them, and she's just sitting there! How dare she! She has no right to leave me with all this work! Wouldn't I like to be in there too, relaxing and hearing Jesus speak? Then what would they do? Pretty soon they'd all be grumbling because they were hungry and dinner wasn't ready. It would serve them right! And how can Jesus just let her sit there? He knows I'm in a rush. Why doesn't He make her help?" On and on she fumed as she doubled the speed of her work.

Finally she was ready to explode. Angrily she marched into the house, her hands sticky with dough and her dress sprinkled with flour. Walking straight up to Jesus she demanded, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Tell her to help me" (Lk. 10:40).

She must have been totally unprepared for His response. The look of love and compassion in His eyes probably made her want to cry. He said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one: for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (v. 41,42).

Do you hear what Jesus said? Only one thing in life is necessary: communion with Him! When I really understood what He was saying, my whole being protested: No, Jesus, that's not true! Lots of things are necessary in the Christian life. There's producing and serving and evangelizing and writing and teaching and caring for the poor. They are all necessary! How can You say they are not?

Probably I was hit so hard by Jesus' words because I was like Martha, constantly driven to serve and produce. I knew if I accepted His words, my whole life would need readjustment.

Gradually the Lord began to show me the problem with my thinking. It is true that service, productivity, and evangelism are important, even very important. But they must never become goals in themselves. If they do, we have moved back from relationship to law. Such things are important only so far as they are products of communion.

When I am listening to the Lord, He gives me instructions and ideas that increase my productivity a hundredfold. As I hear from Him the kind and place of service He has created me for, I find fulfillment and success with every effort. And when I follow His leading in evangelism, the catch is so plentiful that the nets almost break. But all of this happens only if the one necessary thing in life—listening to Jesus—has first priority.

I did not marry my wife so that she would serve me. I married her so that we could be together, enjoy each other's company, and share our lives. What I want most from my wife is not her service or her obedience but her love. Jesus is the Bridegroom of the Church. He is not married to her primarily so that she may serve Him, but to share His love.

Paul

Paul was one of the greatest apostles and missionaries that ever lived. He probably was involved in the salvation of more souls than any other apostle. Yet when he expressed the deepest cry of his heart, it was, "Oh, that I might know Him!" (Phil. 3:10). Paul said that the thing he wanted most in life was not to win more souls, though he did that; nor to establish more churches, though he did that, too. What he cared about more than anything else was an intimate relationship with Jesus. He wanted to know Him and be with Him and hear from Him. Paul longed to love Him more and more each day. And as a result of time spent communing with the Lord, Paul went out and changed the world.

We, too, cannot try to change the world and then become intimate once the work is done. All service, all productivity, all evangelism must flow out of communion.

The Church

God spoke to man once again in the New Covenant and offered us a full relationship with Him.

When I accepted Jesus as Lord of my life, I received “eternal life.” If I thought very much about what that meant, I assumed it was something like a membership card that I would give to St. Peter at the pearly gate and thus be admitted into heaven. Eternal life meant I would live forever.

What a surprise when I found out that Jesus had something different in mind: “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (Jn. 17:3). Eternal life is *knowing* God the Father and His Son.

The Greek word for this “knowing,” *ginosko*, is a very strong word. It may be defined as being intimately acquainted with someone in a growing, progressive relationship. *Ginosko* is used in the Septuagint translation of such passages as Genesis 4:1, “Adam *knew* his wife Eve; and she conceived...” (KJV, emphasis added). It involves the most personal, intimate relationship between husband and wife. This, then, is eternal life; to be intimately involved in a growing relationship with the Father and the Son. Eternal life is a relationship!

Many people look to heaven primarily as an escape from the cares and trials of this world. That is not really what heaven is all about. God gives us eternal life in heaven so we can continue our intimate relationship with Him forever. It would not be heaven without the close communion with our eternal Lover that begins in this life and grows sweeter with the passing

into eternity. Heaven comes to earth in our relationship with the Father and Son! Heaven can begin for you the day you move from law to love, from rules to relationship—the day you truly begin to *know* God!

Jesus came to offer us eternal life, a return to the garden where our Father is still walking, still loving, still longing for sweet communion with us.

Hebrews 12:18-25 is a word to us, the Church. The writer compared the Israelites' fear at the fiery mountain, where God once offered relationship, to the glory of Mount Zion. In verse 25 He said, "See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking." Once more God is speaking. Once more He is offering relationship. He is saying, "Please do not do what the Israelites did. Please do not refuse My voice. Please do not return to the Law. Please do not reject Me once more."

We are faced with the same choice. Will we accept the voice and the fire that comes with it? Will we live in relationship and daily conversation with God? Or will we turn away in fear and remain in bondage under the law which can only work death in our lives? Let us not refuse Him Who is speaking.

His Bride

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:6,7).

The climax of history is a wedding! All of creation, all the universe, all of life is building toward the ultimate expression of the Creator's love: the marriage of the Son. And right now

we, the Church, are engaged to be married. What do engaged couples usually do? They spend lots and lots of time together, sharing their love, sharing their lives, sharing everything.

When my wife and I were dating in college, we spent hours sitting under a big maple tree on campus just talking. I have no idea what we said that kept us there for whole afternoons. We just talked on and on about ideas and feelings, dreams and fears, important things and things that were only important because they were shared. Because we loved each other, we wanted to share every part of our lives.

We are engaged to be married to Jesus. His heart is longing to share His ideas and feelings, His dreams and His love with us. Doesn't your heart respond to that love with the same desire? Don't you want to share your whole life with your Betrothed?

Our Response

I made a decision when the Lord revealed these things to me: Love is more important than work. Love, not productivity, is the center of the universe. I have begun to slow down and enjoy life, every single minute, and to share it in love with Father and those around me. And if no one is around me, I'll just love life, and living, and the beauty of His creation.

And what about work? Well, God has told me again and again that He can do more in a moment than I can do in a month. Do you know, He's right? As we've communed together, He's made me incredibly productive, more than I ever have been when "I" have pushed.

Now I enjoy life more. I enjoy my wife, my children, those to whom I minister and those who minister to me. I will never return to "workaholism." Love will always be the center of life for me.

Why don't you stop right here, put this book down and express your love to Jesus? In some way tell or write of your love for Him and your gratitude for all the blessings He has given you. Thank Him for all the things that He has revealed to you and for His beautiful creation. Just love Him for all He means to you.

When you are finished, wait for His reply. Write down any thoughts that come into your mind. He may want to say He loves you too. He may tell you how precious you are to Him. He may give you guidance or peace about an area of concern. Whatever He wants to say, give Him the chance to say it. He's been waiting for you. Won't you respond?