

Use It or Lose It!
Pastor Joe Oakley
GFC – 7/31/16

We've been speaking on learning to discern the voice of God. Our premise is that God is speaking and you can hear Him.

The title of my message today is Use it or Lose it. "Use it or lose it" is a very common expression that is usually applied to exercise or using our talents. It's the principle that if we don't use our abilities, we will lose them over a period of time.

For example – if you play a musical instrument but you stop playing for a while – you will lose some of your ability. It will only come back with regular use.

Or, if you don't use your muscles, they will waste away. This is called atrophy – which means to decline because of disuse. That's why people lose can lose their ability to walk when they are in an extended hospital stay. That's why they get people up and walking as soon as possible.

Also - did you know that many of the symptoms of old age are due to lack of use, lack of exercise?

Many Christians suffer from a lethal combination of spiritual atrophy – wasting away due to disuse – and spiritual malnutrition – wasting away due to lack of nourishment. As a result, they are dying spiritually.

"Use it or lose it" also applies to hearing God. In Mark 4 Jesus told the parable of the sower. After Jesus told the parable His disciples asked what it meant. He explained it to them and then said in Mark 4:23-25.

"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."

I've seen these verses many times and have always seen the principle of sowing and reaping in them. I had applied them to things like finances and forgiveness and that's okay.

But look what Jesus says here – He says to those who hear – more will be given. More what? More hearing! To those who are not hearing – even what little they have will be lost. In other words, use it or lose it.

Hear the voice of God and walk in the light He gives you, or even what little light you have will be lost. This is serious business.

Those who grow to spiritual maturity do so through proper nutrition – feeding themselves with the word of God – and proper exercise. 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.

Remember, discernment is the ability to recognize and identify as separate, distinct and different. So – when it comes to hearing God – discernment is the ability to recognize God’s voice amid all the other voices we hear.

The senses talked about here in Hebrews are spiritual senses. In the physical realm – the senses of taste and smell are the way we discern what we like to eat. In the spiritual realm – there are senses that we can use to discern God’s voice. We are used to processing what we hear through our soul – mind, will and emotions.

God rarely speaks to us in an audible voice - He speaks to our spirit – which is made up of conscience, intuition and communion. Spiritual intuition is revelation we receive from God through our spirit. Thoughts from my mind are meditated. Thoughts from my spirit are spontaneous.

What I’m about to tell you is very important! We all hear from God differently. That’s because we use different spiritual senses to hear God. Some people hear God through a word that comes to them as a spontaneous thought. Others hear God through pictures – they see things in their mind. They are called seers.

I remember a woman who used to go to church here complaining that she never heard from God. I said, “Let’s pray about it.” So I prayed with her and asked God to speak to her. When I was done I asked if she heard anything and she said, “No.” I was kind of disappointed until she said, “But I did see something.”

She went on to tell me about seeing a door that had been locked open up. I asked her if there was some closed door in her life that she had been asking God to open. She said, “Yes.” Then it hit me – she’s a seer. She hears from God through pictures or images in her mind.

When I told her that - it was a huge revelation that she was indeed hearing from God – but she was hearing through pictures when she thought she should be hearing a voice.

Some people hear God through words. Others hear God through pictures. Others hear God through feelings. *This happens to me sometimes in our worship services.* It’s one way words of knowledge come to me.

For example – there have been times in a service where I’ve felt pain in my body that I knew was not pain from sickness or injury. It was God leading me to pray for people with that physical pain.

There have been other times where I've been in worship and experienced intense emotional feelings like grief or sadness. I didn't have anything causing grief or sadness at that time, so I knew this was God wanting me to pray for people experiencing that emotional pain.

My point is that God can be speaking to you at times in ways you haven't thought of. I want to expand your thinking about hearing God so you can put that to use rather than losing out on hearing God.

Sometimes – what we call a “gut feeling” is actually God speaking to us. I had to learn this the hard way.

When Deb and I were much younger – she was on fire for God and I wasn't. I was a Christian and went to church, but I was more into my career. She was attending a Bible study and began to tell me some of the things she was learning there. I had what I used to call a “gut feeling” that something was not right with what she was learning. But, I just let it go figuring that she was the “spiritual one.”

As time went by, it became more and more obvious that this study was off base and she needed to get out of it. I went to her and told her why I felt this way and she received it. Fortunately, no major damage was done and we learned an important lesson about how God speaks.

Looking back, I know that God was speaking to me – warning me – to keep my wife from harm. I learned that these “gut feelings” were actually what I call now a “check in my spirit.” That's one of the major ways God speaks to us – by a still small voice in our spirit saying, “Whoa! Don't go there.”

Another way to say this is an “absence of peace.” Colossians 3:15 says

Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.

The word “rule” literally means “umpire.” An umpire directs and decides athletic contests. In baseball, an umpire – calls you safe or out.

So – if peace is our umpire – that means when we have peace when we make a decision, we are safe. But if we have no peace, the umpire is saying, “You're out.” That could be God saying, “Hold up.”

In other words – don't keep pressing forward if you have no peace. When in doubt – don't! The Amplified version of Colossians 3:15 says

Let the peace which comes from Christ rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts (deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds).

I'm trying to help you see that God can be speaking to you at times when you're not aware of it. Even through things like a gut feeling or an absence of peace.

Beginning to listen and obey will help us develop spiritual discernment. And that discernment grows only when we use it! Heb. 5:14 says *discernment comes to those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern.*

The word for use means practice. The word for senses means perception. The word for exercise means to train, as an athlete trains for a game.

So – we can paraphrase this verse to say discernment is the ability to know whose voice you are listening to and this ability comes through continually training and practicing our spiritual perception.

We'll never get infallible in our ability to hear God. But we can improve. We can learn to discern.

Remember - the issue is not trying to get God to speak. But we must overcome the things that hinder our ability to hear God. Let's look at some of the things that hinder us from hearing God.

1- Rebellion

Ezekiel 12:1-2 says

The word of the Lord came to me: "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."

Rebellion means disobedience or sin that you refuse to repent of. That sin will hinder you from hearing God.

2- Hardness of heart

The book of Hebrews says 3 times: *Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.* (Hebrews 3:7-8)

A hard heart is a heart that cannot be moved by the things of God or the voice of God. It is stubbornly set on its own way. A hard heart will result in deaf ears.

3- Passive minds

2 Corinthians 10:5 says *We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

A passive mind is not a blank mind – but a mind that takes in every thought without considering its source.

Just because you think something does not mean it is true.
 Just because a thought enters your mind does not mean it is from God.
 It could be from Satan or it could be your own thoughts.

You've got to do the hard work of taking thoughts captive – refusing thoughts from the enemy and submitting to the word of God.

4- Busyness – not taking time to listen

We can get so caught up with work – even the work of the Lord, that we forget the Lord of the work. We must want to hear God bad enough that we are willing to give up anything else.

We must repent of not putting God first in our lives, not hearing Him. We must also do what Psalm 46:10 says:

Be still, and know that I am God.

We must be still, get quiet, focus on God and listen. Often, the issue for us is not whether or not God is speaking, but whether we are being still enough – quiet enough – to hear.

5- Not reading the Bible.

We need to all commit to spend time with God in His word to learn to discern his voice. God is speaking and you can hear him! And the main way He speaks is through the Bible. So, get into the word and get the word in you!

Here's a major way our own voices hinder our hearing God.

6- Adding to God's word.

I'll try to illustrate this with the way I study to preach. My study involves revelation, interpretation and application. Revelation comes through the word. I study the Bible first, then other commentaries and word studies. My first goal is to learn what God was saying to the people in Bible times. Then I want to hear what God wants to say through those verses to us today. In other words, I want to interpret what God's revelation says to us today. Thirdly, I want to hear how God wants to apply that word to our lives – how we should respond – what we should do.

So, we have:

- Revelation – the word of the Lord
- Interpretation – what that word means for us today
- Application – what we should do in response

Now, bring this around to us hearing from God individually.
 What we hear the Lord saying is the revelation.

It's the prophetic word or the dream or the impression in our heart.

Problems can arise in our interpretation and application of that word. Sometimes, the word from God will be kind of general at first. It may have lots of blank spaces. The problem is we try to fill in the blanks.

For instance, God may give someone a word that they have a call to ministry. That's good, but it's still kind of vague. Now we could come in with our own desires – our own voices – and say – the interpretation of that word means you are called to preach and the application means you need to quit your job and go to Bible college.

Well, that's not what God said. That's what we said. God said you have a call on your life. Period. We filled in the blanks.

Some people take a word from God and turn a word into a sentence – a sentence into a paragraph – a paragraph into a chapter – a chapter into a book – and a book into a library. And then when the things in their library don't come to pass – they get mad at God. But all God gave was a word – they wrote the books in the library!

What we need to do with a word from God is to do is pray over it, seek the Lord and wait for further instructions. God's revelation is the who, what and why – the interpretation and application add the when, where and how. We need to seek God for correct interpretation and application of the revelation. We miss God when we determine the interpretation and application.

Where we miss it most often is in the when – the timing. We're usually way ahead of God's timetable.

I'll give you an example. Before we ever even thought about starting this church, Deb, Trudy and another lady had a word from the Lord that they would minister together. Immediately, they began to try to fill in the blanks and add definition to what God said. They began putting together a traveling women's ministry. Deb would teach – Lisa would sing and Trudy would pray.

I remember the 3 couples going out to eat and the husbands all had that gut feeling – that check in our spirits – that lack of peace. So, we cautioned them to go slow and wait on the Lord. They kept praying – and their prayer meetings led to us hearing from God to start this church – and Deb preached, Lisa sang and Trudy prayed!

So, my caution to you is not to add to or try to figure out all the when's, where's and how's – usually your voice answer those questions. Rather, wait on the Lord – seek Him – hear Him.

At the very least, be willing to be adjusted in your interpretation and application.

1 Corinthians 13:9 says *We know in part and we prophesy in part.*

We'll never be infallible in our ability to hear God. But we can improve. We can grow. We can learn to discern. Psalm 119:105 says

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Notice that the word lights the pathway at our feet. Many times, we want to see a mile up ahead, but God usually gives us just enough light to walk in. As we walk in that light, we will receive more light. Psalm 36:9 says

In Your light we see light.

We all need to hear God's voice so we can walk in the light. God wants us to hear His voice so we can know the truth! God wants us to hear His voice so we can live in peace! You might feel you are walking in total darkness – but when you hear God's voice you will walk in the light. And here's the awesome thing. Psalm 139:12 says this about God:

It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you; night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.

Did you get that? To God, darkness and light are the same.

God never experiences dark times!

God never wonders what to do next!

God always knows what to do next!

God always sees perfectly!

What is our darkest midnight is as bright as noonday to Him!

In fact, God does some of His best work in our darkness!

Many major events in the Bible happened in the midst of darkness – from creation to the cross. So - Don't stay in the dark! Hear God's voice and you can walk in the light!

When you are faced with a problem, God's voice will give you wisdom.

When you don't know which way to go, God's voice will show you the Way!

When you're down, God's voice will lift You Up!

When you're fearful, God's voice will give You Courage!

When you're hurting, God's voice will give You Healing!

When you're weak, God's voice will give You Strength!

When you doubt, God's voice will build your faith!

When you're in despair, God's voice will give you hope!

When you need to be set free, turn on the light of God's Word and as you continue in the Word, you will know the truth – the lights will come on – and the truth will set you free! Can you thank God for His word? Can you thank God for His voice?