

**DISCOVER THE GIFTS
OF THE SPIRIT**

TONY DODD

Discover the Gifts of the Spirit

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (Authorized).

ISBN-13: 978-1546379782

ISBN-10: 154637978

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to Elsie, my beautiful and loving wife, and my two awesome sons, Joshua and Josiah.

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INTRODUCTION

AZUSA STREET TESTIMONY

A number of years ago I visited a local Christian bookstore in need of an inspirational book. I asked the Lord to help me find a book that would be meaningful to my life. It is at times a daunting task to select one book out of the thousands of books that are available. Many look inviting. Possibly, you are encountering a similar experience in your search for just the right book – one that will help you to experience a more intimate relationship with Christ.

Seconds after I asked this question, I slowly turned to my left to scan another shelf in search of the right one. Suddenly, one book seemed to leap off the shelf at me. It caught my eye, and I quickly snatched it from the shelf. Have you ever gone in search for something that you felt you needed only to realize later that God was the one leading you? That appears to be what happened in my search for this book. I believe some refer to this as a divine appointment.

Many persons in the Bible experienced such divine appointments. David experienced a divine appointment on the day God chose and anointed him to be king of Israel. A divine appointment is simply an encounter in which God providentially leads you to a specific place, time, event, relationship, etc. They are usually life changing and provide you with new direction for your life.

At any rate, finding and reading this book drastically altered my understanding of what it meant to be a Christian, and it inspired me to revisit my Pentecostal heritage. The book

the Lord directed me too was *Azusa Street* written by Frank Bartleman.

Frank Bartleman was an anointed evangelist and prolific writer. He experienced the wonderful outpouring of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit that took place at Azusa Street in California at the turn of the 20th century. The Azusa Street Revival gave birth to many of the Pentecostal churches in the U.S., as well as many churches around the world.

Bartleman took time to record and share what he and others experienced during this significant time in Church history. If not for him and a few others, we would not have such a vivid account of what took place at Azusa Street those many years ago. In part, the ethos, the fundamental character and culture, of the people would have remained a mystery until we met them on the shores of Heaven and listened to their telling stories. Fortunately, their contributions have provided valuable insights into the history of early Pentecostalism.

Bartleman's writings contained eyewitness accounts and testimonies from those who took part in the mighty outpouring of the Spirit. He recorded stories about the poor, uneducated, Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, immigrants, and believers from various denominations. His own personal stories, experiences, and eyewitness accounts encompass a considerable amount of the book.

As I read the testimonies in *Azusa Street*, the ethos of the people within this book stirred within me a new found passion to know God and drew me closer to the intimate heart of God. A residue of that ethos still exists in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements until this day, I believe. I have

witnessed and sensed it in the lives of some I have had the pleasure of knowing.

Ultimately, reading *Azusa Street* rekindled a fiery passion within my heart for Pentecostal power with the infilling of the Holy Spirit. This fiery passion eventually led me to experience a tremendous movement of God's Spirit that was comparable to what took place at Azusa Street, I believe.

This movement of God's Spirit became even more developed and intensified through another ministry that encouraged me to develop an intimate relationship with God. In particular, this ministry sparked my curiosity about learning to hear God's voice. One pastor ignited my passion for hearing God's voice after he simply stated: "Tony, God is speaking to us all the time, but we are not listening for His voice and seldom do we ask to hear His voice." Surprisingly, I experienced hearing God's voice and in turn discovered the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

INTIMATE TESTIMONIES

Matthew 10:27

What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops.

The Word of God encourages us to share our testimonies openly with any and all who will listen. A testimony is simply an open proclamation to others about a personal experience with God. The greatest testimony of all that we can share with others is our belief that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. It is important that our testimonies remain truth-filled and in agreement with the Word of God.

The Bible is filled with testimonies of people who experienced God in remarkable and extraordinary ways. They are intimate stories of those who knew God in a personal way, and they come alive to us in fresh new ways each time we read them. They inspire, teach, warn, correct and encourage us to know the Lord and faithfully follow Him.

Our testimonies are powerful vehicles for transmitting to others the wonderful works of God and the joys of knowing Him. This book is filled with my personal testimonies about hearing God's voice and discovering the gifts of the Spirit. It is above all things my testimony of God's intimate nature and unfailing love. Reading *Azusa Street* inspired me to write this book, and I write with a great hope – that you too might experience an intimate relationship with God as you learn to hear God's voice and discover the gifts of the Spirit.

The most profound and intimate testimony I have in my experiences with God came not long after I began hearing God's voice. It came as a word of wisdom from the Holy Spirit about the nature of the Godhead. This testimony will give you a glimpse of the types of experiences you can expect to read about throughout this book.

God spoke to me on this occasion through the voice of the Holy Spirit as I sat in my recliner at home reading the Word of God. The initial prompting of the Holy Spirit for this word of wisdom was a series of thoughts. Afterwards, God spoke and told me to go into my utility room to get a piece of notebook paper. After I found the paper, I was on my way back to sit in my recliner when the Lord said, "You will need a pair of scissors." I grabbed a pair of scissors from a drawer in the

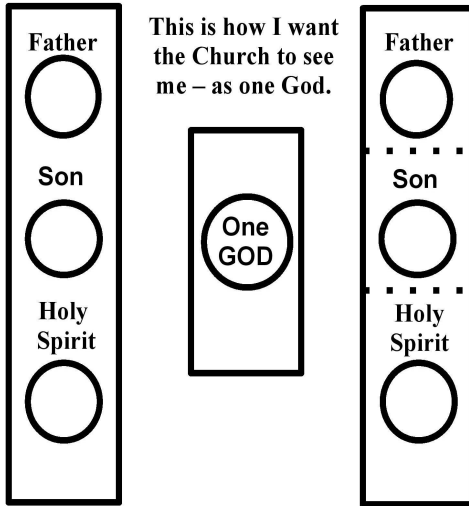
kitchen. I then sat down in my recliner and waited for God to speak again.

After only a moment, the Lord said, "I want you to cut the paper where the red line runs next to the three holes." Without hesitation, I cut the red line straight down the paper from the top to the bottom as He told me to do. Then the Lord asked me question. He asked, "What does the cut off piece look like?" I said, "It looks like the number one, and it has three holes in it." He then focused my attention on the three holes and said, "This is how the Church sees me." The Lord pointed out that the top hole represented God the Father, the middle hole represented God the Son, and the bottom hole represented God the Holy Spirit.

Next, He said, "Fold the cut off piece of paper so that the three holes are aligned on top of each other making only one hole." I did as He said. He then said, "This is how I want the Church to see me – as one God." Finally, He said, "Open the piece of folded paper back to its original form." As I opened it, He said, "This is how I want the Church to see me as I have revealed myself – one God who has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." A visual representation of this message is provided on the next page:

This is how I want the Church to see me as I have revealed myself: one God who has revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This is how the Church sees me.



The unfolding of the paper is representative of how revelation works. The dotted lines on the third figure are meant to show that the paper was folded and then unfolded. Revelation is an unfolding of the truth concerning something that was at one time secret or hidden.

There have been divisions within the Church over the nature of the Godhead since the time of the early Church Fathers. Some people over the years have even been put to death for their particular belief or view. These divisions still exist today in some form or another and there appears to be no remedy. However, if we will only receive God’s wisdom, this illustration by the Spirit can go a long way in helping to heal the divisions within the Church over this controversial issue.

This word of wisdom helped me, and may help countless others who read this testimony, to understand that there is

only one God, and this one God has been revealed as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Note that this illustration is in complete alignment and agreement with the Biblical text about the nature of God, and it is profitable for helping clarify our understanding of God in order that we may worship Him in spirit and in truth.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS

The preceding word of wisdom is but one of the many intimate encounters with God you will read about in this book. In addition to these types of testimonies, chapter's one through three of this book detail a number of penetrating insights on how you can develop a more intimate relationship with God, especially through the spiritual practices of meditation, prayer, and active listening. There will also be insights from the Bible and from my own personal experiences in these chapters that will benefit you in hearing God's voice and prepare you to receive the gifts of the Spirit. Finally, in chapter four I will discuss how I discovered and experienced the gifts of the Spirit, and how you can discover and experience them as well. Important in this final chapter is the discussion about the fruit of the Spirit, and how the gifts of the Spirit operate from a heart full of God's love. Enjoy!

**CHAPTER ONE:
A SEASON OF
TRANSFORMATION**

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

THE PATH

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to make the choice to hear His voice.

In Robert Frost's contemplative poem, *The Road Not Taken*, Frost speaks to the heart of human experience by helping us understand that the choices we make in life can either lead to satisfaction and fulfillment or dissatisfaction and regret. The poem challenges us to consider thoughtfully the journey of life and the many paths we encounter along the way. Our fellow pilgrims in life may choose the paths of least resistance. The poem dares us to be different and to take chances that others may not take. The road less traveled by many can be a path that leads to an abundant life for others.

Psalm 16:11

Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.

The path less traveled for many Christians today is a close and intimate relationship with Christ in which they hear God's voice. Maybe you have heard of this path and thought it was only for the religious fanatic or the so-called spiritual elite. Possibly, you have considered this path but thought it was impossible to hear God's voice. Maybe you tried to hear God's voice but eventually got side-tracked by other interests in life.

Think very carefully before you choose not to take this path. You may regret it later. Just think for one minute how awesome it would be to hear the voice of Almighty God. It may

be hard to wrap your mind around it, but it is possible to hear His voice. Just as Elijah who heard the “still small voice” of God, the prophets in the Old Testament and believers in the New Testament, we can also hear God speaking to us today. How can I say this? Well, because I have heard and continue to hear God speaking to me. You must make this choice and believe the promise of Jesus : “My sheep hear my voice.”

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to become a person after God's own heart.

God had a particular path He wanted me to choose on my journey to become more intimate with Him. This path was to become a man after His own heart. This is what God spoke to my heart at the very beginning of this journey. Truly, this path is available for any and all who believe in Jesus Christ and seek to know the intimate heart of God.

This seemed like such a far stretch for me spiritually at the time. Initially, I could not even begin to think of how I could become a man after God's own heart! And I still to this day wonder if I have ever fully become a man after God's own heart. I did find that the pursuit to become a person after God's own heart was a key to experiencing an intimate relationship with God, hearing God's voice, and discovering the gifts of the Spirit.

God said David was a man after His own heart, and it was for this reason that God chose him to be king of Israel. David was passionate about an intimate relationship with God and appears to have regularly heard the voice of God. The Psalms he wrote were inspired by the Holy Spirit, and it is no doubt that he heard God's voice in some form or another.

After the death of King Saul, David took his place as the new king of Israel and immediately confronted the lack of spirituality in the nation of Israel that had resulted from the reign of King Saul. One of the most important decisions David made as the new king was to seek out the Ark of the Covenant to return it back to the land of Israel. The Ark of the Covenant carried God's presence and covenant to the people and was very important to the nation. David understood this. David knew the story of how God on Mt. Sinai had commanded Moses to build the Ark. He knew that God had said,

Exodus 25:22

There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you of all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.

In returning the Ark back to Israel, David restored God's people back to God's presence and favor. His desire was to have the presence of God in the midst of Israel where the Lord could freely speak to them from the mercy seat. David knew the importance of an intimate relationship with God and wanted Israel to experience an intimate relationship with God as well.

David was a man after God's own heart, because he wanted to restore the voice of God back to the people of Israel.

David was a shepherd, a soldier, a psalmist, a prophet, and a king. David would have been none of these, if he had not been a prayer warrior who intentionally meditated on God's Word and listened for God's voice. David prayed with great

passion and conviction - unlike what many of us experience in our personal prayer lives. He testified, "Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he will hear my voice" (Psalm 55:17). He made God's testimonies his daily meditation: "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation" (Psalm 119:99). He also made it a point to actively listen for God's voice. At one point in his life, David wrote, "Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints, to those who turn to him in their hearts" (Psalm 85:8). David appears to have understood that an intimate relationship with God involved two-way communication. He would speak to God and wait for God to speak to him.

David's identity as a man after God's own heart was intricately linked with the three spiritual practices of prayer, meditation, and active listening. These spiritual practices are essential for us to experience intimacy with God. These means for connecting intimately with God will ultimately help us to hear the Good Shepherd's voice and enjoy the abundant life of knowing God more intimately. Choose today to become a person after God's own heart and experience the amazing power of God's intimate presence at work in your own life.

David was also a man after God's own heart because of his love for Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. David expressed his love for Jerusalem when he wrote, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they prosper who love you!" (Psalm 122:6). I would like to share a testimony at this point that reveals the great concern and love that God has for the nation of Israel at this crucial time in history.

THE PEACE OF ISRAEL

The nation of Israel needs our prayers more than ever before. This has been true in the past, but it is much more so at this present hour. Currently, Israel is regarded as an enemy by many of the nations in the Middle East. Many of these nations will not rest until they see Israel destroyed from the face of the earth.

In light of this threat, the Holy Spirit provided me with a corporate exhortation for the Church to pray for the nation of Israel. The spiritual gift of prophecy appears to be the source of this exhortation. In particular, the message came through the voice of the Holy Spirit. The message specifically identified four areas of prayer to provide intercession for the nation. The following prayers are the ones the Lord told me to share with the Body of Christ:

The Lord said, "I want the Church to..."

- "Pray for the peace and restoration of the nation of Israel."
- "Pray that Israel's enemies, including Satan's kingdom, will lose their influence over the nation of Israel."
- "Pray that every man and woman who is trying to destroy the nation of Israel will be captured by the authorities."
- "Pray that God will loose the destroyer upon those nations who are trying to destroy the nation of Israel."

In order to validate this prophetic exhortation, I asked God to provide me with a confirmation for the message. This idea came to me as I remembered one of David's experiences from the Bible. I had read about it not long before this time. The story is found in 1 Samuel:

1 Samuel 23:1-4

¹Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Kei'lah, and are robbing the threshing floors." ²Therefore David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Kei'lah." ³But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more then if we go to Kei'lah against the armies of the Philistines?" ⁴Then David inquired of the LORD again. And the LORD answered him, "Arise, go down to Kei'lah; for I will give the Philistines into your hand."

In this story, God spoke to David and provided him with a specific instruction: "Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah." After he delivered the message to his men, David's soldiers voiced their doubt and fear concerning this course of action. Possibly, their doubt caused David to doubt as well.

David knew his men needed reassurance at this point. Thus, he prayed a second time, and God gave him a confirmation. God spoke to him again and told him to go Keilah to fight the Philistines. In addition, He guaranteed they would win the battle.

We learn from David that it is okay to ask the Lord for a confirmation. If God speaks to you, He will confirm His words. God has provided a confirmation for me on many occasions. On a few occasions, God did not provide a confirmation, and I decided the message was not from Him. A confirmation will definitely guarantee God has spoken to you and possibly save you from speaking out of turn and presumptuously like many do in this day and time.

After I asked God for the confirmation, the Lord said, "For your confirmation, you will see stars in the clouds today." I questioned God as to how someone could see stars in the clouds. A few minutes later, I took a break from work and decided to pick up lunch from a restaurant nearby. On my way back from the restaurant, I looked up into the sky to see if I could find any stars in the clouds. I said to the Lord, "Lord, I've been looking, and I haven't seen any stars in the clouds." The Lord said, "If you believe, you will see."

A few moments later, I crossed the Tennessee River via the DuPont Parkway Bridge. As I drove across the bridge, I looked to my left at the river and saw something in the sky above that totally amazed me. Although they were not in the form I had expected, I finally located the stars. In fact, there were precisely three stars in a row featured in the sky above.

Have you ever seen skywriting? Someone using a plane fitted with a smoke generator writes messages with the smoke in the sky. It appeared the stars I saw came from these types of smoke streams. God was right. I literally saw stars in the clouds on that day. The stars were enormous in size and looked like five point stars in shape. It was truly an amazing sight. Interestingly, this star shape is associated with military power. The U.S. military has used them as the official insignia for their various ranks of General since the 1780s. This seemed fitting for the prayers given. I knew then that I was definitely a part of the Army of the Lord. Join with me in this spiritual warfare to see Israel restored in these last days.

GOD SPEAKS ALL THE TIME

ASK TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to realize He is speaking to you all the time.

The first time I remember hearing God's voice was on the evening that I committed my life to Jesus Christ and confessed Him as Savior. This occurred after hearing a message of salvation at a local Baptist church in our community. I was only six years old at the time, but I remember the experience vividly.

The pastor preached a wonderful message about Jesus that evening. I don't remember the precise details of the message, but I do remember him standing before the congregation inviting those present to come to the altar to receive Christ as their Savior. I recognized my need at the time to come to Jesus and wanted desperately to walk down the aisle to give my life to Him.

What made it challenging was that I was a very shy and timid child and found it difficult to be in front of strangers. When a stranger would come to our home back then, my sister and I would hide behind the sofa or in a corner until we felt comfortable enough to be in their presence. I did not feel comfortable enough at the church to walk down the aisle to give my life to Jesus. I felt afraid and hesitated from responding to the invitation.

As I sat there, I heard a voice in my mind say, "Don't be afraid. Go down to the altar." The voice was clear as if there was someone sitting beside me whispering into my ear. I found

the courage to respond from hearing the voice. I firmly believe God spoke to me on that day. As the scriptures say, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

This is the first time I recall hearing the voice of God or the voice of the Holy Spirit. It would be many years after that occasion before I would hear His voice so clearly again. Over the years, my family became disconnected from the church, and my relationship with God never fully developed. I remember someone asking me at the age of sixteen if I was a Christian, and I told them I was not a Christian. I did not attend church and believed you must at least attend church to be a Christian. Though I did not attend church, I did find myself praying to God for help during difficult times in my teenage years, and God answered my prayers from time to time.

At the age of nineteen I attended a revival at a local Church of God after being invited by one of my friends who had been saved a few weeks earlier. After hearing the evangelist's message, I felt convinced of my need to go to the altar to pray, and I recommitted my life to Christ that evening. I went home that evening and decided to pray before going to bed. As I knelt on the floor to pray, I felt something leap inside of me. I could only fathom at the time that it was the Spirit of Christ letting me know I was His. After my commitment, I began attending church on a regular basis, fellowshiping with other believers, and studying the Word of God.

I started to grow spiritually as I invested time in learning about Jesus through reading the scriptures. There were times when the Word of God would seem to come alive to me in a

very real and personal way. My mind would be illuminated by some passage of scripture or biblical story that would bring clarity about God's message. This I sense is one of the beginning points for hearing God's voice in a personal way. Many of us do not progress beyond this point, however. The failure to go beyond this initial illumination phase of hearing God's voice may be from not understanding or being taught about hearing God's voice. To receive illumination from the scripture is not the end my friend. It is only the beginning of something wonderful and exciting in the realm of knowing and experiencing God.

I had experienced this illuminating aspect of God's Spirit on various occasions for years after recommitting my life to Christ. However, I had never discerned hearing God's voice speaking direct words to my understanding like I experienced on the one occasion as a child. I had heard of a few who claimed God spoke to them in this way. At the time, I wondered if the people who said they heard God's voice truly heard God speak to them or just imagined this. I would often look questionably at my own life and wonder why God did not speak to me as He did to them. I realized the Bible contained numerous stories of people hearing God's voice. I just simply could not grasp the thought of people in this day and time hearing God's voice. Maybe you have had similar thoughts and feelings.

God began teaching me to hear His voice in the fall of 2001. This did not happen overnight or right away. I had to go through some difficult trials to finally be in the place where I would listen to God. My prayer is that your trials, whatever they may be, will lead you to recognize your need to hear

God's voice. At this time, I had made some poor decisions about a particular relationship. As a result, my relationship with this person abruptly ended, which left me with a great deal of emotional pain and anguish. The experience was beneficial in that it caused me to cry out to God in prayer.

As I prayed, I asked God to show me whether this person truly loved me. A few days later, I decided to visit the Pentecostal church I first joined after committing my life to Christ. Sister Hall gave me an important message from God that day. During the worship service, she came to me and said, "Tony, Jesus wants you to know this one important thing. As you walk through the paths of life, not everyone is going to love you, but Jesus loves you."

I was completely astonished when I received this message. I had never experienced a message so powerful. God's love overwhelmed me that day. Although the message was dear to my heart, I became disappointed at the realization that I had been part of another failed relationship.

Isaiah 30:19-21

¹⁹Yea, O people in Zion who dwell at Jerusalem; you shall weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you. ²⁰And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. ²¹And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

Although God spoke clearly, I eventually disregarded the message. God sent another message to me through my niece,

Macara. Unfortunately, I did not listen on that occasion either. A few weeks later, this person asked for forgiveness and came back into my life. The relationship ended very ugly after only a couple of months, however. A few days afterwards, I prayed to God again for relief from my wounded heart. As I knelt to pray, a verse from the Book of Hebrews came to my mind: "Wherefore he (Jesus) is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25, KJV). I cried out to Jesus with this verse in mind and asked (or rather begged) Him to please pray for me.

Amazingly, God answered my prayer again, and it came almost immediately. This time Jesus answered me in an audible voice in my bedroom as soon as I asked Him to pray for me. He said, "Tony, I am praying for you." I opened my eyes, turned to look behind me, and expected to see Jesus standing at the doorway to my bedroom. Although He was not, I knew with certainty that God had spoken audibly to me. Fortunately, God showed me mercy and spoke to me in a very special way. After this dramatic event, I realized that I needed to draw closer to God, since He was apparently closer than I had realized. And, He is closer to you than you realize. Draw near to Him, my friend.

God's mercy has been made available to us, because Jesus bore the punishment for our sins on the cross and was raised from the dead to impart His life and righteousness to us. We no longer live under God's judgment and condemnation but under His covenant of grace. We have received amazing grace, and God expects us to show amazing grace to others who sin against us. A little later, I discuss how God taught me to

forgive and offer grace to the person that wounded me in the story I shared in the previous few paragraphs.

A couple of months after hearing God's audible voice, I called Pastor George Jones of Abba's House with an urgent need for pastoral counseling. As all Christians do, I was struggling with the flesh, the world, and Satanic forces. There was great conflict in my life, and I was growing weary of the battle. As I talked with George, he told me something that captured my attention like few things had before. He said, "Tony, God is speaking to us all the time, but we are not listening for His voice and seldom do we ask to hear His voice." I thought, "Well, if God is speaking to me all the time, I need to ask to hear His voice and be open to the possibility of hearing His voice." I did not realize it at the time, but Pastor George's statement was a word of wisdom from the Holy Spirit.

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to ask to hear His voice.

After I carefully dissected and digested George's statement, I made a commitment to ask the Lord every day to hear His voice. I did not ask to hear His voice occasionally or casually. No, I was faithful and focused from this time forward. It was not a flippant request but one that expressed seriousness and sincerity. Any time I prayed, I asked to hear God's voice. The following is a list of times when I would ask to hear God's voice:

- I asked to hear His voice when I read the Bible.
- I asked as soon as I woke up in the morning.

- I asked when I was driving to work.
- I asked multiple times throughout the day.
- I asked when I went to bed each night.
- I asked any time the thought came to my mind.
- I asked every time I prayed.

There was not a day that went by that I did not ask God. I was determined to hear His voice. I did not give up or give in but remained patient and persistent. Although I struggled in areas of sanctification, I did not allow these issues to hinder my pursuit either. I did not focus on the reasons why God might not speak to me or how long it would take to hear God's voice. I simply believed that in time I would hear His voice, and I eventually did. Praise God!

If you want to hear God's voice, you must believe He is speaking to you all the time. You may not hear Him at this time, because you may not be asking to hear His voice or listening for His voice. Asking to hear God's voice is a key to hearing God's voice. You should ask and keep asking in order to hear. Jesus said, "For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Luke 11:10). You should ask to hear God's voice throughout each day and every day from here on out. Give God a good reason to speak to you. Let Him know you are interested in what He has to say about your life and future. Truly, God wants to speak to you about some very important things and He will eventually.

God desires above all things to have an intimate "first love" relationship with you through the presence of the Holy Spirit. You must ask often for the Spirit's help on this journey. Truly, only the Spirit of Christ living within you can open your

spiritual ears to hear His voice. You can accomplish nothing by your own means, but by grace you can accomplish much. If you truly want to hear God's voice, you must seek Him with your whole heart and every ounce of your being. Ask to hear God's voice today and every day!

THE WORD OF GOD

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to focus on the Word of God.

Primarily, God speaks to us through the written Word of God. Apart from God's Word, everything we think we hear from God in our minds and from other sources should agree in spirit and character with the written Word of God. Always be critical and discerning of what you hear and compare what you hear to the Word of God.

The Word of God informs us of who God is, what God does, and how God relates with humanity. We develop a greater knowledge and understanding of God as we study the Word. Hidden within His Word are deep truths that connect us with God's person-hood – those qualities and characteristics that clearly define Him. The Bible houses truths that can ultimately transform us into the image of Jesus Christ.

We can receive faith through our interaction with God's Word, either the written or spoken words of God. The Word of God embodies the life of God, His Spirit. The Spirit with and within the Word enters our heart to produce the fruit of faith that works by love (Galatians 5:6). Jesus said, "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63). The eternal Word

of God has creative power and, thus, creates faith within the heart that receives it as truth.

It is important to regularly read, study, and meditate on God's Word. It is our principal resource for connecting with God and hearing God's voice. If we fail to make God's Word our primary resource, we may stray from the path of truth and into paths of deception. God's Word provides us with the guardrails to help us safely navigate this less traveled path.

God's Word must be the central focus for church leaders and every member of our churches. If we diminish the presentation of God's Word, the byproduct will be the spiritual downfall of our congregations and a failure to experience genuine intimacy with God. In this age, some churches have failed to keep the Word of God as their primary resource or focus. They have seriously erred by doing so.

If you want to hear God's voice, simply tune into the network the Holy Spirit is speaking through, the Holy Bible. God is always speaking through the Bible – twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. It has an uninterrupted transmission. Tune in often and listen intently for God to speak to you. Ultimately, full immersion in God's Word is absolutely necessary for hearing God's voice.

WINDOWS AND WINTER

Anne Bradstreet (1655)

If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome.

I began hearing God's voice clearly around July of 2002. At a prayer meeting, I heard the voice of the Holy Spirit during a time of meditation, prayer, and active listening. The Lord simply spoke one word to me at this meeting. The word was "windows." God's voice was not loud but more like a gentle whisper. At the time, I thought the word implied that I had windows to my heart. I sensed God was searching my heart at this time in a unique way.

The following week I attended another prayer meeting. After the meeting, the Lord gently whispered the word, "winter," to me over and over again as I drove home. The next morning I woke up and prayed, and the Holy Spirit came upon me in a special way during this time of prayer. In particular, the Holy Spirit filled my mouth with words of love for God. And I began to speak them with such enthusiasm that I was taken by surprise with the concert of praise I was offering up.

My experience with the baptism with the Holy Spirit was similar to this experience. In both experiences, I felt the tangible presence of God, and the Spirit filled my mouth with words. On this occasion, I simply spoke in my native language and not a language unknown to me. After a moment, the Holy Spirit directed me to a particular book in the Bible, the Song of Songs. There I found the following passage of scripture that furthered my understanding of God's message about "windows" and "winter":

Songs 2:8-13

⁸The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. ⁹My beloved is like a gazelle, or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. ¹⁰My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; ¹¹for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. ¹²The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. ¹³The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. (underline is mine)

This passage of scripture provided me with a renewed hope in God's plan for my life. Later, I realized God's plan was revealed in the passage, and the plan was to bring me into a more intimate relationship with Him. It was to become an intimate relationship with God in which I would hear His voice and discover the gifts of the Spirit. God's earlier invitation to become a man after His own heart was reinforced with this message of intimacy.

As a metaphor in scripture, winter often represents a place of darkness, suffering, and barrenness. Enduring a long winter can cause one to long for the spring season. I had felt for a long time like I had been stuck in the winter season of life. Thankfully, this winter season faded away as I began to hear God's intimate voice.

THE VOICE OF HEALING

God's timing was perfect at this juncture in my life. I desperately needed a season of transformation and spiritual

healing. Throughout my life, I had suffered some debilitating emotional and mental injuries that inevitably affected my spiritual life. These injuries included abuse, the death of my mother at the age of seven, abandonment by my father, and abandonment by some significant others later in life. At one point, I had rebelled against God and even thought of abandoning the battered vessel – myself.

I wondered at times just how much longer I could endure this broken condition. A profound feeling of hopelessness had permeated my thought life for a number of years. I felt like damaged goods that had no hope of repair. I thought I might not ever recover mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. The following Psalm accurately characterizes what I felt:

Psalm 6:2-4 (KJV)

²Have mercy upon me, O LORD; for I am weak: O LORD, heal me; for my bones are vexed. ³My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long? ⁴Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake.

Another Psalm helps capture this state of hopelessness within the human soul. Psalm 107 describes a rebellious and disobedient Israel. They suffered greatly for their lack of faith in God. The psalmist described them as those who “sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron” (Psalm 107:10, KJV).

At one point, the psalmist wrote, “He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions” (Psalm 107:20, KJV). In other words, God spoke to them, possibly through a prophet or some other medium. Ultimately,

they received deliverance and healing as they heard God's voice and responded in obedience to His commands.

The path of healing for my life began by seeking to know Christ, the Word, in an intimate way. Asking to hear God's voice was my desperate cry to know the intimate and compassionate heart of Jesus. God also wants to have an intimate relationship with you. He wants to speak words of healing and transformation into your life. Why are you waiting? Ask now to hear God's voice.

God's healing power began to flow into my life as I began to hear His voice. Not only was hearing God's voice a source of healing in and of itself, but God also spoke messages of healing into my life. They were words of wisdom or knowledge that helped me understand God's love, mercy, and intimate nature in a more profound and meaningful way. God's initial approach to bring healing to me was to deal with some unforgiveness that had been lingering in my own life. It was through God dealing with this unforgiveness that He showed me the source of all true spiritual healing – the Eternal Work of Christ.

FORGIVENESS + BLESSING = HEALING

A few months after hearing “windows” and “winter,” I struggled with the issue of unforgiveness. It was related to the person I spoke of earlier who had wounded me during a relationship. It was through this experience that the Lord taught me about how forgiveness is experienced through our understanding and application of the cross and resurrection of Christ – that is Christ, Him Crucified, and Him raised from the dead. And, let me say that Christ, Him Crucified, and Him

raised from the dead is the very heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the foundation of our faith.

Now, the Holy Spirit provided this understanding through a word of wisdom that came as a vision. As I said before, I developed a close relationship with someone and it ended in a bad way. I got hurt pretty bad and struggled for a time to move past it. I had not seen the person in a long time, and when I did finally see the person I struggled with thoughts and feelings of unforgiveness. In the midst of this struggle, I prayed a confessional prayer of forgiveness for this person thinking I had truly let the hurt go and offered forgiveness. However, I saw this person a few days later and experienced the same thoughts and feelings of unforgiveness. This really did trouble me since I thought I had followed the biblical prescription for forgiveness. I saw this person on a couple of other occasions after this and still there was no change in my attitude.

It was about two weeks later that God finally spoke to me about this issue. The initial prompting of the Holy Spirit for this experience was the conviction I felt at the time. In particular, God revealed that, although I had offered forgiveness, I had failed to complete the process of forgiveness. As I mentioned, He revealed this through a vision. First, He gave me a vision of the cross. And He showed me that Christ's death was the source of forgiveness for our sins and all spiritual blessings. He then showed me a vision of the resurrection in the background of the cross. God revealed through this aspect of the vision that the resurrection was an integral part of the process of forgiveness and blessing as well. He showed that the resurrection of Christ was the means by which forgiveness and all spiritual blessings have been made

available to all who believe. In essence, the cross and the resurrection are two parts of one great work of God in Christ. And they are inseparable works that can be best described as Christ's Eternal Work.

To understand how the blood of Jesus and the resurrection are linked together in forgiveness and blessing, we must consider two points. First, we must understand that Christ's sacrificial death, that is the blood of Jesus, met all the righteous demands that God required for the forgiveness and blessing of humanity. Jesus fulfilled all the righteous requirements of God's Holy law and died as the sinless Lamb of God without spot or blemish. The righteousness of God was established in Christ's once for all and once for all time act of self-sacrifice. Second, the resurrection was necessary to make the righteousness of God in Christ available to the sinner. Christ had to be raised from the dead – that is overcome death - in order that His righteousness might be imputed to sinners by faith. The resurrection was God's signature approval, God's Amen, of all that Christ had accomplished for us through the cross. And all that Jesus accomplished in His death became available to us through His resurrection.

Paul wrote at Romans 4:25 that Jesus “was delivered up for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.” Justification speaks of making sinners righteous in the sight of God. God's act of raising Christ from the dead provided sinners with the provisions and blessings of Christ's sacrifice by faith. And God told me specifically that I needed to complete the process of forgiveness by praying for my offender to be blessed just as Christ was raised from the dead to offer us the immeasurable forgiveness and blessings of God.

So immediately, I began praying that God would bless this person. Each time this person came to mind, I prayed God would bless this person with His peace, forgiveness, love, and mercy. I prayed God would bless this person with a long life, good health, financial blessings, and so on. I prayed this way for about a week, and one day I saw my offender in the local supermarket. Remarkably, on this occasion I felt peace and was able to wish this person well. The rage and bad thoughts I had experienced were gone completely. I have felt this way about this person since that time.

God showed me through this experience that forgiveness is incomplete without the act of blessing. And it must be said further, that faith in the cross is incomplete without faith in the resurrection. In fact, Paul wrote at Romans 10:9-10 that salvation comes by faith in Christ, Him crucified, and Him raised from the dead. Paul wrote, "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." And when Paul speaks of salvation, He is speaking of God's total plan of salvation which includes justification, sanctification, and redemption.

Maybe you have tried to forgive someone only to re-experience rage and hateful thoughts about the person when you think about them or see them. Maybe your lack of forgiveness for others is the cause for other spiritual and emotional troubles in your life. I encourage you to confess your forgiveness for this person in light of Christ's sacrifice and pray that God will bless them in light of Christ's resurrection. As you complete the process of forgiveness, your mind and spirit will be free to love once again. You may find that your life

improves in many other areas as you are freed from the prison house of unforgiveness.

Jesus said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44, KJV). It was through His sacrifice that Jesus revealed God's love for humanity. He has offered to the whole world the forgiveness of sins through the shedding of His own blood. And, Jesus will forever bear the wounds of the cross in His body. These are His eternal wounds (Rev. 5:6). There is still power in the blood of Jesus, since Christ rose from the dead. The blood of Jesus is as fresh and powerful today as the day He shed it on the cross.

The writer of Hebrews says it like this: "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (7:25). In Heaven, Christ, the Crucified One – who rose from the dead still bearing the wounds of the cross in His body, will forever mediate or intercede for us through His eternal sacrifice. The "message of the cross" that Paul preached was not just a single event that occurred at Calvary. The revelation of the cross began at this single event, but Christ's sacrifice at Calvary was eternal in nature. And, it was made available to us through His resurrection in order that He might provide for the eternal redemption and eternal blessings of fallen humanity.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20, KJV). Here, Paul is saying that He is currently or at the present

time in the state of being crucified with Christ. Why? Because the cross is an eternal spiritual reality within Christ and within those who have received Christ by faith. And Paul lives. And why does Paul live? He lives because the Spirit of the Resurrected Christ lives within Him. Paul communicates through this passage two important truths. First, the perpetual, eternal benefits of the cross were at work in His life through the Spirit of Christ. Second, the One who was raised from the dead also raised Paul from spiritual death to be alive in Him. We see here Paul's faith in Christ, Him crucified, and Him raised from the dead. Paul experienced the power of the cross and resurrection at work in his life on a daily basis. We must then on a daily basis reckon ourselves dead indeed to sin through Christ and Him crucified and alive to God through Christ and Him raised from the dead (Romans 6:11).

This experience with forgiveness was very helpful when I began a one year chaplain residency at the VA Hospital in Tampa, FL. It was my first week at the hospital, and God spoke to me through a dream about my first devotion presentation. In the dream, the Lord said, "Teach them about the three principles of forgiveness."

A few days later, I presented the devotion about forgiveness in the chapel. I shared with them some of the things I had learned through the word of wisdom about forgiveness. Immediately after the devotion, three of the chaplains came to me and said my message was directly from the heart of God. There had been some major conflicts among the chaplains that had left them embittered with one another. God revealed that He wanted them to forgive and bless one another as a testimony of His mercy and grace.

ABANDONED CROSSES

At one point, the Lord revealed to me that many Christians in this generation have either abandoned or are in danger of abandoning the cross. This revelation came as a word of wisdom in the form of a vision. It was and is a warning for the Body of Christ. Specifically, it reveals the spiritual condition of the Church and encourages us to embrace the cross daily rather than forsake it.

The vision was unique in that it was from a perspective that I had not experienced before. From the beginning to the end of the vision, I saw the face of the earth from an aerial perspective. I moved through the air much like a plane does. With a bird's eye view of the surrounding terrain, I saw with clarity all the features of the earth.

The first thing I saw was a few wooden crosses scattered on the ground throughout the landscape. As the vision progressed, the amount of crosses increased. At one point, there appeared small groups of crosses together. Next, there appeared even larger groups of crosses than before. Finally, I came to a place where there was a large pile of wooden crosses. The vision ended at this point.

While experiencing the vision, I wondered if one of the crosses on the ground was my own personal cross. My concern suddenly turned into shock as thoughts came to my mind that the vision concerned the spiritual condition of the Church. I was impressed in my spirit at the time that the large pile of crosses symbolized an immense falling away or apostasy of the Church.

Imagine a sizable exodus of people from the Christian faith and picture how that might look. You might picture scores of

people giving up their faith and leaving the Church. You might imagine many people, who at one time were faithful church attenders, deciding church was a waste of time. You might picture a multitude of Christians, who once claimed Christ as the only way to God, embracing other gods or ways of salvation for humanity.

What we are seeing happen in the Church today looks nothing like the things I just described. Christianity is in crisis today, because many have departed from the truth of God's Word in favor of doctrines which appeal to the world's standards and the sensual nature of humanity. Sadly, the mass exodus we see from the Christian faith today is by those who still attend church on a regular basis or somewhat regular basis.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1, KJV). He did not say, "Some shall depart from the church building." He said, "Some shall depart from the faith." What many do not realize is the spiritual dimension related to apostasy and how one can apostatize from the faith while appearing to be Christian-like. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul prophesied about a falling away that would occur around the time of Christ's return. Are we living in those final days before Christ's return? We may very well be in light of the current spiritual condition of the Church.

The Apostle Peter warned there would be false teachers that would arise among the churches to lead believers astray. Consider the following verses:

2 Peter 2:1-3 (KJV)

¹But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. ²And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. ³And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

False teaching has always been a problem in the Church. It is even more pronounced at this time in the history of the Church. Simply turn on the television to a Christian station, and you will be inundated by false doctrine. Regrettably, many viewers and church goers fail to properly discern what they are hearing or the spirits behind the messages.

The Church does do well in some areas of discernment. We are often quick to recognize false doctrine if it is clear and apparent. For example, we recognize it is false doctrine when someone says Jesus was only a man and not God. On the other hand, we often struggle to discern false doctrine when it is not so apparent. For example, we have problems with discernment, if the message is about “another Jesus.”

Paul addressed the preaching of “another Jesus” in his second letter to the Corinthian Church. It appears many Christians today have submitted themselves to “another Jesus” or a false Jesus. This false Christ is proclaimed through false doctrines. Consider the following verses from the Apostle Paul:

2 Corinthians 11:3-4

³But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴For if some one comes and preaches another Jesus than the one we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough.

Another Jesus is being preached in our churches and on television and radio programs throughout the U.S. and around the world. The Jesus that is boldly proclaimed by these false teachers is a Jesus without a cross. The cross was the pioneering message of Christianity at its initial beginnings. Christ spoke often of the cross, and how it related to His mission and the mission of individual believers. From Christ's perspective, one could not become or remain one of His true disciples unless they denied themselves, took up their cross, and followed Him. We must remain faithful to God's message concerning the cross in this generation.

Believers in this day and age are faced with the temptation to abandon the cross. And I personally believe Satan tempts every follower of Christ to abandon the cross. We must be aware of this temptation and take steps to guard our hearts against Satan's temptation. Possibly, this temptation is the greatest temptation we may ever experience.

The Gospel of Mark clearly shows how Jesus was tempted to forsake the cross, and how Peter initially resisted the cross. Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Christ (Mark 8:29), but resisted Jesus' message about the cross (Mark 8:31-33). What Peter did not understand, and for which his eyes had been blinded by Satan, was that Jesus' identify as Christ was directly

connected to his death as the suffering Son of man. But not only that, the cross was connected to the Resurrected Christ who continued to bear the wounds of Calvary in His body. This speaks of the eternal, efficacious power of the cross for the one who believes. Some want to serve a miracle working Messiah but not follow the lifestyle of the suffering Son of man.

Sinners will not be saved. Christians will not be sanctified. And the Church will apostatize, if we remove the message of the cross from our local churches. God help us all to embrace the cross and the message of the cross that Jesus, Paul, and all the Apostles preached.

False teaching can be seen as well in the proclamation of the prosperity and seeker-sensitive gospels. There are some good points for each of these views, but the negatives can outweigh the positives if the minister is not balanced in his/ her approach. Specifically, the message of the cross must be central to a prosperity or seeker-sensitive message.

The prosperity gospel can be very dangerous in that it has the potential to pervert and twist the scriptures for personal gain or greed. Teaching that we give to God (plant a seed) in order to receive back from God (the law of sowing and reaping) is a misinterpretation of the scriptures. We do not give hoping to receive in return. We give out of generosity and love for others knowing only that this is pleasing to God. As the Apostle Peter foretold, some ministers have used the prosperity gospel to “make merchandise” or steal the money of unsuspecting Christians. Given the abuse of some ministers, the prosperity gospel has become a complete embarrassment for the Church in the eyes of the world.

The seeker-sensitive gospel focuses on self-improvement and seeks to address the “felt needs” of people. To help people improve their lives and minister to their “felt needs” is a good thing, if we place it within the context of the cross. However, the pervading perspective on this teaching often avoids so-called offensive Christian terminology like the blood of Jesus, the cross, sin, hell, or personal sacrifice. The seeker-sensitive church often employs secular marketing strategies to attract non-believers to their churches. Once there, these non-believers hear a feel-good message devoid of any truth pertaining to the cross or what it really means to truly deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus. Seeker-sensitive ministers often preach a “soft” Jesus who wants to make people healthy, wealthy, and more fulfilled.

One internationally known and beloved minister is a proponent of both the prosperity and seeker-sensitive gospels. I did not know this about him in 2003 when I received a Spirit-inspired message about his teachings. This revelation occurred as I listened to him preach on television one evening. Sadly, he pastors one of the largest churches in America and is the author of some bestselling Christian books. His name is Joel Osteen.

On this occasion, a message of discernment came to me through the voice of the Holy Spirit. The initial prompting of the Holy Spirit came as a fist-like pressure in my chest that felt very warm. At the end of his televised message, the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said, “He is teaching the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.”

I remembered reading about the Nicolaitans in the Bible. I did a little research and located it in the Book of Revelation

chapter two. As I had on some other occasions, I asked the Lord to provide a confirmation for the message. The following verses in the second chapter of Revelation discuss this particular doctrine:

Revelation 2:6, 15-16

⁶Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicola'itans, which I also hate... ¹⁵So you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicola'itans. ¹⁶Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

God answered the prayer for a confirmation in less than a week. Randall, my brother-in-law, called me at home the following weekend. He asked if I was familiar with Joel Osteen. I said I had listened to him preach on television within the last week. Randall told me a notable Pentecostal minister had identified Osteen's teachings as the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Randall asked for my opinion about this. I told him about the message God had given me. We both agreed the message of discernment had been confirmed by God through our conversation.

There have been numerous writings and proposals as to what are the teachings or doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Some suggest it coincides with the other false doctrines mentioned by Jesus in the Book of Revelation. These are the doctrine of Balaam and the teachings of Jezebel. Some have suggested the teachings can be understood by the meaning of the name of the doctrine. Nicolaitans means "to conquer or rule over the people" or "destruction of the people" (Strong's, G3531).

I suggest one can know in part some of the content of the doctrine by examining the teachings of Joel Osteen and others

whose teachings are similar to his. Osteen is a wonderful fabulist but definitely not a sound Christian teacher. It is bad enough that Joel teaches these false gospels. What makes it worse is that so many people believe him and consider him one of the leading Christian ministers in the Church at this time. Paul warned that this type of following would occur within the Church in his second letter to Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:2-4 (KJV)

²Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; ⁴And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

It may be pointless to ask to hear God's voice, if we embrace these false doctrines and fail to embrace the most important doctrine of the New Testament – the cross of Christ. We must hold tight to the things we have learned and been assured of through the Word of God. God is looking through the windows of our hearts and knows where our faith resides. And God is calling to His beloved – calling us out of these false doctrines that lead to apostasy. He is calling us out of this dark, oppressive winter season of spiritual abuse. And He is calling us into a season of intimacy and fruitfulness in our Christian lives where we here His voice and long to see His glorious face and His nail-scarred hands and feet.

CHAPTER TWO: KEYS FOR INTIMACY

SWEET MEDITATION

A KEY SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to meditate on the Word and long to hear the voice of Jesus.

Meditation is a key spiritual practice for developing an intimate relationship with God and hearing God's voice. From my experience, many spiritual leaders fail to stress the importance and value of meditation. Some mention meditation at times but not with the needed personal and relational emphasis. This has been a serious oversight for many of us.

Meditation on the Word helps to renew the mind and cleanse the heart. Meditation is a form of active listening, and one is actively listening to God's voice through meditating on the scriptures. Active listening can occur during times of prayer as well and will be discussed in the next section.

The word, "meditate" or "meditation," is mentioned in twenty-two verses in the Bible and alluded to in some other verses of scripture. Eighteen of these verses are found in the Psalms. David spoke about meditation more than anyone else in the Bible. Meditation is also mentioned in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul.

The Apostle Paul instructed the Philippian Christians to pray about all things, especially those things which bring anxiety and fear. He wanted them to experience God's peace, a supernatural peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:6-7). Immediately after his exhortation to prayer, Paul instructed them on what types of things to think about after praying. Consider the following verse:

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

We often pray about the things that cause us anxiety and ask for God's peace. For some of us, we often return to those anxious thoughts not long after praying. Paul admonished the Philippians to pray and, afterwards, to think or meditate on the good things of God. As was mentioned before, God's Word is our primary resource for connecting intimately with God. God's Word contains many precious promises for us to meditate on and preserve the peace which God gives. Meditation on God's Word and prayer go hand in hand as we seek the intimate heart of God and strive for spiritual renewal.

Some Christians read and study God's Word daily. Others spend very little time reading and studying the Bible. Studying God's Word is very important, because you need to be able to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). Reading and studying God's Word are valuable, but these activities do not equate to the added value one receives from meditating on the scriptures.

It is not enough just to regularly read and study the Word of God. Meditation takes you a step further than both reading and studying God's Word. The Psalmist David wrote, "My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding" (Psalm 49:3, KJV). According to David, understanding or insight comes through meditation. Meditation involves contemplation, which is thinking seriously and at length about something. You can meditate either

inwardly by thinking to yourself or outwardly by speaking the words of God to yourself. Scripture memorization is a good first step for meditating on God's Word.

You can begin meditating on God's Word by simply choosing a meaningful scripture or passage of scripture and speaking it out loud to yourself from time to time. As you do this, you can contemplate or consider the implications or conclusions of this scripture for your life. For example, Paul wrote, "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. As you meditate on this verse, you can conclude that you are dead to sin through Christ and Him crucified and alive to God through Him raised from the dead – the power of His resurrection. You can speak these things out loud to yourself. Using the Word of God in this fashion will help to renew your mind and prepare you to hear God's voice.

The intimacy you develop with God will be in part determined by how much time you spend meditating on the Word of God and the person of Jesus. Many Christians feel God is pleased with them when they do stuff for Him. God is pleased with our service. However, God is more concerned about having our undivided attention and devotion, and we can give him both through meditation. God wants us to place our relationship with Him first, because our relationship with Him fuels and empowers service towards others.

Meditating on God's Word for extended periods of time will be difficult initially. Nevertheless, the time spent will be rewarding at the end of each day. Eventually, you will become more sensitive to and develop an awareness of God speaking to you in a personal way. You may or may not hear God

speaking to you in a personal way during these times, however. Meditation prepares the heart and mind to hear when God does speak in this fashion. God will choose the most appropriate time to let you hear the voice of His Spirit. Personally, I have only heard the Spirit's voice on a few occasions while in meditation. Nevertheless, meditation is one of the first steps to actively listening for God's voice.

A greater desire to know and love God will permeate your heart as you regularly meditate on God's Word and the person of Jesus. He will eventually become more a part of you and all that you do, and you will be transformed more and more into His image. Your primary desire in meditation must be to fall in love with Jesus all over again and place Him as the first love of your life.

HIS AFFECTIONATE EMBRACE

Songs 2:4-6

⁴He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. ⁵Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples; for I am sick with love. ⁶O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me!

The Song of Songs speaks of an intimate courtship between King Solomon and a young Shulamite woman. As the song progresses, they frequently complement each other and marvel at each others beautiful attributes. Their love for one another deepens as they long to become more intimate and consummate the courtship.

Solomon's song is an intimate picture of how you can be in a "first love" relationship with Jesus. Meditating on his marvelous attributes will deepen your love for Him and help

you to embrace Him with your whole heart. Jesus treasures every moment spent with you, and He longs for you to draw closer to Him. Your desire for Jesus must become so intense that it causes you to forsake the many things of everyday life that keep you from Him. You must desire to be so close to Him that when you wander from Him, you become “sick with love” and long to be in His presence.

The Apostle Paul experienced this type of intimate relationship with Jesus. His greatest desire in life became to know Christ and experience His resurrection power. Paul believed that an intimate knowledge of Christ was the highest calling of God and the greatest prize in life (Philippians 3:8-14).

Songs 2:8

The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

Like the Shulamite, you must long to hear the voice of your beloved, Jesus. You may not hear His voice or feel His presence initially during times of meditation, but rest assured that He is present. Simply enjoy the time spent in His presence regardless of the immediate outcome. Create an atmosphere that is both inviting and intimate. An inspirational worship CD can help to create this kind of environment. If you create the environment and prepare your heart regularly, the Lord will come “leaping upon the mountains” to spend time with you.

Songs 2:14

O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is comely.

Your time of meditation should include repeated requests to hear His sweet voice and to see His lovely face. Remember George's statement to me: "God is speaking to us all the time, but we are not listening for His voice and seldom do we ask to hear His voice." Once again, if you truly desire to hear God's voice, you will ask Him as often as possible to express your earnest desire. Eventually, you will hear Christ's voice as you set apart some time each week to meditate on God's Word and the person of Jesus.

OUR IMMINENT TRANSLATION

Hearing God's voice is an essential component for the courtship of the Church (the Bride) with Christ (the Bridegroom). Hearing God's voice has an eschatological (end times) significance. Longing to see the face of Jesus has an eschatological significance as well. The significance of each is that you will see Jesus face to face and hear His voice when you are taken out of this world. You can prepare for this meeting ahead of time by listening for Jesus' voice during times of meditation and prayer and longing to see His face – that is know Him more intimately. The desire of many Christians to hear Jesus' voice and see His face may be a contributing factor for Christ's return. The Father may send Jesus back to the Earth when we all long to know Him more intimately.

As you hear Christ's voice, the natural progression of your faith will be to want to see Him face to face. Jesus is seeking the affections of His Bride and is waiting for her to respond to His woos and enticements. At the final consummation, the intimate marriage supper of the Lamb awaits all those who long to be with Him: "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9, KJV).

The Old Testament contains countless stories of individuals who had a close relationship with God. Two of these individuals in particular were very close to God. In fact, they were so close to God that He translated them into His presence before they saw death. Enoch walked with God and was translated from the Earth to be with the Lord (Genesis 5:24). In New Testament terms, to walk with God would mean to “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25). Elijah heard the “still small voice” of God and soon after was taken up into Heaven on a chariot of fire (1 Kings 19:11-13, 2 Kings 2:1).

The experiences of Enoch and Elijah may be viewed as types or shadows of the future rapture of the Church. In other words, the Church will be raptured from the Earth in a similar manner as were Enoch and Elijah. Both men experienced what every Christian longs to experience when Christ returns. In light of these shadows, we must learn to walk in the Spirit like Enoch and hear God’s voice like Elijah. As we do, we will be preparing for our imminent translation at the Second Coming of Christ.

AS BUSY AS A HONEYBEE

Psalm 119:103

*How sweet are thy words to my taste, sweeter than
honey to my mouth!*

The Holy Spirit provided a word of wisdom about the importance of meditation in regards to our relationship with God. It is a picture perfect example of the dual benefit of scripture reading and meditation and how these practices affect our spiritual life. On this occasion, God spoke to me through an open vision. An open vision occurs when God shows the vision as if it were happening directly in front of the

person. The person has their eyes open and is conscious of their surroundings at the time.

Remarkable, this vision occurred while I was on a service call for my employer. During my lunch break, a deep desire to read God's Word came upon me. This desire was the initial prompting of the Holy Spirit, I believe. As I read the Bible, there suddenly appeared in my sight a swarm of miniature bees, and they immediately flew down into the pages of my Bible. After their descent, each one of them came to rest upon the various words of scripture I had read. A moment later, they flew back towards me and into my eyes.

Later that evening, an evangelist spoke at my church, and his message was related to the vision I experienced that day. The message was actually a confirmation of the vision. The evangelist's message was about creating a "honey patch" within your heart. He said this could occur through reading and meditating upon the Word of God. After I heard his message, I understood a vivid comparison could be drawn between honeybees making honey and Christians creating a honey patch in their hearts.

A unique process takes place when honeybees make honey. In order to understand a little more about this process, let us take a moment to consider the social order of a honeybee hive and how they make honey. A honeybee hive consists of one queen honeybee responsible for producing drones (male honeybees) and workers (sterile female honeybees). The drones' average a couple of thousand per hive, and their primary function is to mate with the queen bee in order to repopulate the hive as others die off. The workers provide

security for the hive, feed the queen and larvae, construct the hive, and collect nectar for the production of honey.

In the process of gathering honey, the worker bees (a.k.a. field bees when performing this job) journey from the hive to nearby flowers and plants to collect nectar. They store the collected nectar in an internal sac. While coming to and from the hive, the worker bees perform various dances (waggle dance, round dance, and tremble dance) to alert other worker bees of the availability of nectar in particular areas and/ or the need for extra worker bees to collect nectar from returning foragers.

After returning to the hive with the nectar, a honeybee will regurgitate the nectar into the mouth of another worker bee. This worker bee will then use its stomach to process the nectar a number of times. After this process, the honeybee will store the finished product (honey) in the honeycomb. If you would like to investigate further, you can find this information in any encyclopedia or grade school textbook.

The following illustration serves only to provide an example or comparison to help clarify or explain how the Word of God is beneficial for our spiritual lives. It is a message of wisdom based on the vision I received.

God's Word is a field full of sweet nectar. You can gather this nectar as you read and study God's Word. This process is similar to how a worker honeybee gathers nectar from surrounding flowers or plants. As you meditate on God's Word, the mind absorbs the nectar of God's Word, and it eventually becomes honey for the heart. This is like the process the honeybee performs when it repeatedly regurgitates and

eats the nectar. The words regurgitate and meditate are similar in meaning and both indicate a repetitive process.

Honeybees need a constant supply of honey to sustain the life of the hive. Thus, they are always busy collecting nectar. You will need a constant supply of nectar to preserve your spiritual life. Thus, you must be as busy as a honeybee. The level of Christ-like sweetness in your life will indicate how busy you have been attending to the Word of God. If the thoughts, words and actions of your heart reveal a deficit of compassion, sweetness and truthfulness towards others, it is time to reevaluate your spiritual life and begin to take steps to replenish the honey patch.

Ephesians 5:18-19

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart.

As I noted earlier, a honeybee will regurgitate it's nectar into the mouth of another honeybee when it arrives back at the hive. In comparison, you have the opportunity to pass along the nectar of God's Word to other Christians. You can help enrich your fellow Christian's spiritual life by speaking or singing God's Word to them. Ephesians 5:18-19 admonishes us to do this for one another.

VISIONS OF MINISTRY

Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)

Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

To further illustrate the importance of meditating on the Word of God, I provide here a testimony about a time when God purposefully instructed me to meditate on a particular passage of scripture. As I meditated on this particular passage of scripture, I experienced two separate visions.

The visions came as I meditated on Romans 12:1. This verse had been coming to my mind for a couple of weeks, and I finally asked the Lord why. He responded by saying, "I want you to say the verse out loud three times and, afterwards, meditate on the verse." This was the initial prompting of the Holy Spirit.

After I spoke Romans 12:1 out loud three times and meditated on the verse for a few moments, I saw in a vision an elderly man sitting in a wheel chair in the front lobby of a nursing home. If you have visited a nursing home before, you may have seen some of these elderly people gathered together close to the front lobby. Many of them sit there with the hope of a visit from a friend or family member. As the man sat waiting, a kind looking man approached him and offered him a newspaper to read. Apparently, this was not what the elderly man wanted, because he refused to take the newspaper.

While I watched this scene transpire, the meaning of the vision entered my mind. First, God showed me that it was His desire for our church to minister at the local nursing home. Second, the Lord pointed out that we should be careful to share with them the Word of God above all things. The man in the vision did not want to read or hear about the things in the newspaper. The Lord showed me that what he needed and wanted to hear was the good news concerning Jesus Christ from the Bible. I would say that this understanding about the

importance of the Word of God would hold true for all ministry settings.

After I came out of the Spirit, I decided to meditate on the scripture again. I was hoping I would experience another vision. Once again, I meditated on the verse and the second vision occurred.

The first thing that grabbed my attention in the second vision was the field of view from which I could see things happening. The field of view for this vision was much different from the first vision. In the first vision, I looked at a stationary scene from a stationary position. In the second vision, the field of view was from an eye-level perspective. In a motion picture, the eye-level view of a camera is when the camera appears as though it is looking from the eyes of a person.

With my eyes acting as the camera, I walked down a long, shiny white hallway. After I walked for a moment, I stopped and opened a door to my left. As I slowly opened the door, the light from behind me filtered into the darkness, which revealed a small hallway. I walked down the short hallway and stopped just inside an opening. The opening appeared to be a large room, and I could see the silhouette of rows of beds. Some of the beds were empty with persons standing beside them.

After a moment, the persons standing beside the beds walked towards me. They came one after another until they all stood before me, just at the point where the darkness and light intermixed. At this point, I could tell that these persons were actually women. Unfortunately, they looked as though they were terribly sick with deep dark brown circles underneath their eyes. With my eyes acting as the camera, I looked down towards the floor and saw that I was holding a Bible. I knew

then that I was there to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them. The vision ended at this point.

People often equate visions with grand and heroic accomplishments. The truth is – visions lead us to help those in need and bring glory to God. They will inevitably involve sacrifice, like Christ’s vision from the Father – the cross.

Psalms 34:6-8

‘This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. ⁸O taste and see that the LORD is good! Happy is the man who takes refuge in him!

It was only a few short months after these visions that I met Mr. Burnette at a nursing home. How we met was quiet astonishing. One evening I was sitting at home and had just finished a time of prayer. Afterwards, I meditated on the Word of God. A few moments later, the Holy Spirit came upon me in an unusual manner, and I heard the voice of a man crying out to me. With a loud voice, he cried, “Tony, help me my feet are hurting.” I heard him say this three times before I returned to my natural senses. After a short time of reflection, I realized I had heard the voice of God in a profound way while being caught up in the Spirit.

The next day I decided to visit the nursing home where I had been ministering. I had been to the nursing home to visit on a number of occasions since experiencing the visions. After I arrived, I decided to visit a room I had not been to before. As I entered the first room, I saw an elderly man lying on his bed, and he was watching television. I asked if it would be alright to visit with him for a while. He said I was welcome to visit.

After a brief introduction, he shared with me some details about his life. He said his name was William Burnette and that he was 92 years old. He said he had been a member of a Presbyterian church for many years, and he had been a Christian since he was a little child. He had been married, but his wife was deceased. As far as an occupation, he said he had traveled around the world doing business.

After we talked for a while, I noticed he was a little cold. I asked him, "Would you like for me to cover up your legs with the cover so that you might be a little more comfortable? You look like you are a little cold." He said, "Sure that will be fine but please be careful. My feet are hurting really bad. I was crying out to Jesus all day yesterday asking Him to help me with the pain. It's my arthritis and some days are much worse than others."

His response stunned me, and I did not know what to say in response. The experience I had the evening before was still fresh in my mind. I knew immediately that I had heard this man's voice in the bedroom of my home the evening prior.

After a few minutes, I said to him, "God has heard your cry and sent me here to help. While I sat at my home yesterday, the Holy Spirit showed me that a man was having a terrible problem with his feet and was crying out for help." He looked at me with wonder in his eyes. His eyes looked almost childish as if he had just received some unexpected gift for Christmas. In fact, he was speechless for a few minutes.

Later, I prayed and asked the Lord to touch his feet and bring comfort to his body. I am not sure whether the Lord answered the prayer concerning his pain, but that evening Mr. Burnette never mentioned the pain in his feet again.

I went on to visit with him for a number of months. During our visits, we did not talk about world events, what was happening in politics, or things of that nature. Mr. Burnette wanted me to read him stories from the Bible. He loved to hear the stories about Jesus and the kingdom of Heaven.

THE SECRET PLACE

EMBRACING GOD

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to spend time in “secret” prayer.

Prayer is a key spiritual practice that helps you connect with God in an intimate way. Prayer is, above all things, communion with our Holy God through the presence and voice of the Holy Spirit. It is a time when we embrace God and are embraced back by Him in an intimate way. It is a time of bonding that brings you closer in union with Him. It involves spending time in God’s presence apart from the many distractions of life.

It is important that you establish a “secret” place for a private encounter with the Father. Jesus knew the importance of solitude in His relationship with the Father and directed us to seek out a place to be alone with Him. In the secret place, you have God’s undivided attention and He listens intently to every word spoken.

Matthew 6:6

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Secret communion with God is an essential ingredient to becoming a person after God’s own heart. David prayed often and fervently. You must do the same to express your desire to God for an intimate relationship with Him. Prayer is not simply a means to obtain “something” but a means to develop a closer relationship with God.

Frank Bartleman wrote extensively about prayer in *Azusa Street*. He stressed the importance of daily prayer and sacrificial prayer. For Bartleman, you had to be committed to prayer before you would see a genuine move of God's Spirit. His commitment to prayer was a testimony to his beliefs. He was what we would call today a genuine prayer warrior. He spent many hours and, at times, entire nights in prayer. He prayed through to receive a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit that brought many people to faith in Christ.

During the Azusa Street Revival, people prayed day and night to experience the baptism with the Holy Spirit with tongues as the initial sign. Church services often began early in the morning and ended well past midnight. Prayer was one of the primary concerns during the services and what helped stir the flames of God's Spirit. William Seymour, the leader of the revival, said he prayed for five hours a day for two and a half years during this time.

As I read *Azusa Street*, I latched onto that same spirit of prayer in 2003. As a result, the Holy Spirit led me into a deeper commitment to prayer and, in turn, birthed within me a mighty movement of God. As I mentioned in the introduction, I experienced a movement of God's Spirit comparable to what took place at Azusa Street at the turn of the twentieth century.

Having already been broken over the hard surfaces of failure and tragedy, God at last had me in the position in which He could work the best, a position of humility. As a result, my prayers were ones of brokenness and humility. "Come and visit me" and "send your Spirit to help me" were my prevailing prayers in the beginning. "I am nothing without you," "I have nothing without you," and "I can do nothing

apart from you” were my prayers of humility before God. “I only want you and you alone,” I told Him over and over again. “May I hear your voice” became my daily request.

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to ask for the help of God’s Spirit.

One afternoon the Holy Spirit announced His presence in the secret place by embracing me in a profound way as I knelt on the floor to pray. The Spirit of God within me began to groan and intercede with my Father in Heaven, and I was unable to say a word at the moment. The Apostle Paul explained that the Holy Spirit prays for us according to the will of God when we do not know how to pray. The Holy Spirit’s intercession helps us to enter into Gods’ will and plan for our lives. The following verse applies:

Romans 8:26

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

After this experience with the Holy Spirit, I broke through to deeper and longer periods of prayer. I prayed for two hours at a time, then three, and often for four hours straight. I prayed on average for two to three hours each day during this period of my life. This would not have occurred, I believe, without the help and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A constant struggle with the flesh did exist, but the Spirit won me over and carried me through to deeper levels of faith.

As you pray, you will need to ask often for the Holy Spirit's help. A resolute dependence on God's Spirit is necessary. God will give the humble "the spirit of grace and of supplications." The Spirit of grace will help you to become like David, a man after God's own heart.

God wants you to become a person after His own heart. Pray with this purpose in mind. Repent from a life lived for selfish desires and ambitions and have faith in God. Pray and believe He is able to transform you into this manner of person. You will be surprised by what God can do through a person who gives Him their whole heart.

Pray and be aware of any obstacles that might impede your ability to hear God's voice. There may specific barriers or obstacles like the need to forgive or be forgiven, broken relationships, pride, an unholy lifestyle, or a failure to properly manage your time. Treating your spouse with contempt will hinder your ability to hear God's voice. Watching too much television or spending all your time on the computer is a failure to properly manage your time. You must pursue reconciliation with others, forgive others of their faults and spend quality time with God, if you want to hear God's voice.

1 Peter 4:7-8

⁷The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers. ⁸Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Issues of the heart and these types of barriers will hinder your prayers, if you fail to address them. In the long run, your prayers may go unanswered or not fully answered. You may

hear God's voice, but it might only be in relation to your need to repent and love God and others.

God will still speak to you even if you struggle with some type of besetting sin. Be certain to confess your sins daily and pray for faith to overcome these issues of the heart. God does not speak to perfect people, because there are no perfect people. He speaks to the "forgiven" – the forgiven ones who seek Him with all of their heart.

JACOB'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Jacob experienced dramatic encounters (dreams and visitations) with God, and one particular experience paints an appropriate picture of prayer. Jacob, whose name means deceiver, lived up to the meaning of his name. He deceived his father Isaac and stole his brother Esau's blessing. Esau wanted retaliation and promised to kill Jacob for his transgression. Eventually, Jacob was sent away by his parents to look for a wife in his uncle's home town and to escape the wrath of Esau.

Upon his arrival, Jacob met his uncle, Laban, and his two daughters. Immediately, Jacob fell in love with the younger daughter, Rachel, and Laban agreed to allow Jacob to marry Rachel in return for seven years of service. On the day of the wedding, Laban tricked Jacob by sending Leah, the elder daughter, into Jacob's tent to become his wife. It was dark and Jacob did not realize it was Leah until the next morning. Laban deceived Jacob, the deceiver, who had to serve an additional seven years for Rachel to become his wife. Jacob ended up reaping what he had sown over the years in his own family.

At the end of those years, Jacob decided to return to his father's homeland with his wives, children, and possessions. Jacob did all this in secrecy, because Laban had refused to

allow his daughters to leave. During the return trip home, an Angel of the Lord met Jacob one evening and wrestled with him. For an entire night, Jacob wrestled with the Angel, and as morning approached the Angel said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." In reply, Jacob prayed, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" (Genesis 32:26).

At the end of the encounter, the Angel touched Jacob in the "hollow of his thigh" and wounded him. This wound left Jacob with a permanent limp for the remainder of his life. The Angel also gave Jacob a new name. No longer was he to be called Jacob, the deceiver. He would now be called Israel, one who prevails with God (Genesis 32:28). The new name given to Jacob had God's name attached at the end. God's name is holy and, thus, Jacob became holy like God. In the end, God's loving embrace sanctified Jacob and provided him with a new identity.

A dramatic change occurred in Jacob's life after this encounter with the Lord. This dramatic change was immediately evidenced in his encounter with Esau the following day (Genesis 33). Jacob, who once felt it necessary to deceive and manipulate in order to get his way, humbled himself in Esau's presence, and he made amends with the brother he had treated with great contempt. He embraced Esau with God's love and they both wept together.

We can view Jacob's encounter with the Angel of the Lord as a dramatic representation of prayer. God meets us along life's paths and challenges us to trust Him. As we embrace Him through prayer, God wrestles with us, because He wants to bless our lives with His loving embrace. God's embrace often touches the heart and causes brokenness – a brokenness that

ultimately leads to a more intimate relationship with Him and a deeper love for others.

THOMAS' ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Thomas told me he had been praying that God would speak to him when I spoke a word of knowledge to him one day at church. I am sure he never imagined he would receive a message of correction in reply to his prayers. Like Jacob wrestled with God and received a permanent limp, Thomas had been wrestling with God and received a serious chastisement. The testimony in this section illustrates how God works for our benefit and spiritual growth even when we struggle to live according to the Word of God.

A fitly spoken word of knowledge has the capacity to change one's life for the better. The person becomes a recipient of God's grace and peace when the word of knowledge is taken to heart and applied to one's life. If the word of knowledge is not taken to heart, the person often pays a price for their disobedience. This story is a good example of the powerful effects of a fitly spoken word of knowledge.

The experience I refer to occurred during a regular Sunday morning worship service. The Lord spoke to me through the voice of the Holy Spirit and said, "Go to the back of the church and bring Thomas up front for prayer." (Due to confidentiality, I use the name Thomas in place of the person's actual name.) I looked to the rear of the church and saw him sitting quietly with his family.

A few moments later, the pastor invited the congregation to come to the altar for prayer. I decided to go forward to pray for others and myself as well. While I stood close to the altar with my eyes closed, the Lord spoke to me again. This time He said,

“Thomas is standing beside you now. I want you to give him a message. Tell him that he can’t solve any of his problems by spanking his children all the time.” I opened my eyes, looked to the left, and sure enough there stood Thomas. Thomas, by the way, was the church’s youth pastor.

[On a side note, I can still remember the prompting the Holy Spirit gave me for this message. It is somewhat hard to explain and quite mysterious. The message seemed to originate from deep inside of me. It was almost as if I could feel and sense it coming. In fact, it felt like an object was moving inside of me. The best way I can describe it was that it felt like a large ball or bubble rising upward from deep within me. Eventually, this bubble traveled all the way up to my head. After reaching its final destination, the bubble burst and filled my mind with God’s message.

One day as I read the Bible, I was amazed to find a verse in the Book of Proverbs that described what I experienced on that day. In particular, the author wrote, “Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you” (Proverbs 1:23). *Naba`* is the Hebrew word for “pour out” in this verse. The word also means to “bubble up” (Strong's H5042). This verse describes how God would make His words known to the people by pouring out His Spirit on them or bubbling up His Spirit inside of them. This is what occurred inside me in a very graphic and literal way during this experience.]

I knew Thomas well and did not want to lose his friendship. I needed time to process the information but did not have the extra time. The service ended, and Thomas left the church with his family before I could speak with him. As I left

the building, Thomas drove by the door I was exiting. His two young daughters were standing up in the van and looked out the side window at me. They looked really sad, and I felt horrible. I regretted my earlier hesitation to deliver the message thinking I had missed my opportunity to deliver the message.

After I returned home from church, I prayed and asked the Lord to provide me with a confirmation that the message was truly from Him. I wanted to verify for sure that God had indeed spoken. It is a good idea to ask for a confirmation when you are unsure and especially when the message is corrective in nature.

That evening I arrived at church and sat on the front pew. When I sat down, my Bible fell open, and I placed my hand on top of it. I looked down at my Bible and noticed my index finger was pointing at a verse. I quickly recognized the verse and realized the Lord had provided a confirmation for the word of knowledge. My finger was pointing at the following verse:

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Thomas arrived with his family, but I decided to wait until the end of the service to deliver the message. After the service, I met him at the back of the church. Initially, I told him that I loved him and thought very well of him and his family. Afterwards, I asked him if he had any particular struggle in his life at the time.

With a little hesitation, Thomas told me he had some problems in his personal life. He admitted he was guilty of

spanking his children unnecessarily because of the frustration related to these problems. I told him God had a message for him about this. I said, "God told me to tell you that you can't solve any of your problems by spanking your children all the time." I could tell this made him uncomfortable and why would it not. To his credit, Thomas humbly accepted the Lord's correction and made no complaints. He promised to do better.

Although things seemed well with Thomas for a while, he eventually became the focus of much debate and controversy within the church. The youth of the church complained about the way he treated them. It must have been similar to how he treated his children. One of the youth was the pastor's son. Before long, some of the adults complained about his attitude towards them as well. Unfortunately, things did not go so well for our youth pastor the next few months. He was eventually dismissed as the youth pastor and this sparked a firestorm of conflict within the church.

Although forced out of his position, Thomas eventually learned to work better with others. He learned to respond appropriately to the chastisement of God and developed a repentant heart. He continues today to serve God and make a difference in the lives of others. He is one-step closer to becoming a man after God's own heart like David.

Like Thomas, David also dealt with a secret sin. David had an affair with Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah, murdered. Initially, he was able to conceal the matter. He went on about his business as the king and took Bathsheba to be his wife. Before long, Bathsheba gave birth to their son.

2 Samuel 11:27

But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

Although no one else knew of David's deception, God had knowledge of it and sent the Prophet Nathan to deliver a word of knowledge (message of rebuke) to David. Although God was merciful and spared David's life, He did punish David for his sin in a number of ways. What David did in secret, God promised to do openly for all to see.

Faced with his sin and its consequences, David humbled himself, prayed, fasted, and wept before the Lord. David did not take God for granted in this situation. He could have easily dismissed the prophet, along with God's message. Though callous for a season, God softened David's heart with a mighty blow.

God chastises all of His children in order that we might be partakers of His holiness and divine nature. If you want to hear God's voice and experience the gifts of the Spirit, you will need to respond correctly to God's chastisement in your own life.

PRAYER AND ACTIVE LISTENING

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to actively listen for His voice.

Most all significant relationships involve two-way communication. Thus, active listening is a key spiritual practice for communion with God or connecting intimately with Him. Active listening focuses on God and what God might be saying to you in response to your prayers. After prayer and/ or meditation, be silent and simply listen for God to speak. You should expect God to speak back to you, if you pray to hear God's voice or pray for a more intimate relationship with Him.

Active listening may also be practiced throughout the day. God often speaks at unexpected times. Therefore, you must have a certain amount of expectation and awareness for God to speak. A particular word or verse from the Bible may come to your mind over and over again throughout the day. Pray and ask God to speak to you in more detail, if you believe the message is from God. If it is, He will elaborate further.

Any time you practice active listening, be sure to be critical or discerning of the message. It should agree in spirit and character with the written Word of God. If it does not, simply dismiss the message. You cannot afford to get side-tracked. God will provide you with an authentic message when the time is right.

Quality relationships with others take time to build or develop and the same is true for your relationship with God. It takes time and experience to get to know Him. You may not recognize God's voice initially, because His voice is unfamiliar to you. This is like meeting someone you have never met and having to recognize their voice on the phone later when they call you. The person's voice may be familiar, but you may need to clarify who the caller is. Active listening helps you discern God's presence and the sound of His voice.

As God spoke to me, a teaching-learning process occurred. Active listening was an important component from the very beginning in this process. Earlier in the book, I discussed my first experience with hearing God's voice. That experience was the beginning of the teaching-learning process. On that occasion, God simply spoke one word to me as I actively listened for His voice. The word was "windows." A week later, He spoke a second word to me. The word was "winter." The

following day God guided me to the passage of scripture that spoke in more detail about the message. My first experience in hearing God's voice aligned word for word with the written Word of God (Songs 2:9, 11).

The next stage of the teaching-learning process occurred shortly after my initial experience with hearing God's voice. Rather than speaking one word, God spoke to me with a complete sentence. The message did not contain specific words from the Bible. It did, however, agree in spirit and character with the Bible.

On this occasion, I actively listened for God's voice during an evening worship service. God gave me a message for a man praying at the altar, and I resisted the message initially due to its in-depth nature. Eventually, I figured I might miss God's will, if I failed to share the message with him. I finally did share it with him, and he confirmed the message was from God.

The next stage of the process involved a two-way conversation with God. On this occasion, God simply asked me a question. I answered the question and then actively listened for a response. What began as one question ended up turning into a number of questions and statements from God. I listened intently after each question or statement in hopes that God would continue speaking to me.

For the first year, God spoke to me primarily through the voice of the Holy Spirit. After the first year, God spoke to me a lot through dreams and visions. I can't say this was the final stage in this process, because God continued to speak to me through the voice of the Holy Spirit. I never practiced active listening to experience a vision or dream, however. They simply occurred, and God provided a message. For the most

part, they typically occurred after a season of prayer, meditation on God's Word, and/ or fasting. A regular time of fasting will help prepare one to hear God's voice as well.

I am certain God teaches people in different ways to hear His voice. For example, God taught Samuel to hear His voice with the help of Eli, a priest of Israel. I discuss his experience in a moment. Learning to hear God's voice may or may not be a process for you. Regardless, you can keep these things in mind along the way. They may help you to understand how God is teaching you to hear His voice.

Active listening communicates to God your earnest desire to hear His voice, but it is important to remember that God speaks according to His own timing. Regardless of this fact, you should listen for God's voice as often as possible, especially during times of prayer, meditation, and ministry. You must be open to God speaking at any moment of the day or night. God speaks very clearly and in a personal way when He does speak.

The story of Samuel illustrates how God speaks in a personal way and according to His own timing. Samuel was the prophet who became very influential in the life of King David. David was blessed to have this anointed man of God in his life.

Samuel was born through the miraculous intervention of God. Hannah, Samuel's mother, was unable to have children. One day she visited the temple of the Lord. During this time, she pleaded with God for a child. Eli, the priest of Israel, was there that day and added God's blessing to her plea. God was merciful and eventually granted her request. As well, God gave Hannah several more children after Samuel.

After Samuel grew to an appropriate age, his parents brought him to Eli and placed him under the priest's care. This sacrifice was in response to a promise Hannah had made to God if He would allow her to bare children. One night as the boy lay in bed asleep, the Lord called out to him. Samuel assumed at the time that Eli had called for him and went to Eli to see what he wanted. This occurred on three separate occasions. On the third occasion, Eli perceived the Lord had spoken to Samuel, and he instructed Samuel on how to respond to the voice when he heard it again. Once again the Lord spoke to the boy and Samuel replied, "Speak, for thy servant hears" (I Samuel 3:9). In essence, Samuel said, "I am listening for your voice."

God spoke to Samuel in a very personal way by calling him by his name. From my experience, God has spoken to me in a personal way on most every occasion. As I mentioned, Jesus called me by name when I heard His audible voice. I believe God will speak to you in a very personal way as well. In the end, God is interested more in you than in what He can get from you.

God also spoke to Samuel at unexpected time, in the early hours of the morning. God has spoken to me at all hours of the day and night. You may experience something similar as you learn to hear God's voice. Usually, He speaks at an unexpected time, so be prepared.

PRAYER OF FAITH

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to embrace a life of sacrificial prayer.

I hope by now you are convinced that you need to hear God's voice. It is essential that you see it as a desperate need – one that you cannot live without. In the Song of Songs, the Bride desperately needed to hear the voice and see the face of the Bridegroom. If you are able to see it as a desperate need, you will be able to make the sacrifices necessary to hear God's voice. If you fail to see it as a vital need, you will struggle in learning to hear God's voice.

At times, we all face situations that place us in need of something. Since needs are common to us all, Jesus used the story of a widow who was in need to demonstrate the importance of sacrificial prayer. This story is found in Luke 18:1-8. Below is a snippet of the story:

Luke 18:3-5

³And and there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Vindicate me against my adversary.' ⁴For a while he refused; but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor regard man, ⁵yet because this widow bothers me, I will vindicate her, or she will wear me out by her continual coming.'

The widow's story is a compelling example of faith. She sacrificed her time and energy every day to sit before a judge who could care less about her life. She did not give up, however, due to the indifferent attitude of the unjust judge. She set her hopes high and waited patiently to receive what she needed. She truly believed she would receive, and in the end the judge rewarded her for her diligence.

Many Christians speak of the "prayer of faith" as being a one-time prayer that moves mountains or heals the sick. It can

be. However, the “prayer of faith” is often sacrificial prayer that costs you something, and it typically perseveres over time and through intense resistance.

“Praying through” has been a common phrase used by Pentecostals for many years. It simply means we keep praying, regardless of what it costs, until God answers. This manner of prayer demonstrates our firm faith in God and His promises. One New Testament writer said it this way: “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:6, KJV).

PRAYER: A LIVING SACRIFICE

Romans 12:1-2

¹I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

How often do you pray? How much time do you spend in prayer as compared to the time you spend entertaining yourself with various hobbies. If you are consumed with living for this present age, then you will not experience in fullness the intimate relationship that God desires to have with you.

Paul urged the Roman Christians to become “living sacrifices”. This seems like a pretty tall order to fill. Paul prefaced this call to become a living sacrifice in light of God's mercy. God's mercy is an expression of His great love for us. After urging them to become living sacrifices, he instructs them

further by saying, “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” The Greek word for “transformed” is μεταμορφώω. Μεταμορφώω is where we get the word metamorphosis, and we associate this word with the process that takes place when a caterpillar morphs into a butterfly.

In order to become a butterfly, a caterpillar spins a cocoon around itself isolating itself from the worldly environment and literally digests its entire body by releasing special enzymes. All that is left of the caterpillar before it morphs into a butterfly is a soupy mixture that contains the basic cells to become a beautiful new butterfly. In essence, the caterpillar sacrifices itself in order to become something beautiful.

The caterpillar-butterfly metamorphosis paints a beautiful picture of the transformed Christian life that takes place when we become living sacrifices. We must wrap ourselves in the cocoon of God's mercy and love and isolate ourselves from worldly influences in order to become the living sacrifices God wants us to be. It is living our lives in light of God's mercy and love that literally transforms our spiritual lives.

Renewing our minds in light of God's mercy and love leads us to godly living and away from living for this present world. Living sacrificially will ultimately involve patterning our lives after Christ's example and forsaking the things in this life that interfere with living wholeheartedly for God. Personal sanctification is all about the believer loving God and others and becoming more and more like Jesus. God's love has been most clearly expressed through the sacrifice of Christ, and only this kind of sacrificial love expressed in return to God will suffice for hearing God's voice clearly and on a regular basis.

At one point, God asked me in a more in-depth manner to live sacrificially for Him in my prayer life. This took place when I first started to hear God's voice.

At the time, I was deeply involved in hunting and fishing. Charlie, a favorite childhood friend, and I spent many hours in a boat on the water catching fish and many hours in the fields hunting rabbits. Just before rabbit hunting season began that year, the Lord spoke to me about giving up these hobbies or what was really becoming a way of life for me.

I had gone to Walmart one afternoon to pick up some personal items, and afterwards I sat in my truck pondering what I would do for the remainder of the day. A thought came to mind during this time, and it seemed to be a prompting by the Holy Spirit. The thought was simply a question. I asked the Lord the following question: "Lord, is there anything you want me to do today that I really do not want to do?" Amazingly, God spoke to me and said, "I want you to go over to Charlie's house at this very moment and give away your beagles." It was not easy, but I said, "Okay, Lord." The beagles were the dogs I used for rabbit hunting.

Upon my arrival at Charlie's home, I found his cousin waiting outside for him. He was also a rabbit hunter and had some beagles of his own. As I talked with him, he told me he needed to buy some more beagles, because he had lost his dogs on a hunting trip the weekend before. He had searched for them all weekend but could not find them.

I immediately told him about my experience with God in the parking lot at Walmart. I then decided to give him the dogs like the Lord had instructed me to do. Interestingly, I gave him three dogs, which replaced the three he had lost the weekend

before. He wanted to give me some money for them, but God had said to give them away. So, I declined his offer.

I loved hunting and fishing. I realized, however, that God wanted me to spend more time with Him. Since that time, I have not hunted again and have only been fishing on a few occasions. I did miss these hobbies initially but not for long.

Living sacrificially for God will often come at a great cost. You will have to give up some things, if you want to have an intimate relationship with Jesus. You may have to give up a life-long friend in order to find God's will. Or you may have to abandon a favorite hobby in order to devote more time to meet with the Father in the secret place.

Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus' love for you was expressed through His sacrifice on the cross. You can say you love Jesus, but the proof of that love can only be seen in the sacrifices you make. If God places something in your heart to sacrifice, be wise and obey His voice. You will be greatly rewarded when you do.

CHAPTER THREE: THE HOLY SPIRIT

THE PROMISES

THE INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to believe the promises of Jesus.

The Psalmist David wrote, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1). Is the Lord your shepherd? Are you following Him? Are you listening for His voice? In the parable of the Good Shepherd, Jesus declared that His sheep – those who believe in Him and follow Him – would experience an abundant life. At one point, He said to his disciples that “the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:3). A few verses later, He said, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

This promised abundant life, of course, has to do with the eternal life that is granted by the Good Shepherd to the sheep. However, a fundamental component of this abundant life is how the sheep will hear the Good Shepherd’s voice. Jesus even repeated this truth only a short time later in conversation with some Jews: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). It is apparent that this truth – hearing the Good Shepherd’s voice – is a key element of the abundant life we possess in relation with Jesus Christ. Make the choice today to learn to hear the Good Shepherd’s voice and enjoy even more the abundant life God has for you.

The Good Shepherd promised the disciples before His death that He would send them another Comforter, the Holy Spirit (John 14:15). Jesus promised not leave them as orphans and comfortless. On the day of His resurrection, Jesus came to

the place where the disciples had gathered together. It was at this time that the resurrected Christ “breathed on them” and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22).

The Greek word used for “breathed on them” is ἐμφυσάω. This Greek verb is used only once in the New Testament at John 20:22. It is also used in the Septuagint (2nd century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament) at Genesis 2:7: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Many scholars recognize that the use of this Greek verb at Genesis 2:7 and John 20:22 represents the bringing forth of a new creation. Thus, it was on this occasion that the disciples were “born again” or made a “new creation” by the Holy Spirit.

The primary theme of the Gospel of John in regards to the Holy Spirit is the “born again” or new birth experience. Early in the gospel, Jesus informed Nicodemus that one must be “born again.” It would be the Spirit that would bring this new spiritual life to a person (John 3:2-8). The Gospel of John explains in depth that the Holy Spirit would indwell the followers of Jesus Christ. Consider the following passage of scripture:

John 14:16-17

¹⁶And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, ¹⁷even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.

The Holy Spirit would also be at work within the disciples and provide them with various spiritual benefits. One of these

benefits would be to hear God's voice. Consider the following verse:

John 16:13

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

There are other spiritual benefits associated with the indwelling Holy Spirit. You can read about them in John 14:12-17, 26 and 16:13-15. Below is a list of some of these benefits from the Gospel of John:

The Holy Spirit would:

- Come and abide with the believer forever (14:16).
- Enable the believer to do the works of Jesus (14:12).
- Teach the believer all things (14:26).
- Remind the believer of what Jesus had said (14:26).
- Guide the believer into all truth (16:13).
- Speak to the believer (16:13).
- Show the believer things to come (16:13).
- Glorify Jesus (16:14).
- Make known all things pertaining to Jesus and the Father (16:14-15).

As mentioned earlier, the Good Shepherd promised that His sheep would hear His voice. He also declared, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16, KJV). According to many New Testament scholars, the "other sheep" referred to by Jesus here would be the addition of Gentile believers to God's flock.

As Gentile believers today, we are the sheep who can hear the Good Shepherd's voice through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Some believe these verses simply refer to hearing God speak through the Bible. It does refer to hearing God speak through the Bible, but God also speaks in our hearts and minds by His indwelling Spirit.

THE BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

KEY PRINCIPLE

A key to hearing the voice of God is to be baptized and continually filled with the Holy Spirit.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit enables one to prophesy, experience dreams, and experience visions from the Spirit. The Prophet Joel in his writings prophesied about the outpouring of the Spirit and the experiences of those who would receive this outpouring. Consider the following passage of scripture:

Joel 2:28-29

And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

In the Bible, "prophesy" means to "speak forth by divine inspirations" (Strong's G4395) or, in essence, hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and speak forth the words (message) of God. I will often refer to hearing "the voice of the Holy Spirit" in this book when speaking about prophesying. Both dreams and visions are comparable with "prophesy" in the sense that they are inspired by the Spirit and contain a message from God either for personal edification or church/ public ministry.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost infused the disciples of Jesus with dynamic power that transformed the small community of faith into a powerful witness for Jesus. The testimony of these Spirit-empowered believers helped bring many unbelievers to faith in Christ at this time.

Around nineteen hundred years later, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit centered around Azusa Street led to one of the greatest revivals the world has ever seen. Those who experienced this outpouring, like Charles Parham and William Seymour, were convinced God was restoring to the Church the important doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The Classical Pentecostal view of the baptism with the Holy Spirit came out of the Azusa Street Revival. Many of the historical Pentecostal churches continue to maintain the Classical Pentecostal view. This is the view I adhere to. There are other differing views about the baptism with the Holy Spirit and some do not agree with the Classical Pentecostal view. Typically, the disagreement is on how it is received, when it is received, and the manifestation of its reception. Regardless of our particular beliefs, most of us can agree that God wants us to be filled with His Spirit on a regular basis. Our united prayer should at the least be: “God fill us to overflowing with your Holy Spirit.”

Classical Pentecostals teach a person receives the indwelling of the Spirit at the moment of salvation. The Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Christ, comes to dwell in the heart of the person that repents and places their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. The person who believes in Jesus becomes “born again” by the Spirit of God. The born again believer is

immediately sanctified and justified in the name of Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Classical Pentecostals also believe there is a subsequent experience after salvation in which the believer is initially “filled with the Spirit” or receives “the baptism with the Holy Spirit.” They have determined that the baptism with the Spirit is subsequent to the salvation experience based on the accounts recorded in the Book of Acts.

According to the Classical Pentecostal view, a believer must be saved and sanctified in order to receive the baptism with the Spirit. Personal sanctification occurs by living wholeheartedly for God, and it is experienced primarily through faith, prayer, and holy fellowship. The agents of sanctification for the believer are the blood of Jesus, the Spirit of Christ, and the Word of God. To say this simply and concisely, it is faith in Christ, Him crucified, and Him raised from the dead – Christ's Eternal Work. Personal sanctification for the believer ultimately involves the believer becoming more and more like Jesus.

The initial evidence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit is speaking in “tongues” (Acts 2:1-4; Acts 10:44-46; Acts 19:6). This is a visible, outward sign in which the believer speaks by inspiration of the Spirit in a language unknown to them. This doctrine is based primarily upon Acts 2:4 and other corroborating instances in the Book of Acts where the believers received the Spirit and spoke in languages unknown to them.

The Apostle Peter declared that the baptism with the Holy Spirit would be for all of God's people throughout future generations: “For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:39). Make the decision today to receive the

baptism with the Holy Spirit, if you want to hear God speaking to you through the voice of the Holy Spirit, dreams, and visions.

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU BELIEVE!

Regardless of our different beliefs on this important matter, we should all be very concerned that each Christian receives an authentic baptism with the Spirit. Personally, I believe the one who receives a genuine experience will know beyond the shadow of any doubt that they have received the baptism. If you have doubts, then more than likely you have never received the baptism with the Spirit. One must be careful not speak against the promise to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. I share in this section a testimony about the importance of not speaking against the this important work of God.

The word of knowledge has worked in my life in a corrective manner on a few occasions. It is often difficult to provide a word of correction to someone, regardless of whether you know them or not. After a little experience, I have found that God makes the process a little easier than one might expect. God's words are always spoken in a timely fashion and with penetrating insight that leaves the person confounded. They have been wrong in some way, and God's words are both the proof and reproof.

One such experience occurred on a Sunday evening as I drove to church. Before I arrived at the church, I decided to stop at a local convenience store to purchase a snack and drink. As I pulled into the parking lot, the Lord spoke to me and said, "There is a man inside the store who is preaching false doctrine, and I want you to tell him to stop preaching false

doctrine.” This word of knowledge came to me before I ever saw the man.

As I entered the store, I saw a tall, husky gentleman talking with two women. These ladies appeared to be the ones running the store that evening. As I walked through the store, I heard him speak about Christ with them. I was unable, however, to distinguish clearly what he said. Initially, I was unable to approach him, and I struggled with the thought that the message I received was not accurate. I did not want to let God down, so I decided to return to my truck in the parking lot to pray about the situation.

A moment later, two of my friends from church pulled into the parking lot of the convenience store. Their arrival provided me with another opportunity to deliver the message. They went inside, and I followed soon after. After I entered the store, I found they were already having a conversation with the man. I seized the opportunity and joined in the conversation.

After I listened intently for a couple of moments, I questioned him about his beliefs. The Apostle John, in his writings, encouraged us to test the spirit of each prophet (John 4:1). As I questioned him, he told me he did not believe speaking in tongues was an experience for believers today. He stated plainly that Satan was the one behind this manifestation. Although his grandmother had been a Pentecostal who spoke in tongues, he said he would have nothing to do with it.

I know some Christians do not understand the Pentecostal view of the baptism with the Spirit and speaking in tongues. The Bible, however, warns us not to attribute the work of the Spirit to Satan (Mark 3:22-30). This man was in danger of doing this very thing.

After identifying the false teaching, I delivered with confidence and boldness the message the Lord had sent me to deliver. I told him the Lord had spoken to me when I pulled into the parking lot. I said, "God told me to tell you to stop preaching false doctrine. I am fairly certain this refers to your view on the baptism with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues."

Amazingly, the man stood there dumbfounded for a moment. I expected him to be irate and obstinate after he heard the message. Without any rebuttals, he simply asked what church I attended. I told him I was part of a local Pentecostal church. He had no other words to say at that point.

In this account, the word of knowledge was a specific message that brought the man into accountability for his beliefs and actions. It had a paralyzing effect on him. If the Spirit provides you with a word of knowledge, you can have courage to deliver God's message, because God's messages are always effective and powerful. Someone may become upset or angry with you, but know that God's will is being done through the delivery of the message. In the end, it will help them more than it will hurt you.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I received the baptism with the Holy Spirit in May of 1991. I would like to discuss my experience at this time and provide some insights along the way that may help you to believe God for this wonderful gift. Acts 2:1-4 describes the disciple's baptism with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Three aspects during my experience were similar to what they experienced on that day.

Acts 2:1-4

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. ³And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

First, the Holy Spirit – the holy presence of God – filled me inwardly. His presence was tangible, and it felt as though it originated from within my innermost being. Second, a fire enveloped me outwardly, and it felt as though I was clothed entirely from head to foot with an invisible fire. Third, the Holy Spirit spoke through me in a language (tongue) unknown to me without any control or effort of my own. The infilling and fire seemed to occur at the same moment. Within a second after these two aspects occurred, the tongues speech occurred.

As I prayed to receive the promise, one experience tested my faith and patience in the reception of the Spirit. This encounter occurred at an Assembly of God I attended during this time. During a Sunday morning worship service, the senior pastor of the church invited all those, who were asking God for the promise, to come forward to the altar to pray. As I prayed, the pastor knelt beside me and asked if I had received the baptism. I told him I had not. After a brief conversation with him, he and another Christian tried to help me receive the baptism.

At one point, the pastor told me to listen to the thoughts in my mind for evidence of a strange language. If I heard something, then I should speak it out. After about five minutes,

I thought I heard some strange words, and so I spoke them out. They rejoiced and told me that I had received the baptism with the Spirit. After they left, I told the Lord that I did not receive much, if I did receive the baptism! In fact, I knew I had not experienced a genuine baptism. I was not discouraged, however, and I promised God I would be patient until I received a genuine experience.

A couple of weeks later, I attended the same church. This time I attended a youth gathering, and I went forward to speak with the youth pastor after the meeting. Rafielle, an evangelist and good friend, accompanied me at the time. Rafielle introduced me to the youth pastor and told him about my desire to receive the baptism. The youth pastor invited me to pray with him. After only a few minutes of prayer, I received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The youth pastor did not try to coach me or anything of that nature. He simply believed God with me as we prayed.

Unfortunately, some Pentecostal and Charismatic ministers do not clearly understand how one receives the baptism with the Holy Spirit. They provide some accurate information at the beginning but get off track in the process. In the next section, I will do my best to explain how one can receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

RECEIVE THE GIFT

THE DISCIPLE'S EXPERIENCE

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is a gift from God to be received by faith. A detailed account of how the disciples received the baptism with the Holy Spirit by faith is recorded in Acts chapter's one and two. Jesus had given them a command and promise concerning the baptism with the Spirit:

Acts 1:4-5

⁴And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. ⁵For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

The disciples simply believed Jesus' promise and obeyed His command in order to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit. They responded to the promise and command of Jesus in the following ways:

- Acts 1:12 – In faith and obedience to Christ's command, the disciples returned to Jerusalem to wait for the Father's promise to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit."
- Acts 1:13 – The disciples, both men and women, assembled together and remained in holy fellowship with one another.
- Acts 1:13 – The disciples patiently prayed together in the upper room.
- Acts 2:1 – The disciples remained in fellowship together "with one mind," "with one accord" and "with one passion" (Strong's G3661).

You will receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit when you follow the example and pattern of the disciples in the Book of Acts. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is a promise for each and every Christian, and you must believe this promise is for you. The disciples believed and received. You must take this first step of faith in order to receive as well.

You should recognize that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is a distinct and separate experience from being born again. The Holy Spirit is already present within you. What God wants to do is fill you completely with Himself. He wants to fully saturate you with His Spirit. Thus, your focus should be on the Gift Giver and not on the gift itself.

Baptism in water offers an appropriate picture for the baptism with the Spirit. After a person is water baptized (full-immersion), their entire body from head to foot is saturated with water. The baptism with the Holy Spirit leaves one completely saturated, both inwardly and outwardly, with God's Spirit.

The next step of faith is to patiently wait to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. This patient waiting is to be characterized in the following ways: prayerfully asking for the promise until it comes; assembling together with the community of faith in holy fellowship; remaining together in holy fellowship with the same mind, in one accord, and with one passion for the Kingdom of God.

It really is a simple process. However, it takes sincere faith, a commitment to prayer, and a pursuit of holy, sanctified living to receive the baptism. Like the disciples, you must wait prayerfully, patiently, and expectantly for the promise. As you

are faithful to believe and do these things, Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit in due time.

As mentioned earlier, the baptism with the Holy Spirit comes with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. One can expect to experience this evidence when receiving the baptism with the Holy Spirit. A believer should not try to help God out by speaking some gibberish by faith and expecting that is all there is to the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

In regards to the disciples' baptism, Luke wrote, "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4, KJV). The Greek word for "utterance" is *apophtheggomai*. This word means "to speak out, speak forth, pronounce, not a word of everyday speech, but one belonging to dignified and elevated discourse, like the Latin *profari, pronuntiare*; properly it has the force of to utter or declare one's self" (Strong's G669).

There is one point that needs to be clearly understood about receiving the baptism with the Holy Spirit. You do not want to miss this point. The Holy Spirit is the one who provides the "utterance" or gives the declaration when you receive the baptism. In essence, the Holy Spirit speaks through you in a language you do not understand. When the disciples received the baptism, the Spirit "gave them utterance," or spoke through them and declared His presence among the people. In my case, the Holy Spirit filled me and spoke through me as I opened my mouth. A second way of explaining this is I was fully yielded to God, and the Spirit took control.

Some believe the Greek word, *apophtheggomai*, means ability. They think God gave the disciples the "ability" to speak in tongues. They believe you have to speak it out or the tongues

will not occur. This word does not mean “ability” in the sense that we somehow activate or produce the tongue or language. This misunderstanding is one of the reasons why it is so important to wait upon the Lord and allow Him to baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Many ministers get in the way of God and often short-change believers in the process.

THE LATTER RAIN OF THE SPIRIT

Historically, Pentecostal churches have done well in spreading the message of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals as a whole must continue to place an important emphasis on this message to ensure that future generations experience the fullness of the Spirit and Spirit-empowered ministry. I would like to share a testimony in this section about God's desire to pour out the latter rain of the Spirit on His people.

I started attending a Pentecostal church at the age of nineteen. Many of the Pentecostal Christians I met at this time testified to being saved, sanctified, baptized with the Holy Spirit, and on their way to heaven. These wonderful Christians regularly encouraged me to seek the baptism with the Spirit. They also offered advice on things I should do to prepare to receive the gift. The Lord used this community of faith to play a vital role in my baptism experience.

Surprisingly, God used me in the gift of prophecy to foretell of the coming of the Spirit upon a young African American man's life in 2004. This experience reminded me of all the encouragement I had received from my brothers and sisters in Christ. God spoke to me at this time through the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The service commenced that morning with the pastor opening with prayer and announcements. As usual, the pastor and his wife led the congregation in an inspirational worship service. Immediately following the congregational worship, the pastor announced this man would be singing for the congregation.

After he began to sing, I noticed no one stood to worship. A few moments later, I stood and raised my hands to worship the Lord. In part, I did this because I wanted the man to feel accepted in our worship service. As soon as I stood, something happened that I did not expect. The Lord spoke to me and gave me a message for him. God said, "Tell him that he will see the rain again soon."

As soon as he finished the song, I walked over to the place where he was sitting to give him the message. After a brief introduction, I simply said, "I believe the Lord has a message for you. He wants you to know that you will see the rain again soon." Rarely have I seen anyone as excited as this young man after he heard the message. He asked with a huge smile on his face, "How do you know that?" I said, "I don't have any knowledge of you personally. The Holy Spirit shared this information with me and said to give you the message." He still did not understand and continued to ask how I could have known something so personal about him. Apparently, he had never received a message from the Holy Spirit like this and might have been unaware that such things happen. I noticed the pastor was ready to preach, so I made my way back over to my seat.

Hosea 6:3 (KJV)

...then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

After the service, the young man came forward to talk with me again. He still did not understand how I knew something so personal about his life. In all honesty, I had no idea what the message meant. I assumed the message concerned the latter rain of the Spirit and that he would soon experience this rain in his life. Beyond that, I had no reference point. I did not think to ask him about his situation at the time.

After he left, I went to the pastor to let him know what had happened. The pastor shared with me what he had learned from the young man before the service began. He said the young man had shared with him how he was going through a spiritually dry time in his life. He said his spiritual life was like a desert, and he wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It was at this point that I knew why the message meant so much to him.

The gift of prophecy worked in a powerful way to bring encouragement to this young man. One thing the Church desperately needs today is authentic encouragement that flows from the heart of God. As Paul pointed out, we should all desire to prophesy that all may be edified.

A GATEWAY

Every born again believer has the privilege of hearing God's voice. This is evident from the Gospel of John: "My sheep hear my voice." One does not have to be baptized with the Holy Spirit in order to hear God's voice. The baptism with the Holy Spirit does appear to greatly amplify the experience of

hearing God's voice, however, and appears to be a gateway as well for the activation of spiritual gifts in one's life.

Some believers in both the Old and New Testaments (before the baptism with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in Acts) personally heard God's voice in dramatic ways. They prophesied, experienced heavenly dreams, and experienced Spirit-inspired visions. Nevertheless, these persons were typically prophets, kings, judges, or some other special instrument of God for the particular time. The outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost has made this experience available to all believers.

The new community of Spirit baptized believers in Acts experienced in a greater extent and more frequent nature hearing God's voice (the voice of the Holy Spirit, dreams, visions) than ever before. There are numerous accounts of such experiences from the Apostles and ordinary Christian believers throughout the Book of Acts. What becomes apparent in examining these experiences is that the gifts of the Spirit appear to be in operation as the disciples hear God's voice. There are prophetic words, words of knowledge and wisdom, messages of discernment, and miracles and healings associated with hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit, dreams, and visions. The baptism with the Spirit appears to be a gateway for hearing God's voice in a more profound way and in the supernatural operation of the gifts of the Spirit.

Unfortunately, there are many believers who have received the baptism with the Spirit that have not experienced the gifts of the Spirit, or they have not experienced them in more than an infrequent, episodic manner. This may be the result of not hearing or recognizing God's voice. This also may be from not

being regularly filled with the Spirit as the Word of God commands: “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). There is to be an initial baptism (full-immersion) in the Spirit and, afterwards, regular refills of the Spirit. Hearing God’s voice and the gifts of the Spirit appear and appear more frequently as one is filled and repeatedly filled with the Spirit. Experiencing God in this way is a crucial aspect to the abundant life we find in Jesus Christ.

I believe that immediately after my Spirit baptism experience God wanted to speak to me in a more profound way, but I did not fully understand this at the time. For example, the youth pastor who prayed with me gave Rafielle and I a word of discernment immediately after I received the baptism. He spoke to us and said, “The Lord says that the Devil is going to come, and he will try to destroy your relationship.”

Rafielle and I had began a new Christian organization on the campus of Austin Peay State University, and we were seeing many people saved and dedicating their lives to Christ. Unfortunately, neither one of us listened to the message and in part the Devil was successful in crippling our relationship, thereby hindering for a time the work of God on this campus. If I had listened as I should have, I sense I would have heard God's voice in more remarkable ways and experienced the gifts of the Spirit at this time.

It is important at this point to realize that Satan will try to hinder this work of God in your life – hearing God's voice, especially after you receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit. This is no different than what Jesus experienced when He received the anointing of the Spirit and heard God speak from

Heaven after being baptized in water by John in the Jordan River. The scriptures relate the following account immediately after Jesus' experience with the Spirit:

Mark 1:12-13

¹²The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him.

Put your complete trust in the Lord as you seek to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, hear God's voice, and discover the gifts of the Spirit. Satan wants to rob you of an abundant life in the Spirit. And truly, an abundant life lies ahead of you as you seek to know the intimate heart of God.

**CHAPTER FOUR:
DISCOVER THE
GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT**

WISDOM TO DISCOVER THE GIFTS

1 Corinthians 12:1

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed.

I have shared testimonies throughout this book about my experiences with the gifts of the Spirit. This chapter discusses in detail how I discovered the gifts of the Spirit and how you can discover them as well. Maybe you have taken all the spiritual gift assessments your church has offered only to be disappointed with their results. Hopefully, this chapter will help you to become more informed about the gifts of the Spirit and enable you to experience the gifts for yourself.

Earlier in the book, it was shown that God speaks personally to believers, especially through the voice of the Holy Spirit, dreams, and visions. It appears the baptism with the Holy Spirit greatly amplifies the experience of hearing God's voice. It would be difficult to operate in the revelatory gifts of the Spirit if one cannot discern or hear God's voice. For example, one must be able to hear God's voice in order to receive a word of wisdom or word of knowledge. You must be open to God speaking to you, if you want to experience the gifts of the Spirit. God has spoken or communicated to me through the voice of the Holy Spirit, a dream, or a vision each time I have experienced one of the revelatory gifts.

I discussed earlier the need to focus on a "first love" relationship with God in order to hear God's voice. In essence, you must become a person after God's own heart. Focusing on an intimate relationship with God and hearing God's voice helped me to discover and experience the gifts of the Spirit. Thus, I believe hearing God's voice is an essential key to

experiencing the revelatory gifts and possibly all the gifts of the Spirit.

FIRST WORD OF WISDOM

My first experience with the gifts of the Spirit was with the word of wisdom. This word of wisdom enabled me to experience the gifts of the Spirit. That may sound contradictory to say I experienced this gift in order to receive the spiritual gifts. Nevertheless, that appears to be what occurred. It may have simply occurred this way in order to be able to share this testimony with others who would like to discover the gifts of the Spirit.

The initial prompting of the Holy Spirit for this experience occurred when God awakened me at 2:30 am, an unexpected time. I had an immediate recognition of God's presence in the room. The Lord's presence was tangible and very intense. After He had my attention, God spoke to me through various thoughts and images.

The thoughts I experienced signified the voice of the Holy Spirit, and the images signified a vision by the Holy Spirit. The voice of the Holy Spirit can come in different ways. Visions can occur in a number of ways as well. Even dreams from God are often very different from one another as far as the way the person experiences the dream.

In his discourse about the gifts, the Apostle Paul wrote, "And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (1 Corinthians 12:6, KJV). From my experience, the revelatory gifts of the Spirit operate in conjunction with hearing God's voice through the voice of the Holy Spirit, dreams, and visions. These means for hearing from

God have occurred in variety ways as I have experienced these gifts.

In particular, the thoughts and images I experienced on this occasion were related to an incident that occurred in my early childhood. Up until that point, I had not recalled the incident before in any meaningful way. God taught me through this incident how to experience and operate in the gifts of the Spirit.

Childhood Story

I observed a small car from a distance as it journeyed up Porter Street and watched it come to a stop in front of our small, dilapidated green-colored home. Our home was the poorest looking one on the street as far as I can remember. A woman stepped out of the car and made her way towards my mother. My mother was outside enjoying the day in the warm afternoon sun of southeastern Tennessee. It was July, which happened to be my favorite time of the year.

The woman did not look like anyone I recognized. Apparently, she was a friend of my mother's, because my mom smiled and welcomed her cheerfully. They made small talk for a few moments and afterwards the woman handed my mother an envelope. I heard her say it was a birthday present for my twin sister Joni and I. Our birthday was on the Fourth of July.

My mother opened the envelope and surveyed its contents. The gift appeared to be in the form of cash. After a moment, I heard her say, "Oh, thank you so much, our family really needs this gift right now." After I heard this, the first thing that sprang into my little mind was "who is this 'we' you are talking about? That is my gift."

Moments later their conversation ended and the woman drove back down Porter Street out of sight. At that moment, I

expected my mother to call me over and explain that my sister and I had received a gift for our birthday. I was surprised when she told me she was going inside for a nap. This was something she did regularly, however. She took these naps because she suffered severe headaches from brain cancer. Regardless of that fact, my question was why did she not give me my birthday gift? Was not that gift mine? In my little child's mind, it sure was.

After she laid down for a nap, my mischievous little mind began to formulate a plan to take back the gift. It was midday and no one was home except for mom and me. Within a moment, I made my way into our home to investigate my options. After a careful analysis, I decided to wait until I could hear my mother snoring, and then I would sneak into her room to search for the envelope. I figured she put the gift in one of the drawers of the big chest of drawers that had the large mirror on it.

After a short while, I crept up to the door of her room on my hands and knees. I checked to see if I could hear her making any noise. I could hear a faint snore coming from underneath the door of her room. With the plan hatched and the courage grasped, I slowly made my way into her shadowy bedroom. The conditions were not as favorable as I had hoped they would be, however. My mother was lying on her side facing the door. I decided to take the chance regardless of the risk.

Before long, I was on my hands and knees at the foot of the chest of drawers. There was a silence in the room that I had not expected. My hands shook and banged the first drawer against the desk walls. Quickly, I turned to examine the movements of

my mother. Fortunately, she was still snoring quietly. After I searched all the drawers, I reluctantly came up empty handed.

Then it happened. As stealthily as a lion stalking its prey in the brush, my mother snuck up behind me. I did not hear her until her voice echoed like a cannon boom asking the obvious question: "What are you doing sneaking into my room?" With my lips quivering, I made my truthful plea: "I am looking for my gift." That answer seemed only to enrage her even more. The last thing I remember about that experience was the words that resonated from my mother's voice: "I am not raising you to become some kind of thief!"

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:22-23

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.

Any discussion about the gifts of the Spirit must be within the context of the fruit of the Spirit and, in particular, the fruit of love. The Greek word for "fruit" in Galatians is *karpos*. Strong's Concordance defines *karpos* as "that which originates or comes from something, an effect, result" (G2590). *Karpos* is recorded in the singular form in Galatians 5:22. Thus, the "fruit" can be thought of as a single cluster of character traits produced by the Spirit, rather than individual fruits or character traits.

God's love is the core of the fruit of the Spirit. In other words, the whole cluster of the Spirit's fruit originates from God's love. If your heart is filled with God's love, you will inevitably have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The Apostle Paul's discourse on "love" is found in the center of his discussion about the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 13). This discourse sheds some additional light on how love is the core of the Spirit's fruit in the life of the believer. In particular, Paul included many of the character traits of the fruit of the Spirit in his definition of love. Paul wrote that love is "patient and kind," "not jealous or boastful," "not arrogant or rude," "believes all things," "hopes all things," "endures all things," etc. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Paul admonished the Corinthians to make this kind of "love" their primary goal in their pursuit for the spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 14:1

Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

The gifts of the Spirit flow from God's love. That is why it is so important to develop a "first love" relationship with God, if you want to experience the gifts of the Spirit. Unfortunately, some seek the spiritual gifts, because they lust for the respect and admiration of others. They want to be spiritual and for everyone else to know how spiritual they are. They have failed to recognize God's purpose for the spiritual gifts. The spiritual gifts are given for one primary reason – to reveal God's love to the Body of Christ and a lost world.

GOD'S GIFTS

God has given us many wonderful gifts. Some of these gifts include: Jesus Christ (John 4:10), the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), eternal life (Romans 6:23), salvation (Ephesians 2:8), righteousness (Romans 5:17), and grace (Ephesians 3:7). All of these gifts are freely given to us and can be received by faith.

The spiritual gifts are available to those who ask for them and receive them by faith. Jesus said, "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Matthew 21:22). Many do not experience the spiritual gifts because they ask amiss. The Apostle James wrote, "You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (James 4:3).

Although one can experience the gifts, it must be understood that the spiritual gifts belong to God. God's gifts are not our possessions. The gifts are provided for the Body of Christ as a whole. The gift provided to my twin sister and I was God's gift to the family. My mother understood this and I did not.

The Greek word for "gifts" is *charismata*. The definition for *charismata* provided in Strong's Concordance is helpful for understanding this important point. Strong's Concordance defines *charismata* as "grace or gifts denoting extraordinary powers, distinguishing certain Christians and enabling them to serve the church of Christ, the reception of which is due to the power of divine grace operating on their souls by the Holy Spirit." The *charismata* are gifts to us, simply because we experience God's love and immeasurable grace expressed through our lives towards others.

THE HEART OF THE BELIEVER

A careful examination of your heart or the motivations of your heart is required, if you want to experience the spiritual gifts. Ask yourself if you have the right motivations in your heart for the gifts. In my story, I did not have the right motivation for the birthday gift. I only wanted the gift for myself and thought nothing about my family being in need

even though my mother made the point plain and clear in her conversation with the lady.

The way I acted in that situation is an example of childish thinking. One can act that way towards spiritual things as well. You must put childhood thinking behind you, become mature in the things of God and be filled with God's love for the Body of Christ. Paul addressed the need to put away childish thinking in relation to the gifts.

1 Corinthians 13:11-14:1

¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.¹²For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.¹³So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. ¹Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

The Corinthian Christians showed their lack of spiritual maturity by being motivated by less than the love of God in their engagement with the spiritual gifts. We must do much better by pursuing the excellence of love in our desire to experience the gifts of the Spirit. Love for God and others must become the defining motivation of your heart. Some dismiss the gifts in favor of love. However, Paul wrote, "But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31, KJV). The "more excellent way" is when the gifts operate out of a heart filled with God's love. Eventually, your thoughts about the gifts will mature as you pursue a "first love" relationship with God.

THE FAMILY OF GOD

The family of God is in desperate need of the gifts of the Spirit. There are spiritual, emotional and physical needs that go unmet in the Body of Christ due to the absence of the spiritual gifts. Within the family of God, some members are sick and need physical healing. Others are discouraged and need a word of prophecy. Some are bewildered and need a word of wisdom, knowledge, or discernment. Some are desperate for a miracle. The list goes on and on. According to Jesus, many of God's people are spiritually poor, blind, and naked (Rev. 3:17).

The Apostle Paul explained that the Holy Spirit works through each gifted believer for the "common good" of God's family. In other words, the manifestation of a spiritual gift benefits all who are present to receive its benefits. Consider the following passage of scripture:

1 Corinthians 12:4

⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Gifted believers bring glory to God as they minister in love to those in need. There are a variety of needs that need to be met. God has provided a variety of gifts and ministries (services) to meet those different needs. As well, the Spirit works or operates in different ways to fulfill those needs. You must desire the spiritual gifts and be open to the ways in which God wants to work through your life to meet those needs.

From my experience, the gifts of the Spirit manifest more often when you are engaged in ministries that move the heart of God. What are the types of ministries that move the heart of God. Well, all of them do, I believe. However, there are certain types of ministries that God sees as especially needful when

ministering to the family of God. He provided me with a prophetic exhortation that illustrates the importance of participating in these types of ministries. The testimony I describe here will encourage you to participate in those types of ministries that move God's heart.

One evening as I drove through the gorgeous mountains of West Virginia, the Lord shared with me His thoughts concerning ministries for those whom are the least esteemed and thought of at times. God showed me He was referring to those who are in nursing homes, orphanages, homeless shelters, prisons, hospitals, and so on. The Holy Spirit provided me with an example that is easy to identify with and reveals how God feels towards these types of ministries. See if you can identify with the example as well.

Take a moment to think of one of your favorite songs, a song that moves your heart immensely when you hear it. For me, one of my favorites is *In Christ Alone*. Every time I hear this song, it moves my heart immensely. It reminds me that through Christ I can overcome any hardship that comes my way and that trophies are nothing compared to Him.

Just as our favorite songs move our hearts, God's heart of compassion is moved immensely when He sees His children ministering to people in special need. It gives Him great joy and pleasure. In a sense, we are playing one of God's favorite songs when we go to minister to these people. Would you love to fill your Heavenly Father's heart with great joy and pleasure? Reach out to the sick, lonely, isolated, abandoned and rejected ones of your community, and you will do just that.

Prophetic messages give us a glimpse of God's heart, mind, and will. When we respond to these messages, we can

experience God in a more intimate way and experience the gifts of the Spirit. God speaks to us more often when we act compassionately towards the less fortunate and engage in ministries that move His heart.

Jesus would often be filled with compassion for a person before He would heal them. One example of this is found in the Gospel of Mark. On this occasion, Jesus was moved with compassion to heal a leper. Mark wrote, "And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean" (Mark 1:40-41, KJV).

The Holy Spirit wants to work in our lives much like He did in the life of Jesus. God often wants our hearts to be moved by His Spirit before we see His miraculous power at work in the lives of others. In other words, God wants to see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives in order for us to be used in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. I believe the stories throughout the Bible detailing Jesus' love and compassion more than adequately reveal how the fruit of the Spirit works in conjunction with the gifts of the Spirit.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

All that has been discussed in this book will aid you in discovering the gifts of the Spirit. There are some points to remember and some practical steps you can take in order to hear God's voice and discover the gifts of the Spirit for yourself, I believe. Remember and pray about the following points:

- Embrace the cross daily and follow Jesus wholeheartedly.
- Develop a “first love” relationship with God.
- Seek to become a person after God’s own heart.
- Regularly read, study, and meditate on God’s Word.
- Receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit.
- Pray daily to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Ask to hear God’s voice as often as you can.
- Practice active listening often.
- Repent from any childish attitudes related to the gifts.
- Make love for the family of God your aim.
- Participate in ministries that move the heart of God.
- Ask often to be empowered with the gifts of the Spirit.
- Give God the glory for all His wonderful works.

I believe these points helped me to discover the gifts of the Spirit, and they may be of benefit to you as well. God's speed to you as you seek to have a more intimate relationship with God, hear God's voice and discover the gifts of the Spirit.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Church of the 21st century must develop a passionate heart for God like those who experienced the Azusa Street Revival in the early 20th century. Truly, the Church as a whole needs to experience a mighty movement of God's Spirit by becoming a people after God's own heart like David. I don't know about you, but I want to leave future generations with a testimony of how God did amazing and miraculous things in my generation.

God truly wants us to do the works that Jesus did and even in a greater measure. The Prophet Zechariah wrote about a time when God's people as a whole would be like David. He wrote, "On that day the LORD will put a shield about the inhabitants of Jerusalem so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, at their head" (Zechariah 12:8).

A person after God's own heart will become mighty in the Spirit like the son of David, Jesus Christ. In a sense, Jesus confirmed this prophecy when He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (John 14:12). Jesus did return to the Father and He sent the promise of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The promise or baptism with the Holy Spirit brings supernatural, miracle-working power to the life of the believer. The initial baptism with the Spirit is not the end though. We must be continually filled with the Spirit, hearing God's voice, and experiencing the gifts of the Spirit.

The Bible reveals that there are a variety of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:8–10, 29–30; Romans 12:4–8; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:10–11) by which we may accomplish God's work on the Earth. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to pursue love and earnestly desire spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:1). Here, Paul uses the Greek plural form, *pneumatika*, for “spiritual gifts.” Each believer has the opportunity to experience a number of spiritual gifts. The gifts that have operated in my life are the revelatory gifts which include the word of wisdom, word of knowledge, prophecy, and discerning of spirits. The experiences recorded in this book are but just a few examples of my encounters with hearing God's voice and the gifts of the Spirit. The number of gifts we experience is not necessarily important. We can, however, desire more than one in order to be used by God in greater ways.

George said that God is speaking to us all the time. If this is the case, then the gifts of the Spirit are also available to us all the time. We simply need to stir up these gifts with God's love and exercise them as often as the Spirit will allow. Commit yourself today to knowing God more intimately, asking to hear God's voice, and earnestly seeking the gifts of the Spirit in order to share your testimony of God's love with the Body of Christ and an unbelieving world.