

# The Sound of His Voice

Read [Matthew 6:9-13](#)

## *The Sound of His Voice* (from [1 Kings 19:1-18](#))

In the 1990s *The Associated Press* carried the story of a group of people who traveled from Texas to Louisiana—naked! There were twenty of them, all related, traveling from the small town of Floydada, in the Texas Panhandle. They started out in several cars, but by the time they reached Vinton, Louisiana, they were all in one 1990 Pontiac Grand Am.

When they attracted the attention of police in Vinton, they tried to flee. They sped down Vinton's main street, but hit a tree at a baseball park at the end of town. Fifteen adults (as old as sixty-three) piled out of the car, and five children (as young as one) came out of the trunk. And they were all completely naked.

Why were they naked? They said they were following God's instructions. "The Lord told them to get rid of all their belongings and go to Louisiana," Vinton's Police Chief Dennis Drouillard explained. "So they got rid of all their clothes and pocketbooks and wallets and identification and the license plate off their car and came to our gorgeous state."

Their car was totaled when they hit the tree, but there were no serious injuries. The driver was booked on various charges, and the others were released to a nearby church. The driver and his brother said they were Pentecostal preachers.

When it comes to receiving guidance from God, it is obvious that we can be misled. We can think God is telling us to do something, but we're really just following our own desires, or someone else's, or even the devil's.

One reason we make mistakes when it comes to receiving guidance from God is that we don't know the sound of his voice. We have not learned to recognize when God is speaking to us. What does his voice sound like? How will it make us feel when we hear it? What will it tell us to do? We need to know these things to receive guidance from him.

The prophet Elijah was given a lesson once in recognizing the sound of God's voice, a lesson we can learn from. Right after his greatest victory—right after God had answered from heaven and burned up his sacrifice in full view of all the people—Elijah had his greatest failure. The idolatrous Queen Jezebel sent word that she was going to kill him, and Elijah ran. Normal fear had something to do with it, but discouragement was also a factor. After the miracle of the fire from heaven, Elijah thought that surely revival would follow and his nation would turn to God. But it didn't happen. The idol-worshipping queen was still in power, and seeking his life. Elijah ran.

There's a side lesson for us in Elijah's experience here: After a victory, expect a counter-attack. The enemy doesn't like losing ground to us. He will send a temptation, a discouragement, or a trial to strike back. Don't let your guard down.

Elijah journeyed forty days into the desert. He came to Mount Sinai, where God had given the Ten Commandments to Moses, and went into a cave to spend the night. The Bible says:

**9** *And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

**10** *He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."*

**1 KINGS 19:9-10**

Can you hear his discouragement? He thinks he's the only true believer left, and that his ministry has failed.

*The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."*

**1 KINGS 19:11**

God tells Elijah to go outside and get ready to hear a word from him. Watch what happens:

**11** *Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.*

**12** *After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.*

**13** *When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.*

*Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

**1 KINGS 19:11B-13**

Elijah experienced three powerful natural phenomena in which he did *not* find God's presence or hear his voice. What were the three natural phenomena?

*A powerful wind (v.11), an earthquake (v.11), and a fire (v.12)*

After the three powerful natural phenomena, Elijah did hear God's voice. In what manner did God's voice come to him?

*In a gentle whisper (vv.12-13)*

Elijah experienced three powerful natural phenomena—a strong wind, an earthquake, and fire—in which he did *not* hear God's voice. But then "*came a gentle whisper*" (v.12), and Elijah in reverence pulled "*his cloak over his face*" (v.13)—because it was in

the “*gentle whisper*” (the “*still small voice*,” as the King James Version translates it) that Elijah did hear God’s voice.

What I want you to notice is that Elijah did not hear God’s voice in the spectacular displays of wind, fire, and earthquake—where he seems to have been looking for it—but in a gentle whisper.

And what did the gentle whisper tell Elijah?

**15** *The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram.*

**16** *Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.*

**1 KINGS 19:15–16**

The gentle whisper told Elijah to get back to doing what a prophet is supposed to be doing: anoint a new king over a foreign country, as well as a new king over Israel; and anoint a prophet to follow in Elijah’s footsteps. In other words, God gives him a fresh start, re-commissions him. He basically tells him to stop wallowing in self-pity and get back to living his life.

Then he has even better news for Elijah:

**“Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him.”**

**1 KINGS 19:18**

In other words, “Elijah, you’re far from the last true believer left. There are plenty of people still faithful to me in Israel. Your ministry has not been without impact.” The gentle whisper had good news for Elijah.

Elijah did not find God’s voice in the spectacular displays of wind, fire, and earthquake, and neither will we. We will find it in the gentle whisper.

It is vitally important that we learn to recognize the sound of God’s voice, or we can be terribly misled.

You may remember hearing about the “**Uganda Domsday Cult.**” Their official name was a mouthful: the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God. In the spring of 2000, they made headlines—because they decided to kill their followers.

The group was organized around a number of strict rules. The followers were told to give all their belongings to the group. They were forbidden to speak with each other except in religious services (because, one of their rules said, “conversations lead many into telling lies about their neighbors”). Smoking and drinking were forbidden, and AIDS was considered God’s punishment for drinking beer. Strict fasting and prayer were musts.

In spite of the stringent rules—or perhaps because of them—the cult had hundreds of followers, with branches stretching into Tanzania and Rwanda.

The leaders of the group not only drew up a list of tough requirements, they also made the mistake of prophesying that the world would end before January 1, 2000. When it didn't, they pushed back the forecast until the next January—but the damage had been done. Members began to lose confidence and to demand their money back.

So the leaders decided to get rid of them. They gathered them in the chapel at their main compound, nailed shut the doors and windows, and in an act of incomprehensible evil set the building on fire. Over 500 died. Then more bodies were found in mass graves at the cult's other compounds. Some had been stabbed, some strangled. Many were children. The death toll kept increasing until it surpassed the 913 who died in the 1978 Jonestown tragedy in Guyana, the previous record for deaths in a modern-day cult-related massacre.

Why did these poor people fall to this terrible tragedy? They did not know the sound of their Heavenly Father's voice. When leaders bullied, controlled, and used them in God's name, they didn't know any better. They didn't know the gentle whisper.

One of the ways to recognize the gentle whisper is by the effect it has on us. Consider again the effect God's word had on Elijah:

- It encouraged Elijah to consider his ways. God asked him, ***“What are you doing here, Elijah?”*** ([1 Kings 19:9](#)). God's word will correct us without condemning us.
- It gave Elijah new direction. God told him to go anoint two men as kings over their respective lands, and another man as a prophet to succeed Elijah. God's word will give us light for our path, and show us the next step to take.
- It gave Elijah hope. ***“Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel ... whose knees have not bowed down to Baal....”*** ([1 Kings 19:18](#)). God revealed to Elijah that the situation was not as bad as he thought: God was in control. God's word will give us hope as well—the confidence that God is going to work things out for us if we continue to follow him.

It is possible to be misled when it comes to receiving guidance from God. Overzealous preachers have been misled. Terrorists who blow up others in God's name are obviously misled. The naïve who follow controlling cults are misled. We will protect ourselves against deception if we'll learn to recognize the sound of God's voice—the gentle whisper that corrects, directs, and gives us hope.