

Fil-Am Community Church

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GOD WANTS YOU TO HEAR HIM

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### ***GOD WANTS YOU TO HEAR HIM***

Probably one of the most dangerous phrases in the English language is this phrase: ***God spoke to me***. That could be one of the most misunderstood phrases, most misused phrases, and most abused phrases. It could be one of the most manipulating phrases. When somebody says that... How do you argue with that person? *God spoke to me*.

The next three weeks we're going to do a series on what I'm calling, "**Can You Hear Me Now?**" Remember this phrase, popularized by Verizon a few years back? BTW, this is not sponsored by Verizon. In this series we're going to look at how do you know when it's God talking to you? How do you hear God? How do you know when it's the devil talking? How do you know it's just your own imagination? How do you know when it's the pizza you ate late at night talking to you? We're going to look at some ways to test a phony message. How do you know when it's not really from God? And there are ways in the Bible that tells us how to know when it's God talking to you and when it's not God.

You know, you could go out and buy the finest radio around. A Bose wave radio, for example. But if you don't tune it in you're still not going to receive anything.

The point is, God has already given you the capacity to hear Him. The Bible says you were made in His image. That's what makes human beings different from animals. You're not like an animal. Animals don't pray. Animals don't communicate to God. Animals can't hear from God. But you can because you're made in God's image. All the equipment that you already need to hear God you've got. You just have to learn how to tune it in. That's what we're going to do in this series.

**In Luke 8:8** Jesus says *"He who has ears to hear let him hear."* What's He talking about? He's talking about if you've got the equipment you need to tune it in.

Jesus told the story about how to tune in. It's called the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Four Soils. It's in Luke 8. *"While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: 'A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a*

*hundred times more than was sown.’ When he said this, he called out, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’”*

What’s He talking about? Jesus says this farmer goes out to sow seed. He’s not planting one seed at a time. He’s just tossing seed out over the ground. He says it falls on different types of soil and depending on the type of soil it falls on it gets a different response. Fortunately later in this same chapter Jesus explains the story and tells us the meaning of all the parts. He says this: The farmer represents God. And the seed represents God wanting to talk to you – God’s word to you. The soil represents four different attitudes that you can have toward hearing from God and we’re going to look at those today. But first, there are two important reasons why we need to hear God’s voice.

**1. It produces personal success.**

The Bible says in Psalm 32:8 *“I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.”* I’m not talking about the world’s definition of success, which is about selfishness. I’m talking about God’s definition of success, which is about sticking to his plan.

Did you know that God has a plan for your life? As you and I listen to Him, He gets us on track with His plan for our lives. A customized path just for you. Get on that path and you’ll be successful.

**2. It protects me from mistakes.**

If you will listen God will warn you in advance of traps in life. He will keep this promise in Proverbs 3:6 (MSG) *“Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go. He’s the one who will keep you on track.”* How many of you would like to be protected from making stupid mistakes? That’s just a common thing in life. God has the power to do that if we’ll only listen to Him.

So these are the two benefits of hearing God speak.

Now let’s look at “How do I prepare myself to hear God’s voice?” Going back to the parable, we see four things in this story.

**1. If you want to hear God speak you must first cultivate an open mind.**

What does that mean? It means you’ve got to be receptive and willing. The number one barrier to hearing God speak is resistance. “I don’t think I need to hear God speak. I don’t believe God can speak.” So many people are even closed to the possibility that God might speak to them.

This is what Jesus talked about in the first kind of soil – the footpath soil. Luke 8:5 He says this *“A farmer went out to sow his seed and as he was scattering the seed some fell along the path and it was trampled on and the birds of the air ate it up.”* On a farm between the rows of vegetables there are footpaths. You’ve seen these. There are footpaths that the workers walk on when they’re picking the strawberries or whatever. There’s a path between

each row of whatever you're growing. As workers would walk down this pathway many, many times it becomes trampled down. The soil becomes compact. It gets really hard. And if by accident some of that seed that the farmer's throwing out happens to land on the hard compacted soil of the footpath there's no way it's going to sprout.

It's not going to take root. It just lays on the surface until a bird comes along and eats it. It never gets the chance to sprout.

Jesus gives us the meaning of this down in verse 12. He says *"Those along the footpath are the ones who hear. And then the devil comes along and takes away the word from their heart so that they may not believe and be saved."*

There are two characteristics of a footpath. It's hardened and it's narrow. Do you know any minds like that? They're closed to the possibility of God in their life: I don't need God. I don't want God. I don't know if I even believe in God. God can never get through to them.

The point is sometimes we don't even give God a chance. Our minds are made up. Our hearts are hardened. We're unwilling to listen.

So this first kind of soil represents a closed mind. The hardened soil represents a closed mind.

What causes us to have a closed mind? Let me give you the three major mental blocks that keep people from hearing God. These are the birds that pick out the seed of God's Word. There are three.

One is pride. I say, "I can handle this myself. I can figure it all out. I don't need His help so why even pray." Pride causes me to close my mind to God. Second – fear. A lot of people are closed to God because they're afraid of what He might say. They're running from God out of fear. They're scared to death. What if God asks me to do something I don't want to do? What if He asks me to do something that's too hard? What if He tells me something I don't like? Like Jonah who didn't like to go to Nineveh.

The third one is bitterness. Bitterness causes people to close their hearts and minds to God. Resentment. Some people hurt so much that they shift the blame to God. They say, "I don't like God. I'm mad at God." Whenever you hold on to a hurt, your heart grows hard and cold. You become defensive and even God's love can't get through to you.

The tragedy of a closed mind and a hard heart is it's barren. Like a moonscape. Nothing can grow there. Nothing can live there. Even if a little seed does happen to fall on a closed mind or a hardened heart it can't sprout. Jesus said, the birds come along and eat the seed. He says this kind of life is for the birds! It's useless. It's worthless.

What's the smart response? Look at the next verse. The Bible says this "*Get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives. Humbly accept [circle "humbly accept"] the message God has planted in your hearts for it is strong enough to save your soul.*" Humbly accept. The opposite of a closed mind is an open mind. God, I can't do it on my own. I can't figure it out on my own. So I am going to listen to You. I'm going to humbly open up my life to the possibility of God. Even when I couldn't figure it out I'll still be listening to You. First you cultivate an open mind, second if you want to hear God speak to you...

## **2. You've got to allocate time to listen.**

Cultivate an open mind and allocate time to listen. That means you've got to slow down. You've got to make time to be quiet. You've got to put it in your schedule so you have time to hear God speak.

The first barrier to hearing God speak is resistance. But the second barrier to hearing God speak is hurry.

We're always in a hurry. We say, "God, I want to hear from You. Speak, God. I've only got five minutes. Quick!" God says, "I think I'll pass on this one." God wants more than your leftovers. God wants more than your short changing, spare moments. Like "I've got a few moments here. God, talk to me quick." No. God wants to be the center of your life. The way that you prove that He's the center of your life is you allocate time to listen.

Here's the second kind of soil that Jesus talks about. In Luke 8:6 He says *"Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture."*

In Israel much of the country is a thin layer of topsoil over a bedrock of limestone. It's not a really fertile country. It's not like America where we have really deep topsoil in a lot of our areas. Israel is just a little thin layer of topsoil over a bedrock of limestone. So you plant something on this rocky soil and the seed sprouts. But it can't get deep roots so it withers and dies. It doesn't last very long.

In verse 13 He says this. This is what it represents *"Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away."* Jesus says the second kind of soil, the shallow soil represents a superficial mind. You see, sometimes we react superficially to God's word. We get excited. We react emotionally. We're moved impulsively. But we don't let God's word sink into the bedrock of our personality. So there's no real change. It's just kind of an emotional reaction.

Notice in the verse it says they *"are the ones who received the word with joy."* At times after the service, you say, "Wow! That was a great service. That was good." But you walk out the door and you forget it immediately. You never

allow the word to penetrate. Why does that happen? Because we forget what we hear.

The United States Air Force did a study and discovered that we forget 95% of everything we hear within 72 hours. As a pastor that is an incredibly depressing statistic. That's why we have these outlines. And Pastor Dave religiously sends out the sermon notes every week. Because I want it to last a little bit longer than 72 hours.

You can take the outline and notes and later you can take it and review it and look over it. Sometime ago, I spoke about worry, God's Antidote to Worry. A week later someone emailed me and said, *"Dear Pastor Rolly, Just wanted to let you know that I have read this message twice, and am finding it very helpful. I will read it as many times as i need to read it until I finally get it through my thick skull about who is truly in control. I am glad He is in control. I have more faith in Him than myself. And that is a good thing!"* 😊

*Anyway, thank you for sharing this message with us. It is truly beneficial and I really feel like I am more at peace now and I don't feel as stressed as I usually do. Like I said, I will continue to read it over and over again until I finally get it! LOL!!*

*Take care and have a blessed day!"* Guess who wrote that? Probably, someone who is now red-faced. Kevin, thanks for your letter, btw. Oops!

Verse 13 is saying that these people have shallow roots. These are not deep people. They're shallow. They believe for a while but when the hot winds of testing blow they wither.

How do you stop being a superficial person? How do you get spiritual depth in your life? There are two very practical ways. Every one of you can do these. I talk about them all the time and some of you are getting tired of hearing about them because you're doing them. You say, "When are you going to stop talking about these two things?" When everybody's doing them! These are the two ways you stop being a superficial person and you become a spiritually deep person.

***One, schedule a daily time with God.*** It can be ten minutes, fifteen minutes. We call it a quiet time. We even have a class called Class 201 that teaches you how to have a quiet time. In a quiet time you sit down, you read the Bible for a little bit, you talk to God for a little bit in prayer. You say, "God, is there anything You want to say to me through Your word or anything?"

Maybe you review your notes from the weekend. Maybe you journal a little bit. It doesn't matter. You can vary it. But you just have to make time to listen to God. Say, "God, is there anything You want to say to me today?" And then you read His word and you do that on a daily basis. I don't know anything that will build spiritual roots faster than a daily time with God.

***The second thing that will help you not be superficial but grow deeper is join a weekly small group.*** Everybody needs to be in a weekly small group. That's where God can speak to you through other people because in a crowd like this we can't discuss what I'm talking about. As I'm talking you can't raise your hand in order to ask a question or argue with me. If you do that, I'll take it to mean you have a prayer request and I'm going to ask everybody in this room to come around you and lay their hands on you and pray over you. Actually, that happened to me in my former church. Someone raised his hand. He was a first-time guest, looked like he'd never been to a church before. Of course, I was surprised but I politely told the person that I will entertain all questions after the service. Anyway, in a small group you can freely discuss while the study is going on.

***Hebrews 10:25*** says this *"Don't give up the habit of meeting together. Instead let us encourage one another."* Notice it ought to be a habit.

Some of you are going through a tough time right now. You're going through a financial crisis or a health crisis or you're going through relational crisis. You especially need to be in a small group. Because if you listen to the Lord He'll bring you through it. If you want to hear God's voice you have to cultivate an open mind. You have to allocate time to listen.

### **3. You must eliminate the distractions.**

***You can't hear God when your mind is crowded with other thoughts,***  
when your mind is crowded with worries and concerns and anxieties.

You can't hear God when your mind is filled with your dreams, your plans, your ambitions, your activities. When your mind is filled with television, radio, with the Internet, with your cell phone, with your tablet. When all this noise is going on you're not going to hear God.

This is the third kind of soil. Jesus calls it the soil with weeds. In ***Luke 8:7*** He says "*Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants.*" Notice in this soil the seed does get to sprout and it actually starts growing. But after a while it gets choked by the thorns so it never bears fruit.

In verse 14 He tells us the meaning of this "*The seed that fell among the thorns stands for those who hear but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries and riches and pleasures and they do not mature.*"

Circle the phrase "***as they go.***" Are you always on the go? Then you're going to fall prey to this one. The first barrier to hearing God is resistance. The second is hurry.

The third is busyness. ***Busyness.*** You can get so distracted and so busy you don't have time to hear God. A saying goes, "Beware of the barrenness of a busy life." A lot of people confuse activity with productivity. They're not the same. You can be always on the go but you're going in circles. You're not really making any progress and there's no fruit in your life.

The Bible says these people are choked. Today we'd say in common terms, "They're stressed out."

***Jesus says the distractions are like thorns that grow up in your life and choke out the ability for you to hear God.*** Actually it even gives us three very common thorns. He says here are three common ones that tend to choke God out of your life.

He says first is worry. You can be so busy with the problems and pressures of daily living you forget God. I forget God because I'm too filled with anxiety.

Then He said riches. You can be so busy making money you forget God. You get up in the morning and head off to the office or wherever you work. You put in a full day's work. You come home wasted and tired and your head hits the pillow and you go to sleep. You get up the next morning and you do it again. You don't have any time for God.

And third, pleasure. Nothing wrong with seeking pleasure. God gave you your five senses which gives you your ability to experience pleasure. But if you spend so much time in front of your HDTV or playing with your iPad or shopping online that you forget God then that's where the danger lies. You have to reduce or eliminate some fun or pleasure because they are distractions.

These are just three thorns. There are lots of different kinds of thorns. A thorn is anything you allow to take first place in your life instead of God. A thorn is anything you allow to choke God out of your schedule. It could be a very good thing. But if it's anything that you allow to choke God out of your life and you don't have time to hear God it is a thorn.

In the Old Testament there was this guy named Elijah. One time he wanted to hear God speak. He goes up on this mountain and says, "God, I want to hear from You." So God puts on this incredible show. First God sends a huge wind. It comes roaring through the canyon. But God wasn't in the wind. Then He sends an earthquake. And the whole mountain starts rumbling. Elijah's very impressed but it says God wasn't in the earthquake. Then He sent a roaring fire, a forest fire, down the mountain. But it says God wasn't in the fire. Then it says, God spoke to Elijah in a whisper – in a still small voice. It says *"There was the sound of a gentle whisper."*

You know what's the problem with a whisper? You have to be quiet to hear it. It's the only way you're going to hear a whisper. I'm going to tell you something that's going to shock you. God has been whispering to you all week. But you couldn't hear Him. Why? You're never quiet. People don't like quiet. If we were to sit here in total silence for five minutes some of you would freak out. That's the longest you've ever been quiet except for sleeping and even then you're not quiet because you're snoring. People can't handle silence. Yet it is in quietness that God says, "Hey! I'm talking to

you.” All this week God has been trying to talk to you, whispering to you. God doesn’t shout. He doesn’t write it in the sky. He doesn’t go, “This is God!” He doesn’t do that. He whispers. You have to be quiet to hear God’s whisper.

In the weeks ahead we’re going to get into real detail about how you hear God speak. And how do you know when it’s God and when it’s not God?

But before you can do that you’ve got to do a little heart check. A little heart and mind preparation. That’s what you do here.

The fourth thing you have to do to prepare to hear God speaking is...

#### **4. Take and give.**

I cultivate an open mind, I allocate time to listen, I eliminate the distractions, and I take and give.

This is what the Bible calls the good soil. Verse 15 *“The sees that fell in good soil stand for those who hear the message and retain it in a good and obedient heart and they persist until they bear fruit.”* Notice four marks of good soil: first, they hear it. That means they retain it. They care enough to write it down or whatever. They memorize it, they retain it, they remember it. Then they obey it. Then they persist in it until they bear fruit.

How do you bear fruit? One way is to pass it on. In the Living Bible *“They listen to God’s words and cling to them and steadily spread them to others who also soon believe.”* Did you know that God expects you to pass on everything you learn?

God doesn’t say, “Just learn it and then keep it inside and be a spiritually obese person.” So, a person whose heart is like a good soil is one who readily takes in God’s word and eventually gives it out.

Folks, I hope we’ll prepare our hearts in such a way that we can hear when God is speaking. I hope that in the midst of our busy schedule and distractions all around us we’ll manage to be still and head God’s whisper to us.

In the next couple of weeks, I’m going to share with you the ways in which God speaks to us and how to recognize his voice.