

# **HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD**

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Two failures at hearing God's voice convinced me that He had one. As a young pastor I had somehow asked God if my car would get me into LA. The answer came back quickly and quietly, "No." I finished a few other tasks, then asked again. Same answer. I took it anyway, thinking it was my own voice. I didn't drive the car home. God was trying to help me.

Years later I was on my way to pick up four tires at the other end of town I had found on craigslist. I asked God while driving, "Is this going to work out?" The immediate answer came, "No." Again I wondered if it were my own voice. I paid \$400 for the tires, brought them back thirty minutes to town and took them to Tires Plus for installation. They called later and said they didn't fit. God had been speaking. It was worth the wasted time. I concluded that God knows how to talk and I can hear Him. I have come to realize that...

## **GOD HAS A VOICE.**

Eli was right--after three misses; God was speaking to Samuel. The fourth time "the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel.'" God really wanted Samuel to hear Him, so He came right into his room (1 Samuel 3:10). Jesus said, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15). For years I did not have inner ears that heard. I had not been taught to listen to the voice of God. My experience was that we did all the talking and God did all the listening. Little by little, I, like young Samuel, came to experience the voice of God.

Jesus repeats the same words to every church of the Revelation: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7 and following). The Son of God knows that the Spirit is talking, and churches need to listen up if they want to thrive. Jesus had told the disciples that when "the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13). The Spirit has a voice according to Jesus.

God has a voice. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Psalm 19:1-4).

Jesus has a voice: "His sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10:3). Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (27). The world does not know that God has a voice. It thinks God is quiet, speechless, passive. The people of God know better, or at least they should.

## **GOD'S VOICE IS NOT LIKE OUR VOICE.**

When I walked outside to speak at a home group, I heard the words, "Write a book on revival." It wasn't an audible voice, but it was just as clear. It didn't come like sounds wave into my outer ears, but I heard it on the inside. I had ears to hear. I had learned like Samuel learned from

hearing that God has a voice. He became an expert at hearing God's voice, "and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground" (1 Samuel 3:19). But he still made mistakes. When God told him to go to Bethlehem to anoint the next king, he viewed Eliab and thought this firstborn son, impressive to look at, must be the one (1 Samuel 16:6). God was gentle with him and instructed him to look on the heart, not the outward appearance (7).

After I had spoken on revival, the group prayed for me. Cindy said, "I see a book, but the pages are empty. You are to write a book." I responded, "I know, and I have the subject matter." How kind of God to confirm to me that I had heard His voice.

### **YOU CAN HEAR HIS VOICE BY LISTENING.**

Some people don't hear God's voice, because they don't think He is talking--at least not to them. Or if He is, they don't know how to hear Him or how to make sure they are hearing accurately. The king of Syria gathered his servants together and told them that someone was squealing because all his plans to defeat the king of Israel were intercepted and overturned. One of his men said, "Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom" (2 Kings 6:12).

The king determined to do away with the prophet, "so he sent there horses and chariots and a great army and they came by night and surrounded the city" (14). When Elisha's servant stepped outside the next morning and saw the army, he panicked and said, "What shall we do?" Elisha said, "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (16). Then he prayed, "O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see" (17). The prayer was answered, and the young man saw that "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (17b).

God gives us eyes to see spiritual reality. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians includes you, "that the eyes of your hearts may be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you" (1:18). So we need our eyes opened. And we also need our ears attuned to properly hear from God. We have those ears; we need to use them. We position ourselves to listen. Do you have ears to hear? Samuel had ears to hear.

I was speaking at a new friend's church in Arizona and staying at his home. He told me that they had no children and it was very hard on his wife. I went to my room and did what God was teaching me to do--listen. I heard God say that she would conceive soon and have a girl. I shared this with my friend cautiously and said that I didn't know if it should be shared with his wife. He encouraged me to do so. God was faithful--and they named the girl after our daughter. Three more children followed the firstborn.

Babies are incredible listeners. They learn a language simply by hearing it spoken. They don't go to language school. They don't go online to study. They simply listen--and learn. Hearing the voice of God is not a matter of technique; it is a matter of listening. If children can learn a complicated language like Chinese or Japanese or Hungarian, you can learn to hear the voice of God--accurately and immediately. In fact, Jesus says you can do it better than great intellects.

He prayed, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hid things things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children" (Matthew 11:25). You qualify--if you are a child of God. This is not for the superstars or the veterans. Tell God what Samuel was told to say, "Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening." He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

I was once asked by a friend, "Can you teach me how to hear the voice of God?" I responded, "I'm not sure if I can, but one thing you need to do is to shut up and listen." He got the point.

### **HEARING DEPENDS UPON A RELATIONSHIP,**

not a methodology. You hear from Jesus because you are a sheep and He is a shepherd. It goes with the territory. I speak to my children because they belong to me. I know about the children who live down the street, but I don't know them and I have never spoken with them. I have a relationship with my children: "I know my own and my own know me" (John 10:14), as Jesus said tenderly about His followers. Listening is more relational than functional. Jesus did not give the disciples six steps to hearing the voice of God.. The emphasis in John 10 is on the love the shepherd has for the sheep. He is kind, worthy of their trust. He proves it by laying down his life for them.

Saul was chosen by God to lead the people of Israel. When Samuel anointed him, the Spirit came upon him and he prophesied. He had the potential to go deeper and become a strong spiritual leader. Unfortunately, his insecurity and jealousy of David prevailed. His desire for the praise of men overtook his need for the approval of God, and he did not walk into his God-appointed destiny. Sadly, when Saul needed to hear about his future near the end of his life, he went to a witch, a medium, a person who was supposed to have contact with the dead rather than repenting and looking to God and he ended miserably, taking his own life. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

### **FOCUS ON GOD'S ABILITY TO SPEAK,**

not your ability to hear. Put the ball in God's court. Worrying about whether or not you have heard the Lord clearly is proof that you are putting the ball in your court. Many find themselves worrying about a crucial decision. Some are told things that only increase their anxiety: "You don't want to miss God's perfect will. Are you sure you have heard clearly? You could miss it." Such statements often put fear in the hearts of people who desperately want to hear. Out of fear they put themselves in a place of passivity, a bad position from which to hear.

A girl came up to me after class at a Lutheran Bible School in Canada. She was almost in tears as she said she needed to make a difficult decision about which church to choose for her internship. She had three in mind and didn't know how to "find God's perfect will." She was fearful that she would offend God who must have been guiding her, but she didn't know how to hear him. I asked her if she had one that she favored. She said, "Maybe St. John's." I asked her when she needed to make the decision by. She answered, "Next Friday." I told her to tell God that next Friday she was going to connect with St. John's, and if He had anything to say in the matter, He could let her know." She asked, "Just like that." I said, "Just like that." You are not forcing the decision. You are giving God the freedom to communicate with you whenever and

however He wants, and you are not frozen up in passivity.” She was relieved, and she even managed a faint smile.

God didn’t panic when Joseph made plans to divorce the woman who was carrying the Son of God in her womb. He had multiple ways at His disposal to communicate with him and chose to give him a dream in which an angel appeared to him. “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him” (Matthew 1:24).

As the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, I also served as principal of our Christian school. Bob Kogler, who had three boys in our school, told me that he would be pulling his boys out of the school. I did not greet the news with joy, because we didn’t have a big school and his boys were assets. But I said, “Bob, you’re the dad and you can do what you need to do. I would simply suggest that you put the ball in God’s court. Tell Him that you are taking the boys out the following Monday (it was Friday), and that if He had any different opinion in the matter He could let you know. On Monday the boys were in school. I said, “What’s up, Bob? I thought you were pulling your boys out.” He answered, “God gave me a dream and made it clear that they belonged at Trinity.” God communicated, Bob heard, and he obeyed.

Yogi Berra, the well-known catcher for the New York Yankees in the 50’s and early 60’s, was known for his down-to-earth philosophy, called yogi-isms. One was, “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” He was actually right on. Forks create passivity. Jerry was in love with a gal but wasn’t sure if he had the right one. She finally wearied of his noncommittal and married someone else, breaking his heart. He should have abandoned his anxiety about missing God’s will by walking into it, but fear paralyzed him and kept him indecisive. We have many ways to communicate with one another, and so does God. One way to hear from Him is to

### **LEARN TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS.**

“Yes” and “no” questions are a good place for us to begin. I like to ask Him questions like: “Is it time to go to the store? Shall I go to Home Depot or Menards? Do you think I should buy these plants? Is it time to check in with Gary about the trip? Do you have a word for me regarding this counseling appointment?” Notice that I am asking immediate rather than ultimate questions. The Bible says that “the steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord.” God helps us get there once step at a time. So if we need to know the next step, He is probably ready to tell us. So I ask questions like, “What do you want me to say to this person?” “Should I give them any money?” Before meetings, I often ask the Lord, “Do you have any words for anyone?” Always remember--you are a child, and children are good at asking questions!