



Hearing the Voice

By Nancy Shonamon, Christian School Representative

Recently, I was asked to deliver the commencement address at Nazarene Christian Academy near Fort Worth, Texas. After 17 years of serving at this Christian school, the Lord had laid out a different plan for my family. As I approached the podium and glanced over the crowd that I had learned to call family, a surge of emotions flooded into my mind and heart. How does one deliver parting words to friends and family who have shared life together for almost two decades? It was not easy. Some of my thoughts and words are presented below.

How Does God Speak to You?

It had been a wonderful 17 years at this school. My children were 7, 8, and 9 years old when we attempted to explain how the Lord was telling us to leave our home in Chicagoland and move to Texas. I will confess that I was ill-prepared for the questions: *How do you know? Did God call you and tell you that? What does God sound like?* It was another moment when words were difficult to find. How does one put into words what is stored up in a heart?

As I took a deep breath and thought about how to explain how we “knew,” I thought about the journey that brought us to this place. It began with total surrender several decades before that. At a weekend concert in a grassy field with 20,000 spectators, a speaker began to explain how living life with the Lord was the most incredible journey ever. The key to making that journey incredible was total surrender and trusting a God to guide you each step of the way. God really did not want part of me or just a Sunday morning commitment. This God wanted 100 percent of everything—my time, energy, money, goals,

dreams, everything!! As a song began to play, I “knew.” He told me. I dropped to my knees, turned my pockets inside out, and lifted my palms to the heavens. I had heard His voice and responded in full surrender.

As my young children looked up at me with questioning eyes, I attempted to explain. It was a three-year journey for our family. Most of the days, we just lived life going to work, teaching fourth grade in the local public school, getting kids to practice, cleaning the house, and doing laundry, laundry, laundry! But in my everyday life, there was the restless stirring of wanting to be more open with my faith in the classroom. There was a building passion to have my children surrounded with Christian mentors. There was a sermon that challenged me to step out in faith. There were opportunities that seemed to drop in our lap. There was a dream that came in the middle of the night to me, and my husband had the same dream. In all these small but huge moments, I heard the voice of God leading me to something different. We moved from public school to Christian school.

God Speaks Again

Now, with my children being 24, 25, and 26, a new adventure unfolded. The children still had questions. It meant some changes for all of us. However, there is peace in hearing the voice of God over several years. There was a hunger to start a school. There were ideas about how to be more intentional in discipling children. There was an ache to be closer to family. There was a voice that told me six months in advance that I would work part-time for a year, and then I would be moving to something different. There was a random phone call offering an opportunity. As the conversation progressed, details were discussed that I had been holding in my heart and never shared with anyone. I can confidently say I had once again heard His voice, and I needed to surrender to His plan.

As I glanced one more time at the graduates, the families, my fellow teachers, and many alumni in the audience, I began to explain how living life with the Lord is the most incredible journey ever. I commended the families for their sacrifice and commitment to Christian education. Most of the audience was aware that I would be packing a moving truck in a few days and relocating to Kansas City to start a new school. This is the Lord’s next adventure for my family and me.

Closing the commencement address with some math, I explained if a child goes to church twice a week for 13 years at 52 weeks a year, they receive approximately 1,350 hours of discipleship outside of the home. If a child attends a Christian school for 13 years at 36 weeks a year where the curriculum is biblically integrated, they receive approximately 16,000 hours of discipleship. I cannot think of a better way to help a child learn to hear the voice of God in their lives and lead them to full surrender in an adventurous journey with Him.

Nancy Shonamon now lives in Shawnee, Kansas. She will be starting a new Christian school in that city. She has ministered at the Nazarene Christian Academy near Fort Worth, Texas, for the last 17 years. She has been an elementary principal, assistant principal, and academic advisor. You may contact Nancy at snshonamon@gmail.com.