

Why We Don't Recognize God

Many of us, being Coptic Christians, have had the luxury of growing up surrounded by people whose main concern is ensuring our salvation. Our parents baptized us and brought us to liturgy every week. We grew up in Sunday school, hymn, and diaconate classes. We learned how to properly read the Bible, how to pray, the rites of the church, and how to live and survive in this world as a Christian. Every aspect of our lives since we were only a few months old has revolved around learning to understand God and building a relationship with Him. So why do so many of us feel as if we can not recognize the words of God and that we don't recognize His presence? How does one who has God the Pantocrator abiding in him at the time of communion, not be able to feel His presence? How does one who identifies themselves as a child of God, the body of Christ not be able to understand His person?

God is always there. He is constantly unceasingly talking to us, trying to get our attention. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." - Revelation 3:20 Why then can we not hear Him? I'll describe to you a situation that we are all probably familiar with. You're in your room, on your phone, and you hear your mom calling you. Immediately you are able to recognize who is calling you. Not only do we know who is calling us, sometimes we are able - just by the tone of their voice - to know what mood they are in, or what they need from us. However, we can be in the mall, hear our name be called, and not react at all assuming someone else with the same name is being called. The reason we are so reactive to our mother's voice and not to strangers' voices is simply because we are willingly and constantly in the presence of our mothers. Since we are always around them and have heard them call our names so many times and in so many different situations we are so sensitive to their voice when we hear it. If we choose to always be in the presence of God, we will be much more sensitive to His voice. However, as I mentioned before, most of us grew up in the church, always surrounded by the "presence" of God. Nonetheless, without fail, the question "how do I hear God's voice in my life" is in every retreat, and in every Q&A session. We can go to church, we can place ourselves in His presence but *still* not recognize His voice. If we did not spend quality and intimate time with our mothers would we still be able to recognize their voice as quickly and accurately?

There is a story in 1 Kings where God is speaking to Elijah. He tells him to "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." 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. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a *gentle whisper*." - 1 Kings 19:11-12. God's voice is soft, it is calm, it can not be heard in the midst of other sounds. So regardless of how many liturgies we have attended, how many tasbehas we have prayed, how many sermons we have listened to, if *we* ourselves are

not spending this imperative one on one time with God in silence and stillness we *will not* hear His voice. Our God is a jealous God. When we spend time with God, he wants our full attention, our body, and our thoughts. When we do this we experience God in a way we have never experienced him before. Most of us can pinpoint times in our lives where we have read a prayer that they have prayed numerous times and they feel as if this is the first time they are reading it.

A story in Luke 5 perfectly explains this phenomenon. "He [Christ] got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then He sat down and taught the people from the boat. When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break." - Luke 5:3-6 God told Peter to launch out into the deep, just as God wants us to separate ourselves from the "multitude" and launch out alone with Him. However, Peter claims that he has worked all night and caught nothing. Just as we all complain about how we spend hours in church attending and praying, and feel as if we have benefited or "caught" nothing. However, when Peter obeys and launches out into the deep, he catches such a large number of fish that their nets were breaking. God wants us when we pray to "Go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." - Matthew 6:6 We *must* be serious in our spiritual lives, we *need* to give God His due time. When we do this we will have a relationship with God the same way saints had a relationship with Him. We will be exceedingly sensitive to His voice. May God give us all the grace and seriousness to seek him diligently.

"I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me." - Proverbs 8:17