

## Hearing God's Voice

### Week 1: Who me?

Story about Bridge Group...Sometimes we think about God speaking like Moses in the midst of some miracle. Those things only happen to people like Moses.

We have two stories running in our minds about God communicating with people. **Either it's super dramatic** and only for special people, or it's some sort of **elite spiritual skill** that is only acquired by people much less sinful than me.

Obviously, since we have a series called "**Hearing God's voice, I believe that those two views are wrong and that God speaks to regular people.**"

**There are two questions** that each one of us has to answer if **we are going to head down this road of learning how to hear God's voice.** **Do you believe that God is speaking to you?**

**Yes, you with all of your problems, sin, and flaws; do you believe that God is speaking and will continue to speak to you?** But that question only gets us to part of the issue we must confront here at the very beginning.

Here's the followup question. **Do you believe that God wants to speak to you?**

**Is your view of God like someone who holds out on you?** Who is waiting for you to **pass some sort of performance review** before he tells you he loves and accepts you? **A loving God Communicates to the ones he loves because he wants to help them and he wants to be with them.** Or the bible is some sort of **confusing jigsaw puzzle** that you have to figure out the code to unlock what God is saying.

**If you have the wrong picture of God, then it will be hard to hear his voice.** If you picture him as one who **randomly withholds love**, or is **overly critical**, or simply **doesn't want to be disturbed**. You have to **earn God's love**.

**These images of God can come because of what we experienced from our parents. These images are blocking your ability to believe that God wants to speak to you, is speaking to you. We have to relate to him as a good shepherd.**

**"I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! <sup>2</sup> But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice." John 10:1-5**

**In Jesus day, shepherds would often share a shelter or a safe spot at night. In the morning, when it was time to take them out to pasture, the different shepherds would call their sheep and, because they recognized his voice, they would separate from the other flocks that were resting safely together.**

**The shepherd loves, values, and cares for his sheep. He is mindful of what they are up to. And a shepherd is gentle.**

**Do you believe this picture of God? If not, all is not lost. You can begin by acknowledging and confronting your false narrative about God. This must happen or the things we suggest that will help you hear God clearer will make no difference. Why pray, read the Bible, or anything else if you have this storyline playing in your brain about the father, mother, or significant person in your life who withheld love, demanding, making it conditional upon your performance.**

**There is a foundational truth that we have to accept before our ability to listen can be developed. And yes, this is something that is learned and can develop over time with practice. But here's where it all starts. God is always speaking and revealing his kingdom.**

**This is the picture of a good, gracious, and generous God.** It is much different from the other narrative. **If it is hard to get there, then start telling yourself that he is and start watching, looking for signs of his goodness.** This is how we start our **bridge groups**, "God how can you be so good?"

**This next verse sums up the story of the Bible which is one of God constantly speaking and revealing his kingdom to the ones he loves.** **So why are you bringing a charge against him? Why say he does not respond to people's complaints?** <sup>14</sup> **For God speaks again and again, though people do not recognize it.** <sup>15</sup> **He speaks in dreams, in visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on people as they lie in their beds.** Job 33:13-15

**Through scripture, from the Genesis to Revelations, God has done this.**

**Adam and Eve, walking in the garden and talking with God.** That's the way it started, but then everything got messed up. Adam and Eve sinned. Therefore, we need to...**Start with sin and the separation it causes.**

Look at Genesis 3. **Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.** <sup>9</sup> **But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"** <sup>10</sup> **He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."** Genesis 3:8-10

**Adam and Eve's sin caused shame** and a desire to separate from God. **Instead of trusting in him, they decided to trust in themselves,** so they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil which was a direct disobedience to what God had said. **They didn't want to trust, they wanted to figure it out on their own.** In other words, **they thought God was holding out on them, keeping the good stuff for himself. It's like he's eating lobster and steak and laughing because they only know that peanut butter and jelly exists.**

**There's that false narrative** about God rearing its ugly head and preventing people from hearing God.

**Sin creates separation so we cannot hear the whisper or still small voice that the prophets talk about. It's still and small because it's intimate, not because God is trying to make it hard to hear. He doesn't usually shout at his people.**

**Does God speak to us and can we hear before sin is dealt with? Yes, he draws us. It's more of a wooing or a magnetic pull. If you are walking with Jesus now, you can probably look back on how he was drawing you before you actually stepped over the line of faith. There isn't the clarity of message, but a changing of one's heart, openness to God.**

Through the **patriarchs...Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and of course Moses, and then the Prophets...He continually told them when they were getting off track. The prophets would confront them for being unfaithful like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel...**

**All through the story of God the Bible tells of how God is from the very beginning up to today that God is speaking. At first, it was directly from God. Then after sin, it was through chosen people that God spoke. In the development of God's story, that brings us to Jesus.**

**God speaks directly again by coming to us in a form we would understand, a man, Jesus. Jesus comes announcing the coming of his kingdom. He crosses the separation that sin caused by jumping into our sinful world.**

**After Jesus returns to be with the Father in Heaven, he sends the Holy Spirit, which is his presence. The Holy Spirit is in those who trust in Jesus and are not resisting his voice and direction.**

**That brings the story to us today. Where God is always speaking and always revealing his kingdom to us.**

**Have you trusted Jesus? Have you repented, believed, and began to follow him? Then you have ears or the ability to hear him.**

**Maybe you've never done any of that, but you feel this pull toward Jesus, the Bible, some Christ followers that you know and trust. If that's**

you, then my advice is lean into what we are saying. Trust God that he is speaking to you, because he wants to speak to you. Or maybe you are ready to say, "I trust you, I'm yours; take care of my sin issue and help me to hear you voice so I can follow you."

If we are going to learn how to hear God's voice, then we have to start with sin and separation. The next thing we need to understand right at the beginning is that **When God speaks we had better pay attention.**

One time, a substitute teacher chided us about not taking notes when she was talking.

When the person who has the knowledge, the authority, and loves you is speaking, then you had better listen. God has all three of those.

**Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."** <sup>24</sup> Then he added, "Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more. Mark 4:23-24

If I will learn to listen or to recognize God's voice, then understanding will be given. **This is what we mean by revelation.** Revelation means that truth and understanding are not something I uncover. It is uncovered for me if I will learn to listen.

**This is not a skill that only special people have.** It is open to all.

**Are you willing to lean in and try to listen?** The fact that God who created everything and is all knowing and all-powerful, wants to speak to you and me, then that is grace. He doesn't have to, he wants to. That is the definition of extending grace. He doesn't need us; he loves us and wants to bless us and walk with us in the garden, again whispering in our ears. But remember, **grace is anti earning not anti effort.** We have to want to hear and back that want to up with some effort. That is leaning into the voice that is always speaking.

The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but

do not hear, for they are a **rebellious people**.<sup>3</sup> "Therefore, son of man, **pack your belongings** for exile and in the daytime, as they watch, set out and **go from where you are to another place**. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious people. Ezekiel 12:1-3

**Rebellion is when we hear and consistently say "no."** That message either isn't from God or isn't for me. **It's not authoritative.**

**When I took kids on urban mission trips** I could take any type of kid, outgoing, introverted, adventurous or reticent. The one kind of kid I couldn't take was the one who took my words as a suggestion. If he or she would hear them and then evaluate whether or not to dismiss them.

Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your **hearts hardened?**"<sup>18</sup> Do you have **eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?** And don't you remember?<sup>19</sup> When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" Mark 8:17-19

**Rebellion can lead to the heart being completely hardened to the voice of God.** "Hard hearts" are ones that are **set and not easily moved**. They **don't feel anything** when God speaks messages of love or messages of warning.

**Keep in mind that Jesus is saying these things to people he really loves** and has given his life to serve and teach. This isn't a **scolding** from a harsh master. **This is a loving master, trying to teach them what they need to know in order to recognize his voice after he ascends into heaven and sends the Holy Spirit.** They need to be able to recognize his voice in another form.

**He loves us so he asks us these same questions.** We can become numb to the voice of God through consistent resisting or saying no. **After a while, we lose the ability to hear God's voice. It isn't that he stopped speaking. It is a convenient excuse** to say I asked and he didn't answer. The better question is was I listening when he was talking? **When we continually ignore our conscience,** after a while we won't hear it any more.

If we are going to learn how to hear God's voice, then we have to start with sin and separation. What we need to understand is that when God speaks, we had better pay attention. That takes us to the next step...Distinguishing his voice comes from practice.

My dad's hearing aid doesn't help if it simply turns up the volume. He needs something that can cut down the background noise so that he can focus on who is talking to him. **Simply turning up the volume doesn't help** because all of those other sounds get turned up, not just the person talking to him.

Let's look back at John 10 again. "I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! <sup>2</sup> But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice." John 10:1-5

The longer you listen to a voice, the more you are able to distinguish that voice from other voices.

If the tone is condemning or accusing, it is most likely not God. If it is conviction or the confirmation that I am on the wrong path, then that is God. God's voice is "that is wrong and harmful for you and others, you need to stop." The enemy will take that and say, "You will never be anything other than what you are in this moment and that is a failure that falls short of God's standard, therefore, he can't love you."

Does the voice sound different from what you know about Jesus and what you've heard from his story? Does it sound too much like you and the way you naturally think? Does it sound like the voices you heard in the past when you got into trouble and caused yourself and others pain? Is it about a basic sinful desire to have what you want? "The sinful desires of youth." Does it sound like the opposite of loving your neighbor? Does it sound like a short cut? Does it say, "Don't think about it, just do it."

**It's about practicing focusing when someone is talking to you. I tend to think about what I'm going to say instead of what is being said to me. Focus is a form of respect. Half of the battle of hearing God's voice is simply respecting God and wanting to hear from him. If you leave this first session with a ton of questions about hearing God's voice, but you respect him and that is represented in a desire and focus, then you are on the way.**

**Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Proverbs 1:7**

**The fruit of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. The fruit is the evidence of God's spirit in me. If the voice I hear says to disregard self-control, then it's not Jesus' voice.**

**Some of us come to God and want to hear his voice in the middle of a crisis, but we haven't practiced listening before. That usually ends in blaming God for not coming through for you and remaining silent in heaven during your time of need. By the time you feel like you need sunscreen, it's too late to put it on. That simple practice first, saves you pain later.**

**Practicing listening is when we come to this time each week expecting, asking to hear. When we open up that Bible, not because I'm supposed to, but because I want to practice hearing. When I pray not just to tell him what I need, but to ask him to speak to me. God, what do you want to tell me today. The rest of this series is going to be diving into how to practice listening, how to increase the sensitivity of your ears to God's voice.**

**If we are going to learn how to hear God's voice, then we have to start with sin and separation. What we need to understand is that when God speaks, we had better pay attention. That takes us to the next step...Distinguishing his voice comes from practice. Finally, we get to what listening is intended to lead to...Hearing becomes listening when we follow.**



Hearing can be passive, but listening is active. It is something I actively try to do.

Have you ever given your spouse a “yes” honey with a less than convincing nod when she is standing between you and a football game. Maybe that’s just me.

The voice of the good shepherd, Jesus is always on the move, always doing things to restore his kingdom. We have to hear his voice, really listen to what he says, and then follow that voice. I need to put myself in places where he will most likely be speaking.

After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice." John 10:4

The shepherd is not stationary. He has other sheep that are lost, broken, hurting, and he is going out to get them. He doesn't wait in the safety of the pen with the sheep he already has. He goes out to get the others. And he takes his sheep with him. To listen to Jesus, means that we will have to follow.

He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." Luke 11:28 You will be blessed when you obey what you have heard. And yes, obeying God takes practice. You have to keep doing it until it becomes second nature. There are a lot of things, probably most of them that I don't do as second nature. I'm still practicing obeying the master, the shepherd, Jesus.

That's why we teach based upon obedience. You can only learn from Jesus when you obey. He is not teaching you interesting theories or mathematical proofs or trivial facts that don't mean anything. He is teaching us how to live, love, and make his kingdom present for others.

He replied, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." Luke 8:21 That doesn't really need any explanation does it?

Practice listening.

1. Turn off other voices. Create some space where the TV, radio, computer, phone, are off and you are unlikely to be disturbed by others.
2. Lean in... "Jesus, what do you want to tell me or show me today. I want to hear your voice. I am listening."
3. Read John 10:1-30 Read these verses about the sheep knowing the shepherds voice.

**I am so excited about this series. I believe it will be life changing for some of us. Especially for those who really haven't made much progress in the area of "putting into practice" what Jesus is teaching us. But listening to God's voice takes some want to and some effort. I'm challenging you to make this time a priority. I am asking you to invite that friend who is moving toward Jesus. And I'm asking you to lean in because God is always speaking and always revealing his kingdom. Why, because he is good.**