

STUDY GUIDE: BEGINNING THE JOURNEY (MODULE 101)

Lesson #5 – What Does the Owner Want: "Getting Directions from the Owner" (Part 3)

In this lesson you will be introduced to the most subtle and the most subjective ways in which the Owner will communicate His directions to you that only the most discerning of believers will hear.

In the first two parts of this series, we considered how God gives us, His stewards, directions through His Word and through other people. In this final part of the series we will examine what is no doubt the most subtle and the most subjective of the three ways God communicates His will to us – Through Our Thoughts.

God is constantly speaking to us by introducing thoughts into our minds. But our minds are so inundated with distractions and information overload that we hear little of what He is saying to us. Do you remember in school as a child being taught before crossing a railroad track to first do three things: Stop, Look and Listen. Heeding these same three directives can position us to hear a lot more from God than we ever have before.

First, We Need to Stop

David counsels us in Psalm 46:10, "*Cease striving and know that I am God;...*" Most of us live such harried lives dashing from this activity to that meeting to back home, then on to church that we hardly have time to stop and take a breath. And once we finally do stop, we are so exhausted that we collapse in a chair or in bed and we are gone. Does this describe your life at all.

You may have heard the old saying, "Don't just stand there, do something!" But let me suggest that God's message to us is this, "Don't just do something, stand there." Stop! "*Cease striving!*"

How often do we shut off the TV, shut off our cell phones, shut off our computers and iPads, get away from people and just stop long enough to give our loving Owner an opportunity to speak to us through our thoughts?

Second, we Need to Look

A couple homeschooled all four of their daughters all the way through high school and as such spent huge amounts of time teaching them the Bible as well as all the other subjects. When their two oldest daughters were still quite young, they had been sharing with them I John 3:17, which says, "*But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?*" They were trying to teach them that how a person responds to those in need shows whether or not they truly love God.

Well, as the next Sunday rolled around, the father happened to be preaching that morning and his wife was playing the piano and as is often the case with families with small children, they were running late. Church was supposed to be starting in ten minutes and they were at least twelve minutes from the church building. They jumped into the car and hurried out of the driveway and sped on to church.

On the main street to the church that morning the family happened to drive by an elderly homeless woman walking down the side of the road pulling a cart with a big bag of something. The dad crossed over into the left lane so as to not get too close to her and drove on by. Their oldest daughter, who was about five at the time broke the silence and asked, "Daddy, don't you love God?" He said, "Of course I do, honey, why do you ask?" Here next comment has been indelibly etched in this father's memory. She asked, "Daddy, that lady needs help and we have a car. If we really love God, shouldn't we stop and help her?" This young girl had seen a need because she was looking. Her dad, on the other hand, with his obvious blind spots had not seen a thing. He was in too big of a hurry to get to church to minister to the needs of the congregation to see anybody with needs on the way.

The father immediately stopped the car, backed up to where this lady was, opened the trunk put her bundle of laundry in, had her climb in the back seat with the girls and drove her to the laundromat. He gave her his name and phone number and told her if she ever needed a ride anywhere to call him. They jumped back in the car and dashed on to church amazingly arriving two minutes early instead of two minutes late. Go figure.

There is a profound spiritual truth that very few stewards ever come to fully understand? A truth that can radically impact your life. Here it is: We need to give just as desperately as the poor need to receive. We are just as needy as they are, just in a different kind of way. So, when we see a need and respond to it, we are proving to ourselves and to our Owner that His love does indeed abide in us.

We all need to begin looking even more carefully at what and who is around us and how we might be a blessing to those in need. Try this suggestion on for size. Start carrying a few \$5 bills around with you so whenever you see anyone in need, you have something already set aside to share and bless them in Jesus' name. It is amazing how different spontaneous giving is, when we already have something set aside to give away.

Last, We Need to Listen

Do you remember when Elijah had his encounter with God at Mt Horeb? I Kings 19:12 (KJV) tells us that God spoke to him in a "*still small voice.*" Isaiah 30:21 says it this way, "*And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.*" God is speaking thoughts into our minds all the time with His still, small voice and only when we stop, look and listen will we actually recognize that it is a thought from the Lord for something He wants us to do.

Here is a simple, yet powerful, example of how God puts His direction into our minds. Recently, a man was on his way to an appointment when a car coming towards him tried to turn left right in front of him. He swerved to avoid it, but the lady plowed right into the side of his car. He immediately prayed and asked God to not let this be just another frustrating delay and irritating inconvenience, but to do something with it that would honor Him. He accepted that God apparently wanted this lady and him to “bump” into each other that day.

The lady was driving without insurance; was an emotional basket case; pleaded with the man to not have her put in jail because she had small children at home and promised she would pay every penny of the damage to the car. The man reassured her that she would not be going to jail and even though she didn't have insurance he did and everything would be okay. The officer arrived and did give her a ticket for driving without insurance. The wrecker soon arrived to tow his un-drivable car away.

The man called his wife to tell her that he was in an accident, but was fine. As he was talking to her, he was deeply impressed by the Lord to give the lady some money. Since he had begun the practice of carrying \$5 bills around with him to give to those in need, he took out his wallet and to his surprise he only had a \$50 bill in it that his son-in-law had given him the week before to repay him for something he bought for him. He had totally forgotten it was even in there.

He pulled out the bill, walked over to the lady and told her he wanted to give it to her because she was going to have a lot of additional expenses from this wreck. She went from weeping to sobbing and refused to take it. He then said, “Please take it, God asked me to give it to you. He wants you to have it.” She finally accepted it. He got into the cab of the wrecker and rode off with his damaged car in tow, missing his appointment and happy as a lark!

He shared he was not sure there was anything he could have done with that \$50 bill that would have been more fun and more of a blessing. He was thoroughly refreshed by his little act of giving. He came away from that calamity less needy than he was before it happened. Maybe the accident was really for his benefit.

Many of you have also likely had some of the most out of the blue thoughts come to your minds? Someone you haven't seen or talked to for ages for no reason comes to mind? You have the thought that you ought to do something completely random that was not part of the plan for your day? You sense the need to pray for someone right at that moment. Listen, that is very likely the still small voice of our Owner speaking to you - giving you directions on what He wants you to do today with the time, talents and treasures He has entrusted to you.

What incredible fun it is when we stop, look and listen to the thoughts that God puts into our minds to direct us on what He wants us to do with what we have of His to manage.

If we want to be a good and faithful steward of all that God has entrusted to us, we will need to become very attentive to learning how and when and where to hear from Him. He will communicate His will for us through His Word, through other people in our lives and through the still small voice of our thoughts. What a joy and a blessing it is to fully embrace the idea that God owns everything and our singular task is to manage carefully all that we have been entrusted with according to His will – and to carry out His directions for what to do with His stuff with all our heart, soul and mind.

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What is your initial reaction to the message of this lesson?
2. Read Psalm 46:10 and then share what are your personal challenges for why you don't cease striving more often each week so you can just stand silently before the Lord and listen to what He wants to tell you.
3. Why is the idea of "don't just do something, stand there" so counter cultural in America and in American churches.
4. Read I John 3:17 and discuss what this verse is saying and what it says about us if we are unwilling to share with others in need when we have the means to do so.
5. How did the story of the elderly lady impact you? Have you ever missed an opportunity to be used by God simply because you were not consciously looking for how God wanted to use you?
6. What impact did the story of the auto accident have on you? Why do you think its outcome was so different than you would expect?
7. What is your reaction to the comment that "I need to give just as desperately as the poor need to receive?" How does our refusal to give actually harden our hearts to God using us to carry out His will for others?
8. Read I Kings 19:11-12 (King James Version) and discuss the idea that God communicates to us not in loud, obvious ways, but in a "still small voice." If this is true, what does that mean to us in getting our directions from the Owner?
9. Since God introduces thoughts into our minds, share a time in which the most random thought to do something came to mind and what happened when you actually did it.
10. What is going to change in your life because of what you have learned in this lesson?