

Silent Retreat: Knowing God's Voice

"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."
- Philippians 1:6

Beginning

Take some time to start the day in prayer. Ask God to help you to be open to whatever He might have for you this day. Share with God any hopes, fears, questions, or doubts that are on your mind. Throughout the day you may find it helpful to come back to God on a "meta" level: why do I resist this topic or find particular delight in this verse? But if you are having a sweet time of fellowship with the Lord, do not feel obligated to interrupt it with such thoughts!

(More suggestions for Entering In to the retreat are included in the appendix. All the materials here are merely prompts—take up what is helpful and disregard the rest.)

Invocation

Lord, your gospel comes "not only by words, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." May your Word come to us in this way as we seek you, the Living Word, this day. Amen.

Scripture Readings

from the NIV

Philippians 1:1-11

¹Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:
²Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

1 Thessalonians 1

¹Paul, Silas and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace and peace to you.

²We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. ³We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. ⁷And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. ⁸The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, ⁹for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Joshua 24:14-22

¹⁴“Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. ¹⁵But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

¹⁶Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! ¹⁷It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we traveled. ¹⁸And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God.”

¹⁹Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God; he is a jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.”

²¹But the people said to Joshua, “No! We will serve the Lord.”

²² Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the Lord.”

“Yes, we are witnesses,” they replied.

Isaiah 57:14-21

¹⁴And it will be said:

“Build up, build up, prepare the road!
Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people.”

¹⁵For this is what the high and exalted One says—
he who lives forever, whose name is holy:

“I live in a high and holy place,
but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly
and to revive the heart of the contrite.

¹⁶I will not accuse them forever,
nor will I always be angry,
for then they would faint away because of me—
the very people I have created.

¹⁷I was enraged by their sinful greed;
I punished them, and hid my face in anger,
yet they kept on in their willful ways.
¹⁸ I have seen their ways, but I will heal them;
I will guide them and restore comfort to Israel's mourners,
¹⁹creating praise on their lips.
Peace, peace, to those far and near,"
says the Lord. "And I will heal them."
²⁰ But the wicked are like the tossing sea,
which cannot rest,
whose waves cast up mire and mud.
²¹ "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

Other Readings

Batter my heart, three-personed God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me; and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.

- From *Holy Sonnets* by John Donne

You know how we are able to distinguish between human speakers by the quality of their voice, the spirit in their voice and, of course, the content of what is being said? It is much the same with the divine voice. The quality of God's voice is one of drawing and encouraging. The spirit in God's voice is all grace and mercy. And the content of what is being said is always consistent with what God has said before—we have a huge biblical witness upon which to test our leadings. Now, I am not speaking here of an outward voice that can be captured by electronic equipment. That no doubt is possible, as the Bible gives ample witness. But here I am speaking of an inward whisper, a deep speaking of the heart, an interior knowing.

- From *Sanctuary of the Soul* by Richard Foster

How can I be sure that I am hearing the voice of God?

It is very important to have the answer to this question clear in your mind. Remember, Satan pushes and condemns, God draws and encourages. You can tell the difference. Get clear in your mind the great teaching in the New Testament of the Christlikeness of God . . . God is like Jesus. Then, become intimately familiar with Jesus, first from the Gospel records and then in your personal experience. Cling to the words of Jesus that he is the good Shepherd and that his sheep "know his voice" (Jn 10:4). God will always draw you to what is life-giving, to those things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report (Phil 4:8).

- From *Sanctuary of the Soul* by Richard Foster

Themes for Reflection

As you read, reflect, write, and pray, remember to pause, wait, and sit still along the way. The stillness may be the most important part of all.

Choose one or more of the following to guide your day (see also the Appendix).

Knowing God's Voice

Reread the excerpts from Richard Foster's *Sanctuary of the Soul*. If you feel like your ability to distinguish God's voice could use some sharpening or refreshing, ask God to teach you and take Foster's advice and dive in to reading about Christ's life.

The premise of Foster's advice is that God the Father and Jesus are like one another such that we can learn to recognize God by looking at Jesus' life. Read about this in Colossians 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:1-3.

The same God who speaks to us now by His Spirit is written about in these verses: Romans 5:8, Romans 2:4, Galatians 4:4-7, and Joshua 24 and Isaiah 57 as quoted

Read about Jesus in a Gospel of your choosing (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John). Maybe choose a favorite story. Observe how he interacts with the hurting, the outcast, the legalist, the sinner, the sick, the self-righteous, the penitent. As you read, share your thoughts with God and ask Him to show you anything you might especially need to hear right now.

What do you think of Foster's assertion that the spirit of God's voice is all grace and mercy? Be careful to distinguish this from "only exactly what you want to hear!"

The Life of the Church and the Spread of the Gospel

Read slowly through 1 Thessalonians 1. Stop and dwell on any verse that stands out to you, reflecting on its implications. There is a lot in this chapter.

After you've read through on your own, here are some additional things you could think about (any or all):

1:2-3 Is there anyone you'd like to stop and thank God for right now, in prayer? Is there something about that person you'd like to point out to them that could be an encouragement to them?

1:4 Brother, sister—you are loved by God and chosen by Him!

1:5 How did the gospel come? Not just by words. What are Paul et al. saying?

1:6-8 The Thessalonians became imitators (of whom?) and then models. Have you observed this in yourself or others? What role does this have in discipleship?

1:9 In what ways have you turned from idols to the living God? Are there areas in your life where God is calling you to give up idols and turn to Him?

It's a short letter, perhaps you'd like to read the rest of it right now.

Song (for meditation)

Throne of Grace

By the Tree

Oh my Lord, You are so kind

Oh my Lord, You are so kind

Morning to morning, day to day,

You reveal your righteous ways:

It's your kindness that leads to repentance

It's your blood that brings forgiveness

It's your mercy that leads me here

To your throne of grace

Your throne of grace

Oh my Lord, You are so kind

Oh my Lord, You are so kind

Morning to morning, day to day,

You reveal your righteous ways:

In your kindness I find repentance

In your blood I find forgiveness

In your mercy I find myself at your throne of grace

Your throne of grace

Benediction (read together in pairs at the end)

This is our prayer: that our love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that we may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. Amen.

- From *Philippians 1*