

HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD

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Scripture: John 10: 24-30

Turn to the gospel of John, 10: 24-30. There's really one particular verse that I want us to focus on, vs. 27, but for context, we'll read these verses.

"²⁴ The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."²⁵ Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. ²⁶ But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; ²⁸ and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

I love this passage for there is such a wonderful metaphor here. Jesus says, "No one can snatch you out of My hand." And then He says, "I and the Father are one." How secure we are! no one and nothing can pull us out of His hand.

But vs. 27 says, "My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me."

We've been looking at prayer in these last four weeks, and looking at it almost as a multifaceted gem that you can turn and see different angles and different perspectives of it. and each of them is a thing of beauty.

- First, we looked at how we respond to unanswered prayers; prayers that we keep praying, but it seems that the heavens are eloquent in their silence. How do we face that?
- Then we looked at what does it mean to pray in Jesus' name. Why do we pray that? what's the power? Is there power in tacking that along?
- Then we looked at the Lord's prayer in two sections: first where we said that we set our gaze towards the Father. And the second part was when we invite the Father's gaze on us.

But there's almost a problematic response that all of us have when it comes to prayer. How do I really know that my prayers are being answered? How do I hear the voice of God? How do I determine that this is the voice of God? How do I listen? It's not like God picks up the phone and says 'Hello, this is God speaking, just to tell you that I'm answering your prayer request.' We don't get that. somehow God expects that when He answers a prayer request, His sheep, who hear His voice, will know that it is Him. How do we know what His voice is like?

UNDERSTANDING THE VOICE OF GOD.

So often when we pray, we seem to get answers that come from a myriad different areas. We pray about something and we get an answer that is almost fleshly. Why? I'm praying Lord, but this is what I want. I expect You to do what I want. Our prayers are based in our flesh and so are our expectations. It may or may not be the will of God for you, but sometimes it's the flesh that overrides what God actually wants for us.

Or, we may trust our experiences. We may say that in the past God has answered this prayer, and maybe this is how I need to understand this prayer as well. We look to our experiences to give us answers, or we take advice from people around us. We ask them, "What do you think I should do in

this situation?" Then, if a majority of them say, "This is what you should do," and we go with it. We rely on the advice of people around us to understand what God is saying in our lives

When we look at scripture, we see God answers our prayers in very different ways. We look at Hannah. Hannah was barren. She didn't have a child. She kept praying for a child. One day Eli saw her and he said, "This time next year you will have a child." God answered a prayer through Eli, through somebody. That's an avenue that God uses to answer prayers as well.

Then you look at Elijah, praying for rain. God had said, "I will send rain". And there is Elijah praying for rain, not once, but seven times. Praying with tenacity for that rain. Then he stands after that and he's waiting for God to speak. You remember he's run to Beersheba because he got frightened that he was going to be killed. And he stands there waiting for God to speak. And there's thunder. God is not in the thunder. There's an earthquake; God is not in the earthquake. And then in a gentle breeze, God speaks. Quietness. The voice of God comes.

Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Praying, "Father, if this is not Your will, let this cup pass from Me." No reply. Nothing. He knew the will of God for Him, for He was praying. But here's the thing. It's like a caveat that God gives us. Luke's gospel says that God sent an angel to strengthen Him.

So, there are times when you get weary in praying. But there are no answers that seem to be coming from heaven. And you think, "Is it time to give up?" Look for the strength that God will bring into your life at that time.

HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND GOD'S WILL FOR US?

1. **Through Scripture.** God speaks to us through scripture.

2 Timothy 3:16 *All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.*

The Bible is the primary way in which God speaks to His people. His Word provides guidance, correction, and encouragement. And often specific verses or stories will resonate in your heart during prayer.

There was a mother of great faith who lived in Hippo in Africa. She was a prayerful woman, and she had a son. She prayed every day for her son to grow up to be one of God's children, part of His kingdom, and would serve God while he was here on earth. The child grew up to be a very intelligent person, became a professor of rhetoric at a university. But he also grew to become somebody who had no morals at all. He got involved in immorality and hostility towards God, indulged in drunkenness, sexual immorality, and even worse, was misleading people with his own philosophical ideas. But she kept on praying.

And one day, when he was 19, she had a dream where she felt that she saw her son and herself holding hands and walking into heaven. She woke up feeling so strengthened. She felt that God was saying, "Your son will be saved. Your son will be in heaven." So she kept praying. One day a bishop visited their town. He was a well-known person, in some sense an evangelist. He spoke at revival meetings and at the end of it, she requested that he come and pray for her son. He refused. She cried before him saying, "Please, I want you to pray for my son, that he would leave the ways that he has gotten into." And the bishop said something that stayed with her for a long time. He said, "It is impossible for the son of those tears to perish." She drew a lot of strength from that as well.

Nine years after his mother's dream, when he was 28, he was sitting in a park, and he heard this voice come in a kind of a nursery rhyme kind of way that said, "Take it and read. Take it and read," over and over again. and he knew that this voice was telling him to read the Bible. So he opened the Bible and it came to Romans 12:13-14. And this is what it read.

"¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

An arrow to the heart, and it pierced him. It directly confronted the lifestyle that he was living. He experienced a miraculous transformation as he turned his face and gaze toward God and asked for forgiveness. He was no longer known as the immoral son of a woman of faith and prayer. His name would be known to each of us as Augustine. Saint Augustine. He was called one of the greatest theologians of his time, and one of the key defenders of the Christian faith.

She prayed for him, never gave up, and God spoke to him through His Word. So, God speaks through His word. And it is important for us to also know His word. When God speaks to us and says something, we should be able to say that is from the word of God. The onus is on us to make sure we are reading the Word, and know His word.

2. Through the Holy Spirit's Inner Prompting.

John 16:13 says, *"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth."* The Holy Spirit speaks through inner peace, conviction, gentle impressions in your heart and mind. And God's voice often comes as a still voice in the gentle breeze.

When we were looking to which seminary to attend, growing up in Madras I had heard about Asbury Seminary. So we visited Asbury Theological Seminary, and both Sheila and I sat in their Estes Chapel. We had been praying and saying, "Lord, show us." We were sitting there all alone and there was such a peace that descended on us. We knew instantly that this was the place that we needed to go. We told many people that Asbury was the place we had decided on. They asked us which other seminaries we had applied to, and we replied in the negative. It was just Asbury. We were ridiculed and told not to put all our eggs in one basket, and to apply to different seminaries. But we had this sense of peace. and Asbury opened their doors and invited us to come. The Holy Spirit brings that kind of peace and conviction upon our hearts.

As we pray for other people, the Holy Spirit brings to us a revelation as well. I remember quite a few years back, my pastor, late Dr. Sam Kamalesan, got up one day with an urgency to pray for me. And as he prayed, he felt that he should call me. It was very early in the morning, about 5:30 or 6, and yet he did. But he couldn't get through to me. After trying a lot, he got through to Sheila and asked her, "What's going on with Cecil? God just placed him upon my heart." I was actually in the hospital at that time getting ready to have an angioplasty done. And God woke him up, and during prayer, pointed out that he needed to do something. And that call and prayer meant so much to us at that time.

So watch out for impressions that come to you as you pray or even sudden clarity that comes from maybe a confusing state that brings out some kind of biblical principle that God is inviting you to follow. And then trust the Spirit's peace or discomfort.

3. Through peace and confirmation.

Colossians 3:15 says *“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.”* In other words, in all that you’re doing as you pray, let peace rule in your hearts.

Let there be peace. God often confirms His direction through a sense of peace. When you’re making decisions or seeking guidance, His peace rests upon you.

Philippians 4:6-7 describes that kind of peace. *Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything that we can understand.* It’s a peace that you will not understand because humanly, you will look at what’s happening and say: This doesn’t add up. With my knowledge, my logistical skills or analysis, this just doesn’t add up, doesn’t make sense. And yet, there’s a sense of peace that envelops you. And you feel okay with it.

So watch out for God’s peace. It’s also a good indicator when we are not in the will of God. Maybe there are times when you feel that there’s a sense of disquiet that has enveloped you; you’re troubled about things. Go back to the place where you had peace and ask yourself – What decisions did I make at this time? This will help you to understand the decision that made you lose your peace. God’s peace is a great indicator of His will in your life. God’s will and God’s peace are never separated from each other. If you’re walking in the will of God, you will have the peace of God.

4. Through godly counsel and circumstances.

Proverbs 15:22 says, *“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors, they succeed.”* God sometimes uses the wise counsel from others or orchestrates events to open or close doors in your life. Sometimes you’ll see that you’re praying for something and suddenly it vanishes; it’s no longer an option. It’s like God has closed a door. Other times, there’ll be five doors open and you pray, “Lord, close the four doors.” He never does that. That’s the time when He’s telling you: You’re grown up now. I trust your discernment. In the five doors that are open, I know that you will go through the door that you ought to go through. That’s the sign of growing up in the Christian faith.

So watch out for circumstances as well as godly counsel that will come to you through mentors, your pastor or friends that you trust. Pay attention to what they say. I’ll say this to you: Make sure that you know or have a sense of what God is asking of you before you invite others to speak into your situation. Because if you don’t, you’re going to be taken in by the majority of voices that are coming to you, and maybe that’s not the way or the route to go. Maybe it’s the position that you had which wasn’t very popular. But two or three out of the six people said: This is what we sense.

Be careful with people who come to you and say, “Thus saith the Lord. This is what God told me you should do.” Be very, very careful of that. Always respond to people who say that with a “thank you very much. I’ll take this to the Lord, and if He confirms it, I’ll accept it in my life.” Be very careful. Accept people who will say to you: It seems to me that this is what God is saying. But you take it, you pray and let the Lord lead you.

5. Through dreams, visions or even extraordinary means.

Acts 2:17 *“In the last days God says, ‘I will pour out My Spirit. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams.’”*

We just heard in the men’s breakfast how a dream was given to somebody to help bring clarity and draw them to the Lord. God uses dreams. So many times people come to me and say, “God gave me this dream. I don’t know what it means, but this person featured in it.” My reply: When God gives you a person in the context of a dream, and if the dream is non-

specific, just raise that person up in prayer. That's all you need to do. Don't run around trying to analyse the dream. Just say, God placed you on my mind. Pray and say, "Lord, I don't know what's going on. If You want to show me, show me. But Lord, I pray for this person, whatever they are going through. I pray for wisdom. I pray for protection. I pray for encouragement." Just pray up a storm for them. That's what God does when He sees His son or daughter in trouble. He wants prayer to be generated and He speaks to His church. He speaks to us in ways that we can understand or be motivated or encouraged to do.

I remember I was going through one of the darkest periods in my life and it was really bad. I had a cousin who was in California who didn't know what was going on in my life. He had a dream, and he called me and said, "Cecil, I don't know what's going on with you, but this is the dream I had. Does it make any sense to you?" And the dream made perfect sense to me. I was such an encouraging moment for me. In the midst of all that was going on, it came like a ray of sunshine into my life. he had no idea, but he just passed it on to me. God speaks through dreams, visions or extraordinary means.

A Final Word.

Sometimes God's answer takes a while to come. And you may wonder whether this is the end. should I just give up on this? The psalmist says in Psalm 37:7 *Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him.*

The key word here is patiently. We want to jump the gun most times and say, "Let me do something about this. God wants me to do something. I'm praying about it. not let me just start. As I've always said: In all of God's creation, all His living creatures, He's given to us a point of conception and a point of birth; and they're never the same.

There's a period between conception and birth, a period to fine-tune what God has birthed in you. Young parents who are expecting a child, have 9 months to prepare what it means to be a dad/mom. How can we bring up the child? What are the values that we want to pass on? Make sure that this child grows up in the knowledge of the Lord. all of these things are preparation in that 9 months before the little bundle of joy comes into our lives. wait patiently, be still and wait patiently for the Lord to come through.

So, do we have guardrails as we look at this? Because all that I said can get subjective – in the sense that it's some kind of a sense I'm feeling about this being the right path.

Guardrails to prevent us going off track.

1. When you have a sense of what God is leading you to do, the question you need to ask is: Does it align with scripture, or does it go against scripture? God's subjective revelation will never go against His objective revelation found in His Word. His subjective revelation, that is the expressions, the impressions, the dreams, the visions, all of these things will never go against His objective revelation – His Word. That's the first litmus test.
2. Does it bring peace, clarity and encouragement? God's will and God's peace always go together. When they are separated from each other is a time to take a step back and say: I need to evaluate this again, because I don't have His peace.

Clarity comes when we take a decision that God is placing upon our hearts. Out of the confusion, out of the chaos will come clarity. God is not a god of chaos, not a god of confusion. He's a God who brings clarity into situations.

There will be encouragement that can come not just from within you but from without as well. You will have encouragement that will come from people who don't know what you're going through, but they will come and tell you what they felt they needed to. I remember when we first entered ministry, we thought that it was a ministry of music that God was calling me to. And I was quite happy and confident about the music, doing everything, getting equipped. Then I felt God saying: I want you to get into pastoral work. I turned and ran. I said, "No Lord! Don't call me into preaching ministry. I'll do anything in the music ministry, but don't send me into the pulpit." But slowly God just worked on me. I always said I was not a steamboat that could take a 90 degree turn; I was a tanker. It took a long while for God to really press upon me that that's what He had in mind. But He was patient with me. Numerous times, as I was walking down the seminary, someone would tell me, "You know, Cecil, music and all is fine, but you need to be a pastor." I'd look at them and say, "No! Get away from me." I felt like that. It got confirmed many times over that this was what God wanted from me. The sense of encouragement and confirmation that came from God's people around me.

3. Is it affirmed by godly counsel? You talk to people whom you trust, people who are mature believers, disciples, Christians. do they affirm what you're doing or do they sense red flags?

So just three guardrails as you try to decipher what is the will of God for you.

How do I hear the voice of God? Spend time in His presence. Read His Word so that you know more than just Psalm 23, and one or two other scriptures. Listen to His Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the Bible tells us, lives within us. The Holy Spirit, the Bible tells us, knows the mind of God. And the Holy Spirit, the Bible tells us, communicates the mind of God to our spirit. What a beautiful pathway!

So we need to listen to the Holy Spirit and then trust that He will reveal His will at the right time. Beloved, God knows the right time to do things. He's never early, He's never late. He's always on time. And that's what we need to do. Why is that so important to spend time, read His Word, pray and let the Spirit speak? Because Jesus said, "My sheep know My voice." The only way you can know His voice is if you spend time with Him.

My sheep know My voice, listen to My voice. I know them and they follow Me. When you can hear God's voice speaking to you, follow Him. And there's peace and joy that become your companions each and every day.

Amen.