

our reference point is centered on loving and serving God, not on ourselves and what we can attain.

Believers in God do not look to powerful political leaders or rich and popular entertainment figures as their models. Rather, they look to Jesus Christ, not only as the model of their lives, but as the one who has the spiritual power to transform them into a new creation. That was our Father's intention from the very moment of creation. Instead of seeing human existence as an accident, believers accept that God desired to create the world for the sake of all humanity and to call each individual, without exception, to a unique purpose within history. This means that God created my soul and yours in our mothers' wombs to live precisely at the particular moment of history into which we were born. "Now" is the time for the mission God has chosen for each of us to fulfill. The choice to listen to God and do his will is the most noble, fulfilling, and purposeful thing we can do with our lives.

Listening to God in prayer will give us new and deeper insight into the person of Jesus Christ. As we meditate on his life in the gospels, as we understand the ways in which the Old Testament foretold and prefigured him, and as we gain insight into the meaning of Christ in the letters of the apostles, we will come to know Christ better. He will definitely challenge us. His words and actions in the gospels will challenge our instincts to be self-centered or to focus on our own personal pleasure or the acquisition of property and power. He will challenge those habits of sin that we too easily rationalize.

Instead of letting us slip into mediocrity, Jesus Christ commands us to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"

## INTRODUCTION

(Matthew 5:48). Jesus will challenge our compulsive behaviors and ingrained patterns of wrongdoing and sin. We think that we can never change, and then we find that Jesus changes us the way he changed Matthew the tax collector (Matthew 9:9) or healed the blind man (Luke 18:35-43) or even raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11). Meditation on these actions of Jesus Christ can give us hope that he will raise us up from the death of our bad behaviors and give us new life. When we read about the leper who dared to ask Jesus for a healing (Matthew 8:1-4) or about the woman with the hemorrhage who was afraid to ask but who touched the tassel of Christ's garment and was healed (Mark 5:24-34), then we gain courage to ask Jesus to help us too. By listening to the gospel in prayer, we learn to become the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair; her great love saved her and her faith freed her from her sins (Luke 7:36-50). Learning to listen to these and other Scripture passages will change our lives into something far better than we could ever imagine—even better than the fantasies we entertain when we buy a lottery ticket and hope to win millions!

Yet listening to God is not as simple as listening to our MP3 players or cell phones. How do we even learn to listen to God? How does someone know whether God is speaking or whether they are hearing a little voice in their own heads? What is discernment of God's will? What are the basic principles of discernment? What are the goals and purposes of listening to God in the modern world? These are some of the questions this book seeks to answer.

Jesus taught on many different levels to the people of his time. He traveled throughout Galilee proclaiming, "Repent and believe for the kingdom of God has come near" (Mark 1:15). Then he