

# — LISTEN FOR — HIS VOICE

AND OTHER ESSAYS BY JOE R. BARNETT

**THE CHRISTIAN**  
**Appeal**

## Preface



John Gulley

**A**nyone serious about seeking God's will discovers that what we really need is our Lord's help to *do* the part we already know. In the same vein, philosopher and author Dallas Willard has written, "Our failure to hear His [God's] voice when we want to is due to the fact that we do not in general want to hear it, that we want it only when we think we need it." In this issue, Dr. Joe R. Barnett ably urges us to center always on our Lord and "Listen for His Voice."

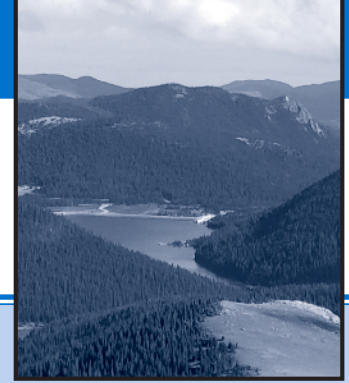
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## Praise God Who Has BLESSED US



Curtis Shelburne

**P**raise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

\* The Apostle Paul  
Ephesians 1

Curtis Shelburne



# listen for his VOICE

**THEY HAD EXPECTED so much and walked away with so little. They had thought that by now they would be cabinet members in a new administration, wrecking Rome's rule and restoring Israel's independence. Instead, they were jobless, and Rome was having her way.**

With heavy hearts and sluggish steps, they had come home to Galilee. "I'm going fishing," Peter said. Six of his pals said, "We're going with you."

Fishing had been their occupation before they joined Jesus' crew. That's what they were doing the day he showed up and said, "Follow me." And they did—they berthed their boat, abandoned their nets, and became his disciples. He taught them, inspired them, and seeded their dream for a never-ending kingdom.

Never-ending? The campaign collapsed before the kingdom commenced! He was arrested, convicted—and now he was dead.

So, they unpacked their nets, boarded their boat, and started rowing. Out in familiar water, they tossed the net. Bad throw. They hadn't fished for three years and were

**"THE CAMPAIGN COLLAPSED BEFORE THE KINGDOM COMMENCED! AND NOW JESUS WAS DEAD."**

out of practice. When they finally got the hang of it, they threw it over and over, all night long, without netting a single fish. Not only had their hopes for position and power been dashed, they'd even lost their job skills.

Peter looked at John. "Did you say something?" "No." "James?"

“No.”

“Nathanael?”

“Wasn’t me.”

Cupping a hand behind his ear, John said, “Shh. Listen! Hear that voice? It’s coming from the beach.”

“IS THE LORD TELLING YOU TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENTLY? WHAT DOES HE WANT YOU TO CHANGE?”

“Throw out your net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you’ll get plenty of fish,” said the voice.

John’s stomach turned flips! He could barely breathe. He was having a flashback: it was as vivid as if it had happened yesterday, though it had occurred three years ago. They had fished all night and come back with an empty boat. They were

putting away their nets when Jesus walked by and said, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” So they did—and caught so many fish their nets started ripping.

John recognized the familiar voice coming from the beach.

“It is the Lord!” he said.

And sure enough, it was!

Does this have a familiar feel? Have I caught you at a time when you’re feeling down? Disappointed because things haven’t worked out the way you hoped they would? Are you tempted to go back to your old life—fishing for whatever it was you fished for before you met him?

Listen for his voice. Is he telling you to throw your net on the other side of the boat—telling you to do something different than what you’ve been doing? What do you

think he wants you to do differently? What does he want you to change?

Listen for his voice.



Curtis Shelburne



# getting more than you **ASKED FOR**

**I HAVE NEVER MET Sue, but her letter made me wish I had. She had reason to be bitter but wasn't.**

**Sue wanted children—four of them. Instead, in her first six years of marriage, she had four miscarriages. The fifth pregnancy was problem-free. Sue was going to have this baby!**

And she did. Baby Robby was born. With Down syndrome.

The doctor was frank: Robby would never be able to feed himself, tie his shoes, or go to school. Sue sat by Robby's crib and sobbed for hours.

Her husband went for takeout and never returned—

heartbreak times two: disabled baby and deserter husband.

Lots of rough days came. But so did good ones. Robby had cognitive and physical limitations, but contrary to the doctor's prognosis, he fed himself, tied his shoes, and went to school. And he had a beautifully sweet disposition.

"It would have been nice," Sue wrote, "having normal children and a husband

by my side as they grew up and I grew old. I didn't get the life I'd hoped for, but I can tell you without reservation that if I could trade the life I have for the one I thought I wanted,

**"AGONY MAY SEEM TO LAST FOREVER, BUT THE ROAD WILL TURN, AND THE SCENERY WILL CHANGE."**

I'd pass. I wouldn't trade a single day I've had with Robby for a lifetime of my youthful dreams. God knew what Robby needed—me. And he knew what I needed—Robby. He has given me more than I could have ever imagined."

Like Sue, you may have traveled seemingly endless stretches of rough road. But though it seems the agony will last forever, it won't. One

of these days, the road will turn, and the scenery will change.

The apostle Paul wrote: “[God] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine”

“DON'T GET BENT OUT OF SHAPE WHEN YOU THINK GOD ISN'T ANSWERING YOUR PRAYER. KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR HIS 'MORE.'”

(Ephesians 3:20).

Warning: the word in that sentence that may give you the most trouble is “more.” God’s “more” may be a welcomed add-on to your request. Or maybe not. His “more” may be something different than what you asked for—perhaps so different that you can only see it as rejection.

Paul was writing out of personal experience. God’s

answers to his prayers included more than he had asked for—a “more” that probably puzzled and disappointed him. Some of his plans and prayers seemed to dead-end in defeat.

For instance, Paul planned to preach in Asia, but the Holy Spirit vetoed it (Acts 16:6). So, he altered his plan. He would turn

north to Asia Minor. But that got a thumbs down, too (Acts 16:7). He had run out of land. There was nowhere else to go. Or was there?

As he stood at the edge of the Aegean Sea, two hundred miles of water separated him from the opposite shore. Even so, the call became clear to him: go to Europe. That wasn’t remotely what he had planned on or prayed for.

But it worked out well—he planted a string of churches there that you’ve heard of: Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth. It worked out well for us, too, since the gospel came from Europe to America.

There was another trip on Paul’s prayer list: he wanted to go to Rome. The answer to that prayer was delayed for years. While he waited, Paul wrote to his sisters and brothers in Rome. If he had forked over his credit card and booked passage the first time he talked to his travel agent, that letter—the book of Romans—would never have been written.

There’s still “more” to the story. When God finally answered Paul’s prayer by getting him a ticket on a boat to Rome, it wasn’t in a First Class cabin; it was in police custody. When he got to Rome, he didn’t go to church,

he went to jail: more of God’s “more,” for Paul spent his two-year sentence writing letters. Copies of those letters—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon—are likely within reach of where you are sitting.

If there happens to be a place in heaven where God displays your prayers alongside his answers, I bet you’ll run your eye down the list, occasionally pause, and say, “So that’s how he answered that prayer that I didn’t think had been heard. It’s immeasurably more than I asked for or imagined!”

Don’t get bent out of shape when you think God isn’t answering your prayer. Keep an eye out for his “more.”

Will God give you what you ask for? Maybe more.



# be faithful REGARDLESS

**THE WORLD'S TALLEST statue of an American hero is at the southern edge of Huntsville, Texas—a dazzling 77-foot-tall image of Sam Houston, composed of thirty tons of concrete and steel.**

**It is impressive but nowhere near as imposing as Nebuchadnezzar's statue on the plain of Dura in Babylon,**

which trumped Houston's monument in both size and materials. Nebuchadnezzar's statue was 90-foot-tall, besting Sam Houston's by 13 feet. And Houston's concrete and steel couldn't hold a candle to Nebuchadnezzar's solid gold.

Travelers stop by the side of the road to gawk at Sam. They look up, but they don't bow down. They stare, but they don't worship.

That wouldn't be good enough for Nebuchadnezzar. He christened his ego-serving shrine with a doozy of a dedication ceremony.

*"He ordered all the important leaders in the province, everybody who*

*was anybody, to the dedication ceremony of the statue. They all came for the dedication, all the important people, and took their places before the statue that*

**"SOMETIMES GOD RESCUES, AND SOMETIMES HE DOESN'T, BUT HE ALWAYS HONORS FAITHFULNESS."**

*Nebuchadnezzar had erected.*

*A herald then proclaimed in a loud voice: 'Attention, everyone! Every race, color, and creed, listen! When you hear the band strike up—all the trumpets and trombones, the tubas and baritones, the drums and cymbals—fall to your knees*

*and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Anyone who does not kneel and worship shall be thrown immediately into a roaring furnace”*

**“IF GOD RESCUES YOU FROM PROBLEMS, BE FAITHFUL. IF HE DOESN'T, STILL BE FAITHFUL.”**

*(Daniel 3:2–6, The Message).*

Three Jewish teenagers—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—refused to bend the knee to this gold giant. Some Jew-haters tattled to the king, and he was furious! He summoned the three and gave them an ultimatum: worship my statue or burn in my furnace.

They gave him their answer:

*“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it . . . But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up”*  
(Daniel 3:17–18).

That did it! Up went the heat, and in went Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

“One, two, three, four.” Rubbing his eyes, King Nebuchadnezzar counted again.

“One, two, three—*four!*” “Didn’t we throw three men into the furnace?” he asked.

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Well, look! I see *four*

men, unbound, walking around in the fire, and they aren’t even hurt by the flames!”

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, come out!” he shouted. Not a hair of their heads was singed, their clothes were unscorched, and they didn’t even smell of smoke! (Daniel 3:24–27).

They weren’t in the furnace alone: “One, two, three—*four!*” the king counted. “And the fourth looks like a god!”

Faithful regardless! “If God rescues us, we won’t bow to the image,” they said. “And if God doesn’t rescue us, we still won’t bow to the image.”

Sometimes God rescues; sometimes he doesn’t. Hebrews 11:33–34 names people of faith who were rescued: they conquered kingdoms,

shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of flames, escaped the sword, were powerful in battle. Then, without a break, verses 35–38 cite people of faith who were not rescued: they were tortured, flogged, chained, put in prison, stoned, sawed in two, persecuted, mistreated.

If God rescues you from problems, be faithful. If he doesn’t, still be faithful. God honors faithfulness. Now or later.





# you are an ORIGINAL

**DR. BATSELL Barrett Baxter**  
once told me about a cute kid  
who edged in next to him one  
Sunday after his sermon and  
whispered, “I wisht I wuz you!”

It’s not just kid stuff. Many  
adults have enviously eyed  
someone who seemed to have  
it all and thought, “I wish I was  
you!”

For some reason, which

escapes me, movie stars  
and sports celebrities are  
often idolized.

Don’t misunderstand.  
These high-profile  
superstars are  
important—not because  
of their talent  
for mimicking  
someone they’re  
not, and not  
because of their  
ability to run,  
throw, catch,  
kick, shoot,  
jump, or skate. They’re  
important because God  
made them and loves  
them.

You are important for  
the same reasons: God  
made you and loves  
you.

You are who God  
wants you to be. If he had  
wanted you to be Martin  
Luther, Meryl Streep, or  
Tom Brady, he could have  
pulled it off.

But he made you who  
he wanted you to be.  
There is no one else in  
the world like you. Never  
has been. Never will  
be. You are an original.  
One-of-a-kind. You’re the

**“YOU ARE THE ONLY  
YOU IN THE WORLD. GOD  
MADE YOU WHO YOU  
ARE, AND HE LOVES YOU  
AS YOU ARE.”**

only you in the world. He  
made you who you are,  
and he loves you as you  
are.

You are special. You  
occasionally encounter  
those who think they  
are more important than  
you—people who have  
an exaggerated sense of  
their importance. Do you  
ever cool your heels way  
past your appointment  
time? The implication is,

“My time is more valuable than yours. I’m more important than you.” Or, “I have a higher position than you.” Or, “I’m better-known than you.” Or, “I have more money than you.”

“THE EARLY CHURCH WOULDN’T HAVE SURVIVED WITHOUT ‘SECOND FIDDLES.’ NEITHER WILL TODAY’S.”

Don’t be intimidated into a feeling of insignificance or unimportance by such arrogance. Great people recognize the worth of all people.

The distinguished orchestra conductor, Leonard Bernstein, was once asked, “What is the most difficult instrument to play?” He answered, “Second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists,

but to find one who plays second chair with as much enthusiasm, now that’s a problem.”

Paul wouldn’t have gotten to first base without second fiddles.

He did his rookie preaching in Damascus.

Some radical Jews, irritated by his conversion, conspired to assassinate him.

They kept an eye on the city gates, determined to drop him in his tracks the minute he set foot outside Damascus. But a cadre of disciples did an end-run on them. At an obscure site on the city wall, they lowered Paul to the ground in a big basket. He hit the ground running, and you know the rest of the story.

Who were the members of this basket brigade? No one knows. Not a single name is recorded—just a bunch of second fiddles who saved the life of the man who became Christianity’s best-known spokesperson.

In the last chapter of Romans, Paul salutes some special people. He mentions twenty-seven by name, most of whom are mentioned nowhere else in the Bible. A bunch of second fiddles.

Do you consider yourself a second fiddle? It’s not a bad thing to be. The early church wouldn’t have survived without them. Neither will today’s church.

Measure your value by how you use your abilities, however small, rather than by comparison with others’ abilities, however large.

Let me say it again—there’s no one else in the world like you. Never has been. Never will be. You are an original. One-of-a-kind. You’re the only you in the world. He made you who you are, and he loves you as you are.

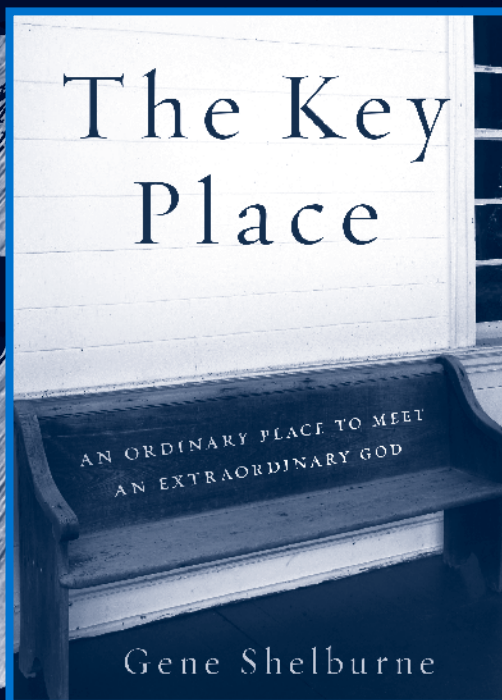


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