



JANUARY

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## *Easily Recognized*

*“The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”*

JOHN 10:3 NLT

Although many of us don't live in a farming community, we can grasp the principles displayed in John chapter 10. The way a shepherd cares for his sheep is used to explain how Jesus cares for us. A good shepherd leads his flock with intention and awareness. He calls them, and they follow willingly because they know who he is. The recognition of his voice comes with an association of love, safety, and provision. The flock knows who their shepherd is, and they expect him to take care of them.

When you recognize Jesus' voice, you'll be able to filter out the other noise within your life. Like finding the right station on a radio, you tune out the static until what you are looking for rings clear and true. When your ears are attuned to Jesus' voice, you'll be able to follow Him confidently. You won't have to worry if you're on the right path because you know without a doubt what your shepherd sounds like. His voice calls you, and you trust Him to take care of you as you follow Him.

*Jesus, thank You for being my good and faithful shepherd.  
Fill my heart with truth so that I readily recognize Your voice.  
Help me follow You closely like a sheep follows a shepherd.*

## Practice over Passion

As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul longs for you, my God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?

PSALM 42:1-2 NIV

At the beginning of most relationships, passion and emotions are the driving force. We're excited, anxious, and curious as we get to know someone new. The anticipation we feel as we face the unknown motivates us to move forward. At some point, those electric feelings fade, and if we haven't built a firm foundation, we'll struggle to maintain that relationship. Passion must push us to develop healthy habits so a deeper, more sustainable relationship can be created.

This is true in your relationships with others as well as your relationship with God. In the early days of your walk with Him, you may have lived off spiritual highs. Everything you learned was new, and you soaked up truth like a sponge. While passion is beautiful, it can't sustain your walk with God long-term. It's important to intentionally develop habits and practices that promote lasting depth and intimacy. Developing spiritual muscles is a lot like digging a well. The well doesn't feel necessary in seasons of abundant rain, but when drought comes, you'll be grateful for the work that is already done.

*Father, give me the fortitude I need to pursue You each day. Draw me close and strengthen my resolve. Help me to build healthy habits that build intimacy with You.*

## After the Mountaintop

Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

MATTHEW 17:1-2 NLT

Peter experienced something incredible with Jesus that few others did. He saw Him transfigured, and he heard God's audible voice declaring His love for His Son. Peter had a literal mountaintop experience. Even so, he went on to deny Jesus. The presence of a miracle in his life didn't guarantee he would never stumble. Sometimes, as believers, we seek out emotional experiences because they make us feel like our faith is meaningful. In reality, longevity of faith is built day by day.

Have you put too much weight on mountaintop experiences? Those times are a gift from God, but they cannot be the foundation of your faith. God may use miraculous experiences to encourage you, but they are not meant to be your daily experience with Him. When life becomes mundane or suffering is persistent, you need endurance over intensity. Endurance is built by investing in habits and strengthening your faith bit by bit like a muscle.

*God, thank You for the mountaintop experiences I have had. Help me to honor You even when my emotions are not high. As I pursue my daily relationship with You, fill me with truth and help me develop consistency in my faith.*

## Chasing a Feeling

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.

EPHESIANS 4:14 NLT

When we pursue spiritual depth, we protect ourselves from the dangers of making emotional decisions. It's easy to be led astray by our own passions. When we follow our emotions or the whims of our desires, we miss the steadiness that comes from having an identity that is secure in Christ. Seeking to grow spiritually cultivates our relationship with God and gives us a firm foundation to stand on.

Your worth comes from who you are as a child of God. The way you serve, the rules you follow, or the teachings you listen to don't equate to maturity. Maturity is found in developing a personal relationship with God in which you fill your heart with truth and stay soft toward His instruction in your life. Getting to know His voice keeps you safe from following a wayward path.

*God, give me the grace to follow You wholeheartedly. Remind me of my worth so my obedience to You is rooted in love. Help me cultivate habits that draw me closer to You.*

## Tenacity and Fortitude

Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them.  
Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously.

ISAIAH 55:7 NLT

Culturally, we have become accustomed to doing exactly what we want. We are a society full of short attention spans and the pursuit of instant gratification. We value entertainment over tenacity, comfort over fortitude, and personal satisfaction over sacrifice. If we want a thriving relationship with God, our pursuit of Him must be counter-cultural. We must accept the task of saying yes to God while saying no to what is accepted in the world around us.

Hearing from God and responding to Him is your own responsibility. No one can do it for you, and it won't always be an easy road. There must be a deliberate act of turning away from the ways of the world and turning toward God. The good news is that you are only responsible for your response to Him. The work of sanctification belongs to Him alone. As you turn to Him, He transforms your heart. He is the one who does the hard and miraculous work of redemption.

*Lord, give me strength to follow You when I am tempted to go my own way. Give me the grace to surrender even the smallest parts of my life to You. Thank You for transforming my heart as I turn to You.*