

LESSON 1: HEARING GOD'S VOICE

Objective: This lesson is designed to help church members be more attuned to God's voice and walk in close communion with him on a daily basis. It is our hope that believers will be better able to abide in Him, through prayer, study, fasting and thus, hearkening to God's voice. Harkening means to listen and obey.

John 10:27:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

Revelation 3:20:

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; **if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him**, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Mosiah 11:128 & 136:

And **he that will hear my voice, shall be my sheep**; and him shall ye receive into the church; and him will I also receive . . . Therefore I say unto you, that he that will not hear my voice, the same shall ye not receive into my church, for him I will not receive at the last day.

Habakkuk 2:1-2:

I will:

- stand upon my **watch** [alert & listening] and
- set me **upon the tower** [find a quiet spot], and will
- **watch to see what he will say unto me** [come in faith expecting God to speak], and
- **what I will answer** when I am reproved [receptive to the truth].

Joel 2:12-13 & 28-30:

. . . **turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your heart**, and not your garments, and **repent**, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and he will turn away the evil from you . . . **I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh**; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth . . .

Jeremiah 33:3:

Call unto me, and **I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things**, which thou knowest not.

Numbers 11:29:

. . . **would God that all the Lord's people were prophets**, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The Prayer That Changes Everything: The Hidden Power of Praising God by Stormie Omartian, p. 7:

If you're like me, you don't want to live a lukewarm, mediocre, "barely making it," sad, lonely, hopeless, miserable, frightened, frustrated, unfulfilled, meaningless, ineffective, or fruitless existence. You don't want to be imprisoned by your circumstances or chained to your limitations. You want to live an extraordinary life. A life of peace, joy, fulfillment, hope, and purpose. A life where all things are possible. The kind of life I just described can only happen when we enter into **a close relationship with God**. I mean really close. There are many people who believe in God . . . Yet not many are really close to Him . . . close enough to know him intimately. Close enough to communicate your whole heart to Him on an ongoing basis. Close enough to be able to direct your attention away from yourself completely and place it on him entirely . . . loving him with all your heart and letting him love you . . . What an awesome gift! **When we praise and worship God, his presence comes to dwell with us.**

WHAT ARE WAYS THAT GOD SPEAKS TO US?

1. **CREATION**

God provides evidence that there is an intelligence that formed the creation we see around us.

Psalm 19:1:

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork.

Romans 2:1:20:

For **God hath revealed unto them the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world**, which are clearly seen; things which are not seen being understood by the things that are made, through his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.

2. **CONSCIENCE**

God gives every person who is born on this earth a moral sense, an intuitive understanding about right and wrong.

John 1:5 & 9:

And the light shineth in the world, and the world perceiveth it not . . . Which was **the true light, which lighteth every man who cometh into the world.**

Romans 2:14-16:

. . . **the Gentiles, which have not the law**, do by nature the things contained in the law . . . which **show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience** also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to the gospel.

D & C 83:7c:

And **the spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world;** and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit.

3. **SCRIPTURE**

God has preserved divinely-inspired writing that reveals his will to us.

Alma 16:52-55 (Alma 2 to Korihor):

- 52 And now **Korihor said unto Alma, If thou wilt shew me a sign**, that I may be convinced that there is a God, yea, shew unto me that he hath power, and then will I be convinced of the truth of thy words.
- 53 But Alma said unto him, **Thou hast had signs enough**; will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Shew unto me a sign, when ye have **the testimony of all these thy brethren**, and also all the holy prophets?
- 54 The **scriptures** are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the **earth**, and **all things that are upon the face of it**, yea, and its **motion**;
- 55 Yea, and also all the **planets which move in their regular form**, doth witness that there is a Supreme Creator: and yet do ye go about, leading away the hearts of this people, testifying unto them there is no God? And yet **will ye deny against all these witnesses?**

4. CIRCUMSTANCES

We sometimes receive direction from God as **he opens and closes doors of opportunity in our lives**. In situations where we are attempting to be of service to God, there may be times that the enemy of our souls places obstacles in our way. We have to exercise discernment in this regard. Perhaps our prayer to the Lord should be, "If it is your will Lord, open this door of opportunity to me."

5. PROPHETIC UTTERANCE

There may be times that **God speaks to us through his earthly servants**. It is not unusual for a fellow believer to deliver a "Thus saith the Lord . . ." unto any member of Christ's church.

6. VISIONS & DREAMS

It is possible for **the Lord to project images and pictures on the screen of our imagination** that perhaps tell a narrative. There are times when we have the strong impression that such a narrative is a message from God. We then have to pray for discernment to correctly interpret their meaning.

Joel 2:28-30:

. . . **I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh**; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth . . .

7. ANGELS

Angels are "ministering spirits" (Hebrews 1:7 & 13-14) who can **deliver God's word to his children**. We see examples of this throughout scripture.

Moroni 7:29-33:

And because he hath done this, my beloved brethren, hath miracles ceased? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; neither have **angels** ceased to minister unto the children of men. For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, shewing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness. And the office of their ministry is, to call men unto repentance, and to fulfill and to do the work of the covenants of the Father which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him.

8. GOD'S STILL SMALL VOICE

Probably the most frequent way God conveys his will to us is through direct communication when we are focused on him in a moment of silence. Most scriptures were probably conveyed to the prophets through that **milder, quieter inner voice that speaks to our souls** on a regular basis. Elijah experienced this on Mt. Sinai in 1 Kings 19:12.

1 Kings 19:11-13 (Elijah on Mt. Sinai or Horeb):

And he [God] said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks . . . and after the wind an earthquake . . . And after the earthquake a fire . . . and after the fire **a still small voice**. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came **a voice** unto him . . .

3 Nephi 5:4-5:

. . . they heard **a voice**, as if it came out of heaven . . . And **it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice**, nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being **a small voice, it did pierce them that did hear, to the center**, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; **yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn**.

After 40 days of fasting and walking across the desert toward Mt. Horeb (Sinai), Elijah the prophet was shown God's power and then God spoke to him in "a still small voice." God is not limited in how he can speak to us. God can speak in a whisper in the solitude of our minds, or he can speak in a dramatic way through a strong wind, an earthquake or a fire (1 Kings 19:11-12). But most of the time, God seems to use a quiet, inner voice, and that can sometimes make it difficult to discern between God's thoughts and our own thoughts.

WHAT PREVENTS US FROM HEARING GOD'S VOICE?

Thinking We are Too Busy To Talk With God

It is often in the midst of being **overcommitted and overwhelmed** that we suddenly realize we need to spend time with God. It's frequently the case that we do things in a backward fashion. Instead of consulting God as an afterthought, we should have started our day asking for his guidance.

The enemy of our souls wants to distract us from talking with God. When we awake, we're often anxious about that day's activities and quickly direct our energy toward things that we hope will make that anxiety subside. It's often the case that we race through the entire day without stopping to ask for God's counsel.

However, the greatest antidote for anxiety is not ticking items off of a to-do list. Rather, it is knowing that I'm living my life in the will of God and walking in close relationship with him. If I can start my day with the assurance that I am acting within his will, it's possible for me to experience inner peace in the midst of trial and hardship.

When I think I'm too busy to talk to God, I need to ask myself **what activities are preventing me from talking with him**. What aspects of my life cause me to be so anxious that I'm distracted from a time of prayer? We are called to "stir up" the indwelling gift of the Holy Ghost that was given to us at confirmation.

2 Timothy 1:6:

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

The Flood of Information & Influences That Invade Our Lives

Today, we are bombarded by news and drama on television, streaming and social media on our cell phones, messages on our watches, home electronic devices, radio, etc. In this cacophony and tumult of words, **the enemy wants to drown out the voice of God.** We are again distracted by the many choices we have. Entertainment can distract us from the turmoil and even pain of this life, but only momentarily. News can make us informed citizens, or it can be used in an attempt to shape our thinking. We can give so much time to streaming that we never actually engage in real life.

In a world where so many different forces are vying for our attention, we must make a conscious decision regarding what we will allow to influence our lives.

Apathy

In an affluent society those who are doing well often do not see the need to hear God's voice. Money comes in. Time is filled with entertaining things to do. Seeking pleasure becomes the foremost priority (2 Nephi 12:9-12). The exhilaration that comes from entertainment and the comfort that comes from gluttony temporarily distract us from any problems in our lives. But those distractions and pleasures often do not last.

Instead of spending our energy filling our time with pleasure, **we could find a greater sustained joy in aligning our lives with God's purposes and serving others.** To do that, we must first desire to be with him and listen to his voice.

Ingratitude or Bitterness Toward God

For some of us it has been a rocky road. The pain and heartache of this life has been overwhelming. We sometimes waste our time comparing ourselves to others, seeing only what they have and we do not. Perhaps our lives have been so painful that we want to shake our fist at God and ask why. Perhaps we already made up our minds a long time ago that we know he doesn't answer prayer. Hope is extinguished. We might ask what's the use of even trying.

Ingratitude can lead to bitterness and then to cynicism. Our experience can shape our perception of who God is. In our cynicism we simply assume that God will not answer our prayers, or is not able to. Knowing what the scriptures say about who God is can help us focus on **God's character and attributes**, which will increase our faith, and give us hope, instead of despair.

To those who doubt, God says:

Matthew 7:12:

"Ask and it shall be given you."

Mosiah 2:13-20 (King Benjamin to the Nephites & people of Zarahemla):

Believe in God; believe that he is, and that **he created all things**, both in heaven and in earth. **Believe that he has all wisdom, and all power**, both in heaven and in earth. Believe that man doth not comprehend all things which the Lord can comprehend. And again: Believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you. And now, if you believe all these things, see that ye do them . . . **ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long suffering toward you unworthy creatures.**

Alma 3:76-80:

Behold, I testify unto you, that **I do know that these things whereof I have spoken, are true.** And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? Behold, I say unto you, **They are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God.** Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days, that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for **the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me.**

WHAT CAN I DO TO BE IN TUNE WITH GOD'S VOICE?

First, I must come before God with a clear conscience and a pure heart (e.g., right desires). This may include removing worldly influences that tend to corrupt my thoughts or divert me from God's mission for my life.

Psalm 24:4-5:

He that hath **clean hands, and a pure heart;** who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord . . .

Second, I have to be willing to ask.

Matthew 7:12:

Say unto them, Ask of God; **ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.**

Third, I should exercise faith. If I just offer up a quick prayer to test God and see if he is there that is one thing. If I believe with all my heart that he is a God who answers prayer, that is a different matter. In doing this, I come expectantly before his throne with the assurance that he wants to bless his children.

Mark 9:45:

Seek unto my Father, and it shall be done in that very moment what ye shall ask, **if ye ask in faith,** believing that ye shall receive.

Hebrews 11:6:

But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that **he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.**

Jeremiah 29:13:

And ye shall seek me, and find me, **when ye shall search for me with all your heart.**

Fourth, I should take time to listen. A quiet location is important. We want to remove every distraction from our environment. When our minds are enlightened by the Holy Spirit, it should be recorded. So you might want to keep a journal of impressions that you receive from the Holy Spirit's counsel.

1 Samuel 3:10:

Speak, for thy servant heareth.

BELIEF IN GOD'S SUPERNATURAL POWER

What *solidifies* a belief in God, and what causes some to doubt? What *strengthens* faith, and what weakens it? First, God tells us in Exodus 3:14, "I am." He wants us to know he exists.

Naturally, our next question would be, “Who is God?” If I am speaking to God in prayer, who am I addressing? It’s difficult to offer a simple explanation for a being of such magnitude and complexity. For now, let’s say **we know who God is by his attributes.**

Today, we live in a society that rejects any God, much less the miraculous and supernatural. They don’t believe in miracles. Even among Christians there are those who believe in what is called “cessationism,” the idea that miracles and gifts of the Spirit ceased with the last of the apostles in the second century. We, the Restoration, stand in direct opposition to this belief.

Ephesians 4:14:

That we henceforth **be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine**, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

II Nephi 13:28:

Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far, save it were by the word of Christ, with **unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save.**

Helaman 2:31:

Nevertheless, **they did fast and pray oft**, and did wax stronger and stronger in their **humility**, and firmer and firmer in **the faith of Christ**, unto the **filling their souls with joy and consolation**, yea, even to **the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts**, which sanctification cometh because of their **yielding their hearts unto God.**

Luke 7:22:

Then Jesus, answering, said unto them, Go your way, and **tell John what things ye have seen and heard**; how that the **blind see**, the **lame walk**, the **lepers are cleansed**, the **deaf hear**, the **dead are raised**, and **to the poor the gospel is preached.**

Luke 10:22:

In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that **thou hast hid these things from them who think they are wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes**; even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.

Alma 18:6:

Now my son, I would not that ye should think that I know these things of myself, but **it is the Spirit of God which is in me, which maketh these things known unto me: for if I had not been born of God, I should not have known these things.**

Moroni 7:28-31:

And because he hath done this, my beloved brethren, **hath miracles ceased? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men.** For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, **shewing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind, in every form of godliness.**

As Christ’s church, we must be unwavering in our belief that God still wants to reveal himself to humanity.

A FIRM BELIEF THAT GOD WANTS TO MOVE IN POWER

Becoming a Disciple of Christ

As a church, we affirm that we believe in:

- continuing modern revelation,
- modern miracles,
- the gifts of the Spirit in this day.

For too long, we have restricted the movement of the Holy Spirit. We sometimes just lack sufficient faith. Some have even been guilty of skepticism and doubted that God could move in power in this day.

Those who preside over worship services tend to err on the side of caution and often want to please people rather than being attuned to the Spirit. In doing this, we've frequently become skeptical. It's possible that we've become so good at identifying false spiritual gifts that perhaps we've throttled the movement of God's Spirit and even been slow to recognize gifts that are genuine.

Those who teach have sometimes been overly cautious about teaching modern revelation, miracles or the gifts because they're concerned it will make them appear to be enamored with the larger charismatic movement in Christianity. But the charismatic movement is simply a poor imitation of the real thing. Genuine revelation, miracles and gifts of the Spirit should be more evident in our worship, and we should not be influenced by what imitators there are in other Christian circles.

God longs to reveal himself to us, to move among believers in miraculous ways, to bring the confirming evidence of his power into our worship.

Psalm 24:8:

And he will roll away the heavens; and will come down to redeem his people . . .

Numbers 11:29:

. . . **would God that all the Lord's people were prophets**, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them.

Alma 3:76-80 (How Alma 2 attained "knowledge"):

Behold, I testify unto you, that **I do know that these things whereof I have spoken, are true**. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? Behold, I say unto you, They are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, **I have fasted and prayed many days, that I might know these things of myself**. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; **and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me**.

CAN GOD REVEAL HIMSELF TO AN UNHOLY MIND?

God wishes to pierce the veil that separates us from him, and there are times when he even chooses to speak to those immersed in sin. Think of Paul on the road to Damascus or Alma 2's encounter with an angel. However, God is holy and we are unclean as the prophet realized in Isaiah 6:5:

Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

This is the same realization we've all have had at one time or another. **We feel a sense of our own sinful nature and our inability to approach God seeking a direct manifestation of his power and glory**. As we grow in our understanding about God, it's common to recognize the distance that really exists between us and a holy God.

Becoming a Disciple of Christ

Don't let that discourage you from trying to make that connection with God. Recognizing his holiness and our own sinfulness can inspire us to worship his attributes even more intensely and increase our desire to be more like him.

In Genesis 7:42 God told Enoch, "Behold, I am God; **Man of Holiness** is my name . . ." No unclean thing can enter the kingdom. If we wish to enter into his presence, we must be washed clean through the atoning sacrifice of Christ and then our lives must begin to evince a change in thought life, in our words and actions.

God is available to us in our private worship (e.g., our personal devotions at home). He wants to make himself accessible to us in that setting. In corporate worship, God has blessed us with the gift of priesthood authority to bring us into God's presence as the body of Christ. **In our corporate worship it is the responsibility of priesthood to bring a sanctified people before a holy God that they might be able to pull back the curtain that separates God and man.** To do this we are all called to be a *sanctified* people.

D & C 1:5f:

. . . for I the Lord cannot look upon **sin** with the least degree of allowance.

I Peter 1:16:

Be ye holy; for I am **holy**.

Psalms 24:3-4:

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? **He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart;** who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

Mormon 4:94:

Be wise in the days of your probation; **strip yourselves of all uncleanness;** ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts, but **ask with a firmness unshaken, that ye will yield to no temptation, but that ye will serve the true and living God.**

Helaman 3:7:

Then were his people easy to be entreated, **firm to keep the commandments of God, and slow to be led to do iniquity;** and they were quick to hearken unto the words of the Lord.

3 Nephi 3:16:

And they would not depart from it, for they were **firm, and steadfast, and immovable,** willing with all diligence to keep the commandments of the Lord.

3 Nephi 4:2:

And there was not any man who could do a miracle in the name of Jesus, save he were **cleansed every whit from his iniquity.**

Matthew 5:10:

And blessed are all the **pure** in heart; for **they shall see God.**

I Peter 1:22:

Seeing ye have **purified** your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto **unfeigned love** of the brethren, see that ye **love one another with a pure heart fervently.**

We live in a world that is in direct conflict with the objectives of God who is holy, but he will not endure the least degree of sin. If I want to enjoy the fullness of his presence, I must be cleansed of every vestige of sin that still resides in my life. I must remove any sinful desires or influences. For example:

- I must earn a living from the world, but I cannot succumb to its influences and compromise God's principles.
- Perhaps I worship in a congregation where the gifts of the Spirit are not clearly evident, but I cannot allow that to discourage me from seeking to know God's mind and will.
- I might have a spouse or children who do not share my vision of the kingdom, but I cannot allow that to injure my relationship with a holy God.

I need to always be aware that my relationship with God is tenuous. Imagine that it hangs by a delicate thread. Think of this thread as the Holy Spirit. The weight of my sin is enough to gradually unravel that thread. The least sin in my life is enough to damage that connection with him. We should constantly be aware how vulnerable that connection to God is.

With this understanding in mind, is it possible in this life to reduce the distance between my sinful self and a holy God? Yes, it is! We all struggle with this issue. Is the answer to be self-punishing, to beat ourselves down mentally? No, it's not. That is exactly what the forces of evil would have us do. Instead, we must place our trust in a loving God to close that gap between our own sinful condition and his holiness. He made us with weaknesses; he wants us to be dependent on him.

2 Nephi 3:29-66 (Nephi's psalm):

Nephi had the mind of Christ (e.g., the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling within him) and he was therefore able to **"delight in the scriptures."**

- Meditation: Nephi's heart meditated on the scriptures.
- Writing: Nephi wrote the scriptures for others' benefit.
- Delight: Nephi took great pleasure in the things of the Lord.
- Prophecy: Nephi pondered the revelations he had seen and heard.

For **my soul delighteth in the scriptures**, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children. Behold, **my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord**; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard.

With this meditation and study, Nephi came to realize there was a wide disparity between himself and God. "His flesh" or "his iniquities" or, in other words, "his sins" caused his heart to groan because **they separated him from a holy God.**

Nevertheless, the great goodness of the Lord, in showing me his great and marvelous works, my heart exclaimeth, O wretched man that I am; yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh. **My soul grieveth because of mine iniquities. I am encompassed about because of the temptations and the sins which doth so easily beset me.** And when I desire to rejoice, my heart groaneth because of my sins.

In delighting in the scriptures, Nephi gained the insight that God in his condescension (deserving glory but lowering himself instead) had poured out abundant mercy upon Nephi and blessed him despite his own unworthiness. **This caused Nephi to "wax bold in mighty prayer" that God might lift him from the mire of sin:**

- Why should my heart weep?
- Why should I linger in the valley of sorrow?

- Why should I yield to sin because of my flesh?
- Why should I give way to temptations?

This is the very same struggle that every believer experiences. We all want to be free of the sins that so easily beset us. To do this, Nephi had to trust in a power greater than himself. Trusting in our own strength will never get us there. It is only by a miracle and a power outside ourselves that we will ever come to “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13 and Matthew 5:50). It is only by God’s grace that we will ever have the “desire and power to do his will” (1 Corinthians 15:10 and Jacob 3:8).

Nevertheless, **I know in whom I have trusted.** My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions . . . And **by day have I waxed bold in mighty prayer** before him . . . **O then, if I have seen so great things; if the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men, hath visited me in so much mercy, why should my heart weep, and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow . . . And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations . . .**

In verse 46 of Nephi’s psalm we see a turning point where he is resolved to be a victorious Christian who wants to know the liberty that comes with living in moral purity. It’s at this point that Nephi asks God, **“Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?”**

Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul . . . Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say, O Lord, I will praise thee forever, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation . . . **Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin?** . . . therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God. Amen.

If Nephi lived today, he would probably never turn on a television. He probably would never aimlessly scroll through a streaming device. He may or may not make very limited use of a browser. He wouldn’t listen to comedies with raunchy, unwelcome humor. He would not expose himself to movies designed to cause their audience to succumb to increasing degrees of filth. Perhaps he wouldn’t even attempt to lead a boycott to overturn all of this debauchery. **For him personally, it’s possible that he would resolutely and unhesitatingly close all these channels of communication like an iron door, never to be opened again!**

If we were to guess, **Nephi’s joy would not be found in** plays, movies, sporting events, television, extravagant vacations, beautiful clothes, elaborate homes, fancy cars, sumptuous meals at exclusive restaurants, achieving massive profits on the stock exchange, hobnobbing with celebrities or beautiful people. He would probably see these as vacuous activities that do not bring lasting happiness.

Instead, Nephi would probably go out on the street and look for someone who is suffering. “Suffering from what?” you might ask. Perhaps he’d tell that person, “I know a cure, I have an answer, I have a fix for that.” We would imagine that he might know how to use the power of Jesus Christ to heal every spiritual and physical wound in this world. **When he found someone suffering, his joy would come in telling someone, “I have a cure for that; Jesus is the answer!” The joy in knowing that simple truth would be immeasurably greater than anything this world has to offer!**

To some degree, this is what it means to become disciples of Christ and a sanctified people. As his grace molds us into people who will not return again to the old pattern of sin, there will begin to be **power** to live as victorious Christians in true freedom!

We have entered this commentary on Nephi's psalm in more than one of these modules because it's extremely important to those on a quest to become "disciples" learning to arrive at "**the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**" (Ephesians 4:13).

WHAT IS THE DESIRE OF MY HEART?

Is my heart pure before God? I can discern what my heart's desire really is by my thoughts, words and actions. Throughout each day, I must be intentional about focusing my attention on *praising* him for his attributes and *thanking* him in every situation.

- **Thoughts:** What do I think about through most of a day?

Philippians 4:8:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are **true**, whatsoever things are **honest**, whatsoever things are **just**; whatsoever things are **pure**, whatsoever things are **lovely**, whatsoever things are **of good report**; **if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.**

- **Words:** Are the words that I utter edifying to everyone around me?

Luke 6:45:

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good. And an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil; **for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.**

Psalms 19:14:

Let the **words** of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

Matthew 12:32:

For by thy words thou shalt be **justified**, and by thy words thou shalt be **condemned**.

- **Actions:** Are my actions guided by the Holy Spirit?

Mosiah 2:49-50:

But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not **watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe to keep the commandments of God**, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not.

As a member of Christ's church, what does my heart desire most? What do I long for? What is the focus of my energy? How is that expressed in my words and actions?

I can tell what I love the most by what I think about, what I speak passionately about, how I use my time, where I spend money, how I invest my energy and other resources.

Alma 17: 68-70 (Alma 2 speaking to his son, Helaman):

O remember my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth to keep the commandments of God; yea, and **cry unto God for all thy support. Yea, let all thy doings**

be unto the Lord, and withersoever thou goest, let it be in the Lord; yea, let thy **thoughts** be directed unto the Lord; yea, let **the affections of thy heart** be placed upon the Lord forever; **counsel the Lord in all thy doings**, and he will direct thee for good. Yea, when thou liest down at night, lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; **and when thou risest in the morning, let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day.**

Do I cry unto God for all my support? Do I lean upon him for my strength? Is my thought life pure? Are the thoughts and affections of my heart placed upon the Lord? Do I seek his counsel before I do something? Do I pray to him when I lie down at night? When I rise each morning is my heart full of thanks to God? Where are the affections of my heart directed?

Imagine that every **thought** in my heart is immediately broadcast to the entire world and displayed on a giant screen for the world to see. What about the **words** that I utter? Are they always pleasing to the Lord? Do my **actions** indicate a heart that is entirely devoted to the service of God?

We need to utter **words of healing and blessing** to a world that is broken. We need to provide **words of hope** to a world that sees no meaning or purpose in this life. But we cannot hope to provide such words to the world if our own spiritual tanks are empty. We must speak words of healing, blessing and hope to ourselves! We need to constantly be re-directing our thoughts to praising and thanking God. We must carefully guard our hearts against spiritual influences that would distract us from the cause of God's kingdom on earth.

MORNING PRAYER

As disciples of Christ, we don't want to go out the door in the morning without first committing our day to God. At the very minimum there must be morning prayer. If that truly is the most *important* thing to do, then perhaps it should be the *first* thing we do – to kneel beside our beds and give praise for God's many attributes, to thank him for his abundant blessings (be specific), to commit the activities of that day to him that we might have his blessed Holy Spirit to guide us.

What is it that prevents us from doing this on a daily basis?

- Planning – when we fail to plan ahead and make time to speak with God.
- Escape – when we enter a mindless cycle of distracting lesser activities.
- Anxiety – when we are so anxious about the day, we think we don't have time.
- Spiritual – when we allow ourselves to fall into a spiritual rut.
- Inactivity – when we are not physically active enough during the day.

We don't like to think about it but we are, first of all, human. We are subject to the same weaknesses and spiritual struggles that plague every believer. We often rationalize and talk ourselves out of praying in a particular moment. However, for our own well-being, we owe it to God to allot specific time to speak to him each morning.

Success in this area begins with an *intention*. We must first be *willing* to retire to our beds early enough that we have the energy to arise and pray. However, going to bed early can be a struggle for some. How do I alter my schedule to wake up early enough to pray to God every morning? What if I have trouble going to sleep early at night?

D & C 85:38b:

Cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.

D & C 119:9b:

For even now there are some, even among the elders, who are suffering in mind and body, who have disregarded the advice of the Spirit to retire early and to rise early that vigor of mind and body should be retained.

In affluent countries, the inability to sleep at night can be tied to physical inactivity. In some cases, we sit at a desk all day to do our regular jobs and we rarely move. This can be detrimental to our health. Greater physical activity during the day could be the solution. In many impoverished countries, the problem can be too *little* food – lack of adequate nutrition.

The amount and timing of meals can interfere with sleep. Affluence sometimes means that we eat too much food or eat too late at night. In some areas of the world, the problem is too *little* food. The main point is that eating can affect our sleep patterns.

There are certain people who, even if they are physically active and eat very little at night, they are physiologically unable to sleep in the early evening. If I am one of those people, perhaps I need to create a temporary sleep deficit. For example, I could set an alarm to rise an hour earlier than normal. I might be tired that first day. I might have to do that for several days in a row until my body makes the adjustment, allowing me to go to bed early. In America, this is what we do when there is a time change in the spring.

Finally, though we often don't like to admit it we suffer many of the same spiritual struggles and turmoil that plague all people. Spiritual forces are always at work. There can be spiritual forces in our lives that try to prevent us from spending a moment in prayer.

If I can arise at that earlier time and immediately apply my efforts to earnest prayer, I will:

- feel the assurance that I'm in a right relationship with my Creator,
- commit the day's activities to his care,
- be able to see more clearly God's hand working in my life,
- be better attuned to hear his voice directing me.

This will lighten the burden that I feel in my daily walk with God. My anxiety about what I must do that day will diminish. I will have a greater ability to see God working. I will be ready to receive his instruction.

EVENING PRAYER

As mentioned, we are constantly involved in a spiritual struggle in which forces of good and evil are pulling us in different directions. At evening time, this is particularly true. When darkness falls, when we're alone, when we're weary, when we retire to our beds, all of us are more vulnerable.

That is a time when many of the major spiritual battles are fought. It's possible for painful memories to arise. We can think about experiences in which we were humiliated. We can become upset about offenses of the past. Satan would like for us to become focused on those offenses. If not in our waking moments, perhaps in our dreams.

We previously said we each have a mission from God to perform. It is often in the evening when we are tired that the obstacles standing in the way of that mission weigh most heavily upon us. The enemy of our souls will attempt to discourage us and tell us it can't be done.

Late in the evening, we have time to think about past successes and failures. We can succumb to the idea that we have more often failed. Self-critical thoughts can arise. Satan wants to convince us we have very little value. We can think self-punishing thoughts. A heavy, oppressive spirit can weigh upon us. Perhaps, we might be despairing.

Job 3:11 & 25:

Why did I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? . . . *For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me.*

Psalms 22:1-2 & 14-15:

My God, why hast thou forsaken me? My God, hear the words of my roaring; thou art far from helping me. O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou answerest not; and in the night season, and am not silent . . . for I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

Psalms 6:6-7:

I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. Mine eye is consumed because of grief . . .

Psalms 119:28:

My soul melteth for heaviness; strengthen thou me according unto thy word.

We must remember in all of this we are not alone. This is a spiritual battle between good and bad forces. We must begin with an intention to resist those negative emotions. We trust in God's promise found in **Psalms 30:5:**

. . . weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

We are repeatedly instructed in scripture to pray in the evening. Evening prayers are given to us as a weapon to confront the forces of evil that want to overwhelm us. In that setting, it is a good time in the name of Jesus to tell Satan to be gone and leave this place, to cast him out.

Alma 17:70:

Yea, when thou liest down at night, lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning, let thy heart be full of thanks unto God . . .

The things we watch on media can be taken with us to bed. If there was sadness in a story we saw, we can take that sadness with us. If we were weighed down with a sense of hopelessness or futility, that can remain in our souls. We have to carefully guard our hearts, particularly at night when we are spiritually the weakest. Here are two scriptures that apply to television and social media. Perhaps they will help you.

Psalms 101:2-3 & 7:

I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. Oh when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes; I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me . . . He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight.

2 John 1:9-11:

Becoming a Disciple of Christ

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed. For he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Evening prayers, praising God, singing hymns, reading scripture and thanking God for his marvelous blessings are all good things to do in the evening.

Ephesians 5:19-20:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Before we retire to sleep, it is important to at least offer a word of prayer to God. In doing this, it is helpful to invoke God's presence, to thank him for casting out any evil influences and to praise his name. We all seek his blessed peace that we might rest.

Philippians 4:6-8:

Be afflicted for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

As this peace descends upon us, let us ask God to speak to our hearts.

FASTING

Joel 2:12:

Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning.

As believers in Christ, we want to take the next step to become disciples who are consistent in their daily walk. We want our actions to match our words. Fasting is an action, aided by the Holy Spirit, that can help us be better aligned with God's mission for each of us.

In our daily walk, we often have divided loyalties. Our hearts are frequently swayed to love something in this life more than we love God. It's difficult to discern when that's happening. When our priorities are distorted, fasting brings our original mission back into focus and restores that love that originally motivated us.

James 1:8:

A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Revelation 2:4-5:

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.

Fasting helps us subdue fleshly urges and our pride. It makes those earthly desires subservient to the Spirit. It makes our faith more consistent. It humbles us.

I John 2:15-17:

Love not the world, neither the things that are of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all in the world that is of the lusts of the flesh, and

the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world . . . but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.

We may have a *desire* in our hearts to serve God, but often we fail in this endeavor because the weakness of our flesh is pulling us back. How do we achieve victory over our own sinful nature? If we have a desire in our hearts, why is it so difficult to do the things we want to do for the Lord? How do we subdue the flesh and unleash God's power? Fasting is a way to make our actions congruent with our words.

Galatians 5:1 & 16-17:

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

In fasting, we are tapping into the source of power: God's grace. Fasting makes us humble. Humility gives us strength to resist the devil. Fasting cures our double-mindedness and purifies our hearts. Humility unlocks God's grace (e.g., the desire and power to do God's will).

Proverbs 3:34:

. . . He giveth grace unto the lowly.

James 4:6-8:

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

In the weakness of fasting, being utterly dependent on God's grace, we begin to trust in his strength and place less importance on our own abilities. In everyday life, God's power becomes more evident.

Ether 5:28:

I give unto men weakness, that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

God wants us to search the scriptures and increase in knowledge and wisdom. Prayer, study and fasting is a means by which we can receive the spirit of prophecy. God wants his church to teach with power and authority. That power is available if we will diligently seek him. Fasting is one avenue by which we obtain that power from God.

Alma 12:2-5 (Alma 2 & the sons of Mosiah):

And what added more to his joy, they were still his brethren in the Lord; yea, and **they had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth. For they were men of a sound understanding,** and they had **searched the scriptures diligently,** that they might know the word of God. But this is not all: **they had given themselves to much prayer, and fasting,** therefore **they had the spirit of prophecy, and the spirit of revelation,** and when they taught, **they taught with power and authority,** even as with the power and authority of God.

This brings us back around to this question: What is a true fast? It is a fast that bears fruit, in order that those who are struggling under the yoke of sin might be set free, that burdens might be lifted, that those hungering for the Spirit might be nourished.

Isaiah 58:6-8:

Is not this the fast that I have chosen?

- To loose the bands of wickedness,
- To undo the heavy burdens,
- To let the oppressed go free, and
- That ye break every yoke
- Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry?
- And that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?
- When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him?
- And that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

Promise:

- Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and
- Thine health shall spring forth speedily,
- And thy righteousness shall go before thee,
- The glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward.

As servants of Christ, we want to use the tool of fasting as a means to put our priorities in proper order, to subdue the desires of the flesh, to obtain more of God's grace and eventually lead us to a victory over sin. In doing this, it's our hope that we will be better able to hear God's voice guiding us on a daily basis.

Helaman 4:29:

But it came to pass that Nephi and Lehi, and many of their brethren, who knew concerning the true points of doctrine, **having many revelations daily**, therefore they did preach unto the people, insomuch that they did put an end to their strife in that same year.

A GOD WHO REVEALS HIMSELF TO MAN

There are Christians who do not believe God reveals himself to man in a visible sense because God is spirit, despite the many passages in the Bible that say men saw God, spoke with him face to face, saw him in a vision, or looked upon his similitude. The idea that men cannot see God is based on:

- **John 1:19** in the King James Version of the Bible: "And no man hath seen God at any time." The Inspired Version contains an emendation: "And no man hath seen God at any time, *except he hath borne record of the Son . . .*"
- **I John 4:12** in the King James Version: "No man hath seen God at any time." The Inspired Version has an emendation: "No man hath seen God at any time, *except them who believe.*"

In **Psalm 14:1** we read:

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no man that hath seen God.

There are some Christians who say that God does not appear to man. To equip you with evidence that God has revealed himself to man we want to list a number of examples that can be presented to skeptics. While some of these come from Restoration scriptures, there are a number of the following that can be found in the King James Version of the Bible.

Ether 5:40 (the brother of Jared):

And then shall ye know that **I have seen Jesus, and that he hath talked with me face to face**, and that he told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things; and only a few have I written, because of my weakness in writing.

Genesis 7:4 (Enoch in I.V. only):

And I saw the Lord, and he stood before my face, **and he talked with me, even as a man talketh one with another, face to face**; and he said unto me, Look, and I will show unto thee the world for the space of many generations.

Genesis 28:12-13 (Jacob-Israel):

And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. And behold, **the Lord stood above it**, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father . . .

Genesis 32:24-30 (Jacob-Israel):

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day . . . And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel, for **as a prince hast thou power with God . . .** And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel; **for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.**

Exodus 3:1-6 (Moses):

Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law . . . and came to the mountain of God even to Horeb. And again, **the presence of the Lord appeared unto him, in a flame of fire in the midst of a bush**; and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed . . . God called unto him out of the midst of the bush . . . Moreover he said, **I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.**

Exodus 24:9-10 (Moses):

Then went up **Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. And they saw the God of Israel**; and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon **the nobles** of the children of Israel he laid not his hand; also **they saw God, and did eat and drink.**

Exodus 33:11 (Moses):

And **the Lord spake unto Moses face to face**, as a man speaketh unto his friend.

Numbers 12:8 (Moses):

With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; **and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold . . .**

Numbers 14:14 (Moses):

And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land; for they have heard that thou Lord art among this people, that **thou Lord art seen face to face**, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by daytime in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.

Deuteronomy 5:4 (Moses):

The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire.

D & C 22:1 & 20 (Moses):

The words of God which he spake unto Moses, at a time when Moses was caught up into an exceeding high mountain, **and he saw God face to face, and he talked with him**, and the glory of God was upon Moses; therefore Moses could endure his presence. . . . And behold **the glory of God was upon Moses, so that Moses stood in the presence of God, and he talked with him face to face.**

Isaiah 6:1-8:

In the year that king Uzziah died **I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up**, and his train filled the temple . . . And one [seraph] cried unto another, and said, **Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts**; the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. **Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips**, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; **for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts**. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it on my mouth, and said, Lo, this has touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. **Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.**

Ezekiel 1:25-28:

And there was a **voice** from the firmament that was over their heads . . . And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and **upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it**. . . . I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about . . . **This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.**

I Nephi 1:7 (Lehi):

And being thus overcome with the Spirit, he was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and **he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne**, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.

Alma 12:143 (Alma 2)

For as sure as thou livest, behold, **I have seen my Redeemer**; and he shall come forth and be born of a woman, and he shall redeem all mankind who believe on his name.

Acts 7:55-56 (Stephen):

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and **saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God**. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

Acts 9:3-9 (Saul):

As he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and **suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven**. And **he fell to the earth, and heard a voice** saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutes thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, **I am Jesus** whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? . . . And **they who were journeying with him saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice** . . . And he was three days without sight . . .

I Corinthians 15:3-6 (post-mortem appearances of Christ):

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures; and that **he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that, he was seen of about five hundred brethren at once**; of whom the greater part remain unto this present . . .