

Lesson One

Hearing God's Voice

Introduction

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, hearken to God's voice.

Hearken means to listen and obey.

Unit 3

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.

What Is The Desire Of My Heart?

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.*

What Is The Desire Of My Heart?

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**.*

What Is The Desire Of My Heart?

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.***

What Is The Desire Of My Heart?

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 whithersoever 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?

What Is The Desire Of My Heart?

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.

Morning Prayer

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.

Morning Prayer

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, are physiologically unable to sleep in the early evening. If you are one of those people, perhaps you need to create a temporary sleep deficit. For example, you could set an alarm to rise an hour earlier than normal. You might be tired that first day. You might have to do that for several days in a row until your body makes the adjustment, allowing you to go to bed early.

In America, this is what we do when there is a time change in the Spring.

Morning Prayer

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 you can arise at that earlier time and immediately apply your efforts to earnest prayer, you will:

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

This will lighten the burden that you feel in your daily walk with God. Your anxiety about what you must do that day will diminish. You will have a greater ability to see God working. You 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. In the evening, 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 died 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.

Evening Prayer

Psalm 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.

Psalm 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 . . .

Psalm 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 Psalm 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.

Evening Prayer

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:

*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 Prayer

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

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.

1 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.

Fasting

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.

Fasting

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 are 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.

Fasting

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.*

Fasting

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.*

Reflection

Reflection

Reflect for a moment on the purity of your heart.

What can you do to further prepare your heart for truly effective prayer?

What are challenges you create for yourself in striving to have a pure heart?

Have you really given fasting a serious chance in changing your heart?

Unit Summary

Summary