

The Power of Whisper: Hearing in the Dark

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AUDIO: DARK EXPERIENCES/GOD'S STRENGTH

Do you hear God speaking to you—even in the dark moments of life? Have you felt the prompting of the Holy Spirit? In order to hear God's voice we have to slow down and listen. He is always speaking, are we listening?

Francois Fenelon describes our challenge in hearing God's voice: "God does not cease speaking, but the noise of the creatures without, and of our passion within, deafens us, and stops our hearing. We must silence every creature, we must silence ourselves, to hear in the deep hush of the whole soul, the voice of God. We must bend the ear, because it is a gentle and delicate voice, only heard by those who no longer hear anything else."

In previous messages we talked about ways to tune into God's voice and ways to discern if it is God's voice or some other voice. If you have missed the messages the last couple of weeks I encourage you to go to our website where you can watch, listen to, or read the messages.

This morning we are going to explore hearing from God during the dark times in our lives. King David had one of those dark times in his life. Samuel anointed him King of Israel. At the time there was another King by the name of Saul who was still on the throne. When Saul learned that David had been anointed King, he was furious and sought to kill him. David had to flee for his life. For ten years he was a fugitive, forced to take up residency with a loyal band of followers among the Philistines in a village called Ziklag. He led his men off to a battle, when they returned they discovered that their village had been raided by the Amalekites. The village had been burned to the ground. Their families had been kidnapped and their possessions stolen. Listen to how Samuel describes the scene:

³ When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.

⁴ So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep.

⁵ David's two wives had been captured--Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

⁶ David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.

1 Samuel 30:3-6

David is bursting out in loud wails and weeping until he is weak with exhaustion. He has lost his family; he has no home to return to; and his own men want to kill him. He feels totally abandoned and alone. He knows that God has chosen him for a specific purpose, but he is tired and God does not seem to be keeping his end of the bargain. David feels the darkness closing in. Then something happened: "David found strength in the LORD his God."

Have you ever felt the darkness closing in? The darkness closes in when we get an unexpected phone call in the middle of the night that someone we love has died. The darkness closes in when the doctor says you have cancer, or Alzheimer's, or Lou Gerhig's disease, or some other debilitating or terminal disease. The darkness closes in when your spouse says, "I want a divorce." The darkness closes in when you receive a pink slip at work and you no longer have a job. The darkness closes in when you declare bankruptcy or have your home repossessed. There are hundreds of ways the darkness closes in on our lives. How have you experienced the darkness?

I've felt the darkness closing in when as a teenager my parents were experiencing problems in their marriage, and I feared they would get a divorce. I've felt the darkness closing in when my parents battled Parkinson's disease, strokes and Alzheimer's. I've felt the darkness closing in when contributions don't cover our expenses. If you've ever worried about making payroll, you know what its like to feel the darkness closing in. I've felt the darkness closing in when our church went through tremendous turmoil over a decision I made about a staff change. I've felt the darkness closing in when I went through a divorce.

With David I can say, during those times I found strength in the Lord my God. Sometimes when the darkness closes in I cannot sleep. I feel empty inside, cold and afraid. Sometimes it feels like there is a black hole in my chest and I'm about collapse from the inside. Sometimes I can't breathe. I cannot pray. I do not feel the presence of God. All I can do is cry out and say the name of Jesus. "Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. Come to me, Lord Jesus." And he comes and strengthens me. Sometimes I read through the Psalms of David. He expresses the darkness and the questions I feel. I know I'm not the only one who has felt abandoned and alone. And then in the midst of expressing his agony, David begins to praise God. As I read his praises, I begin to praise God. He comes and strengthens me. Sometimes it takes a while, sometimes hours, days, months. David felt it off and on for ten years.

Let's look at one of the Psalms of David where he feels the darkness closing in and then experiences the strength of God.

Psalm 55

¹ Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea;

² hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught

³ at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked; for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger.

⁴ My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me.

⁵ Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me.

¹⁶ But I call to God, and the LORD saves me.

¹⁷ Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

²² Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall...I trust in you, O God.

David felt his enemies literally closing in on him to take his life. The darkness came upon him. In the midst of the darkness, he heard God whisper, "Trust me."

In his book, The Power of a Whisper, Bill Hybels mentions three truths that he has learned during the dark times of his life. **Truth #1: God is near.** Last week I sat with the Mercer family as we planned a memorial service for their son, Connor, who was run over by a truck and killed. They showed me Connor's phone where he had posted some scriptures on his Notes app dated August 31. One of the scriptures was Deuteronomy 31:6. It records the words of Moses to the Israelites before they cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Moses is near the end of his life and will not go with them. He speaks these words of encouragement:

⁶ Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

As we read those words together, it was as if Connor had selected that scripture for them for that day. As the darkness closed in on the Mercer family, Connor gave them the promise of God's word: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

God is the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow. When God became flesh and walked this earth 1400 years after Moses spoke these words, Jesus made the promise even stronger: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

Psalm 34:18 says, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." God is close to us in the darkness—even when we can't feel him. He is giving us strength even when we don't know it. He will never leave you or forsake you—especially in the dark.

Truth # 2: God Seeks.

Jesus told us that our Heavenly Father is like a good shepherd who when one of his sheep is lost goes and searches for him until he finds him and brings him home. Jesus said our Heavenly Father is like a woman who has lost a valuable coin and turns her house inside out until she finds it. You matter to God. You are of infinite value to Him. How do I know? Because he loves you so much he died on the cross for you. He gave his life for you. God is always near, but he is not passive. He is constantly seeking us out, calling our name. When we are in the darkness and we don't know where to turn. God is seeking us out to show us the way out of the darkness. The media has reported recently about family who got lost in a corn maze and could not find their way out. It was getting dark and they panicked. The police came and sought them out. They were only 25 feet from the entrance. It was dark and they could not find their way. Someone had to come and show them the way out. God comes and finds us in the dark when we are lost and shows us the way to the light.

Truth #3 God Speaks. If we get quiet in the dark, we can hear God's whispers of encouragement and hope. The problem is when we are in the dark, we are afraid. We make a lot of noise. We cry, we wail, we scream, we talk to ourselves and to anyone who will listen. But we are making so much noise; we cannot hear God calling to us in a whisper. He is whispering: "I love you." "I am with you." "Trust me." "Lean on me." We need to ask God to calm our fears so that we can be quiet and hear him.

We are going to give you an opportunity to do that this morning. Donna Walker is going to come in a few moments and sing a wonderful song called, "God Speaking" I want you to listen carefully to the words and let them prepare your heart for prayer. Following her song, I will lead us in a time of guided prayer.