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## When God Speaks

### Part 1 – How Do We Hear From God Today

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Today, as we start this series, I was thinking about... Some of you maybe you've heard someone say, "God told me..." And they said it just emphatically. And you're like, "Wow, how did he tell you?" You want to know. "I've never had God tell me something. Did you hear his voice? Was it loud? Was it soft?" So, you have those questions. There are seasoned believers in here that have heard someone say... I've heard some one say this recently. "God told me..." And my first response was, "Really? You sure about that? Because I can give you a verse that says God ain't telling you that." We live in a day where believers want to follow Jesus their way, not His way. Some of you have said, "I don't feel like I've ever heard from God. I wouldn't even know what to listen for." Others of you say you've heard from God, but then, "Ted, now when I pray, my prayers don't even hit the ceiling. You've heard the expression they don't go any higher than the ceiling. They don't even get close." What do we do? How do we proceed, believers in Christ Jesus, to recognize God's voice?

Today, I'm going to have you turn in your bibles to Hebrews 1. When you read the New Testament, I love reading the epistles or I love reading letters, whether it be to a church or to an individual. There is always this warm greeting. It always has the feel or the tone of "I greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." "I miss you." "I'm thankful for you." "I'm hearing great things about you." "I can't wait to be with you again, face to face." You always get this typically at the beginning and the end of a letter because these are letters.

That is not at all what you get from the writer in Hebrews. In Hebrews, you hit the ground running with Verse 1. There is no introduction. There's no warm greeting like you see in a lot of the other epistles because it needs to be made clear to the Jew who believes in Jesus, "Hey, don't go back. Don't walk away from Jesus and revert to what you know." I also want you to think about this text with a Jew listening to it who does not believe in Jesus. I think these two verses in the first chapter of Hebrews are so clear because to someone who believes in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and believes that God is the creator of the whole universe, but they put their arms up when it comes to Jesus.

Think about that person for just a moment as we jump into Hebrew 1 ***1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors...*** Writing to the Hebrews. ***...through the prophets at many times...*** So, think about the Old Testament in all different times from Moses through major and minor prophets. ***...and in various ways...*** God spoke through a bush, through a pillar of cloud, through a pillar of fire, through angels, through a donkey, through the prophets. All different kinds of ways that God spoke to his people and got his message across to people. Now to a Jew not believing in Jesus, they read this first verse going, "Yes, our ancestors would understand in many times, various ways, God spoke."

**2 ...but in these last days... (for us, today) ...he (God) has spoken to us by his Son (Jesus Christ), whom he appointed heir of all things... That's very important. It's all about Jesus and this is the key. It's always been about Jesus. ...and through whom also he made the universe.** When Jesus speaks... Look at what Jesus says. Now you bring the Trinity, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, "I only speak what my Father tells me to speak. Not one word I speak, I speak on my own. I give to you because the father gave it to me." John 12: 49 – **For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken.**

Now, I'm not going to ask the charismatics to raise their hands in the room, but I'm about to talk about the Holy Spirit. You're like, "Sit down, Ted, let me teach you." I get that. I did not grow up in a charismatic or Pentecostal church. I didn't grow up in Assemblies of God. I have so many dear friends in the Assemblies churches. I've learned so much from them. I've spent time with them, and it is all about Jesus for them. Here's what I want to encourage you. If you are brand new to studying the Holy Spirit, you've been a believer for a while and you don't understand the role and you hear people say, "The Holy Spirit told me to tell you..." And that confuses you. Here's what I want to encourage you with. Before you study the gifts of the Spirit, study what Jesus says about the Spirit. He's going to be very clear on the role, the distinct role of the Holy Spirit today, in your life and in mine, as he speaks to the disciples.

We obviously can't cover all of it, but we are going to give five roles of the Holy Spirit, part of his activity in your life and in mine.

John 14 Jesus says... and again, keep in mind he's talking to the disciples. **26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things... Primarily fulfilled in the apostles writing of the New Testament. ...and will remind you... Of what? Just new stuff? Stuff that I haven't said. No. He's saying, ...of everything I have said to you. So, he teaches, he reminds.**

In John 15, we read, **26 "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. So, he reminds and testifies.**

We read this in John 16, Jesus says, **12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.**

This text is teaching what JI Packard calls the spotlight ministry of Jesus. Does anybody here have their home lit up with floodlights in their front yard? We don't do that in the Ozarks. But I have one neighbor who had floodlights that you could land a 747 in his back yard. You drive around the corner getting to our house and it blinds you. He's a great neighbor. Love the guy. You don't ever really pay attention to the floodlight, but with his house, you could see every detail on it.

*"The Holy Spirit's distinctive new covenant role, then, is to fulfill what we may call a floodlight ministry in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. When floodlighting is well done..."* And my neighbor knows how to do it.

I try to stay hidden in the woods. ...*the floodlights are so placed that you do not see them...* If you've ever been to Big Cedar, they do a great job with the floodlighting. *"This perfectly illustrates the Spirit's new covenant role. He is, so to speak, the hidden floodlight shining on the Jesus our Savior.*

*It is as if the Spirit stands behind us, throwing light over our shoulder, on Jesus, who stands facing us."*

And then he concludes with this:

*The Spirit's message is never,*

*"Look at me;*

*listen to me;*

*come to me;*

*get to know me,"*

*but always* As we just read from the words of Jesus.

*"Look at him, and see his glory;*

*listen to him, and hear his word;*

*go to him, and have life;*

*get to know him, and taste his gift of joy and peace."*

That is the role of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as we talk today about how we hear, how we recognize God's voice. Before we do, let's look quickly at three reasons why we need hear from God or three reasons why I want to hear from God.

**1. Assurance.** When I know God is speaking to me clearly, I'm convicted as I read the scripture in a passage and I apply it to my life and the Word of the Lord is speaking to me, the Holy Spirit is bringing it to my mind. I know I have assurance in that moment. And Jesus put it this way in John 10: 27, ***My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*** Some of you want a relationship with Jesus, but you couldn't care less about his voice. You want to walk with God, but you kind of want to do it your way. We deal with this all the time. All week, I've been talking to people who say, "God told me this..." And I want to say, "No he didn't. That is not a direction he would send you for your life." We may edit this out, but I'm going to say it anyway. God is never going to send you someone else's spouse. He's never going to do it. I'm not alone in this. You've heard some people tell you some pretty kooky things. "The Lord led me in this." "No, he did not. Oh, no, he did not. I can guarantee you he did not."

I shared this one time, years ago when a guy came up to me with his fist clinched. He was ready to take me out. He goes, "I didn't come to church today to feel like crap leaving." I go, "I don't come to church for that reason either. I come to church so I can experience the peace and joy that Jesus brings." What that means for you and for me... not just you, for you and for me. Sin in my life needs to be rooted out. It needs to be dealt with. That's why if I'm living in sin and tell you God told me to do this in church, this is when we go, "Really? I don't believe he did." "Why?" "I've got a verse." Jesus says, "My sheep listen to my voice. They want to hear my voice."

My daughter got married May 31, which meant all of May, we were finishing up the back yard and weed eating, lots of weed eating for a backyard wedding. That meant that I couldn't go fishing for the whole month of May. My daughter wanted the wedding to be all about her. Anyway... I didn't go fishing. In my garage where I park, I have two wading boots and my waders; they hang right there. I hadn't used them for a month. I came out one day and a little wren flew out of my left wading boot.

I didn't pay much attention, but then I kept noticing it. I went over and I grabbed the boot. She had built a nest in my left wading boot with six eggs. I can't tell the rest of the story because now I'm going to be this heartless... No, so the boot is full and went oh no because the wedding is over and now, I can fish. Amy said, "What are you doing." I go, "I'm going to have to transplant this nest from the boot to a tree.

How many of you had a grandma that told you that you can't touch a nest or eggs? I need to explain to you that she lied to you so you wouldn't touch the eggs or the nest.

I Pulled it down and Amy said, "Not only do you need to let those eggs hatch, but they have to be born, grow, and be released before you can use that boot." So, I'm online Googling, "gestation period of wren eggs." Then they are born. Amy's like, "Ted, it's a beautiful picture the Lord has sent us of these babies leaving the nest as our daughter has just left the nest." I'm like, "Oh, don't bring the Lord into this. This is just a wren's nest." And then we get home one day, mid to late June, and the birds have all grown to where they hop out and they are all six on the garage floor. I'm like, "Amy, go in and take care of the dogs, okay? Can you go ahead and just get them dogs taken care of. We are going to get these birds out."

All that to say, once the babies were hatched... I didn't hear much out of mom until her babies were born. And then she hated my guts. I would sneak out and hear her singing to her babies. She's talking to them and just... It was fun to hear, and then she would go in and out of the garage. It was fun, but whenever I tried to talk to her or her babies or look at her babies, she was an angry little bird.

It was just fun to watch because those babies recognized their mother. They don't want to hear from me. The preciousness and the sensitivity of it. One of the reasons I want to hear from God is for that assurance that he is there; he is near, he is walking with me.

**2. Guidance.** I also want guidance. Some of you have a big decision to make right now. "Do we move to Branson?" "I know we're on vacation and we love this place." Every week I meet someone who says, "I think we're moving to Branson." I have to remind them. "Just so you know, Monday through Friday, we are not on go-carts every day, eating funnel cakes for breakfast. You're a tourist right now, enjoying our town, but you're asking the question." "Is God leading us here." You got a new job offer? "Is God telling me to take this job?" You're dating someone. "Is this God's person for me?"

Wouldn't you like to be led as the children of Israel were led? As they crossed over the Red Sea. **21 By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.** Wouldn't it be great, over major decision in our life, if we had a pillar of cloud, a pillar of fire? We want that kind of guidance. That's why we want to hear from God.

**3. Comfort.** Philippians 4: 6-7... I think a lot of people making decisions that tell you, "Hey, we moved to Branson. God led us here." Some of you are always intrigued like, "What does that mean? How did he lead you? How did you hear from God?" **6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.** New job? New

home? Somewhere you're going to in life? For you just to sit around and Google advice or go on Facebook community groups to ask them their thoughts, I wouldn't start there. Hit your knees in prayer. Present all of this to the Lord. **7 And the peace of God...** I think a lot of times that's what people are sharing. "We made the decision after months..." **Many are the plans in a man's heart, but the Lord ultimately directs the steps.** "We made our plans, and they were over here and then they were over there, but as we look back, God guided us throughout the whole thing." And they have the peace of God. **...which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

So, in the time we have remaining, let's talk about three ways to recognize God's voice, to know clearly you are hearing from God. I want to hear from God. I want to hear from God daily. There are times I wish, when something is heavy on my heart or a big decision needs to be made, it would be great to go on the front porch and have a bush in our front yard on fire. Wouldn't that be great? "God, speak to me through this bush." Some of you are looking for those moments, and yes, God works in mysterious ways, but sometimes we overcomplicate this.

**1. Start with a verse first.** Hebrews 4: 12 says, **For the word of God is alive and active.** It's alive and active today. And because the Word of God is living and active, he speaks directly to us through the Bible. Open the Bible. Read, study, search, memorize, meditate, so that when you're in that moment, the Holy Spirit can bring that verse back to your mind. Get in the Word. Start with a verse first. 2 Timothy 3: 16-17 says, **16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

**2. Draw near to God and remove distractions.** James teaches us in Chapter 4: 8 that this is how God works. When I move toward him, he's very clear God moves toward me. It says, **8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**

Talking about distractions. I can't give you this whole story, but this past weekend, I was in Portland. This is the second time I've been there on the same weekend they are doing the naked bicycle race. I love Portland, it's a beautiful city. I have a heart for the people of Portland. I want people in Portland to know Jesus, but I started the comedy night with, "Raise your hand if you think riding a bike is comfortable." Nobody thinks riding a bike is comfortable. Who came up with the bright idea to do it naked? Come on, Portland.

To say the least, Amy and I were a little distracted in that town. We had to walk away. We were there the day of, but out of city. But the next day, we were having a great moment walking as a couple, We ended up on the Portland State University Campus. We're walking and this guy, who obviously was left over from the race, in good shape and on his morning walk with nothing but tennis shoes. "Amy, you have to admire the confidence. I've never seen such..." We were having great couple time; it was kind of a get away for us tied to an event. But talk about distractions.

I think it's our daily lives. We're so distracted. we've got so many voices. Adam talked about this a couple of weeks ago and Rene alluded to it last week. We've got so many things hitting us. How do you

discern between all that you're reading online? We're getting ready to head into another election cycle. You're going to bombard your life with voices, and if you're not careful, those voices are distractions that are going to keep you from hearing the voice of God. So, draw near to God and remove distractions from your life. Do you know what happened when we saw the naked man? We went in a completely different direction. He was on our path. We chose this path long before he did when he turned that corner. But I ain't walking behind a naked man in Downtown Portland for six blocks.

Some of you are on a path. You just need to get off of it and go on another direction. Draw near to the Lord and he'll draw near to you. James 1: 21 says, ***Get rid of all filth and evil in your lives and humbly accept the word that God has planted in your heart, for it has the power to save your souls.***

In verse 5 we read, ***If any of you lack wisdom, ask God...*** If you're in that big decision mode right now... "Do I start this business?" "Do I build this house?" "This seems like a difficult time to build a house; do we sell our house? Do we buy a new house? Do we move?" Whatever decision you're up against right now, if you lack wisdom, understanding, the peace of God, hit your knees. Ask. Seek. ***...who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.***

**3. Listen for sacred echoes in trusted voices.** You are in the Bible, you are on your knees in prayer. Some of you have big decisions to make and you're asking the wrong people. Your asking terrible advisors. We use sacred echoes around here a lot. Margret Feinberg kind of coined that term. It's like you are in your Bible in the morning and you read a passage and it stirs something in you and you're thinking about it and medicating on it while you drive. You go to coffee with a friend and that friend who isn't even on your reading plan on the Bible app says, "You know what I was thinking about last week?" And shares with you the same text. Then you go over to grandma's house, and you look on her cat calendar and there's that verse again. That's just a sacred echo – God bringing that verse up again and again in front of you in trusted voices.

Proverbs 12: 15 says, ***The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advise.***

Proverbs 15: 22 says, ***Plans fail for a lack of counsel, but with many advisors, they succeed.***

Many of you are trying to recognize God's voice in your life right now. Discerning the voice of God. Ask someone who walks closely with him. Find that person and lean in. Now this comes from the heart of a pastor who loves you. Please hear this. Stop asking for financial advice from your broke friends. One of my favorite stories of this church... Years and years ago, a guy in his mid-20s was on Facebook talking about how he didn't have money for rent. So, he's on Facebook and he told another friend on Facebook in the same struggles, "Hey, I don't have enough money for rent. I'm thinking about starting a go-fund-me page and seeing if I can get some people to help me with rent and utilities this week. Then this friend said, "You should call Woodland Hills because they help people like us." I know, you're thinking I should have responded to that, but I didn't need to because a church member was already on it. It was the best one word answer I've ever heard in my entire life. In all caps, NOPE. That was it. Don't call the church, get a job. But stop going to the people who are giving you bad advice.

Stop asking for relationship advice from your jaded, drama-loving friends. That co-worker who hates men probably isn't the one you should ask for husband advice. You have a guy at work who hates and curses his wife every chance he gets. Don't ask him about your marriage. He doesn't need to help you. He's going to take you down the wrong path. For vocational career advice, stop asking your lazy, unemployed friends. You are just listening to bad voices.

Maybe we've overcomplicated this whole thing. Hearing from God is so much easier when you spend time in the Bible, kneel in prayer, and surround your self with godly men and women. You watch how easy decision making becomes. Yeah, you're still going to struggle, you're still going to have moments where your like, "God, is this you guiding and directing and speaking? "I feel led in this direction. I don't have peace about it, but I am pouring out myself in the bible, I am pouring out myself in prayer, and I am surrounded by good, godly voices." This is why online is not enough. This is why you need the local church. You need a community of believers that surround you and are able to call it out when they see you claiming something God is saying in your life and they know clearly from his Word that is not of the Lord. I think in some of the churches I visit sometimes people have a word from the Lord for me and we don't have enough people saying, "That is not a word from the Lord for you."

Get in your Bible, spend time in prayer, and then find some of that good, godly voice. I'm not telling you that jaded co-worker or that unemployed friend shouldn't be your friend, or you shouldn't spend time with them. That's not at all what I'm saying. Just don't take your shots in life based on what they tell you to do. Seek, ask, recognize the voice of God.

This whole month, we are going to look at what it means to act on the Word of God. What does it mean to hear God's voice, to recognize his voice and do something with it in our lives?

Father, in the name of Jesus, again, we pray for Dee and ask for comfort for her today as she mourns and as we mourn with her. We pray for the one who has never placed faith in Jesus that today is the day of their salvation. That they would confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead. We rejoice when all those who have stepped in the water today and have made the decision to follow you, and for that we are grateful. We look forward the baptisms yet to come this morning.

We pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.