



UNMUTED

LISTENING FOR GOD'S VOICE

WEEK 3 – DISCIPLINES

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... okay, it's that time of year again, let the annual debate begin: where do you stand on the pumpkin spice sensation? Are you PSL, ride-or-die... "give me all the pumpkin spice, please?" Or are you over the craze... "pumpkin-spiced dog treats were the last straw?" (Remember, we're all friends here.)

OPENING PRAYER

Ever-present God, thank you for speaking to us so often in so many ways, and remind us that we don't have to wait to hear your voice.

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of the war that just erupted over pumpkin spice, we can all agree that we'd love to hear God's voice... telling us what to do, giving us direct advice, telling us it will all be okay when The Cardinals have been mathematically eliminated from the playoffs. And it's easy to think that if we don't get an angel coming down from heaven with a scroll, we don't think God is speaking to us. But there's good news...

God *does* speak to us. It just isn't an angel with a scroll. And so, for this series, that's what we're talking about... how to listen for God's voice. Because, remember our premise for this whole series: God is always talking to us... constantly. In every moment of life, in multiple ways, all around us, directly and indirectly, God is speaking. We just have the volume muted. And so, for these 4 weeks, we're talking about how to Unmute God's voice. The last two weeks, we've covered was that God chooses to speak to us in a passive sense. That is, things we have to wait for. Today, we'll talk about how we can be proactive in listening for God's voice. But first...

Review Question: Last week, we talked about getting nudgings from God. Did God speak to you in a subtle way this past week? Did God use someone else to give you a message or a hint somewhere that guided you on the right path? What has God been trying to tell you?

SCRIPTURE

It's halftime, so let's recap... week 1, a story from Exodus where God speaks to Moses through a burning bush gave us our first way God speaks to us... what we call...

REVELATION

Revelation is when God speaks to you directly. God will allow you to just *know* an answer, just *feel* his response, or, in rarer experiences, just *hear* God's voice. (For more details on those, go back and watch

last week's reflection.) Then last week, we looked at ways God speaks to us a little more subtly. And a story from Jesus, where he calls himself the Good Shepherd and us his sheep gave us a way to look for God in between the revelations. We called these...

NUDGINGS

Like the little orange road cones that guide you when you're driving a car, *nudgings* happen when God speaks to us through others, through the mentors and pastors in our lives, and through a relationship that is so close to him, you simply know the sound of his voice. But, how do we develop that kind of closeness to Christ? Well, we do that through what will be the third way God speaks to us. For that, let's look at the same story we looked at last week... but back up a bit. See, Jesus would occasionally tell a story, then explain what he meant. Our scripture last week was the explanation part, but there's something very interesting in the first part that we need to tease out. Let's take a look...

Read John, chapter 10, verses 2 through 4.

He explains a bit more, but they don't get it. So, he spells it out... "*I am the shepherd, and my sheep know my voice,*" which is what we looked at last week. But there's a phrase in verse 3 that he doesn't put in the explanation that is easy to miss, but is so powerful. We'll come back to that...

Question 1: You've had a week to sit with this story now. What stands out to you? Is this a comforting image and metaphor, Jesus as the Good Shepherd? Or is that not how you experience God and your relationship with Christ? Discuss!

REFLECTION

Did you catch it? In verse 3, Jesus says, “the sheep recognize his voice and *come to him*.” That phrase, that we “*come to him*,” wasn’t in last week’s scripture, and it’s so telling. Part of listening to the voice of the shepherd is meeting him halfway. There’s a response on our part. There’s a step we have to take, too. If you’re intent on listening for God’s voice in your life, you can’t just sit around wait for a revelation or a nudging. Those happen on God’s timing, not yours. But there’s always something we can do on our part. We can go *to him*, as the Scripture says, to hear his voice better. Jesus is in the pen. The Shepherd has come through the gate. His voice is calling out, calling you by name... will you go *to him*, so you can hear and know his voice better?

Let’s assume your answer is, “yes.” How do we do it? Well, the only way to know the voice of the shepherd better, is to spend more time with him. And the way to spend more time with him, is through what we call...

DISCIPLINES

Spiritual Disciplines are how you meet God halfway in listening to his voice. Now, depending on who you read, there are anywhere between 2 and 120 spiritual disciplines. (Okay, the highest number is probably, like, 12, but at that many, it feels like 120.) But we're going to focus on the 4 that are most closely related to God's voice.

Question 3: How disciplined a person are you? Are you someone who thrives on routine and structure? You wake up at the same time, same routine getting ready, same schedule, same coffee, same rhythm, rinse and repeat? Or, are you one whose days never look the same, throwing off the oppression of a schedule?

So, if you want to hear God's voice, but you're not getting a burning bush—and you don't even think you're getting the nudgings from others that we talked about last week—what can you do to go to Jesus, as the Scripture suggests? Well, the first one is fairly obvious and a little on the nose: go to Scripture. Read your Bible. We call the Bible the Word of God, and if God is speaking to us, God would use words—so where better to find those words than *the* Word, right? Now, there are lots of ways to approach the Bible. You can read it for study, learning about its context and the facts of the matter, though that's not always the best way to hear God's voice speaking to you. The best way to do this is what we call *lectio divina*, where you read a passage and listen for what God may be trying to say to you through it. (We've taught this a number of times, so we won't go through it today, but if you want a description, go find the series "Sacred

Rhythms” on our app and watch the “Scripture” week.) You can also try the “let the Bible fall open and see what happens” trick. Of course, God doesn’t always speak to you through Scripture in the way you expect. You might let the Bible fall open and land on Ezekiel 4:12, where God tells the prophet to “prepare and eat your food, baking it over a fire made with human dung.” But reading Scripture as a conversation between you and God—listening for what God might be saying through a passage—is a spiritual discipline that can help you hear God’s voice in between the revelations and the nudgings.

Spiritual discipline #2 is prayer and meditation. We won’t go too deeply into this one either, because every Easter we do a series on prayer. If you want more about that, go back and watch one of those this week. This year’s series was called *The SCRIPT*, and it focused on ways to pray. Last year’s was called *Sacred Rhythms*, and it focused on how to pray—great nuts-and-bolts material on the spiritual disciplines of prayer and meditation. For today, let’s just reiterate what we emphasized in the *Sacred Rhythms* series: 92.47% of your prayer life should not be talking, it should be getting quiet. God doesn’t like to shout over the noise in your life. If you’re always going, if you’re always busy, if you never stop to listen, you will not hear what God has to say. If you want to draw close to the shepherd, as our Scripture says, if you want to hear God’s voice, find a way to get quiet.

Spiritual discipline #3, which can also help you hear God’s voice, is worship. Here in The Connection, we define worship as, “encountering the presence of God.” Anything you do to encounter

the presence of God is worship, and when you worship, you enter into that presence in a real and direct way. When you worship, the distractions, the noise, and the barriers between you and God are lifted, and you can hear God's voice more clearly. That's why coming to community worship every week you can—even when you're not on the volunteer list—is essential. The veil that can mute God's voice in your life gets thin in worship, and a song or a Scripture or a message can hit you in a way it might not otherwise. Now, you can also worship on your own, but it's often less effective because you've got other things going on—though rocking out to your latest worship favorite in the car can be a truly holy and moving experience where you hear the voice of God. But it happens best in “corporate” worship.

Okay, #1 open your Bibles. #2 get quiet in prayer. #3 come to worship. Now, there's one more we want to mention. There are a few spiritual disciplines that, by definition, allow us to meet God halfway. We call them sacraments. If you have a Catholic background, you may be familiar with seven. We're United Methodist, so we aren't nearly that disciplined; we only have two: Communion and Baptism. We define these as two holy events where our spirit meets God's in the middle. So, if you want to hear God's voice and feel God's presence in your life, these two things are a direct channel. Many of us were baptized as infants or in another church or denomination, and that's great. We don't make you do it again as if the first one didn't stick. But if you've never been baptized and want to be, or what to do a remembrance of your baptism, find Pastor Mike. As for Communion, if you let it, it can

be a holy moment where God speaks to your spirit. Next time you're in worship and we do communion, simply pray, "God, speak to me through this representation of your body and blood," and see what happens.

Question 4: Do you find any of these ways particularly more effective in hearing God's voice than another? Which do you struggle with? Is there one that you'd like to try to potentially hear God's voice speaking into your life?

CLOSING

Next week, we're going to finish this series by talking about how to know that what you've heard is really God's voice. How do we test what we've heard? But for now... if you want to hear God's voice and you're not getting any revelations or nudgings, sometimes you have to give God a little help and, as our Scripture suggests, go to Him... through opening your Bible, through getting quiet in prayer, through worship, and through sacraments. Get to know the sound of the shepherd's voice by meeting him halfway.

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations and close in prayer.