

When People Pray: Week 6 – Listening

Exodus 33:7-11, Ps. 16:7-8, John 10:27, Rom. 8:14-16

*Note: this is not a word-for-word manuscript of the message video, but an outline summarizing the main content of the message.

• LISTENING

- So far, we've talked mostly about how to *speak* to God and connect with God in prayer (adoration, petition, intercession, contemplation). But what about *listening* to God?
- **John 10:27** “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me.”
 - Think about the wonders of recognizing voices. You can recognize the voice of your child, your spouse, your friend out of thousands—you know it's their voice, they don't even have to introduce themselves. How do you know it's them? How do you explain that?
- **Read 1 Sam. 3:1-10.** This is a wonderful story about the boy Samuel in the tabernacle, serving under the priest and mentor, Eli. It's about hearing God's voice for the first time and learning to recognize when God is speaking.
 - The Bible is full of stories of people hearing from God in different ways. It begs the question, should we expect God to speak to us today? Three questions we will consider today:
 - Should we expect to hear from God?
 - If so...how do we hear from God?
 - And how do we get better at hearing from God?
- Here are some thoughts listening...
 - Soren Kierkegaard (famous Danish philosopher & writer), “A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer was listening.”
 - Dietrich Bonhoeffer (German theologian and martyr during WWII) “The child learns to speak because his father speaks to him...so we learn to speak to God because God has spoken to us and speaks to us.”
 - Pete Greig observes that babies are born with the instinct to babble, make noises with their mouths, but it's only through listening that we learn how to talk. “Everyone starts out in life trying to pray, but only those who learn to listen become fluent in its form.”
- If prayer is, at its heart, communicating and interacting with God, then a big part of prayer has to be *listening*.

• SHOULD WE EXPECT TO HEAR FROM GOD?

- When we start to talk about “hearing from God,” there can be various reactions:
 - Worry & concern – we have seen far too many sad examples of people abusing the notion of “hearing God” to destructive, harmful abuses, or simply foolish and silly things.
 - Disappointed & jaded – maybe you were sure you heard from God and ended up being disappointed, maybe somebody boldly claimed a word from God to you and it fell through.
- Skeptical & Closed – Some think that God did that in the past, but only in Bible times. Now the only thing we need to hear from God is to read the words of Scripture, but we should not seek to receive God's personal and direct communication too us.
- So this brings us to the first question: it's fair to ask—***should we expect to hear from God?***
- *To this question, I believe the right answer is, YES! Not just my experience, but from listening to the Bible's teaching and listening to the experience of wise and faithful Christians through the ages.*
 - **Dallas Willard, “God has created us for intimate friendship with himself—both now and forever. This is the Christian viewpoint. It is made clear throughout the Bible...As with all close personal relationships, God can be counted on to speak to each of us when and as it's appropriate.”**
- The whole message of the Bible points to a relational God who wants a relationship with us—God wants to be close to us. This is the heart of the Gospel.

- Humans were created for intimate connection with God – In Genesis 2 God would come to the garden “in the cool of the day” to walk with Adam and Eve.
- This is the whole story of Scripture. We were created for intimate connection with God, we become alienated from God through sin—and the rest of the Bible is about how God reconciles us back to Himself, bringing us closer and closer to Himself
- Abraham-one man, one family chosen to be friends with God and the beginning of the covenant family, Israel-God rescues this people and makes them his covenant people, Moses-God meets with him and the Israelites in the tabernacle, Kingdom-Israel becomes a nation with kings and a temple in which God’s glory dwells, rebellion-the people turn away from the covenant repeatedly but God continues to send prophets to turn them back, Messiah-God coming closer than we could have imagined to be with us and become one of us, Cross-we are reconciled to God through the sacrifice of His Son, Spirit-God comes even closer to be within us and His very people are the new tabernacle, New Creation-the Bible ends with a vision of everything being restored back to the Garden and God fully dwells among people again.
 - **God wants us to be so close to Him, to have an intimate, interactive relationship.**
 - Exodus 33:11 “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”
 - John 15:14 Jesus calls his disciples his *friends*—friends of God—followers of Jesus are all *friends of God* like Abraham
 - We should expect to hear from God, not just in the occasionally extraordinary ways, but in everyday, ordinary life.
 - Dallas Willard, “Generally speaking, God will not compete for our attention. Occasionally a Saul gets knocked to the ground and so on, but we should expect that in most cases God will not run over us. We must be open to the possibility of God’s addressing us in whatever way he chooses, or else we may walk right past a burning bush...we may mistake the voice of God for the sound of someone’s radio turned up too loudly, for some accidental noise or—more likely still—for just another one of our own thoughts.”
- **HOW DO WE HEAR FROM GOD?**
 - So how about you? Have you ever heard from God? Some have very clear experiences, testimonies of God giving clear direction in various ways...others hear stories like that and wonder, “Why don’t I hear from God like that?”
 - If God wants to have this kind of relationship with us, how do we do it? How do we hear from God and how do we get better at it?
 - Pete Greig in this week’s chapter gives several general ways God often speaks to us
 - Hearing God through the Bible – the Bible is our primary source of revelation, we weigh everything against its authority. We read the Bible not just to learn its timeless truth about God, but to encounter God and hear God—it is the living word.
 - Hearing God through dreams & visions
 - Hearing God through other people (counsel & common sense)
 - Hearing God through personal reflection – ordinary, still small voice, thoughts and impressions God places upon our hearts
 - I’ve found my kids listen to me better when I whisper rather than shout...
 - Most of the time, I believe God prefers to whisper rather than shout (1 Kings 19, Elijah hears God in a still, small voice on the Mountain of God)—God often speaks in more subtle ways to protect us (we can’t handle the full truth all at once) and to get us to seek him more
 - Pete Greig wrote, “Most people today miss the voice of God not because it’s too strange but because it’s too familiar.”
- **HOW DO WE GET BETTER AT HEARING FROM GOD?**
 - **Slow Down** – we move to fast
 - **Soften Up** – be open and receptive, not calloused
 - **Test it with A.B.C.**
 - Advice of wiser Christians, Biblical truth, Common sense

- **Weigh it with 2 simple Questions:** *is this like Jesus? What's the worst that can happen if I were to get this wrong?*
- **Don't focus just on guidance**—God wants to say more to you than just what to do...
 - I remember times when I have felt that God was giving me direct guidance—but some of the most profound times of hearing God have been simply His love & promises (Romans 8:15-16)
- **Seek more, but don't compare**
 - We were made for a relationship with God, but we were made differently, and we hear from God differently. Be content with the way God made you, and pay attention to how God is speaking to you and leading you.
- If nothing else, just begin by seeking to *hear from God* through the Bible. We're going to put that into practice a bit more in our discussion with the practice of praying and meditating on Scripture.
- Let's listen. Once again, *Jesus, you have our attention.* Amen.