

*Learning to Discern
His Still, Small Voice*

FAINT
Whispers

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TAMMY LYONS
WILKINSON

REDEMPTION 
PRESS

DEDICATION

To every person who has asked me, “How can I hear the voice of God?” I pray you develop a hunger and a thirst for His Word and His “voice” as you have never experienced before. As you seek God, I pray your relationship with Him will be strengthened and deepened.

God took a simple act of kindness and a viral video to spark a conversation. Without those events, this book would not exist. Thank you to each one of you who liked, commented, or shared the video.

My God, I pray I have fulfilled your Scripture in Psalm 45:1: “My tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.” I pray you would anoint this book and use it to the furtherance of your kingdom.

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FOREWORD

Her voice.

There is no mistaking the voice of Tammy Wilkinson. If you close your eyes and listen to her speak, you may dare venture to say that she is a bubbly ten-year-old, ponytail-swinging, hand-gesture-flying little girl from “somewhere mid-America.”

But open your eyes and to your delight and surprise, you will find that all her contagious, childlike bubbli-ness resides deep within an electric-blue-eyed, Jesus-lov-
ing, people-serving, heart-surrendered mature woman of God.

I was near dozing off on my couch one afternoon, when out of the blue, I heard my friend Tammy’s voice coming from my child’s cell phone while she was scroll-
ing through several social media videos. I flew up from my pillow, shouting, “Wait a minute! I know *that* voice. Play that video again!”

And as the video replayed Tammy’s now Face-
book-sensation video, “A Homeless Man, Chicken,
and a Banana,” I smiled, watching my friend unveil her

heart-wrenching story of listening to God as He prompted her to feed a homeless man. I was amazed at her transparency, watching tears stream from her face as she shared her story. And I counted; not just one million, not even five million, but twelve million viewers were listening to her story.

Without a moment's hesitation, I leaped from my couch, grabbed my cell phone, and called her. Before she could even answer the phone with her usual "Hello, sunshine!" salutation, I blurted out, "Remember a few years ago, when I told you at our Nashville women's retreat that God had a ministry for you and that you would be speaking before thousands? Girl! This is *it!* It's here! I'm sitting here watching your video! Wow!"

Tammy's response was the same as always, "God is *awesome.*"

Is it any wonder that the remaining hour and a half of our conversation sounded like two barnyard turkeys gobbling simultaneously from excitement?

Yes, God *is* awesome. And isn't it awesome how He has led you to this book? Like the homeless man in Tammy's story, God has a special word for you today too.

Sheri Thrower

Author of *My Will Be Done* and *Miracles in Room 107*

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INTRODUCTION

On December 14, 2016, I posted my first-ever Facebook Live video. I did not know it then, but my life would be forever changed. Posting that video was a simple act of obedience. God spoke, I heard, and I obeyed. Nothing more and nothing less. But God chose to take that simple act and magnify it in a way in which my mind could never have conceived! In just twenty-four hours, the video was viewed over eight million times, garnering the attention of news and radio personalities as well as movers and shakers such as Reba McEntire, Marcus Stanley, Taye Diggs, and Todd Chrisley.

It wasn't just the big names who heard and responded—after all, I'm not a big name; I'm a person just like you. And people just like us responded too.

I received messages from all over the world. Those messages ranged from a simple but heartfelt thank you to the sharing of a personal story of homelessness.

Three individuals shared personal and tragic stories. All three told me they had chosen the very day the video posted as the day on which they would end their lives.

Because they saw the love of Christ for a homeless man, they chose instead to seek out God's love.

My heart was overwhelmed with what was happening.

What *was* God doing?

Over the course of the following weeks as I read and studied, God began to reveal a common thread woven among the comments and personal messages pouring in through Facebook. Many people—maybe you were one of them—asked a simple question. “How do you hear the voice of God? You seem so sure it was Him, but how do you really know it was Jesus?”

My answer, which seemed very simple to me at the time, was, “My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” That’s John 10:27, and it became my standard answer. I did not know how else to explain it. For me, it was just that easy.

When I recorded the Facebook Live video, I’d had a relationship with Christ for twenty-two years. It had become second nature for me to recognize that voice, and I had learned to trust and obey it.

I learned in the days, weeks, and months that followed that not everyone understood what I was talking about when I spoke of recognizing God’s voice. Many genuinely wanted to get to know Jesus the way I did.

It’s my desire that you hear from Him too. I’d like to make learning to hear His voice easy for you. In the following pages, I hope to lead you in such a way that you find an answer to the question, “How do I hear the voice of God?” In John 10:27, Jesus refers to us as sheep

INTRODUCTION

who know His voice. I pray that as you read this book, you'll begin to understand that God does still talk to His people, but not all hear Him the same way.

I will show you many of the ways God's people hear His voice. I desire that you, too, find a deeper relationship with Jesus and the reassurance that comes from recognizing His voice.

I will be sharing stories from Ray Carman, a shepherd from the hills of Tennessee. He has given me much insight into the life of his flock as it compares to the everyday life of a Christian. I am excited to share his stories with you, with his permission, as they relate to hearing the voice of our Father.

Before you begin, I would ask that first you pray and invite the Lord Jesus to open your heart and your mind to receive whatever He would like to share with you, whatever He would have you receive from the words of this book.

Father God, I thank you for this journey, and I thank you for choosing me to help others hear your voice. Without you, I am nothing. With you, I can be everything you have created me to be. Amen.

 ONE 

HE CHOSE ME: A LOOK AT THE HEART

In one moment, my life changed forever.

There was nothing extraordinary about the beginning of that day, nothing to hint that anything was going to be different. It was just another cold, blustery December day in New Castle, Indiana. The temperature hovered somewhere around twenty degrees, and there was about two inches of snow on the ground.

I shivered and pulled my coat closer as I slid into my car at the office to drive to the grocery store and pick up some gift cards. As I made my way into the store early that afternoon, I noticed a homeless man in a large overcoat huddled on a bench between the two sets of doors, obviously trying to keep warm, an overstuffed backpack by his side. He seemed to be in his midfifties and had dusky skin and rough hands with deep grooves.

We had no interpersonal exchange. I didn't even make eye contact with this man. I was focused on buying the gift cards and getting back to work.

As I walked past him and made my way to the second set of doors, I heard the voice of Jesus say, *He loves bananas.*

My internal reaction was simply, *Okay*, and I immediately headed to the produce department to pick up a few bananas for the man.

He probably needs some protein. Maybe I should get him something else to put in his backpack for later. I didn't question whether it was God's voice telling me to do this.

I just picked up a few more items that would be easily stored in his backpack and would not spoil.

I Said No

Although I had clearly heard the voice of Jesus telling me that the man loved bananas, the mother and cook in me begin to think, *That is just not enough. I am going to go over to the deli and pick up some warm fried chicken.*

Again, the voice of Jesus said, *I did not ask you to get him fried chicken.*

I am sure the look on my face was not pretty! It was likely a look of confusion, perhaps even a grimace. I do not like to be told no. Who does? I was helping this man!

I picked out the gift cards I had come to get and was walking toward the register when that gnawing thought came once again: *But I want to go get him some fried chicken. It is cold outside, and I just want to put some warm food in his belly.*

Again came the gentle voice of Jesus. *I did not ask you to get him chicken.*

Was Jesus saying no to me helping someone? I had never expected that! But He clearly had, and more than once. Still, I was wrestling with the thought. *I felt the need to put something warm in his belly.*

God did not tell me to do it. That was the issue. I was entertaining my own thoughts, wants, and wishes for this man. Why was I being told no to what I thought were perfectly reasonable actions? I couldn't understand it.

At the checkout, I paid for my items and went to deliver the bananas and other little food items to the homeless man. I still felt confused about why I couldn't buy the fried chicken. As I exited the first door, I made eye contact and greeted the man with a smile and asked, "You trying to keep warm, buddy?"

The man barely looked up at me but replied, "Yes, ma'am."

I extended my little bag of goodies to him and said, "May God bless you. Merry Christmas."

He reached his weather-worn hand out and gently took the bag.

As I began to walk away, another voice spoke up from behind me. A lady said, "Well, today must be your lucky day."

I turned to watch as the man looked up at her and tilted his head.

"You see," the woman continued, "I got you some fried chicken. It's still warm, and there are some napkins in there for you too."

My heart nearly leaped out of my chest! Hot tears instantly streamed down my cold cheeks as the sudden realization hit me: I was standing in the presence of my Jesus. Had He spoken to this woman the same way He had spoken to me?

It Was Just Bananas

I rushed to the car. After I pulled the door closed, I let the tears—which came from the deepest parts of me—stream down my face. Part of me wanted to get back out and rush back to the woman I did not know, grab her by the shoulders, spin her around, and scream, “Do you know what just happened? I mean, seriously, do you really know what just happened?”

But then I thought, *She'll see my tear-stained cheeks, think I've lost my mind, and wonder what on earth I am screaming about.* So instead, I sat and cried, and then I began praising God.

A few minutes later, I took my phone out, thinking, *I'll just tell my friends about this encounter with Christ. They have to know just exactly how real He is!*

I opened my Facebook account and saw the little prompt asking, “What’s on your mind, Tammy?”

Well, Facebook, let me just tell you.

I began typing the incident out, pausing to wipe away the tears before continuing. I wrote a bit, wiped some more tears, and continued writing. Then I went back and reread the entire post and fixed all the typos. Just as I went to hit send, without any warning, the entire message was gone.

For the second time in just a few short minutes, I heard the voice of Jesus. This time He said, *No, not today. Today you go live.*

What?

Never having gone live on Facebook, I wasn’t even sure how to do it, but I had to get this story out to my

friends. And, of course, I wanted to obey. I wanted everyone to know how real Jesus is, how He is always with us at every moment. I sat in my car with tears still rolling down my cheeks and figured out how to go live. Then I told the story of a homeless man, me, some bananas, and a lady with fried chicken, the tears still streaming down my face.



That's the message millions saw December 14, 2016.

The next twenty-four hours were a blur. God began using this simple situation to speak to millions through the Facebook Live video. And people were responding! One year later, this video had been viewed over 100 million times, and people were still sending me messages.

But just six days after the video went viral, I stood in the shower at my momma's house in Florida asking God, "What are you doing here?" I mean, seriously, it was just bananas, and things seem to have gone—just bananas! Why was this simple act getting so much attention?

As I stood with the warm water running over my face, I said, "God, you have to be up to something. I simply responded to what you told me. I bought bananas, and then I heeded your words when you told me not to buy the fried chicken. This simple act is not worthy of such a massive outpouring from people. You must have something more in store. What are you trying to tell me, Lord? What are you trying to show me? How will you use this story to speak to so many others? What is it that you

are trying to say to me—to us—that we are not hearing or understanding?”

Attention, Please

God often speaks to me in the most inopportune situations and times, because He then has my attention. In the shower, I can't run and hide from what He is trying to talk to me about. As I stood there in my momma's shower, with a head full of shampoo suds and my eyes closed tight, God gave me a vision.

I saw a little boy, perhaps about third-grade age, who had been chosen to sing the big solo in the Christmas pageant at school. I could see him waiting his turn with his teacher in the wing of the auditorium. As he stood there looking to the right, he saw his classmates singing their little hearts out. They performed all the proper motions to match the songs. Then he looked to the left toward the audience, and he saw the parents clapping, smiling, and snapping pictures of their favorite little performer. Then glancing back to the stage, he watched as his friends performed the tasks they had been given. One was the star shining bright, another, the tree standing tall and straight; others played the roles of the animals gathering around a makeshift manger where third graders, acting as Mary and Joseph, sat.

Suddenly, the stage went dark, and a single, bright spotlight took center stage. The teacher put her hands on the shoulders of the little boy waiting in the wings, leaned down, and whispered in his ear, “Okay, buddy, it's your turn. Go on out there!”

He stood, seemingly paralyzed. He looked back at his teacher and muttered, “Uh-uh, I can’t go out there.”

“Come on, buddy; you got this,” she said. “We have practiced and rehearsed it. You got this!”

Frozen in fear, he shook his head and stuttered, “Uh, I can’t do this. I . . . I can’t go out there.”

His teacher once again affirmed him, reminding him of the countless hours they’d worked together to commit the song to memory that he had so effortlessly sung in rehearsal. But he still stood there, trembling, completely overcome by fear, and violently shaking his head no and saying, “There is no way I can go out there.”

Again, she took him by the shoulders, bent down, looked him square in the eyes, and for the final time, she said to him, “You got this!” Without warning, she thrust him out onto the stage, right in the middle of the spotlight, and there he stood.

There in the shower when I was soaking and wet and unable to run, God began to speak to me.

Now that I have thrown you out into the spotlight, you will either choose to do what I have created and called you to do, or you will choose to turn your back and walk away, and you will never come back to me. What will the choice be, my child?

Talk about getting my attention. I was finally ready to listen and, more importantly, to obey.

As my tears pouring down my face mingled with the water from the shower, I stretched out my hands in praise. “Yes, Lord, I will go, and I will do whatever you are asking of me. I will stop running from this calling and

allow you to guide me in the direction you would have me to go.”

I had known for years what that calling was, but I never felt worthy of such a calling. I always felt like, *Who am I, Lord?*

Who Am I, Lord?

For years, I had ignored this calling on my life. I should have won awards for the speed with which I ran in the opposite direction!

My calling is to speak and to write, to offer encouragement to those who feel broken and as if they are damaged goods.

My answer to God’s call had always been, “Who am I, Lord? What makes you think anyone would ever listen to anything I have to say or to offer?”

At times in my life, I teetered on the edge of accepting that call, and then the enemy would swoop in. Before I knew it, I would take on that feeling of worthlessness once again and back away.

Perhaps you too have been there. Perhaps there is something you have felt God ask of you, and yet you have not stepped out in faith to answer that call.

What is He is asking of you today? Will you surrender to His call?

The Scripture that always comes to mind during times like this is Proverbs 3:5–6 (NKJV). “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways, acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your path.” I have recited this Scripture more

times than I can count but often out of head knowledge, not heart knowledge. There is a huge difference between the two.

Perhaps you are reading this and feel a little nudge in your gut. Are you wondering, questioning even, "Is this God urging me to act?" You may be scared, and you don't want to look foolish if it turns out not to be Him tugging at your heart.

We'll be looking in the chapters ahead at how to have a better understanding of just how our Father speaks to us, how He gets our attention. It is not always a booming and thunderous voice from heaven, but it is all too often just a faint whisper. Sometimes it is not even directly to us but through a messenger He sends to us. Sometimes it is a confirmation delivered as we hide His Word in our hearts.

What has God placed on your heart to do? Have you begun or completed the task? Are you still running from it like I was? I urge you, don't make God create a spotlight moment to get your attention.

Proverbs 19:21 tells us, "Many are the plans of a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." I encourage you to lay aside your fears of inadequacy and allow God's purpose to prevail in your life. God has been preparing you your entire life to fulfill your destiny in Him.

You may not understand it, but I assure you, you are far readier than you realize. Put your trembling hand in His and have faith that whatever it is, He will see you through it to completion.

It helps to remember that according to God's Word in John 15:16, He chose you to complete the task He has called you to. We are not here by happenstance. We are here because God chose us!

When I really think about that, it blows my mind. Out of all the other people on this whole planet, God chose *me*. And He chose *you* too.

How Do You Know?

I have been asked repeatedly, "How did you know it was Jesus speaking to you?" Well, I just knew.

Have you ever been in a setting where you and your child were separated from one another? You set about looking for her among the throng of people, and suddenly you heard that cry of distress, "Mom?" You could be in a room of a hundred kids all screaming for their mothers, but you know and recognize your child's voice among all the rest.

You can recognize your child's voice because you are the momma, and you know your child. You know that fevered pitch her voice reaches when she is scared. You even know the difference between her various cries at night. After you put your child to bed, and you're sitting in the living room, relaxing, if you hear a cry from down the hall, you take a moment and analyze the cry. Is it an I'm-scared-of-the-dark cry or an I-need-a-drink-of-water cry? Perhaps it is an I'm-in-pain cry. Whatever the cry, you typically know the need before you even enter the bedroom. How? Because you know your child; you have

spent so much time with her that you know the meaning of the very sounds she utters.

That is exactly how it is with me and Jesus. I have spent so much time hiding His Word in my heart, praying to Him, and allowing Him to speak to me, that our relationship has reached a level of intimacy and trust. When He speaks to me, I just know. He longs to be that intimate with all His children, and that means you too.

Chosen

God has chosen us just as He chose David on the day he was called in from the field while tending his sheep. In 1 Samuel 16:10–13, we read how the prophet Samuel had checked out David's seven brothers then asked, "Is there anyone else?" Jesse, David's father, said, "Yes, there is. He is the youngest, and he is out in the field tending the flock."

As soon as David came in, God spoke to Samuel and told him: "Rise and anoint him; this is the one." Samuel then took a horn of oil and anointed David, and "from that day, the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David."

I believe that in the same way God chose and anointed David, He will anoint His chosen here on earth today. We, as a body of believers, need only to position ourselves to be used of God, to be anointed for His purpose. So let's lift one another up in prayer and urge each other on in the journey toward heaven.

Favorites

I have been getting acquainted via the internet with the stories of a man named Ray Carmen, who is a shepherd and posts on Facebook as “Enjoy the Shepherd.” He tells of traveling to another state to speak to a youth camp about the heart of a shepherd. After receiving a huge welcome, he said it was obvious that the teens had studied him and his flock in preparation for the event.

Ray asked them, “What is a shepherd?” and “What are the names of some of my sheep?” When he asked, “Which one of my sheep do I love the most?” the answer, of course, was, “All of them.”

The Bible says we’re like sheep. Just as a shepherd loves his sheep, God loves us all but uses those who trust the Shepherd with all their hearts.

When God chose David to be the king to lead his people, He did not pick the strongest, the best looking, or even the smartest man. God wasn’t looking for a leader who people considered wise or overly attractive. God looked at the heart of the would-be king. He wanted a heart that trusted Him fully, one that would follow Him no matter where He led.

I want to be one who trusts God with all my heart.

The day I bought the bananas, I was trusting my Good Shepherd and His instructions to me, and it made all the difference.

Scripture Focus

You did not choose me, but I chose you
and appointed you so that you might go

HE CHOSE ME: A LOOK AT THE HEART

and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. (John 15:16)

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. (Psalm 25:5)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5–6)

Challenge

I challenge you to simply whisper, “Yes, Lord.”

Challenge Accepted

What do you feel God is asking you to do that you have not yet done?

Why have you not stepped out in faith and completed the task?

What steps will you take this week to fulfill God’s request?

Will You Pray with Me?

Father God, today I surrender to your complete will for my life. Go before me and guide my steps so I can complete this

task in a way that will bring honor and glory to you. In Jesus's name, amen.