

Discerning God's Voice Through Relationship

Our text today comes from John 15:9-15. Jesus is speaking to his disciples, and I want you to imagine that Jesus is speaking directly to you as I read it. Notice the themes of mutual love, close relationship, mindset shift and intimacy in these words.

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Thanks for the opportunity to bring God’s word to you today. My topic today is **Discerning God’s voice through relationship**. Did you notice the themes I mentioned in the text?

Jesus is inviting us to an experience of love that is rich and deep. It is a life you and I have always wanted, but we won’t get it if we are so consumed and distracted with other things.

I am going to focus on the last three verses ¹⁴ **You are my friends if you do what I command.** ¹⁵ **I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.**

Discerning God's voice involves developing a close relationship with him.

As a Christ follower, God's perspective about you is that he sees you as his friend, not an enemy, not a slave.

Here this: The perspective we have about our relationship with God has huge implications for our ability to hear and discern his voice from other voices. If you really want to grow in your ability to hear God's voice, you need to know God as your friend, as opposed to knowing him as a master who is far away and doesn't care about for you. There are two mindsets we can have about God. A **friendship mindset** or a **master/slave mindset** about God.

Let's talk about the **friendship mindset**. Friends have privileged information about each other. They know each other's secrets. They are aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses, but they choose to build up each other's strengths. They do not shame each other with their weaknesses instead they find ways to support and encourage each other to improve on areas of their weakness. **That is not to say that God has a weakness. I am just using human illustration to describe something deeper than human friendship.**

Friends, live sacrificially for each other because they care about each other. They communicate on a deep level. They have a deep, intimate and close relationship with

each other. Their friendship is based on mutual love for each other. Think of your relationship with your best friend and the things that help you sustain your friendship.

That is the kind of friendship that God wants to have with you and even more.

Let's talk about the other mindset. If you have a **master/slave mindset** with regards to your relationship with God, you won't be able to discern his voice clearly (not because he doesn't want to speak to you but because you can't recognize his voice because your perspective of him is based on master/slave mentality).

You see, slaves don't have privileged information about their master. They don't have close relationship with their master. That leaves them at a disadvantage. They have distorted views and opinions about their master. They misunderstand their master's intentions. They see their master as one to obey or else they'll be in trouble. They have little or no say in the decision-making process in the household. They simply do as they are told.

Furthermore, **slave masters** have unhealthy relationship with their slaves. They look down on them. They treat them as properties not as person with dignity. Friendship doesn't exist between masters and their slaves.

This master/slave relationship is not the kind of relationship God wants to have with us, neither does he want us to have that kind of relationship with him. If this is the kind of relationship you have with God, then you are relating with him with a slave mentality, which leaves you with a distorted view about the nature and character of God. It will be

hard to discern his voice because you will always question his intentions towards you.

Example from couple's therapy.

Let me say this: our relationship with God occurs primarily in the context of love.

Out of that understanding flows other aspects of our relationship with God where we call him Lord and we are his servants. We call him father and we are his children. I obey him not out of fear but out of love because he is already pleased with me. It's different from the master/slave mentality I talked about.

One of the lies we believe that contributes to the slave/master mindset is that God is so far from us, he is not concerned or involved in our lives. And we can validate that lie with some of our life experiences. Times when we can't feel or sense his presence around us. Times when we feel we are in the desert and we don't sense his nearness.

And that is hard. The Psalms talk a lot about that and give us a helpful perspective to hold onto at those times.

Here is the truth we need to soak in and immerse ourselves in this morning. **God is our friend.** He is willing to reveal his heart to us, and he wants to hear what's on our heart too because that is what friends do. This friendship requires faith, trust, endurance and continuous relationship and connection with him. It's about two people committing themselves into a relationship of for better or for worse, richer for poorer. It's a relationship that can weather the storms.

If you have a slave mindset about your relationship with God, you must confront it with the truth of what Jesus says in this text. *You are my friends since I have told you everything my Father has told me.*

You say, I have been told that God only speaks to special people. Jesus says to you. *You are my friend and I want to converse with you.* **You say, I am so sinful and God doesn't want me.** Jesus says, *I have laid down my life for you because that is what friends do and I want to love you and I want reveal my Father's heart to you.* **You say, I am disappointed with God because he hasn't answered my prayers.** Jesus says, *I am still your friend, let's talk about that disappointment because friends listen to each other.* **You say, how can anyone say they can hear God speak to them, is it not some sort of thing you imagine in your head?** Jesus says, *I am your friend, I am real, I don't play games with you, I really want to be your friend and converse with you.*

These are Jesus' words to you. They are words to take seriously and live by. They are words that bring you life. He says, *I am your friend and I want to converse with you and reveal my Father's heart to you.*

This reminds me of Abraham in the OT in the Bible. In Gen. 18, God was going to destroy the city of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their continuous sinful and rebellious heart towards God. But before God did that, he consulted with Abraham. He said, *shall I keep back from Abraham what I am about to do?* Friends, that is the God of the universe relating with an ordinary human being like you and me and revealing his plan to him. And Abraham gets to hear what is on God's heart and he intercedes for the

people of Sodom and Gomorrah. In James 2: 23, Abraham is also called the friend of God.

Another example of this close friendship with God is that of David. In Psalm 8, David writes this beautiful Psalm

¹ O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens. ² You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you.

³ When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—

It's like David got a revelation of the greatness and majesty of God and he is soaking it in. And he is saying, God you are so beyond me. I cannot even begin to comprehend you. I am nothing compared to you. And friends we need to have that sense of wonder about God.

But then he also got a revelation of how close God really is to him. He said.... *⁴ what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?* I feel like singing that song. Who am I that you are mindful of me, that you hear me when I call? Is it true that you are thinking of me, how you love me, it's amazing. I am a friend of God.

David goes on. He says...*⁵ Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor.* Some of you feel you have no honor, you feel insignificant. But here is the truth, your life matters in the presence of God who has

called you his own. I am not just one in 8 billion, you see me, you know me and want to relate with me.

⁶ You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—⁷ the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, ⁸ the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents. ⁹ O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!

In other words, David realizes that God has placed value on human beings, inviting them to participate in his creation and he shares his authority with us because we are not mere servants who don't know what their master is up to. We are friends of God, and we can hear him speak and reveal his heart to us. That's who we are.

So, I say to you again this morning, discerning God's voice occurs in the context of relationship with him. So, seek to build your relationship with him. I want to leave you with this Scripture. Jeremiah 33:3 *³ Ask me and I will tell you remarkable secrets you do not know about things to come.* There are a lot of things that God wants to tell you about himself, your life, about your family, your neighbours. The things he wants to tell you are good things that will bring you life, guide you, prevent you from making unnecessary mistakes. He wants to tell you those things because you are his friend. So, seek to be his friend.

Approach him as a friend who loves you and has got your back. **When you pray,** pray from the perspective of spending quality time with a friend who cares about you. Don't pray out of obligation or a sense of guilt as that will hinder the discerning process.

When you read Scripture, read it as a love letter from a friend who is invested in your life and wants the best for you. Do not read Scripture to analyse, scrutinize, look for contradictions. That's okay if you are writing an academic paper. But in the context of growing in discernment, that perspective can damage your mind and bring you back into the slave mindset.

When you are among the community of believers, realize that they are God's friends too and together you can discern his voice and the direction he wants you to go.

If you hear voice that condemns you, or manipulates you, or makes you feel less than a human, that voice is not from God. Why, because it is not friendly. It is a voice that makes you feel lonely and hopeless. It is a voice that reinforces the slave mentality. So run away. Do not listen.

Friends, discerning God's voice happens in the context of relationship with him. So, focus on growing your relationship with God. When you do that, you increase the chances of clearly discerning his voice among other voices clamouring for your attention.

From God's perspective he is eager to make himself known to us. So relate with him from that perspective and your life will not remain the same.

Let's pray