

Mother Teresa is known throughout the world as having started multiple ministries to the homeless and impoverished of India. I once knew a girl who was taken in by one of her orphanages and adopted by an American couple. Writing about her early days as a Nun, Mother Teresa says, "I was traveling to Darjeeling by train, when I heard the voice of God." It is with this line she begins the story of how God called her to minister to the poor of Calcutta India.

What most people don't know, and didn't know for a long time, was that after that initial call, Mother Teresa heard very little from God. Rev. Brian Kolodiejchuk, her executor, released journals and private writings that revealed her deep, dark night of the soul that lasted for most of her life.

Here is a woman that many of us would believe had a direct line of communication with God, but through the years, she confessed over and over again to not feeling God's presence or hearing his voice.

"I am told God lives in me — and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul. I want God with all the power of my soul — and yet between us there is terrible separation. I feel just that terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me, of God not being God, of God not really existing."

I may be a bit strange, but I wish she would have revealed this earlier because when I learned of it I found great comfort in this.

Some people seem to hear God constantly, but for many people they struggle to hear God's voice.

As part of this message series, you have been asking the questions. And one of the most asked questions about the spiritual life is Why can't I hear the voice of God? Why doesn't He just write it in the sky for me or make it undeniably clear when I have an important decision to make? Or, as this question was worded, why doesn't God speak like He did in the Old Testament?

Worse yet, many, because they haven't heard God's voice or had an experience of His presence, jump to the belief that God doesn't speak at all. At least those who are voicing the first set of questions believe that God speaks...the others, generalizing from their own personal experience, assume that because it hasn't happened to them that it can't happen for anyone or doesn't happen at all.

This morning, I am running with the assumption that God does speak to us. It may not happen like we want it to happen. It may not happen as often as we would like it to happen. It usually isn't as clear and direct as we would hope for it to happen...But it does happen!

As we get started it is best to clear up some misconceptions...

So many times we make the mistake of assuming that God always spoke in huge, loud, unmissable ways.

It is easy to read the Bible, see all of these power things: God rolling back the waters of the Reed Sea, Manna from Heaven, Bold Dreams, Fire from the sky....we see them and think, "Why doesn't God speak like that anymore!?! It is so clear, so unmistakeable...so undeniable!"

Do you realize that within a week of the Reed Sea the Israelites were complaining and wanting to go back to Egyptian slavery? You would think that if this was so undeniable and so unmistakeable they would be like, "After what I just saw!!!! I will keep believing and trusting God for anything!" But they didn't. Water from a rock? Same complaining sniveling whiners. Jesus raises the dead? Some believe, others believe it is a trick and they should just kill him.

God knows that the undeniable, unmistakeable miracles and voices and fire from the sky...are not so undeniable and unmistakeable as we might like to think.

There are all kinds of possible reasons for this...sometimes people have hardened their hearts. They won't believe because they don't want to believe. Sometimes God uses natural means to do supernatural things. I believe that some of the miracles of the Bible were simply God using natural occurring things in our world. Sometimes something is so unbelievable that it is unbelievable even after you tell it to yourself later. "I must have hallucinated or been dreaming!"

So

How do we hear the voice of God?

We must learn to be quiet.

We make the mistake of believing they always heard an audible voice or had a clear direction...Take Elijah, though, as a prime example. Here is a man that challenge the prophets and priests of the false-god Baal to a God-off. He gave them all day to have their god rain down fire and light their simple sacrifice. It didn't happen.

The story goes that when he built his altar he poured bucket after bucket of water over the sacrifice and wood...wanted no reason for people to disregard the work of God. He prayed and the Bible tells us that fire fell from heaven and consumed. And yet, not everyone believed. A price was placed on his head and soldiers were hunting him so he ran and hid. He was depressed. He fell asleep under the shade of a tree and ravens brought food to him, and yet this wasn't enough for him to get out of his funk.

1 Kings 19:11-13

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

We assume that God speaks in these great and powerful ways, but God tells us here that He wasn't in the wind, He wasn't in the earthquake, He wasn't in the fire. God's presence was in the whisper.

Psalm 46:10

"Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

So many times we fail to hear the voice of God or sense His leading because we have no room for quiet in our lives. There are times in our life when it is extremely difficult to find a place to be still and be quiet.

I can't imagine how a mother with several children can do it. Add to that if it is a single mother.

There have been times when in my life where it has been so full I barely had time to do anything.

For those starting a business...it is extremely difficult to find the time to be quiet.

But whether all the busyness and noise in our lives are self-inflicted or a product of our just how life has to be at this time...the reality is that it really does make it harder for God's voice to break through. It is not impossible, and God can and does speak in the midst.

There are times we have to balance the reality of our lives with everything else, but let's be honest for a moment. Sometimes, we use it as an excuse. We build time in our lives for everything else that we really want to do...If you really WANT some time...you can find a way to create it. It won't necessarily be easy. Sometimes it won't be cheap. Sometimes it won't be perfect.

But let's find that balance between getting things done, having a full schedule, and also not using it as an excuse to distance ourselves from God. Get up a few minutes earlier in the morning just to have some quiet with God...or stay up a bit later. Turn the radio off in the car. Cut a television program from your viewing schedule. Take a walk around the neighborhood. Take the kids to the park. Hire a babysitter for a few hours (I might know someone if you are in need of one!)

We must learn to recognize God's voice.

One of the things the silence does is help us learn to recognize God's voice amid all the other voices. Was that God's voice or was it my own idea? Or the Devil? Or the pizza I ate last night? Or just some crazy idea?

John 10:25-27

Jesus answered, "...The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."

One of the reasons we don't hear the voice of God is not because He isn't speaking...it is because we can't make out His voice amid all the others and can't tell which one is His.

There have been times when people come asking for counsel. They say, "I am going to do this because God told me to do it!" And my thought is, "Have you even read the Bible?" I know the Bible can be unclear sometimes, but there have been times when what the person is blaming God's leading couldn't be more clearly against the way God works.

I have heard people say the craziest things, and then blame it on having heard from God. Some crazy things are from God. Others are proven as the other kind of crazy by how they fall apart or they are just so contrary to the way God works or to His word.

Hebrews 4:12,

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Every time I have read or heard about people trained to spot counterfeits...counterfeit money, diamonds, artwork, anything...they are trained how to spot the counterfeits by meticulously studying the real thing first. Hours and hours of studying and being with the real thing helps them know when something just isn't right when a counterfeit shows up.

The best way to learn the voice of God is by reading, meditating, memorizing, and studying Scripture. God is consistent. There are all sorts of interpretation things when it comes to the Bible, but thousands of years of God-followers can attest that reading the Bible, spending time with it, enables them to hear the voice of God and pick it out from a crowd of voices we all face.

Finally

We must learn to hear God in others.

Because God has called us to live and function within and out of a community of people...God will often speak to us through the Church. I use a capital "C" for church

there because God uses pastors, scholars, theologians, prophets, songwriters, prayers, authors, and even people who have no idea they are being used by God to speak. God can and does use people like you and me to speak to others.

This can be challenging. Is it God or is it their attempt to guide and control us? Are they being judgmental or being moved by God? Is it all from God or just a part?

God uses others to speak to us in the same obscure ways He speaks to us elsewhere.

One of my favorite stories growing up comes from Numbers 22. God speaks to Balaam through a donkey. We always used the King James version so it used the word "Ass" instead of donkey. It was the only time I could get away with using that word and not getting in trouble. But mom, I was just reading the Bible... You want me to read the Bible don't you?

But here is one of the biggest lessons I learned. God will use whatever He has to use to speak to us. If God can speak to someone through an ass... He can speak through you and me.

There are times when God gives you an impression or a word that isn't for you... it is meant for you to give to someone else. Sometimes you might be talking to someone and you are given a clear impression or idea of what you should say... it might be God.

I admit this is often the hardest because sometimes God is sending us correction or direction we don't really want, and to hear it on the lips of someone else... I mean who do they think they are!!!! But if it really is from God... the telling should be difficult for both parties involved.

When I was in college a friend of mine felt very strongly that God was directing her to give me a message. She came up to me, crying, and asked to talk. If it had been some other girl at the college, I would have rejected the message immediately, but I knew her. She told me she felt God was saying that I should put my marriage to Lori on hold.

To be honest, I was wrestling with some doubts, and wasn't really in a place. I was going ahead with plans because it was what I thought I ought to do. It hurt, but I asked Lori if we could step away from the marriage plans for a little bit for me to sort through my feelings and make sure it was what I wanted to do. I wasn't breaking up, though Lori was sure we were. But after a few months, I knew it was what I wanted to do.

I know it wasn't easy for that girl to say that to me. She was a good friend. Some might think she was making a move. She was interested in a good friend of mine, and they are married and have two beautiful children. She felt like God wanted her to say that to me, and, I think if she hadn't I would have gone ahead and married not because I knew it was what I wanted but what I thought I ought to do.

God will speak to us through others.

Conclusion

God has not always spoken to me the way I want. There are some people who seem to have his direct cell number while I only get his voicemail. There have been a few times...

I sensed God nudge me to ministry. I felt Him nudge me again to church planting. I know he opened the door for me to plant the church in Pleasant Hill, but there was no direct voice. I recognized that He had led me to plant here in Huber Heights. And I had an argument with what seemed to be the very real voice of God in the Wendy's drive through line...that is extent of the most direct forms of communication I have had with God.

There have been other nudges and impressions and times when his presence was real, but as far as hearing God's voice or seeing some undeniable indication that He was active...those have been sparse.

There is so much more we could say, but I wanted to give you some very practical ways and places to hear the voice of God. We didn't even cover the work of the Holy Spirit leading and guiding. How God can use our consciences to lead us. How dreams and visions can play into it.

There are dangers with how God speaks. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish his voice from all the others...sometimes He doesn't speak as clearly and plainly as we would like...there are some people who seem to hear God's voice in EVERYTHING! And other who seem to never hear it at all. It doesn't guarantee you will hear His voice immediately. It doesn't mean it will be louder or unmistakable.

Despite these dangers and in spite of the difficulties we have in hearing...God still speaks.