

HEARING GOD – BALANCE IN LISTENING FOR GOD’S GUIDANCE

A family was driving to Tampa, Florida. As far as the eye could see, orange trees were loaded with fruit. When they stopped for breakfast, they ordered orange juice with their eggs. "I'm sorry," the waitress said. "I can't bring you orange juice. Our machine is broken." At first they were dumbfounded. They were surrounded by millions of oranges, and they knew the store had oranges in the kitchen -- orange slices garnished their plates. What was the problem? No juice? Hardly. They were surrounded by thousands of gallons of juice. The problem was that the workers had become dependent on a machine to get it. Christians are sometimes like that. They may be surrounded by Bibles in their homes, but if something should happen to the Sunday morning preaching service, they would have no nourishment for their souls. The problem is not a lack of spiritual food -- but that many Christians haven't grown enough to know how to get it for themselves.

George Truett said, "The greatest knowledge is to know God's will, the greatest work is to do God's will. Success is knowing God's will and being right in the center of it." When we follow God's will for our lives we will bear fruit that will last. One of the most important things we must do as Christians is to follow God's will for our lives. God has a plan for your life.

Col 1:9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God

Today we are concluding in our series Hearing God and we want to talk about balance. Balance is important. For the last 5 weeks we have been talking about why it is important to hear from God and how to do it. Perhaps some of you may be wondering where the line is concerning what we should be going to God for in terms of guidance and what we should not need to go to God for. For example, we somehow know that it would be absurd to ask God if He wants us to eat meatballs or turkey for supper tonight; or if He wants us to buy a yellow T-shirt or a red one. It does not matter what you have for supper or the colour of your T-shirt.

Psa 32:8-9 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. 9 Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

God says that he will lead us and teach us, but in the same breath he says that there are somethings that we just need to figure out on our own. There are things that require guidance, but other things that just require common sense.

I grew up in a conservative Baptist church where there was really no exposure to the charismatic. I remember going to a Pentecostal church with a friend in high school and telling the person sitting beside me to stop talking because I was trying to listen to the message. I had no idea of what tongues was. When we went to Kuwait for the first time I was suddenly exposed to the supernatural on a regular basis. I also quickly saw the problems and accesses that it brings. We need to be balanced. So how do we hear God in a ways that is appropriate and balanced?

Luke 4:1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert

Jesus was led by the Spirit in everything that did. So how are we to be led by the Spirit? Hearing God is important, but as we listen we must also consider 4 important things;

1. Commanding Scripture – bible study

God's rhema word must be balanced by His logos word. As Patrick said last week and as we have said repeatedly through this series, God will never directly tell you to do anything that contradicts what He has already told you in the bible. The first and primary way we hear God's voice is through His word. That is why the message on the 6 'supernatural' ways we hear from God came after the message saying that the bible is the primary way we hear from God. The Bible is God's love letter to us. You do not need to ask God if it is His will for you to commit adultery. The answer is clearly NO. If you feel led to do something that the Bible declares wrong then it is not God calling you to it! There are many things that God has laid out in His word for our direction and these are things that are black and white. The problem often is that we do not read it.

Psalms 119:24 Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.

We need to be students of God's word. Anyone who would seek to hear God but ignore regular and intentional study of the bible is setting themselves up for failure.

2Ti 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Notice it says here ALL SCRIPTURE. That means that you do not get to pick and choose the parts that you like and the parts that you don't. You do not get to stand in judgement of the bible saying that this book is authentic but this book is just poetry so I do not really have to take it seriously. If we take the time to study the bible God can use it to guide us into all truth.

Jos 1:8 Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

If you are studying the bible and obeying what it says than you are already walking in a way that conforms to God's general will for our lives. Once you have that right, you should seek God's individual will, but you dare not do the one without the other.

If you have the Word without the Spirit, you tend to dry up. If you have the Spirit without the Word you tend to Blow up. However, if you have both the Spirit and the Word you tend to grow up. – RT Kendall

The bible has so much to say to us in all areas of life. Do you want to know how to be a better partner for your spouse or a better parent for your children? Do you want to know how to be a better employee and a nicer person? The more you read the bible and the more you obey what it says, the more you will become like Jesus.

A person who neglects to spend daily or consistent time reading or meditating on God's Word; who neglects to expose himself to regular teaching of God's Word; will open himself to deception, exactly because he won't know the parameters. He will not know how God operates! Much of what God wants to say to you is found in His general will for you, as recorded in the Scriptures.

Don't ignore the systematic ingestion of Scripture: through daily reading and study of the Scriptures; through meditation and memorization of the Scriptures; and through attentive listening to the preaching of God's Word each weekend.

After we left Kuwait the Senior Pastor of the church there was diagnosed with brain cancer. Since the church was quite charismatic, there were a number of people who were from the 'name it and claim it' background. They declared publicly that Pastor Jerry would be healed. A number even stood up in services and told everyone that God had told them that he would be healed and would not die. About a year later he died, and the church was thrown into confusion as to why God allowed it to happen. The problem was that these people did not properly understand the bible. They had taken certain texts and twisted them to support their own theology, and then declared that God had spoken to them in order to back it up. This is what happens when you have a warped view of scripture.

We need balance in hearing God. The first way we find that balance is by being a student of God's word.

2. Common Sense – conventional wisdom

Hearing God's voice also does not mean that you ignore logic and common sense. If you hear God telling you to go and throw yourself off a cliff, you should think long and hard first if that was really God who was speaking to you or not. When discerning the will of God for our lives it is important that we don't simply turn off our brains. God gave us our brains and expects that we use them.

What is common sense? Common sense is an understanding of how life works, often discovered through experience. Writers from the past referred to these as God's natural or self-evident laws. There are many examples of common sense: Hard work will yield better results than laziness. Treating others well, will generally result in you being treated well. Poor financial management leads to poverty. Exposing your skin to the sun for lengthy periods of time will damage your skin and may cause cancer. Too much alcohol consumption will lead to addiction, as well as disease.

These things are common sense. It is called common because it is a truth understood by most human beings through a period of long observation. Many such observations made early in the history of the human race, were recorded and included in the Bible. We read about them in Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. They are mostly Solomon's observations of how life works. At least 10 times he prefaced his notes in Ecclesiastes by saying 'I saw.' He observed something and understood how it worked.

Pro 24:32 I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw:

This is common sense - learning through observation of what is truth. Sometimes, especially when people first begin to hear God, they think that they can just suspend common sense. Not true.

Pro 3:21-23 My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; 22 they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. 23 Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble

God does NOT want us to suspend common sense. In fact, we're exhorted to learn as much about the practical ways this world was designed to work, and then live in harmony with those ways. Then we will be kept safely and protected from failure.

God made each one of us and infused in us certain interests, natural abilities and passion. Sometimes when deciding God's will for us the answer lies in the choice that simply makes the most sense for us in terms of who we are and how God made us. For example, often young people struggle with what they should do with their life. I often use the following as a guide;

Things you like to do (following the desire of your heart)
Things you are able to do (following your personal gifting and talents)
Things you have permission to do (morally right)
Things you can earn a living at (being self-supporting)
Things that society feels is important (making an impact on the world)
Things that build God's kingdom (being a witness wherever you are)

We need to be students of God's word and use our common sense.

3. Counsel of the Saints – good advice

Hearing God's voice also does not mean that you shut down your mind and just blindly obey something that may or may not be true. It is important to make sure you confirm God's voice. Paul gives this instruction for people who would speak prophetically in church;

1Co 14:29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.

The congregation needs to weigh what is said. Have you ever heard someone say something like "I feel like God is trying to tell us right now..." and then they say it and you are thinking "that is NOT what God was telling me AT ALL?" Other times someone will share something and it is immediately recognized because it is what God was saying to others as well. That is the importance of discernment. It is important for us as a church, but it is also important for us as individuals.

When discerning the will of God in your life it is often a good idea to ask people who are spiritually mature and who know you well. God often speaks to us through other people.

Prov 12:15 The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.

I have already shared that when I first met Naomi that I felt like God was saying to me "this is the person you are going to marry." I did not share that with her right there and then. That would be crazy. I needed to make sure. Yes, I went back to school for 2 years so that we could get to know each other and get engaged, but during that time I was seeking godly counsel. I asked my most trusted friends, my mentor and the people who knew me the best what they thought. I asked Naomi's friend what she was like. I asked my pastor who had met both of us what he thought. I asked my parents. I sought godly counsel.

Please understand what I am saying. This does not mean that we must always follow the opinions of people. Ultimately it is God who calls the shots, and there will be times that He tells us to obey and everyone else will tell us that we are crazy. Often God will call us to go "against the flow" and we must obey even if everyone around us tells us that it is a bad idea.

Being controlled by the opinions of others is a guaranteed way to miss God's purpose for your life. - Rick Warren

This is why it is so important to not just get counsel but GODLY counsel. You need to get counsel from people who you trust are also hearing from God. Even then, you have to be careful that you are prepared to act in obedience.

In 2002 I became the pastor of Cornerstone Community Church in Virgil (Niagara-On-The -Lake). We had just come home from Kuwait and this was my first church serving as Senior Pastor. After three years at that church we could see how God had been moving. Attendance was way up and finances were good. We were adding to the staff. We had just built a new house that Naomi loved. Everyone was happy, and then I felt like God was calling us to return to Kuwait.

I had a decision to make, so I tried to use my common sense and get godly counsel. I called the church in Kuwait to see if they were looking for someone. They were not, they had everyone they needed and things were fine there. Strike one. Then I got together with the Head of the Elders from Cornerstone. I told him that I sensed that God was calling me to leave and he went silent and would not look me in the eye. Strike 2. There was nothing about what I felt that God was saying to me that made sense or was confirmed. I was preaching a series on obedience at the time (of course) and I came under such conviction that I ended up obeying what I felt that God was telling me to do. I wrote up a letter of resignation and gave it to the head of our elders and then went home, thinking I had just made the biggest mistake of my life.

Less than 24 hours later I got a call from Kuwait saying that the pastor that had replaced me when I had left had just announced that he was leaving and would I consider coming back. Confirmation 1. So I called the head of our elders and asked him why he had been so silent at our last meeting. He was the spiritual life director at a local High School and had been trained in ministry. He told me that for months God had been calling him to leave his position at the school and go into pastoral ministry, but Cornerstone was his home church and did not know how it was possible to become a pastor and still be part of the church, until I had told Him I felt that God was calling him to leave. It was not sadness that had made him quiet, it was excitement that God was about to open the door for him to do what he felt that God was calling him to do.

We need to balance hearing God with being students of God's word, using our common sense and listening to godly counsel.

4. Core Supporters – human authority

Hearing God also does not mean that we forget the parental and spiritual leadership that God has placed over us.

Rom 13:1-2 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

An example of this is in the area of missions. God has given us as a church a clear calling in terms of global missions. We have our 5 priority areas – Quebec, Middle East, India, Japan and raising up national servants. We choose to focus our ministry in these areas of the world that are least reached and we do it through trusted mission partnerships.

It is much better to have a long-term partnership in a region that we are passionate about than to have lots of short-term trips to areas where there is already a very active church presence.

It is great when people get passionate about missions. They go to a conference and they hear a story about what God is doing in a certain place and then they hear about an opportunity to go and get involved and they jump at the chance. However, often this is done without any communication and direction from the church. The reality is that we have lots of exciting opportunities to serve in each one of our focus areas.

Again, we need to be wise about submitting to authorities. Just blindly following is not good. Currently the Liberal Government is trying to put Bill C6 through parliament to ban conversion therapy. I think we would all agree that forcing someone to do something that they do not want to do is not a good thing. However, this Bill could also be used to prosecute people who even suggest that Homosexuality or Transgender is a sin. It could be the first step toward declaring the bible (which says that these things are sin) as being hate literature. We must submit to governing authorities where those rules do not conflict with clear scriptural guidelines. When there is conflict we must follow God's laws and not man's. When I lived in Kuwait it was illegal to share your faith with Muslims. So, did that mean that I had to obey that law in order to follow what Rom 13:1-2 says? Of course not.

The issue here is balance. You have to test what God has said to you by sharing it with those who are in positions of spiritual authority over you. If God has told you something, He has probably also told your parents and pastors as well.

I should also mention here that it is also important to test it through your spouse. God has lead us as a family to many places in the last 30 years (Naomi and I are celebrating our 30th anniversary this June). Every time God has called one of us to get up and move to a new church or new country, He has also told the other. In ministry, God does not just call individuals but families. You need to test what God says to you through your spouse.

That is also why it is so important that you are not unequally yoked. If you think that God is telling you to marry a non-Christian then let me be clear. That is not God, it is your hormones. Being unequally yoked does not just mean that you as a Christian need to marry a Christian, it means that you have to marry someone who is going the same direction as you are, someone who has the same calling and spiritual maturity as you. When I was dating Naomi and I asked my pastor what he thought about us getting married he told me something that I have shared with many couples in premarital counselling over the years. He told me that the person that I marry will either double your ministry or half it, so choose carefully. Get guidance.

God want to speak with us today. Through this series I hope that you have heard that loud and clear. It is important as we seek to hear His voice that we do so in a balanced way, we must be biblical, use our common sense, listening to godly counsel and our parents and pastors.

I have really enjoyed this series, not just because of the messages but because of the seminars that we have been having afterwards. Not simply hearing the truth but having the opportunity to put it into practice. We have heard so many positive testimonies of people who have been blessed.