

HEARING GOD SPEAK

Does God Still Speak?

Some of the books I used to help me write the prayer journal have very little about listening to God. I was quite astounded. I used much of the outline for this series from a book called 28 days to powerful prayer. It contained not one single section on listening. It is not really a relationship if only one person speaks.

This week is all about listening to God, a subject that many find challenging. How do I hear from God? How does God speak. Day 2 contains a list but it is not exhaustive. One of the things not there is pain, a whole subject in itself. Sometimes the only way God can get our attention is through pain. While I am not saying that God causes pain, he certainly, often uses it.

One key question today as we start is this: **Does God still speak today?** Is God speaking to people today? Is he speaking to me?

When we read the Bible, it seems as if almost every page God is speaking to someone. 1301 times "God said" 111 times "Jesus said" Total 1412 times. There is 978 pages in my old NLT bible so it is more than once per page. We tend to read the Bible and think Well, they were special people. But this is not true. We see God speaking to anyone and everyone.

Is there any indication he has stopped? No, some of the last words of the Bible. Revelation 3:20. Behold I stand at the door and knock.

I know God speaks. I have experienced it time and time again. The real question is not Does God speak today. But are we listening today? When Samuel was a child being trained by the old priest Eli, he heard a voice at night and mistakenly thought it was Eli calling. When he got up and went to Eli, Eli told him to go back to bed as he hadn't called at all. Eventually after being woken three times, Eli told Samuel to go back to bed and when he next heard the voice was to reply "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." That is a great prayer.

There is famous painting about this by English artist William Holman Hunt. In 1853 he painted a portrait based on these words in Revelation 3:20. Note really carefully No door handle on the outside. What the painter is trying to communicate is that we have to be listening. We have to take the initiative to listen. God does not barge in uninvited. We have to open the door.

Listening to God is a skill. Cultivated over years and years. Mark Battersby in a great book called Whisper said these words

"If we are not willing to listen to everything God has to say, you eventually won't hear anything He has to say. If you want to listen to his comforting voice, you have to listen to his convicting voice. What we want to hear the least is what we need to hear the most. "

"Tell me what you pay attention and I will tell you who you are". Spanish philosopher, Jose Ortega y Gasset. You will be shaped in the image of the loudest voice in your life. The voice you listen to the most. This is a profound thought. Whose voice are you listening to? The voice of a critical parent. The voice of a wounded child. The voice of the spirit of the age. Whose voice are you listening to? That voice will determine who you are.

Jesus says 6 times in the gospels and 8 times in Rev. i.e. a lot of times. 14 times. Whoever has ears let them hear.

To a Jew hearing this they would have heard echoes of Ps 40:6. My ears you have opened. The word opened can have two root meanings. One is open as in to dig through dense material. But the other meaning is to pierce. Many scholars believe that David was referencing a Jewish practice outlined in the law given on Mt Sinai. A Hebrew servant was bonded for 6 years. But in the 7th year he was to be set free. But if the servant wanted to stay he was given the option of pledging allegiance to his master for a lifetime. What the instruction in the law says was that the servant was taken to a door post, and his ear was

pierced with a sharp rod. So, who are we listening to. Have we pledged allegiance to listen to the voice of God? Those who have ears let him hear

Jesus said. My sheep hear my voice. The picture here is of sheep without paddocks. The sheep would graze with other flocks in a mixed herd. But at the end of the day, the shepherd would call his sheep out to follow him to the pen for the night. Do you know the voice of God?

In 1973 an Austrian biologist called Konrad Lorenz won a Nobel Prize for his study of geese. Goslings, in the first few days of their life undergo a process called imprinting. During that process it is imprinted on their brains whom to follow. If the bond fails to form, the gosling doesn't know who to follow. Or it can end up following the wrong voice,

The same process happens with babies. By the 7th month a baby in the womb can recognize and respond to their mother's voice. By neuro imaging they have shown mums voice has a unique influence on the brain, over and above a stranger's voice.

The same concept is with us. We are imprinted by God to bear his image and recognize his voice. Whether you recognize it or not, God's voice was the first voice in your life.

Since then you have been subject to all kinds of other voices. Anxiety, shame, criticism, rejection. Today the question is. Is God the loudest voice in your life.

Joshua was the leader who succeed Moses as the leader of the Israelites. Why was he chosen? We are not told directly, but I think we are given a clue in Ex 33:11 Joshua choose to linger in the presence of God. In that quiet space outside the camp, where Moses would meet with God. That was his quiet space where he could linger in the presence of God and listen to his whispers.

Listening is something we must actively do. Let say I want to catch up with you for a coffee. It would be impossible to do without making a time and a place. Sometimes people we meet say. "Oh, we have to catch up for a coffee some

time." But we know it is just something they are saying. To hear from God means Finding solitude, and ruthlessly slowing our lives down.

Am I scared to listen?

Hebrew 11:6 say if we are to approach God we must believe he exists and know that he cares enough to respond. I get nervous about meetings where there might be conflict. No one likes those meetings. If we think the person is going to get angry with us, tell us off, we put them off. So how we perceive God is going to influence how keen we are to listen to God. If God is critical and angry and going to beat me up, we might not want to listen.

If we were to sum up the Bible in 3 words it would be: "God is love." The closest we get to understanding this love is to think about the love we have for our children. Now, we know are kids are not perfect. But we love them absolutely. But God's love is some much greater.

When we succeed, God says I love you
When we fail, God says I love you
When we have faith, God says I love you
When we have doubt, God says I love you.

A W Tozer said. What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. If love is not the first thing that comes to mind, we have the wrong impression of God. Yes, God's love includes tough love. Discipline. But whatever God does, he always does it out of love and with our best interests at heart

Justin Webley archbishop of Canterbury was once asked after speaking what the greatest challenge was that we faced as Christ followers. Seemingly without hesitation he said. Every Christian I meet cannot quite believe that they yare loved by God.

Last story is that of Elijah. . Elijah was depressed and suicidal. He had just been in a power encounter with the prophets of Baal. He had just seen an incredible answer to prayer to break a 3 and half year drought. But now he was not in a good place, emotionally, physically or spiritually.

God had given him rest and physical nourishment. Then he began to minister to his spirit on Mt Sinai. God told him to go out of his cave and stand before the mountain. The Lord passed by in a windstorm. That powerful that it blew rocks off the mountain. God was not in the wind. Then an earthquake shook the mountain. Frightening power of God. God was not in the earthquake. Then there was fire, but God was not in the fire.

Clearly God was the cause of the wind, earthquake and the fire. God was speaking powerfully. The noise would have been absolutely incredible. I'm sure it would have got Elijah's attention. But how did God choose to speak to Elijah.

God spoke in a whisper. God has an outside voice as it were. And he can use it. But most of the time, God speaks in a whisper. Why? Why does God speak in a whisper.

God wants us to hear what he is saying. He wants us to hear his heart. So, he whispers softer and softer so we have to get closer and closer. His goal is intimacy. Not just that we would hear. But he wants us to be close. And when we get close enough he hugs us and tell us he loves us.

Download or listen to this message at:
www.icbc.org.nz

SMALL GROUP REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

1. What is one thing that God impressed upon you this week from the devotions?
2. Look at the list on day 2 of how God speaks? Brainstorm some other ways God speaks. How does God typically speak to you?
3. What is the biggest obstacle to you hearing from God?
4. Discuss the idea that the quieter we are, the more we will hear God.
5. Discuss the quote: Tell me what you are listening to and I will tell you who are.
6. What fears or worries to you have about listening to God?
7. How convinced are you on a scale of 1-10 that God wants to speak to you every day? If you really believed this, what would you do differently?

Discuss the action point at the end of Day 1. Create some space in your group to do this, or make a commitment to each other to practice this discipline this week. Warning. This is actually harder than it seems. Honestly share how it goes for you.