

Finishing Well
A conversation about living for Jesus on the back nine of life

Conversation Six: Wisdom & Discernment

– What is the way of wisdom in this situation?

A few questions to start the conversation...

- What is the difference between wisdom and discernment?
- What do these terms used by Paul mean: “human wisdom”; “wisdom of the world”; “man’s wisdom; “wisdom of this age?”
- What do these terms used by Paul mean: “wisdom of God”; “wisdom from God?”
- Are wisdom and discernment fruits of the spirit even though they are not listed in Galatians 5:23-34?
- Why would wisdom and discernment be important to those of us living in our “Golden Years?”
- When thinking about the will of God, to you think of it as a dot or a circle? Why?

I. WISDOM

1. What is Wisdom? The capacity to live life as it ought to be lived

Wisdom in the Bible originally meant technical expertise or the ability to do a job well. It was skillfulness in dealing with whatever was at hand. And, since the matter at hand was always life itself, wisdom came to mean ‘skill at life,’ or ‘the capacity to live life as it ought to be lived.’



-- David, Roper, Growing Slowly Wise, p. 91.

Dictionary definition of WISDOM: 1a: ability to discern inner qualities and relationships: INSIGHT; b: good sense: JUDGMENT c: generally accepted belief; d: accumulated philosophical or scientific learning : KNOWLEDGE 2: a wise attitude, belief, or course of action; 3: the teachings of the ancient wise men.

2. Key Scripture

1 Corinthians 1:17-31 (NIV) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. ¹⁸For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." ²⁰Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²²Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

²⁶Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (NIV) When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ²For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

1 Corinthians 2:6-7 (NIV) We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of

this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.

Colossians 2:2-3 (NIV) My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

James 1:5 (NIV) If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

James 3:13-18 (NIV) Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. ¹⁷But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

3. A Closer Look at Wisdom

The wise are those who live well, and who, when finished, have something to show for it. They have accomplished something eternally worthwhile.

However, it's not what we know that makes us wise, but what we are. James makes that very clear: 'Let the wise man show his wisdom by his good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom.' Wisdom is the 'good life,' or more precisely, the 'beautiful life—a holy, genial presence that makes visible the life of our invisible Lord.

Wisdom is the essence of the spiritual life and the means by which everything is done. It is the dynamic that draws others to God, if they are to be drawn at all. It is the most powerful force on earth. Remember Peter's words: 'Live such good (beautiful) lives among the pagans that...they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us' (1 Pet 2:12). This is wisdom.

It is far better to be wise than well-informed because, as James warns us, knowledge alone is counterproductive. It gets past our hearts and goes to our heads. It riddles our thoughts with 'bitter envy and selfish ambition,' and where these motivations and agendas exist, James assures us, 'there is disorder and every evil practice.' Without wisdom, no matter how well-informed and well-intentioned we may be, we will soon find ourselves doing the work of the devil.

-- David, Roper, Growing Slowly Wise, p. 92.

4. How to Develop Wisdom

We can call these activities 'spiritual disciplines,' but I prefer to call them 'soul-training exercises.' ...the spiritual disciplines are wisdom, not righteousness. But they are wise practices that train and transform our hearts.

-- James Bryan Smith, The Good and Beautiful God, p. 27.

In his book The Good and Beautiful God, James Bryan Smith calls spiritual disciplines wisdom instead of righteousness. That raises some important questions.

- What does he mean that spiritual disciplines are about wisdom not righteousness?
- How do the spiritual disciplines allow us to develop wisdom?

We are continually tempted to create laws: A Christian must give everything to the poor. People who love Jesus don't drive luxury cars. It's sinful for a Christian to wear jewelry when there are poor people. We like to make laws because they provide security, allow us to feel good about ourselves and give us a way to judge others. ...We are tempted to turn Jesus' teaching into universal laws...Living in the kingdom requires wisdom. It entails understanding Jesus' teaching not as universal laws (except the Great Commandment, to love God, self and neighbor) but as insights for kingdom living. We need to examine the ways we spend money, how we think about possessions, and see them in light of the kingdom of God.

-- James Bryan Smith, The Good and Beautiful God, pp. 167-8.

In one of his other books, The Good and Beautiful Life, James Bryan Smith raises the issue of how quickly some Christians are to establish “do’s and don’t’s,” to clarify rules and regulations they believe should be obeyed by all Christians.

- Do you agree with this idea?
- What does this say about Christian freedom in Christ?
- Why might this be a problem?

5. The Beauty of Wisdom and Depth

Deep things are intriguing. Deep jungles. Deep water. Deep caves and canyons. Deep thoughts and conversations.

There is nothing like depth to make us dissatisfied with superficial, shallow things. Once we have delved below the surface and had a taste of the marvels and mysteries of the deep, we realize the value of taking the time and going to the trouble of plumbing those depths.

This is especially true in the spiritual realm. God invites us to go deeper rather than to be content with surface matters. We read in the Scriptures that the Spirit of God ‘searches all things, even the depths of God’ (1 Cor 2:10). The depth of His wisdom and ways is defined as ‘unsearchable’ and ‘unfathomable’ according to Romans 11:33.

-- Charles R. Swindoll, Intimacy with the Almighty, p. 14.

1 Corinthians 2:10 ... but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

6. The wisdom of allowing God to be our guide and director

The quotes in this section are from Lisa Repko Borden, Approaching God.

Proverbs 16:9 (NIV) In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.

God as guide... God as Director. What if we actually invited God to show us how to navigate the practical as well as what we think of as the spiritual aspects of life? What would it mean to allow God into daily decisions and choices?

The first qualities in a director or guide are that this person be available, have wisdom and have our best interest at heart. The questions to be asked are: ‘Will this person be good for me and if so, is there a willingness to engage in my life?’ Considering these things as they apply to God might feel a little odd, or hard to get at. Yet I believe that we have to settle them as the starting point. There is no real help in a mentoring-type friendship if I constantly second-guess the trustworthiness of the advice or instruction I’m receiving...

By even the most basic definition of what it means to be divine, we have to recognize that God is fundamentally wise.” (pp. 136-7)

Referring to the book of Job / “Finally, God seems to have had enough of all the babbling. Taking well over two thousand words, God describes Himself to Job in strong, clear language. In chapters 38 – 42 of Job, we find some of the most awe-inspiring text ever written. Here, in a list of questions and declarations, the Maker of the universe asks Job if he has any of the knowledge, power or wisdom that He, Himself, carries within. He is asking Job if he, based on all this history, has any right to stand there, questioning God’s ways.

Foundational to all, then, there is unfathomable wisdom residing in the heart of God. We can trust that God has what is required to be a good guide. But will He guide us, or is He more of a remote overseer? (p.139)

Psalm 16:7 (NIV) I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.

James 1:5 (NIV) If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

James doesn't say, 'and it might be given to you'; No; James says God gives the wisdom generously and without finding fault. Wow, this is the kind of wisdom-giver we need! He isn't tearing off a stingy scrap of wisdom before doling it out, Instead, God generously bestows the wisdom we need, even when we are full of weakness and fault.

Why is God so ready to guide us? I think the simple answer is that He loves us. He cares about how life goes for us. He has our best interest in mind. His hope for us is that we will have peace and joy in the here and now of daily life. Contrary to the popularized notion that God is a grumpy rule-maker, God gives wisdom and direction because He wants us to be happy. ...Listening to the wisdom and instruction of God brings David joy. (pp.141-2)

Psalm 16:11 (NIV) You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

David is saying that God has directed him on the path of life. God has nudged and guided, granted wisdom and given instruction all along the way, and this has led to the best path for David's life. Following this path has meant the felt presence of God with him in the journey. This presence produces joy in David and, as he follows closely, he experiences lasting pleasure. (p.143)

But how do we practically seek the guidance, wisdom and direction of God? How do we begin to live with Him as our Life Coach? I believe it begins with simple obedience to what we know God is saying. Jesus boiled the essence of following God down to two commandments that cover quite a lot... (pp. 143-5)

II. DISCERNMENT

Every Christian should be able to answer two questions. First, what do you think Jesus is saying to you at this point in your life, in the context of the challenges and opportunities you are facing? Second (and just as critical), what indicators give you some measure of confidence that it is indeed Jesus speaking to you rather than someone or something else? This book addresses these questions through an examination of the inner witness of the Spirit, with the conviction that the Spirit is present to each person and that each of us has the capacity to respond intentionally to this witness.

-- Gordon T. Smith, The Voice of Jesus, p. 9.

1. What is Discernment? – delighting in and recognizing the voice and will of God.

Discernment opens us up to listen to and recognize the voice and patterns of God's direction in our lives.

-- Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, Spiritual Disciplines Handbook, p. 99

This is life: an intentional response to the voice of Jesus, a voice that comes through the presence of the Spirit. Discernment is the discipline of attending to this presence and responding to this leading.

-- Gordon T. Smith, The Voice of Jesus, p.18.

Dictionary definition: : the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure: skill in discerning;
2: an act of perceiving or discerning something.

2. Key Scripture

John 16:7 (NIV) But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

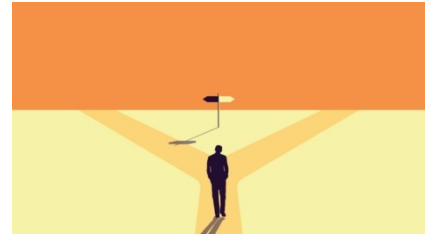
Philippians 1:9-10 (NIV) And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,

1 John 4:1 (NIV) Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

James 1:5 (NIV) If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

The Practice of Discernment Includes:

- Taking time to listen to God; not hurrying to make a decision
- Seeking to bring both head and heart into alignment with God's will
- Asking for help, counsel and guidance
- Going on a retreat to gain perspective and listen to God
- Attending to the desires God has placed deeply inside you
- Naming your addictions, predilections, prejudices, unbelief and so on in order to understand how these play into making decisions



The God-given Fruit of Discernment Includes:

- Listening in prayer for the nudging of the Spirit
- Ability to wait for God rather than just deciding
- Freedom from rationalizing your choices
- Seeking the Guide rather than a map for your life
- Recognizing your motivations and the source of your deep gladness
- Being able to read both your mind and heart when making decisions
- Being attached to God's love and will alone

3. Discernment: a closer look

The word discernment implies (at least in English) three different concepts simultaneously. First, it includes the idea of insight, which speaks of the capacity to see something clearly—the acumen to recognize that which is. Second, discernment includes the idea of discretion, the capacity to distinguish between good and evil as well as between good and the better. A wine taster, for example, has the particular capacity to distinguish between good wine and even better wine. And third, discernment includes the idea of judgment. To be a discerning person is to be a wise woman or man capable of making a good assessment, a judgment that is informed by knowledge and understanding. Through the regular practice of discernment, a person grows in wisdom—a wisdom evident in the quality of one's choices.

-- Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus*; by Gordon T. Smith; p. 9 – 10.

We truly understand when we know something with heart and mind. Discernment, then, is not merely a matter of rational analysis, of weighing the pros and cons and seeking to respond with a biblically informed mind to the options we are facing. Neither is discernment a matter of pure revelation, what some call a 'word from the Lord.' Rather, it is a way of knowing and seeing that is experienced as a profound interplay of intellect and emotion in which head and heart are informing and guiding each other. Discernment is a matter of attending to both the circumstances of our lives and the emotional contours of our hearts.

-- Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus*, T. Smith; p. 53.

Christian discernment is the spiritual discipline by which we listen to God by attending with heart and mind to the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

-- Gordon T. Smith, *The Voice of Jesus*, T. Smith; p. 53.

Discernment is *an increasing capacity to recognize and respond to the presence and activity of God—both in the ordinary moments of our lives and in the decisions we face*. The word increasing indicates that we will never fully arrive when it comes to discernment, but we can grow more and more attuned to the presence and will of God through practice. Recognizing and responding are related but separate ideas. To recognize is to see, to know, to cherish, and to allow the other to speak; then to respond truly and thoughtfully requires that we bring our best and most attentive selves. Of course, we will need to recognize the presence and

activity of God before we can respond, but for a whole host of reasons it is possible to recognize what God is doing and yet refuse to participate. So the idea is to recognize and respond, and if we don't we could be curious about why we are not responding and what's holding us back.

-- Ruth Haley, Barton, Invitation to Retreat, pp. 84-85.

4. It is hard to be discerning with our noisy lives in a noisy, busy world.

The quotes in this section are from Ruth Haley Barton, Invitation to Retreat.

Isaiah 30:15 (NIV) This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.

We aren't rest-filled people who occasionally become restless; we're restless people who sometimes find rest.

-- Henri Nouwen

If we are honest, many of us have given up hope that we will ever be rested. We have succumbed to the belief that life is out of control and we have no choice but to walk through it exhausted. We're convinced that being rested is simply not an option or that it is a luxury only few can afford. But God's invitation to you on retreat is to 'just flop down'—to let your body call the shots, at least at first. Structure your retreat so that when you need to rest you can rest in God's presence. Let go of all the pushing and striving for productivity that usually characterizes your life and believe that in the resting, you are entering into Jesus' invitation to all his busy disciples. (p.28)

It is impossible to overstate the level of exhaustion many of us are experiencing these days and how dangerous it is. Christian busyness layered on top of the stresses of life in our culture, along with the more subtle sources of exhaustion that are harder to identify, means we are all at risk of drifting into dangerous levels of exhaustion before we even know it! (p.30)

Why are we so tired? Some of the common sources of our exhaustion...

- We are functioning out of an inordinate sense of ought and should.
- We find it difficult or even humiliating to receive help from others.
- We are living more as performers than as the person God created us to be.
- We may have few, or no, boundaries on our service and availability to others.
- We are carrying the great burden of unhealed wounds—sadness, unresolved tension, toxicity in one or more of our relationships.
- We may be experiencing information overload.
- We may be mired in our own willfulness. (pp.31-7)

Many of us are in danger of moving through life so fast there is little or no time for this kind of attention; because we are so riled up, we find it increasingly difficult if not impossible to settle into a quiet, listening stance in which God can speak to us about matters of great importance. We are chagrined to admit we are moving so fast we routinely find ourselves making decisions totally apart from the awareness of God in our lives or any clear sense of divine leading. This means we are relying on our own wisdom rather than discerning what is on God's heart for us... This is an alarming situation for any Christian—given the fact that human wisdom is often so different than God's wisdom on any number of things (1 Cor 1:25; 2:1-5). (p.84)

5. The Voice of Jesus

Quotes in this section are from Gordon T. Smith, The Voice of Jesus.

The ability to discern the voice of Jesus is a critical spiritual skill, basic to our capacity to make vocational and moral choices. What we long for are the insight, discretion and judgment that would enable us to respond with integrity in the face of emotional turmoil and perplexing alternatives. As we yearn to know the voice of Jesus at the critical moments of our lives...we can learn how to discern, how to listen for the voice of Jesus and how to speak of this voice with the community of faith. (p.10)

The life of God is found in knowing the voice of the Son—the voice of Jesus. God has spoken to us through Jesus. (p.11)

Jesus is the incarnate second person of the Trinity, but the Scriptures remind us that he is also a Teacher who speaks on behalf of God, and his words are the words of life. As Jesus said to his disciples, 'The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life' (Jn 6:63). And so Jesus himself announced that if we attend to the voice of the Son of God, we will live (Jn 5:25). For what Jesus speaks, he speaks on behalf of the Father (Jn12:50).

The words of Jesus are the bread by which we live (Jn 6), the living water for which we thirst (Jn 7:37-38) and the light of the world (Jn 8:12). He is water, bread and light to those who listen to his voice. Jesus is the good shepherd, and so of course his sheep hear his voice (Jn 10:4). (p.11)

In our senior years the longing to know the voice of Jesus is, if anything, even more pronounced, for then we need to hear the voice of comfort, the voice of courage, the voice assuring us that indeed we know God and God knows us. Thus one of the deepest desires we have as Christians is to know the voice of Jesus. (p.12)

Rev. 3:20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

We do not genuinely fulfill what God is calling us to be and do as a community unless we develop the capacity to hear together the voice of Jesus in our midst—his voice of assurance and comfort, but also his voice of call and guidance. (p.17)

We urgently need to develop a corporate capacity to hear the new word that Jesus has for us as a community. We urgently need to develop a corporate capacity to respond to the voice of Jesus and have the courage both to hear this voice and to respond eagerly to the particular way God is calling us at this time and place.

This is life: an intentional response to the voice of Jesus, a voice that comes through the presence of the Spirit. Discernment is the discipline of attending to this presence and responding to this leading. (p.18)

6. Hearing God. What does that mean? Is God's will a dot or a fairly wide circle?

Quotes in this section are from Gordon T. Smith, The Voice of Jesus.

Faith is not opposed to knowledge; it is opposed to sight. And grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. Commitment is not sustained by confusion but by insight. (p.194)

God has created us for intimate friendship with himself—both now and forever. This is the Christian viewpoint. It is made clear throughout the Bible, especially in such passages as Ex 29:43-46, Ex 33:11, Ps 23, Is 41:8, Jn 15:14, and Heb 13:5-6. (p.10)

Hearing God is but one dimension of a richly interactive relationship, and obtaining guidance is but one facet of hearing God. ...It may seem strange, but being in the will of God is very far removed from just doing what God wants us to do—so far removed, in fact, that we can be solidly in the will of God, and be aware that we are, without knowing God's preference with regard to various details of our lives. We can be in his will as we do certain things without our knowing that he prefers these actions to certain other possibilities. Hearing God makes sense only in the framework of living in the will of God. (pp.10-11)

Generally speaking we are in God's will whenever we are leading the kind of life he wants for us. And that leaves a lot of room for initiative on our part, which is essential: our individual initiatives are central to his will for us. (p.11)

The watch word of the worthy servant is not mere obedience but love, from which appropriate obedience naturally flows. (p.12)

...I continue to believe that people are meant to live in an ongoing conversation with God, speaking and being spoken to. (p.18)

In the last analysis nothing is more central to the practical life of the Christian than confidence in God's individual dealings with each person. The individual care of the shepherd for the sheep, of the parent for the child and of the lover for the beloved are all biblical images that have passed into the fundamental consciousness of Western humanity. (p.22)

The biblical record always presents the relationship between God and the believer as more like a friendship or family tie than like merely one person's arranging to take care of the needs of another. If we pass before our minds that startling array of biblical personalities from Adam to the apostles Paul and John, we behold the millennia-long saga of God's invading human personality and history on a one-to-one basis. There is nothing general or secondhand about the divine encounters with Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Nehemiah, Mary or Peter. (p.23)

The idea of hearing from God is finally determined by who God is, what kind of beings we are and what a personal relationship between ourselves and God should be like. Our failure to hear God has its deepest roots in a failure to understand, accept and grow into a conversational relationship with God, the sort of relationship suited to friends who are mature personalities in a shared enterprise, no matter how different they may be in other respects.

It is within such a relationship that our Lord surely intends us to have and to recognize his voice speaking in our hearts as occasion demands. He has made ample provision for this in order to fulfill his mission as the Good Shepherd: to bring us life and life more abundantly. The abundance of life comes in following him, and 'the sheep follow him because they know his voice' (Jn 10:4). (p.29)

7. Hearing from God

Quotes in this section are from Dallas Willard, Hearing God, Developing a Conversational Relationship with God.

A. How do we hear from God?

Love: A Way of Being With...The first guiding principle: We must be growing in our love for him. We must never forget that God's speaking to us, however we experience it in our initial encounter, is intended to develop into an intelligent, freely cooperative relationship between mature people who love each other with the richness of genuine agape love. We must therefore make it our primary goal not just to hear the voice of God but to be mature people in a loving relationship with him. Only in this way will we hear him rightly. (p.31)

Only our communion with God provides the appropriate context for communications between us and him. (p.33)

The second guiding principle: "We must believe that as we see God communicate with people in the Bible, we must come to see that such communication can happen to me/us also. (p.38)

The third guiding principle: "When God speaks to us, it does not prove that we are righteous or even right. It does not even prove that we have correctly understood what he said. The infallibility of the messenger and the message does not guarantee the infallibility of our reception. Humility is always in order. (p.39)

The voice of God we seek to hear in the Way of Christ is only one part of a life of humility, power, faith and hopeful love, whose final overall character is life with God in the embrace of 'the everlasting arms' (Deut 33:27). (p.40)

B. "His presence" verses "His presents" – Are we seeking the Giver or a gift?

Psalm 16:11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Our contentment lies not in his presents but in the presence of the One whose presents they are. In all our trials we are more than conquerors because, as we have seen, nothing shall be able to 'separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rm8:39). (p.45)

Ways in which we are present to the Lord... (pp.46-51)

The basic idea here is that God calls us to a direct and fully self-conscious personal relationship with him (as priests) in which we share responsibility with him (as kings) in the exercise of his authority... (p.46)

- Blind faith... "...what we call 'blind' faith is a valid, though very minimal, way of God's being with us. Here we find ourselves really believing God and believing that he is with us. Perhaps we believe because of past experiences or because we have faith in the faith of others, or even because of abstract reasoning that tells us he simply must be there."
- Sensing God's Presence..." ...an indeterminate but often very powerful sense, feeling or impression of God's presence." God is sensed and there is a strong impression of his presence.
- It can only be God..." He acts in conjunction with our actions to change our surroundings in ways beyond our own powers."

The primary manner of communication from God to humankind is the Word of God, or God's speaking. The Bible itself is God's speaking preserved in written form. God spoke directly to Moses, to Ezekiel, to Paul and to many others. Through them he spoke indirectly to the people of Israel and to the church, and now—in the Bible—he speaks to world history. (p.53)

C. The Still Small Voice

But a major point of this book is that the still small voice—or the interior or inner voice, as it is also called—is the preferred and most valuable form of individualized communication for God's purposes. God usually addresses individually those who walk with him in a mature, personal relationship using this inner voice, proclaiming and showing forth the reality of the kingdom of God as they go. (p.89)

The reality of God's voice does not make seeking for it unnecessary. When I seek for something, I look for it everywhere. It is when we seek God earnestly, prepared to go out of our way to examine anything that might be his overture toward us—including the most obvious things like the Bible verses or our own thoughts—that he promises to be found (Jer 29:13). But we will be able to seek him only if we honestly believe that he might explicitly address us in ways suitable to his purposes in our lives. (p.91)

I believe that I can say with assurance that God's speaking in union with the human voice and human language is the primary objective way in which God addresses us. That is, of all the ways in which a message comes from outside the mind or personality of the person addressed, it most commonly comes through a human being.

This best suited to the purposes of God precisely because it most fully engages the faculties of free, intelligent beings who are socially interacting with agape love in the work of God as his collaborators and friends. This is obvious from the contents of the Bible. And of course, the Bible is itself a case of God's speaking along with human beings—usually so in the process of its delivery to mankind and now always as it continues to speak to us today. (p.96)

It is significant, I believe, that those chosen by our Lord to bear his message and carry on his work were for the most part 'uneducated and ordinary' people (Acts 4:13). The pattern seems to prove amply that in God's selecting them there would be no mistake as to the source of their words and authority. God would use ordinary human beings and would dignify them by their association with Him. But just as this is wholly suitable to his redemptive purposes, so it is wholly appropriate that everyone—and especially the individuals involved—should be clear about the source of the power manifested. (p.97)

The human spirit or the 'still small voice.' The final means through which God addresses us is our own spirits—our own thoughts and feelings toward ourselves as well as toward events and people around us. This, I believe, is the primary subjective way in which God addresses us. That is, of all the ways in which a message comes from within the experience of the person addressed (such as dreams and visions or other

mental states), for those who are living in harmony with God it most commonly comes in the form of their own thoughts and attendant feelings. Of all the possible subjective routes this mode is best suited to redemptive purposes of God because, once again, it most engages the faculties of free, intelligent beings involved in the work of God as his collaborators and friends. (pp.99-100)

Proverbs 20:27 The lamp of the LORD searches the spirit of a man; it searches out his inmost being.

D. The Bible as the Word of God

The Bible is one of the results of God's speaking. It is unique written Word of God. It is inerrant in its original form and infallible in all of its forms for the purpose of guiding us into a life-saving relationship with God in his kingdom. It is infallible in this way precisely because God never leaves it alone. (p.141)

The Bible is the Word of God in its unique written form. But the Bible is not Jesus Christ, who is the living Word. The Bible is not born of a virgin, crucified, resurrected and elevated to the right hand of the Father... (p.142)

Many discussions about hearing God's voice speak of three points of reference, also called 'three lights,' that we can consult in determining what God wants us to do. These are circumstances, impressions of the Spirit and passages of the Bible. When these three things point in the same direction, it is suggested that we be sure the direction they point is the one God intends for us. (p.170)

In order to qualify as the voice of God, a thought, perception or other experience must conform to the principles—the fundamental truths—of Scripture. It is the principles, not the incidentals, of Scripture that count here. Study of the Scriptures makes clear that certain things are fundamental, absolute, without exception. They show up with stunning clarity as we become familiar with the overall content of Scripture. (p.178)

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