

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Christmas

Scripture: 1st Kings 9:12

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 8th, 2009



PP 1,2

Tools for Hearing God's Voice

1st Kings 19:9-14 (NASB)

Then he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰ And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹¹ So He said, "Go forth, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; *but* the LORD *was* not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, *but* the LORD *was* not in the earthquake. ¹² And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. ¹³ And it came about when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice *came* to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴ Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, torn down Thine altars and killed Thy prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."

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Introduction Some of you will know the name Corrie ten Boom. She was born in 1892 and died at 91 years old on her birthday, the same weekend Renée and I candidated here at Dartmouth, in the Spring of 1983. She is known for being part of a Christian family that harbored Jews in Holland during WWII. They were discovered and all shipped off to concentration camps. It was a horrific experience, which she survived but her father and sister Betsie did not. She wrote about the experience in her book *The Hiding Place* (1971.) Corrie was released on New Year's Eve of December 1944 and later found out that had been a clerical error--the women prisoners her age in the camp were killed the week following her release. She said, "God does not have problems. Only plans." At one low point, she was out in the yard of the notorious Ravensbruck concentration camp, alone, and in despair. She said she heard, behind her, a voice, as clear as could be, which said just three words: "Filled with tenderness." She took this as the voice of the Lord, referring to His arms. I believe her. I think God can and sometimes does speak to believers in dramatic ways. I started study on campus Thursday evening on "hearing God's voice." I would like to continue that study here today.

Elijah is one of the great prophets of Israel in the Old Testament. And yet, I am sorry to say, we have said very little about him over the years. In the New Testament he appears—post-mortem—with Moses before Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17.) That alone ought to signal us of his importance. It is speculated that Jesus Himself was in fact, Elijah reincarnated (Matthew 16.) On the cross, as Jesus cried out, **Eloi Eloi**, some of the people didn't understand their own old Hebrew, and thought the dying Jesus was appealing to Elijah (Mark 15). Finally, James thinks, of all the many righteous men in the history of God's people, of Elijah (James 5). And even today we are only going to make a passing reference to him... He lived in the ninth century before Christ, and he raised the dead, brought fire down from the sky, and ascended directly into heaven in a chariot. He was an amazing man, yet we are looking today at only one little incident in his life—what we read in 1st Kings 19:12.

Arriving at one of the mountains in the Sinai range Elijah found **a cave** and took refuge in it. There he received a revelation from God. **The LORD** began this lesson with the question, **What are you doing here, Elijah?** God had not sent him here as He had directed him to other places (1 Kings 17:3, 9; 18:1). Elijah had run out because of fear (19:3). Elijah's response revealed that he felt he was standing completely alone and defenseless against the ungodly forces that threatened to overpower him (14). Of course he knew that he was not **the only one left** of all the faithful remnant (18:13), but he felt all alone. Interestingly Elijah spoke only of the Lord's **prophets** being killed (18:13a); he made no mention of Baal's 450 prophets who were killed. Fear and discouragement caused him to see only the dark side. He sensed failure in spite of his being **zealous**. Mercifully God did not lecture Elijah or chasten His chafed prophet. God simply gave him a demonstration of His ways. **19:11-14**. Standing on the mountainside outside his cave (9) Elijah witnessed what Moses had seen in those mountains centuries before (Ex. 19:16-18) and what he himself had seen on Mount Carmel only a few days earlier (1 Kings 18:38, 45), namely, a spectacular demonstration of the power of God, this time in **wind**, an **earthquake**, and **fire**. But on this occasion **the LORD was not in** any of these, that is, they were not His instruments of self-revelation. Evidently some time later when Elijah was back in his cave (19:13) he **heard** the sound of a **gentle blowing** which the NIV interprets to be a **gentle whisper**. Recognizing this as a revelation of God **he pulled his cloak over** part of **his face**, walked **out** to **the mouth of the cave**, and **stood** there waiting for God to act. God asked the same question He asked earlier (9): **What are you doing here, Elijah?** The prophet's response was identical to his first reply (10), suggesting that even though he may have understood the point of God's display of natural forces for his benefit he still felt the same way about himself. The message God seems to have intended for Elijah is that whereas He had revealed Himself in spectacular demonstrations of His power in the past at Kerith, Zarephath, and Carmel, He would now use Elijah in gentler, less dramatic ways. These ways God proceeded to explain to His servant

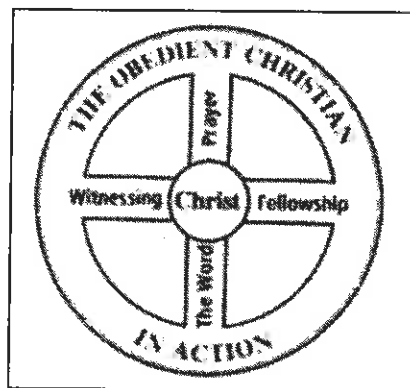
(15-18). God would deal with Elijah's personal feelings about himself later in a gentle way too.¹

SO how does God speak to us today? Do you need to hear from Him? I think the answer is "Yes," and this is the second part of a study I began on Thursday night this week, on "Hearing God's Voice." [outlines available in the foyer] I don't presume to know all there is to know about how God speaks, but I thought about it and presented an introduction to the subject, an exciting thing!

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In the rest of our time I want to suggest some simply tools for hearing God's voice in your life, IF you are a Christian. If you're not a Christian yet, then I cannot guarantee that any of these tools will be of much spiritual use to you. You still need to hear the first thing the Lord says, "**Come unto Me all you who are weary...**" That's the voice of God to anyone who hasn't found Him yet.

I always liked the NAVIGATORS WHEEL ILLUSTRATION, which depicts the Christian life as a wheel with a rim (obedience, balance), a hub (Christ) and four spokes (Prayer, the Word, Fellowship and Witnessing.) The idea is that as the wheel rolls, obedience is lived out, and people see Christ as the center, not the individual spokes...



But I think each of the spokes can be seen as a tool for hearing God's voice. Obviously 1. **PRAYER** is given to us so that we can express ourselves directly to God, and in prayer—if we do it enough—He will speak as to Elijah, in a **still, small voice** (KJV.)

2. **THE WORD** is the other vertical spoke—having to do with our direct relationship with God. In the Bible reading we do, we set ourselves up to really hear God's voice because we are reading God's Word! And the Spirit of God loves to emphasize, highlight, and apply the Word which we're reading, to our own situation. How has He spoken to you through the Bible??

3. He also communicates with us through the **FELLOWSHIP** we share with other Christians. I don't mean just going to church or being *near* other Christians. That would be a low estimate of the power of His voice. But sometimes He uses other Christians to whom we are close, to indicate certain things to us. He might make it clear to you that you need to become a better

John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985).

listener because the Christian next to you *desperately* needs to be heard. He might communicate to you something good about yourself because the Christian next to you says they appreciated something you did. If someone gives a testimony, it can be used of the Spirit to really touch our hearts.

4. God also may speak to us when we are **TRYING TO SHARE** the Good News of Jesus Christ **WITH** someone. He might say, "Go." He might say, "Wait." He might say, "Adjust." He might well urge you to pray more for that person you want to see come to faith in the Lord. He might even tell us to shut up a bit and not get preachy with that person.

Those are the spokes of the old Wheel illustration but I think God can use any and ALL of those spokes to really communicate with us!

But there are some other tools, too:

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5. **QUIET**. I think sometimes, because this culture we live in is so noisy and so filled with sound, we just need some quiet to think. And then, in being able to actually think some thoughts, God can speak better. He doesn't have to shout to be heard over the television, the radio, the surround sound, the mp3 player, the iPod, the iTouch, the Droid, the earbuds, the truck CD player, etc. Some folks turn the TV on as soon as they wake up in the morning and they go to sleep with it on! Psalm 46:10 (KJV) ***Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.***

6. **WISE COUNSEL**. If you need someone to talk to, about anything really, and about especially thorny issues you might be facing, and they are wise and offer good conversation, God may be speaking to you through the wise counsel.

Proverbs 12:15 (NASB) ***The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.***

Proverbs 27:9 ***Oil and perfume make the heart glad, So a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.***

7. **CHRISTIAN AUTHORS** – which I suppose is a sub-category of wise counsel. But its easier to get, because its things that are written in a book. If you read a Christian book the Holy Spirit can use it greatly to speak to us, to encourage us, to instruct and convict us, to broaden our sense of the body of Christ and of how ministry works.

8. **DAY OR A ½ DAY IN PRAYER** – I am willing to wager almost anything that if you gave the Lord a half day at least to spend with Him, and planned it well, you would hear His voice. I think He delights to meet our level of commitment with blessings.

9. **OTHERS' TESTIMONIES** – I wish we did this more. Over the years I think this is one of the things the Lord has used the most as an encouragement and as a thing that gets us moving. It is why we do “encouragements” at the end of every quarterly family meeting. Hearing OTHER people talk about some way in which God worked, is powerful! Our society has become so addicted to privacy and “space” that rarely do we even get to HEAR a few minutes’ of someone else’s story. But God can speak through the experience of other other believers. Our couples’ group has been listening to each others’ stories. The Lord has certainly told ME some things through hearing what some other people are saying!

10. **VISIT A MISSION FIELD** – I have really only done this twice, and then only briefly. But my sense of God’s voice was so crystal clear, that even though the going to a field was a challenge that was well-worth the price for the privilege to hear His voice.

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None of these “tools” are magical in any way. God speaks when He wishes and to whom He wishes. But if we are open to Him, and hungry to hear His voice, He can speak through many ways. His words are always true and fit for the moment. He has a plan for us, and any “conversation” we have with Him will be within and about His plan. Seek His face. Be satisfied with nothing less.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: God's Voice (2)

Scripture: various

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 15th, 2009



PP 1,2

The Wonder of God's Voice

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NASB)

And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself! ⁸ Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

PP 3,4

Introduction I trust most of you know what I mean when I refer to a “red letter” Bible—Bibles which have the words of Jesus printed in red. A number of years ago there was a discussion taking place about the use of “red letter” Bibles. A few preachers questioned the use red letter Bibles because the implication was that the words of Jesus in red were somehow “more inspired” than the rest of the words in black. Then there is the **blue letter Bible**, an interactive web based site for Bible study primarily by Calvary Chapel Bible study leaders. And there is the **green letter Bible**, published by HarperOne, which is a Bible printed on recycled paper and with soy-based ink and a cotton/linen cover and highlighting passages about creation and the environment in green letters. Then there was the controversy over using **study Bibles** (Scofield, Ryrie, MacArthur, NIV Study, Life Application, etc.) suggesting that the inclusion of study notes and footnotes cluttered the reading of the pure Word of God and that some new Christians might think the notes were somehow inspired along with the text. Then there are Bible teachers who say you **shouldn't write any personal notes in your Bibles** because that is sacrilege too, presuming to include your words alongside of God's words.

These discussions about how to study the Bible come and go. And as Christians, and without apology, we understand that the Word of God is one of the great tools we are given by which to hear the voice of God in our own walks of faith. And I wish to try to get right at this thing I am calling the “voice of God” today. The Christian life is more than the academic study of the Bible. It is in large part, after coming to faith in Jesus Christ, a walk with Him in which we seek to hear His voice.

As I said last week, the voice of God, and us talking about it, seems to me to be a “heavy” subject. I feel like I have my neck stuck out here on this subject—not with you, but with God. I fear He might say to me, “Do you have any idea what you are talking about?” But I am leaning on the grace of God and I hope to say something that will interest you, intrigue you, draw you to seek to discern His voice to you. It is a faith act. Most likely you will not hear something audible—you will have to learn to hear His voice in quieter ways...

We could find lots and lots of biblical examples of God’s voice—when He spoke, directly communicated, revealed Himself, showed His will and plan—to His people corporately, or individually. Just very briefly, in example,

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To Abraham Genesis 12:1-2 (NASB)

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

To Hagar Genesis 15:7-11 (NASB)

And He said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it.” ⁸ And he said, “O Lord GOD, how may I know that I shall possess it?” ⁹ So He said to him, “Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” ¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. ¹¹ And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

To Moses Exodus 3:4-6 (NASB)

When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” ⁵ Then He said, “Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

To Elijah 1st Kings 19:9 (NASB)

Then he came there to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

To David (through Nathan the prophet) 2nd Samuel 7:5 (NASB)

“Go and say to My servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Are you the one who should build Me a house to dwell in?’

To the people and rulers of Judah (through Isaiah) Isaiah 1:10-15 (NASB)

Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah. ¹¹ “What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?” Says the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams, And the fat of fed cattle. And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats. ¹² “When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? ¹³ “Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. ¹⁴ “I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ “So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you, Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.

To the Samaritan woman at the well John 4:7 (NASB)

*There *came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus *said to her, “Give Me a drink.”*

To Saul of Tarsus Acts 9:4 (NASB)

...and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

To Paul, the apostle 2nd Corinthians 12:9

My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in weakness

To John Revelation 1:17 (NASB)

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,

I am jealous of His voice. I want to hear—I think—whatever He would say to me, because I know that whatever He would say, and whenever He would say it, it would be utterly GOOD. I have a great confidence in the goodness of God. And in Christ, since I view myself as a saved sinner, with Jesus' righteousness imputed to me—though I have no good thing within myself—I can rest in His constant goodness to me—as we sing about it frequently: Great is His faithfulness. I Know Whom I Have Believed. Etc.

In fact, I get a little annoyed when I hear people say, "God told me this or that," and I don't think it was His voice. I know. That sounds really arrogant, as though I have the corner on the knowing-God's-voice-market. I certainly do not possess an infallible sense of the genuineness of His voice. I know. Nevertheless, it bothers me when I hear people claim to repeat something they think He has said, and I just know He couldn't have possibly said that. Like, when I hear some preacher teach something they say God told them, when I know it is a clear contradiction to the written Word of God. Or when—and this is more frequent—someone say, God told me to leave my husband or wife, or dissolve this or that friendship or affiliation, or even once in a while, to leave their church. Or even more absurd, God told me to kill somebody. These are dramatic examples of a falsified claim to have heard God's voice. I trust you are as jealous for His voice—for the TRUE voice of God—as I am.

What I wish to say about His voice today, what is on my heart, is to say that HIS VOICE IS A WONDROUS THING. First, that He would even *want* to communicate, that He would even stoop to communicate with such small and fragile creatures as us. And second that over His history of doing so, certain things have become plain about His voice to us. His voice us wonderful because of:

When It Isn't What I Expect

This is a thing you see very quickly when you start to study the times God spoke. God's character and attributes do not change and so it is OK I think, to say that sometimes His voice is predictable. If we behave in a sinful way, we can expect something to be said about it. But even then, the Lord is always wonderfully

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surgical and healing at the same time. He knows just what to say. The woman taken in adultery is a prime example (John 8). But hearing His voice in my life is humbling sometimes because of

When It Is What I Expect But I'm Not Sure I Want to Hear It

Paul didn't exactly hear what he wanted to hear in those three occasions that he wrote about where he *entreated the Lord*. He wanted the Lord to heal him or remove the *thorn in the flesh*, whatever it was. Well, God had given to Paul wondrous glimpses into heaven and the world to come. And to keep him humble God allowed this affliction to be with Paul, which we take it involved some pain or disability or at least inconvenience. David didn't want to hear Nathan the prophet tell that story about the little, ewe lamb that became the rich man's lunch, when Nathan said he, David, was the rich man. Conviction come from hearing God's voice, or maybe a turn in the road to the left when we thought our lives should go to the right. Or maybe we hear about grace when we expect judgment, as the thief on the cross heard Jesus promise him. Or maybe we hear from the Lord, "wait," when we want to hear, "Go." But sometimes it is as we hope,

When It Is What I Expect And I Love to Hear It

There's an old hymn in which some of the words go, "Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that will pardon and cleanse within! Grace, grace, God's grace, grace that is greater than all my sin." We can expect His voice to us to contain much love and kindness. It is a kind voice! It is gentle and affectionate. It is full of promise and hope. Sometimes we ask God for things, and He gives them! Jesus said these wonderful words-- "*Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he?*"¹² "*Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?*"¹³ "*If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*" Luke 11:11-13. But sometimes I think we imagine that God's voice would always be dramatic and startling. Rather, I imagine that much of the time just as we people are, and even though He is the King, His voice is good,

When It is Relaxed and Normal

Can you imagine being with Jesus in those three years when Peter and Mary and the others walked with Him, and how His voice would have sounded day in and day out. We have recorded in the Gospels many extraordinary times when Jesus spoke strategically or authoritatively or in deep wisdom. But there were seven days a week in most weeks when He talked like anyone does. I love to imagine how God would speak to me in a moment when I am not sick, in danger, hungry, confused, and so forth. Would not His voice be just as wondrous when the topic of discussion is something other than my need? So I want to suggest to you

three things about His voice in your life. Whatever He says to you, in your spirit, through His word, or at whatever time, I think you can depend on the fact that

God's voice is always good

The Greeks didn't think this, and the Romans did not. I'm not even sure how convinced the Jews were that God's voice is always good. But this is because He is always good. I would recommend you do some reading sometime in the attributes of God. As we think of His people learning more and more of His nature, and there is no end to His goodness, He is wonderful. The Bible references which testify to this are many!

A Good Voice is never unreasonable

Unlike us, who can waver between speaking well to each other, and being irritable, arbitrary, belittling, even abusive, God's voice is never unreasonable. Even in judgment when He spoke in the Old Testament, it was always a measured and controlled judgment. His voice is always reasonable and righteous.

His Good Voice always prompts a good end

Last we would say that whenever God communicates to us or anyone, it produces a righteous and good end. He does not seek to harm or injure. He does not speak cunningly to deceive or to get a secret way. He does not speak to overwhelm or confuse. He speaks to give wisdom and to help us find our way. If it is true, as we suggest, that He has a good plan for each of us then it makes sense that He would lead us in that plan. Everything He says to us, each week, each month and each year, He says so that we will experience the most possible of His good plans for us. To Israel He said these words, through Jeremiah,

'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11

PP 7

It is a wild thing to trust in a God invisibly, and to seek to hear a voice which the ear does not hear! The Christian life is a walk of FAITH, and we are really driven by the Lord Jesus, and shepherded by Him invisibly. His voice will cause us to make VISIBLE decisions which are in obedience to His will, which promote His purposes, and which support His Kingdom. Jesus said His kingdom is like a wedding, with the wedding party awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. Some of the party had enough oil for their lamps to see out the waiting period, others ran out. We're awaiting the bridegroom too. And we live our lives, in faith, in a world that says, "Bridegroom? What bridegroom?" He is coming, be sure of it. Listen for His voice in your life. It is always good. It is never unreasonable and it always produces a good result!

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: God's Voice (3)

Scripture:

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: November 22nd, 2009



PP 1,2

Hindrances to Hearing God's Voice

Revelation 2:1-7 (NASB)

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: **The One** who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: ² 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be false*; ³ and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. ⁴ 'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ 'Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. ⁶ 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'

Introduction Do you ever remember when you were growing up, your Mom or Dad giving you a lecture about something, and then pausing for a moment, staring at you, and saying, "Are you listening to me?" The comic strip "Zits" is particularly intuitive about being and raising teenagers, and communications during that time of life... (two strips)¹

PP 3,4

In 1997 when my mother was ill, we had a good final visit and she shared some stories with me that I did not know. One was from my early youth. When I was young I had trouble with my ears and I was often going to one doctor or another as they tried to correct the difficulties in my ears and sinuses, which were making me very hard to hear. My Mom told me at one point I went "stone-cold deaf," as she put it. She said she looked at me and said my name, and I made no response at all. I had multiple procedures done which as a five and six year old were terrifying (they hooked me up to vacuum machines of some kind and either blew or sucked out my sinuses which I remember as being quite painful. I had to be driven into Washington D.C. every Saturday morning for seven years for special allergy shots, was seated near the front of every school classroom I was in, and have people tell me all the time, "Get a hearing aid." My trouble with hearing has been lifelong. So when we talk about "hearing" God's voice, I am particularly sensitive.

I realized this week, that there are a number of people for whom I pray regularly but that I can't seem to think of much else to pray for other than, "Lord, help them to hear Your voice.

Set it up so that they notice You, want to hear what You would say to them, and that they WOULD hear what You have to say to them."

In the seven letters to the churches at the beginning of the Book of Revelation, each letter concludes with an invitation by Jesus Himself—in today's reading it is, **He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches** (Rev. 2:7). Jesus was the only person to issue this invitation in Scripture. The Gospels also record Him doing so seven times (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35). This invitation always occurs where Jesus appealed to His hearers to make a significant change.¹ I can think of no greater change-agent in our lives than to personally sense Him speaking to us. His voice is a thing that we each need to know we CAN hear, and WANT to hear, and SEEK to hear. But there are some things that hinder our hearing His voice. It isn't because He is an ineffective communicator or can't get through to us. But it is just part of this broken world and this state we're in by remaining in the flesh, to struggle to hear Him. So we can combat these things, let's consider some things that might make it difficult to hear His voice in our lives:

1. Unbelief

If I do not BELIEVE Gods Word is true, or some statement in the Bible, or maybe a particular author in the Bible, I will definitely miss out on some of God's voice, what **the Spirit is saying to the churches**. The written Word of God must be met with faith that it is true. I am sorry—there is no way around that.

Sometimes preachers and Bible students think we can do such a good job of apologetics and scientific research of evidences that we can eliminate the need for people to believe that it is true. Too much skepticism and doubt dull our ears so that we don't hear what God is saying. In Exodus 7:11-13 we have **Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. ¹² For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. ¹³ Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.** Unbelief caused Pharaoh to completely miss the true God of the universe.

2. Sin

God can cut through any noise in our lives, including the noise of sin. He cut the noise of David's lust and murderous plan when he took Bathsheba and had Uraih, her husband, killed. He cut through the noise of 450 prophets of Baal howling around Elijah on Mount Carmel (1st Kings 18.) But there is no greater

¹Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Re 2:7.

hindrance to us hearing what the Lord is saying to us than to indulge sin and rebellion. Of all the preachers on the airwaves these days I find only a few who are even talking much about sin. Sin is saying “No” to God. It is saying, “I want what I want and I *will have* what I want.” It drowns out the still, quiet voice of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

3. The Enemy

I am careful to blame things going on inside of us on Satan but clearly his foul voice sometimes speaks alongside the Lord’s, as it did all the way back with Eve. We need to discern and be alert to the enemy that he wants to distract us, seduce us, make us sleepy with his syrupy, too-sweet whispers. You can tell when he wants to get you to listen to him: the plan is never to do God’s will. It is always to indulge some lust or drive or passion. He would have us be impulsive and explosive.

4. Bitterness

Another loud voice which can hinder our hearing God’s voice—a thing which might be one of the loudest distractions—is our own sense of offense, and bitterness. Unforgiveness and the desire to strike back at people can ruin a believer’s sense of God’s calling to him. In Colossians 3:12-16 we have, ***And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*** You and I must make the elimination of grudges and bitterness a high priority if we want to really hear the Lord’s voice. Indeed, if we do NOT, then His voice is saying to us exactly what Paul wrote to the Colossians!

5. Weariness

Another hindrance to hearing what God wants to say to us is when we get just too weary! This is more of a practical item, to say that we all need to get enough rest. I think if we get too tired or just worn out spiritually even we start hearing our own voices too loudly. This is one reason why the Lord would have all of us enjoy a Sabbath rest each week. Too much “clutter” and frenzy and busyness is just not spiritually healthy.

6. Ego

I’ve always been amazed at the capacity we have to miss the real God even when He’s right in front of us and unmistakably fearsome. Pharaoh had no shortage of awesome evidence as to who Israel’s God was. Herod and Caiaphas and Pontius

Pilate were all endowed with power and prestige. Jesus' reputation was undisputable—Herod and Pilate even invited discussion with Paul about Jesus. I realize the word “ego” is not a biblical word, it is a word from psychology. But it seems to really capture what the problem with some believers really is: they're just too proud. They do things, say things, make certain decisions, sometimes even *saying* God told me to do or to say this, and really it is their own ego speaking. You know, just because we find Christ and trust Him for our salvation doesn't mean ego gets automatically disabled.

7. Dysfunction

All of us probably have some measure, whether small or great, of dysfunctional aspects of our emotions, our thinking powers, our ability to get along with people, etc. Not thinking right, being emotionally messed up, can interject all kinds of “voices” into our hearts and minds. There seems these days to be no end to all the kinds of dysfunctional weirdness in people's lives. And sometimes it is some disorder, or some deep-set hurt that has never really been healed which keeps people from hearing the Lord's call to them. It is said that for women who had no father or had an abusive one, their God-concept has been severely hampered. It is hard to believe or even to hear their heavenly Father's voice when they have not had a good Daddy when they were growing up. We may be truly saved, but we do not hear the voice of a loving Father. Instead we may hear the voice of a harsh boss, a prison guard, an uncaring and disinterested uncle, etc.

Unfortunately, too many churches contribute to a kind of spiritual dysfunction by teaching views of the Christian life that are just enough “off” to confuse their people. I can half understand when someone from a Catholic church says, “I am rarely to never confused in my church—the teachings are consistent whether you hear them in Baltimore or Bangkok. You Protestants are so widely different from one denomination to another, and even from one church to another.”

8. Pain

Simple physical pain can be a hindrance, too. This is why the ministry of visitation can be very important—a physical “voice” reminding the hurting person of what God has plainly said can be a vital link of the person in pain to the Word of God. God is gracious, and we certainly see from time to time that God grants mercy and the person continues to hear the Lord, maybe even more clearly, under pain.

9. Dominant Leaders

This has all too often been the source of the body of Christ. Sometimes a leader starts off full of the Spirit and good wisdom, but somehow mutates down the line and becomes full of himself. Or, someone who has a charismatic personality, a good look, speaks well, is warm and charming, or gifted at working with people,

can start to replace a personal sense of God's voice in a believer's life. They hear him (or her) instead of the Lord any more... This is the very reason why James wrote, James 3:1 **LET not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.** Elders and pastors and missionaries and teachers all carry a lot of weight with people and we need to carefully guard the individual believers' ability and sense of His voice for themselves. We can trust God to tell them things personally through His Spirit!

10. Too Much Tradition OR Too Much Novelty

Either excess can block our really hearing the Lord. Some people are so opposed to tradition that they miss a great richness and heritage that God blesses. Others are so TIED to tradition that they think the only thing the Spirit does is polish the silver!

I hope this message does not discourage you about hearing God's voice. It is not some secret knowledge or an experience which is given only to the super spiritual. God WANTS us to hear Him, and that is why Jesus invited ANYONE AT ALL—**whoever has an ear** to listen to the Holy Spirit. It is the most wondrous thing there is, to sense the Lord of the universe communicating with you about your life!

God's voice will give us direction and help us make godly decisions. He will speak to us and show us where He wants to use us for the kingdom. It will comfort us, correct us, rebuke us if need be, and always, always remind us of what Jesus has accomplished on the cross! I hope you have heard that part of His voice at least—**come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest** (Matthew 11:28).



ZITS/ by Jerry Scott and Jim Borgman

