

Hearing God's Voice Luke 8:4-15

One of the most basic claims to Christianity is that God speaks to people. The Bible stories indicate God is speaking directly to us. Our Creator wants to have a relationship with us.

The problem is communication is often difficult. Despite being married for over 30 years, at times it's like I'm deaf in one ear and can't hear out of the other. So if I have that much difficulty hearing someone who I know, see and love, how much of a communication problem do I have with God?

Personally I'm skeptical of people who *always* have a clear word from God. When an affirmation is voiced to me, supposedly from God – that's nice to hear. But a lot of stupid things have been said by people who claim God has spoken to them. On the other hand we know God speaks through prophets, a cloud, fire, angels, and even a donkey.

We do have evidence God speaks to people. I also believe without a doubt that God speaks to me at times. Just like when my children phone me, I know their voice. I know who's putting the idea into my mind. I know where the impression or coincidences are coming from.

So how do we know when God is talking? How do I know I'm listening to the right voice? In our text we read, verse 8, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" So we need to be tuned in to God like we are tuned into our technology.

How do we do this? By having the right kind of attitude. Let's look at 4 kinds of soil, 4 kinds of people, or 4 attitudes because we all have these attitudes at times.

How do I hear God speak to me? **First, by cultivating an open mind.** I have to be ready, receptive, eager and willing to hear. I'm not talking about an audible voice, but an impression in our minds that we know is from God. And it needs to line up with basic principles from the Bible, God's church and God our Creator.

But some people have a closed mind. They don't believe God communicates personally, or even at all. When we have an unbelieving mind we are like this soil.

Verses 5 and 12 say. "Some seed fell on the path and it was trampled on and the birds of the air came and ate it up. Those along the path are like people who hear and then the devil comes along and takes away the word from their hearts so they cannot believe and be saved."

Seed was sown, God communicated, but because our minds are closed, our hearts are hardened, we've made up our mind, and we can't hear. This cut off communication.

What causes us to have a closed mind? *Pride* is one reason. We value being independent self sufficient so why would we listen to someone we can't see? Pride leads us to ignore God and think we don't need God. We close our minds to Jesus and he can't get in and say anything to us because we think we've got it all figured out. So I don't pray or read or listen.

Another cause of a closed mind is, *fear*. What if I pray or open my spirit to God and God tells me something I don't want to hear? We might have to change, or to do something unpopular, or hard. God might tell me something to do that I think I can't do or don't want to do. Or I fear I'll lose my freedom to be me, to have fun, to feel fulfilled and independent.

We close our minds to the Creator's voice out of pride, fear and third, *bitterness*. Life is difficult, painful and hurtful, so it's not unusual to blame God for life's unfairness. So we cultivate that spiritual soil of bitterness toward God. But we have a choice. We can be bitter or better. Bitterness so often leads to blame and a wasted life. This closes our minds and hearts to God. People who have been deeply hurt have a hard time opening up, trusting their minds, hearts, lives and souls to God.

Life has many situations that leave scars in us, even from fellow believers. But let me say 3 things. One, I'm sorry you were hurt. So does

God. Since He sent his Son Jesus to earth, he understands our pain and he hurts with us.

Second, God has not promised to exempt us from pain. We live in a world of sin. How we live in this world is part of our maturing in faith and trust and “working out our salvation.”

Third, when you are in pain, please don't run from God. Instead run to God. It amazes me when a disciple of Jesus gets into trouble, of their own doing or circumstance or because of others sin, they began to distance themselves from the church and from Jesus. Right when they need to be listening to God and having others listen on their behalf, so many people in trouble, go the other way. Don't let bitterness, life's unfairness, pain, pride and fear take you away from connecting with Jesus. Nothing can grow in our soul when we are closed off.

The tragedy of a hard beaten path is nothing can grow there. James 1:21 encourages us to, “Get rid of all the moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent & humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you.” Let God love you, drop your defenses and open up your mind.

The first step in hearing God speak is, we must cultivate an open mind. **Second, to tune in to God, I've got to make time to hear Him.** We have to slow down, be quiet and plan time to be with Jesus. Too often we allow life to crowd out our Creator. Does the Almighty get the leftovers of your busy schedule? Have you noticed that juice in jars is now outselling frozen concentrated juice? Why? Because it takes too long to thaw and then mix it!

When we live in a hurried lifestyle, being busy, God gets short changed, shuffled to the bottom of the deck and Satan is pleased. Then we demand to hear our Sustainer speak but on our schedule and in the way we want him to speak. When we demand to hear what we want to hear, we miss what God has to say to us.

Verses 6 & 13 represent this attitude. “Other seed fell on shallow soil with rock beneath. It began to grow but soon withered and died for

lack of moisture. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but have no root. They believe it for a while, but in the time of testing, fall away.”

Just as the hardened path represents the closed mind, the shallow soil represents a superficial mind. The soil Jesus is talking about is soil with an inch or so of topsoil but then rock underneath. Plants can't develop deep roots. This is the superficial hearer, where we hear our Redeemer, get all excited, emotionally and intellectually moved, but then we never give it time to sink into our hearts, minds, behaviors and souls. So we don't change.

Studies show that we forget 90 to 95 % of what we hear within 72 hours. It's why sermon outlines can be helpful. I can't always remember what I preached on last week. But for learning, implementing, and to act on what we hear we have to be listeners with deeper roots. How can we base our lives on God's laws, if they haven't become rooted within us? How is it that people can attend worship and be involved in church for years and never be changed?

So we have to find ways to carve out the time to hear, to listen to our Creator. We need good and regular prayer, Bible study, and worship habits. What goes into us, always leaks out in our habits, attitudes, actions and words.

The **third** attitude necessary to hear God speak is, **I must eliminate the distractions.** So often even in quiet we have background noise. And what about multitasking? I still can't figure out how my son was able to do homework, listen to music, play a computer game, answer email, all at the same time and still get good grades. And I wonder how much better he could have done. Also we fill up our minds with the concerns of daily living, plans, goals, worries, ambitions, bills and so on. Even the obsession with family can distract us. When our minds are full we never give God a chance to talk to us. Our Creator can't get through.

Verses 7 and 14 describe this attitude. “Other seed fell among the thorns which grew up with

it and choked the plants. This seed represents those who hear the word but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches, and pleasures, and their fruit does not mature."

God wants to talk with us but he keeps getting the busy signal because we're distracted. The result is unproductive spiritual lives. God wants to connect with us, but if we stay busy and distracted and don't find the time to listen – how can we hear God's ideas for our lives?

We need to be careful we don't confuse business with productivity. Being on the go all the time, may mean you're going in circles. It may mean we are too busy for God. Maybe our purposes in life have more to do with self than with God. We've got to have time with God.

Jesus says that distractions are like weeds. First, *worries* can keep us from hearing God. The Greek word for worry means pulled in different directions. Worry interferes.

Second, *riches* are like weeds. We can be so busy making money we have no time for hearing the Holy Spirit. Then we are busy spending that money. In our desire for the supposed security and wealth riches bring, we give God the leftovers – if we even offer those to him.

Another weed can be *pleasure*. God wants us to have fun. But church involvement and programs have greatly decreased. Guess who gets crowded out because of business and entertainment? You can make your own list of things that distracts us from listening to God.

Here's a theological question. How much effort does it take to grow weeds or thorns? No effort at all. A plant takes work and time to cultivate and nurture. A weed doesn't need our help to grow. When we start neglecting time with God and worship time with fellow believers – weeds start growing. They choke the spiritual life out of us. I'm going to lose my joy, peace, calmness, purpose, and my ability to handle stress. You can name what happens to you when you're letting the weeds grow in your life. Weeds keep us from making

the time to allow God to work in our lives. And weeds can be sin – especially habitual sin.

To hear, to tune into our Sustainer, we must cultivate an open mind; allocate time to listen; and eliminate the distractions. **Fourth, we must cooperate with what God says.** I suspect God talks to people who decide in advance they are going to do what He tells them to. Most of us want God to talk to us and then we will decide if we are going to do it or not. But I think God doesn't play this game.

Brasilians have a phrase which is, "If God desires." They use this as a social way to say no to invitations. As a church planter in Brasil, at times when I invited someone to one of our Bible studies & heard, "Si Deus quiser," I'd respond by saying, "Good, I'll see you there because I know God wants you to come to church." People were always surprised.

The fourth soil represents a willing heart. Verses 8 and 15. "Some seed fell on good soil, and produced a hundredfold. Those in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance."

Do we want to make our lives count? Would we like to have productive, fulfilling, satisfying lives? Then do what James 1:22 tells us. "Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourself." We kid ourselves if we think we are spiritual and maturing just by attending church and good deeds.

God wants us to be tuned in to Him. The hard, superficial, and distracted soils need to become willing hearers with the right attitudes. They need to allow our Savior to water, fertilize and prune them. Be doers of the word, not hearers only. Let's cultivate an open mind, allocate time to listen, eliminate the distractions, and let's cooperate with what God says. "Let anyone with ears to hear, listen!"

(Outline adapted from a Rick Warren sermon)