* Hearing God
* The day I gave my mother and father entirely to God I was furious with Him. I had learned that Communist soldiers in Vietnam had killed them with machine gun fire and a hand grenade *as they tried to surrender under a white flag*! Because I knew God had the power to protect them and had chosen not to, I screamed at him, "Why didn't you protect them! They were serving you!" In that moment of pain, I heard God speak to me for the first time in my life, and I didn't like it! He simply asked, "David, do you trust me?" And when I insisted that I did, he gently replied, "Then thank me." My confusion was total.
* Why is God's call so often baffling? Because to really hear God, we must love Him more than anyone or anything else and we must trust him more than we trust ourselves.

You see, I had treasures that I needed to protect. The first treasure was my desire to marry a beautiful, wonderful woman of my choice. Only after I gave that up did I find the woman God was saving for me. For the past 52 years, she has been my lover, my partner, my advisor, and my greatest human ally!

My second treasure was my desire to return to Cambodia or Vietnam to finish the work that my parents had begun among an unreached tribe. My wife felt the same call, but the wars in both countries were ongoing, making serving in either country impossible! When our mission suggested medical work in Africa, without even praying about it we asked them to look elsewhere in Asia. Another mission invited to serve at their hospital, but two weeks before we were supposed to fly there, the hospital changed its mind! Only then did we begin to pray and seek God's leading, and after two months, on the same day God spoke clearly to both of us that it was Gabon. Gabon? Up until then, we had never heard of it!

My third treasure was my time. It was all mine, and believe it or not, for many years, except for attending our local African church for three long hours every Sunday morning. It wasn't that I wasn't *serving* God faithfully and with all my heart. I just had no time *to listen to Him.* I had time to run a mile or two every morning, time to be a dedicated doctor, time to eat, play with my kids, sleep at night. If God wanted to say something to me, it had to be short and to the point!

Ten years into it I was pounding down a rutted dirt road in our rugged Landcruiser when God broke my into my life again through the preaching of a South African pastor on my car radio. The pastor asked this: "How can you serve God if you aren't talking with Him every day?" His words pierced my dull brain, and contained the wisdom of God. He suggested that listeners start with just 10 or 15 minutes every morning. I could do that! But I soon realized that 15" was not long enough, so I got up 20" earlier. After six months that was too short, and I increased it more and more. Giving God the first part of each day changed my priorities, and opened my heart to read God's Word and talk with God every morning *before the sun comes up.*  If we want to hear God speak, we must be listening to him and talking with him every day.

In Mark 8:34-36, Jesus called the *crowd* to join his 12 disciples and said to them, *“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.”*

Jesus was about *His* dreams for the crowd listening to him. In saying “*If you try to hang on to your life you will lose it”* he was saying that the only way they would fulfill God's goals for them, was to give *him* their treasures, listen to *His* voice, and obey Him. The same holds true for us today.

But does the God who calls us to trust Him promise to protect the ones we love? Absolutely! But his goal is not that they have easy lives. His goals for them are the same as his goals for us. I love my wife Becki, my three children, and my six grandchildren with all my heart. When our children were very young and we were living together in central Africa, we did our best to protect them from malaria, injuries, poisonous snakes, and human predators. But despite our best efforts, they fell ill with malaria, dengue, and dysentery. One of them actually *fell* on a six -foot cobra while playing with his African friends! Somehow his fall crushed the snake's head and killed it before it could bite him! Even in America, we do not have the power to keep our children entirely safe all of the time, or even give them success in life. But serving God where it's more dangerous or difficult is what it means to “take up your cross and follow Jesus.” That is what is baffling. God calls us through pain, entrusting all that we are to his care, and accepting His outcomes. The blessing that comes with this kind of trust is *fellowship with God*.

Where does the courage come from to say, “Take it, Father, and do with it as You please"? The answer is simple: Jesus loves me. When we give him our treasures, he keeps them safe, gives us peace, *and we hear his voice*! But when we close our fingers tightly around our treasures, they slither out of our hands. That was the point Jesus made in the parable of the talents about the servant who buried his small treasure in the ground to keep it safe.

Over 35 years, God helped us build a hospital in the jungles of Gabon from scratch, minister to tens of thousands of sick and broken people, and lead thousands to faith in Jesus. We even planted several churches by going to nearby villages on Sundays. It’s a long story that I've chronicled in five books, but though today I'm old, I still revel in the amazing ways God is uses those who listen to His voice. Had I not learned to talk daily with God, I would not have heard God challenge me to begin training and discipling African surgeons. That word from the Lord resulted in 1996 in the creation of the Pan African Academy of Christian Surgeons (PAACS), which to date has trained and discipled more than 140 African surgeons, all of whom are still on the continent. I was blessed to personally train twelve African surgeons under PAACS. Today these twelve are serving and sharing the gospel with needy people in Madagascar, Angola, the Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Mali, Guinea, and Egypt! Who could ask for more?

As I have leaned into God, I have come to know and love His great heart, a heart so passionate about people that it has changed my loves. God loves lost people because He has created them. His stated desire for the Church until He comes is that we seek them out, no matter where they are, no matter what the cost. He was willing to sacrifice His Son Jesus for them, and He was the one who made sure my ancestors heard of his love.

What I have to offer God is small, but so were the loaves and fishes that the little boy offered to Jesus on the day that he fed 5,000 hungry men and probably twice as many hungry women and children. The little boy God used that day did not offer *some* of the food that was in his basket. When he heard it was needed, he offered it all.

Jesus said, “To whom much is given, much is required.” In my experience the most generous people in the world are not the wealthy, but those whose hearts are hearing and obeying the Spirit of Christ. Their lives overflow with love for their King and service to others.