

**“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them,
and they follow Me”- John 10:27**

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There is great comfort in knowing we are not alone. Whether it is life’s daily challenges or the greater decisions one must make along the journey, it is important to remember we have a Shepherd, and He communicates with us. “My sheep hear my voice,” says Jesus. This tells us we are the sheep, and we are subject to Him. And this means He provides the guiding voice that leads us away from the wolf pack and into the safety and pasture of His ever-present care. But there are other voices. There is the voice of the thief (the devil), and there is the voice of the flesh, and the voice of the world. For most of us, we are far more familiar with these voices. The enemy was a liar from the beginning, and he continues to lie, he can do nothing else. It is his very nature to lie. And many of us have become far too accustomed to his voice.

Do you recognize the devil’s voice? Yes, I am sure you do. Irrational fear, even terror—that’s the enemy speaking. Resentment is another common theme of the enemy. Judging others, even condemning others, that too, comes from the evil one. As does religiosity that appeals to the natural senses but stands outside the pale of biblical truth, that too, is the enemy. Then there is the lust of the flesh. The voice of the flesh involves fantasy—the lust for more, the lust of the eyes, immoral thoughts, the pride of life. Then the world also offers its guidance. This comes through social and political narratives that stand apart from revealed truth but claim to be the final word. 24-hour cable news, material and sexual deviancy, disregard for the poor and the weak, hatred, violence, paranoia, all of which are presented through the media and interpersonal conversation. The thief, the flesh, and the world all compete against you hearing the voice of your Shepherd.

So, what are you to do? It may sound too simple, but the answer is, you are to pray. Not just a casual prayer in passing, but a concerted prayer from a depth of your soul which touches upon your genuine dependence upon the Lord. For many people, this is a place they prefer to avoid, that is to say, genuine dependence. There is a common thought that prayer is good, but

in the end, we have to figure things out for ourselves. But we dare not lean too far into this thinking.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

This proverb affirms my call to a depth of prayer mentioned above. Let’s look closer.

First, trust in the LORD. This is an act of the will liberated by grace. We can choose to trust. James tells us when in trial we ought to ask God for wisdom (James 1: 2-8). And when doing so, we must remind ourselves that God gives liberally and without reproach. And we must also ask in faith, with no doubting. This means simply we are to exercise child-like trust in our heavenly Father. We do not have to be tough or smart, but we do need to trust. As someone once told me, “Why pray if you’re going to worry anyway?” Indeed, why pray if you don’t trust God to answer? James warns such a double-minded approach will receive nothing from the Lord, and such a person will be unstable in all his or her ways.

Second, we are not to lean upon our own understanding. We don’t have to figure things out on our own. We don’t have to plan and scheme. We don’t have to over-analyze and talk and talk and talk. The spiritual life is not a puzzle or math equation to be solved; rather, it is a way life built upon trust. The spiritual life is not an intellectual achievement; rather, it is a lifestyle of trust and thanksgiving.

Third, we are to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways. He is present to you. He has said he will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5-6). It is critical therefore that we simply acknowledge him. Can you imagine ignoring your doctor while sitting in his office? Can you see the folly of sitting with a caring friend but behaving as though that person isn’t even in the room? Likewise, the Lord is present to you, therefore be careful to acknowledge him. As you do, you have this promise: he will direct your paths.

So then, let's summarize. We are facing many decisions each day, some are trivial, and others weighty. For instance, weighty decisions involve finding healthy, loving fellowship, caring for family, managing physical health, and stewarding one's finances, and so on. In all this Jesus tells us, "My sheep hear my voice." And make note: this is not a promise, it is a settled fact, a reality of the Christian life. Therefore, if we are not hearing his voice, it is because we have allowed his voice to be overcome by the other voices within and without us. The work then is to recognize this and take steps to quiet those voices by regulating our inner life, and disciplining our bodies, and also, by stepping away from over-exposure to Fox News, MSNBC, or CNN, as well as the moral filth and violence common within popular movies and television series these days.

And then, we are to pray. And quality is what is important here, not necessarily quantity. Pray at a depth that requires you touch down on dependence, and trust—trusting the Lord to answer. Then, make this your routine. "Today, I will pray. I will pray in genuine dependence and trust. I will believe the Lord to answer me, and I will be singled-minded in my trust that he will do so. Today, I will not lean upon my own understanding for I am not alone, I do not need to figure things out as those I were alone. God is with me. My Shepherd speaks to me. And I am listening."

AMEN.

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