

# Is Jesus “Real” to You?

by  
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*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.*  
John 10:27 NASB

A well-known televangelist once testified that, as a new believer, he was perplexed by the familiarity the mature believers around him seemed to have with the Lord. These men, in their casual conversations, made statements like, “The Lord and I were going...”; “The Lord told me...”; and, “The Lord showed me...,” and he was certain that they were being presumptuous, even pretentious, in their seeming familiarity with the Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

Though he was convinced that these men were being pretentious, he longed to have the kind of intimacy and familiarity with the Lord that these men seemed to have and that the Lord’s original disciples were described as having as they followed Him around Galilee.

But he wasn’t sure that it was really possible.

In prayer he asked the Lord, “Lord, if what these men seem to be experiencing is real, why don’t I hear you and experience your presence the way these other men seem to hear you and experience your presence?”

At that very moment he heard the Lord’s voice, not audibly, but clearly, in his spirit, as the Lord said, “Because, \_\_\_\_\_, you’re not that much fun to be with.”

This somewhat humorous response by the Lord reveals a simple but profound truth. Though His spirit is always with us, we simply will not be aware of His voice or His influence while we’re engaged in physical and mental pursuits of the flesh, laying around on the couches of the world.

The same is true for the Christian “Pharisees” who engage in religious works out of a sense of obligation, because those who do not clearly “hear” His voice will always tend towards legalism.

But if we are engaged with Him, and responding to His voice in our inner man, “hearing” His truth and His promises, and obeying His commands, He will not only be very real to us, we will literally become a manifestation of His love and His life in the world.

It doesn’t get any more intimate or any more powerful than that.

Many new believers, especially in cessationist denominations and fellowships, are pressured by pastors and by the fear of man (the need to be identified with and approved by a certain group of people) to do religious works of service that are not triggered by or empowered by the Lord. And, when they experience “burn out” because the burden becomes

too heavy, they begin to reject the demands of the organized church, and they become even more vulnerable to the enemy than they already were.

But others, doing many of the same things, as they are prompted and empowered by the Holy Spirit, not only do not experience “burn out,” they experience the joy of the Lord in the things that they do.

What is it, then, that makes the difference between the two experiences?

As a new believer, having been rescued from seven years of bondage to New Age occultism, I had already experienced Satan masquerading as an angel of light, and I had experienced his real, but deceptive, spiritual powers. It was not a giant leap then to expect the same, but true, spiritual communion and power from the Lord.

After several months of intense cleansing, as the demons’ nests were removed from my soul, I was awakened early one morning at the sound of my name being called.

It was a Sunday morning and the sun was just rising above the horizon with shafts of light breaking through the uncurtained window.

I sat bolt upright, and in my mind’s eye, almost like a holographic projection, I saw,

**John 14:15.**

I woke Peggy up in my excitement, saying, “Peggy! Peggy! I’ve been given a scripture.”

I did not, at that time, know the many ways in which the Lord reveals or applies specific scripture to His disciples, but I knew, without a doubt, that this was an important revelation to me.

***If you love me, obey My commands.***

As I read that passage I remember feeling a sense of disappointment. Surely, I thought, if the Lord has given me a vision, it is going to be about His call on my life. But...obey His commands? Is that all?

“Maybe it was John 15:14,” I said hopefully to my wife, who was rubbing her eyes as she wondered about her strange husband who had been getting up at all hours of the night to pray and weep and meditate on the word of God.

***You are my friends if you obey My commands,*** He said, knowing in advance, that I would doubt His original revelation.

What He told me, through John 14:15, was that my love for Him as my Lord and Savior, is only demonstrated by my eager and complete obedience to the revelation of His truth, promises, and commands, not my obedience to religious rules and the expectations of men.

Friendship (intimate communion) with the Lord, then, is based on how well we “hear” the truth, promises, and commands of the Lord and how well we obey (by grace through faith) what we have heard and believed. But, and this is important, it is NOT related to intelligence, education, or any natural ability or natural effort.

The intellectual GIANTS of Israel, the Pharisees and scribes, in the arrogance of their intellectual prowess and their long-standing religious traditions (religious rules and the expectations of men), rejected their Messiah while fishermen, tax collectors, and simple, uneducated men received Him with joy.

To place this truth in its current context, America has more seminary trained pastors and ministry leaders per capita than any other country in the world, and, yet, we are more divided in what we believe and practice (and, therefore, more “childish” according to Ephesians 4:14) than the church has been at any other time in history.

I’m not against seminary training. I’m just making an observable point that seminary training is not a guarantee that the one who understands biblical Hebrew and Greek will “hear” the Lord or have an intimate supernatural relationship with Him. Nor is intelligence a guarantee, either.

This was brought home to me in a powerful way by a documentary film, “Bill,” about Bill Sackter, a mentally challenged man with an IQ of 50. The film that won two Emmys, starred Mickey Rooney as Bill and Dennis Quaid as a sociology student making a film about how Bill, who had spent most of his life in an institution, was able to manage life out in the world on his own.

Bill worked as a janitor at a private elementary school, and he was befriended by a young girl who enjoyed Bill’s companionship at school. But, when her parents found out about the relationship, they assumed the worst about Bill, and they asked the principal to step in and forbid Bill to engage in this friendship.

Shortly thereafter the little girl contracted spinal meningitis and was hospitalized. When she went into a coma and was under an oxygen tent the doctors told her parents that she only had a short time to live.

Bill arrived at the hospital to visit his young friend, but the parents would not allow him to visit the girl’s room. Sixteen hours later the doctors convinced the parents that if they let Bill see their daughter he would be satisfied and leave.

The parents reluctantly agreed, and as Bill walked into the room he turned toward the girl and said, “Jesus, heal my little friend.”

Then he turned and walked out of the room.

The very next scene, without commentary of any kind, showed the little girl at her next birthday party...healed.

What that true testimony revealed to me in a life-changing way was that Bill, with an IQ of 50, scarcely able to read or live on his own, had a more intimate, faith-filled relationship with the Lord than many Christians with college educations and seminary degrees have today.

(“Bill” is available from Amazon as a DVD).

It was not Bill’s intelligence or his education that enabled him to pray effectively on behalf of his little friend. It was Bill’s intimate relationship with the Lord, his “hearing” and “knowing” by the Holy Spirit the will of the Lord, and his eager and willing obedience to the revelation of that will.

There are numerous ways we communicate with others in our natural relationships. Speech (including tone of voice), written messages, body language, what we do or don’t do in response to them are all ways that we communicate with one another.

Likewise, there are numerous ways that the Lord communicates His truth, promises, and commands to us. We have the holy writ and our interpreter, the Spirit of truth, the gifts of the Spirit operating in and through other believers, the gifts of the Spirit operating in and through ourselves, spiritual dreams and visions, angelic visitations, and certain circumstances that reveal answers to prayer or even reveal the Lord’s discipline.

But the most important means we have of “hearing” the voice of the Lord is the still, small voice of the Spirit, our spiritual conscience, as He makes the specific truth, promises, or commands of the Lord real to us.

This is explained scripturally as the Spirit “testifying” to us through our unique spirit-soul connection.

***The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God...Romans 8:16 NASB*** (emphasis is the author’s)

It is this inner witness through which we “believe in our hearts” (our unique spirit-soul connection), which is “hearing,” and “obey” by confessing or acting on what we believe, that first caused us to experience faith in Christ, to know for certain, without having any natural evidence, that He exists and that He died as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of all men in order that we might be restored to covenant status with the Father in Him. And it is this same inner witness that we are to seek continually in all of our circumstances as a ruling “umpire” over our thoughts, words, and actions.

***And let the peace (soul harmony which comes) from Christ rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts [deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds, in that peaceful state] to which as [members of Christ’s] one body you were also called [to live]. Colossians 3:15 Amplified***

This can be as simple as having an inner prompting that something we are about to do is wrong, and, if we make the correct response, we have peace and, even, joy.

Or, on the contrary, if we respond in an emotionally and negatively inappropriate way, we sense the “check” of the Holy Spirit, almost like an inner squeezing.

His communication can also be incredibly profound as He communicates with us through dreams and visions and prophecies. But it is all His voice, sometimes gently comforting and sometimes rocking our world.

Bill Sackter obviously experienced and participated in the love of God toward him and through him. And what Bill Sackter, who likely did not know a great deal of scripture, demonstrated so beautifully, was his simple response to the voice of the Lord that came to him, and comes to us, from the indwelling Spirit, our Counselor.

This inner knowing that we identify as our spiritual conscience is the MOST IMPORTANT source of “hearing” that any believer has, even more important than prophecy.

I used to enjoy watching NCIS on TV, and the head of the unit, Special Agent Gibbs, sometimes playfully slaps the back of his crews’ heads if they goof up in some manner. It did not surprise me, then, when the Lord began to use that same mental image with me when I goofed up. The image tells me that I goofed up, so I can repent, but it also expresses His love and affection for me as He corrects me.

I have also noticed, in spite of the fact that I teach inductive Bible study methodology, that I sometimes know truth before I discover it and confirm it in scripture. This is the opposite of what we think of as the normal approach. Our normal approach is to examine scripture for the purpose of allowing the Spirit of truth to guide or lead us into truth.

I can only explain the fact that He sometimes reveals the truth, even extraordinary truth, to me in advance, as coming to me in this way because He can trust me to then search it out and confirm it in scripture.

Thus He sometimes “guides” me by revealing the truth first and then guiding me as I search the scriptures to fully confirm the truth.

I mention this only because I am certain that Bill did not attend any intensive Healing School training sessions. His faith that Jesus would heal his little friend came directly from his intimate personal relationship with the Healer, not from memorizing and meditating on scriptural passages about healing.

Please do not misunderstand me. It is fully appropriate for us to study, memorize, and meditate on scripture. But the real depth and strength of our faith and our intimate supernatural relationship with Him comes from our day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment response to His voice in our inner man .

Let’s examine a passage in which the Lord promises to make Himself “real” to the believer, and then find out specifically how we grow in this supernatural relationship so that He is very “real” to us on a day to day, moment to moment basis the way He was to Bill Sackter.

***He who has My commandments...***(as a living word of faith)... ***and keeps them*** ...***(responding in obedience to what he has heard or seen in his spirit)...******is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father...***(will recognize and experience the love of the Father to him and through him), ***and I will love him and will disclose Myself*** ...***(make Myself real)...******to him.*** John 14:21 NASB (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)

“Having” the Lord’s commands is not about the knowing the ten commandments as revealed in scripture, or even about knowing the “new command” to love one another. It is about “hearing” His voice as He speaks His specific commands into our spiritual ears so that they become a supernatural, living word to us, just as if He was physically standing in our presence.

Our obedient faith response to the revelation of His truth, promises, or commands thus revealed supernaturally to us in all the various ways that this can happen, but especially as it comes to us through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, releases the power of God in us and through us in both large and small ways.

What we clearly see in this passage spoken to the Lord’s disciples on the night He was betrayed and crucified, is that true fellowship with the Lord is not only possible, but is the will of the Lord for every believer. This intimate communion is not reserved for the super-prophets, televangelists, and mega-church pastors. It is the will of the Lord for you and for me.

Likewise, the Father’s love and the Lord’s love for the disciple who does not clearly “hear” Him or obey Him is the same as it is for the one who does “hear” and obey, but the one who does not “hear” and obey does not experience this love or participate knowingly in it.

***...seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true...***(relationship)... ***knowledge of Him...***(not knowledge about Him)... ***who called us by His own glory and excellence.***

***For by these...***(our relationship knowledge of Him and His divine power)... ***He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them...***(by grace through faith)... ***you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.*** 2 Peter 1:3,4 NASB (inserts and emphasis are the author’s)

What Peter is expressing in this powerful, interesting passage is that our intimate relationship with the Lord that comes from hearing and responding to His voice in various

ways, but especially through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, allows us to participate in His divine nature by grace through faith.

Let me express this in a simpler, but still profound way. We think “faith” only relates to the big things like healing, casting out demons, and raising the dead to life, but “hearing” and obeying the inner voice of His Spirit, prompting us with “NO” or “GO,” is faith. And, like Bill Sackter, if we earnestly seek to hear and respond to His voice, His truth, promises, and commands, in whatever way it comes to us, we will participate in His divine nature which glorifies (reveals) Him in the world.

Then He will become increasingly “real” to us, and His love for us, as well as His love being expressed through us, will begin to flow like a river of living water as we manifest His very own persona in what we think, say, and do.

Would that we all had the faith of Bill Sackter, that friend of the Lord’s who was the manifestation of Christ to his little friend, to her parents who tried to end the friendship between Bill and their daughter, and to the doctors as Bill heard the voice of the Lord and spoke the “amen” that day, confirming the presence of the Lord in himself and the love and life of the Lord being released through him by grace through faith.