

Hearing God's Voice
Week 5: Abundant Life

We are in a teaching series called "Hearing God's Voice." We began with two questions:

1. Do you believe God is speaking to you?
2. Do you believe God wants to speak to you?

I believe that the story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is saying, **"God is always speaking and always revealing his kingdom."** That is our starting point. **Because he is good, he wants to speak to those he loves.**

This is one of the key verses we keep coming back to: **Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand."** ²⁴ 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**

Listening takes effort, but the closer you listen, the more you will hear from God. In this series, we are **learning and practicing** ways to listen. That is because hearing God's voice is **something that can be developed or grown in our lives**. In other words, we can learn to listen better.

This is **another key verse**. This describes those who can recognize the voice of God over other voices. **"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!"** ² But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ 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. ⁴ After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice." John 10:1-5

Part of learning to hear God's voice is the ability to distinguish God's voices from other voices vying for our attention. We will talk more about that skill today.

Here are some images we are using to help us learn to hear God's voice better.

The human mindset is usually fueled by one of three malformed views of God. He is either angry, ambivalent, or absent. In any of these cases, this is what gets us trying to get to him. We are trying to get his attention, earn his praise, and stop making him angry...

If we have one of these three malformed views of God, then it will be really hard to hear his voice because we think he is speaking from one of these places. We don't hear God because we don't think he is good. This mindset ultimately leads to disappointment because we never get to our goal of arriving.

To hear the God who is always speaking, we have to put aside the human mindset, accept the Jesus mindset, the new reality that we have been brought close to God by Jesus as adopted sons and daughters. In order to hear God's voice, we have to see him like this. He is good and we are already close to him. He came down to us in the person of Jesus. You can't get any closer to God, so stop trying to earn his approval and attention. He is near; now listen. You have been chosen and adopted into his family.

Last week Matt did a great job of showing us how we must view ourselves as in the family business if we are to hear God's voice clearly. We are adopted and loved, therefore, we can be ambassadors who represent Jesus. If I don't view myself that way, then the things Jesus wants to say to me about loving those around me and making his kingdom present for those people won't make any sense. God has, in fact, created opportunities for good works ahead of time and if I'm listening or tuned in, then I will get to join Jesus there.

We need to view ourselves as ambassadors who represent Jesus if we hope to hear his direction in loving others.

We ask, "God how can you be so good?"

Then, "How am I doing loving those you have placed around me?"

These questions get us focused on God and on others, which helps prepare us to listen. It's like cleaning out your ears.

Here's a little more from John 10. I tell you for certain that I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ Everyone who came before me was a thief or a robber, and the sheep did not listen to any of them. ⁹ I am the gate. All who come in through me will be saved. Through me they will come and go and find pasture. ¹⁰ A thief comes only to rob, kill, and destroy. I came so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest. John 10:7-10 CEV

¹⁰ The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. John 10:10

You can call it the full life, the rich and satisfying life, or the abundant life. That is the word we are using today.

How do we get that full, abundant life that is promised? It is promised to those who are his sheep who know his voice and trust him.

Here is what John is trying to say. Hearing God's voice and obeying is the only way to the abundant life.

The ability to hear God's voice is the path to this kind of life.

"Through obedience—listening, hearing, and then responding—our lives are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, and we become powerful witnesses to the goodness of God. As Jesus makes clear, in obedience we become fruitful. Listening and responding with obedience is the only thing that leads to an abundant life." *Learning to Live and Love like Jesus*, pg. 69

I don't know about you but having my life, "filled with the power of the holy spirit," sounds pretty good! That I can "become a powerful witness to the goodness of God." And that I can become fruitful sounds pretty full, rich and abundant to me.

Oh but there's more. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. Matthew 7:26 The

house crashing to the ground in a heap is not what I would call abundant life. **That is what I call the tragic life.**

Teach these new disciples to **obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**" Matthew 28:20

Having the presence of the God of the universe with me always even through any transition in time even death also sounds abundant and full.

Here's the next image that I think will help us in our ability to hear God more clearly. ("**?**" **Abundant life**)

Why the question mark because the life of a disciple is built upon 3 questions and this is the last one.

The abundant, full, rich life is different from what we have made it in our culture.

American Dream v. Abundant life can't be mapped out because I'm not in control of it setting **both the path and the goal.**

Get yours please yourself, do what makes you happy versus Abundant. It's about finding my own, or **crafting my own fulfillment.** And of course the focus becomes me not God or others. **God is there to help me get what I want by "blessing" me. Others are there as a means to my end.**

When we talk about hearing the voice of God, part of the goal is to recognize the reality of the Jesus Mindset—that God has already brought us close. Then we can know with confidence that we are "in" and we can focus on making the reign of God present for others. Listening always leads us into partnering with God as he works to make all things new. We should expect times of clear instruction and also times where we are simply guided by peace (or directed back onto the path by a lack of peace). Of course there will be times where we don't feel much of anything, but even then we trust that our Shepherd is with us. Pg. 70-71

When we settle the fact that we are adopted and already in, then we don't need to waste energy trying to earn anything or arrive somewhere; we can direct that toward loving others.

Here are some ways of listening that lead to abundant life. **Return to the places where God speaks.**

Let's not try to be so smart that we miss the obvious. Remember, **God is always speaking** and always revealing his Kingdom. And, he has four hotspots, or places where he speaks consistently and loudly. **Do you remember these four hotspots?**

Can you remember the places God speaks or where the signal is strong?

- Creation.
- Word.
- Spirit.
- Body.

Let's try to demonstrate how these four hotspots can work together to make God's voice clear and easy to hear and distinguish from other voices.

If you sense it in your spirit and can then put it into words, next weigh it against scripture (does this sound like Jesus) and test it with the community of believers then this is pretty much foolproof.

The first thing to do is decide if **I'm avoiding any of these hotspots.** It might be because of my **personality**, one is more natural than the others. **Prayer, music, and the emotions that come are what I am sensitive to, but I don't want to be in a smaller setting** and, therefore, make excuses for not doing it. **I'm avoiding the body.**

Or I love being with people, talking, discussing scripture, but I'm uncomfortable with being alone and silent before God. I'm avoiding the spirit and also the Word.

Let's say I'm a thinker by nature, but I don't really like sharing my thoughts and feelings with others and I just don't get singing in public,

then I'm focusing only on the word. That's avoiding the body and the Spirit.

The two that generally get left out in the cold are word and body. Those I can't control and they take vulnerability and they are messy.

You need to get into these hotspots because that is where God is speaking and speaking loudly. Which one is the weakest? How can you make room for that in your life and schedule?

Here's another way of listening to God's voice and experiencing the abundant life. **Label other voices and move on...** that are not God and put them in their proper perspective.

1. **Cyclical...** Mondays I am desperate and tired and overwhelmed.

2. **Depression/mental illness.**

I'm getting better, and being able to call the voices and messages that come out of my depression what they are, and move on from them.

3. **Born out of my wounds.**

Have you experienced **abuse, neglect**, particularly in your formative years of childhood? Or you've lived through some sort of **trauma**. This is a tough one to recognize and label. In most cases, you need **an outside source**, like a mature friend or, even better, a Christian counselor. This could also be from an abusive relationship as an adult.

4. **Immaturity.**

This is a tough one to see for us adults, but it's very real. Sometimes we need someone to tell us that what we are hearing is coming out of an area of immaturity where we, for some reason, haven't developed. When **I want what I want, no matter what, it costs others**, that's immaturity. These are usually based on **not wanting to take responsibility** for myself. It's always someone else.

5. Contradicts the Bible.

I don't need to pray about, seek counsel for, or in any other way decide if it is God giving me the desire to cheat on my wife. **It's in the bible** and it is quite clear. It says it and it gives **cautionary tales of those, like David,** who saw, desired, took, and then there was a price to be paid.

6. Directly from the enemy, from the pit of hell.

It sounds like the accuser or deceiver. **It just doesn't sound like the Jesus portrayed** in the New Testament.

So we have to give these voices a name that describes where they are coming from. That is the first thing. **Then we can rebuke them.** "Nope, that's not Jesus, that's not for me.

We don't change so that God can love us, God loves us and, as a result, we can be changed. Trying to fight the voices and overcome them is hopeless. They will never fully go away; they're simply part of our humanity. But if we listen for the voice of Shepherd, the voices of the wolves will become smaller and smaller until they are just shadows, grabbing at our heels. Pg. 74

Somebody in this room needs that desperately. Doesn't that sound like abundant life to you?

After putting a label on them and rebuking them, **then we move on. We don't stay there and continue to listen. But how do I do that?**

We replace it with truth. We find something in God's word that contradicts what I am hearing. **I use Psalm 23** all the time to combat the idea that God isn't good, and I'd better just take things into my own hands. (I will describe my lie cards).

Don't believe everything you think or feel. When we associate our identity with certain feelings then we aren't finding our identity in our adoption by God through Christ.

Have you ever heard the old saying, **"Give the devil a name."** Then you **take its power away** to have that message you are receiving **take root so it can steal, kill, and destroy.**

Remember the story we told about the young boy with his grandpa. He said that it's like there is a good wolf and a bad wolf inside of him. Then he asked, "So which one will win." The grandpa responded, "the one you feed."

Here's another way of listening to God's voice and experiencing the abundant life. **Chase the peace.**

Remember that quote from earlier? **"We should expect times of clear instruction and also times where we are simply guided by peace (or directed back onto the path by a lack of peace)."**

Shalom is complete or whole...**Peace is not the absence of conflict.**

If I have peace as I listen and act upon what I am hearing, then keep going. If I don't have peace, then it's time to stop and ask "why".

It's like the game of hot or cold. You close your eyes and someone hides an object. As you start moving around the room the person says either you're getting hotter or you are getting colder. You could be **freezing**, meaning you're a long way away, or you could be **boiling** because you are right there.

But keep in mind that the peace God gives isn't what our culture offers, which is diversion. That is, "look over here" and then "don't look over here." That is **self-medicating** or **filling my life with noise and activity** so that I don't have to deal with the problems I have. Or simply go **buy something new.** **This is not peace.**

Peace is also not the same as comfort. What is the difference between peace and comfort? **Comfort is about me.** It is about avoiding discomfort or trouble. **You can have peace in the middle of being very uncomfortable.** Comfort comes when things are good and allows me to become passive. **I can think that if I avoid difficult people, then that is**

peace; no, that's seeking my own comfort. The couch can bring comfort, but rarely peace.

I want an abundant, full life for you. It only happens when we hear God's voice and obey it. What can help us hear and obey? 1.) Return to the places where God speaks loudest. 2.) Label the other voices and move on. 3.) Chase the peace.

Learning to Listen

1. Slow the pace, lighten the calendar, and turn down the noise.

Pick one of those and do something about it. Test God. Examples...fasting from TV, don't turn the radio off when I drive to Beaverton, turn my phone off when I'm fishing...

2. Label one other voice you have been listening to.

I really think this could be transformational for those who have a constant negative inner dialogue. You don't white knuckle this problem away. You call it what it is and then replace it with truth. **Lie cards**

3. Pray this, "Jesus, what are you speaking to me today?"

This is really simple. I mean, how can it be that easy? **But don't pray this request if you don't want to hear.**

We have a card for you to take home to use as a prompter for prayer. It works well to ask these questions in the morning. **This is a way to open your ears, focus your attention, and make you much more sensitive to hearing God's voice and seeing his Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.** On one side it gives us the three questions written a couple of different ways. Then on the back, it has the three symbols that match the questions. Use this. Take it like a prescription.

1. **Jesus, how can you be so good? How have I seen God's goodness?**
2. **Jesus, how am I doing loving those you've given me to love/my people of peace? What are we up to together?**
3. **Jesus, what are you speaking to me today?**