

*And quenched with joy thy weary, parched soul's thirst;
To find, as time goes on, thy streamlet alters
From what it was at first.
Hearts that are cheered, or soothed, or blest,
Or strengthened;
Loves that have lavished so unstintedly;
Joys, treasured joys – have passed, as time hath
Lengthened,
Into obscurity.
If thus, ah soul, the brook thy heart hath cherished
Doth fail thee now – no more thy thirst assuage –
If its once glad refreshing streams have perished,
Let HIM thy heart engage.
He will not fail, nor mock, nor disappoint thee;
With oil of joy He surely will anoint thee;
And wipe away thy tears.*

J. Danson Smith

Personal testimonies.

I had been meditating on a Scripture for seven years and finally heard from God on His application of this Scripture for my life. Continual meditation, prayer, discerning circumstances and reading various commentaries finally allowed me to hear what God was saying to me. It was very important and worth the effort. This had to do with the last chapter of Malachi about turning the father's hearts toward the children and the children's hearts back to the fathers.

Also years ago I heard a preacher state that since he had died with Christ that he was free from sin, referring to Romans chapter 6. I wanted and craved that freedom, so I began reading Romans chapter 6. I read that we did go through death with Him and that we were free from sin. I believed it with my head, but not my heart. The Lord spoke and told me to memorize that chapter and speak it out every day. Finally, one day, all of the sudden, it hit me, "I have died with Him."

Author Chris Tiegreen wrote, *"The lighter you are packed for this life the clearer you will hear his voice."*

Quoted from David Wilkerson

TO KNOW HIS VOICE.⁴

Those who truly know God have learned how to recognize his voice above all others. He wants you to be absolutely convinced that he desires to talk to you—to tell you things you’ve never seen or heard before.

I believe that three things are required of those who would hear God’s voice:

1. An unshakeable confidence that God is wanting to speak to you. You have to be fully persuaded and convinced of this. Indeed, he is a speaking God—and he wants you to know his voice so you can do his will. What God tells you will never go beyond the boundaries of Scripture.

2. Quality time and quietness. You need to be willing to shut yourself in with God and let all other voices hush away. True, God speaks to us all day long. But whenever he has wanted to build something into my life, his voice has come only after I had shut out every other voice but his.

3. Asking in faith. We do not obtain anything from God (including hearing his voice) unless we truly believe that he is able to convey his mind to us—to enable us to understand his perfect will!

God is not a tease! He will not allow the enemy to deceive you. When God speaks, peace follows—and Satan cannot counterfeit that peace!

John 10:2-5 (KJV) says,

But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

⁴ <http://www.worldchallenge.org/>

Chapter 3

Hearing God's Voice Produces Fruit

The Parable of the Sower in Mark chapter 4 is all about hearing God's voice, which is planted as a seed into your heart. Then it talks about the various types of ground, or hearts. Only the good and honest heart will bear fruit. Satan comes immediately to steal the Word because all that God needs for the building of His Kingdom and all that you need for yourself is accomplished by fruit bearing.

Financial Desperation? I've been there! Here is how the Lord worked in my life.

Matthew 6:33 says,

33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Why did Jesus say to seek first His Kingdom when He was talking about financial needs?

In Matthew chapter 6 Jesus made it clear that if a person acted like a "Gentile," or someone without a blood covenant, that their conscience (eye) would not allow them to have a deep relationship with God. If you seek the "things," then you are seeking an idol.

Notice in Matthew 6:33 it says to also seek His righteousness. I believe the applicable meaning for this is two-fold:

1. To seek to be found and clothed in His righteousness, not ours.
2. To be continually healed in your inner being from inner wounds and strongholds that cause you to behave like a "Gentile," or an unbeliever. God wants to supply your financial needs, but He needs you to allow Him to heal your soul, mind, and emotions.

3 John 1:2 says,

2 "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers."

How does one "seek" the Kingdom of God?

Read the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4. Mark 4:11 says that the mystery of the Kingdom is embedded in the Parable. The mystery is that the word is a seed that bears fruit.

Types of Fruit you should expect.

In my other books I talk about the various types of fruit by relating the idea to the various items contained in the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple. Since we are now the Temple of God, then that Ark and its contents are in us. Those items, in my opinion, are the three main types of fruit that we can bear by hearing God’s voice. I can testify personally that this has been true in my life since 1979

When you look at the Ark of the Covenant inside the Tabernacle, it contains three major items, which represent the three types of fruit:

1. The Law. This represents your character, as in the Fruit of the Spirit.

2. Manna. This represents your daily provisions for your natural life supernaturally provided for by God.

3. Aaron’s Rod that budded. This represents your outreach or the fruit you bear by ministering to others.

You may find a more detailed look at this idea in our book “Grow or Die”, chapter 2, “The Flowing River.”⁵

Not everyone qualifies for inheriting the benefits of the Kingdom of God now.

In Matthew 19 the Rich Young Ruler missed it. As Jesus explained to His disciples who would benefit from the Kingdom in this life, He told them a parable in Matthew 20.

The “One Hour Man” (the last men in the parable who worked only one hour) inherited the benefits of the Kingdom of God first (Matthew 20:8-16).

When I became financially desperate, God showed me the Parable of the Sower and how it bore fruit. Then, He would continually speak to me various Scriptures that I knew were intended to supply my needs and the needs of His kingdom. Often I did not know how a Scripture applied to my life, but that was God’s way. I did not have to understand the seed, I just had to receive it and keep it in my heart. Each and every time the result was super abundantly beyond all I could even imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

When the woman at the well in John chapter 4 heard Jesus’ voice she obtained the fruit of a changed character and of ministry.

John 4:13-14, 28-29 says,

⁵ Grow or Die book - http://isob-bible.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=292

13 *“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,*

14 *but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.’”*

28 *“The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men,*

29 *‘Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?’”*

When the man at the pool of Bethesda in John chapter 5 heard Jesus speak he bore the fruit of provisions, or physical healing.

John 5:8-9 says,

8 *“Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’*

9 *And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.”*

The primary by-products of hearing God speak is that His voice produces faith in you.

Romans 10:17 says,

17 *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

That faith is what gives you the seed that will produce fruit, but it will also give you the strength to stand against the demonic forces that will try to steal your seed, until God’s promise of fruit is manifested in your life.

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Chapter 4 Hearing God's Voice Produces Freedom

Inner bondages are common but most often not recognized.

When one has a wound on the skin, it is easy to see and the treatment is discernable to modern science. However, God speaks of inner wounds and in Isaiah 53 He says that Jesus will come and provide our healing. Do you struggle with depression, low self-esteem, habits that you cannot break, unforgiveness? Do you feel hopeless, like your life is a dead end? If your answer is yes, then you are a prisoner. Wait, there is hope!

The Israelites were still prisoners after they had reached their promise land! Are you?

Judges 6:1-6 says,

1 "Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years,

2 and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains.

3 So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East would come up against them.

4 Then they would encamp against them and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey.

5 For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it.

6 So Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, and the children of Israel cried out to the LORD."

For hundreds of years, the Israelites called out to God and He delivered them in their pain. Then they got into idolatry again and became prisoners to something else. Why?

Judges 6:10 says,

10 “Also I said to you, “I am the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell.” But you have not obeyed My voice.’”

Prisoners in the Promise Land.

We can be Christians and still be in bondage. Judges chapter 6 tells us about God’s people living in the promise land, yet their enemies had them in bondage. They were living in fear, and without God’s provision.

Gideon heard God’s voice and was set free, and was used by God to set Israel free.

What are some prisons that Satan can keep us in?

John 8:34 says,

34 “Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.’”

Sickness, disease.

Continual lack of finances.

Being unloved. If we have not received unconditional love from our parents, we are in a prison.

Low self-esteem – a sense of unworthiness and defeat.

Widows and Orphans.

Mammon – trusting in the world, other people, or anything else for your material needs, rather than God. Any kind of idol will keep you a prisoner.

Abuse – So many people have been abused, sexually and in other ways.

Self-righteousness.

Other enemies. Guilt, moral sins, sexual sin, bitterness, gossip, anger, compromising integrity and truth, and the list goes on.

Addictions – There are too many to name, but they are a substitute for God’s love through the Holy Spirit.

Generational curses.

Witchcraft or the control of others.

Guilt and shame from your past – Jesus gives us a fresh start and wipes away our past.

I believe that one of the most widespread issues is rejection.

I believe that rejection is the root of hundreds of other problems. We need the unconditional acceptance from our parents when we are

young. Broken relationships with our fathers is a widespread cause of bondages to drugs and other addictions.

We need acceptance from our peers, our spouses, etc. In today’s society, broken people inflict damage on others through rejection and it spreads from generation to generation. We are not able to pass love on without having first received it.

1 John 4:19 (NIV) says,

19 “We love because he first loved us.”

God’s remedy for rejection is two-fold:

1) He took our rejection and bore it for us.

Isaiah 53:3 (NIV, 1984) says,

3 “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

2) He accepts us unconditionally with His great love!

Ephesians 1:6 (KJV) says,

6 “To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

Jesus is not condemning us for these areas. Jesus wants to set us free. This is His mission. But we need to be honest with ourselves, drop our pride, and be prepared to cooperate with the healing process of getting free.

Notice what was the bottom line and root cause of the bondage of the people of Israel.

Judges 6:10 says,

10 “Also I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; do not fear the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell.’ But you have not obeyed My voice (Word).”

Unforgiveness.

The other most common thing that will keep you in prison is unforgiveness. Most people do not really understand what forgiveness is. It is not excusing the act or sin, it is indeed recognizing it as a very bad thing that is not to be excused. To forgive means to cut away like a

surgeon cutting out a cancer. When you forgive you recognize that your sin and the sins of others have been cut away and have been put on Jesus.

You need to ask forgiveness for the things you have done against others and receive the forgiveness that Jesus has freely provided for you.

However, you need to recognize that those things done against you by others have put wounds on you, and until you forgive those people who have hurt you, you cannot be free. “How?” – you may ask.

Isaiah 53 says that Jesus bore our sins. Therefore when the person sinned against you, rejected you and/or hurt you, he/she did actually put it on Jesus because He bore it for you. Now it is your task to agree with that fact and see it on Jesus and not on you. When you know this truth, you will be free.

Isaiah 53:4-5, 10 says,

4 “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”

10 “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.”

John 8:32 says,

32 “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Hearing God’s Voice Gives You the Abundant Life.

What happens when you hear God’s voice?

- You will be changed into His likeness.
- A seed will be planted into your heart for fruit.
- You will have peace in the midst of storms.
- Your inner wounds will be healed.
- You will be in intimate contact with the Creator.

Isaiah chapter 55 (Amplified Bible) gives us a beautiful poetic picture of the benefits of hearing God speak. Of course, as we have

stated, obedience to God’s Word is always required of you as you hear Him speak.

Isaiah 55:1-2 (Amplified Bible) says,

1 “WAIT and listen, everyone who is thirsty! Come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Yes, come, buy [priceless, spiritual] wine and milk without money and without price [simply for the self-surrender that accepts the blessing].

2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your earnings for what does not satisfy? Harken diligently to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness [the profuseness of spiritual joy].”

In this Scripture the spiritual wine is joy, and the bread is our provision. That includes everything that we need. The word milk carries with it the meaning of abundant life. It means the finest of the land, and it infers moral purity. In John chapter 10 Jesus said that the thief comes to steal, kill and destroy, but that He came to give abundant life (John 10:10). The word *abundant* carries the deep meaning: *over and above; more than is necessary; more remarkable; more excellent; superior; extraordinary; surpassing; uncommon; superiority; exceeding abundantly above; exceeding some number or measure or rank or need; vehemently.*

Notice, the price we pay is self-surrender.

Next, God tells us what is the source of this wonderful provision, spiritual wine, and milk. It is hearing His Word.

Isaiah 55:3 (Amplified Bible) says,

3 “Incline your ear [submit and consent to the divine will] and come to Me; hear, and your soul will revive; and I will make an everlasting covenant or league with you, even the sure mercy (kindness, goodwill, and compassion) promised to David.”

Next, God shows us how His Word works, and why we can always depend on it.

Isaiah 55:8-11 (Amplified Bible) says,

8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

10 For as the rain and snow come down from the heavens, and return not there again, but water the earth and make it bring forth and sprout, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

11 So shall My word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return to Me void [without producing any effect, useless], but it shall accomplish that which I please and purpose, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”

When rain falls on my garden, I can go out the next day and the ground may be dry. It has evaporated and gone back to heaven. However, it accomplished its task of causing fruit to grow before it left to go back to heaven. In the same way, when we hear God speak, we are to speak His words back to Him in heaven, and then we can be assured that His fruit will prevail in our lives, provided, of course, that we keep out the satanic weeds.

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Chapter 5 How to Hear God's Voice.

How to hear God's voice is not an absolute formula, however, we can position ourselves to better hear Him on a regular basis and with increasing familiarity. This chapter is about intentionally putting yourself in the proper position to hear God. For instance, if you wish to catch a ride on a train, you will not wait at the bus station. God wants to meet you more than you want to meet Him, however, He needs for you to make yourself available to Him.

Abram heard God speak. He obeyed what he heard, and the result was that God "appeared to him."

Abram heard God's voice.

Genesis 12:1-6 says,

1 "Now the LORD had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.

2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

4 So Abram departed as the LORD has spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

5 Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan.

6 Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land."

God asked Abram to leave everything he trusted in. He made him a promise of becoming the father of a great nation. Nation, in this sense, I believe refers not only to a race of people, but also a land. God has not forsaken the promise of inheriting a great nation. The physical land of

Israel is still promised to Abraham’s natural seed (through Isaac and Jacob), and the spiritual promise land is promised to Abraham’s spiritual seed through Christ.

Abram obeyed the voice of God.

Notice, this was really an act of great faith. How did Abram know for sure that this was God’s voice?

Abram “saw” God.

Abram had experienced something even greater than having heard from God; he saw God. God appeared to him. Perhaps that was the result of obedience to the voice of God. John 14:21-23 contains the message that when we obey God that He makes Himself real to us.

Genesis 12:7 says,

7 “Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’ And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.”

The word ‘*appeared*’ is a very strong word. It infers seeing the real and true identity of a person or thing.

Come against fear.

Drawing Near to Darkness

TGIF – Today God Is First, Volume 1, by Os Hillman ⁶

Sunday, August 22, 2010

“The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was” (Exodus 20:21 NIV).

Like the nation of Israel, we are each called to the mountain of God, but few are willing to pass through the darkness to get there. God wanted to reveal His glory to the children of Israel, but they were afraid to enter into His presence. They only wanted to know about God, rather than know him personally like Moses did. This grieved the heart of God.

Why wouldn’t the people of Israel risk entering the darkness if it meant being in the presence of God? What did the people fear?

⁶ <http://www.crosswalk.com/devotionals/marketplace/>

Perhaps they had fears like each of us. The fear of the unknown. The fear of what might happen. The fear that God might not like what He sees. Or, perhaps even the greatest fear: the fear of darkness itself and what lies behind that darkness.

Many of us have been satisfied to hear about God from God’s messengers. But there is a greater calling for each of you - a calling to enter into His presence. Sometimes entering into His presence means we enter through an unexpected door - a door that appears to have nothing good behind it.

We do not need to fear entering the presence of God even if it means entering through a period of darkness. Above all else we must believe that God is a God of love. If He calls us into darkness in order to enter His presence, then that darkness will become an entry to new levels of relationship with a God who longs for fellowship with you and me.

Ways of positioning yourself to hear God speak.

In attempting to keep this booklet short and concise, I am not going to go into a lot of detail with many things. So many of these ideas are embedded in our book “Grow or Die” which is available on our website (see the first page of this booklet).

I believe that most people begin to hear God in a mixed sort of way. At first, it could be difficult to discern God’s voice from our own unregenerate mind and emotions.

Walking through the Tabernacle as in the Flowing River.⁷

I urge you to study chapter 2 of our “Grow or Die” book titled “The Flowing River.” This has really worked for me and for thousands of others around the world. I believe it is God’s model of walking through the Old Testament Tabernacle into the very Holy of Holies, which represents His presence. It involves confession of sin, repentance, thanksgiving, and offering to Him our wills, minds, and emotions. Then He pulls us into the Holy of Holies where He blesses us with His presence and His voice.

Journaling.

Journaling involves spending time with the Lord and writing down in a journal your gut-level honest feelings and thoughts, and confessing

⁷ Flowing River <http://isob-bible.org/component/content/article/73/380-grow-or-die-chapter-2>

your sins. Then you would spend time in His word and write down what you sense He is speaking to you. I did this when I was a new Christian and it was amazing how I learned through trial and error.

Speaking in tongues for long periods.

The Lord taught me this principle at an early time in my Christian walk. When we pray in the Spirit, or in tongues, it is God the Holy Spirit who is speaking. This sets your mind free of the challenges of worry, fear and other such issues. The speech center of the brain has dominion over the entire brain. Look at our book “Be Real With God” on ISOB website, and in it you will see how speaking in tongues relates to all of the positive benefits listed in Psalm 119.

Clean hands and pure heart.

God is holy and righteous and you can only have real intimacy with Him if you are holy and righteous. You might say, “Oh, I can never attain to that.” Yes, you can. Even the adulterer and murderer King David did.

Psalm 34:18 says,

*18 “The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart,
and saves such as have a contrite spirit.”*

If you feel that God cannot be intimate with you because of your dark sin, just tell God you don’t think He loves you enough to love your darkness. You will be surprised how He responds.

Isaiah 9:2 says,

*2 “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great
light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
upon them a light has shined.”*

Here is the secret.

God made you righteous when He saved you and gave you the new birth. You had little to do with it. He did not just clean you up, He replaced you with Himself, His own holiness and righteousness.

We need the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 3:11 says,

*11 “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but
He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I
am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy
Spirit and fire.”*

Ask God to baptize you in the Holy Spirit. Notice however, you can only receive the Holy Spirit when you are obedient to God.

John 14:15-18 says,

15 “If you love Me, keep My commandments.

16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—

17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”

Forgive.

Matthew 6:15 says,

15 “But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

This is a big one. The reason many people do not forgive is that they really do not understand it. To forgive is like a surgeon cutting out a cancer with his sharp instruments and removing it. God removes your sin by cutting it out of you and putting it on Himself. He bore your sin at the cross.

To forgive others is not to excuse them. Your feelings do not want to excuse someone who has done something bad to hurt you. You forgive them by seeing their sin that they perpetrated against you to go onto Jesus at the cross. Why? Because that is the truth. Jesus did take the sin of the one who hurt you. And, by you agreeing with that truth, you are set free. If you harbor hatred, you will reap the consequences of a murderer, because Jesus said that hatred is the same as murder. You will receive a spiritual death sentence.

Keeping a clean conscience.

Our spirits have three basic functions: intuition, communion, and conscience. We connect with God’s voice through our intuition (rather than our intellect), which causes intimate communion. However, all of that is blocked if we do not have a clean and clear conscience. The only way our conscience can be clean and pure is to allow the forgiveness from God for our sins and our sinful nature be operative.

If we compromise with a lie and/or a sin, attempting to bury or hide it as something that God will not care about, then with that we have put a

“layer” of numbness on our conscience. If you steal a few pennies because you are hungry and feel that God understands, with that mindset you have compromised your conscience. The compromise is not so much with your stealing, but with your feeling that you do not need to confess and repent.

I briefly mentioned this subject in chapter 3 of this booklet by referring to Matthew chapter 6. In that chapter Jesus is warning that trusting in any kind of an idol, especially money, will cause your “eye” or your conscience to be dimmed. When that happens, your ability to hear God will disappear. I know many Christians like this, and the tragedy is that they have compromised for so long that they actually believe the lie (2 Thessalonians 2:11).

Matthew 6:19-25 (Amplified Bible) says,

19 *“Do not gather and heap up and store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust and worm consume and destroy, and where thieves break through and steal.*

20 *But gather and heap up and store for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust nor worm consume and destroy, and where thieves do not break through and steal;*

21 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

22 *The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is sound, your entire body will be full of light.*

23 *But if your eye is unsound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the very light in you [your conscience] is darkened, how dense is that darkness!*

24 *No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will stand by and be devoted to the one and despise and be against the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (deceitful riches, money, possessions, or whatever is trusted in [idols]).*

25 *Therefore I tell you, stop being perpetually uneasy (anxious and worried) about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink; or about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life greater [in quality] than food, and the body [far above and more excellent] than clothing?”*

Avoiding strongholds is a major way of keeping your spirit open to hearing God speak.

There are many ways to describe a stronghold, and I do not intend to cover the subject exhaustively. However, here are some major keys that I have found and discovered as simple truth for your protection.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 says,

3 “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.

4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds,

5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

Notice that the object and goal of a stronghold is to cut off your “knowledge,” or intimacy with God. A stronghold works mainly on the mind. Briefly, a stronghold works like a magnet in your thinking process that attracts outside information to be processed through the stronghold rather than through your God-given mind and your spirit. The stronghold “catches” the information coming in to you and deflects it from going to your conscience, so that you react in an involuntary way to the information. Your reaction therefore is against God and godliness, and is often even accompanied by demonic influence.

Strongholds are formed by the process of our conscience becoming hardened or seared. As this slow process takes place, we don’t even realize that strongholds are replacing the function of our conscience.

Three areas.

I have found three major areas for protecting our conscience, and by that, staying in constant communication with the Lord. Each of these three areas can build a stronghold in your mind.

1. Truth.

2. Authority.

3. Flesh.

Truth. As we compromise truth in our lives, our conscience becomes hardened and ceases to function at a level at which God created it to function. For instance, we could begin to justify telling a “small” lie, or justify “small” stealing, or some other sin. As we justify those things, our conscience begins to harden and becomes less effective,

resulting in a decreased connection and communion with the Lord and the Holy Spirit within us.

Authority.

Romans 13:5 says,

5 *“Therefore you must be subject [to delegated authorities], not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake.”*

When we justify showing disrespect for our civil and spiritual leaders, as well as other authority figures like parents, pastors and employers, our conscience becomes seared. I have personally witnessed this in others and have been strongly trained by the Lord on this issue. We are blessed when we show respect, and we are cursed when we do not.

Flesh. When we justify acts from our flesh, like bitterness, anger, wrong reaction to irritations, instead of taking up our cross when these things occur, eventually our conscience will become seared. Instead, we should immediately recognize that our thoughts or actions are from our fallen nature, our flesh, and confess them as sin, and then “die” to our old nature so that the nature of Jesus in us may prevail. When we finally discover that all our passion and obedience to God is the only thing that fulfills us, then we will have an easier time making whatever petty sacrifices we make by forsaking our flesh nature.

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Chapter 6

The Word and the Blood Covenant

“AFTER THESE things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your Shield, your abundant compensation, and your reward shall be exceedingly great’” (Genesis 15:1, Amplified Bible).⁸

After what things?

Just before this took place, in Genesis chapter 14 Abram was confronted with two beings, most likely, at the same time. Melchizedek, which I submit was a manifestation of the pre-incarnate Jesus, and the King of Sodom. Just before this confrontation Abram defeated, in a war, the kings that attacked Sodom in an effort to save his nephew Lot and his family. Both beings showed up to give Abram a reward. Melchizedek offered Abram some bread and some wine. The King of Sodom offered him enough riches to last his lifetime. I submit that Abram saw the glory in the face of Melchizedek, and then recognized that he had been offered a blood covenant with deity. Abram chose the blood and denied the worldly riches.

One may wonder why God may have begun this conversation with the words, “Do not be afraid.” Abram had just refused a great material reward from the King of Sodom, and had just confirmed the blood covenant in a ceremony with Melchizedek. God says, “Fear not” many times in Scripture. He knows that we have these opportunities to doubt, and that doubt can bring fear. Abram refused the earthly king’s reward, but was promised a reward from the King of Kings.

This is a wonderful lesson about the character of God for our lives. When we forsake and cease to depend upon our worldly strengths (the strength of our flesh, our old unregenerated nature, our inherent dishonesty, human manipulation) and rely entirely on God, through His Word which represents the blood covenant, then God says to us like He said the Abram, “Fear not, I am your Shield, your abundant compensation, and your reward shall be exceedingly great.” In other words, “You have depended upon the exchange in the blood and not on the King of Sodom, therefore, I am free to really bless you. I AM your King!”

⁸ The reference in this Scriptures is to the Lord as Abram’s King.

Do you want to be free from fear, from hopelessness, from depression, from guilt and shame?

Then make the same choice as Abram made that day as recoded in Genesis chapter 14. Choose to give the blood covenant first place in your life, and say ‘no’ to the things of this world, the King of Sodom.

How can you make the same choice as Abram made?

I am glad you asked. Look with me at a conversation Jesus had with His disciples in John chapter 6.

John 6:53-55, 60-63 says,

53 *“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.*

54 *Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*

55 *For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.’”*

60 *“Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is a hard saying; who can understand it?’*

61 *When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, ‘Does this offend you?*

62 *What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?*

63 *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.’”*

This conversation took place the day after Jesus fed the multitude by a miracle. Then, the next day they asked to be fed again, but Jesus denied them. He then went on to tell them a better way to be blessed, the provision of a blood covenant with God. He told them that they should eat His flesh and drink His blood, and many of His disciples were offended and left, maybe for good. Then He told those who remained that His blood covenant was to be obtained in His Words, His voice, not in his physical flesh and blood.

The Word of God transfers the blood covenant to you, not only when you were first saved, but also every time God speaks His voice, His Word to you. You receive more of Him through the blood covenant.

More of His character, more of His blessings, and more of your death to your old nature.

Live in the Word, God's voice, marinate in His Word, obey His Word, spend enormous amounts of time in His Word, waiting for His voice to inject the very life of the Creator into your soul.

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