

Two Critical Words for Pastors in This Hour

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a Refiner's Fire and like launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness (Mal. 3:2-3).

This is a very important word especially for ministers. Lives and destinies are at stake and a new spiritual door has been opened, but we cannot walk through it unless we are willing to yield to the Refiner's Fire.

As my wife and I were praying for a sick minister recently the Holy Spirit cut in. He began to teach us by revelation the reason ministers often don't enter into the fullness of their callings, and why sometimes even their lives are cut short. This is what He said:

"There are reasons why men were limited and didn't enter into the times and seasons of their lives. There are limitations through character. Over and over again I deal with men, but until they're put under the Refiner's Fire and My dealings they cannot go into that new season, and walk in that new place."

The Lord has turned up His Refiner's Fire on our own lives and ministry. He has spoken to us more thoroughly and more urgently about our love walk, our words, our lifestyle and our diet. These things do matter, friends if we want to fulfill the call of God on our lives and enter into the fullness of our ministry. These things do matter if we want to run our race and finish our course.

When we allow the Refiner's Fire to deal with our soul,

fleshly strongholds, attitudes and emotions, then the devil cannot have a handle on you. So it is really God's mercy and protection for ministers that they don't receive a greater glory on their lives and gifts because with it comes a greater judgment. To whom much is given much will be required, and ministers receive a greater condemnation (Jam 3:1).

History is littered with casualties of mightily anointed men who left this earth prematurely and whose callings were aborted for lack of the Refiner's Fire. God was merciful in taking them home when He did so their fruit could be saved and their works could follow them.

Let me give you a recent example from our lives so you can learn from it. A few months ago when we were ministering in another nation two ministers asked my wife and I how a certain mutual minister friend of ours was doing. We told them that we had heard he was now divorced and his adult children had backslid. In the past this divorced minister preached frequently and had a platform in the nation we were in. The Lord told us our comments could rob him of favor and future opportunities to minister in that nation.

We didn't know the details of the divorce nor did we know if the minister was at fault, or if he was, whether he had repented. You are siding in with Satan, the accuser of the brethren, when you accuse others after they've repented. Many ministers would think nothing of making comments like this, but the Lord does. We repented before the Lord and apologized to those two ministers the next day.

Our attitudes, words, offenses and dealings with other ministers and the body of Christ in general are so important in determining our health and whether we enter into the new doors and seasons of our lives and ministries. Yielding to the Refiner's Fire can take us into our next assignments, open doors and new levels of blessing and glory that God has ordained for us.

The gifts and callings of God are without repentance—meaning God will not change His mind about your calling and purpose in Him, but the fullness cannot be seen in a man's life until they go through the Refiner's Fire. Ministers need to go to the altar again and live from there. For ministers to go through certain doors of utterance of greater glory they have to be refined, not easily offended and not given to any appetite.

Years ago in an extended time of prayer and fasting the Father told me that he had not opened certain doors for me because of His protection. Then I wept when He said that I would've ceased to be a man after His own heart if He had opened those doors when I had wanted Him to. He is a good Father. He will not give us instructions that He knows we cannot obey through our insufficient character, thus giving access to the enemy to legally attack us.

Parents do not give their elementary school children instructions fit for a college student. Lack of maturity of character limits what they are able to do and obey.

Moses was a great example of a minister who moved in the flesh, killing a man to deliver his brethren from bondage, and as a result he spent 40 years in the Refiner's Fire on the backside of the desert. God had big plans and a high calling for Moses, but he could not fulfill it until the Refiner's Fire had done its work in his life. There is a difference in how God deals with us in the New Covenant versus the Old Covenant, but the principle remains the same.

Let's not judge other men but let us judge ourselves (1 Cor. 11:31).

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the purpose of training up a holy generation. He ministers interdenominationally and cross-culturally in nations, churches, and homes. He and his wife also host The Holy Ghost Forum – a school of the Spirit. Follow him at Bert Farias and Holy Fire Ministries on Facebook or @Bertfarias1 on Twitter.

Be Someone's Angel

God will make you rich enough so that you can always be generous. 2 Corinthians 9:11 (GW)

When John and I first got married, we lived through lean years. I'd been a single mom, so John took on an instant family. He was in college, and we lived in low income housing. John delivered pizza at night to make ends meet. I didn't have much to offer to others, **but I did have time and love.**

I'd often babysit for friends for just a few dollars an hour. I know this helped them, and my kids enjoyed it too. What I didn't expect was the outpouring of care that came back.

When we were low on groceries, bags of food appeared on the doorstep. An older man from church often stopped by with pizza. I received hand-me-down clothes from friends.

Like the little boy with the loaves and fish, we tend to look at what we have and see a problem with trying to be generous. Jesus looks at our willingness and knows His ability. **A willing heart and open hands opens the door to His storehouse of provision—a storehouse that has an endless supply.** What do you have to share? Your time, affection, your child's hand-me-downs? The little you have, with Jesus, is more than enough.

Faith step: Look at your closet, bookshelf or cupboards and find something—even one thing—to share with a friend in need.

Tricia Goyer has written more than 35 books, including both novels that delight and entertain readers and nonfiction titles that offer encouragement and hope. She has also published more than 500 articles in national publications such as *Guideposts*, *Thriving Family*, *Proverbs 31*, and *HomeLife Magazine*.

8 Reasons Christians Are Leaving Denominational Churches

While working on an unrelated research project, I recently came across some data published by the Hartford Institute of Religion Research. Though the information was five years old, it still seemed highly relevant today. In essence, the data showed that nondenominational churches are now the second largest Protestant group in America. Only the Southern Baptist Convention is larger.

Here are some of the fascinating nuggets from that study:

- There are more than 12 million people who affiliate with nondenominational churches.
- The research found at least 35,000 nondenominational churches in America.
- Nondenominational churches are in 88 percent of the counties in the United States.
- Nondenominational churches are one of the top five largest religious groups in 48 of the 50 states and the

District of Columbia.

In light of the growth of these churches, I conducted an informal Twitter poll and asked why people are moving to nondenominational congregations from churches affiliated with denominations. Here are the top eight responses in order. There is obvious overlap in some of the responses.

1. Denominational churches have a negative reputation. Some respondents used the phrase “negative brand” to communicate this reason.
2. Denominations are known more for what they are against than what they are for.
3. There is too much infighting and politics in denominations.
4. The denominational churches are too liberal. From what I can tell from these respondents, they are current and former members of mainline churches.
5. There is a general waning of institutional loyalty in institutions such as denominations.
6. Denominations have inefficient systems and organizations. They are too bureaucratic.
7. Some of the respondents could see no perceived benefit to belonging to denominations.
8. Denominations are not good stewards of their financial resources.

I plan on doing a second poll in the near future to see how respondents view denominations positively. In the meantime, let me hear from you.

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What America Would Look Like Under Sharia Law

The diurnal interminable squabbling about First Amendment rights intentionally and ironically ignores the concerted effort to ensure its compliance to Sharia law.

Under the guise of “religious freedom,” Islamic organizations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood such as the Islamic Circle of North America, the Association of Muslim Jurists of America (AMJA), and the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) have devoted millions of dollars and resources to a well coordinated campaign to ensure American laws, including judicial proceedings and state constitutions, be Sharia compliant. Sharia (“legislation”) is rooted in the Quran, the foundation of Islamic law; non-compliance is punishable by death (3:85; 4:65).

Such efforts are curious however, in light of Fiqh Council of North America (FCNA) assertions. Islamic scholars, who draft opinions on issues concerning American Muslims, advocate no conflict exists “between Islamic teachings and the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights.”

FCNA asserts, “it is false and misleading to suggest that there is a contradiction between being faithful Muslims committed to God (Allah) and being loyal American citizens. Islamic teachings require respect of the laws of the land where Muslims live as minorities, including the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, so long as there is no conflict with Muslims’ obligation for obedience to God. The primacy of obedience to God is a commonly held position of many practicing Jews and Christians as well.”

But, if Sharia doesn’t contradict American law, why vigilantly advertise, lobby, award “educational grants,” and fund

political campaigns, to implement Sharia compliant American law?

The answer is quite simple. Groups like FCNA may use terminology like “religious freedom” but their definitions of religion and freedom can only be rightly understood within the context of Islamic ideology—not from western law or culture.

FCNA’s assertion is obviously false when understood from within the context of taqqiya, Qur’an sanctioned deceit, and the Islamic doctrine of abrogation (2:106; 3:185; 16:101).

Sharia law is in fact what the European Court on Human Rights ruled more than once: “incompatible with the fundamental principles of democracy.” Sharia actually rejects Constitutional rights, legislating restrictions and punishments against them.

Consider how First Amendment rights fare under Sharia law.

Under Sharia, no free exercise of religion exists, especially for Muslims who choose to leave Islam. Muhammad ordered, “Whoever changes his Islamic religion, kill him” (Hadith Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol. 9, Book 84, No. 57). Likewise, Muslims are instructed to murder, crucify, and dismember those who reject Islam, “wage war against Allah and his apostle and strive to make mischief in the land” (2:191, 5:32,33; 9:5, 123, 29).

According to a 2012 Pew Research Report, 60 percent of Middle Eastern and North African countries criminalize apostasy, the act of abandoning one’s faith. Apostasy laws also exist in Asian-Pacific and sub-Saharan African countries. Examples abound in America, however, just consider Ground Zero’s Imam Abdallah Adhami’s assertion that Muslims who leave Islam should be imprisoned.

Likewise, blasphemy laws exist worldwide to criminalize offensive speech or actions related to the Qur’an, Allah, and Muhammad. Seventy percent of Middle Eastern and North African

countries, 31 percent of countries in the Americas, and 16 percent of European countries criminalize blasphemy.

Those who correctly claim the word “blasphemy” cannot be found in the Quran exclude the fact that blasphemous acts are easily identifiable. Any “offensive” speech is illegal, which is why Dutch filmmaker van Gogh was brutally stabbed to death and French *Charlie Hedbo* satirists were gunned down; all victims were unarmed. These violent acts were not random, extreme or isolated, but examples of following the Quran’s instructions.

Discrimination against all non-Muslims exists under Sharia—because the underlying concept of equality does not. In fact, inequality, slavery and murder are enforced through the Islamic construct of dhimmitude.

Under dhimmitude, non-Muslims are divided into two groups. The polytheists, “pagans, idolaters and heathens” are given a choice to convert to Islam or die. Jews and Christians, known as “people of the book,” dhimmi and/or kuffar, are legally classified as third class citizens. They first must be humiliated and subjugated to pay a tax (Jizyah) in increasing amounts to Muslim-majority rulers. Next, they are given time to convert or leave their town, region and eventually country. If the Kuffar can’t or don’t pay the Jizyah, convert to Islam or move, Muhammad states that peace is impossible and the kuffar must be caught and beheaded (9:29; 22:19; 47:4).

Sharia law first imposes unequal legal status for non-Muslims; then eliminates them. The near extinction of non-Muslims in Muslim-majority countries evidences the stark reality that no First Amendment rights exist under Sharia. Instead, Muslims are instructed to “terrorize and behead those who believe in scriptures other than the Quran” and punish non-Muslims with “garments of fire, hooked iron rods, boiling water; melt their skin and bellies” (8:12; 22:19). The Quran incontrovertibly clarifies that conflict not only exists “between Islamic

teachings and the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights," but also exists infinitively.

This article first appeared in the Washington Times.

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When Someone Says 'No Thanks' to Your Offer for Prayer

Healing testimonies are great, but what happens when you step out into active obedience, and things don't go according to plan... well *your* plan anyway?

A few weeks ago I visited a local beautician to have my eyebrows sculpted. So fancy! In reality, you hand over \$10, and in return, a beauty technician or beauty therapist uses scalding hot wax to rip out your delicate eyebrow hairs, and you walk out of the salon with fantastically shaped eyebrows surrounded by red and swollen skin. Smokin'!

Excited about my impending ability to post 'Eyebrows On Fleek' social media statuses and selfies (if you're missing the context, don't worry, you're probably over 30! As am I, but

currently spend too much time with teenagers... and on the Internet) I laid down and made small talk with my beauty technician.

She started telling me about how she'd woken up with terrible back pain and was feeling rather unwell.

"Oh, that's not good at all, I'm sorry to hear you're in pain" , I said.

Immediately, I hear God speak into my heart, in the unique way that only He can. Although, this time it was so 'loud' it was almost audible (and indeed 'twas needed, in order that it be heard over my screaming hair follicles as they were ripped from their cosy homes)!

'Why is that your first response? Why is your first response not: "can I pray for you?'

Ouch- and this time it wasn't the waxing!

'Okay God', I reply, 'I get it. BUT, if you want me to do this, YOU have to provide me with the opportunity. You have to open her heart!'

Ya know, 'cause suddenly I'm in an authoritative position to tell God what must be done! Ha!

We come to the end of our sculpting session, and the beauty therapist says again: *'Oh I'm in so much pain, I just don't understand it, I was fine yesterday'*.

Fine, God, fine, (because all life-changing acts of obedience begin with a heart attitude of 'fine') here goes...

"I'd love to pray for your back to be healed, may I pray for you?" I ask, feeling no courage at all.

'Oh yes, I'd love you to pray! Thank you so much. You must be an angel!' I then prayed, she was healed, the room filled with glorious light, the real Angels appeared, plucking their harps

as we danced the dance of happy-healed-back-beauty-technicians and saintly clients.

Wouldn't that have been great? This is, however, the complete opposite of what actually transpired!

Instead, she said:

"NO! No, no!" And physically backed away from me, 'I took medicine. I'll be fine!"

She then walked straight out of the room, over to her colleague and whispered something to her, in one of the many languages I do not speak.

Now look, I'll be the first to admit that my paranoia is heightened at the best of times, and this was not the best of times. So what ensued only added explosive fuel to my situational paranoia fire...

The colleague looks at me, then back to my beautician and cracks up laughing! Not a giggle, not a chuckle, actual proper laughing!

Sigh.

I pretend I'm not completely mortified, I pay my \$10 and walk out thanking my beautician for her work.

Then God and I had a serious chat!

"WHAT. WAS. THAT!?! Why did you ask me to do that? You were so clear. Your voice was so clear! There is not a doubt in my mind that this was you and not my kooky head! (I understand that at this point some readers may disagree) Seriously, why did you ask me to do that!?!"

And then I hear His response, and it's not at all what I expect...

'Would you vouch for her?'

"Sorry? What do you mean?" I ask.

'Would you vouch for her. If she stood before me, would you step forward for her? Would you plead her case? In spite of your humiliation, would you beg me to love her and forgive her because she was unaware of who she was rejecting?'

" course I would. It was embarrassing, but it's only my ego that hurts."

I'd been given my answer.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts..." (Isaiah 55:8-9 NKJV)

Although this humbling took place a few weeks ago, I've continued to ponder it.

We live in the new age of instant gratification. Almost every whim, or desired knowledge is accessible at the push of a button. Fast food, fast cars, fast 'love'. Why wait?

We surf and swipe our way through life, rarely learning what it is to wait. We rarely know what it is to desire something but never see the fruit of our labour in this lifetime. For most of us, fruitless labor, fruitless humiliation seems pointless. And while reaping the fruit of our labor is Godly principle, sometimes, because His ways are higher than ours, His understanding far greater, He chooses to shroud some fruit in mystery.

And so, over these weeks, God has spoken to me again and again, stirring me, challenging me...

'Are you willing to look like a fool a thousand times over, with no reward, no instant fruit? Will you be prepared to be a fool for me, even if it means you never see the fruit from the seed you have planted?'

My answer, in spite of my aching pride, is yes. May my pride never win, never stand in the way, when the opportunity to love another stands present before me.

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Anti-Semitism Rears Its Ugly Head Again on Campus

Two months after the student government at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) raised concerns over the Jewish background of Rachel Beyda, a candidate for the school's student judicial board, an eerily similar incident has emerged at Stanford University.

The *Stanford Review* reported that student senate candidate Molly Horwitz's Jewish background was called into question by the Students of Color Coalition (SOCC) during an endorsement session for elections. An SOCC member asked Horwitz, "Given your strong Jewish identity, how would you vote on divestment?" Earlier this year, Stanford's student senate passed a resolution calling on the university to divest from companies that support Israel in the West Bank.

In a statement provided to the Haym Salomon Center, Horwitz said, "I wasn't sure that the interviewer knew the significance of what she was asking. After I questioned why my Jewish identity was relevant, she scrambled and referenced my application, in which I stated that I was very connected to my Jewish heritage."

In her endorsement application, Horwitz repeatedly referenced her Jewish identity, as follows: "I identify as a proud South

American and as a Jew;" "I felt like I was not enough for the Latino community and further embraced my Jewish identity;" "I found many parallels between the oppression of the Jews in Egypt and oppression of communities of color in the United States."

"I was deeply saddened to see my fellow student leaders unapologetically resort to anti-Semitism," Horwitz told the Salomon Center. "I am running for the Stanford Undergraduate Senate in order to help foster an inclusive and welcoming environment at Stanford. I am upset that SOCC, a group which purports to encourage such an inclusive environment, instead engaged in anti-Semitism."

The SOCC is a highly coveted endorsement in the student senate election. The organization represents six student groups: Asian American Students' Association, Black Student Union, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan de Stanford, Muslim Student Awareness Network, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and Stanford American Indian Organization.

Horwitz, a junior, filed a complaint with the student elections commissioner the evening of her March 13 endorsement interview with SOCC. The complaint was immediately forwarded to Nanci Howe, the associate dean of students and director of student activities and leadership.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) sent Howe a letter expressing "serious concerns about treating individuals differently on the basis of their religion or ethnic affiliation."

Howe responded to the ADL, explaining, "Sally Dickson, the Associate Vice Provost of Student Affairs, promptly spoke to the students directly involved in the interview session in order to hear their perspectives about the exchange. We learned that there are different accounts of what occurred. Regardless, we have reminded those involved that all

candidates should be treated consistently and fairly and that questioning based on an individual's ethnic or religious affiliation is inappropriate. We remain committed to working with our students involved in the elections to actively support a fair and respectful process. We will also continue to work directly with Molly in addressing her concerns."

With the election beginning Wednesday night, it is unlikely that any final determinations will be made by the university before students begin casting their ballots.

Horwitz is embracing the situation, explaining why it may be a teachable moment.

"This event has highlighted for me the importance of increasing education on anti-Semitism and the various ways in which it can manifest," she said. "It is my hope that the Stanford community can come together, reject this intolerance, and envision a future on campus in which all students, regardless of their religious beliefs, are welcomed and embraced."

For the original article, visit .

If It's All About Grace, Does Obedience Even Matter?

Of all the attributes of God described in the Bible, holiness is seen most often. Men fell down in the holy presence of God. Leaders, priests and kings all trembled at the sheer magnitude of His holiness. The angels cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy is our God."

Holiness (through obedience) is the key to truly understanding God. This is why sin is serious. It separates us from God; it stands in direct opposition to Him. It corrupts our character and our testimony; it prevents holiness and quenches and grieves the Spirit within.

J.C. Ryle (1816-1900) in his book on holiness said that we must stand guard as a soldier on enemy ground. The problem is that many love the world and have a hard time separating. They believe in heaven but they don't truly long for it. They "say" that they fear God but they don't live like it. They indulge temptation rather than fight it. They enjoy sin rather than confront it. And they compromise rather than conquer. The lukewarm church disdains the heat of conviction. Holiness, to them, is outdated, old-fashioned (too conservative).

Are you willing to do what it takes to truly know God? Seeking to identify the middle ground between our responsibility (obedience) and God's role in sanctification (holiness) can be challenging, but it doesn't need to be. The Bible is filled with passages about obedience. This is why I do not embrace hyper grace, but I cherish biblical grace.

□(Watch my sermon excerpt, *What Is Hyper Grace*)

For example, 1 Peter 1:14 says, "As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance." 1 John 3:3 adds that "all who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure." And Romans 6:19 tells us to present our "bodies as slaves to righteousness." Peter asks, "What sort of people ought you to be in holiness and godliness?" (2 Pet. 3:11).

It's clear from Scripture that grace produces sanctification (holiness). Holiness is a by-product of our submission to the work of the Spirit. Because of God's grace I want to obey Him. Sadly, many don't seek this surrendered life. They want the narrow road to be broad and the cross to be light. But

holiness has a cost.

J.C. Ryle noted that "holiness will cost a man his sins. He must be willing to give up every habit and practice which is wrong in God's sight ... There must be no separate truce with any special sin which he loves." Ryle continues, "Our sins are often as dear to us as our children: We love them, hug them, cleave to them and delight in them. To part with them is as hard as cutting off a right hand, or plucking out a right eye. But it must be done. The parting must come."

Holiness comes with a price ... there is a cost—death to self and crucifixion to the world. To be filled mightily with the Spirit, we must first be emptied of self. Pride and arrogance hinder holiness. We are to overcome sin, not surrender to it.

A vast majority of Christians are turning a deaf ear to holiness saying, "We live under grace now." Conviction is replaced with complacency. Their thought is, "I'm just not convicted about that like you are." Often, the reason is because they are not truly seeking God.

Again, lukewarm living disdains the heat of conviction. It "loves the world" more than the things of God. A call to holiness challenges our lifestyle (mine included); it forces us to confront idols and remove destructive habits.

Holiness will cost the opinions of men. We will be ridiculed, mocked, slandered, persecuted and even hated when we take a stand for holiness. Nevertheless, we desperately need holiness.

We should not apologize for following God's Word. We are in the midst of a spiritual battle. We will be criticized for following Christ, mocked for believing in truth, and challenged for promoting holiness. We are called to deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow Him. The day of the passive, lukewarm church must come to an end if we truly desire for families to be restored and for lives to be

rebuilt.

Be clear here:

[1] [Holiness does not mean that we never sin. Those who seek holiness realize just how sinful they actually are. The closer we draw to God the clearer the picture of sin becomes.

[2] [Holiness does not lead to the forgiveness of sin. God declares the believer righteous (holy) because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Christ plus something equals salvation is not biblical. We are declared right before God when we put our trust in Christ, not in our "good" works.

[3] [Finally, holiness is not as much about "what" I don't do as it is "why" I don't do something. It's safe to assume that those who live strictly by rules rather than a true relationship with Christ are not holy ... they are religious. They may avoid people, places and things but still be critical, judgmental, jealous, arrogant and angry—"having a form of godliness." Holiness involves truly seeking God verses "playing church."

We must lovingly preach holiness in our pulpits again: "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). The prophets of old bear this out as well. These men were sent by God to call the people back to Him ... back to holiness: "And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers [to convict them], rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy" (cf. 2 Chr. 36:15-16).

Little has changed: We still mock difficult messages from the pulpit and the pen, we despise the heat of conviction, and we scoff at those who seek God unconditionally. I ask again, "Are you willing to do what it takes to truly know God?" It will

require grace on God's part AND obedience on ours.

□

View recent sermons here:

Pockets of true revival are breaking out across America. Want to know more about the next great move of God? Click here to see Jennifer LeClaire's new book, featuring Dutch Sheets, Reinhard Bonnke, Jonathan Cahn, Billy Graham and others.

Shane Idleman is the founder and lead pastor of Westside Christian Fellowship in Lancaster, California, just North of Los Angeles. He recently released his 7th book, *Desperate for More of God* at . Shane's sermons, articles, books, and radio program can all be found at . Follow him on Facebook at: □□□□

How Would You Act if You Really Believed Psalm 23?

Did you ever hear a child proudly proclaim, "That's my daddy"? That child probably really put some emphasis on the word "my." Children have a way of saying it that leaves no doubt they believe their daddy is bigger, smarter and stronger than anyone else's dad.

I believe that's the way David expressed himself in Psalm 23 when he said, "The Lord is MY Shepherd" I think he was proclaiming his *personal* connection with God. Certainly David knew that he was talking about the God of heaven and earth, the Ruler of the universe, the Almighty and Omnipotent One; but at that very moment, I believe he was simply thinking, *He's mine*. It was personal.

The Lord Is Your Shepherd

As children of God, we have the privilege of looking at it the way David did: The Lord is *MY* Shepherd. Just meditate on that for a moment. He is God of all, but He is also *my* God ... and *your* God. He loves *you*. He has a plan for *your* life. He knows every single thing about you. The Lord is *your* Shepherd. He is moving in *your* life right now.

This is very personal. But many times, we miss what God is doing just because we aren't aware of His presence and His guidance. I began to keep a journal several years ago so that every time I witnessed God doing something special, I could record it. I love to go back now and then to just sit and read some of the things I've written ... all those special things God has done for me and for others.

I encourage you to write down the things God is doing in your life. Keep a record of His goodness and go back to it often so you will see how He is moving in you. I believe it will help bring your faith to a new level and strengthen your relationship with God.

His Providential Care

The Lord wants to take care of each of us, much like a shepherd cares for his sheep. Psalm 23:1 says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." God wants to take care of every one of our needs. He is our Protector and our Provider.

In verse 2, David says, "He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters." God is our Caretaker, seeing to it that we have what we need in life. It might not always be what we think we need, but we can trust that He knows better. We do not have a real need that He will not meet and because of that, we can experience a wonderful sense of peace.

Then in verse 3 he says, "He restores my soul; He leads me in

paths of righteousness for His name's sake." He refreshes us with His wisdom and restores us with His strength. And He leads us to righteousness and does good things for us, not because we deserve it, but because of the power and reputation of His name.

Verses 4 and 5 say, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over." Whatever is going on in our lives, or when the enemy comes against us in some way, we still have access to God's presence, power and peace. We never need to be fearful, because He is always guiding us and always protecting us.

That's My Dad!

Finally, David declares in verse 6, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Doesn't it excite you to know that God's goodness and His mercy are with you everywhere you go and that He loves you ... no matter what? You are always under His care and protection. Because the Lord is *YOUR* Shepherd!

And He is a good Shepherd! A good shepherd is to his sheep like a good father is to his child. Now I know not every one of us has had a good relationship with our earthly fathers. I had a terrible relationship with my father for a long time, filled with fear because of emotional and sexual abuse.

The enemy will attack the father-child relationship any way he can. He wants us to grow up and not trust God, because many times we think God is the same way we view our earthly dads.

However, every single one of us has a good heavenly Father who loves and cares deeply for us. We can each have a wonderful, personal, intimate relationship with Him. And when a child has

a good relationship with his father, he is proud to say, "That's *my* dad!" Just like David, you and I can also say, "The Lord is *MY* Shepherd!"

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Overcoming Blocks and Hindrances to Hearing God's Voice

For most of us in a 21st-century rational culture, the greatest miracle of all is to learn to hear God's voice, clearly, plainly and on an ongoing, daily basis. Christians often debate whether this is even possible.

However, those who have tasted communion with God know that not only is it possible, but it satisfies the deepest longing of both the human heart and God's heart. For this reason we were created, to fellowship and commune with our Creator. Therefore, it is with arms wide open and faces aglow with the joy of His Son's light that we embrace the warmth of His companionship. Truly, the Morning Star has risen within our hearts and the prophetic word becomes clear to us (2 Pet. 1:19).

However, some days we still experience strong, stormy gales that hinder our access to fellowship with the Father. In this

article we want to talk about some of these storms, and discuss ways they can be tamed by the power of His Spirit and a knowledge of His ways.

The Tabernacle Experience

First of all, there is a basic approach laid out in the Bible for those who would draw near to God. It is found in the tabernacle experience. The one who wants to experience God in the Holy of Holies (one's spirit) must learn to live this tabernacle experience, which begins with the gate of salvation. We enter this gate with thanksgiving, clothing ourselves with the white raiment of righteousness that Christ has provided for us (Ps. 100:4; Is. 61:10).

We then come immediately upon a **brazen altar**, where we offer our lives as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God (Rom. 12:1). We do this not only at the point of salvation, but also as a daily experience, as we awaken each morning.

Next, we come before the **laver**, where we are washed with the washing of the water of the Word (Eph. 5:26). As we look intently upon the Word, we allow it to cleanse our lives, purifying our actions. Therefore, the pattern of regular Bible meditation becomes a part of our daily approach to God.

Then we enter the holy place, the realm of our souls, and God deals with our minds, wills and emotions. First we go to the **table of showbread**, a place where the priests ate together around a table. This represents the fellowship we enjoy in the family of God as we partake together of God's provision. As the grain is ground fine to make the bread, so our wills are ground fine as we fellowship with other believers. As we allow this process to happen, choosing to allow our wills to be ground fine within the bond of unity of the fellowship to believers, we are prepared to go ever further into the depths (heart) of God.

Next, we stop at the **golden lampstand**, made of beaten gold

representing the cultivating of divine nature, and lit by oil, representing the illumination of the Holy Spirit. As we examine the Word under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we find revelation knowledge pouring into our souls, transforming our lives and taking us even deeper into the presence of God (2 Cor. 3:18).

We then move to the **altar of incense**, where we learn to offer continuous praise and worship unto the Most High God, the Maker of heaven and earth. As a fragrant aroma ascended perpetually from this altar, so our praise and worship ascends perpetually before the nostrils of the Lord (Ps. 141:2). We have learned to be worshippers. Through revelation knowledge, we have seen that the Most High rules in the affairs of man, and we have learned to worship Him everywhere, in everything (Dan. 4:17). We have learned to worship in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:24).

Entering the Holy of Holies and Experiencing Direct Fellowship

Now we are ready to ascend directly into His manifest presence, fixing our gaze upon His glory and speaking face-to-face and mouth-to-mouth with the Most High God. Oh, what a privilege! Oh, what glory! To stand and fellowship directly with the Lord of heaven and earth Himself! The veil has been rent; the way has been opened, through the atoning blood of Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior (Heb. 10:19-20).

It is in this manner that God has prepared a way for us to enter before Him and fellowship with His Holy Spirit. The way is clearly established in the Old Covenant and torn open for all to partake in the New Covenant. Now, when storms and gales hinder our access before the King of kings, we can go back and re-walk the path that He has prepared for us. We can ask:

A Checklist for Tuning Our Hearts to God's Voice

1. Am I singing in thankfulness for the robe of righteousness

which He has allowed me to put on? Do I see myself wearing it? Do I see myself cleansed and spotless before the King?

2. Have I laid down my will in all matters this day, and sought only the will and purposes of the Father in all areas?

3. Am I being washed daily by the constant application of the Word of God in my life?

4. Is my heart full of love for those in the body of Christ, with whom I live? Have I closed off my heart to any Christian brother? Have I allowed my will to be ground fine before my brothers?

5. Am I prayerfully pondering the Word and waiting before the Holy Spirit, allowing revelation knowledge to illumine my life?

6. Am I a constant worshiper? Has all grumbling been replaced with worshipping in my life? Do I dwell only on that which is pure, good, honest?

7. Do I stand, fixing my gaze on the manifest glory of Almighty God, receiving His spontaneous ideas, visions and feelings?

Usually, I find that if I walk through the tabernacle experience, any block I may have as I approach God in prayer is erased. If not, God has provided a fine-tuning dial in Hebrews 10:22:

“Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

In this verse are found **four more keys** for removing blocks to effectively hearing the Master's voice. The first key is that we must have a **sincere heart**. There can be no hypocrisy, no double-mindedness, no halfheartedness. Only total, pure, childlike dedication to the desires and purposes of Almighty

God.

Secondly, we must have a **full assurance of faith**. In other words, we cannot doubt that there is a river flowing within us. We must believe that the spontaneous bubbling that wells up within us as we seek God in prayer is actually God speaking to us and flowing within us (John 7:38,39). If we do not have a fullness of faith, if we doubt that He is "Immanuel," God with us, then we will cut off the flow of His Spirit.

Therefore, we must believe that He is a Rewarder of those who earnestly seek Him, and receive in faith that which is flowing within us, trusting that indeed it is the Spirit of Almighty God (Heb. 11:6). If it is not, then Christianity is a lie. However, I am persuaded that it is the truth.

Thirdly, we must have **our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience**. If there is sin, it must be brought before the cleansing flow of Christ's blood and removed as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). Then it must be forgotten, as all of our attention is turned upon our Maker. All nagging unrest must be brought before the purifying blood of Christ for removal. Then the heart is free to soar into the heavens with God.

Finally, we must be **cleansed with the washing of water of the rhema word**, or the voice of God (Eph. 5:26). Those things which God is speaking to us must be acted upon and obeyed, or our ability to go on with God is destroyed.

When I come before God in prayer, I begin by quieting myself in His presence. I use the eyes of my heart to see Him present with me. I tune to the inner river (in other words, spontaneous flow), and I begin writing down and recording the flow that is welling up within me. (See this pattern in Hab. 2:1-2.)

If I am stuck and some block seems to be hindering my ability to hear God's voice and see His vision, I review the above

questions concerning living the tabernacle experience. Often as I go through this checklist, I identify the block and remove it.

If the block still remains, I ask myself the four questions found in Hebrews 10:22. Is my heart sincere, honest and committed? Am I free of reservations as I approach God? Do I have a full assurance of faith that He is within me and welling up through my spirit (which is joined to His Spirit—1 Cor. 6:17)? In addition, I must ask whether I have been obedient to the previous words which God has spoken to me.

Summary

These two patterns, the tabernacle experience, and the fine-tuning dial of Hebrews 10:22, (when coupled with the four keys found in Hab. 2:1-2) offer ready access for most of us almost all of the time, so we can readily hear God's voice within our spirits, and write down the spontaneous flow of thoughts, visions and feelings which bubble up within us as we seek the face of God. Thus, we find that many of the most common blocks and problems to hearing the voice of God are removed as we follow these biblical patterns.

3 Reasons I May Still Find 'Errors' in My Journaling

Once we begin recording the things we sense God speaking to us, we may still find errors, or "supposed errors," in our journals. This can come from many things. I will list very briefly only a few of the most common situations.

One problem is that when we pray, we often fix our eyes on the thing we are praying about, rather than on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Therefore, the answer comes back from the thing, rather than from our Lord. The solution to this problem is to be very careful to fix our eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12:2), rather than on any thing, or person, or issue. If we are bringing a person or issue to God in prayer, then we should actually see ourselves presenting this before Him and

watch what He does or says concerning it. Then the spontaneous flow will be more pure.

A second issue is that some of God's commands are simply positioning moves and are never meant to be fully carried out. Instead, God redirects us in midstream. An example of this may be seen in Genesis 22, when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son. However, as Abraham began to act in obedience to this order, God changed it, telling him not to sacrifice his son. Now, was Abraham's first word from the Lord wrong? No, God was simply positioning Abraham in order to fulfill one of God's goals for his life. Once the test was completed, God discontinued the action midstream with new orders. I find this happens often in my journal. Many orders are simply positioning moves, both for me and for others.

A third, and final, problem which we will discuss is the problem of improper interpretation. It is very easy to interpret the words of your journal to say what you think they mean, rather than simply seeing them for what they are. Often, as I have gone back to my journal, thinking my journaling had been wrong, I have been amazed to see that the actual words of the journaling were fulfilled. It was my inner interpretation of these words that was not correct. Let us be careful to hear that which the Lord is speaking.

*Each of the above points are much more fully developed in two texts by Mark & Patti Virkler: **Dialogue with God** and **4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice**.*

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Discerning the Difference Between Holy Spirit Conviction and Demonic Condemnation

In order to bind our flesh, thoughts, feelings and confusion when hearing directions in our mind; we need to define the difference between Holy Spirit conviction and condemnation which comes from the enemy or our flesh. If you search inside yourself, you can feel your spirit man.

When the Holy Spirit starts to manifest you can feel an overwhelming joy or it can be similar to when we feel the presence of the Lord upon us.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin or when we are heading in the wrong direction. When the Holy Spirit convicts us, we might feel slightly grieved or disappointed. When He is convicting you, pay attention!

Be aware of what the Spirit of the Lord is trying to teach you. Be open to receiving His correction and what He is showing you that you need to repent of and change in your life. The word repent means to turn around. When the Holy Spirit convicts us, we need to turn around, change the way we did something or the direction we are thinking of proceeding.

When the Holy Spirit corrects or convicts us, I like to describe it as the "get in-get out" theory. He is going to correct and discipline us and show us what we did wrong. He is going to get in and get out. He is not going to badger us or nag at us about the same thing. He is going to show us the

mistake, lay it upon our heart to repent and ask for forgiveness and then He is going to expect us to move on. He will keep convicting us until we do something about it.

However, He won't make us feel depressed, guilty or ashamed like the enemy will. As we grow in our walk with the Lord we will be able to more quickly identify when it is conviction from the Holy Spirit or condemnation from the enemy.

When we receive condemnation from the enemy, it is different. He wants us to stew on what we did wrong and let it build up inside us. He is hoping we will take on the emotions of guilt, regret, blame and shame. He wants these emotions to plant a seed inside us; telling us that we are no good, that we will do it again and nobody is going to forgive us for our mistakes.

These are a few of the lies that the "father of lies" will plant in our mind. The key to our victory is to remember they are just lies. Don't take the lies in; rebuke them (take authority over them) and refuse to think anything else then what the Word of God says about you.

The enemy is going to attempt to twist and turn our thoughts. He wants to make it hard for us to accept the forgiveness that Christ offers. He wants us to be mad at all the people involved. He will try to plant thoughts in our mind that we should be mad at God because, *"A good God could have prevented it from happening."*

He is going to repeat old lies to us and have us go to an emotional place we don't care to visit again. He wants us to wallow in our self-pity. He will take the low self-esteem that we may have struggled with in the past and will attack us again with those feelings of self worth and doubt. Don't listen; don't take it in! We are more than conquerors, bought with the blood of Christ, wanted and accepted by the Father! Meditate on the scriptures and fill your mind with those

thoughts and truths!

An easy way to discern between Holy Spirit conviction and condemnation from the enemy is that the Holy Spirit does it quickly. He comes in and disciplines, convicts, corrects and then loves on us. Once it is over, we might think about it for a few minutes and then we move on. It's done, it's handled, we feel released and we have given it back to the Lord to never pick it up again!

The enemy wants us to stew on our situation and stay mad at the person or ourselves. Before we lived as Christians extending the grace He gave to us to others when we would get mad at someone it would take us 3 days to get over it. I think the enemy still uses that today. When we let guilt, regret, blame and shame in, it still takes us 3 days to get over it. When the enemy condemns us it usually takes 3 days to make a turn around.

How did you react in the past when you received bad news or had a situation that did not have the outcome you expected? Did it take you 3 days to blow it off? He will steal your time by getting you depressed, so you sit on the couch and do nothing. We need to take time to get in the Word and overcome our thoughts, fears and condemnation! We should be binding our minds to the mind of Christ; instead of allowing unnecessary thoughts to come into our minds. The next time you can't blow something off, ask yourself, "Is this Holy Spirit conviction which only lasts a few minutes or enemy condemnation which lasts 3 days?"

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:13).

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. God desires to give us good things if we ask" (Matt. 7:7).

God will give us good things if we ask. His Word states He will. We need to put ourselves in a position of hearing from God. God may be silent for a period of time while seeking Him for an answer. When God makes us wait for the answer it doesn't mean He is ignoring us. We need to be careful when waiting to hear from the Lord. It is in the waiting, that the enemy will use that time to counterfeit in a wrong answer. The enemy will use our lack of patience, control and the things that make us act out of God's timing to get us out of God's will.

God's timing is perfect and in the waiting is when we grow and learn. In waiting we develop perseverance and learn how to stay on the path that He has set before us. When we are seeking an answer, we don't know why God makes us wait. Is it for our benefit such as; cleaning some junk out of our trunk or defining us to more effectively hear the voice of the Lord.

We might have to wait on someone to do something, so our answer can come to pass. It doesn't matter what we are waiting for or how long we are waiting, as long as, we are continually pressing in to get the direction God wants for us.

We need to make sure when God is silent we don't take on our old behavior patterns, thoughts and habits. We need to wait silently for God. Don't try to analyze and come up with your own answer. There is growth in waiting, intimacy in waiting and learning in the waiting. Guard your mind, thoughts and heart during the waiting. Then when you hear the answer there will be no flesh involved.

When the Holy Spirit is giving you conviction or a word of knowledge, it won't leave you until you act on it. The same word will keep coming to you. It is like a basic computer program that we used to write years ago. The program tells us what to do line by line, but we always have a "go to" line in the program. Therefore, no matter what we do, or in this case, what we try to avoid, He is always going to bring us back to

the original instruction.

We can try to ignore it, but the Holy Spirit is going to keep bringing it to us until the conviction becomes so uncomfortable that we must act on it. As soon as we act on it, we feel released by the Spirit of the Lord and know we have been obedient to what He has called us to do.

How do we know if it was your flesh? If it was your flesh you could have ignored it. Think about the times you thought you were suppose to apologize to someone and didn't. What about the time you "felt" you should call a friend and didn't? Many of you have been taught when you have a problem to "stuff" your feelings. These are examples of how our flesh can control our actions. When it is our flesh, we can ignore our feelings or what it makes sense to do in the natural. It is an emotional response that we can push aside.

God has given His people free will. He is a gentleman and doesn't force us to do anything, sometimes causing us to take an alternative route to what He wants. Suppose God sent your friend to witness to you and your friend was disobedient and didn't do it. Do you think He is going to sit there and give up on you or use someone else?

There are probably many instances that God had to use someone else to do something. What if the first person didn't hear clearly, didn't act on what they were supposed to, was scared to do it or wasn't sure if it was the voice of the Lord or their own feelings?

Our God is a God of second chances. Let's be obedient to act on what direction the Lord gives us. There will be times we make mistakes, act in our flesh, miss a God appointment or allow the enemy to condemn us. Thank God He gives us a lot of grace to get through those times when we make mistakes.

Spend some time in prayer. Reflect and think, "Are there times I was convicted versus condemned? How can I learn to hear the

voice of the Lord faster?" Discern the next time you get a direction and ask yourself, "Where did it come from?" I pray you will notice the difference between your flesh, Satan or God and conviction and condemnation. May the Holy Spirit increase your discernment!

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