



GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

DECEMBER 9, 2018

Discussion Guide

RECOGNIZING GOD'S VOICE

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- HAVE YOU EVER HAD THE EXPERIENCE OF HEARING SOMEONE'S VOICE AND KNOWING WHO WAS SPEAKING TO YOU EVEN THOUGH YOU COULDN'T SEE THEM? HOW MIGHT HAVE THIS BEEN POSSIBLE?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

RECOGNIZING GOD'S VOICE IS NOT ALWAYS EASY, PARTICULARLY IF WE DO NOT HAVE EXPERIENCE IN DOING SO. MANY VOICES FILL OUR LIVES, AND ALMOST ALL OF THEM CARRY COMPETING MESSAGES. RECOGNIZING GOD'S VOICE INVOLVES SIFTING THROUGH THE VARIOUS VOICES WE HEAR IN ORDER TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S VOICE. THE FOLLOWING EXERCISE IS MEANT TO GUIDE YOUR THROUGH THIS SIFTING PROCESS AND CAN BE DONE AS A GROUP.

1. ASK GOD TO SPEAK TO A SPECIFIC AREA OR ISSUE. OVER A PERIOD OF SEVERAL DAYS, PAY ATTENTION TO THE NORMAL EXPERIENCES AND CONVERSATIONS WHICH FILL YOUR LIFE. PULL ASIDE ANY MESSAGE OR VOICE WHICH SEEMS TO ADDRESS THIS AREA OR ISSUE. (IF DOING THIS AS A GROUP, TAKE THIS STEP BEFORE MEETING AS A GROUP.)
2. WRITE DOWN THE VARIOUS MESSAGES OR VOICES YOU HAVE HEARD. (AS A GROUP, SHARE WHAT YOU HEARD WITHOUT PEOPLE OFFERING COMMENT.)
3. READ ROMANS 8.1, GALATIANS 5.22-23, AND REVELATION 12.10. THESE VERSES DESCRIBE WHAT GOD'S VOICE DOES AND DOES NOT SOUND LIKE. AS A GROUP, REFLECT ON WHAT THESE VERSES SAY ABOUT THE QUALITY OF GOD'S VOICE.
4. CONSIDER YOUR LIST AND CROSS OFF ALL VOICES AND

MESSAGES WHICH DO NOT FIT THE QUALITY OF GOD'S VOICE. (IF DOING THIS AS A GROUP, EXPLAIN YOUR CHOICES AND WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO MAKE THESE CHOICES.)

5. CONSIDER THE LIFE OF JESUS AND READ COLOSSIANS 1.15 AND JOHN 1.14. AS A GROUP, DISCUSS HOW IN JESUS WE SEE WHO GOD IS AND HEAR HIS VOICE.
6. CONSIDER YOUR LIST AND CROSS OFF ALL VOICES AND MESSAGES WHICH DO NOT FIT THE CHARACTER, MINISTRY, AND MESSAGE OF JESUS. (IF DOING THIS AS A GROUP, EXPLAIN YOUR CHOICES AND WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO MAKE THESE CHOICES.)
7. TAKE WHAT REMAINS AND ASK THAT THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY CONSIDER IT SO THEY MIGHT AFFIRM WHETHER IT IS OF GOD. THIS AFFIRMATION INVOLVES THE LARGER COMMUNITY ENGAGING IN THE PROCESS ABOVE IN ADDITION TO EVALUATING WHAT WAS HEARD IN CONJUNCTION WITH HOW AND WHAT GOD HAS SAID TO THE LARGER COMMUNITY. WHAT IS AFFIRMED IS OF GOD.

AS A GROUP, CONSIDER CLOSING BY DISCUSSING WHAT THIS EXERCISE WAS LIKE. PRAY FOR GRACE TO HEAR AND RESPOND TO GOD'S VOICE.

CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND COMMENTARY

OBEDIENCE AND GOD'S VOICE

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE AS IT PERTAINS TO GOD'S VOICE IS ONE OF REVELATION AND RESPONSE. THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE, WHEN GOD SPEAKS, THERE EXISTS THE EXPECTED RESPONSE OF OBEDIENCE BY THOSE WHO HAVE HEARD GOD'S VOICE. THIS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEARING AND OBEDIENCE APPEARS AS EARLY AS GENESIS 22 WHEN ABRAHAM IS BLESSED BECAUSE HE OBEYED WHEN HE HEARD GOD (GENESIS 22.18). BEFORE GOD GAVE THE LAW TO MOSES AT MOUNT SINAI, HE REITERATED HIS EXPECTATION THAT IN HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD THROUGH THE LAW, THE PEOPLE WOULD RESPOND BY OBEYING (EXODUS 19.5, 8). THROUGHOUT THE PROPHETS, A REGULAR REBUKE LEVELED BY GOD AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL IS THEY HEARD GOD'S VOICE AND DID NOT RESPOND (PSALM 115.6; ISAIAH 6.9-10; JEREMIAH 3.13). IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, JESUS REGULARLY STATED HE EXPECTED THOSE WHO HEARD HIS VOICE (GOD'S VOICE) TO RESPOND WITH OBEDIENCE (MATTHEW 11.5; MARK 4.9; LUKE 6.46-49). FURTHER, HE NOTED IT WAS THOSE WHO HEARD AND OBEYED HIS VOICE WHO WERE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM (LUKE 6.46-49; JOHN 15.9-16). THAT OBEDIENCE IS THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE TO HEARING GOD'S VOICE MAKES THE JOURNEY OF FAITH ONE OF DEVOTION EXPRESSED THROUGH ACTION. IN OTHER WORDS, THOSE WHO ARE TRULY UPON THE JOURNEY OF FAITH WILL DEMONSTRATE IT THROUGH PHYSICAL ACTIONS, ACTIONS OF OBEDIENCE (JAMES 1.22; 2.14-26).

THE TEXT

LISTENING FOR GOD'S VOICE

HEARING GOD INVOLVES THE PROCESS OF DISCERNING GOD'S VOICE FROM AMONG THE MANY COMPETING VOICES WHICH ARE PART OF A FALLEN AND DISTORTED WORLD. THIS IS A SIFTING PROCESS WHICH INVOLVES THE ON-GOING CONSIDERATION AND EVALUATION OF VARIOUS VOICES IN CONJUNCTION WITH WHAT WE CAN EXPECT WITH RESPECT TO GOD'S VOICE. THIS PROCESS RESTS UPON THE BELIEF THAT GOD REALLY DOES SPEAK, AND THAT PEOPLE CAN HEAR AND RESPOND TO HIS VOICE.

PERHAPS THE MOST OBVIOUS (AND OFT OVERLOOKED) STARTING PLACE IN THE PROCESS OF DISCERNING GOD'S VOICE IS WITH THE ACTION OF ASKING GOD TO SPEAK. WHILE GOD CAN AND DOES INITIATE CONVERSATIONS WITH HIS PEOPLE, ONE NEED NOT WAIT FOR GOD TO REVEAL HIS WILL. HIS CHILDREN ARE INVITED TO

ASK, AND GOD PROMISES THAT WHEN ASKED, HE WILL REVEAL WHAT HE DESIRES FOR HIS PEOPLE (JEREMIAH 33.3). ONCE A PERSON HAS ASKED GOD TO SPEAK WITH REGARD TO A SPECIFIC SUBJECT OR ISSUE, HE OR SHE MUST BEGIN TO LISTEN WITH GREAT INTENTION FOR VOICES/MESSAGES WHICH ADDRESS THIS SUBJECT OR ISSUE. THIS PROCESS OF LISTENING INVOLVES THE SIFTING OF VARIOUS VOICES, AND THE CHALLENGING OF ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING GOD'S VOICE. PERHAPS THE FIRST SUCH CHALLENGE INVOLVES ADJUSTING ONE'S EXPECTATION TO INCLUDE THE ABILITY TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE IN VARIOUS WAYS, BOTH WITHIN AND OUTSIDE SCRIPTURE (HEBREWS 1.1-2); THAT IS, GOD CAN SPEAK THROUGH A MAGAZINE ARTICLE JUST AS CLEARLY AS HE CAN THROUGH THE BIBLE. THEREFORE, LISTENING IS ABOUT PAYING ATTENTION TO ANY AND ALL VOICES/MESSAGES WHICH ADDRESS THE SUBJECT OR ISSUE.

AS ONE BEGINS TO PAY ATTENTION, IT CAN BE SURPRISING HOW MANY COMPETING VOICES ADDRESS THE ISSUE AT HAND. IT CAN BE TEMPTING TO DRIFT TOWARD CERTAIN VOICES BECAUSE OF THEIR CONTENT OR TONE, BUT EACH VOICE MUST BE CAREFULLY EVALUATED TO SEE WHETHER IT IS GOD'S VOICE. SOMETIMES, WE ARE TEMPTED TO LISTEN FOR VOICES WE DO NOT HEAR; THAT IS, WE ASSUME GOD'S VOICE WILL COME IN SOME MIRACULOUS MANNER. THIS CAN HAPPEN, AND WHEN IT DOES, IT IS CLEAR GOD HAS SPOKEN. HOWEVER, THE CLEAR TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE IS GOD SEEMS TO PREFER TO SPEAK IN AND THROUGH OUR EVERYDAY CIRCUMSTANCES, THE VOICES WHICH ALREADY SURROUND US. THIS PREFERENCE IS SEEN THROUGHOUT THE OLD TESTAMENT AS GOD SPOKE PRIMARILY THROUGH THE PROPHETS, ORDINARY HUMAN BEINGS WHO VERBALLY PROCLAIMED GOD'S VOICE (HEBREWS 1.1). IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, WE SEE GOD'S VOICE TAKE ON FLESH; THAT IS, GOD'S VOICE ENTERS OUR EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE IN A PERMANENT WAY (JOHN 1.14). IT IS THIS ENFLESHED VOICE WHICH CONTINUES TO SPEAK TO US TODAY, OFTEN THROUGH PEOPLE WHO REPRESENT CHRIST'S BODY (1 PETER 4.10-11). EVEN THE BIBLE IS A RECORD OF GOD'S VOICE COMING TO US IN THE HUMAN VOICE; GOD INSPIRED SCRIPTURE, BUT PEOPLE WROTE IT. GOD SPOKE TO US IN THEIR VOICE AND THROUGH THEIR PEN! SIMPLY PUT, OUR EXTRAORDINARY GOD LIKES TO SPEAK THROUGH THE ORDINARINESS OF LIFE, AND IN THIS HE SEEMS TO PREFER THE HUMAN PRESENCE AND VOICE. THEREFORE, IN OUR PAYING ATTENTION, WE SHOULD CAREFULLY NOTICE WHAT WE SEE AND HEAR AROUND US IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES.

OF THE MANY VOICES WHICH ADDRESS THE ISSUE AT HAND, ONE MIGHT ASSUME GOD'S VOICE WOULD STAND OUT CLEARLY. IN SOME WAY, IT WOULD BE THE LOUDEST AND MOST OBVIOUS VOICE, BUT SOMETIMES GOD'S VOICE IS THE SOFTEST AND MOST OVERLOOKED (1 KINGS 19.9-18). THEREFORE, WE MUST PAY ATTENTION TO EACH VOICE, NO MATTER HOW SOFT. WITH EACH VOICE, WE MUST THEN ASK IF IT FITS WITH THE NATURE OF GOD'S VOICE, HOW GOD'S VOICE WOULD SOUND. FOR INSTANCE, A CONDEMNING VOICE WOULD NOT BE THE VOICE OF GOD (ROMANS 8.1), BECAUSE GOD DOES NOT SPEAK IN THIS MANNER TO HIS PEOPLE. GOD'S VOICE WILL MATCH HIS CHARACTER OF LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, AND GENTLENESS (GALATIANS 5.22-23). AT THIS POINT, ONE MAY BE LEFT WITH A SINGLE VOICE OR A REDUCED NUMBER OF VOICES. REGARDLESS OF THE NUMBER, THE REMAINING VOICES MUST THEN BE COMPARED WITH THE PERSON OF JESUS, FOR THE VOICE OF GOD WILL ALWAYS SPEAK IN KEEPING WITH THE CHARACTER, MINISTRY, AND MESSAGE OF JESUS (1 JOHN 4.1-3). AT THIS POINT, ONE GENERALLY HAS A SINGLE VOICE IN VIEW. HOWEVER, ONE CANNOT YET ASSUME THEY HAVE HEARD GOD. THIS VOICE MUST BE TAKEN BACK TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD, SO THAT IT MIGHT BE AFFIRMED AS BEING FROM GOD (ACTS 13.1-3; GALATIANS 2.1-2). THROUGHOUT HISTORY, THIS KIND OF TESTING HAS BEEN REFERRED TO AS MEASURING SOMETHING AGAINST THE "RULE OF FAITH." WHILE NEVER DEFINITELY DEFINED, THE RULE OF FAITH IS GENERALLY UNDERSTOOD TO BE THE BOUNDS OF ORTHODOXY AS UNDERSTOOD BY THE CHURCH. THIS EVALUATION INVOLVES NOT SIMPLY THE EVALUATION OF THE MESSAGE AGAINST THE STATED ORTHODOXY OF THE CHURCH BUT ALSO THE COMPARISON WITH THE GENERAL EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICE (ORTHOPRAXY) OF THE CHURCH.

ONCE A MESSAGE/VOICE HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS OF GOD, THE BELIEVER MUST THEN SEEK TO RESPOND IN OBEDIENCE, FOR TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE IS TO HEAR AN INVITATION TO OBEY. THE CONSTANT TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE IS THAT OF REVELATION BEING FOLLOWED BY OBEDIENCE. THEREFORE, THE BELIEVER MUST ASK WHAT OBEDIENCE LOOKS LIKE AND TAKE STEPS TO MODEL THIS BEHAVIOR WITHIN A CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY.

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

IF GOD SPEAKS, HOW DO I RECOGNIZE HIS VOICE? ONE MIGHT ASSUME THAT RECOGNIZING GOD'S VOICE WOULD BE EASY. INASMUCH AS GOD SPEAKS THROUGH DONKEYS OR VOICES FROM THE SKY, RECOGNIZING HIS VOICE IS EASY. THE PROBLEM IS THAT THESE ARE THE EXCEPTIONS NOT THE RULE. GENERALLY SPEAKING, GOD SEEMS TO PREFER TO SPEAK THROUGH OUR ORDINARY LIFE (INCLUDING OUR CIRCUMSTANCES) AND IN THESE HE SEEMS TO PREFER THE HUMAN VOICE. THE TROUBLE IS, I HEAR A LOT OF VOICES, INCLUDING MY OWN. IF GOD IS SPEAKING THROUGH ONE OF THEM, HOW DO I KNOW WHICH ONE IS HIS?

HEARING GOD'S VOICE IN THE MIDST OF MANY COMPETING VOICES REQUIRES A GRID, THE RIGHT GRID. THEREFORE, THE PROCESS OF DISCERNING GOD'S VOICE IS AS MUCH A PROCESS OF REFINING OUR GRID (CHALLENGING OUR ASSUMPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS) AS IT IS LISTENING. FOR INSTANCE, I GREW UP IN RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT WHERE GOD WAS PRESENTED AS ANGRY, DEMEANING, AND CONDEMNING. SO, IT MIGHT BE EASY TO ASSUME THAT THE ANGRY, DEMEANING, CONDEMNING VOICES I HEAR ARE GOD'S VOICE. THE PROBLEM WITH THIS IS SCRIPTURE IS PRETTY CLEAR THAT SUCH VOICES ARE REAL, BUT THEY DON'T COME FROM GOD (ROMANS 8.1; GALATIANS 5.22-23; REVELATION 12.10). SO, HOW DO I DETERMINE WHICH VOICE IS GOD'S VOICE?

A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, A DEAR FRIEND GAVE ME A GRID WHICH I HAVE FOUND VERY USEFUL. FIRST, LISTEN FOR THE VOICE WHICH FITS THE CHARACTER OF GOD AS REVEALED IN SCRIPTURE. LET EVERYTHING ELSE GO. THEN, OF THE VOICES WHICH REMAIN, LISTEN FOR THE ONE WHICH FITS THE VOICE OF GOD MADE FLESH; THAT IS, LISTEN FOR THE VOICE WHICH FITS THE LIFE AND PERSON OF JESUS. LET EVERYTHING ELSE GO. THIRD, LISTEN FOR THE VOICE WHICH IS AFFIRMED BY THE CHURCH. THIS LAST ONE IS THE ONE I FIND MOST DIFFICULT, BECAUSE IT MEANS I MUST ENGAGE CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY WITH WHAT I HAVE HEARD SO THAT IT MIGHT BE AFFIRMED AS TRULY FROM GOD. THIS IS DIFFICULT BECAUSE HEARING GOD CAN FEEL SO PERSONAL, BUT I MUST REMIND MYSELF THAT WHAT GOD HAS TO SAY TO ME IS ALWAYS ABOUT THE "WE."

ONCE I HAVE GOD'S VOICE, I MUST THEN OBEY IT. AFTER ALL, THE POINT OF LISTENING FOR GOD'S VOICE IS TO RESPOND TO IT WITH OBEDIENCE. SOMETIMES THIS IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE. I THINK THIS IS WHY I AM SOMETIME RELUCTANT TO LISTEN OR EVEN TO ASK GOD TO SPEAK. THIS REVEALS MY BENTNESS TOWARD BEING MY OWN GOD, A BENTNESS WE ALL ENDURE. HOWEVER, THE MORE I HUMBLE MYSELF AND LISTEN, THE MORE I REALIZE GOD'S WAY IS THE BEST WAY, WHICH ENCOURAGES ME TO CONTINUE HUMBLING MYSELF TO LISTEN.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

IF GOD SPEAKS, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO HEAR HIS VOICE. THIS STATEMENT MAKES SENSE, BUT IT DOESN'T HELP US MAKE SENSE OF OUR EXPERIENCE, BECAUSE WE HEAR MANY VOICES. WHICH ONE BELONGS TO GOD? RECOGNIZING GOD'S VOICE AMONG THE MANY VOICES WE HEAR INVOLVES A PROCESS OF SIFTING OUT ALL VOICES WHICH ARE NOT OF GOD SO THAT ONLY GOD'S VOICE REMAINS. THIS SIFTING WILL INVOLVE NOT JUST THE REMOVING OF VOICES BUT ALSO THE CHALLENGING OF EXPECTATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS CONCERNING GOD'S VOICE. THIS SIFTING BEGINS WHEN WE CHOOSE TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE MANY VOICES AND MESSAGES WHICH SURROUND US, AND PULLING OUT THOSE WHICH SPEAK TO AN ISSUE TO WHICH WE DESIRE GOD TO SPEAK. WE THEN CONSIDER THE VARIOUS VOICES AND REMOVE ALL WHICH DO NOT FIT THE TONE AND CHARACTER OF GOD. SO, FOR INSTANCE, WE REMOVE ALL CONDEMNING, UNKIND, ACCUSING, AND ANGRY VOICES (ROMANS 8.1; GALATIANS 5.22-23; REVELATION 12.10). NEXT, WE REMOVE ALL THE VOICES WHICH DO NOT FIT THE CHARACTER AND MINISTRY OF CHRIST. WHAT REMAINS IS LIKELY THE VOICE OF GOD, BUT WE MUST TAKE AN ADDITIONAL STEP. WE TAKE WHAT WE HAVE HEARD INTO CHRIST-CENTERED COMMUNITY, ASKING THAT THEY AFFIRM WHAT WE HAVE HEARD AS BEING FROM GOD. THIS IS AN IMPORTANT STEP AS IT CHECKS OUR INCREDIBLE ABILITY TO DECEIVE OURSELVES AND JUSTIFY OUR BENT DESIRES, AND IT ACKNOWLEDGES OUR DEEP CONNECTION WITH OTHER PEOPLE OF GOD. ANY WORD FROM GOD WILL REQUIRE A RESPONSE AND SUCH A RESPONSE WILL ALSO AFFECT OTHER PEOPLE OF GOD. THEREFORE, HEARING FROM THEM IS THE FINAL TEST IN KNOWING WHICH VOICE IS GOD'S VOICE.

THIS WEEK, WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO CONSIDER AN AREA OR ISSUE WHERE YOU DESIRE TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE. ASK GOD TO SPEAK, AND THEN PAY ATTENTION TO THE ORDINARY EVENTS, HAPPENINGS, AND CONVERSATIONS WHICH FOLLOW. PULL OUT THE VARIOUS VOICES AND EXPERIENCES WHICH ADDRESS THE ISSUE AND ENGAGE IN THE SIFTING PROCESS AS DESCRIBED ABOVE. YOU MIGHT JOURNAL WHAT THIS EXPERIENCE IS LIKE FOR YOU OR TALK ABOUT IT WITH A SOUL FRIEND.



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