

**SALT CO 2/22/26**

**“A Life More than Guidance”**

**“If you indeed cry out for insight,  
and raise your voice for understanding,  
if you seek it like silver,  
and search for it as hidden treasures-  
then you will understand the fear of the Lord  
and find the knowledge of God.”**

Proverbs 2:3-5

### **Table Talk I**

Share your name and how old you were/what you remember about first hearing the story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

### **SALT TALK**

We've been exploring what it's like to grow in a conversational relationship with God from our guide Dallas Willard through his now classic book: *Hearing God*.

Now we're going to bring this all home. Last chapter! Here's the key question most of us have struggled with and we hope Willard has helped us to better answer:

How may we come to live confidently and sensibly *with God* as a conversational presence in our lives?

Hearing God, p. 255.

As we review and explore the wisdom found in the final chapter keep in mind that when Willard uses phrases like “hearing God” or “God speaks to us”, we might automatically translate that to mean “when we hear an audible voice from God”. Frankly that can leave us thinking we've never “heard from God.” But, as Willard makes clear in the book, what he is referring to is God's many different ways of **communicating with us**.

By way of quick review here are five helpful clues for discerning God's communication:

1. their detailed content of meaning takes the form of the "inner voice"

Willard describes this inner voice like this,

"...whenever he guides us in our conscious cooperation with him as friends and collaborators, he does so by giving us his thoughts and perceptions that bear within themselves the marks of their divine origination."

Hearing God, p. 256

2. His speaking most commonly occurs in conjunction with study of and reflection on the Bible, the written Word of God
3. Less commonly, though still often, [his speaking] comes in conjunction with a human being speaking to us.
4. Our ability to recognize God's voice [communication] in our souls and to distinguish it with practical certainty from other competing voices is acquired by effort and experimentation

a. in other words, with time and experience!

5. The infallibility of the speaker- God- does not and need not guarantee the infallibility of the hearer.

a. Let's be honest, sometimes God is communicating with us and we are in rebellion. This happens all the time in human communication, just reflect on our experiences in our families!

SO we do well to pay attention to how we hear. This is why Jesus urgently emphasized, ***"Let those who have ears, hear!"***

***"Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get and still more will be given you. For to those who***

***have, more will be given; and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away.”***

Mark 4:23-25

Meaning of course that if we really want to run our own lives without God interfering then the ways we perceive and discern will filter out His communicating or will twist it to our own purposes.

On the other hand,

“People who understand and warmly desire to hear God’s voice will, by contrast, want to hear it when life is uneventful just as much as when they are facing trouble or big decisions.”

Hearing God, p. 258

This lead to a question- do we seek God only when things are difficult? How we answer might help us to see one reason why we fail to hear God’s voice, His communicating- because in general, truth be told, we don’t really *want* to hear Him speaking to us, just when we *need* to hear Him!

Willard puts it like this,

“Usually, those who want a word from God when they are in trouble cannot find it.”

Hearing God, p. 258

At least, they have no assurance. Why? Because they are not in a conversational relationship with God. Prayer becomes what is done in times of trouble. It becomes all about asking for help. THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH ASKING GOD FOR HELP!! It’s just that this is a very limited view of the relationship.

This got me thinking about the conversations Suzanne and I have. Most of the time I’m not asking her for something. We converse about what we’re reading, how we’re feeling, plans we’re making, what we’re working

on, how we slept, what's for dinner, our hopes and fears. I do ask for help and she asks me. But we know each other as companions, not employees.

Don't misunderstand, of course God can speak to those who have walked away. It's just not wise to assume this is what a conversational relationship with God intends or means.

What might lie underneath this assumption is that it doesn't matter how I live, after all I'm forgiven, right? But this is a profound misunderstanding of the gospel itself. If we think the gospel is "give your life to Jesus so that when you die you go to heaven and not the other place", this Willard calls barcode Christianity. I call it status Christianity. It's like saying the vows, putting the rings on, then one goes to live in Las Vegas, the other into New York. But they wear wedding rings. They're "married" (in heavy air quotes).

What kind of marriage is that?

But we all should take heart. Willard quotes the preacher G. Campbell Morgan,

"Wherever there are hearts waiting for the Voice of God, that Voice is to be heard."

Hearing God, p. 260

Your ache, your seeking, your wondering are signs of His Spirit in you and upon you. You are being drawn. Our loving God desires a conversational relationship with you and me.

So with regard to *listening* for God. Willard loved this practical advice from James Dobson.

"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.'"

Hearing God, p. 260

What do you do as you go through your day to discern God communicating with you? This is worth some conversation which you'll have in a bit at your tables...

Willard also cites Frederick B. Meyer on the importance of having regular times for listening.

"Be still each day for a short time, sitting before God in meditation, and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you the truth of Christ's indwelling. Ask God to be pleased to make known to you what is the riches of the glory of this mystery (Colossians 1:27)."

Hearing God, p. 260

I think God loves to be asked for this!

Let's hear now from Dallas Willard about his own experience,

READ p. 261

*"After I ask for God to speak to me... I find it works best if I devote the next hour or so to some kind of activity that neither engrosses my attention with other things nor allows me to be intensely focused on the matter in question. Housework, gardening, driving on errands or paying bills will generally do. I have learned not to worry about whether or not this is going to work. I know that it does not have to work, but I am sure that it will work if God has something he really wants me to know or do. This is, ultimately, because I am sure of how great and good he is."* (p. 261)

Willard noticed that often at the end of an hour or so there stood within his awareness **an idea or thought with a "peculiar quality", spirit and content** that with time and experience he came to associate with God's voice.

If so, then he would write this down.

Maybe discuss it with others, without leading with "This is what God has told me..."

If uncertain if this is a word from God, ask for further confirmation.

Willard would put a limit of two to three days on waiting for clarity.

If nothing comes after an hour or so, no reason for alarm, *“I set myself to hold the matter before God as I go about my business and confidently get on with my life. Of course I make it a point to keep listening. Very often, within a day something happens through which God’s voice, recognizably distinct, is heard.”* (p. 262)

Most important, is to cultivate the quiet, inward space of a constant listening than it is to always be approaching God for specific direction. This is what a conversational relationship with God is like!

Rest assured *God will speak*. Willard writes *“Especially direction will always be given to the mature disciple if without it serious harm would befall people concerned in the matter or the cause of Christ.”*

*Everything that is being said here about how to listen must never be taken as a gimmick, or technique* for then we fall prey to the temptation to try to force God to speak. Willard talks about the case of Saul who, wanting to keep control over his armies in the face of the Philistines, made sacrifice without Samuel the priest. He also tried to force a word of wisdom to come using a witch.

Willard comments,

“How sadly typical this is of the human view of God and his guidance! We treat him like a celestial aspirin that will cure headaches brought on by the steady, willful tendency of our lives away from and even against him. We treat him as a cosmic butler who is to clean up our messes. To compel him to serve us, we seek gimmicks and tricks suited only to idols.”

Hearing God, p. 265

What about the times in which God does not send a particular word? What then? What do we do?

First, this does NOT mean we are in God’s displeasure! If we are this can be known through honest self-examination, with the help of honest

counsel of Christian friends and leaders and asking the Lord to reveal it to us.

God will not play games with us. God will show us the problem, if there is a problem.,

What are some other reasons why we don't hear from God?

"In general, it is God's will that we ourselves should have a great part in determining our path through life. This does not mean that he is not with us. Far from it. God both develops and, for our good, tests our character by leaving us to decide. He calls us to responsible citizenship in his kingdom saying- in effect or in reality- as often as possible, 'My will for you in this case is that you to decide on your own.'"

Hearing God, p. 266

We have to understand that you and I are in formation. We are being shaped, prepared, trained... for what? We have our answer in the final chapter of our Bibles:

***"And there will be no more night; [the servants of God] will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever."***

Revelation 22:5 (1:5-6; 5:9-10)

We are in training for reigning with God in the new creation.

two photos of my coffee mugs

Handle on right and I hold it in my right hand so that the words face away from me. My thought was then I can share with others that I believe I am training or reigning. See Revelation 22:5

**PHOTO** of green mug

But then it dawned on me that the first person who needed to be reminded that I'm training for reigning is me! So I got another one with the words facing me. Sometimes I forget...

**PHOTO** of blue mug

Willard observes that we are dealing with the essence of human personality as God has ordained it. "A child cannot develop into a responsible, competent human being if he or she is always told what to do." (p. 267)

Truth is

"What we want, what we think, what we decide to do when the word of God does not come or when we have so immersed ourselves in Him that His voice, His speaking within us is not held in distinction from our own thought and perceptions, these show *who we are*."

Hearing God, p. 267

WHAT GOD GETS OUT OF YOUR LIFE IS THE PERSON YOU BECOME.

But this does not mean that we should become spiritual hypochondriacs! Remember the old Verizon commercial of the guy walking around with his phone asking, "*Can you hear me now? How about now? How about now...*"

=Spiritual navel gazing. Being more concerned with being "righteous" than with loving God and others. Again, this is the great problem with status Christianity. It misses what we are being trained for!

Willard is perceptive,

"We may insist on having God tell us what to do because we live in fear or are obsessed with being right as a strategy for being safe. But we may also do it because we do not really have a hearty faith in his gracious goodwill toward us. If so, we need to grow up to Christlikeness, and nothing short of that will solve our problem. Certainly more words from God will not!"

Hearing God p. 267

We may be fearful to make a decision or some move without direct direction from God. We may even have the idea that if we can get God to

tell us what to do, we will no longer be responsible for our decisions! (p. 268)

So this is about our formation, not about “getting it just right”. It’s about our deepening conversational relationship with God that slowly grows and matures with time and experience. It’s about the kind of persons we are becoming.

There’s another reason for communication breakdown. There will also be times when we are face to face with the powers of darkness that inhabit our universe. It’s not that we are doing something wrong, it’s that we’re in a battle. You and I will face hours of darkness too as Jesus did.

And sometimes the will of God that is made clear to us is not fulfilled because of the choices of other people.

In such times we must remember God’s faithfulness. And the love of Christ from which nothing can separate us!

So we can stand firm even we do not hear a direct word from God!!

The main point is this:

LIVING WELL WITH GOD IN ALL OF LIFE.

Let’s talk about this.

## Table Talk II

1. Reflect on conversational relationships you are in today. What do you find you talk about? How much of your conversation involves asking for something?
2. What do you think would be some signs that you really don’t want to hear God (although you don’t say this or even realize that you think this) and give his word a place in your life?
3. James Dobson said this about listening for God speaking, *“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.*” What do you do as you go through your day to listen for God speaking to you?

4. Can you recall a time when you asked for guidance from God and you didn’t seem to get an answer? What did you do? What did you learn?
5. “What God gets out of your life is the person you become.” Talk about this. If this is true how might this change your understanding of prayer?

## **WRAP UP**

Draw attention to the Hearing God Steps hand out.

Willard once more,

Such a good word for us Seasoned Adults!

“We must ultimately move beyond the question of hearing God and into a life greater than our own- that of the kingdom of God. 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 provision for our whole life. Our aim in such a life is to identify all that we are and all that we do with God’s purposes in creating us and our world.”

Hearing God, p. 275

## **DOXOLOGY**

## **BLESSING**

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit be with you, in you, among you this day, now and forever. Go in peace and serve the Lord.**

**Amen**