

Open Ears
Pastor Joe Oakley
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We are in a sermon series called Open. So far, we have taken a look at Open Doors and Open Eyes. Today I am speaking on Open Ears. Since today is Father's Day I'm subtitling it The Voice of the Father.

I believe that God speaks, and you can hear Him. In fact, you're probably hearing Him and just don't know it.

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.

Many people shy away from saying we can hear from God because that conjures up images of wild-eyed self-proclaimed prophets. But God does speak and we can hear His voice – if our ears are open!

To each of the seven churches in Revelation – the Lord said:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (Rev. 2:7)

Jesus said fifteen times in the Gospels, He that has an ear, let him hear. 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, then 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.

You can grow in your ability to hear God. Samuel was one of the greatest prophets in the Bible, but he did not recognize God's voice at first. 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.

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.

God speaks to all of us – but there are times we do not recognize His voice. If there is any problem communicating, it's not on God's end.

A man was having difficulty communicating with his wife and concluded that she was becoming hard of hearing. So, he decided to conduct a test without her knowing about it. One evening he sat in a chair on the far side of the room. Her back was to him and she could not see him. Very quietly he whispered, "Can you hear me?" There was no response. Moving a little closer, he asked again, "Can you hear me now?" Still no reply. Quietly he edged closer and whispered the same words, but still no answer. Finally, he moved right in behind her chair and said, "Can you hear me now?" To his surprise, she responded with irritation in her voice, "For the fourth time, yes!"

Any problem we have in hearing God is not with God speaking but with our hearing!

1- Knowing the Voice of God requires Knowing the Heart of God

Knowing God's heart and knowing God's voice always go together. That's why Satan works so hard to make you think you can't hear God. Or when you do – he tries to twist God's words. That's that very first thing we see Satan do in the garden in Gen. 3:8-10. He deceived Adam and Eve by casting doubt on God's word.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

There's a lot here that I don't have time to teach on today. I just want you to see that sin causes us to be afraid of God's voice. And sin causes us to have a wrong view of God.

The most important thing about you is what you believe about God. Why? Because your belief about God impacts every other area of your life on earth AND more importantly, your eternal destiny.

Hearing from God greatly impacts your relationship with God. The Old Testament rarely refers to God as Father. However, when Jesus came on the scene he introduced God as Father. He referred to God as Father more than 170 times. He taught us to pray, "Our Father Who art in heaven."

You can tell the depth of a person's relationship with God by the way they relate to him as Father. Some people have problems with the word father. Maybe their father was abusive or absentee. Some people relate easily to God as father because they had loving fathers. Regardless of how your father treated you, God is the perfect loving Father and no earthly father can love us like Him.

By the way – there are no perfect parents! No one perfectly models God to their children – but there is a vast difference between being raised by a father who loves you and one who abuses you. Our relationship with our parents shapes our image of self and God.

Here's how family contributes greatly to our view of God and how we can end up with wrong concepts of God that need to be put away.

If you had no father in the home – or if your father was there but uninvolved – you will tend to see God as distant. He's too busy for me or He doesn't really care. This will impact your worship and your prayer. It's hard to express love and devotion to someone you're not sure cares or is paying attention.

Maybe your parents were hard to please. If you got a C – why not a B? If you got all A's and one B - they focused on the B. When you did a job around the house – they criticized it. No matter what you did – it was never good enough. When that happens – you can end up viewing God as hard to please. No matter what I do – it's never enough or never good enough. As a result, you live under condemnation.

Some people view God as Santa Claus – "He should always give me what I want when I want it. I just sit in His lap and tell Him what I want and it appears." I've seen many people view this view and when God was not their Santa Claus – giving them what they wanted when they wanted – they turned on Him because their view of God was wrong.

The wrong concept of God will not sustain you in the long run. With the wrong concept of God – you will end up shipwrecked in your faith.

That's why you need to recognize the voice of your heavenly Father! It's important to have the right concept of God! Where do we get that right concept? Knowing the voice of God requires spending time with God and spending time in His word.

2- Hearing God requires spending time with God

It takes knowing God to know His voice. That requires spending time with God. Having a devotional time with God is also called a quiet time – yet many of us are never quiet! When we pray we do all the speaking.

Psalm 5:1-3 gives us wisdom in hearing from God. It says-

Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for I pray to no one but You. Listen to my voice in the morning, O Lord; Each morning I bring my requests to You and wait expectantly.

The Amplified Version says – *I wait for You to speak to my heart.*

Notice that the Psalmist spoke to God and took time to hear from God.

Prayer is not a monologue where we do all the speaking. It's a dialogue - a conversation between two individuals.

So – learning to hear God's voice requires us to spend time with Him and then getting quiet and still to listen to Him. Psalm 46:10 says:

Be still, and know that I am God.

We must be still, get quiet, focus on God and listen. We need to all commit to spend time with God in His word to learn to discern his voice. When we pay attention, hear Him, understand Him and respond to Him – He rewards us by speaking even more.

God is not going to speak to someone who is not going to obey His voice. But if we will develop ears to hear, God will speak to us. Jesus said believers could know the voice of God and distinguish it from voices that give wrong guidance. John 10:27 says:

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

In John 10:3-5, Jesus tells how sheep respond to the shepherd's voice:

The sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.

I saw a video where a test was conducted with sheep. Three strangers called to the sheep, but they did not respond. However, when the shepherd called them,

they instantly responded. Why did the sheep recognize the shepherd's voice? Because they spent time with him.

Don't complain that you can't hear God if you don't spend time in prayer listening to God. People make prayer hard and complex, but it is nothing more than talking to God and waiting for Him to respond. This conversation doesn't have to be long to be effective.

It's better to spend five minutes with God than an entire day without Him. So, if you don't have a great prayer life, don't feel guilty or make an unrealistic commitment that you're going to begin praying an hour a day. Pray for five minutes. And then spend some time in God's Word.

Just remember to start where you are – not where you want to be. It's like training for a marathon. You must first get up off the couch. Then walk around the block. Then work up to walking a mile. Then start running longer and longer distances.

It is the same with your time with God. People who have spent little time with God and make a commitment to an hour with God will become discouraged and quit. So, start where you are, wherever that might be.

3- Knowing the Voice of God requires knowing the Word of God

God is infinite and unlimited and can speak any way He chooses. 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.

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.

And one of the main ways God speaks to us is through circumstances. Don't waste your tough times! Don't waste your sorrows! Don't waste the difficulties you go through! Develop an ear to hear God so you don't keep going through the same things over and over!

But the main way God speaks is through His Word. So, read the word of God with an ear to hear God's voice. Don't complain about not hearing from God if you don't spend time in the Word.

You can read the Bible with closed eyes or opened eyes.

You can read the Bible with closed ears or opened ears.

You can read the Bible with a closed heart or an open heart.

So, before you read, pray this simple prayer – "Lord, open my ears and speak to me through Your Word today."

If you do faithfully spend time with God, you will hear from God.

Jesus addressed people who read the Word but didn't hear God in John 5:37-40-

And the Father who sent me has Himself testified concerning Me. You have never heard His voice nor seen His form, nor does His word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one He sent. You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life.

It's possible to read the Bible and not hear God. But, when you spend time with God and you ask Him to speak to you through His Word - you will hear from God. If you want to hear the voice of your Father, you must spend time with Him in prayer and in the Word.

The main way our ears are opened to hear God is found in Romans 10:17 –

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

It doesn't say, Faith comes by the word of God, but faith comes by hearing, and hearing comes by the word of God. The reason we are constantly challenging you to spend time in the Word is because that's the main way you hear from God.

And there is nothing more faith-building than knowing you have heard from God. I'm not a natural risk-taker, but when I hear from God, I will go where He says and do whatever He says with confidence and boldness. I will charge hell with a water-pistol because I've heard from God. Knowing you've heard from God will build your faith. The voice of God will direct you, correct you and protect you!

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!

So, 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!

Tell Him about your discouragement – and you will hear His encouragement.
Tell Him about your failure – and you will hear Him say, "I forgive You!"
Tell Him about your loneliness – and you will hear His voice say,
"I love you and I will never leave you or forsake you."
Tell Him about your condemnation – and you will hear His voice say,
"That's not from Me because there is no condemnation in Jesus Christ!"

The voice of God will never condemn you!
The voice of God will always forgive you!

The voice of God will never curse you!

The voice of God will always bless you!

The voice of God will never say, "I hate you!"
The voice of God will always say, "I love you!"

The voice of God will never put you down!
The voice of God will always lift you up!

The voice of God will never lead you to despair!
The voice of God will always say, "I have plans for you that are good not evil!
Plans to bless you, not harm you. Plans to give you a future and a hope!"

Just begin talking to God and listening to God and you will develop ears to hear His voice.

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!

If you wonder what the voice of God is like – it is the voice convicting you at moments like this – drawing you to relationship with God.

Will you open your ears and your heart to Him today?