

## ***YOU ASKED FOR IT***

Part 4: How to Recognize God's Voice  
John 7:17

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Words of Encouragement Days 92-98



The Bible has much to say about the issues we deal with each and every day. **YOU ASKED FOR IT** is a series that looks at a few of those issues:

- **How to deal with stress**
- **Getting over what people think about me**
- **Learning to be who God wants me to be**
- **Recognizing God's voice**
- **Discovering my true identity in Jesus**

So what does the Bible say about us? It says we are created by God as complex, multifaceted, not easy to understand, and not easy to explain people. And with good reason! Layer upon layer, God made us unique. During this series, we'll take a deeper look at those complexities and **discover a sense** of who we were **made to be**.

**YOU ASKED FOR IT** sermon series is based on some of the most requested "How To" answers from God's Word for some of life's most perplexing issues.

**This Week's Memory Verse:**

***"A heart at peace gives life to the body,  
but envy rots the bones."  
Proverbs 14:30***

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 92

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." 1 Peter 3:15

### TELL IT LIKE IT IS

**TELLING** God that you want to share your faith might excite you. Or it might make you scared to death. Perhaps you are afraid your friends will reject you. Or that you don't know enough. Or that you'll mess up an incredibly important message.

No need to worry. Let's think about some things you should say—or not. Vote "yea" or "nay" on whether you should slip these statements in when you share your faith:

- (a) The reason you don't believe in Jesus is because you're really stupid.
- (b) Being a Christian means you have to walk, talk, act, dress, and doodle Christian slogans all over your school notebooks just like me.
- (c) My church is the only church any real Christian would go to.
- (d) I could tell you about Jesus, but the thought of spending eternity with you in heaven makes me gag.
- (e) Trusting Jesus will instantly take care of every problem in your life—including your bad breath.

Well, that covers a few things not to say. Actually, sometimes when we get nervous, messed-up words slip from our lips. But we don't need to be nervous. Without

being pushy or proud, we can confidently talk about Jesus with people who don't know him. Here are some helpful tips:

1. Get ready. You don't need to memorize the Bible for God to use you to share your faith. Yet you can keep learning, and each time you share your faith, you'll know more for the next time.
2. Don't feel threatened. You are representing Christ, so he won't leave you dangling alone. When you discuss the gospel - the good news about Jesus and a relationship with God - with your friends, God's power is at work in you.
3. Don't argue. Just share the gospel with your friend by quietly asking the Holy Spirit to guide you. Then let your caring attitude be what helps to convince your friend that your message is true.
4. Don't be afraid of questions. Your friend might have a million questions. If you can't answer a question, tell your friend you will find out more and give an answer at another time.

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, I want to share Jesus with the world around me. Please, give me the time to get ready and prepare, the guts to not feel threatened, and the engaging words to say and not to be afraid for fear is not from you. Thank you for the opportunities I will have to share Jesus with others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 93

*“They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord’s Supper and in prayer.” Acts 2:42*

### TAKE TWO STEPS

**WHEN** he was younger, Armani would often compare himself to others. Unfortunately, it didn’t matter who he compared himself to, he always fell short. He wasn’t as strong as William. He wasn’t as smart as Emmy. He didn’t live in as nice a house as Megan. He had nowhere near as many friends as Gabriel. Even though Armani thought long and hard, he couldn’t think of a single kind thing to say about himself.

One day Armani drew a self-portrait. He pictured himself with scraggly hair and crooked teeth. Big blemishes covered his face from chin to forehead, and a huge hairy mole topped off his nose. And in his picture, Armani was totally alone. At the bottom, he labeled his drawing, “The Total Loser.”

That was several years ago. Since then Armani has found Christian friends who like to study the Bible. They also just love being friends. Armani’s new friends have helped him recognize what he is really like. Armani has discovered that God sees him as a wonderful, gifted person, inside and out.

God has a simple two-step program for you to get his true view of you:

Step 1: Get into God’s Word. You spend all day long at school or on the job studying and reading books and reports, so the last thing you might want in your life is more study time. Yet if you want to uncover what God thinks of

you, your first step is to get into God’s Word. The Bible is God’s book of absolutely true facts about you.

Step 2: Get godly friends. God’s family is where we can learn to treat each other as lovable, valuable, and capable. Getting together with other believers is how we experience the truths of God’s Word day by day.

God wants to use his Word and other Christians to make us doubly sure we are loved, valued, and useful. There’s no better way to discover how God sees us than to dig into his Word. And there’s no better way to pound that truth home than to have caring believers remind us of how God sees us. It’s one thing to learn the truth about God and ourselves from the Bible or a sermon or a Sunday school lesson. The truth is even more real when we experience it through believing friends.

God wants you to grow more and more sure of who you really are, but it’s your job to put yourself in the right spot. He’s given you his Word to teach you and his people to reinforce that message. When you get those two things, you’ll get his view of you!

### TODAY’S PRAYER

Lord, thank you for the opportunity to study your word each day. Give me the time to learn more about you and the relationship I have with Jesus. Help me do what I need to do so I can grow in my understanding of who you say I am. Thank you for the godly friends you have given me who continue to be a great encouragement and help to me. Help me to be a good encouragement and help to others. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 94

*"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12*

### THE PEOPLE SOLUTION

**FOR** a few years, Ridge has been part of a performing arts group that shares the gospel in parks throughout the city. One day Ridge and several friends from his youth group finished performing mime in a park pavilion of a large city. They then had a chat with a nice-looking couple while Ridge explained that the whole point of the mime was to help people know that they need Jesus.

"So that's what you guys are here for," the woman responded. "Well, we don't need Jesus to solve our problems. We just need to come together. People are the real solution to the troubles facing the world."

Ridge had just bumped into a way of looking at the world that opposes the Bible, Christians, and the church. It's an idea called secular humanism, and it claims that human beings are so super powerful, we can solve all of the problems on our planet. At first that sounds smart. After all, we aren't looking to the dolphins, whales, baby seals, or endangered microscopic insects to save the world. And all of us—Christians and non-Christians alike—can work in ways that help people. But can we, as human beings, really solve all of the world's problems all by ourselves?

Perhaps you have spotted that this plan leaves God out. There are folks who argue God can't save the world because he doesn't exist. But solving our problems on our own is a fantasy which misses some major facts. Human history is jam-packed with examples that show we can't solve our own problems. Just think of people and groups

like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, the Khmer Rouge, Idi Amin, the KKK, and Osama bin Laden!

Some people believe the only hope we have for a better world is by eliminating all religions and trusting human brainpower to bring peace and happiness to the world. (When you hear about people working to remove any mention of God from school or public life—like the Pledge of Allegiance—this is the thinking that drives them. They take the idea of "separation of church and state" to an extreme.)

The apostle Peter stood and proclaimed that Jesus—not humankind—is the world's only hope for salvation. Of all the people on earth—including all of us working together—only Jesus has the power to save. Of course, as humans we need to do our part to erase war and famine, to fight disease and injustice, but in the end we can't rescue ourselves. We need Jesus!

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you that you have reminded me I don't have to solve my problems by myself. You came as the answer to any problem I will ever face or the world will ever face. Please guard my mind from ever thinking I can function without you. I am thankful you can help me learn how to place my trust in you and you alone. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 95

*“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”  
Luke 19:10*

### WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW

**AS** Paul left the movie theater with some friends from his swim team, he almost crashed into another group of friends—boys from church. When Paul said, "Hi," to his church buddies, they hit him with a look of disgust that felt like a punch in the face. Paul shrugged and kept walking, puzzling over the weird looks. They couldn't have been mad about the movie, he figured. They were in line to see the same one. The more he thought about it, the more sure he was that it had to be the people he was with at the movies.

As Christians we are called to make the health, happiness, and growth of anyone and everyone within our reach important to us. When it comes to showing agape love, the Bible says, “Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God’s law.” (Romans 13:8)

Christians who think it’s wrong to be friends with unbelievers point to James 4:4 which states, “Don’t you realize that friendship with this world makes you an enemy of God?” But think hard about this: That verse warns against accepting the world’s attitudes and actions, not being friends with the world’s people. For an example of how to be friends, we can look at Jesus. He spent so much time among unbelievers that he was mocked as a friend of sinners (see Luke 15:2). His openness to outcasts like Zacchaeus was all part of his mission to seek and save people who are lost—those who had not let Jesus find them and save them from sin (see Luke 19:10).

Jesus’ mission to save unbelievers gives us a huge clue about what’s right or wrong in the way we get along in the world. Here’s the test: If you can be friends with a non-Christian and help that person understand what it means to follow Christ, the relationship might be right. If, however, you get drawn into doing wrong things, you probably need to pick a different friend.

God wants you to be friends with non-Christian people in your world—at school or work, on sports teams, in your neighborhood, among your relatives. Without your friendship, they may never feel Christ’s real-life love, and without feeling that great love, they will have no reason to want to become friends with God.

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Father, I know the great joy of my salvation is having your Holy Spirit dwell within me to teach me and help me make wise choices in life. I pray that you would use me to introduce you to those around me who do not yet have a relationship with you so that you will live within them and give them your great joy. As Ezekiel 36:27 states, “And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” Thank you for blessing my life with your Holy Spirit within me. Help me to look for opportunities to share you with others so that they can know the same true happiness from you. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**

## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 96

*"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." John 15:11-13*

### NO STRINGS ATTACHED

**THE** scratch on Alondra's face sparked a lot of good conversations. For six days of her spring break, Alondra baby-sat inner-city children while their moms attended Bible classes. While her friends lounged on the beach, she burped babies. When they came back to school to show off their tans, Alondra wondered if the scratch dug into her cheek by an angry five-year-old would leave a scar.

Have you heard of agape love? Agape (rhymes with "uh-sloppy") is a Greek New Testament word that English Bibles translate simply as "love." But the meaning of agape is much richer than the simple love we think of when we hear the word 'love'. Agape is love that's from God. It's the love that gives without expecting anything in return. It's the love that makes the health, happiness, and growth of others important to us. And it's the kind of love that motivates students like Alondra to give up time, treasures, and perfect tans to do countless kind deeds. A famous Christian author, C. S. Lewis, called agape "gift-love." When God sent his Son, Jesus, to die for us on the cross, that was the world's biggest demonstration of gift-love. John wrote, "This is real love. It is not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." (1 John 4:10)

So think about it. When have you received gift-love? When have you given it? The Bible makes totally clear how powerful gift-love is—and how important it is:

- "Love your enemies!" (Matthew 5:44)
- "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39)
- "Love each other in the same way that I love you." (John 15:12)
- "Everything you do must be done with love." (1 Corinthians 16:14)
- "Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins." (Ephesians 5:2)
- "Let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. . . . Since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other." (1 John 4:7, 11)

Showing God-powered, agape love is the only way we can ever love people we don't find lovable—like enemies, misfits, and grimy toddlers. Gift-love is the kind of love Jesus has for us. And it's the love he puts in us for others!

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you that your love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, and thank you that your love never fails. Help us to love as you love. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we can choose how to really love others. We are weak Lord, but we know that even when we are weak, you are strong within us. So thank you that it's not all up to us, but that you equip us to face each day with the power of your love, your forgiveness, and your grace. We love you Lord, and we need you today and every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

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## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 97

*"While the women were on their way [to tell the disciples about the empty tomb and that Jesus had risen from the dead], some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, 'You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.'" Matthew 28:11-13*

### HIDE-AND-SEEK

**DO** you want to hear another fairy tale? How about the one that says the Resurrection isn't true because Christ's body was stolen from the tomb? Did you know that the Bible itself contains the first version of the Stolen Body myth? After the Resurrection, some of the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb reported to the chief priests what had happened. The chief priests bribed them to say the body had been stolen while they slept. (see Matthew 28:11-15)

Some people today still think that the disciples played hide-and-peek with Jesus' body, but many reported facts make that fairy tale impossible to believe. Think about the stone, for example. The stone that sealed the tomb after Jesus was buried wasn't exactly the kind of pebble you skip across a pond. The five-foot-high circular stone could easily have weighed around two tons. When the tomb was first built, a team of workers probably put the stone in place, using a wedge to keep it from rolling down a trench that sloped down to the opening of the tomb. When Jesus was buried, the wedge was removed and gravity did the rest. It sealed the tomb so it could only be reopened with much noisy grunting by a gang of strong men. (That's why the women of Mark 16:3 wondered who would roll the stone away from the tomb entrance for them.)

Then there were the guards, a detachment of soldiers from Pilate, the Roman governor, who stood watch over the tomb. Their unit could have numbered as many as sixteen highly trained soldiers. To think that Jesus' body was stolen, you would have to imagine that a group of disciples—the guys who days before had scattered like scared rabbits—confronted a guard of heavily-armed, battle-trained soldiers. The disciples would have had to overpower the soldiers or sneak past them in their sleep to heave a two-ton stone up a slope without waking a single man. Then, as the theory goes, the disciples would have hauled away Jesus' body, hid it, and endured ridicule, torture, and martyrdom to spread what they knew to be a lie!

That's ridiculous!

Like the first Christians, you can be sure that the Christian faith isn't based on a fairy tale. It's built on the solid historical fact of the empty tomb and the risen Christ!

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You for the resurrection of Your Son, Jesus. I want to celebrate Him every day of my life. In a world that is growing increasingly chaotic, angry, and confusing, help me to hold up His light everywhere I go and to everyone I meet. Holy Spirit, give me courage to speak boldly and never be ashamed of proclaiming the Good News about Jesus. Thank you for allowing me to be an instrument of your message and peace in a world that is searching for answers. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

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## MEETING WITH GOD – Day 98

*Jesus stopped and said, "Call him."*

*So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you." Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.*

*"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.*

*The blind man said, "Rabbi, I want to see."*

*"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.*

*- Mark 10:40-52*

### MERCY, MERCY

**HERE**, based upon what Scripture tells us, is a report of what happened one day in Jericho (I have added the part about the conversation with the mayor to the story found in the Bible).

Several city leaders, Jesus, and a big crowd listen to the mayor of Jericho as they jostle one another through the gate on the road to Jerusalem. "And so we want to express our thanks to you, Jesus, for your brief visit –"

A rustling at the back of the crowd interrupts the speaker. "Jesus, Son of David," a man yells, "have mercy on me!"

"Stop it, you blind fool," one of the important men growls over his shoulder.

The mayor looks at Jesus nervously and continues, "We want to thank—"

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" This time the voice from outside the circle is loud and demanding.

"Hush, old beggar!" several people join in harshly. But Jesus is visibly moved by the plea. He calls the blind beggar, named Bartimaeus, forward and heals him.

What caused Jesus to turn his attention away from the crowd to a persistent, blind beggar? Maybe it was the man's cry for mercy. "Mercy" is compassion that causes a person to provide

relief for someone in misery. A "merciful" person is someone who feels the hurts of others and relieves those hurts. Groups like the Red Cross show mercy with huge, organized programs, but we can show mercy in simple acts like comforting and bandaging a little brother or sister who has skinned a knee, listening to a friend's problems, or helping out a parent whose workload is overwhelming them.

God said about himself, "I am the Lord, the merciful and gracious God" (Exodus 34:6), and Moses said about God, "The Lord your God is merciful" (Deuteronomy 4:31). Since Jesus was God in a human body, it's no surprise that mercy was one of the major characteristics of his earthly ministry. His heart of mercy was moved by the suffering of people—and his power allowed him to heal and free people from their hurts.

There's no pain, fear, or loneliness that Jesus doesn't understand. When you come to him crying, "Master, I need help," Christ answers you with compassion. Sometimes you spot his kind deeds when he supernaturally fixes someone's body, like he did for Bartimaeus. At other times you spot him through the caring of a Christian friend. Jesus had great mercy for poor Bartimaeus, and God has the same great mercy in store for you when you run to him for help. May you, in turn, reflect his mercy to the hurting world around you.

### TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, There are times in my life when all I can do is cry out to you, "Jesus, have mercy on me." Thank you for your tender mercy that hears my cry and answers me with mercy only you can give. Thank you for extending mercy to me so I can know how to extend mercy to others, to hear others when they are sharing a hurt, in need of physical, tangible help, or in need of specific prayer. Just as you were sensitive to those around you as you walked on earth, help me to be sensitive to those around me. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your ability to use me, no matter what my situation, to extend mercy to others, and help me to respond to them in your power and strength. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**Love the way Jesus loves!**

**Pastor Steve**