

This short article is adapted from material New Creation Ministries uses to train leaders. If you work with individuals or groups struggling with sexual brokenness you may find this information helpful. If you are a struggler or the spouse of a struggler you may find some practical guidance here for yourself. If you are in any of these categories it is strongly advised that you do not treat this information as mere data to add to your "recovery knowledge." It is crucial that you apply it conscientiously to your life with the help of wise counsel.
-R.W.

Listening to the right voice

Our enemy isn't just the devil and the world but another version of ourselves. Because we often mistake this false self for our true self we're going to need strong (and sophisticated) medicine to destroy him. This imposter has lived inside us since birth and is still inside us to some degree. Therefore, it would be extremely helpful if we could get something or someone else inside us to fight him directly.

Of course that is exactly what God did by giving us the new birth. In the beginning Christ enters our dead worldly soul as an invader. We could compare it to the Allies landing on Normandy Beach on D-Day to meet the Germans. Did the Americans and British come that day to destroy the French? Of course not. They came to push the Germans out of France but this required bloody conflict.

The French still welcomed allied forces though they were shooting, blowing things up and killing people all over the French countryside. Yet this was necessary to liberate the French from Nazi control. In this analogy we are France, the Germans are the old, sinful nature (dug in and prepared to fight to the death) and the Allies are Christ landing on the beach ready to do whatever it takes to root out the Nazis and give France back to its people.

When Jesus enters our lives he wants to bring peace to us but he has no such plans for the old nature. His agenda is to root that out wherever he finds it. He will not stop until we draw our final breath. Some believers will let Jesus win impressive victories in their lifetime; pushing the old nature out of much of their lives and glorifying God in ways that are amazing.

Other believers will let Jesus land on the beach and launch the invasion but only penetrate so far into French territory. They might hate Germans but they also hate violence. They don't have the stomach for it. Besides, some of the German aren't s-o-o-o bad. When they come to the door they just want food, shelter and a place to ride out the invasion.

As hard as it is we need to cooperate 100% with Jesus and not provide material support to the enemy in any form. Not only that, we need to join the war effort and fight alongside our Commander (he is fighting for *our* liberation after all).

Christ has landed in our hearts. The invasion has begun. Now the question is how much of the old nature (and his propaganda) will we allow Jesus to drive out and replace with his forces?

In this particular battle the one who will claim the most territory and displace the other is the one *we listen to the most*. It is a war of words. Our Master said, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (Jn 15:7).” A crucial part of remaining in Jesus, abiding in Jesus, is listening to what he says and not allowing any other words to remain in that place.

We have listened to the voice of the flesh all our lives. It rings “true” in our hearts and sounds familiar. When the voice of Christ is first introduced to our inner ear it is faint. It sounds tentative, wispy. The authoritative voice of our old nature is loud. Insistent. In-your-face. The whispers of Jesus seem shy in comparison. Whereas the logic of shame feels iron-clad, irrefutable, simply *true*.

This may be one of the hardest battles of all for the Christian (especially one that is sexually broken). If we take our sword and hack this miserable wretch to death (even though we are certain at times it is the real us) we shall see that it was an imposter. Only then will the real us rise up from under his bloody corpse. I know this is a gory image but I didn’t come up with it:

“For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”

(Rom 8:13)

Each time we refuse to listen to the constant put-downs of this angry, hateful bully he dies a little. But, more importantly, we must actively—tenaciously—cling to those small rustlings of Jesus. As we do they will grow louder. We will hear them in Scripture (which is why we must stay there for a lifetime). And we will hear them in our hearts, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children (Rom 8:16).”

Helping our clients to stop acting out, make themselves accountable and even immerse themselves in the Bible are all good, but the most important thing we can ever do for them is *teach them how to hear the voice of God*. It is God’s voice that will break the power of shame.

God's voice that will tell them who they are. God's voice that will comfort them when they are inconsolable. God's voice that will warn them when pride is setting a trap for them.

Clients often tell me, "Well, I don't hear God like other people do." I don't flinch. "Of course you hear God's voice," I tell them. "You wouldn't even be saved if you didn't hear God's voice. He said, "If you hear my voice and open the door I will come in." You asked Christ to come into your heart didn't you?" They usually agree. "Then you heard his voice at some point. You may not have known that's what it was. You may have thought it was a "feeling," a "sense" or a "prompting," but whatever you call it there was communication between God and you."

The light usually goes on for them. I will tell them it probably wasn't the only time they heard from God. I will ask if they can think of other times they knew God was directing them or being clear with them. With some reflection most clients can recall other times. It is our job to help them see they aren't strangers to God's voice as they first supposed.

I also point out to clients that the term "voice" can be misleading. When the Trinity communicates with us it is usually sub-vocal. Our flesh communicates in a similar way. That "voice" just seems so loud because we've listened to it consistently and it's worn grooves into our brain. The difference between the two voices is one voice feels real and right because we've listened to it all our lives. The other voice feels unreal, fake, "made-up" because it is new, strange and says things that flat contradict everything we've ever believed about ourselves. A personal example might help.

Years ago while reading Isaiah I came across the verse where he tells the Israelites, "You will be called Hephzibah...for the Lord will take delight in you (Is 62:4)." The name Hephzibah means "my delight is in her." I felt a quickening in my soul as if the Lord were saying *Russell I'm saying this to you right now. All my delight is in you!* I was learning how to simply accept those impressions by faith as words from the Lord and I felt such joy and peace.

About a week later I was at a prayer retreat for pastors and leaders. One of my favorite people was there, a woman named Estelle. Estelle is one of those gray haired ladies that prays for several hours a day and often gets words from the Lord for others. As I walked through the door of the retreat center there was Estelle. She walked right up to me and put both hands on my face like she was going to give me a big kiss and said, "It's so good to see you, Russell. Do you know that the Lord just *delights* in you?" She squeezed one of my cheeks like I was her little grandson and walked on. You could have knocked me over with a feather.

Thinking they don't hear God's voice is a problem for many of our clients. The other problem is being afraid they *will* hear it. And they are certain that when they do he will tell them to give up something they can't live without. Or, on the flip side, they fear he will require them to do something that terrifies them. These fears actually say more about their perception of God than about God himself.¹

Apart from sin and rebellion the biggest block to hearing God's voice is shame. Even those who walk humbly before God and have truly tender hearts may be crippled in this area. This can be especially true when a person is just starting out in their attempts to practice listening prayer.

It goes something like this. They pray about something and hope for a response from the Spirit. As they listen they will often accept the second impression they get as God's answer. Why the second? Because they don't really expect God to answer them in the first place. *Why would he speak to me? I'm not worthy of that.* (See how shame trips us up before we even get out the gate?) So if we ask a direct question and then have an immediate thought occur to us we say, "Well I know God didn't put *that* in my mind so I must have put it there myself."

The next thought we have (the more "logical" thought that we probably *did* insert to counteract the "crazy" one we had first) is the one we attribute to God. This is how we often talk ourselves out of God's voice. This is exactly what James was talking about when he said:

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do."

(Jas 1:5-8)

James says if we need wisdom about something (perhaps not specifically addressed in Scripture or accessible through wise counsel) that we can ask God directly. If we do this (James says) three things will happen. Number one, he *will* give it to us. How can I be so emphatic about this? Because James says God gives answers like this to *all*.

Our brother doesn't say God only gives it to those who are "spiritual." Or to those who don't have sin in their lives (since all of us do). Or to those who pray in just the right way or use

¹ See our article, "Our faulty God-image: secret barrier to healing"

the right faith formula. He gives it to everybody who asks. Number two, when he answers our prayer for wisdom (and he answers it for everyone) he imparts it *generously*.

He doesn't give wisdom in microscopic specks and hope you figure it out. He doesn't scrimp because you're not a good Christian. Or hold back the answer because he's mad at you. He's generous to all! And, number three, when he gives his answer he doesn't find fault. He doesn't say, "What! You didn't know this?" or "I've already told you the answer to this but you never listen!"

So we can communicate with God and expect him to communicate with us. This is not pride or an entitlement mentality. Yet so many still believe they don't hear from God. James gives us the reason why: "when you ask, you must believe and not doubt." So what is he saying? Is James saying that God *doesn't* give to doubters?

That's not what he is saying. Now don't miss this. He already told us that God gives abundantly to everyone. But the doubter is like that ocean wave that rises up and then gets tossed. God gives the doubter an answer too. But the doubter gets his answer from God and then says, "Naw. God didn't give me this." And he throws it away!

THE DOCTRINE OF INELIGIBILITY: Because I'm worthless and unloveable no good thing will ever come to me. I should expect tragedy, misfortune and the short end of every stick. If something good does come to me, a wonderful opportunity is presented to me or a quality person is interested in me I will sabotage it somehow. If (by some miracle) I don't sabotage it and settle into the relaxed idea that it is mine to enjoy the "universe" will realize its mistake and take it away. It will then be given to someone more deserving.

Since the doubter doesn't hold on to what God drops into his hand but immediately tosses it aside he doesn't "receive" anything from the Lord. In other words, he doesn't take it in, hold on to it or believe it. He's 'empty handed' once again and accuses God of never talking to him.

This crazy-making cycle can go on for a lifetime. But we can help our clients break out of it by showing them they are limiting God before they even pray. They are starting with the presupposition that they are worthless, unlovable and unworthy of God's love. We have called this the doctrine of ineligibility.

By stubbornly clinging to this doctrine instead of the truth of God's love for them they rule out (in advance) any good thing God wants to say to them or do for them. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (just like James said it would, Jas 1:6-8).

Your ace in the hole in refuting the doctrine of ineligibility is helping your client see that the facts of their life don't square with their belief. I have yet to meet a client who (when pressed) says *all* of their life has been tragic or cruel. They may lament growing up with alcoholic parents or being raped as children but then tell you how the Lord has blessed them with a great spouse, wonderful children or a fantastic job.

As you acknowledge God's obvious goodness in their life it presents something of a dilemma for them: If the doctrine of ineligibility is true (nothing good ever comes to me because I'm worthless) then how do they account for the obvious blessings God has showered on them? At that point they may concede that *some* good things come into their lives to stay (but everything else is bad).

Or they may tell you they are in the process of destroying the good things God has given them (so this "proves" — according to their logic — that their negative orientation to life will turn out to be true after all). Or they may tell you that the good things are imperfect and, therefore, not really good. So, see? The doctrine still stands!

These are all attempts to avoid the obvious: even the greatest abuse victim or the person with the worst luck in history has been blessed by God somewhere. Horrific childhood abuse but blessed as an adult? *Blessed by God*. Living a blessed life now but certain she will destroy it? Unless she has a 100% success rate at predicting the future she can't know that. Besides she is enjoying God's gifts right now. *She is blessed by God*.

Does he say the good things aren't that good or there are no good things? How can he tell you that? Apparently he has a working mouth, tongue, voice-box and brain. Not everybody has those. Did he drive to the appointment to tell you that? So he has a car then? It was gassed up? He was healthy enough to operate it (working eyes, arms, legs, coordination, etc.)? *Blessed by God*.

If a client has any of these blessings in his life it is proof that God loves and cares for him. God doesn't give these to people he hates, barely tolerates or finds worthless. The message of worthlessness their flesh constantly feeds them *is disproven by the reality of their lives*.

And we haven't even touched on John 3:16! If they are saved what does that mean about their value to God? All of this means that their core belief in being ineligible for God's gifts is completely bogus. It means that God would speak to them as surely as he would speak to anyone. It means their negative orientation to life (as overwhelming and real as it seems) is a fiction they've organized their personality around.

The most effective way to die to this self is to refuse to cooperate with its old, hateful rhetoric and only embrace what their Master says about them. We help them with this each time we confront the negative self-talk and hold that up to who Jesus says they are. As they get better at doing this themselves we must praise them and be their number one cheerleader.

We get to help our clients dump erroneous ideas about God. We get to help them attack their flesh with all of its self-loathing double-speak. We get to help them embrace a healthy, Christo-centric self-image. We get to help them see and hear God's heart in Scripture. We get to help them tune in to the "still small voice" (1 Ki 19:12 NKJV) and tune out the accusing voice of their "condemning heart" (1 Jn 3:20). All this goes a long way in liberating them from sexual and relational brokenness. The rest of their life will never be the same either.