

11/9/25 SALT CO

“The Still, Small Voice and its Rivals”

“Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, ‘Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’”

I Samuel 3:8-9

“And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks 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.”

I Kings 19:11-13

Where we remember November 11, 1918 suspended fighting in WW I on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. Today where we honor our veterans! Please stand if you served in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, Space Service. Let us thank them!

TABLE TALK I

Share your name and a song, some music, maybe a hymn that helps your spirit to settle. [I love that classic hymn Be Thou My Vision...]

SALT TALK

Our theme is Growing a Conversational Relationship with God. We're using as our resource Dallas Willard's book Hearing God.

book Hearing God

which you find on your tables to flip through. These are available for purchase at our bookstore for the absurdly low price of \$15.00. Not required but recommended reading.

You can catch up easily by simply going to our Webpage

Key thought from last SALT CO,

“...there is no reason in the established truths of science to suppose that God cannot reach us and be with us in order to guide and communicate with us... We can be comfortable with the view that we live in the kind of material universe in which hearing directly from God is possible.” (p.100)

God can and does guide and interact with humans by addressing us. But Willard knew well that most believers need more knowledge about HOW God communicates with us.

This morning, he directs our attention to the variety of ways God interacts with His people in Scripture-- such as dreams, visions, voices and extraordinary events, which can be inspiring—but also very confusing.

Confusing because, Willard warns us, we might assume that these kinds of things were for special people; extra spiritual people...not for ordinary people and we count ourselves out...OR we think that if we haven't had these kinds of conspicuous and clear experiences—then God is not communicating with me.

But Willard has an encouraging word for us here—he's of the conviction based on study and experience, that more spectacular does not mean more important OR that the person involved is somehow MORE spiritual than others.

IN fact---he would advocate that it is the less spectacular and more common experience that is of greater significance:

“...that the “still small voice” experience in an individual's life has a vastly greater role than anything else.” (p. 115)

Let's drill down.

What is this still small voice? AKA “gentle whispering”, another translation of what Elijah experienced at the mouth of the cave,

“And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks 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."

I Kings 19:11-13

It is unobtrusive, unremarkable, unassuming, not immediately noticeable.

We will see today that in this still small voice of God, we are addressed and given a message in such a way, a quality of way that has about this quality His personality that, with time, we will learn to recognize.

Willard observes

"But the medium through which the message comes is diminished almost to the vanishing point, taking the form of thoughts that are our thoughts, though these thoughts are not from us." (pp. 115-116)

This still small voice in our thoughts that are not just our thoughts can be easily overlooked, disregarded, even dismissed especially by those who assume (preconceived idea) that only spectacular communication can be the real thing. [I remember the student who required God to strike him on the head with a bolt of lightning...] This in turn has led to the counter view attacking dramatic visions etc. as satanic.

Talk about confusing!

Willard tells us about Mrs. Lively who described a hum and crackle in the air of her living room, a ball of white shining through the window that then came into the room. Instantly she saw Jesus. His presence in this way was with her for three months.

Martin Shaw, a world renown mythologist and professor had spent 101 days alone in the woods, seeking a deeper spiritual connection and wanting to be "defeated by something bigger than" himself. He was not in an altered state, just looking at the pitch-black sky. He noticed a single star

that was a different color from the others. As he was praying and expressing gratitude, the light suddenly began to move and accelerate rapidly. The light took on an unusual shape, "like the tip of an arrow" with "purples, whites, and luminescent greens," expanding as it moved. This object, or "Great Light," shot out of the darkness and landed silently on the ground about ten feet away from his kitchen tent. Shaw was frozen to the spot in a state of wonder and shock. He had seen "signs and wonders" before, but nothing like this event, which he says he will never fully understand.

This intense, personal encounter was a significant, life-altering experience and led to his eventual conversion to Christianity, which he described as a return to a "wilder, more profound aspect of faith". (Notes from AI on Martin Shaw's encounter with falling star).

Norita shared the experience of a woman in eastern Turkey where no one had ever preached the gospel, awaking to see Someone standing at the foot of her bed. She knew Who He was! She called Him Issa, Turkish for Jesus.

As I said, some Christians might say these are "of the devil" because the devil can mimic angels of light. (II Corinthians 11:14)

Others would say these are cases of "emotional collapse".

Still others, maybe us too, feel a little *envy*. What makes these people so special? We know from the effects of social media how we are sorely tempted to compare ourselves with others. Subtly we might come to covet such experiences, to, in a way, worship the experience, to try to make that happen for me, to *require* such experiences as a qualification for significant ministry!! (the worst of Pentecostalism)

Willard writes,

"A major point of this book is that the still, small voice- or the interior or inner voice, as it is also called- is the preferred and most valuable form of individual communication for God's purposes. God usually addresses individually those who walk with him in a mature, personal relationship

using this inner voice, showing forth the reality of the kingdom of God as they go.” (p. 118)

Willard puts it,

“So when you hear God’s voice, you do not automatically know it is God’s voice”. (p. 118)

And

“Scripture teaches that the less dramatic the message, the fuller the content and the more advanced the person who is receiving the message.” (p. 119)

More on this in a bit.

Those who are in this kind of interactive, conversational relationship with God are often not sure if it was “God’s” presence or they are reluctant to speak about this inner, still, small voice. It feels to them like intimate conversation.

-Story of Miriam who had to come see me to compare notes with me on what she was experiencing warmth, or presence, of being addressed.

-Pearl as she looked down into the tomatoes in her salad while we shared lunch. She told me about this much later. Strong sense of His warmth/light-joy she could not put into words.

It’s important to talk about “experiences like these” because it helps us be open, more aware of the variety of ways God’s presence can be experienced. This morning we’re going to look at a “brief catalogue” of the kinds of encounters people had with God in the Bible, but with some very important heads ups,

"We must make the conscious effort to think that such things might happen to us, and to imagine what it would be like if they were to happen."
(p. 119)

1. *Remember that Moses, Elijah, Paul were people just like us.* They were subject to the same human passions as us. They dealt with doubt, hunger, exhaustion, worry, nerves, confusion, fear, self-worth. It's so good our Bibles are so honest! We have to pull back to re-Mind ourselves of God's intention, to restore the IMAGO DEI in human beings! Not just in the "special ones".
2. *Also, God will not compete for our attention.* Most of the time God will not come crashing into our lives, Damascus road noted...that's not the norm.
3. *At times we may mistake God's voice for some other voice-* the podcast on speaker on someone's cell phone..., or most common, as just another one of our own thoughts.

So,

4. Seeking His voice is necessary

Seeking His voice is necessary [2X]

In seeking I am looking all the time everywhere. I don't look for my car keys when I feel like it, nor do I look only where there is "good light"...Seeking=noticing=listening= paying attention. We seek because we believe He might explicitly address us in ways fitting for His purposes in our lives. The more we notice the more we notice...

Willard finds six ways God addresses people in the Bible. These are not the six ways that God can (is permitted!) to use. We do not want to harden these into laws or doctrine.

Six Ways God Addresses People in the Bible (building)

1. Phenomenon plus a voice

This happens a lot. Consider the covenant with Abraham, the flaming torch passing between slaughtered animals in Genesis 15. Or Moses at the burning bush. Ezekiel sees this dazzling display of wheels inside wheels (Ezek. 1-2). How about Jesus' baptism and the heavens opening (Matt. 3)? Or Saul's encounter on the road to Damascus (Acts 9: 3-8).

2. Supernatural messenger or angel

"Angel" means messenger. They appear as persons but are not merely persons. They come on a divine mission. Often, we do not realize we are being addressed by an angel maybe only later.

Consider Abraham and Sarah meeting the three strangers. Joshua encounters a man standing before him with a drawn sword. Elisha was shown an army of angels (II Kings 6:17). It is a long list of people encountering angels: Balaam, Gideon, Samson's parents, Isaiah, Daniel, Joseph of Joseph and Mary, Zacharias (Lk. 1:11-30), Mary, the women at the empty tomb, Peter, Paul.

Willard points out that all of these people encounter angels in an otherwise normal state of mind. They were not smoking weed or taking LSD (a group here in California experimenting with having religious experiences).

-Touring the pyramid in Lima, Peru, our guide explained how the Priest had to drink a concoction that made him hallucinate and so he could give guidance to the people. The tour guide quipped, "This gives new meaning to 'High Priest'."

Not to say that these people described in the pages of our Bibles did not feel that "things were a little more than strange..." (p. 124).

3. Dreams and visions

It's uncertain in some cases whether the person is awake or asleep. Paul's experience for example of the vision of the Macedonian man at night. Or his vision of heaven in II Cor. 12:1.

Some visions are clearly not dreams. Ananias gets direct marching orders about Saul (Acts 9:10-13). Peter on the roof sees the sheet lowered down animals and the command to kill and eat in Acts 10.

Some dreams are not visions. Jacob's dream at Bethel of the ladder reaching to heaven, or Joseph's dream about his brothers (Gen. 37:5-9), or that of his jail mates (Gen. 40:5-19).

Dreams require interpretation, often with difficulty in a way that visions do not. Dreams can be used or even faked. By the day of Jeremiah dreaming prophets had come to be viewed with skepticism.

“I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, ‘I had a dream! I had a dream!’ How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their ancestors forgot my name through Baal worship. Let the prophet who has a dream recount the dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?” declares the Lord. “Is not my word like fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”

Jeremiah 23:25-30

Willard quotes Gustave Oehler in a key principle:

“The principle that a clear consciousness when receiving revelation is placed higher than ecstasy or other abnormal states of mind.” (Gustave Oehler, p. 124)

4. An audible voice

Last time we talked about Peter Marshall's experience at night at the edge of a quarry. So too Abraham was directly addressed when he raised his knife over his son Isaac, "**Abraham! Abraham!**" (Gen. 22:11) Young Samuel heard his name, (II Sam. 3:7) which began his conversational relationship with God.

The two most important ways God speaks to us come next. They are most important because *they use the language of human beings* addressing people through the inner voice of our own thoughts. They are most suited to God's presence with us as a close friend, a presence that is shared with the whole Christian worldwide community (45,000 denominations notwithstanding). *They are also most appropriate to our working out of our individual personalities into His likeness- what this conversational relationship with God does in us, how this forms us.*

5. The human voice

This is most common- the voice of a human being, God speaking along with human beings. The word is God's word and the word of the human being who is also speaking. Not in some mechanistic way, we are not "Iphones", we are not God's devices.

Willard says this is the "primary objective way in which God addresses us". It most fully engages us, our faculties, our whole brains, in our interactive relationships, as collaborators and friends in human affirming ways.

When God speaks in union with human beings, He often seems to purposefully choose weaker vessels who protest. So Moses. Or Isaiah. Or Jeremiah. Paul may not have been an eloquent public speaker (I Cor. 2:1-5)

-Inadequacy is perfectly "fine". It may even be preferable!!

Hear this

"...for the most part God chose the uneducated and ordinary people to bear his message and carry on his work." (p. 127)

That way it was and is clear Who has the power and authority!

I hope we seasoned adults are taking this in...the more aged, the more human, the more available, the more useful to the kingdom of God.

Finally, a sixth way God communicates with us is in

6. The human spirit or the “still, small voice”

God speaking *in our own spirits* refers to our thoughts and feelings that we have toward ourselves, about things that are happening and about people around us. This is the primary subjective way that God addresses us. (p. 130) [2X]

Willard uses the King James version of Proverbs 27:11,

“The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all inward parts of the belly” (Proverbs 20:27).

Or, searches his deepest self.

This wisdom leads to the core truth and teaching we find in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Christians,

“For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God.”

II Corinthians 2:11

Which means we who have received the Spirit of God can search out and know the very mind of God by means of His Spirit.

The apostle shares,

“For who has known the mind of the Lord as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

I Corinthians 2:16

So, Willard writes,

“...God uses our self-knowledge or self-awareness, which is heightened and given a special quality by His presence and direction, to search us out and reveal to us the truth about ourselves and our world.”

AND

“We are able to use His knowledge of Himself- made available to us in Christ and the Scriptures- to understand in one measure His thoughts and intentions toward us and to help us see his workings in our world.” (p. 131) [2X]

Some implications:

The more I know about me, the more honest I am with myself, the more open and available I become to this “conversation” with my Friend.

Calvin’s Institutes begins

“Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: The knowledge of God and or ourselves, and these are intimately intertwined.” (Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book I, chapter 1)

-a sentence later he says it is not easy to tell which comes first...

-denial of our age makes us less available. God wants to gently show me me. For His good purposes in and through me. God wants to be in intimate conversation me, and you.

*Highly recommend the LECTIO DIVINA exercise on pp. 131-133.

-Reading God’s word “listeningly” (with HUPAKOUO)- much more about this in next chapters of Hearing God.

For now, let’s have some conversation.

TABLE TALK II

1. Have you experienced times you would describe as God speaking to you through someone else? (i.e. through reading scripture; hearing a sermon or teaching; in a conversation with a friend or family member; or someone who said something that felt tailored specifically for you at that time?) What is it about those

experiences that lead you to describe them as your being addressed by God?

2. Talk about this statement: *"This still small voice in our thoughts that are not just our thoughts can be easily overlooked, disregarded, even dismissed especially by those who assume that only spectacular communication can be the real thing."*
3. What do you think might help you to notice His still, small voice addressing you?

WRAP UP

We finish with some questions raised at the conclusion of this chapter. I can only point you to the book for more complete responses.

1. Aren't all thoughts inherently bad?

Isaiah 55:8 says, ***"My thoughts are not your thoughts."***

Jeremiah 17:9 says, ***"our hearts are desperately wicked..."***

More on this in chapter 8! Our thoughts and feelings are what make us persons! Suffice to say our thoughts and feelings in the mind of one who is surrendered to God should be treated as if God were walking through our personality with a candle directing our attention to things He wants me to work on in me, that He is working on in me! We find ourselves praying, ***"Search me O God! Test me! Know my thoughts!"***

2. Isn't the canon of scripture closed?

In other words, aren't we saying God is revealing things to us that ought to re-open the bible to new revelation?

The canon of scripture IS closed. Because it is based in history and apostolic eyewitness. The bible as our "rule of faith and practice" is very adequately stated in human language that nothing more in general needs to be said.

But let's not miss that its witness is to the ongoing divine-human conversation informed by the principles and doctrines that are the foundation of God's written word.

We are not just people with a book who hold certain beliefs. We are also a people who live the kind of life that is demonstrated in the bible! This is not about rules, this is about a relationship.

3. What about silence?

We are not just making "prayer speeches" when we pray. We are also listening. If we know how to listen even the "silence" can also be communication= "wait", "watch", "pay attention", "be still", ("shut up and listen...")

Sometimes we have no idea what we are asking!

Obscurity allows us room and time we need to notice the ways God's word comes to us. Our struggle grows and deepens us, strengthens us.

The more aged I become, the more I know the less I know! And I think I'm more and more good with that.

4. Isn't the Bible enough?

No. Not for our conversational relationship with God who is described in the Bible, who invites humankind into this relationship through the Bible. We are not "bible deists" who believe God gave us the bible and then went away leaving us to make we could out of it with no individual communication.

Remember beyond the bible the creation also bears witness ! (Romans 1:19-21).

The most important point of all this is this:

God gently moves us, lovingly, like a Shepherd, into an on-going, personal, interactive conversational relationship with Himself.

God wants us as friends.

Let's let Dallas Willard have the last word today,

“The rivals of God’s voice- still and small, still and within- continue to be necessary, then, and have their place. But as we are earnestly seeking God, we get beyond the need to have big things happening to reassure us that somehow we are all right, and possibly others are not...”

...Then we begin to understand that God’s whole purpose is to bring us to the point where he can walk with us quietly, calmly and constantly, leaving us space to grow to be his (often fumbling) collaborators. We will still have some distance from him and yet be united with him because we are being conformed to the image of his Son, bearing the family resemblance” (p. 151)

Taking next steps...

BLESSING

We stand in the community of the spoken to. Whether you have ever sensed God’s guiding or interacting with you personally, God has spoken to all of us in His creation, in His word, that tell us that He wants to have a conversational relationship with us.

Receive this prayer for you from the apostle, for your conversational relationship with God

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.