

Contents

Very Special Thanks	9
Foreword	11
Positioning Ourselves to Hear from God	13

PART 1

A SIMPLE RELATIONSHIP

Chapter 1	A Childlike Simplicity	21
Chapter 2	A Humble Approach	29
Chapter 3	A Simple Trust	39

PART 2

A SINGLE-MINDED WORSHIP

Chapter 4	Glory to God	51
Chapter 5	The Real Deal	59
Chapter 6	The Heart of the Matter	69

PART 3
A SET-APART HOLINESS

Chapter 7	When God Is Silent	81
Chapter 8	Perfecting Holiness	91
Chapter 9	Running to Win	99

PART 4
A STILL ATTENTIVENESS

Chapter 10	Be Still	111
Chapter 11	Strength in Surrender	119
Chapter 12	A Mature Peace	129

PART 5
A SOLD-OUT HUNGER

Chapter 13	Within Reach	143
Chapter 14	Hungry for His Presence	153
Chapter 15	The Voice Behind You	161

PART 6
A SERVANT SPIRIT

Chapter 16	Gifted to Serve	173
Chapter 17	Sacrificial Offerings	183
Chapter 18	Modeled Servanthood	191
	What's Your Position?	199
	About the Author	203

A Childlike Simplicity



I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

—Matthew 11:25



*N*ot long ago I spoke at a women's conference in Maryland. There was a time of praise and worship before I got up to speak, and as soon as the music began, I noticed a young lady out of the corner of my eye.

It was hard not to notice Ryan.

At the sound of the first notes, she threw her hands straight up in the air over her head and began to clap wildly. She sang loudly—

so loudly that at one point I could actually hear her voice over the praise and worship team. And they were using mics! That teenage girl was serious about praise and worship. I mean, she was *passionate*. At one point, she even danced right out of her seat, down the aisle, and up to the front of the room.

Of course, we more mature, sedate believers were worshipping God as well—in a refined, upscale kind of way—and pretending not to notice Ryan’s enthusiasm. In my peripheral vision I saw her mom reach out and grab Ryan’s shirt to pull her back to her seat, but Ryan didn’t care. She wanted to praise God. So her hands stayed in the air and she clapped and sang loudly as she worshiped Him with abandon.

By then I was no longer watching Ryan out of the corner of my eye. She had captured my full attention. There was just something about her that attracted me.

After the event was over, I asked about her. I learned that she is a two-year-old trapped in the body of a seventeen-year-old. You see, Ryan is autistic. She hasn’t learned that her style of worship should please and impress people. Her worship hasn’t been tainted with religious pomp and circumstance. She doesn’t pay attention to the people around her or worry about what they might think of her. Out of her childlike relationship with her Savior, Ryan just gives Him everything she has.

We need to ask ourselves if we have a childlike relationship with the Lord. Have we become too grown-up to receive what Jesus Christ has for us? Too dignified to respond as spontaneously and wholeheartedly to Him as a child would? If so, that could be one reason we don’t hear His voice more clearly.

A NOVICE WILLING TO LEARN

At first, I missed the detail that Samuel was a boy when God spoke to him. In fact, I had almost finished my study before it occurred to me that “the boy Samuel” might be the three most important words in the chapter.

The nation was full of grown-ups God could have spoken to, and the most likely one to hear from Him was right in the next room. With Eli's title and status, you'd think God would have spoken to him. He was the high priest, for heaven's sake! But God bypassed all the adults in Israel to speak to a boy. What was it about Samuel that made God choose him? First Samuel 3:7 seems to indicate that it was Samuel's childlike simplicity.

*“Fearing God” means reverencing
God’s majesty and respecting His power.*

The first part of this verse tells us that Samuel “did not yet know the LORD.” At the time God spoke to him, he was not yet wise or learned. He had knowledge about God but not the wisdom that comes from knowing Him experientially. Did you know there's a difference between knowledge and wisdom? Although we often use these words interchangeably, knowledge is a natural thing, while wisdom is a spiritual thing. Someone once said that knowledge comes from looking around, while wisdom comes from looking up.

As they grow, children add to their knowledge as a matter of course. Depending on IQ and inclination, some accumulate more than others. But wisdom doesn't come naturally to us. No one becomes wise without applying spiritual insights that come only from God, and God reveals them to people who fear Him.

I know that when I speak of fearing God, I run the risk of being misunderstood. Many women who have suffered abuse tend to equate fearing God with the fear they feel in the presence of the evil, unpredictable people who have harmed them. Please remember that God is anything but unpredictable.

God is love . . . all the time.

God is good . . . all the time.

Fearing God doesn't mean that we should feel the way an abused child does in the presence of a raging parent. In the Bible, “fearing

God” means reverencing God’s majesty and respecting His power.

“The fear of the Lord” is essential to hearing from God because it prepares us for what God has to say and enables us to apply what He tells us to our lives. It is so important that Solomon repeats the phrase eleven times in Proverbs.

Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” The word “knowledge” here actually means *spiritual understanding*, and the word “beginning” means *prerequisite*, so the sentence can read like this: “Reverence for the LORD is the prerequisite for spiritual understanding.” And Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of *wisdom*.”

Notice the progression: Proverbs 1:7 promises that respecting God will lead to spiritual understanding, while Proverbs 9:10 promises that it will also lead to wisdom. Fearing God not only opens the door to spiritual insights, it also goes a step further and allows us to skillfully apply those insights so that they can transform our lives in practical ways.

I don’t know about you, but *proven skill* matters much more to me than knowledge. What good is knowledge if we don’t know how to apply it wisely? If I were going to parachute out of an airplane, I’d much rather go skydiving with someone who had jumped and landed successfully dozens of times rather than with someone who had just read dozens of books on the subject.

Intellectual knowledge can help us know about God, but only a personal relationship with Him will lead us to saving knowledge, because that’s what leads us to respect God. In fact, Isaiah 33:6 says that the fear of the Lord is the key to the rich store not only of salvation but also of wisdom and knowledge. We cannot expect to hear God’s voice if we begin at the wrong place. Reverencing God opens our spiritual ears to hear clearly from Him.

Although Samuel “did not yet know the LORD,” he had begun at the right place. He had positioned himself to acquire knowledge and wisdom, and his spiritual ears were open to hear God’s voice. Because he revered God, he was also prepared to obey God’s word when it came.

A CHILD WILLING TO OBEY

When Samuel first heard God's voice, he thought Eli was calling him, and he responded immediately. The boy's obedience flowed out of his relationship with his mentor. Because he respected him, he obeyed him.

To hear God's voice, we also must be willing to respond appropriately to Him. Ecclesiastes 12:12 says, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body." Though we sometimes think we can please God by plowing through a stack of books on theology, we can get so wrapped up in accumulating knowledge about religion that we forget the simple truth tucked away in the next verse: "The last and final word is this: Fear God. Do what he tells you" (THE MESSAGE).

I was a rebellious teenager. I hate to admit it, but it is true. Whenever my parents told me I couldn't do something, I immediately found a way to do it. The "no dating rule" translated to "go out with the group, but just couple off once you get there." The "no talking to boys on the phone rule" translated to "wait until everyone goes to sleep for the night, and then call them." When I wasn't allowed to wear makeup, I would just put it on after I got to school. More often than not, I would get caught.

I clearly remember my parents saying, "You don't respect us, because if you did you would obey us. If you would obey us, we would have a better relationship." At the time I didn't see any correlation between respect, obedience, and relationship, but time has proved that, once again, my parents knew what they were talking about. (Don't you hate it when your parents are right?) When you and I respect someone, our actions automatically reflect it.

Our ability to hear God's voice begins when we reverence Him through simple obedience. That is the basis of the childlike relationship He desires with you and me. Knowing God is not enough; we must fear and obey Him.

AN AMATEUR RECEPTIVE TO REVELATION

After telling us that Samuel “did not yet know the LORD,” 1 Samuel 3:7 goes on to say that “the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed” to him. The boy did not regularly receive direct revelations from God. He wasn’t a pro at this. In fact, he was an amateur. He had no experience at all in hearing directly from God. That’s why at first he didn’t know what was going on. But that didn’t stop God from speaking to him, and it didn’t keep Samuel from listening.

Be encouraged if the idea of hearing God’s voice is new for you. It was new for Samuel too. Remember that God had to call Samuel three times. If you don’t get it the first time, God will call again.

As near as we can tell, Samuel was around twelve when God spoke to him. Eli had been his mentor for nine years by then, so the boy probably knew that God usually spoke through prophets. However, Samuel was open to the unusual way in which God chose to speak to him. Young people are teachable because they are still receptive to new experiences.

Samuel was willing to accept what God had to say and how He chose to say it.

I wonder how many of us would have accepted God’s unconventional method. When God wants to do something out of the ordinary, can He look to you or me? Or will He have to bypass us because we’ve become too set in our ways? Does He just know we’d say, “But we never did it that way before”? Sometimes we try to put God in our little denominational, traditional, or comfortable boxes and assume He operates only within those boundaries. So when He wants to do something outside those boundaries, He can’t do it with us.

Samuel didn’t spend a lot of time second-guessing God’s message. He didn’t pick it apart, challenge it, or criticize it. He just listened to it and accepted it. Sometimes it’s just better not to know so

much. Did you know that, aerodynamically speaking, it's impossible for bumblebees to fly? Science books say that the body of a bumblebee is too heavy for the weight of its wings. But because bumblebees don't know any better, they just fly.

God chose to break years of silence in an unconventional way, and Samuel was willing to accept what God had to say and how He chose to say it. People who have a childlike relationship with God listen to Him and accept His revelation however it comes.

When I met Ryan at that conference in Maryland, I wondered if I might be missing out on what she was experiencing because she just didn't know any better. In the midst of a throng of presumably more mature, educated, experienced believers, this one girl was expressing her childlike relationship with the Lord with passion and enthusiasm because that was all she knew. *Who is really better off?* I asked myself.

Do you want to hear God's voice? Then you must become like a child, for when the Lord said that "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14), He was talking about people like Samuel and Ryan—people who have a simple, childlike relationship with Him.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

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TAKE TIME FOR A GPS READING:

- The last time I heard from God through Scripture, what was my reaction?
- How do I expect God to speak to me?
- What evidence do I have that the knowledge I've attained in life has made me more like Christ?
- How would I react if someone like Ryan were to sit next to me in church?



Father, I thank You for the great privilege of being Your child. I reverence Your majesty and power. Lord, as I think about what it means to have a simple relationship with You, remind me of the childlike characteristics You want to see in me. Help me put aside my traditions and religious prejudices so that I will be completely willing to receive both Your message and the way You want to give it to me. Then help me respond to You like a child—obediently, spontaneously, and wholeheartedly.

