

RECOVERING OUR INTIMACY WITH GOD ([Psalm 95:1-8](#))

[Psalm 95:7-8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁷ For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice,

⁸ Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness,

LOSING AN INTIMATE SENSE of God's presence is a sobering experience. Such a state may come as a result of flagrant rebellion, or it may be the culmination of many seemingly minor choices to resist God's clear leadership. Whatever the cause, it is disturbing to sense in ourselves or others a growing hardness of heart and an accompanying helplessness to recover from it.

Many believers are under the misconception that they can return to intimacy with the Lord whenever they want. They believe restored fellowship is solely a matter of their personal discretion, available at the drop of a hat. But in moments of deep searching and quiet desperation they admit that even the willingness to will themselves back to God is missing. They come to the startling revelation that we must come to Him on His terms and at His time or we will not come at all.

The underlying plea of [Psalm 95](#) is that we guard against the hardening of our hearts. To illustrate the nature of such a dangerous spiritual state, the psalmist refers to a critical moment in Israel's history. While the people were camped at Kadesh Barnea, God instructed Moses to send spies into neighboring Canaan, the Promised Land ([Num. 13](#)). Their report was meant to encourage the recently delivered Israelites.

But the spies brought *discouragement* instead. With Joshua and Caleb as notable exceptions, the spies acknowledged the land's abundance but focused primarily on the giants, the sons of Anak, before whom the Israelites were like grasshoppers. Angry and terrified, the Jewish nation rejected the pleas of Moses, Joshua, and Caleb to do what God had told them to do. Their refusal to follow God brought His wrath, and the disobedient generation was sentenced to wander and ultimately die in the wilderness they had preferred over Canaan.

After a night of reflection on God's judgment, the children of Israel repented and returned to Moses, expressing a willingness to go in and conquer Canaan. **"It is too late,"** Moses warned them. But they refused to hear him and mounted a battle that cost the lives of many. The lesson was clear: God had opened a window of opportunity that they neglected, and their refusal to immediately obey was costly. Their hardened hearts had cost them and their families dearly. God would give Canaan to another generation of faith.

God calls believers to prayer. He is calling you! He is calling me! Through prayer we are, figuratively speaking, to occupy the land and enjoy the fruit of His promises—to accomplish whatever He intends and to step out by faith in Him. He is today the same God as Israel's God, **and the need for immediate obedience is unchanged.** **Also unchanged are the consequences** when we fail to obey. With every delay, opportunities are lost.

A CALLING MASTER

The call to prayer tests our comprehension of God. If we know Him, if we rightly understand the truth about who He is and what He desires of us, prayer is a welcome invitation. **Can we ignore His call? Can we substitute our own plans for God's? Yes, but not without disastrous consequences.** Is there anything God will accept in place of simple obedience to Him? **No.** Nothing at all.

Notice *the profound significance of this call.* The urgency of our response to any voice is directly related to the personal significance of the one who is calling. Just watch a cluster of mothers visiting with one another around a picnic bench in a crowded park. Amid the clamor of playing children they sit calmly until one of them hears the voice of *her* child. That is a voice she knows, a call she will not disregard.

The One who is calling you to prayer is your Savior (**Ps. 95:1**), your Sovereign (**v. 7**), your Sustainer (**v. 4**), your Source and Maker (**vv. 5–6**), and your Shepherd (**v. 7**). He has charged Himself with the responsibility for your welfare. ***He is the One who calls you.*** **Will you ignore His voice?**

I can remember years ago a congressional hearing in which a lieutenant colonel in the Marines was asked how he would respond to any request the President of his country might make. He noted that his President was also his Commander-in-chief and that no request, however ridiculous it might seem, would be denied. He knew that in human terms the President holds ultimate authority for American citizens and soldiers. Here the psalmist is not referring to an earthly commander-in-chief but to our Sovereign Lord, the God to whom we must all answer and who invites all His children to approach Him in prayer.

Notice *also the personal subject of this call.* Frequently when I speak at the different Covington Theological Seminary extensions around the world, I am asked how we can recognize the call of God. My response is simple. **Knowing is inherent in the call. You know God is speaking to you.** God is a powerful communicator, and He speaks with distinction.

When I was a child my mother would come to the window front of our apartment and call, "Come in and wash your hands! It's time for supper!" Some things were obvious in that situation. This was *my* mother. She was calling *me*. I knew *what* she wanted. And I knew that as far as my mother was concerned, obedience was either *immediate* or it was not obedience.

“**Today, if you will hear His voice,**” pleads the psalmist. When God speaks, you know He is *speaking to you*. And as far as He is concerned, obedience is either immediate or it is not obedience at all.

Finally, note *the particular sound of this call*. People often hide their disobedience behind the skirts of feigned ignorance. “I didn’t know what the Lord wanted me to do.” Our faith must come to the level of maturity that accepts that God holds us accountable for all our decisions. Sufficient knowledge of His will is always available so that we can respond appropriately.

The “**voice**” to which the psalmist refers is not some muffled, indistinguishable sound. It is the clarion call of God. As a friend of mine once said, “There are times when I *think* God is speaking to me. But when God really speaks to me, I *know* it is God who is speaking!” Again, God is a clear communicator.

Our Master is calling us to pray and to persevere in prayer. He may be addressing other issues in our lives as well. Perhaps the issue is our devotional life—the necessity of spending time regularly in His presence. Maybe it has to do with some breach of personal or moral integrity. It could be that He is addressing the matter of our stewardship. Or He might be asking us to make adjustments in our relationships with others in our homes, in our neighborhoods, at church, or at work. Whatever the particular situation, the Master is calling us. **Will we harden our hearts, or will we obey Him?**