

# The Power of Whisper: I'm Listening

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FOLLOWING ANTHEM: DIM LIGHTS IN SANCTUARY

VIDEO: "Discerning the Voice of God"

SANCTUARY REMAINS DARKENED AS SCRIPTURE IS READ FROM THE MEDIA BOOTH

SCRIPTURE WILL NOT BE PROJECTED ON SCREEN: PROJECT SERMON THEME SLIDE DURING SCRIPTURE READING.

SCRIPTURE READER: "Be still. Close your eyes. Slowly take and release three deep breaths. Now listen to God's voice spoken from his word. Imagine you are in the Temple in Jerusalem. The priest Eli and a young boy name Samuel are sound asleep. It is just before dawn when everything is totally dark. You can see only a faint flicker of light from the lamp stand as the last of the oil passes through the wick. Be still. Listen."

<sup>1</sup> The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

<sup>2</sup> One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place.

<sup>3</sup> The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am."

<sup>5</sup> And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

<sup>6</sup> Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

<sup>7</sup> Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy.

<sup>9</sup> So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

**1 Samuel 3:1-10**

"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."

Has God spoken to you? Perhaps not in an audible voice; but rather in that still small inner voice that we label a nudge from the Holy Spirit. Do you believe that God is speaking to you on a daily basis? Are you listening?

There are three key verses I want to focus on this morning from our scripture passage. I Samuel 3:1 says: “In those days the word of the Lord was rare.” Why was the word of the Lord rare? The preceding chapter tells us what was happening “in those days” that made the word of the Lord rare. Eli was the high priest at the tabernacle—the place where God was worshipped. He had two sons who were priests. They were scoundrels. I Samuel 2:12 says “Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the Lord.” When persons brought sacrificial animals for offerings to God at the Tabernacle, Eli’s sons would forcibly take the portions of meat they wanted and roast them rather than boil them in violation of God’s law. The portion for the priest was intended to be a voluntary offering not a forced one. “They treated the Lord’s offering with contempt.” They also were having illicit relationships with women who served at the Tabernacle. (I Samuel 2:22) These two sons reflected the spiritual condition of the majority of the Israelites at this time. They were selfish and disobedient to God. The word of God was rare—not because God was silent, but because no one was listening. Everyone was so preoccupied with their own selfish agendas they did not listen to God. The Holy Spirit is constantly speaking to us—whispering words of encouragement, love, guidance, correction. If we do not hear his voice, it is because we are so preoccupied with our agendas and so focused on ourselves that we do not hear. We choose not to listen. Disobedience to God and our arrogance keep us from hearing God’s voice.

I Samuel 3:7 tells us that “Samuel did not yet know the Lord. The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.” Samuel was about twelve years old. Shortly after birth, he was brought to the tabernacle and dedicated to God’s service by his parents. He grew up in the tabernacle and was being trained by Eli to become a priest. Even in this place surrounded by daily worship and the presence of God, Samuel did not know the Lord. Just because we grow up in the church, does not necessarily mean that we know God. We may know a lot about him without knowing him. I grew up in the church and attended Sunday morning and Sunday night and Wednesday night. But it was not until I was 16 years old that I asked Jesus Christ to come into my heart and be my Lord and Savior—not just the Savior of the world; but my Savior.

“Samuel did not yet know the Lord.” And yet God called to him. Even when Samuel answered, he was not sure who was calling him—he thought it was Eli. When he went to Eli, he instructed Samuel to respond to the voice with these words: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” But when Samuel responded he left out a key word. He replied, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” He left out the word, “Lord” because he did not know the Lord. This is such an important message: God speaks to us even before we become believers. In fact, it is his voice that speaks to our souls to whisper that he loves, forgives, and cares for us. He has a plan for us—he wants a relationship with us.

I have asked you to pray for at least two people who need to know and experience God’s love—one person you know well and one person whom you see regularly but don’t know well. As you pray for these folks you are releasing the Holy Spirit to speak God’s love into their hearts. Before they know him, God

is calling them to discover the joy of a relationship with him. God is constantly speaking to us even before we know him. Are you listening? Can you hear him say, “I love you.”

Even though Samuel was uncertain about this God who speaks, he made himself available: Verse 10: “I am listening.” When we listen God will speak. He will speak in a variety of ways. He will speak to us through his word—the scriptures—more about that next week. How do we know it is God’s voice and not just indigestion? More about that next week!

God speaks to us in whispers—little nudges in our souls. It may be a nudge to call someone you haven’t thought about in a long time. You may not hear it like this: “This is God speaking: Call Fred.” Instead it may seem like a passing thought: “I need to call Fred.” Listen to the internal nudges and respond. Call Fred!

Sometimes God speaks to me through something another person says. It could be a speaker or something I read in a book. Those persons did not intend the message for me. They were just telling their own story and yet God somehow spoke to me through what they said.

This happened to me recently at a Leadership Summit. Bill Hybels, pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, was speaking via video. Bill wrote the book upon which this series of messages is based called “The Power of Whisper.” During the Summit he shared that he was 60 years old and beginning to think about retirement. He told about a retreat he went on with four other staff members who had been with him since the beginning of Willow Creek church—over 35 years ago. As they were sharing together, one of those in the group said,

“Rather than just coasting into retirement, what if we decided to make the next five years of our lives the best years of leadership.” Those words became a message from God for me. “Make the next five or six years of your ministry the best years of your leadership at LakeRidge.” We are in the typical pattern of churches that reach the 30 year mark. We have reached a plateau of growth. My human tendency is to find ways to pump up attendance and break through the plateau. But as I prayed about this word from God, I felt God impressing me to go a different direction. He told me to focus on the core things that will lay a strong foundation for the future of LakeRidge. One is to enhance our experience of worship so that we experience the presence of the living God each week. Another is to identify and strengthen the groups and ministries in our church that are producing transformational spiritual growth in your lives. Another core thing is to continue our focus on Impossible Dreams of joining with God on what he is doing to redeem and restore his creation—to bring the Kingdom of God upon earth as it is in heaven. And to undergird everything we do with prayer. I knew these were not my thoughts—because this is not the way my human side thinks. I want quick fixes and immediate results. My idol is success measured by numbers. God’s word to me was: “Stay focused on the core things and leave the results to me.” I’m still tempted occasionally to take a short cut and find a quick fix or two; but when I start down that path, God raises a question in my heart: “Is this one of the core things I’ve called you to focus on?” God is speaking all the time. Are we listening or do we get so preoccupied with our own agenda, that we don’t hear him?

Is God speaking to you? Yes—all the time. Will you listen to his still, small voice—his whisper—often an inaudible nudge? I've found that most of the time God speaks to me in very short sentences. He might say, "Speak up," in defense of those who have no voice. Recently some of you spoke up for the homeless persons who were going to lose their tent city. Sometimes God may say, "Keep quiet." You feel the urge to give some unsolicited advice or to give someone a piece of your mind—and you feel this nudge—"Keep quiet." That's one of the most difficult nudges for me to obey!

Sometimes when we are seething with resentment or hatred toward someone, God says "Lay it down." When we are burdened about a problem, God says, "Give it to me."

Today is Confirmation Sunday. Today those of you in our confirmation class will publically profess your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Jesus will whisper to you, "Now, you belong to me. Follow me." Will you listen to his voice? When you are tempted to do something that you know would not honor him, will you listen to him say, "Don't do that. It will destroy you. Choose life. Follow me." Will you listen to his voice say, "Start tithing your allowance" or "Go on the youth mission trip." Will you listen when he asks, "Where have you been? I miss you. You have allowed your schedule to get so full of school and activities that you have no place for me." Will you listen when he helps you to see someone who is an outsider, "Go be a friend to that person."

God is constantly speaking to you. Are you listening?

Let's take a few moments to listen. Bow your heads and close your eyes.

AUDIO TRACK OF NOISES BEGINS

There are many noises and distractions in our heads and all around us. We have to quiet them in order to hear. Take three deep breaths and release each one. Picture yourself in a favorite place—a mountain top or valley, beside a gentle stream, on a beach somewhere. In the distance you see someone approaching—you feel comfortable and safe with the way this person is coming toward you. As he comes closer, you realize it is Jesus. He asks you to join him and walk with him. What is one thing you would like to say to Jesus? Now, ask Jesus to speak to you? What is one thing he wants to say to you? Listen... Thank Jesus for this time with him. Ask him to help you hear his voice every day. And know that he is not going to leave you now. He is going to walk with you through the rest of today and every day. Keep listening.