

Should we listen for a small still voice?

by Denver Cheddie

Many experts on prayer advise us that when we pray, we should enter into a time of quiet meditation where we do nothing but listen for the “small still voice” of God speaking to us. The problem that often ensues is that during those moments of silence, how are you so sure that any silent voice you hear is God? How do you know it is not your own mind playing tricks on you? How do you know it is not your own mind retrieving some piece of information that you read somewhere or heard sometime? One person I know thinks that what he hears is from God because he hears it during his prayer time - he was praying when he heard it, so it has to be God. Suffice it to say that Jesus while He was fasting for 40 days when the devil came to him.

There is one scripture in the Bible that mentions this “small still voice”. It is 1 Kings 19:12.

And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind and earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

Admittedly, it is a difficult passage to really understand. Elijah had just won a tremendous victory over the prophets of Baal, but was now wallowing in self pity in a cave. And God spoke to him. The passage states that there was a wind, an earthquake and a fire, but the Lord was in neither of them. Finally there was a still small voice, and the implication is that God was “in it”, because the passage didn’t say He wasn’t.

But the thing is that God had already been speaking to Elijah (1 Kings 19:9). So obviously the still small voice was not an indication of how God speaks to us. God certainly was not trying to tell Elijah that He speaks in a still small voice. Elijah already knew the voice of God. There had to be some other message in there for Elijah.

As mentioned earlier, Elijah had just won a magnanimous victory over the prophets of Baal. Now threatened by Jezebel, he fled for his life and was depressed because all of the other prophets were being killed, and presumably because he thought he was next.

This is my interpretation of the passage. God showed Elijah three spectacular demonstrations of power: a wind, an earthquake, and a fire. But God was not in either of them. Then he showed him a simple seemingly feeble one: a still small voice. Afterward, God told Elijah that there were still 7000 people in Israel whom God had reserved and who had not worshiped Baal (1 Kings 19:18) – contrary to what Elijah had previously believed.

Maybe God was trying to show Elijah, that as great as his victory of Mount Carmel was, the greater victory was that in the midst of all opposition, there was still a remnant who did not succumb to the prevailing spirit of the world. Maybe the still small voice simply demonstrated the fact that God does not always work through spectacular means, but sometimes His ways are simple and behind the scenes. There is no indication that the still small voice is how God speaks to us. Surely that was not the message God was trying to get across to Elijah. Elijah already knew the voice of God.

I believe that God's voice is the written word. As we study and meditate on that word, it becomes more and more in us and part of us. I believe

that God thinks to us more than he speaks to us. Often the Holy Spirit would just bring a scripture or something in the Bible to you, and that is a sure indication that God is leading you in a certain direction. You may call that a small still voice if you like. But I would be careful about telling people to listen for small still voices. God does not want us to be lead by voices. His word is a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our pathway (Psalm 119:105). God wants us to listen to His voice through His word. See my articles on the Voice of God and How to Interpret the Bible for more.

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