

HEARING GOD

Week 3 | Unceasing

Deeper Dive

How do we hear God's voice?

Scripture - *Psalm 119:105* - This is the most common way that God speaks to us and serves as the discernment filter to put all other methods through. *If it doesn't align with God's Word, then it's not from God.*

Audibly - *1 Samuel 3:1-10* - God can literally speak to us out-loud.

Others - *1 Thessalonians 5:11* - God can use other people in our lives to speak truth to us. This is why it's so important to be in a small group and have a strong church family in your life.

Signs, events, or circumstances - *1 Kings 19:11-12* - God can use things happening around us to speak to us or to get our attention.

Hearts and minds - Sometimes God will speak with a feeling, or a scripture that suddenly comes to mind, or a subtle nudge that you know isn't just from your own internal thoughts.

Day 1 - His voice

Read: 1 Samuel 3:1-10; 1 Kings 19:11-12; John 10:3-4

Think about a person in your life that you can recognize their voice BEFORE actually seeing them. Maybe you know the specific way they call your name, or the way they laugh. You can pick their voice out of a crowded room, or hear them coming down the hall. Teachers often gain this familiarity with their students and can identify the paper without a name by the end of the year. Athletes learn to discern their coach's voice above the screaming crowds. Parents even learn to discern their baby's cry from all the others. We become familiar with the voices of those that we are closest to, those we spend the most time with, and those we care deeply enough about to immediately "tune in" when we hear that familiar sound.

Jesus spoke about this in John 10 when he compared hearing God's voice to sheep knowing the sound of their shepherd's voice. The only way sheep learn their shepherd's voice is by spending time together. In ancient shepherding this was especially important because the shepherd would lead the flock away from danger, or towards food & water by his voice. This is exactly why God wants us to listen, to learn the sound of His voice, and to follow Him. He knows the best plan for our lives, and wants us to hear His voice above all the other noise and chaos in our lives.

In the same way that you became familiar with the voices of those you are closest with in your life, we have to become familiar with the voice of God. This requires spending time in His presence and listening to Him. Whether it's through His Word, outloud (1 Samuel 3), in a whisper (or breath of Spirit - 1 Kings 19), through others around us, or in our inner sense of knowing (John 10), God is always speaking! It's up to us to take the time to listen, learn and "tune in" to hear His words.

DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY: Set a timer for 5 minutes. Sit silently and pray, *"Speak Lord, your servant is listening"*. View the silence as an invitation & opportunity to spend time in His presence, and not an emptiness that needs to be controlled or filled.

- Did any scriptures, convictions from the Spirit, invitations to act, peace over circumstances, or specific feelings come to your mind? Was this exercise inside or outside of your comfort zone today? ¹

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Mark 1:35** ~ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.
- **Luke 5:16** ~ But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.
- **Luke 6:12** ~ One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God
- **Matthew 14:23** ~After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.
- **Matthew 14:13** ~When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.
- **Mark 6: 31-32** ~“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.
- **Luke 22: 39-44** ~ He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Day 2 - Solitude makes space for God

Ever jumped into a clear mountain stream in the summer time? Undisturbed the water looks crystal clear. You can easily see the rocks at the bottom, tiny fish, and maybe even a crawdad or a snake. Of course if you jump in, disturb the rocks and mud, then the water quickly gets cloudy, muddy and murky. You can’t see clearly anymore. If we think of this in a spiritual context, that mountain stream is a lot like our souls. When we take time to sit in solitude, listen to the bubbling water, and allow the muddiness of life to settle. Then, we are able to see clearly below the surface, to examine, to pray, listen and discern God’s voice in our lives. In contrast, if our lives are never still, if we’re always jumping in before we pause to look, if our busyness is constantly churning the water and turning over the rocks then we will never be able to see clearly, or to hear and discern God’s voice.

Jesus perfectly modeled this ideal of pausing for solitude for us. Often, in the gospels Jesus would withdraw from a busy crowd, a long list of demands, and the noise of those around Him to seek time and connection with the Father (see Deeper Dive). He wasn’t running away, or escaping. This was a momentary, necessary, and essential moment spent in His Father’s presence. This was time for the waters to clear and for Him to see & hear clearly what God was asking Him to do.

In our busy lives, we might tell ourselves that we don’t have 5 minutes to spare. However, if we are honest, we tend to make time for the things we want to. Instead, we should ask ourselves if we avoid solitude because we are uncomfortable *without* our distractions. Has noise and busyness become our comfort zone? What happens when we are quiet, the water begins to clear, and we have to fully face what is beneath our muddy surface?

DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY: Take 5 minutes today to sit in solitude with the Lord. Notice if any distractions come to mind. Don’t get discouraged, this is part of seeing clearly into the water. Give it over to Him today as you learn how to sit quietly in this space with Him.

Distraction	Name it	Give it to God
Mentally rehearsing conversations, interactions or situations	anxiety, un-forgiveness, fear, pride, insecurity	James 1:20; Col 3:2 & 13
Making a grocery list, planning your afternoon, making a to-do list	idol of productivity, self-reliance, seeking control	John 3:30; Psalm 46:10
Temptation to glance at your phone, or constantly checking the time	reliance on constant stimulation, impatience	Luke 10:42; Psalm 37:7

- Which distraction did you struggle with most today? How did it feel to name it, and give it over to God?
- Were you able to sit long enough for the water of your soul to get a little bit clearer? What is God trying to show you?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **2 Timothy 3:16-17** ~ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- **Psalm 1:2** ~ But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.
- **Psalm 119:11** ~ I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.
- **Jeremiah 15:16** ~ When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty.
- **Psalm 119:105** ~ Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.
- **Hebrews 4:12** ~ For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Day 3 - God speaks through His Word

We tend to look at spiritual practices as nice neat little check boxes that are independent of each other. "Ok God, I've prayed 5 minutes = check the box, I read the Bible 20 minutes = check that box, and I went to church on Sunday = check". Of course, this isn't really how God intended for us to follow Him. He wants us to experience way more than check boxes. Many spiritual practices should overlap and enhance each other. Experiencing God shouldn't really fit into little "man-made" boxes we can check off each day.

Since prayer is defined as spending time in God's presence talking and listening to Him, then we absolutely should be in prayer WHILE we are reading in His Word. We want Him to speak to us and guide us as we read and study the Bible. In fact, one of the primary ways God speaks to us is through His Word. Reading the word in a prayer-filled, Spirit lead way is different than simply reading to check off a chapter on our daily reading plan. Instead of reading for information, we are reading to hear His voice, experience time in His presence, and ultimately to be transformed by His words. This approach to reading the Word reflects a posture of humility that allows God to teach, form, correct, and speak into your soul as you read His words.

One practical way to prayerfully read scripture is called: "Lectio Divina".

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance as you read. Then, read a specific passage slowly (often 2-3x over and over)
2. Listen and notice the words or phrases that stand out to you, convict you, challenge you, or comfort you. Spend time praying and reflecting over those words. Maybe even writing them down.
3. Afterwards spend time in solitude, just listening to God as you consider what you've just read.

This is just one great way to meditate on God's word as it says in Psalm 1:2. Spending time in contemplative reading can help as you learn to listen to God's voice in and through reading in His word.

DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY: Take time today to read Psalm 23 using the "Lectio Divina" method above. Underline the words or phrases that stand out to you, circle something that comforts you, and write down a challenge or an invitation that you hear from the Lord. Simply ask, "Lord what are you showing me today?". Then, sit quietly as you listen.

- How did this way of reading in God's Word differ from the ways you have read and studied the Bible in the past? Did you find it freeing, or uncomfortable? Why?
- What phrase or words stood out to you in in the Psalm 23 scriptures? Is there something that God is inviting you to consider after doing this activity today?

Deeper Dive

- **1 Kings 19:11-13** ~ The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.
- **2 Corinthians 12:9** ~ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.
- **Psalms 32:5** ~ I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Ask, Supplication or Request:

- **Matthew 7:11** ~ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Yield:

Day 4 - God speaks in our weariness

If you are a parent you've experienced a toddler's tantrum. Even if you've never been a parent, you have witnessed this phenomenon in the grocery isles or at family gatherings. At the peak of the kicking and screaming, the child is so upset that no one can reason with them, no explanation will appease them, and they can't really even hear their parent's voice over their momentary chaos. Most experienced parents know that if you wait long enough there will eventually be a moment where they become so exhausted that they can't keep going. Sometimes, it's only at this point, that you can finally speak and comfort them. During the midst of the tantrum it does no good.

As much as we probably hate to admit it, don't we do the same in our Spiritual lives? How many times have you tried absolutely everything on your own before surrendering to the Lord? How many times have you been so furiously busy trying to "fix" your own problems that you couldn't hear (or actively ignored) God's voice of reason, comfort and truth? Thankfully, God is a highly experienced parent. He's patient, gracious, and loving. He quietly waits for us to settle down in our exhaustion. Often, this is why we seem to hear God so clearly in our weakest moments, in our weariness, and sometimes in our utter exhaustion.

We see examples of this throughout scripture. God's people have often had to come to the end of themselves before fully surrendering. Just like an upset child, it's in these moments of kicking and screaming that we truly need to hear God's voice of truth and comfort the most!

- **Elijah** - 1 Kings 19 - After intense struggle the prophet Elijah flees to the wilderness and tells God he just wants to give up. God meets him there and speaks to him in a gentle whisper.
- **Jacob** - Genesis 32 - After trying everything on his own Jacob finally wrestles with God, and asks for God's help & blessing. God meets him there, wrestles with him, and speaks a blessing over him.
- **Jesus' Invitation to us all** - Matthew 11 - Jesus invites each of us to come to Him when we are weary and burdened. He promises us rest for our souls if we will yoke ourselves to Him and His Word.

DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY: In your prayer time today, spend time in silent listening prayer, physically hold your hands open to God in an act of surrender. Simply pray *"Lord I bring you my spaces of weakness, weariness, and exhaustion. Let me hear your voice."*

- What are the areas of weakness and exhaustion that you have been holding onto instead of releasing them to God? Where are you striving instead of trusting? What would it look like to bring your struggles to God, humbly listen to His voice and receive His grace?

Deeper Dive

See the "Daily Prayer Activity" before reading this section:

- **Start the day** - BEFORE your feet hit the floor or you check your phone:
 - Spend 2 minutes silently with the Lord ~ then pray "*Jesus, help me to stay aware of you today.*"
- **During the day** - Continually return to Him:
 - When you feel distracted, anxious, irritated or rushed ~ "*Jesus, I trust you with this, help me to stay close to you.*"
 - Wait 1 min before a meeting, or a conversation ~ pause in silence and let God's presence fill that moment
 - Take time to sit with God without an agenda. Don't ask for anything, just be present. Talk and listen just like you would a close friend.
- **End of Day** - Spend time with God reflecting on the day:
 - List the places you noticed Him today
 - Ask His forgiveness for the places you resisted Him today
 - Surrender the things you are trying to carry into tomorrow
 - Thank Him for His grace, provision and presence

Day 5 - God speaks through abiding

Read: John 15:1-8

Culturally we are taught to value achievement, productivity, and efficiency. It's almost like we were born to hurry, meet goals, and stay busy. Often, we let this cultural lens affect our spiritual practices as well. We ask ourselves, "How much time will this take?", "What am I getting out of this?", "Am I doing _____ spiritual method correctly?", and eventually we assess that if we don't feel a certain way, or achieve some specific "goal", then it must not work and we quit. When we view our time in prayer this way:

- **Prayers are isolated, scheduled, and calculated** - Prayer becomes a box to check on our to-do list, an obligation to do before dinner, or an empty performative act instead of a continual conversation with God.
- **Prayers are "me" focused** - Prayer becomes transactional verses conversational. "If I ask God _____, then God should respond with _____." We spend most of our time talking, requesting, & telling God what we want, instead of slowing down to hear His voice.

In contrast, what happens when we slow down and "abide" as Jesus says in John 15? What if we focused on Him rather than ourselves? We know that God is always with us, however, we can lose site of His presence in all our busyness. Abiding with God is the act of continually focusing on His presence in our lives. This is exactly how we can "pray without ceasing".

- Duty & obligation *turns into* fellowship
- Control *turns into* trust
- Transaction *turns into* authentic relationship
- Performance & productivity *turns into* presence

Abiding in Him transforms our prayer life, our relationship with Him, and opens the door to hearing God's voice in our lives.

DAILY PRAYER ACTIVITY: In our busy lives it's easy to get distracted and lose site of God's presence in the chaos. Try the method listed in the "Deeper Dive" for one day and then answer these questions:

- What habits or distractions most often pull your attention away from abiding with the Lord throughout your day?
- Did the daily prayer activity help you to stay more focused on God's presence throughout your day? Why, or why not?
- How could you continue to build rhythms of solitude, listening prayer and slowing down to abide with the Lord in your daily life?