

**Hearing God's Voice**  
**Week 6: Hearing that transforms**

**Do you believe that God wants to speak to you?** We use the word speak, but it is really communicate. Usually it's not in an audible voice. At least that's my experience. It comes through his **creation, his word, his body, and his spirit.**

Here's what I believe that the Bible clearly teaches; **"God is always speaking and revealing his Kingdom."** The question is, **are we hearing him, are we seeing the things he is doing around us? And then, can we put that into words** what he is trying to communicate to us.

**God wants to speak to you because he loves you. He wants to change us, to transform us** into someone more like Jesus and wants to live through you to love others.

**How can I cooperate with God's plan to transform me?** We say it this way; **A disciple is someone who is following Jesus, being changed by Jesus and committed to Jesus' mission.** But to do the change part, we have to hear his voice and cooperate with him.

As a kid, did you ever hear your mom's voice and not cooperate?

**If you've lived with guilt, because you always feel you are falling short** of what God wants for you, because you just can't seem to stop doing bad things. **Or you just gave up trying** to control your impulses. This part of the sermon isn't another one of those things that confirm what you think in the back of your mind. **"God is good, I am bad, now try harder.** That's not what this is about.

Hearing God's voice and cooperating with his plan for transforming you...**It's not just about moving away from, but moving toward.**

**It's very easy to think** that our relationship with God is about moving away from sinful things so that they don't get us dirty. **We think that this life is about white knuckling our way to some state of holiness that will please a grumpy God.**

The problem with that way of thinking is that **it's about my willpower**. Here's what Brandon Cook says in "*Learning to live and love like Jesus*." **Relying primarily on willpower is another model for transformation, but it often plays out like this: refrain from temptation, indulge in temptation, feel shame, repeat. This type of transformation—by willpower alone—is akin to pushing a beach ball beneath water. Eventually, it's going to pop up. Which points to a truth; transformation is not built upon refraining from something, but from moving into a greater reality. While we need to refrain from and move away from many things (illicit sex, the abuse of pleasure, and so on) over the long course of life, moving away, in and of itself, easily becomes a mere religious game. We need to be moving forward, into something and, namely, into union and communion with God."** Pg. 115

**What is the greater reality? That God chose me, he came to me. I have been adopted and, therefore, I am already "in". I don't have to get the attention or approval or appease the anger of God. Jesus did all of that for me. Not only that but I am in the family business, which is making the kingdom present for others and making disciples.**

Simply avoiding or moving away from certain things **is the path to religion**. And it's the path to the **cycle of shame** that Brandon Cook described.

**God loves you and, therefore, he wants to communicate with you.** Through that relationship he will transform your life into what you were created to be. **But we have to trust and obey.**

**We will not hear God's voice if we are only moving away from certain things and if we don't hear God's voice, we cannot be transformed.**

**Here's a visual** to help us with this idea of transformation and how it happens.

**Desire → Practice → Habits → Character**

This can be to a **bad end or to a good end**. We can allow our **selfish sinful desires** to take us to a place of character that we don't want. There are lots of examples of that.

- Sex outside of marriage covenant between a man and woman.

- Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs.

**Let's say you have a desire to hear God's voice and be more like Jesus.** It starts with the desire. Then I start doing some things that I believe will help me learn to hear him and be transformed. Some of those that I do over and over will become habits. Then my character will be changed and certain Jesus-like behaviors and attitudes will become second nature.

**Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts. 2 Timothy 2:22** Yes, there will be some running away, but that is effective because at the same time I'm pursuing "righteous living."

**Here's how God works when we run to him. Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. <sup>13</sup> For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. Philippians 2:12-13**

**I've got the best news for you today.** If you have any desire for more of God and what he wants to do in you and through you, then that is **absolute proof that the Holy Spirit is drawing you to God.** He is giving you that desire. **Now you just have to cooperate.**

Now God gives me the desire **and the power to do that thing** that He has given me a taste for.

**"We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what it meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased. C.S. Lewis**

**There is something better that God has given us a desire for, but we are too easily pleased.**

I've said these words to several young men, "I want for you what I have with Robin, but what you are pursuing probably won't get you there."

It's not just about white knuckle avoiding our bad desires out of our own puny willpower. It's about this... "I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. <sup>2</sup> He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. <sup>3</sup> You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. <sup>4</sup> Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. John 15:1-4

For our lives to produce the kind of character that allows us to live and love like Jesus, we need to remain or abide in him.

When I remain in him, he will give me good desires that then I must listen and pursue those.

Spiritual formation is the great reversal; from acting to bring about the desired results in our lives to being acted upon by God and responding in ways that allow God to bring about God's purposes. Robert Mulholland, Jr.

(Human mindset pic) Keep in mind that we don't approach God this way. If that is true, then we can't approach our faith growing, or our character becoming like Jesus as a destination. Then we are doing it, not God.

Character becoming more like Jesus is what God wants to do in us. Virtue is what happens when wise and courageous choices become second nature. N.T. Wright

How can I cooperate with God's plan to transform me? It's not just about moving away from, but moving toward. Creating space for God to fill.

God has to have some space in us to plant these good desires and to have them grow. He has to have some space and time to speak to us. That brings us back to abiding or remaining in him. There have to be ways that we create a greater capacity for what God wants to fill us with.

**If we can begin to practice something in our lives that will create space for God to fill, then think what that would mean for us if those became a habit. 60 days to develop a habit.**

**C.S. Lewis** tells about a demon who was charged to keep young men from following Jesus. He reports something he thinks to be bad news to his superior that the young man he was responsible for has, in fact, become a Christian. Here are the wise words from his superior. **"I note with great displeasure that your patient has become a Christian...(Yet) there is no need to despair; hundreds of these adult converts have been reclaimed after a brief sojourn in the Enemy's camp and are now with us. All the habits of the patient, both mental and bodily, are still in our favour."** C.S. Lewis

**There needs to be practices that become habits that create space for God to transform our character.**

**I need to desire more of God**, which will lead to some sort of practice that opens me up to God's presence. **If that can become second nature**, then my character will be changed into something more like Jesus. **And that will produce fruit that will nourish others.**

**If you don't have that desire, or much of it, then ask for it!**

This is one of my favorite verses. **Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:2** That means you can hear his voice as he gives you direction.

**What are some practices that you do that open up space for God so you can hear his voice and he can transform you?** Public worship, prayer, reading the Bible, hearing the Bible taught, journaling, fasting, discussing God's word with other believers, serving neighbor, particularly the poor or marginalized.

**This is how we can ruin spiritual practices** like prayer, reading the Bible, or coming to worship. We view them as a way to arrive somewhere. **We need to view these practices as ways to open up space for God.** Then we

can hear his voice and be transformed by him. **These are not steps to getting closer to God.**

**There's an image we are going to use for the rest of this series, the image of the Rock in the river, giving peace and space for God to transform.**

**Then we return to our daily life with all its craziness as different people, who know they are His and can make his love and kingdom present for the people around them. They can represent him as ambassadors.**

**At the end of this sermon, we are going to look at some spiritual practices, some that will look familiar, but others won't. These are designed not to get somewhere, but to open up space in our lives for God to fill with his transforming presence.**

**I am so honored and excited to give you some more really good news. Cooperating with God's transforming presences means we have to understand this truth...Shame fights against God's transforming presence.**

**Shame is different from conviction. Shame is the feeling that God can't and won't love us. Conviction is the loving nudge that God gives us to move both away from something that is wrong and to himself.**

**What I'm about to say is going to sound like heresy to some of us, but I believe it is true. In church there's this sadistic thought that if God, through the preaching, will just yell at me and make me feel bad, then if I feel bad enough, I'll change. That isn't true. We have to release judgment to God. We confess, yes, but judgment is god's.**

**This ability to release judgment must be compared to the religious game of trying to pretend we are something we are not. Religion is when you employ behavior modification to keep yourself from an inner sense of shame. You feel bad about yourself—and, hand in hand with the feeling, anxious about whether God could really love you—so you cover up by trying to look good, convincing yourself and others that you are good. This is what Jesus called**

cleaning the outside of the cup, while the inside, the heart remains unclean."  
Pg. 130

**Shame is about me wanting to clean myself up in order to have God accept me. That is about control. I prefer being in control to the vulnerability of being transparent before God.**

Here's how Jesus dealt with that belief. <sup>25</sup> "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! **For you are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and self-indulgence!** <sup>26</sup> You blind Pharisee! First wash the inside of the cup and the dish,<sup>[b]</sup> and then the outside will become clean, too. "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like **whitewashed tombs**—beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity.  
Matthew 23:25-26

**Isn't it amazing that he uses a cup that he wants to fill with himself, but we have to let him clean it?**

Keep in mind that the **Pharisees were the good guys**. They were the religious people who **kept the Jews eye on the ball of obeying God down to the very smallest thing**. Jesus is saying that the **good guys are missing the point** because they are offering religious practices but ignoring that it is the presence of God in Jesus that is what makes them ok in God's eyes.

**Religious practices don't bring transformation; God does when we make space for his presence in our lives.** When we make space to hear his voice. Then he cleans the inside of the cup and roots out the dead stuff so that he can fill it.

**They can become religion** instead of ways to make space in us that God can fill.

**Shame is good for motivating us to repent. Shame is a poor motivator for transformation.** Jesus came to take our shame away. **We no longer want to hide, but rather to be transparent in front of him. He can't change what we refuse to admit.**

- Desire...feeding the good wolf.

### Learning to listen

1. Make a commitment for the next 5 weeks.
2. What am I already doing that makes space for God's presence?
3. Circle the practices that would help you be open to God's transforming presence.

Here is a list of spiritual practices or soul training activities that create space for God's presence to speak and transform us. They are in categories. Over the rest of the series we will look at these categories of practices that can become habits that God can use to change our character.

### The Slow Life.

Remember it's nearly impossible to hear someone's voice if we are frantically trying to get somewhere.

Unhurriedness, Silence, Sabbath, Hospitality

All of these ask us to slow down our bodies and our minds so we can hear God's voice. They make space in our day for God and others.

### The Grounded Life

Once we slow down, then we can get our feet under us on something solid. In the midst of life changing, these remind us that God has us.

Prayer, Scripture, Fasting, Risk

### The Generous Life

This is where we get to release what we tend to squeeze and keep for ourselves.

Forgiveness, Gratitude, Giving, Telling the Story of God

- Image of rocks in the river.

It is my hope that you will lean into this next part of this series. I believe this has the potential of getting you off of the wheel of shame and disappointment and into the kind of relationship with God that you've avoided, even feared, but secretly long for.

Call someone and invite them next week!