Two Lies Stopping Millions from Hearing God with Paul Young

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCWCYzgGHMg

Hearing God Within: Moving From Fear and Control to Love and Participation

KINGDOM CONVERSATIONS | STUDY NOTES

Wm. Paul Young, author of the bestselling novel The Shack, explores the goodness of God, our union with Christ, and the possibility of living in continual conversation with the indwelling Trinity. In this conversation on the Receive Experience podcast, Young challenges religious ideas of separation, fear-based control, and performance-driven spirituality.

Central Message

Christianity is not primarily about reaching a distant God, following religious formulas, or achieving a predetermined spiritual purpose. It is about awakening to God's presence, trusting His goodness, and participating in His life through ordinary, everyday relationships.

The transformation Young describes is a movement from separation to union, from fear to trust, from control to participation, and from being right to being loving.

Key Quotables

These are direct statements from Young, with punctuation lightly cleaned:

- "It's so much easier to talk about God than listen to God."
- "I don't want a purpose-driven life. I want an indwelt, mutually participatory, Spirit-filled life."
- "Stay in the present tense where God lives with you."
- "There's no principle for that. It's a relationship."
- "You can either play the Holy Spirit in someone's life or trust the Holy Spirit in someone's life."
- "Do the next right thing. Participate. … Trust the ripples."

1. The Two Great Lies: God Is Not Good, and We Are Separated From Him

Young recounts a vision described by theologian Baxter Kruger: an enormous beaver dam blocking the flow of water, held together by two massive logs representing foundational lies:

- ***God is not good. ALWAYS good.***
- ***We are separated from God.***

These beliefs, Young argues, have distorted Christianity by portraying God as distant, unpredictable, and difficult to approach.

If creation exists through Christ and God is everywhere present, the central problem cannot simply be understood as physical or metaphysical distance from Him. Young distinguishes actual separation from alienation—the experience of living unaware of or resistant to God's presence.

Scripture: Colossians 1:16–17; John 1:3; Acts 17:27–28; Ephesians 4:6; John 14:20; Romans 8:38–39.

Biblical discernment: Scripture affirms God's omnipresence and Christ's sustaining relationship with creation, while also describing alienation through sin (Ephesians 2:12–13; Colossians 1:21). Young's understanding of universal divine indwelling extends beyond what all Christian traditions affirm. God's presence everywhere and the believer's indwelling by the Spirit are related but distinguishable biblical teachings.

2. Hearing God Is Not Reserved for Spiritual Experts

Young challenges the assumption that hearing God requires an extraordinary spiritual experience or specialized religious training.

God may communicate through ordinary experiences: music, beauty, compassion, imagination, creativity, wonder, and the quiet impressions of the heart.

- God's communication need not resemble someone else's experience.
- Our thoughts and impressions may participate in an ongoing conversation with Him.
- Listening involves trust, openness, and attentiveness rather than striving.
- Fear of making mistakes can prevent us from recognizing His presence.

“It's so much easier to talk about God than listen to God.”

Young suggests that thoughts encouraging love, goodness, and human flourishing may reflect God's activity within us. He does not insist that every internal impression is divine.

Scripture: John 10:27; John 14:26; Romans 8:14–16; 1 Corinthians 2:12–16; 1 Kings 19:11–13.

Discernment: Internal impressions should be tested rather than automatically attributed to God (1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22). Our emotions, thoughts, and imaginations can be places of spiritual awareness without being infallible.

3. From Fear and Control to Childlike Trust

Young identifies fear as a major obstacle to experiencing God's goodness. When we distrust God, we attempt to control outcomes, circumstances, and sometimes other people.

“I don't want a purpose-driven life. I want an indwelt, mutually participatory, Spirit-filled life.”

Fear and control	**Trust and participation**
Must predict outcomes	Trusts God amid uncertainty
Seeks certainty before acting	Responds faithfully in the present

Fears making mistakes	Allows room for learning
Tries to manage others	Honors their freedom
Measures life by achievements	Values relationship and love
Strives to secure the future	Participates with God today

Young is not rejecting meaningful action but warning that an obsession with purpose can turn people into instruments for achieving our goals.

Scripture: Matthew 18:3–4; 1 John 4:18; Proverbs 3:5–6; Galatians 5:1; Romans 8:15.

Qualification: Scripture also affirms purposeful living and wise planning (Ephesians 2:10; Proverbs 16:3). The concern is not purpose itself but allowing ambition to replace love and dependence on God.

4. Living in the Present: Where God Meets Us

Fear frequently pulls our attention into imagined future problems. Young calls this "future tripping"—mentally rehearsing circumstances that have not happened and attempting to control their outcomes.

This can produce anxiety, diminish our awareness of the present, and interfere with genuine relationships.

"Stay in the present tense where God lives with you."

The practical invitation is simple:

- Recognize when fear has moved your attention into imagined outcomes.
- Return to what is actually happening now.
- Respond to the person or circumstance immediately before you.
- Make wise decisions without demanding certainty about the future.
- Trust God with what remains beyond your control.

Scripture: Matthew 6:25–34; Philippians 4:6–9; Isaiah 26:3; Psalm 16:11; James 4:13–15; 2 Corinthians 10:5.

Living in the present does not eliminate preparation or responsible planning. It means refusing to let imagined futures dominate today's experience of God's presence.

5. Jesus Demonstrated Participation, Not Religious Formula

Young uses the wedding at Cana (John 2:1–11) to illustrate Jesus' responsiveness to the Father.

Jesus initially tells Mary that His hour has not yet come, yet subsequently performs the miracle. Young interprets this as an example of Jesus' continuing interaction with the Father rather than adherence to a rigid formula. "There's no principle for that. It's a relationship."

Young also points to Jesus' encounters with people along His journeys. What might appear to be interruptions were opportunities for love and participation.

Scripture: John 5:19; John 5:30; John 8:28–29; John 2:1–11; Mark 5:21–43; Luke 5:15–16.

Textual clarification: The transcript blends details from different Gospel accounts when discussing Jesus' interruptions. The woman with the issue of blood encounters Jesus while He is traveling to Jairus's daughter, not Lazarus. Also, John's account of Cana does not explicitly record a second instruction from the Father; that is Young's interpretation.

6. The Meeting Place Within: Prayer as Ongoing Relationship

Prayer is not confined to a scheduled devotional time. Young describes an inward meeting place where we can become attentive to God's presence even during conversations, work, and ordinary activities.

Quiet prayer remains valuable, but spiritual communion also occurs through listening, responding, loving, and serving.

- Silence creates space for intentional attention.
- Daily encounters reveal our assumptions and reactions.
- We can inwardly ask God for wisdom while remaining engaged with others.
- Spiritual practices include ordinary expressions of compassion and presence.

Scripture: Matthew 6:6; John 15:4–5; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Colossians 3:17; Acts 17:28.

Kingdom insight: The secret place is not merely somewhere we visit. Communion with God can become the continuing context in which we live.

7. Discovering Our Unique Identity

Young recounts a series of unusual experiences through which he came to understand his identity using the imagery of a royal court jester—someone who communicates truth in unexpected ways.

He relates this to his writing, particularly The Shack, and the unconventional ways his work has challenged familiar religious assumptions.

“You don't have to hear like other people do.”

Our identity is not ultimately defined by occupation, accomplishments, public recognition, or ministry position. Personal experiences may help us recognize our gifts, but their spiritual meaning should be held with humility and discernment.

Scripture: Psalm 139:13–18; 1 Corinthians 12:4–7; Ephesians 2:10; Romans 12:4–6.

8. The Tree of Being Right Versus the Tree of Life

Young draws a provocative parallel between the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and humanity's preoccupation with being right.

He observes that ideological arguments can damage relationships when winning becomes more important than loving**. “The tree of being right is death.”**

Tree of being right	Tree of life
Winning arguments	Loving people
Defending ideology	Seeking truth with humility
Categorizing opponents	Recognizing human dignity
Controlling conversations	Listening with compassion
Protecting personal certainty	Remaining open to correction
Creating division	Pursuing reconciliation

Scripture: Genesis 2:9, 16–17; 1 Corinthians 8:1–3; James 3:13–18; Ephesians 4:15; 1 Corinthians 13:1–3.

Biblical qualification: Genesis does not explicitly identify the forbidden tree as the desire to win arguments. This is Young's theological metaphor. Scripture values truth and discernment; the problem is using knowledge without love.

9. Stop Trying to Be the Holy Spirit in Someone Else's Life

One of Young's most practical insights concerns the tendency to manage others because we fear what may happen if we relinquish control.

“You can either play the Holy Spirit in someone's life or trust the Holy Spirit in someone's life.”

This applies especially to parenting, marriage, friendships, and spiritual ministry.

- Listen before advising.
- Recognize when fear motivates attempts to control another person.
- Offer insight without claiming unquestionable divine authority.
- Respect another person's ability to discern and respond.
- Ask forgiveness when our attempts to help become manipulation.

Young specifically cautions against using "God told me" to pressure others into accepting our opinions. Trusting the Spirit in another person's life does not eliminate appropriate correction, accountability, or protection. It changes the spirit in which those responsibilities are exercised.

Scripture: Romans 14:4; Galatians 6:1–2; James 1:19; Ephesians 4:29; 1 Peter 5:2–3; John 16:13.

10. Living in Participation: A Simple Daily Practice

“Do the next right thing. Participate. Assume a participation with the Holy Spirit, do the next right thing, and trust the ripples.”

Rather than trying to orchestrate a grand spiritual outcome, we respond to what love requires in the present.

This way of living involves growing in trust, recognizing God's goodness, releasing control, and learning to treat people with kindness.

Young acknowledges that this can be particularly difficult for people whose experiences of trauma have undermined their ability to trust. Healing may require patience, safety, and sustained support rather than pressure to believe or respond differently.

Scripture: Micah 6:8; Matthew 6:34; Galatians 5:22–25; Colossians 3:12–17; John 15:5.

Final Comparison: Religious Striving Versus Relational Participation

Religious striving	Relational participation
God is distant	God is present and near
I must earn access	Christ has opened the way
Fear motivates obedience	Love cultivates trust
Prayer is primarily an activity	Prayer becomes ongoing communion
My purpose defines me	My identity is grounded in Christ
I must control outcomes	I respond faithfully and trust God
Being right is most important	Truth is expressed through love
Others need my direction	Others deserve love, respect, and freedom

Final Reflection

The invitation is to move beyond a Christianity dominated by fear, separation, performance, and control into a life of conscious participation with the indwelling Christ.

God's goodness becomes the foundation for trust. His presence becomes the context of everyday living. Love becomes more important than proving ourselves right, and relationships become opportunities to express His life.

Kingdom maturity is not measured merely by how much we know about God, but by how freely we trust Him, recognize His presence, and express His love toward others.

These notes are organized for a compact Word or blog layout, with the main themes, scriptural references, selected quotations, and theological qualifications preserved.

For a potential blog post, my strongest title recommendation is:

“Is God Really Distant? Awakening to His Presence Within You”

An alternative that captures the practical side of the discussion is “Stop Trying to Control Your Life: Learning to Live in Union With God.”