

2017 Prayer & Fasting Guide

JANUARY 9-13

KNOWING GOD



EVERY NATION

KNOWING GOD

by **JIM LAFFOON**



EVERY NATION

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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INTRODUCTION

I Hate Fasting but I Do it Anyway

I don’t remember which year we started or whose idea it was (probably Pastor Manny Carlos’ in Manila—definitely not mine), but for as long as I can remember, Every Nation has started each year with a week of prayer, fasting, and consecration.

This week is both my favorite and least favorite week of the year—because I hate fasting, but I love the results of fasting.

Over the years we have heard countless testimonies—salvation, healing, financial provision, freedom from addictions, business turnarounds, job promotions, clear direction, and restored relationships—that result from answered prayers during our week of consecration.

I know 2017 will be no different because God still hears and answers prayer.

So this January 9–13 we are doing a Joel 1:14, “*Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God and cry out to the Lord.*”

You are invited to pray with thousands of Every Nation people around the world, daily. Thank you for believing with us for God to transform our homes, our nations, and our world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "STEVE".

Steve Murrell

President, Every Nation Churches & Ministries

A Practical Guide to Prayer and Fasting

PLANNING FOR THE FAST

Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you."

JOSHUA 3:5 (ESV)

Pray—Spend time reading the Bible before the fast. Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance in your prayers. On pages 4 and 5, write down your faith goals, as well as your answered prayers in 2016.

Commit—Pray about the kind of fast you will undertake and commit to it ahead of time. Do not decide on a day-to-day basis. Ask God for grace.

Act—Start eating smaller portions a few days before the fast. Avoid food high in sugar and fat. Plan to limit physical and social activities for the week of the fast. Ask someone to be your prayer partner and support throughout the fast.

NOTE: Consult a physician, especially if you are pregnant, nursing, or taking medication. If your situation does not allow you to do a full fast, determine what will work best for you.

WHILE FASTING

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

MATTHEW 4:4

Focus—Set aside time to work through the devotionals. Be ready to respond to God's Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Pray—Join at least one prayer meeting in your local church. Intercede for your family, church, pastors, nation, campuses, and missions throughout the week.

Replenish—During mealtime, read the Bible and pray instead. Drink plenty of water and rest as much as you can. Be ready for temporary bouts of physical weakness and mental annoyances like impatience and irritability.

BREAKING THE FAST

"Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'" . . .

ISAIAH 58:9 (ESV)

Eat—Reintroduce solid food gradually. Your body will need time to adjust to a normal diet. Start with fruits, juices, and salad, then add more vegetables. Eat small portions throughout the day.

Pray—Don't give up! Trust God's faithfulness and timing. Carry your newfound passion for God throughout the year. Be in faith for God to answer your prayers.

DAY 1

FASTING OPTIONS

- Water only
 - Liquid only
 - One meal only
 - Other
-

DAY 2

FASTING OPTIONS

- Water only
 - Liquid only
 - One meal only
 - Other
-

DAY 3

FASTING OPTIONS

- Water only
 - Liquid only
 - One meal only
 - Other
-

DAY 4

FASTING OPTIONS

- Water only
 - Liquid only
 - One meal only
 - Other
-

DAY 5

FASTING OPTIONS

- Water only
 - Liquid only
 - One meal only
 - Other
-

PRAYER TIMES

List what times and how long you are planning to pray.

I am thankful to God for ...

ANSWERED PRAYERS IN 2016

List highlights, answered prayers, and lessons learned in 2016.
Thank God for His faithfulness, provision, and grace this year!

In 2017, I am believing God for ...

PERSONAL FAITH GOALS

Spiritual Revival • Physical Healing • Prosperity and Abundance • Rich Generosity

MY FAMILY

Restoration of Relationships • Household Salvation

MY SCHOOL/CAREER

Excellence • Promotion

MY MINISTRY

Small Group Growth • Salvation of Colleagues, Classmates, Bosses, Employees

MY PRAYER PARTNER

The Scriptures and the Power of God

DAY
0

READ MATTHEW 22:23-33

Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."

MATTHEW 22:29

Some of the Sadducees (the priestly class of Judaism) were trying to trap Jesus with a question about the resurrection of the dead, which they themselves denied. They presented Jesus a scenario based on a Jewish law, which required a man to marry his brother's childless widow. The child of this new union would be regarded as the son of the deceased brother, ensuring that his family line did not die with him.

In essence, the Sadducees asked Jesus: if a widow married seven times within the same line of brothers, whose wife would she be in heaven? The timeless answer of Jesus is still relevant today: *"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God"* (Matthew 22:29). In other words, the hypothetical scenario they presented was a manifestation of the fact that they had been led astray and deceived, because they misunderstood both the Scriptures and God's power.

The word *error* in Matthew 22:29 is a powerful word in the original language. It means "to be deceived, to be led astray, or to wander about." Tragically, I still see countless well-meaning Christians being led astray because they have failed to grasp God's Word or experience His might.

Although this deception is rarely theological (like that of the Sadducees), the ramifications can still be devastating. Some Christians may be destroyed by bitterness because they have never fully grasped the implications of the scriptural injunctions to forgive. Or perhaps they lack the understanding necessary to appropriate God's resurrection power, so they are living in a perpetual state of darkness and despair.

No matter where you find yourself today, I want to begin a journey with you—a six-day journey into a deeper understanding of both the Scriptures and God's power. As we journey together, I will introduce a number of exercises designed to give you the skills necessary to gain a deeper understanding of God's Word and a fresh appropriation of His mighty power.

I am also asking the Holy Spirit to help you apply these newly developed skills to an area in your life that has proven resistant to change. Finally, we will join in prayer with thousands of our brothers and sisters by focusing on specific prayer requests from around the world.

APPLY

- What specific area or pattern in your life has proven the most resistant to change? Please write it out. Let's bring the Scriptures and God's power to bear on this area/pattern for the next five days.

- As great as fasting is, it loses its effectiveness when we do not pray. And although it's clear in Scripture that God loves for us to start our day with Him, any time is better than no time. What time every day do you hope to pray? How long do you hope to pray during these times?

Remember: You don't need to set a lofty goal. Be practical and realistic. Refer to the schedule on page 3 to help set a plan.

- What is the name of your pastor? Is he or she married? If he or she is married, do they have children? Please write out their names. Make time to pray for your pastor and his or her family every day.

- What special requests do you have from your congregation or local church? Write down these requests as they are given to you.

- We will be taking time to pray for all six of our Every Nation regions around the world. Each day, choose one region and allow the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pray.

Tomorrow, we will journey together into some of the intricacies of our new nature. We will take a fresh look at some of the practices involved in appropriating new levels of divine life and power.

The Well of Salvation

DAY
1

Before you read the Scripture passages below, ask the Holy Spirit to help you grasp what He is saying to you so that you can apply it to your life. I also recommend that you read the passages out loud and slowly. Open your journal and get ready to write down your impressions and thoughts.

READ ISAIAH 12:3-4 • JOHN 4:1-42

¹³Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

JOHN 4:13-14

Jesus was on historic ground; this was the very well where Jacob had watered the flocks of his family. It was also controversial ground. There had been centuries of hatred and misunderstanding between the Samaritans and the Jewish people. Jesus realized the true openness of these precious people, unlike His disciples, who were totally oblivious to His Father’s love for the Samaritans because of their ethnocentricity and hatred.

Even though He was tired, Jesus refused to have lunch with His disciples. His Father’s gentle leading to go through Samaria had brought Jesus’ acute spiritual senses to a place of heightened awareness. He was there to open a well in that spiritually-parched land—a land forgotten by everyone but Jesus and His Father. The well was not Jacob’s famous well; this well was buried deep within the rubble of a broken life.

Jesus’ choice was an unlikely candidate to become a well of salvation for a whole city. She was living with a man out of wedlock after being married five times. Her shame was so acute that she had come to the well in the heat of the day to avoid being rejected by the other women of the city. Yet, through this seemingly chance meeting, the infamous woman at the well would become a woman with a well.

Jesus’ first words to her seemed a little out of character: “Will you give me a drink?” (John 4:7). How could Jesus ask this poor, broken woman to serve Him? Surely He realized the abuse she had suffered at the hands of men as well as the hatred she felt for Him as a man and a Jew. In reality, however,

Jesus’ request was a promise; for before the day ended she would not just get a drink—she would become a drink.

As Jesus’ words slowly disarmed her, He promised her a drink of living water that would quench her thirst forever. Her reply in verse 11 revealed her great thirst: “Where can I get this living water?” His answer revealed one of the most critical aspects of receiving God’s power and life: “Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). The internal *spring* or *well* spoken of here is a metaphor for the new nature every believer receives when they trust in Christ. Essentially, the moment you were born again, your human spirit was reunified with the Spirit of God. With this reunification, your whole being came under the powerful influence of the Holy Spirit. The concept of having a new nature is seen throughout Scripture:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 (ESV)

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

GALATIANS 6:15

This new nature is the channel through which the living waters of God flow into your life. In order to understand how the waters of God’s life flow into us, think about running water or indoor plumbing. If you don’t have the luxury of running water in your home (like the woman in this story), the bucket or container you use at your source provides a perfect metaphor for God’s living water. Despite the fact that you have access to this water, you must open a faucet (or draw a bucket) to use it.

It is no different in our spiritual lives; we do not have a water *supply* problem. We have a usage problem. We are simply not turning on our spiritual faucets. In the context of John 4, the living water Jesus is speaking of is received through *drinking*. Drinking here is synonymous with the whole concept of worshipping God through the spiritual disciplines:

¹⁹ “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

JOHN 4:19-24

The Scalpel of the Spirit

DAY
2

READ REVELATION 1:16 • HEBREWS 4:12–13

In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

REVELATION 1:16

¹²For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

HEBREWS 4:12–13

In Revelation 1:16, Jesus is revealed to John (on the island of Patmos) with a double-edged sword coming out of His mouth. We know from Hebrews 4:12 that this sharp sword is a picture of God's Word. In the context of Hebrews 4:12, the sword's two edges reveal both its *piercing power* and its *sharpness*. I have also found this perspective to be helpful: one edge of the sword is for my flesh, and the other is for my spiritual foe. In this devotional, we will concentrate on the edge of the sword that is for our flesh—using the Scriptures as a type of surgical scalpel.

In Hebrews 4:12–13, the Word of God is described as *alive* (living), *active* (effective, energetic), and *sharper* (cutting). So sharp that it can *penetrate* (pierce) into the very depths of our beings, God's Word is both incisive and decisive: *incisive*, because it discerns the subtle differences between our soul and spirit, and *decisive*, because no sin or deception can remain undetected from its penetrating power.

The Holy Spirit has used the Scriptures as a surgical scalpel in my life many times—in order to reveal and deal with sinful patterns. God's Word has relentlessly penetrated through layers that hid patterns of sinfulness—from brazen selfishness to subtle pride. This same powerful Word has also burned through seasons of depression and condemnation that have crippled my soul, and it has rescued me from despair.

What has been true for me can be true for you as well! Through the Holy

Spirit and the people of God, the Scriptures can reveal, heal, and deal with anything you are facing. You simply need to apply them consistently to your life. Through reading (1 Timothy 4:13), speaking (Matthew 17:20), hearing (Romans 10:17), and meditating (Joshua 1:8), the power of Scripture can be released into your life.

Although we don't have time to discuss all the ways we can apply the Word of God to our lives, let's take a few minutes to practice the skill of biblical meditation. The word *feeds* in John 6:57 is a powerful picture of meditating on the Word of God. We feed (gnaw, bite, chew) on the power and life of Christ's person as we partake of His Living Word.

Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

JOHN 6:57

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.

JOHN 6:63

APPLY

The meditative exercise I have chosen for us is both biblically and neurologically sound. It is designed to engage both your spirit and the right side of your brain. Most of your embodied, emotional experience of God is guided by brain activity in this right side of your brain.

MEDITATING ON THE SCRIPTURES WITH THE BRAIN IN MIND

DR. EDWARD B. DAVIS AND JIM LAFFOON

The following exercise is a potentially transformative way for the Holy Spirit to speak to you. It is designed to help slow down your mind so that you can listen more clearly to what the Lord is saying to your heart. Spend at least twenty minutes on it.

- Find a quiet place where you can be free of distractions. Turn off your phone and forms of social media.
- Quiet your mind; this can be a challenge. If you don't already have a Scripture in mind, take several very deep breaths and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to the passage He wants to speak to you. Or, you can simply pick a Scripture that corresponds to a need you are currently facing. (For the purpose of this exercise, we will use Isaiah 61:1–7.)

Praying in the Spirit

DAY
3

READ JUDE 20-21 • 1 CORINTHIANS 14:2-16

²⁰But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

JUDE 20-21

In Jude 20, we are commanded to pray in the Spirit. *Praying in the Spirit* means to pray under the inspiration and leadership of the Holy Spirit. One of the primary ways this was done in the New Testament was through the gift of tongues.

²For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit . . . ⁴Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:2,4

¹⁴For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. ¹⁶Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying?

1 CORINTHIANS 14:14-16

Speaking in tongues is the supernatural ability to speak in human or angelic language. (see 1 Corinthians 13:1) This gift was so important to Paul that when he was correcting the church in Corinth for their use of tongues in public worship, he said to them, *I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you* (1 Corinthians 14:18). Earlier in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul had even told them, *I would like every one of you to speak in tongues* (1 Corinthians 14:5). Why is the gift of tongues so important?

Although there are a number of reasons for the importance of tongues, I will comment on just a few of them. First, in 1 Corinthians 14:14, Paul said, *For if I pray in a tongue my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful*. In verse two of that same chapter, Paul said when people pray in tongues, *they utter*

mysteries by the Spirit. In other words, when we pray in tongues, the Holy Spirit prays through our spirit in words that are unintelligible to our minds. Jude 20 says that when we pray like this our faith is built up.

How does praying in tongues build up our faith? First, you exercise your faith when you pray in a language you do not understand. Second (and most importantly), praying in tongues enables you to effectively communicate with God, even when you have no idea how to pray or even what to say. In Romans 8:26-27, we discover the power of the Holy Spirit to pray perfectly through us no matter what we are facing.

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

ROMANS 8:26-27

A number of scholars believe that the phrase *the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans* is the same type of praying described in 1 Corinthians 14:2: *For anyone who speaks in a tongue . . . utters mysteries by the Spirit*. Furthermore, verse 14 continues: *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful*. The Greek word translated *wordless* in the NIV can be interpreted as either *silence* or *inexpressible* (no words). In my opinion, if the second definition *inexpressible* is accepted, this passage may be describing a person who cannot find words for what they are feeling or facing. If that is correct, this passage could be referring to tongues.

Even if the *inexpressible groanings* referred to in this verse don't specifically refer to tongues, the passage itself does explain why the Holy Spirit's prayers through us build our faith. As God, the Holy Spirit perfectly understands both our desires and the Godhead's divine desires for us. This enables Him to perfectly express our needs, even when we cannot understand them ourselves.

This is why praying in tongues can create such a deep sense of divine connection, peace, and faith. Like the Apostle Paul has found, praying in tongues can be incredibly helpful. When we have no words to express the agony and burdens of our heart and soul, we can find relief through speaking in tongues. As the Holy Spirit bypasses our confusion and pain, we are filled afresh with peace, joy, and faith.

APPLY

Have you ever spoken in tongues? We know from Acts 10:45-46 that speaking in tongues is the primary sign of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is an immersion in the Holy Spirit's power that is normally both *separate from* and *subsequent to* our conversion to Christ.

Perhaps you have never been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Although it is normally received through other believers laying their hands on us and praying, there are times when God simply pours out the power of the Holy Spirit on people while they are praying. If you have never spoken in tongues, ask the Lord to baptize you in the Holy Spirit. If you do not receive it, inform one of the leaders in your church that you want to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

PRAY

- Raise your hands and begin to pray in tongues for at least two minutes. (Even two minutes can seem an eternity if you haven't prayed in tongues for awhile.)
- Focus on three things as you pray in tongues. First, express aloud (in your native language) the area of resistance you are targeting. After you have done that, pray in tongues over it for ninety seconds. Second, select a painful area or situation that has been difficult to pray about. Pray in tongues over this area for ninety seconds also. You may find it helpful to imagine the person or situation as you are praying. Third, pray over your pastor and his or her family for ninety seconds in tongues.
- Pray for two minutes for your local church and the Every Nation region that you've chosen for today (page 27). After praying, take one more minute and quietly worship in tongues as you thank God for meeting with you. Try raising your hands again as you allow His peace and joy to seep into your soul.

Tomorrow, we will examine one of our most important weapons in spiritual warfare—the sword of the Spirit.

The Sword of the Spirit

DAY
4

READ EPHESIANS 6:17 • MATTHEW 4:3-10

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

EPHESIANS 6:17

On Day 2 of our fast, we learned how the Holy Spirit can use the Scriptures as a scalpel in our lives. Today, I want to describe the power of God's Word to pierce like a sword through the deceit and temptation of our demonic foes. In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul gives us the Scriptures' most comprehensive treatment of spiritual warfare.

During his first visit to Rome, as Paul awaited his trial before Nero, he was imprisoned between two Praetorian guards for two years. He must have been guarded by hundreds of these elite Roman soldiers during his long imprisonment. While writing a letter to the church at Ephesus, he began to look at his armored jailers in a whole different light. In a flash of Holy Spirit inspiration, Paul realized that the tactics, weapons, and armor of his captors provided a powerful metaphor for spiritual warfare.

While gazing at the gladius one of his guards was carrying, Paul wrote the following: *Take the . . . sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (Ephesians 6:17b). The Roman short sword, or gladius, was twenty-five to thirty-one inches in length. It was created as a thrusting or stabbing weapon. "Word" in this passage is *rhema*, not *logos*. The word *rhema* emphasizes the Word of God being spoken or proclaimed. In other words, God wants to give you Spirit-anointed Scriptures that can cut through the multi-layered maneuvers and deception of the enemy. Jesus used the sword of the Spirit repeatedly in His wilderness duel with Satan.

³The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" ⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" ⁷Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain

and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

MATTHEW 4:3-10

Before doing a practical exercise on using the sword of the Spirit, you must learn some of the distinguishing marks of spiritual warfare. How do you know when the resistance you are facing is not just natural, but demonic? Demonic attack is marked by its intensity, density, and/or its immensity.

Intensity—When something you are facing is far stronger or much longer than usual, it could be a sign of spiritual warfare. Sometimes, spiritual warfare can come in the form of a powerful wave. For example, you might suddenly be pulled into despair by a wave of depression, and it is out of proportion to anything you are currently facing in your life.

Density—An unusual density can also mark spiritual warfare; perhaps a thick fog that clings to your soul, a wall between you and God, or a wall between you and others that cannot be penetrated.

Immensity—Spiritual warfare also tends to maximize our pain and problems and minimize God's promises and power.

APPLY

Whenever you are faced with indicators of this nature, ask the Holy Spirit for discernment. If you sense that what you are facing is spiritual in nature, it's time to pull out the sword of the Spirit. This can be done in a number of ways.

First, you can ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind the Scripture He wants you to use. Second, you can look up a Scripture that corresponds to the problem you are facing. Both *YouVersion* (youversion.com) and *Bible Gateway* (wbiblegateway.com) have great concordances and are available on the Internet. *Bible Gateway* also has a great topical search engine in multiple versions of the Bible. Once you have a Scripture (or Scriptures), begin to thrust them into what you are facing by boldly proclaiming them. Remember, the more you proclaim the Scripture, the more your own faith will grow as well.

- What form of spiritual warfare have you been facing?

- Which Scripture or Scriptures are you going to use?

- Begin to worship and pray in tongues for two minutes.
- As your faith grows, begin to pray the Scripture the Holy Spirit helped you select. Pray it for two minutes also.
- Begin to thrust that Scripture into the resistance you are facing by proclaiming it for two additional minutes.
- If the warfare persists, you can use this strategic cycle (or a variation of it) multiple times, for as long as needed.

PRAY

Once you have completed the cycle, begin to focus your prayers on your pastor, your local church, and the needs of our world.

- Pray for your pastor and his or her family.
- Pray for your church.
- Pray for one of Every Nation's six regions on page 27.

Tomorrow, we will focus on learning to hear God's voice.

Hearing God's Voice

DAY
5

READ JOHN 10:4-5 • JOHN 10:27

⁴"When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

JOHN 10:4-5

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."

JOHN 10:27

All of today's devotional is an exercise designed to help you grow in your ability to hear God's voice. Although God's written Word is the primary way He communicates truth to us, today I want to concentrate on hearing God through impressions, visions, dreams, and the internal voice of the Holy Spirit.

I have chosen to picture the process of learning to hear God's voice through the metaphor of a mobile phone. Unlike earthly cellular companies that promise us limitless coverage and perfect reception but rarely deliver it, God has the ability to transmit the heavenly signal of His voice to us no matter where we are on the planet. If this is the case, why do we have so much trouble hearing God's voice? After all, He says, "*My sheep* (Christians) *hear my voice.*"

Before I answer this question, take your mobile phone out and turn it off. Whether you have an iPhone, a Samsung, or another brand, it will work fine for this exercise. Here is something important to remember: other than an exercise like this, I have found mobile phones to be one of the greatest distractions Christians face in their attempts to hear God's voice.

Press the power button—No matter how great your phone is, you cannot receive or make calls until the power is on. It is no different with humans. Unless your power is "on," regular communication with God is almost impossible. Spiritually speaking, our power is turned on through our conversion and baptism in the Holy Spirit. At conversion, our human spirit is reunited with the Holy Spirit, and we receive a new nature. Although this re-establishes our communication with God, being baptized in the Holy Spirit empowers us to hear God even more clearly.

Turn your ringer on vibrate—Have you ever wondered what God's "ringtone" feels like? I have discovered that many times when He is trying to "call" us, He uses feelings, burdens, and impressions. They are actually the most elementary way that God communicates with us. All of us have either heard or used expressions like, "I felt God's presence," or, "God was really here today." These expressions are examples of this type of communication.

Sadly, many of us never leave this elementary form of experiencing God. We are satisfied with simply *feeling* His presence when we could actually be *talking* to Him. After all, if God has gone to the trouble of coming to visit us, He probably has something to say. In fact, He has probably been saying a lot of things, but we simply don't recognize them. As a spirit being, God rarely communicates audibly. The fact that all of us can fail to recognize God's voice is described in Job 33:

¹⁴For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it.

¹⁵In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds.

JOB 33:14-15

Take your phone off vibrate—In light of this verse, it is critical that we learn how to both *see* and *hear* what God is saying to us. Now, take your phone off vibrate. Sometimes, God will just call your name when He wants to talk to you. Other times, He might simply give you a set of instructions. Therefore, learning to recognize God's voice is critical, whether you are just answering His calls or having an intimate conversation with Him. Although God can speak audibly, He usually speaks to us through the internal voice of our conscious mind.

In 1 Kings 19:12, this form of divine communication is referred to as a *gentle whisper*. This internal voice of the Holy Spirit is probably the very thing the Apostle Paul is referring to in Romans 8:16 when he says, *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children*. Other than the written Word of God, this is the primary way God communicates with His children.

In order to help you understand how these forms of communication work, let me use an example from how I taught my own children to hear the Lord. As a parent, it did not take me long to realize that if I did not teach my children how to hear the Lord's voice, sooner or later they would stop talking to Him. After all, talking to a person or a being who never talks back doesn't feel any different than talking to a wall.

When teaching my children to hear the Lord's voice and see visions, I would ask my children to say their name out loud. Then I would ask them to imagine their name being spoken. I would explain that the internal voice they heard when they imagined their names was very similar to how God's voice sounded. Once they had grasped the concept, I taught them every night before they fell asleep to ask God what was on His mind.

While they were in that place of reflective calm that normally precedes falling asleep, they would simply focus on the Lord and wait for Him to speak. Through this process, all four of my biological children learned how to hear the voice of their beloved Savior and friend. It's no different for you. No matter how old you are, if you will come to God in faith like a trusting child, He will speak to you *as a man speaks to his friend* (Exodus 33:11, NKJV).

Another way God communicates with us is through images and pictures. Although some visions can seem almost real, they are typically images and pictures on the screen of a person's imagination. Unlike imagining something, however, the person does not conjure them up; instead, God initiates them. As for dreams, they are simply divine visions. Some examples of these are when Paul saw the vision of Ananias coming to minister to him (Acts 9:12) and Joseph was warned by God in a dream (Matthew 2:13).

Signal problems—Within the cellular world, signal strength can be affected by proximity to a cell tower, obstructions such as buildings or trees, destructive interference from other communication towers, or the condition of the cell phone. First of all, just as cellular reception is affected by proximity to cell towers, so your ability to hear God clearly is directly related to your proximity to His person and His people (the church). Remember, hearing God is not just a *skill*; it is a *relationship*. Therefore, the more quality time you spend with God, the better you will hear him.

The word quality here is important; without discipline and focus, your time with God might be wasted. When I say discipline, I am not just describing the classical spiritual disciplines. I am talking about the discipline it takes to deal with all the attractions and distractions of our media-driven world. Once we have discipline, we will be free to focus on God through His Word, worship, and waiting on Him.

Our proximity to God's people is also vital. Without the discipleship, mentoring, fellowship, equipping, and accountability provided through a healthy local church, we would not have the foundations necessary to develop an authentic, sustainable relationship with God. In addition, the heavenly signal of God's voice is greatly increased through corporate worship, making it easier to hear His voice as you wait on Him with music

playing softly and others focusing on Him as well.

Even as the internal condition and quality of a cell phone can determine call quality, so the condition of our souls is vital to the whole process of hearing God. These are some of the factors that influence our ability to hear God: stress, fatigue, physical sickness, exhaustion, distraction, or busyness. You cannot forget that your spiritual life is deeply impacted by how you are doing physically, emotionally, and intellectually. It can also be damaged if you have injured your conscience through unconfessed sin.

If none of these factors are involved, it could just be destructive interference. Just as cellular communications can be affected by other electronic signals, so the enemy—the *prince of the power of the air*—does everything in his power to impair our ability to hear God's voice.

... in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.

EPHESIANS 2:2 (NKJV)

Unlike the sense of defilement created by sin, demonic resistance normally comes in the form of a wave or a wall. As a wave, it is typically an overwhelming sense of accusation, defilement, fear, despair, or weakness. As a wall, it feels like an impenetrable barrier. We discussed how to deal with demonic resistance on Day 4, "The Sword of the Spirit."

APPLY

It's time to talk—Since our "power" is on now, let's ask Him to call us.

- Simply quiet your soul and take a deep breath. Tell Him you love Him and you would like to talk with Him. Can you hear His whisper?
- Take your time. Spend two or three minutes simply waiting. You may feel Him before you hear Him.
- If you are feeling His "ring," simply say, "What do you want to say to me, Lord?"
- Write down what you are hearing. If you are having trouble, you may be having a signal problem.

PRAY

Let's practice one more time.

- Quiet your soul, and begin to worship in tongues.
- After a moment, ask God to speak to you: be more specific this time. Ask the Lord how you should pray for your pastor and his or her family.
- Maybe He has something to say to you about the area of resistance you have been targeting.
- As you finish this exercise, pray for your church and the region of the world that you have chosen for today (page 27).

Now we have come to the end of our worldwide prayer and fasting for 2017. The spiritual skills you have been developing have the potential to release life-changing power into your life. You may want to wait a week or two and then go through all five days again (devotions, not necessarily fasting). In the end, these devotionals (and the exercises that accompany them) are about more than refining your spiritual skills. They are about responding to your Savior's invitation to know Him and to make Him known. I am praying for you to have your greatest year in Christ yet!

Pray for the Nations



Every Nation has churches and campus ministries in 73 of the 196 nations of the world, with 123 nations to go!

REGIONS

Asia & Oceania
Africa

Europe
Latin America

Middle East
North America

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for open doors to bring the Gospel to every nation.

Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

PSALM 2:8

Pray for workers who will go to every nation and every campus.

"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

MATTHEW 9:38

Pray for our pastors and campus ministers as they boldly proclaim the Gospel.

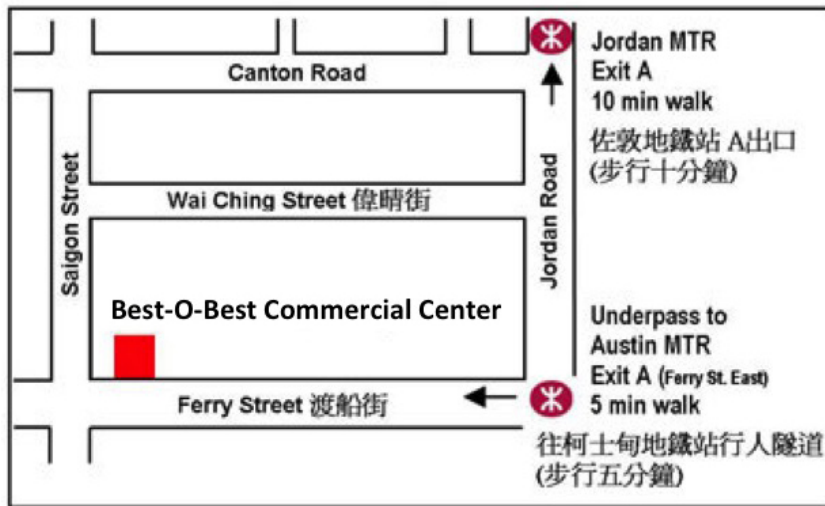
¹⁹Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

EPHESIANS 6:19-20

Pray for our churches and campus ministries to continue to grow in influence and number.

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

ACTS 6:7



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EVERY NATION

Every Nation is a global family of churches and ministries that exists to honor God by establishing Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered, socially responsible churches and campus ministries in every nation.

everynation.org/fasting #ENfast2017