

The Voice – Learning to Hear God
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Deb and I love to watch a show called The Voice. It's a talent show for singers – but the difference between The Voice and other shows is that the judges listen to the singers with their chairs turned away from them. So – they don't know what the singer looks like: Whether they are old or young – short or tall – good looking or not so good looking. They also cannot see the singer's on stage performance. Do they move around or just stand in place? All they have to go on is the singer's voice.

And to succeed in the Christian life – we need to learn to turn our backs on how things look and how they're performing and concentrate on hearing the Voice – the Voice of God!

Today we are beginning a new sermon series called The Voice – Learning to Hear God. Did you know there are thousands of voices in this room right now? Can you hear them? No, because we are not tuned in to them.

But with the right antennas and receivers, we could get hundreds of TV channels, hundreds of radio stations, CB channels, shortwave radio, air traffic controllers and airplanes and millions of cell phone users. All these voices are in this room right now and we could hear them if we tuned in to them.

So it is with God – He is speaking and we can tune in to Him and hear His voice. Here's my main point today:

God is speaking and you can hear Him!

The issue is not trying to get God to speak. God is a speaking God. He spoke the world into existence and has been speaking ever since. Some people think God wrote one book and then retired and is living off the royalties.

Some denominations believe that God spoke in His word – the Bible - and does not speak today. But, then they make statements like:

I felt led by the Spirit

I felt impressed by God

I sought God's will in the matter

God put this on my heart

Their ministers say they are called into ministry. Called by whom?

All these statements are really just another way of saying, "I heard from God."

Many people shy away from saying that because it conjures up images of wild-eyed self-proclaimed prophets. But God does speak and we can hear his voice.

That requires us to take the time and effort to hear him. If there is any problem communicating, it's not on God's end. 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.

Our text for today is found in 1 Samuel. Samuel was the son of a woman named Hannah. She was unable to have children – but she went to the temple regularly to pray and cry out to God. She prayed with such intensity that the priest Eli thought she was drunk. But when he discovered that she was grieving over not being able to have a child – Eli told Hannah she would have a child.

Hannah promised God that if she had a son – she would give him to the Lord all the days of his life. She did have a son she named Samuel and when he was still young – she took him to the temple where he lived to minister to God and Eli. 1 Samuel 3:1-10 says

Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation. And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place... and while Samuel was lying down, that the Lord called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!" So he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." And he said, "I did not call; lie down again." And he went and lay down. Then the Lord called yet again, "Samuel!" So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." He answered, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." (Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.) And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears."

Then the Lord began to speak about the future of Israel. The thing that excites me about this true story is that there was a process involved in learning to discern God's voice. There is a progression to learning to hear God's voice.

Samuel became one of the greatest prophets in the Bible, but he did not instantly recognize God's voice. He actually mistook it for a man's voice. Samuel was hearing the voice of God yet he did not know it was God speaking.

The Bible reveals that there are many voices in the world clamoring for attention: 1 Corinthians 14:10 says

There are ... so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without significance.

What are these voices in the world?

THE VOICE OF PEOPLE:

This can be people we know or voices we hear through the media.

THE VOICE OF SATAN:

Satan's voice lies, deceives, condemns, accuses and tempts us to sin.

THE VOICE OF SELF:

The voice of self is us talking to ourselves – our self talk – what we tell ourselves.

One of the hardest parts in hearing God and is learning to discern between God's voice and our own voice. We are used to hearing through our physical ears into our minds. But God speaks to our spirit – He gives us revelation. And we sense it as a spontaneous thought, word, feeling or picture. Thoughts from my mind are meditated. Thoughts from God are spontaneous. When God speaks He does not drive you or force you – it's usually a still small voice that is easily ignored.

I submit to you that God speaks to all of us – there are times we do not recognize his voice. That's why I'm preaching on learning to discern God's voice.

You see there is a spiritual gift of discerning of spirits, but there is discernment that we all can grow in. Hebrews 5:14 says

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.

The New International Version says *by constant use have trained themselves...*

Discernment is the ability to know whose voice you are listening to and this ability comes through continually training our spiritual perception. The word discern comes from a Latin word which mean to separate or distinguish between. In other words, discernment is the ability to recognize and identify separate, distinct and different sounds.

For instance, when our kids were little, my wife could hear their cry in the midst of noise and even other kids crying. She was so familiar with their cry and so tuned it to hear it that she could pick their cry out in a nursery full of crying babies.

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 amid the other sounds of life.

By the way, if you are a believer, you have heard God's voice at least once – it's the voice that drew you to Christ in the first place. John 6:44 says

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.

You would have never come to Christ without that drawing. So, you have heard from God. One key in discerning God's voice is to remember the voice that drew you to Him in the first place.

Let me add – no one is or will ever be perfect in hearing God. 1 Corinthians 13:9 & 12 says

For we know in part and we prophesy in part... For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

We'll never be perfect in our ability to hear God. We'll miss it at times. But we can improve. We can learn to discern.

The Progression of Hearing God's Voice

1 Samuel 3:1 says *Now the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation.*

1- Minister to the Lord

Samuel spent his life ministering to and for the Lord. Even though the word of God was rare and there was no open vision, he ministered to the Lord. That was his priority. We all have the same priority to minister as priests unto the Lord. 1 Peter 2:9 says

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

How do we minister to the Lord? Well – what did priests do in Bible times? They offered sacrifices. What sacrifices can we offer? Hebrews 13:15-16 says

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

We can offer up sacrifices of praise – doing good – and giving. We should do this as a ministry to the Lord. We should give unto the Lord even when it doesn't seem we are getting anything in return. In due season we will reap if we faint not.

If we are going to hear from God, we must continue ministering to the Lord and making Him our first priority no matter what.

2- Submit to authority

1 Samuel 3:1 says *The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli.*

That means he was submitted Eli's authority. The Complete Jewish Bible says that Samuel ministered to the *Lord under Eli's direction*.

Many people say they want to serve the Lord and submit to authority, but they don't because this preacher wronged me or this church did this or that. Listen - not only was Samuel ministering in a time when there was no move of God, he was also ministering under a priest who was allowing rampant corruption and open sin among the priesthood. Yet Samuel remained true to the Lord. And he remained under authority. We must do the same if we want to hear God clearly.

I can't tell you how many people have come to us for counsel when they believe they've heard from God. Most of the time we will say, "Great, go for it." But there are times when we do not have a witness that they are hearing from God. So we usually tell them to wait and pray.

Some do - but some say, "I know I've heard from God and I'm going on no matter what you say." The vast majority of the time, they end up messed up because they were not under any authority. Don't expect to hear from God if you are rebellious.

3- Know the Lord

1 Samuel 3:7 says *Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.*

Samuel was hearing from God and did not know it. You can be hearing from God and not know it. It takes knowing God to know his voice. That requires getting still before God. Psalm 46:10 says

Be still, and know that I am God.

We must be still, get quiet, focus on God and listen. Every time Samuel heard a calling, he got up and ran with it. But he had a calling without clarity. He needed help because he had hearing without understanding.

Way too many Christians are running around saying God told me this and God told me that - but if it does not line up with God's word and God's character - it's not God!

4- Learn from others who know God's voice

1 Samuel 3:8 says *Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy.*

Samuel was hearing from God and did not know it. He needed someone familiar with the voice of God to say, "That's God speaking." It's the same for us - we need to spend time with others who recognize the voice of God so they can help us learn to discern God's voice.

Are there people around you who are drawing you closer to God?
Are they helping you discern the voice of God?

It's good to go to have people you can go to and say, "I think God may be saying this to me, what do you think?" Mature believers can help us learn to discern God's voice.

5- When you're a hearer – God comes nearer and speaks clearer

1 Samuel 3:9-10 says

Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times... Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Something different happened this time – God came and stood there and spoke clearly to Samuel God responds to attentiveness and responsiveness.

Back when the telegraph was the fastest means of long-distance communication, a young man applied for a job as a Morse code operator. Answering an ad in the newspaper, he entered a large, noisy office. In the background a telegraph clicked away. A sign on the receptionist's counter instructed job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were called into the inner office.

The young man completed his form and sat down with other applicants who had been waiting for quite some time. After a few minutes, the young man who had just come in, stood up, went over to the inner office and walked right in.

The other applicants wondered were upset that this late arriver went in before them. But they took satisfaction in assuming he would be reprimanded for his presumption and disqualified for the job.

Within a few minutes the young man emerged from the office escorted by the interviewer, who said to the other applicants, "Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming, but the job has been filled by this young man."

The other applicants looked each other in astonishment, and then one said, "Wait a minute—I don't understand. He was the last one to come in, and we never even got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair."

The employer responded, "I'm sorry, but the whole time you've been sitting here, the telegraph has been ticking out the following message in Morse code: 'If you understand this message, come right in. The job is yours.' None of you heard it or understood it. This young man did. So the job is his."

The one who paid attention, understood and responded got rewarded.

Likewise, God constantly sends out messages to us. When we pay attention, hear Him, understand Him and respond to Him – He rewards us by speaking even more.

So, I challenge you to take the time to learn to discern the voice of God.

God is infinite and unlimited and can speak any way He chooses. But the main way God speaks is through His Word. So read the word of God expecting to hear from God.

God can speak to your spirit during the worship service. So develop ears to hear by expecting to hear God when you come to church to worship, when someone gives a word or preaches a sermon. That's why I ask at the end of a sermon, "What's God saying to you?"

God speaks through dreams and visions and miraculous signs.

In the Bible – God even spoke to one man through a donkey. So don't be surprised if God uses some of the donkeys in your life to speak to you.

God is speaking and you can hear Him! If you're hearing it for the first time or hearing it for the last time... I want you to know you can hear the voice of God!

If you've never heard of it before or if you've heard it all before...
You can hear the voice of God!

If it's so quiet you can hear a pin drop or so loud you can't hear yourself think...
You can still hear the voice of God!

You might have people asking, Can you hear me now?
You might have people gossiping, Did you hear about so-and-so?
People might say, I don't want to hear another word about it.
Or they might say, You'll never hear the end of this!
But you can hear the voice of God!

People might say lend me your ear, hear me out or you're gonna hear from me.
But I'm challenging you to lend God your ear and hear Him out and you're gonna hear from Him!

You might have heard from others on the phone line, the mainline, the party line or maybe you heard it through the grapevine...
But the most important thing is that you hear the voice of God!

I want to close by saying that one of the prerequisites for hearing from God is that you must be a child of God. You must be born again. John 8:47 says

He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.

You can become a child of God today and start hearing the voice of your Father. In Revelation 3:20 – Jesus said

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

Respond to the voice of God today by opening the door of your heart and letting Him into your life. You'll leave here a new creation in Christ!