

Humble and Hungry

Week 1: Discerning the Voice of God

John 10

Good morning! We're starting a new series today called Humble and Hungry and over the next 7 weeks, we're going to get super practical about prayer. We're going to pull this topic of prayer out of the theoretical realm where it typically lives and get really practical about how to pray. How to talk to God. What to talk to Him about. Even, how to listen to Him.

So, each week in this series, we're going to give you a card that you can use to guide you in some aspect of prayer. At the end of the 7 weeks, you'll have 7 cards that you can use like a Quick Reference Guide for how to pray. (*Instructions for baskets, keyring, card. Miss a week, table in the lobby with cards from each week.*)

So, we're going to give you some tools each week. We want this series on prayer to be practical. And if you're like, *but I don't know how to pray. I don't know what to say.* Here's my conviction, **prayer doesn't need to be poetic, it just needs to be practiced.**

Prayer is not about saying the exact right words in the exact right ways like it's some kind of magic formula. Prayer is about growing and flourishing in our relationship with God. Connecting with Him in prayer is one of the greatest gifts He has given us, but only if we use it. So, if you have ever struggled to pray, or don't think you can pray...if you want to grow deeper in your prayer life...we hope this series will equip you to cultivate a life of prayer that will transform your faith.

Now, with this series, I've got some good news for you...we are going to preach shorter sermons during this series. (Amen!) But, before you get too excited, the reason we're going to preach shorter sermons is because we want to build in time to **practice** these tools we're giving you each week. We're going to create space in our worship gatherings to put these tools to use.

And, I know that might be a little awkward, but we're going to embrace the awkwardness together. Our hope is that if we practice prayer in here, then we will put prayer into practice out there.

Okay! Now we're all caught up on what's coming over the next 7 weeks. Let's dive into our first practice, and it's probably not where most of us would expect a series on prayer to begin. Most of us **think** about prayer as talking to God, and that's part of it. But there's also a **listening** aspect to prayer that we often times neglect.

Prayer is a conversation. There's a back-and-forth-ness to it. But, if you're like me, the talking part of prayer is easy, it's the listening part that I struggle with. And there are a couple of reasons why I think we have a hard time listening in prayer.

For starters, it's just kind of a weird concept. Like, talking to someone we can't see feels strange enough for some of us, but there are special places for people who hear Him talk back! So, this idea of hearing God's voice tips Matt's "weird meter" for some of us, but it seems to be a part of prayer that our Heavenly Father, who desires a relationship with us, doesn't want us to miss out on.

Another reason we have a hard time listening in prayer is because it can be difficult to quiet our hearts and minds long enough to hear Him. Just like it's hard to hear someone in a noisy restaurant, it's hard to hear God when our lives are filled with all kinds of noise from busy schedules to social media to television. Most of us struggle to quiet our hearts and minds enough to be able to hear God, so his voice just gets absorbed into all the other noise around us.

But then, let's say we're able to push past the weirdness of it and actually quiet our hearts and minds. We want to listen and are seeking God's wisdom and direction in our life...how does God speak to us? And just as important...how do we know it's actually Him? How do discern if it's God speaking to us and not just some "undigested bit of beef" to quote Scrooge when he saw the ghost of Marley?

There's a show on Netflix called *Is It Cake*. The premise is expert bakers create hyper-realistic cakes that look exactly like everyday objects. Things like shoes, hamburgers, even a roll of toilet paper. Then a panel of three celebrity(ish) judges are shown each cake alongside of real objects and they have to guess which is real and which is the cake.

Sometimes the cake is pretty easy to spot, but then other times, it's nearly impossible. I mean, you could be looking at what seems like a stack of books, but then Mikey Day cuts into it and BAM! Well, it's just a stack of books, but in the show, it could have been cake!

It's pretty incredible to see how realistic these bakers can make their cakes look. It kind of messes with your perception. But here's the secret of the show. Yes, the bakers are talented, but so are the producers. They keep the judges at a distance so they can't get up close to the items. The room is kind of dark so you can't see them clearly. They use wide shots and quick panning so you can't focus on the imperfections of the cake.

And they do all of this because they know, the closer you get, the clearer it becomes. The closer you get to the items, the easier it becomes to tell what is real and what is cake. That's what **discernment means. It's the ability to judge well.**

It's the ability to separate what is real from what is fake. A discerning person is able to cut through the noise, and everything coming at them, so they can hear what they need to hear and move in the direction they need to move. So, when it comes to prayer, the discerning person knows the closer you get to the Lord, the clearer His voice becomes. The closer you get to Him, the easier it is to discern His voice.

In John 10, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep. He knows them, protects them, guides them. There's a closeness to their relationship. The Good Shepherd goes out ahead of his sheep and they follow him because they know his voice and trust it. Sheep are able to discern the voice, even the whistle, of their shepherd, and they run away from all the others.

Jesus puts it like this in **verse 27, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."** Everyone under the care and protection of Jesus is able to hear and discern His voice and follow Him.

So, how do we do it? Go ahead and pull out the card for today. I want to share three ways you can hear God's voice and three questions you can ask to help you discern that it's actually Him and not cake.

Number one, **Meditate on Scripture**. God's Word is the primary way He speaks to us, which is why it's so important for us to be rooted in it. God speaks through His Word as we prayerfully read through it, but He will also remind us of His Word as we pray. You may be praying for wisdom and guidance on something and a verse will come to mind. Or you may be reading Scripture the next day and all the sudden something connects with what you're praying for.

Scripture is the primary way we hear God's voice, but it also helps us discern His voice. Like, if God tells you something that's not in here, or directly contradicts something that is, it's probably not God's voice you heard. Anything that God speaks to us today in prayer will always line up with what God has already spoken. And so, the discerning question is this: **Does this align with what God has already said?**

Is it in line with God's Word, or does it veer off from the guidance He's already given us? God speaks to us through His Word and His Word helps us discern His voice.

Second, **Seek the Holy Spirit's Guidance**. Jesus said the Holy Spirit lives in those who follow Him and helps guide us into truth. The Spirit will bring us a conviction of what we need to do, or peace about doing it. The Spirit will sometimes even make us a little restless to stir us up into action and point us in the right direction.

The Holy Spirit helps us become more like Jesus. And so as we pray and we feel a prompting from the Spirit to start or stop or see something through, the discerning question is: **Is this something Jesus would do?** If it is, do it! If it doesn't seem like it, maybe keep seeking guidance. But a general rule of thumb is that you can never go wrong by doing what Jesus did.

And third, **Listen to Wise Counsel**. So many times in my life, God has spoken through the wisdom of fellow believers. Sometimes it's because I've asked for their wisdom and

sometimes the Lord just uses something they said to connect the dots to something I've been praying about.

Wise, godly friends help us hear God's voice, but they also help us discern it. There have been times in my life when I've not been sure which direction to go and a godly friend helped me figure out my next step. And so the discerning question is: **Do other godly people in my life affirm what I'm hearing.** Do they sense the same thing, or do they have a check in their spirit that you need to pay attention to?

These are three ways you can hear and discern God's voice. And we just blew through them, but next Sunday **(show promo slide)** during the 11am service, Matt Nussbaum is going to be doing a deeper dive into this topic. He's leading a workshop called *Hear and Respond: Learning how to have a conversational friendship with Jesus*. So, if you want to go deeper in this, you don't want to miss this workshop.

Alright, we're about to put this into practice. Everyone get comfortable. Again, we're going to embrace the awkwardness of this together. We want to practice these prayers in here so we can put prayer into practice out there. A couple of deep breaths. Relax jaw, shoulders.

We're going to create some space for us to quietly pray and listen for the still, small voice of God.

(Silent prayer and listening)

Response Time

All throughout Scripture, we see that God is speaking. He speaks through His Word, His Spirit, and His people. So the question isn't "*Is God speaking?*" The question is "*Are we listening?*"

Jesus said in John 10:27, "*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*" Maybe today, God is calling you to something. Maybe He's convicting you, guiding you, or just inviting you to draw near to Him.

The best way to respond to His voice is simple: listen and follow. What's your next step...?

Communion: a moment when we remember the clearest message God has ever spoken: Jesus crucified and risen for us. His body was broken, His blood was poured out, and through His sacrifice, He calls us into a life of grace and relationship with Him.

As we take communion today, let it be more than a ritual, let it be a moment to quiet our hearts and truly listen. What is Jesus saying to you? Where is He leading you? Take this time to surrender, to trust, and to follow the voice of the Good Shepherd.