

Ears to Hear
Pastor Joe Oakley
GFC – 7-10-16

We are in a sermon series called The Voice and our basic premise is that God is speaking and you can hear him.

The title of my message today is Ears To Hear. I get that from what Jesus said to each of the 7 churches in Revelation.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Jesus said 15 times in the Gospels, “He that has an ear, let him hear.” When Jesus said ears he was not just speaking of physical ears. We all have physical ears, but we need to develop spiritual ears. In other words, get tuned in to the voice of God.

It’s important to hear from God so you know you are on the right track, making the right decisions. Life’s too short to miss God.

The hearing talked about in these passages is not just hearing the sound of a voice, but to understand what is being said. The New Living Translation says:

Anyone who is willing to hear should listen and understand!

It’s one thing to hear someone’s voice; it’s another thing to understand the meaning of what they said.

For instance, when I hear someone speak another language, I hear their voice, I hear their words, but I do not understand the meaning of the words. And even when it comes to English, I can understand the words someone is saying and not necessarily understand their meaning.

Take communicating with my wife for example. There have been many times when my wife and I have had conversations where she will say, “You’re not hearing me.” My response is always, “Yes I am; here’s what you said.” And I repeat to her exactly what I heard.

But she will say, “That’s what I said, but that’s not what I meant.” And I will say, “But that’s what you said.” But she will say, “Well, you heard me wrong.” So, I’ve had to learn that the issue is more than the words she says – it’s understanding her heart in the matter.

It’s the same with God – He is speaking and we can hear him, but we must take the time and effort to hear him. If there is any problem communicating, it’s not on God’s end.

Everyone has ears, but not everyone has ears to hear. Some people do not want to hear God. Others are too busy to take the time to hear. But most of us just need to learn to discern God's voice.

This discernment is not just hearing the sound of a voice, but to understand what is being said. Hebrews 5:14 says

But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Discernment comes from two words which mean to sift apart, or to separate. In other words, to be able to recognize and identify as separate, distinct and different. Discernment means you have ears to hear.

For instance, there are experienced cooks who can taste something and tell you all the ingredients. When I taste something – I know if I like it or if it needs more salt.

What I do know is music. I'm a musician. I've been listening to music all my life and I've played in bands ranging from garage bands to church bands to orchestras to jazz bands.

When my wife and I listen to music, we listen very differently. She listens to the band as a whole. I listen with discernment – recognizing and separating out the different instruments.

For instance, if we were listening to an orchestra, I could say to her, "Wow, listen to the flutes or the cellos in the string section" and she would not be able to differentiate between the instruments.

She could develop discernment by listening and learning. She would need to learn what flutes sound like on their own before being able to hear them in a symphony. That's how you develop ears to hear music.

Likewise, we all can tune our ears to hear God's voice – but unless we take the time to hear his voice in the quiet moments of life, we will not be able to hear him in the symphony sounds of life.

God is infinite and unlimited and can speak any way He chooses. There are times in the Bible where God's voice sounded like thunder and other times it was a still small voice.

The Bible reveals many ways God speaks:
 Gifts of the spirit
 Dreams and visions
 Ministers, pastors, prophets and other people
 Sermons, teachings and books

Worship
 Circumstances
 The Holy Spirit within
 Angels
 Miraculous signs, like a burning bush that doesn't burn up

I want to emphasize that God's primary way of speaking is through the Bible and any other way He speaks will never contradict the Bible! 2 Timothy 3:16 says

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

The Greek word for inspiration - theopneustos – literally means that God breathed the Bible into existence. God inspired the Word and He still speaks through it today. Just as God breathed life into the word originally; He still breathes life into it today. So - the biggest key to hearing from God is time spent with Him in His Word. Romans 10:17 says

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Many people take this to mean faith comes by hearing the word of God. That's not what it says. It says faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the word of God. Being in the word develops our hearing which develops our faith.

To me – this is the big benefit of hearing from God.
 It builds faith.
 Without faith you will never attempt anything big for God.
 Without faith you will never believe for miracles.
 Without faith you will not operate in the supernatural power of God.

When it comes to hearing God, there is no way around the absolute necessity of spending time with God in His word.

There are two main Greek words translated “word” in the Bible. One is logos – which means, "the expression of thought." Logos is the revealed will of God. This speaks of the Bible, the written word of God – which is the written expression of God's thoughts.

In contrast, the other Greek word for word is rhema – which means "that which is spoken." Rhema is more of a personal, life-giving word from God. Vines Dictionary of Biblical Words says that the distinction between rhema and logos is that rhema does not refer to the whole Bible as such, but to the individual scripture which the Spirit breathes life into at a certain time. There are times when a Scripture seems to jump of the page and speak to you – that is rhema.

We only receive rhema as we spend time with God in the logos. Don't complain about not hearing from God if you don't spend time in the word.

It's always good to hear from God, but there are times we really need to hear from God. For example, when we started this church 14 years ago. Deb and I had started a church before and I swore up and down I would never do it again. Yet – here we are. What happened? I heard from God.

Hearing from God gave us the direction to start and the faith to persevere.

10 Ways I've heard from God in leading GFC

1- Inner prompting of the Holy Spirit

Psalm 37:4 says *Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.*

I believe if our heart is after God and we love Him with our whole being - one of the ways He speaks is by placing desires in our hearts.

Before we started GFC we had been out of the ministry for two years and the Holy Spirit began to stir up the desire in us to minister again. At that time, I said I would never start a church again, but I would pastor if God opened us a church that was already established.

2- Preaching

I heard John Ortberg preach at a conference. He challenged us to pray every day for 30 days on how God wants us to get out of the boat. I felt God leading me to take that challenge.

3- Prayer

We took the challenge and began to pray every day about how God wants us to get out of the boat. He spoke to us to pastor again.

Remember, prayer is a two-way conversation. It involves listening as well as speaking.

4- Books

During this 30 days, we read the book, *If You Want To Walk On Water, You've Got To Get Out of the Boat.*

Through this book, God showed me that the boat I was afraid of getting out of was starting a new church. I was willing to pastor again, just not start a new church. God started stirring up in me a vision a worshipping spirit-filled church unlike any other in our community – which meant we had to start it.

5- The Bible

God woke me up early one morning to pray about this. I was seriously seeking the will of God – asking him to reveal His will to me. I felt led to turn to Acts 13:42

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath.

I felt God was speaking to me through this verse that I would hear a word from the Lord by the next Sunday – a word that would come through someone in the church and give me specific direction.

6- Other People

On the very next Sunday – we were at On The Border in Arlington with Trudy and Gerry. This is when Gerry received what we call the Fajita Revelation. In the middle of the meal, Gerry just spouted out, “Why don’t we start a church in our home?”

That was the specific word we needed to hear. We immediately knew this is it – even though it was kind of scary. We did not want to run off and start something without getting counsel. Even though we had heard from God six ways by now.

By the way – one of the ways we can hear from God is through our spouses. When we were starting this church, Pastor Deborah believed that God was leading us but I was hesitant due to past failure. She helped me face my fear of failure by asking, “What would you do if you knew you would not fail?” I responded, “Start another church.” She said, “There’s your answer.”

7- Church leaders

God confirmed this word through respected church leaders. We called Olen Griffing and my dad – two fathers in the faith – and both felt it was right. We also heard God through other church leaders.

GFC began to grow substantially in early 2006 and our leadership team began to pray about if and when we should go to two services. We were feeling led to do so on Easter Sunday, but asked the Lord for a confirming word.

Some of our leaders went to Gateway Church for a pastor’s meeting. During lunch, Pastor Robert Morris came up to me and asked, “Joe, have you gone to two services yet?” I answered, “No, but we’ve been praying about it. Why?”

Robert said, “I got a word from the Lord during worship that someone here should go to two services. I didn’t feel right about giving it at that time, but when I came into the room and saw you, I knew it was for you. And do you know when you should start it? Easter Sunday.”

Needless to say, we started two services that Easter Sunday and we grew substantially.

8- Prophecy

In the Fall of 2001 – before we started this church - we went to a pastor’s retreat and received a word of prophecy from Bro. Olen. I was kind of tentative about starting a church because I had been reading and researching and one expert said don’t do it if you’re over 45. I was 46.

I went down for prayer after one meeting and Pastor Olen prayed over me. In the midst of the prayer he began to prophesy and one sentence jumped out at me: “You are not too old.” He did not know I was struggling with that, but God did.

That word brought confirmation to what we had heard and gave us the faith and determination to move ahead. A prophetic word is usually a confirming word rather than a directing word. Acts 2:17-18 says:

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

God said that three of the ways He speaks are through prophetic words, dreams and visions. We’ve experienced all of those multiple times. I just talked about prophecy – let’s talk about dreams and visions.

9- Dreams

Let me say that not all dreams are from God – but some are! As for me – I dream all the time and most of those dreams are not from God. However, I’ve had a few significant dreams that I knew were from God. I knew it when I woke up and I remember those dreams vividly years later.

For instance, when God was renewing the call to preach in me – I resisted because I could not see myself preaching. My father and grand-father were awesome preachers and I could not see myself doing that. Then I had a dream in which I was preaching. I was actually sitting in the congregation watching myself preach and amening myself heartily! When I woke up I knew that was God showing me that I could preach.

In the Fall of 2004, I had a dream where I was up on the platform and in the middle of a service, people of all ages and colors began walking into the church. After the service, they said they all felt led to join Grace Fellowship Church. I woke up wondering what the dream meant.

I found out a few months later. Another church called Faith Harvest Church met in the same shopping center we are in. Their pastor resigned and the core group was left without a pastor.

One Sunday morning the members of Faith Harvest met and voted to merge with Grace Fellowship. Then, just like in my dream, the people from Faith Harvest – people of all ages and colors - came into our church service. They were received with love and acceptance and that took us to a new level of faith and excitement.

That dream from God imparted our vision to be a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-generational church. Since then, we have intentionally worked towards diversity in our membership.

In June of 2008, I Joe had two dreams where we had an African American worship pastor. At that time, I was not aware that our white worship pastor was praying about making a change. Within a few weeks of the dreams, our worship pastor resigned and we began our search for a new one. We found an African American worship leader and again we grew substantially.

10- Visions

In early 2003, we were meeting in the YMCA and praying for a permanent meeting place. Not only did we pray, but we looked at every building and every piece of property. Nothing was opening up and we continued to pray.

Once, when we were praying I had a vision – I saw in my mind – the pastor who was in this building at that time - opening the door to the Krause’s house where we were praying, throwing in the keys to this building and saying, “Here, you take it.” Ultimately, that’s what happened – he called to ask if we wanted the building and here we are today.

That’s 10 ways God spoke to us just in the beginning of this church:

Inner prompting of the Holy Spirit

Preaching

A Book

Prayer

The Bible

Dreams

Visions

Other People

Church Leaders

Prophecy

God speaks and we can hear Him! Hearing the voice of God is something we grow in. It doesn’t happen all at once. But we can persist until we develop ears to hear!

Do you ever wonder why some people seem to accomplish so much in the Lord? How do they do that? They hear from God and do what He says! Daniel 11:32 says:

The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.

If you know God – if you know His voice – if you know that you know that you’ve heard from God – you can:

- Climb any mountain
- Cross any river
- Travel any distance
- Wait any amount of time
- Fight any enemy
- In fact, you can go right up to the gates of hell with a water pistol

Why? Because you’ve heard from God and hearing from God builds faith. There is nothing like the confidence that comes when you know you’ve heard God. That’s why I’m encouraging you today to develop ears to hear God!