



UNMUTED

LISTENING FOR GOD'S VOICE

WEEK 4 – TESTING

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

God of Grace, give us the wisdom to recognize your voice, and the humility to admit when it's just our own.

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 (usually) 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 three weeks, we've covered three primary ways that God speaks to us. "That's it, then, right? Three weeks, three ways to unmute God's voice. Done and dusted, yeah?" Well, no, there's one more vital step that we'll finish with today.

Review Question: Last week, we talked about using spiritual disciplines to listen for God's voice. Were you able to do that? Maybe you spent time in prayer or scripture and heard a word from God? Perhaps you received a message through worship or a sacrament? Maybe you got nothin'. That's okay, too! Share why or why not.

SCRIPTURE

Let's review... 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. It might not be a burning bush, but it does happen even today. God will allow you to just *know* an answer, just *feel* his response, or, in rarer experiences, just *hear* God's voice. Then last week, we looked at ways God speaks to us a little more subtly. 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 the third way God speaks to us.

DISCIPLINES

There are specific practices, or spiritual disciplines, that help us meet God halfway and open the door for us to hear his voice. We mentioned reading the Bible as a conversation between you and God, going to God in prayer and silence, and letting the veil between you and God get a little thin in worship and sacraments as ways to do this.

So what is this vital last step? Well, for that we'll look at a passage from the book of Acts. Here's your setup: Jesus has returned to heaven and sent his followers out to start new communities of faith.

Two of these guys were Paul and Silas, and they're headed for a town in modern day Greece called Berea.

Read Acts, chapter 17, verses 10 through 12.

Paul and Silas were speaking to a Jewish community in Berea, probably talking about how Jesus fulfilled prophecies from the Jewish scriptures. That was how they were preaching the Good News about Jesus... that the Messiah had come and Jesus fulfilled these Scriptures. And yet, the Bereans didn't just take them at their word... they fact-checked it.

Question 1: What stands out to you about this story? How would you have felt were you one of the Bereans, listening to Paul and Silas? How would you have felt if you were Paul or Silas and the Bereans were checking your work? Discuss!

REFLECTION

But the Bereans, even though they were more open-minded than the Thessalonians, (kind of a cheap shot at the Thessalonians, but whatever...) they still do something important. Look at verse 11. They didn't just accept what they were hearing... they checked to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. We need to do the same thing. See, there are a *lot* of voices in our lives. We have people in our ears all day, every day. We have social media and news reports. We have our own thoughts and desires. All these voices can be overwhelming,

and it's easy to mistake those for what God is trying to tell us. How often do we hear someone say, "I think God is telling me to..." and then they say something so ludicrous that it's absolutely obvious it wasn't God's voice they heard. Maybe they were just feeding their own ego, their own ambition, their own prejudice. Maybe they were doing what just felt right or what eased some pain in their lives. It's all too easy to convince ourselves that these other voices are God's. And so, for this final week, we're taking a note from the Bereans... when you think you've gotten a revelation, or you're seeing nudgings, or you believe you've gotten a message through disciplines... when you think you've unmuted God's voice in your life, there's one more step.

TESTING

You gotta test the audio. You have to check out what you think you've heard, like the Bereans did. "Is it really God's voice, or is it just what I want to hear?"

Question 2: What voices have the strongest influence in your life and your decision making? Who or what do you turn to when you need guidance? Is there a specific area of your life when you're more likely to following your own desires than maybe what God wants for you?

The good news is that there are some time-tested, tried-and-true ways to test what you think you're hearing. We're going to look at five questions that operate like a filter to help you know whether it's truly

God's voice. The first question you have to ask yourself is this: Does God actually care about what you've asked or prayed for? Now, don't get me wrong, God always cares about you. The Bible says God is concerned about every hair on your head, (an easier thing for some of us than it used to be.) What we mean is, sometimes God doesn't have a *preference* about what you're trying to decide. He might just be saying, "my child, it doesn't matter what you choose. Either way, I'll be with you. I'll use you, and I can bring good out of either choice." So, the first question to ask is: Does God have a preference in this decision?

The second question you need to ask is: Is it reasonable? God has given you a brain capable of logical thought. So, ask yourself, "is the thing I think God is telling me *reasonable*?" Yes, sometimes what God asks of us may be outside our comfort zone. But, for example, if you have an abusive boyfriend, would God really tell you to stay in that relationship? No. Or, since God obviously hates the Chicago Bears, would he really ask you to remain a fan? No. (That's an abuse we bring on ourselves.) So, question two is, "what I think God is telling me, is it *reasonable*?"

Question three: Does it fit with Scripture? Scripture can be vague about many things, and some passages can seemingly be used to justify choices that would not be good for you. That makes this test question tricky, which is why you also need the other questions. Still, use Scripture as a litmus test. Like, if something you think God is telling you does not fit with Jesus's command to love your neighbor,

or with the commandment not to commit murder, it is probably not from God.

Question 3: Let's pause here a moment. Review these three questions... are any of them new to you? Which of these is a struggle for you when discerning God's voice?

Now, these first three questions are helpful when we don't know whether we are hearing God's voice or merely our own desires. But there is another common situation we often find ourselves in, where the next two questions can help. Say you've been trying to discern something and God is trying to give you an answer. It's absolutely obvious to everyone else, but *you* are the one denying or ignoring it. For that situation, use the next question: Has it been confirmed? A great test is the "Rule of 3." If you experience 3 confirmations from completely unrelated sources that couldn't have conspired... it's probably God trying to tell you something. A friend tells you something, the song on the radio has the same theme, and the sermon on Sunday is over the same topic? God might be trying to get your attention. So, has the guidance you are considering been confirmed through more than one trustworthy source?

And finally, the best way to test what you think God is telling you is to ask: What does my Circle of Faith say? Does my faith community think this is right for me? Do my spiritual mentors and "border collies" agree? Some people have been given the gift of discernment for this very purpose: to help you understand what God is saying. So use

them! If you are considering something and your entire trusted faith flock is telling you, “No,” perhaps you should listen.

So there you have it: five questions that can help you test the audio, what you think you are hearing.

Question 1: Does God have a preference here?

Question 2: Is it reasonable?

Question 3: Does it fit with Scripture?

Question 4: Has it been confirmed by more than one source?

Question 5: What does my community of faith say?

When you run a decision through these five tests—through this filter—you can get a pretty good idea of whether what you are hearing is truly God’s voice.

Question 4: Consider these last two questions. Have you ever had a situation where God has had to use multiple sources to get your attention? Do you rely on your faith family to help you discern God’s voice? Who are those folks? If you are currently in a situation where you are seeking God’s guidance, run this test right now. If you’re in a group setting, let the group run through these 5 questions with you and see what happens.

CLOSING

Okay, so there you go... hopefully, by now you have a pretty good idea of how to unmute God’s voice in your life. God is speaking to you... all

day, every day, in so many ways... if you only listen for it. 1) Keep your heart and mind open for God's Revelation speaking directly to you. 2) Keep your eyes open for the nudgings of God speaking to you through indirect ways. And 3) meet God halfway through spiritual disciplines. Then, run what you've heard through these 5 questions, this filter... and you might just unmuting God's voice in your life.

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