

HABITS (2)

Hearing God's Voice

A. Introduction

1. Two things we are called to do as followers of Jesus are to keep going and to keep growing.

To keep going means that we keep trusting in Jesus and don't give up.

To keep growing means that we become more and more like the Lord Jesus.

The way we keep going is as we keep growing.

"Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen." (2 Peter 3:17-18)

2. How do we keep going and growing?

Ultimately it is God who keeps His people going and growing.

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

However, there are paths through which God works so that we survive, grow, and flourish and we are to walk these paths to keep going and growing.

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Philippians 2:12-13)

These paths are known as 'spiritual disciplines' or 'means of grace' or 'habits'.

"A means of grace is a tool or instrument that God uses to strengthen and nurture us so that we grow in conformity to Christ." (RC Sproul)

3. What are these habits that help us to keep going and keep growing?

"Whilst there's no final and complete list of such practices, the long tally of helpful habits can be clustered underneath three main principles: hearing God's voice, having his ear, and belonging to his body. Or simply: word, prayer, and fellowship." (David Mathis)

"The 'means of grace' are such as Bible reading, private prayer, and regularly worshipping God in Church, wherein one hears the Word taught and participates in the Lord's Supper. I lay it down as a simple matter of fact that no one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification. I can find no record of an eminent saint who ever neglected them." (JC Ryle)

4. Hearing God's Voice helps us to keep going and keep growing.

"Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"" (Matthew 4:4)

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:7-8)

No wonder the early church devoted themselves to *"the apostles' teaching"*.

B. How do we hear God's voice?

1. By listening to God's Word.

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17)

The easiest way to hear God's voice is by listening to God's Word being read and preached.

For most of church history, this would have been the way that Christians heard God's voice.

"Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching." (1 Timothy 4:13)

Practical Suggestions:

- i) Attend a Bible believing church where God's Word is faithfully preached.
- ii) Listen an Audio Bible – The Bible Experience; The Complete NIV Audio Bible.
- iii) Listen to sermons online.

2. By reading God's Word.

"Haven't you read...?" (Matthew 19:4)

One of the most important things we can do is regularly read the Bible for ourselves.

Choose a time. Choose a place. Choose a plan. Block out distractions. Read.

Practical Suggestions:

- i) The Big Read – join the rest of the church in reading one book of the Bible each month.
- ii) Use Bible Reading Notes.
- iii) Follow a Bible Reading Plan (e.g. M'Cheyne Bible Reading Plan).
- iv) Watch or listen to Reading Between the Lines a vodcast/podcast from Glen Scrivener.
- v) Knowable Word by Peter Krol (Bible Reading Method: Observation – Interpretation – Application).

3. By studying God's Word.

"For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel." (Ezra 7:10)

"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." (Acts 17:11)

"When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments." (2 Timothy 4:13)

The focus here is depth.

It is seeking to understand what God is saying in individual passages or books of the Bible, or what God says on a certain subject.

Practical Suggestions:

- i) Sunday evenings at Banstead Community Church.
- ii) Read the Bible with a Commentary.

- iii) Listen to a series of lectures given at a Theological College.
- iv) Meet with another Christian(s) to study the Bible or a Theological Book.
- v) Read a couple of blog posts or articles each day online.

4. By meditating on God's Word.

"But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." (Psalm 1:2)

"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it." (Joshua 1:8)

God has made us to pause and ponder.

That's what we do when we meditate.

In meditation we pause and ponder what we have heard, read or studied in God's Word.

"The reason we come away so cold from reading the word is, because we do not warm ourselves at the fire of meditation." (Thomas Watson)

Practical Suggestions:

- i) Pray the Bible (3 questions to help you: What can I rejoice in? What can I repent of? What can I request for?).
- ii) A Thought to Make Your Heart Sing.

5. By memorising God's Word.

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11)

Memorisation is not primarily for the future, but for today.

Memorising Scripture is a means through which God transforms us now.

Practical Suggestions:

- i) *"Dr Mitchell, how do you approach Scripture memory?" "I just read it and read it; after a time it becomes familiar."* (Ron Frost, Discover the Power of the Bible)
- ii) Some suggestions from David Mathis to start with: 10 Gospel Verses to Keep Warm¹; 12 Gospel Passages to Soak In².
- iii) An Extended Approach to Scripture Memorization by Andrew Davis.

6. By applying God's Word.

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22)

"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4)

"These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come." (1 Corinthians 10:11)

¹ 10 Gospel Verses to Keep Warm (Mark 10:45; Romans 5:8; Romans 6:23; Romans 8:1; Romans 8:32; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 2 Corinthians 8:9; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 4:10; Revelation 5:9)

² 12 Gospel Passages to Soak In (Isaiah 53:4-6; Romans 3:23-24; Romans 4:4-5; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Galatians 3:13-14; Ephesians 2:4-5; Philippians 2:6-8; Colossians 1:19-20; Colossians 2:13-14; Titus 3:4-7; Hebrews 2:14-17; 1 Peter 2:22-25)

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:2)

99% of the decisions we make each day we do without any immediate reflection.

We just act.

How then do we apply God's Word?

"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ." (Philippians 1:9-10)

"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God." (Colossians 1:9-10)

We need God to change us so that we intuitively act in way that pleases God.

Practical Suggestions:

i) Pray – *"Speak, O Lord, as we come to You to receive the food of Your Holy Word. Take Your truth, plant it deep in us; Shape and fashion us in Your likeness."*

ii) Application Questions – Is there a sin to avoid, forsake or confess? Is there a promise to be believe or a condition to meet in order to partake of the promise? Is there an attitude to change or guard against or an action I need to take? Is there a command to keep? Is there an example to follow? Is there a prayer to pray? Is there a priority to change? Is there an error to mark? Is there a truth to memorise and meditate upon? Is there something to thank or praise God for?

C. How does hearing God's voice help us to keep going and keep growing?

1. Hearing God's voice is how we behold Christ.

God reveals Himself to us by speaking to us about His Son.

"He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:25-27)

As we behold Christ, we become like Christ, as the Spirit makes us like the One we are beholding.

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

But hearing God's voice doesn't guarantee that we behold Christ.

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:39-40)

Unless we hear God's voice to see Jesus, this habit will not help us keep going and keep growing.

2. Hearing God's voice is how we be like Christ.

"The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back." (Isaiah 50:4-5)

Hear God's voice.

Hear God's voice often.

Hear all of God's voice.

"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity." (Hebrews 5:12-6:1)

Ask the Spirit to show us Christ and make us like Christ as we do.

"We would like to see Jesus." (John 12:21)