

The Voice of Jesus

Introduction

Every Christian should be able to answer two questions:

- 1) What do you think Jesus is saying to you at this point in your life?
- 2) What indicators give you some measure of confidence that it is indeed Jesus speaking to you rather than someone or something else?

Where are you at right now in your spiritual experience in being able to answer these two questions?

If the goal of the Christian spiritual journey is being like Jesus, then how will this happen in our lives?

The subtitle to the *Voice of Jesus* is “Discernment, Prayer, and the Witness of the Spirit.” Define each of these, and how do they interrelate to each other?

Why must we also learn to do these things in community?

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Chapter 1 – Jesus and the Spirit

*“The life of God is found in knowing the voice of the Son – the voice of Jesus.
God has spoken to us through Jesus.”*

What were some of your impressions and thoughts about this chapter? Was anything specifically stirred in your heart by what you read?

Who is Jesus (Read John 10)? What “role” does He play in the Trinity? What role does He play in our spiritual journey?

What does it mean to “know the voice of Jesus”? How do we hear and know His voice? How are you doing in your ability to hear and know the voice of Jesus in your own spiritual life?

Who is the Holy Spirit (Read John 16:5-15)? What “role” does He play in the Trinity? What role does He play in our spiritual journey? How do Jesus and the Holy Spirit interact within your spiritual life (read 1 John 3:24)?

What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures (see also pp. 30-32)? What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the community of Christ?

Explain some of the “Dynamic Tensions in Christian Discernment” (pp. 18ff).

- Divine Initiative and human response
- The context of our lives and the particularity of the voice of Jesus
- The voice of Jesus in prayer and in the world
- The individual and the community

Once again, two key questions we need to be able to ask each other are:

(1) What do you think Jesus is saying to you at this point in your life and in the midst of this set of circumstances?

(2) What indicators give you some measure of confidence that it is indeed Jesus speaking to you rather than someone or something else? How do you know this is the voice of Jesus?

Think of this season of life that you are in right now, perhaps facing a critical situation in life. How would you answer these two questions?

- Season of Life or Specific Circumstance
- (1)
- (2)

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Chapter 2 – Three Voices, One Tradition

Why is it important that we “consult” and learn from others in Christian history that have pursued Christ? What are some key sources of Christian tradition (who has influenced you in your faith and in your spirituality)?

Ignatius Loyola

What is the “vision of finding God in all things” (p. 38)?

What is so important about learning to “discern our feelings” (p. 39)?

Describe the principle of “holy indifference” (p. 41). How are you living in accordance with this life principle?

John Wesley

Why is it so important to Wesley that we understand “this affective awareness of our spiritual adoption and the inner confidence that we are loved by God” (pp. 43-44)?

Comment on these three thoughts:

- The inner witness if the affections
- The inner witness of the Spirit will never contradict the Scriptures
- The inner witness of the Spirit will not contradict the living community of believers

Jonathan Edwards

Do you agree that the real test of the validity of spiritual experience is the outcome—the fruit of the experience (p. 48)?

Comment on Edward's critical indicators of authentic spiritual experience (pp. 51-52):

- Authentic spiritual influence arises from that which is spiritual

- Authentic religious affections arise from an “enlightened” mind

- Humility is central in Christian experience

- True religious affections lead to the transformation of character

Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

“We do not know ourselves, much less God and the presence of God in our lives, unless we are able to make some sense of what is happening to us emotionally” (p. 53).

How are you doing in your ability to “discern” your heart and your mind?

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Chapter 3 – With Heart and Mind

Do you take your emotions seriously enough? How has the evangelical world responded to “heart” and “mind”?

Taking Emotion Seriously

Can we truly learn faith (and even Christian faith, doctrine, and theology) without a “definite emotional content to this faith” (p. 57)?

What is the heart? Why does it need to be central in all we do in our faith and in our lives?

What are some of the emotions that we will experience when we are filled with the Spirit of the Risen Christ? Give some actual examples in your own life.

Thinking Critically

How do we perceive and discern what we are *feeling* emotionally (p. 62)?

Explain the classic spiritual exercise of the *examination of conscience*.

Spiritual Maturity and Emotional Maturity

Do you agree “we do not mature in our Christian experience unless we mature emotionally” (p. 65ff)?

How present are joy and peace in your Christian experience and your own life right now? If they are present, describe your “current spiritual state” and perhaps some of the factors that are allowing you to experience joy and peace. If they are not present, what might be holding you back from experiencing joy and peace?

How can you incorporate this into your life: “The essence of faith is found in the deliberate decision to rejoice even when these external sources of joy are not present”?

Pray today and this week that Christ would give you joy and peace in whatever circumstances you find yourself in.

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Chapter 4 – The Assurance of God’s Love

For the next four chapters, we will be reading and discussing how we experience and hear the Voice of Jesus through the role of the Holy Spirit. And in the process, we will discover what our role is in this experience.

Read Ephesians 3:14-20. What does it mean that we have “Christ within us, dwelling in our hearts”? Why is this such an important part of our Christian faith and experience? What does this look like in your own life?

Read Romans 5:3-8. Why is it so vital in our lives and Christian experience to know that we are loved by the Father? What difference does this make in your own life, especially in the context of pain, hurts, and disappointments?

What do you think about this statement: “If we do not learn to live in the love of God, we will always be vulnerable to the opinions of others” (p. 79).

Why must we feel the love of God experientially? What is the Holy Spirit’s role in assuring us of the Father’s love?

What is our role in experiencing the Father’s love (p. 85)?

If the two critical signs of our experience of the Father’s love are **humility** and **a love for others**, how are you doing?

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Chapter 5 – The Spirit Convicts Us of Sin

Read John 16:12-15. What is the role of the Spirit in this passage? Why is it so important that the Spirit's conviction of sin is in the context of God's love for us?

Why is temptation, or the inclination to sin, really “doubt about the goodness and love of God” (p. 90)? Read Genesis 3:1-7. How do Eve (and Adam) doubt the goodness and love of God in their actions in the garden?

How does sin “undercut our capacity to hear the voice of Jesus”?

What is the role of guilt in sin and confession (pp. 93-97)? When is guilt healthy? When is guilt unhealthy (false guilt)?

Explain the three guiding principles of the Spirit's conviction of sin:

- Avoid the temptation to look at others rather than yourself
- Respond in one area of your life at a time
- Take into account the full range of human sinfulness

What is confession and what should be the “content” of our confession? Why is it important to confess our sins to one another?

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Chapter 6 – The Spirit Illumines our Minds

“Central to the Spirit’s ministry is the reality that the Spirit transforms us into the image of Christ, specifically through the truth.” Explain this statement in your own words. What are some Scripture passages that you would use to support this statement?

What is meditation? What are some of the critical components that the author mentions in this chapter? How is meditation the “antidote” to our hectic lives?

Lectio Divina

Explain the four features of *lectio divina*.

- It honors the historical and human character of the Bible
- It disciplines us to read slowly
- It requires that we read with heart and mind, we always read with attention to what is happening to us emotionally
- The outcome of *lectio divina* is the encounter with Christ Jesus himself.

How are you doing in your meditation upon God’s Word? Do you experience Christ when you read the Word or is your experience typically bland and dry (be honest)? How can the things learned in this chapter impact how you read and meditate upon God’s Word? What are some specific things you can (and will) incorporate into your time with the Lord in the Word?

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Chapter 7 – The Spirit Guides Us in Times of Choice

Think of a major decision in your life in the past 2 years. What was the decision? What was at stake? How did you make your decision? Ultimately, how well did you choose?

What does it mean for us to “choose well”? How do we learn to choose well? Why is it so important for us to choose well?

How can “the good often be the enemy of the best” (p. 130)?

Explain Smith’s matrix of intentional decision-making:

- *Understanding the issues and the decisions to be made*
 - What does it mean to “frame” our decisions?

- *Attentive to the presence of desolation*
 - What are the emotions of desolation and consolation?

How do we test and discern the emotions of consolation? How can we discern and test our motives?

When is it okay (and even best) to not decide or choose?

How can you apply this to a decision you are facing right now?

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Chapter 8 – The Character of our Prayers

Comment upon the four dimensions of the Spirit's inner witness in your own spiritual journey. How have each of these impacted you and even possibly changed our relationship with Christ?

- The assurance that we are loved

- Convicting ministry regarding sin

- The illumination of our minds with truth

- Guidance in times of choice

What is prayer? What are different aspects of prayer? What is the primary "character" of your prayer (asking, listening, praising, etc.)?

How does prayer "form" us? How do we more deeply encounter Christ in and through our prayers?

Read 1 Kings 19. What is the "context" of Elijah's prayer experience (what is going on in his life and what does he do to hear God's voice)?

How well do you do "silence"? What is the noise in your life and how can it be removed so that you can experience times of silence?

Explain how the order of our prayer should correspond with the four dimensions of the inner witness of the Spirit (see pp. 167-169).

Have you ever experienced an “arid” season in your spiritual life (perhaps you are in one right now)? How did (or does) it make you feel? How did you respond (or how are you responding right now)?

What does St. John of the Cross have to teach us about the “dark night of the soul”? What does this mean in your own spiritual journey?

How do we need to distinguish between the Giver and the gifts? Be honest... which one do you long for more? Which one moves you towards obedience?

What was the most meaningful thing in this chapter to you? Why? How can this impact your spiritual journey in learning to listen to the voice of Jesus?

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Chapter 9 – The Call of God: Vocational and Moral Discernment

Part 1 – Discerning Vocation

Discerning Vocation

When you “chose” your current job/vocation, how much did you seek to hear from God while making the decision? If you sought after God, what was the “process”? If you did not seek Him, what have you learned?

How well does your current vocation suit your SHAPE (spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, experiences)? Be specific.

In your current vocation, have you “settled” and perhaps not taken enough risk (perhaps because of fear; see pp. 194-199)? Have you taken too much risk and not been realistic about yourself and/or the circumstances around you?

In your own spiritual life, do you tend to seek the counsel of others (community) or silence and solitude with God more? Is there a balance in “the voices”?

How can we develop a “non-mechanical” process of developing vocational discernment? What are the factors we should consider and give priority to when considering our vocation?

Take the “Fear and Fundamental Convictions” audit on p. 197. Answer those questions:

- What do you tend to complain about?
- What fundamental conviction lies behind the point of frustration?
- Is there anything that you are doing or not doing that undermines your capacity to fulfill this fundamental commitment?
- What lies behind this pattern of behavior?

How does all of this relate to your own life right now?

How can we pray for you in the process of developing vocational discernment? Do you need wisdom and courage about a prospective job? Do you need patience and perseverance to stay committed in the job you currently have?

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Chapter 9 – The Call of God: Vocational and Moral Discernment

Part 2 – The Need for Moral Discernment

The Need for Moral Discernment

What is moral discernment? Why is it so necessary to develop moral discernment in our world?

What are some “parameters” in not only developing moral discernment but in developing response to the evil and injustice we see around us? What responsive actions consistent and inconsistent with the reign of Christ? Here are some example questions to help “prime the pump:”

- Is it ever okay to disobey the law? When and why?
- How involved in the political process should we be?
- Should we be involved with “financial embargos” (i.e., respond to a moral issue with our wallets)?

What are some evils in our world (across the street and across the globe) that demand a response from followers of Christ? How are you personally responding to them?

Pick one “evil” from your list above and use it to apply to the following questions:

- How much is your conscience as it relates to this issue informed by a biblical theology of love and justice? In regard to this issue, do you love truth more than people (or vice versa)?
- Do you see the factors involved in this issue truthfully? Do you understand the extent of the evil? Is there any overstatement?
- What response are you called to enact in your own life? ***How will you respond?***

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Chapter 10 – Spiritual Direction, Pastoral Care, and Friendship

Friendship

How do you define a friend in the context of discernment?

Individualism vs. Collectivism

How do you define a community and its role in discernment?

How do we balance interplay between us as an individual and our role in a community?

Spiritual Direction

What is the focus of spiritual direction and how is it different from counseling or mentoring?

Describe some noteworthy themes from St. John of the Cross on spiritual direction.

The Ministry of Co-discernment

What are some of the “roles” of spiritual directors in helping people to discern the voice of Jesus?

Being Present To One Another

How can we be more present to one another in this process of communal discernment?
Describe a specific example in your life right now?

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Chapter 11 – Making Decisions Together: The Challenge of Communal Discernment

What are some of the decisions that you make with other people? What is the “process” that you use to determine the choices and the decisions? Why and how might this chapter be applicable to you in your life and in your workplace?

Read Acts 15:1-29. How did the leaders in the early church make a major decision (note especially vv. 25 & 28)?

What are the three types of decision-making models listed and explained on pp. 225-229? Do you tend to prefer one of these models? If so, why? What are some of the limitations of your preferred model?

How does “communal discernment” differ from the models above? What is the role of leadership and the community (especially those with the gift of discernment) in the communal discernment model? Where do you fit in with the model (leader, member of community, member with gift of discernment)?

In the section “The Conditions for Communal Discernment,” how well do you do at each of the following sub-sections (i.e., which of these are a challenge for you):

- A common purpose
- A resolve to decide together
- Mutual regard and acceptance
- A clearly framed matter for discernment
- Good information and research

Where are you on the “conflict meter” (1 = avoid conflict at ALL costs; 10 = seek conflict ALL the time)? How does your view of conflict help and/or hinder the communal discernment decision-making process?

How can you apply this chapter to your life (personal relationships, church relationships, and professional work relationships)?

What is one thing from this chapter that you want to work on? How can we pray for you?

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Chapter 12 – Making Decisions Together: the Process of Communal Discernment

Why is it so important to make decisions in community with others? Think through the whole range of “community” (relationships, marriage, work, church, etc.).

How does “appreciative inquiry” differ from our traditional analysis? Why should we engage in appreciative inquiry? How can we ensure that we still stay open to new and innovative (i.e., untested) ideas?

Comment upon any part of the communal discernment process that sparked interest in you:

- Strategic planning & appreciative inquiry
- Leading a small group towards decisions
- The role of the moderator
- Open discussion
- Prayer and silent reflection
- Discussion towards resolution
 - Questions of consequence
 - Questions of continuity
 - Questions of community
- The minority voice
- External confirmation

What would this process look like in your world?

What was the most meaningful part of the Voice of Jesus? How will you incorporate this into your life (action & accountability)?