

Daniel S. Teefey  
Riverside Covenant Church  
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What Did You Say? – John 14: 15-21

Read John 14: 15-21.

**We have now spent 4 weeks talking about prayer** and whether it makes a difference and we have spent a fair amount of time discussing the mystery of prayer and how it is often difficult for us to understand what is happening in prayer. We have talked about unanswered prayer and healing and lots and lots of aspects of prayer that hopefully make it less confusing. **This morning I want to end our series by discussing what I believe to be the simplest and most important aspect of prayer . . . yet the most difficult for us to do.**

Thus far we have spent a great deal of our time studying how we are to speak with God. What is it that we are to say, how do we say it and then we have discussed whether or not God hears our prayers. And all of this is important . . . **but I want to begin this morning by calling us to be people that listen to God.**

**Listening is fundamental to communication.**

**All children learn to speak first by listening.** Listening always proceeds speaking in the development of children's language skills.

with couples and I universally require that we talk about one thing first. We always begin **I do a fair amount of pre-marital preparation and marital counseling** by talking about communication.

The two communication skills I focus on with couples in helping them to communicate most effectively are **assertiveness and active listening.**

**Successful couples are assertive – meaning they have the ability to express their feelings and ask for what they want in the relationship.** If a husband is frustrated that he does not spend as much time with his friends as he would like, then he should be able to talk with his wife about this in a way that expresses his feelings in a respectful and positive way. If the wife is frustrated that her husband is unattentive and regularly chooses his own activities over spending time doing the things she likes, she should be able to

tell her husband this. If couples are not assertive in sharing their feelings in constructive and not destructive ways . . . they generally stop bringing up their concerns and the problems simply get worse and worse over time. And eventually they blow up.

**In a sense as we think about how we have been discussing prayer, we have used the past several weeks talking about how we are to be assertive with God.** We are to share what it is that we really want.

**But there is another aspect of communication that is very important. It is active listening.** It does no good for a spouse to assertively share how they feel about an aspect of their relationship if the other spouse does not listen and understand what they are saying.

**Dana has been participating in a bible study of Isaiah through the Bible Study Fellowship in Lafayette.** The study is pretty intense with a fair amount of reading and homework throughout the week. I have been really excited that she is doing this study and this week we had talked about going over some of it together on Wednesday night. So Wednesday night comes and we put the kids to bed and went downstairs. Dana said she had one quick thing she wanted to finish up and I sat down on the couch and jumped on the computer. I started going through email and working on a few things and 10 minutes later Dana jumped on the couch, pulled out her Bible and started looking at a few things. She then says, **“Hey, I have a question for you?” I keep looking at the computer screen and say, “yah.”** (You know where this is going) She then, (in her mind) tries to start a conversation, “what do you really think it means that God is sovereign?” Without moving my head from the computer screen, I say, “God is in charge.” . . . needless to say, I was hearing words come out of her mouth, but I was not actively listening. And things deteriorated into frustration on both of our parts and no discussion of the Bible study happened.

**Active listening is the ability to let your partner know you understand them by restating their message.** Dana was right in feeling that she was not really being “heard” and understood.

***The point I want to make abundantly clear to you today is this: God speaks to us every day and we do not listen.***

**Too often we spend our prayer time “talking at God” as opposed to being in dialogue with God.** Listening though is the first expression of communication in prayer.

**Take a look at our passage this morning.** Jesus is speaking with his disciples and he tells them that if they really love Him, they will keep his commands. They will love God and they will love others. It is the same for us. Our love for God is demonstrated by our willingness to do what it is that he has told us to do. Our love for God drives what we do.

And Jesus goes on to say that if the disciples love him, then **he will give them another *advocate* to help and be with them forever** – the Spirit of truth. There are a couple powerful things in what Jesus says here.

**The first thing to look at is this gift that Jesus says the disciples and us will be given.** He calls this gift an advocate. The Greek word here is “paraclete.” It is strange and difficult to translate. Some of your translations might have “helper.” In every instance its use implies the action of a friend, trying to make someone see his mistake or fault or duty or opportunity.” The word “to show” is probably the nearest we have to it in English. **Jesus says that upon belief we will get a divine helper or advocate.**

**A second thing to notice is that Jesus says that the disciples will receive “another advocate.”** Jesus is the first. Jesus has been walking with them in the flesh and talking with them and showing him in person all that God wants them to say and do.

**But Jesus is leaving. He is on his way out.** Immediately preceding our passage Jesus has just told his disciples that he will be betrayed and that Peter will deny him on his way to death. And so in an effort to comfort the disciples who are increasingly distraught and confused over what they are hearing, Jesus tells them that though he is leaving “another advocate” will not only come, but be different than Jesus in that it will be with them “forever.” **Jesus calls this advocate the Spirit of truth.**

**Jesus says that though the world will not know him, Jesus' followers will and not only will this Spirit live with them as Jesus did . . . but it will be in them.** Jesus then reassures them again, saying “**I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.**” I will not leave you helpless.

**Now there are two dimensions to Jesus' promise not to leave us helpless.** One is that Jesus will reappear to his disciples. They will see him again. But the other dimension is more permanent. They are not left

alone when Jesus ascends to heaven, they are given the Holy Spirit which dwells in everyone that believes.

**This is no small thing. The Bible tells us that God speaks to us. Not only is God's Spirit active in advocacy for God in the world, the Spirit is active in us. God is not just speaking to us from the outside, but He is speaking to us through the Holy Spirit within us.**

*The Bible says over and over again in a thousand different ways that God speaks . . . but we too often do not listen.*

**How does God speak to us? How does God interact with the Holy Spirit dwelling in us?**

**The most obvious is through God's Word.** Why do you think it is called God's Word. He speaks to us through the Bible. Paul says that "all Scripture is God-breathed." It is God's communication. Our communication is formed when our breath is manipulated by the movement of our mouth and tongues forming our words. God's voice is heard through the breath he breathed into his revelation or the Bible.

**There is a difference between reading the Bible as words on a page and reading it as God's words spoken to us.** When I read the newspaper I understand the text on that page as information that enters into my mind and that I process. When I read the Bible I understand the text on that page as God's Word (the Bible says that it is "living and active") speaking to me. I have shared this before, but it has been powerful for me . . . Eugene Peterson says that we read most texts . . . but we must allow the Bible to read us.

This week I thought a lot about a part of our passage from last week. **"The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."** God made it clear to me that I have some areas of my life where the flesh is winning and I can't be resigned to this. I must allow the Spirit to wage war against my flesh. God's Word speaks to us.

**God also communicates to us through creation.** I know many of you understand this. Walking the paths in Happy Hollow park can be one of the most spiritually significant encounters for some of you. Allowing you to peak a 14,000ft mountain can be God's way of explaining how mighty and powerful He is. Psalm 19 says, **"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day**

**they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”**

Paul says something similar in Romans when he says, **“For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”**

**We also hear God's voice through one another.** Sometimes someone speaks a word of encouragement to us at the perfect time. I have had several moments when I was sitting in my office discouraged about something and someone emails me or I come across an encouraging note written by someone. God is sharing His grace with me through that person.

**We also have instances where someone says something to us that is very difficult to hear.** And we might even get really angry when we hear it . . . and walk away mad afterwards. But as we are walking away we realize what they said was true and that though it was hard to hear, it was God speaking His truth to us through another person.

**The circumstances of our lives are another medium of God's communication with us.** Sometimes God simply opens some doors and closes others. (e.g. **our adoption process**)

**God sometimes speaks to us through gentle promptings too.** We have a sense that we should do one thing or another. Last week we talked a little about Paul's **“thorn in his flesh.”** Some sort of physical ailment that Paul prayed to disappear, but never did. Paul eventually believed that God taught Him or spoke to him through this struggle his whole life. That it actually benefited his walk with God.

**Finally, God can speak to us in more dramatic forms as well.** Many report vivid dreams or the hearing of an audible voice.

One of these dramatic moments of God's communication appears in Acts 10. Peter goes up onto a roof to pray and he has a vision. Acts 10 says he saw, **“heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let**

down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

Peter then has a dialogue with God in his vision. "'Surely not, Lord!' Peter replied. 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.'"

The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

*Raise your hand if you had a dream like this last night?*

It is a little bizzare . . . but **it spoke powerfully to Peter**. God used this vision to communicate clearly to Peter that he was called to share what he knew about Jesus with Gentiles, who he believed to be unclean. And Peter did.

**Visions like this are not every day occurrences** for most of us, but they are not near as rare as we tend to believe either. God speaks to us. God is speaking to us.

**Again, the issue is rarely that God is not speaking.** God speaks in so many different ways throughout our days that the problem is nearly always our inability to truly listen for God's voice.

**I have found that dry times in my spiritual life are generally sourced in my failure to spend time listening for God's voice** or being aware of God's Spirit speaking throughout my day. I find that in these times I do more thinking or googling and far too little listening. I fill silence with more of me and not more of God.

**God's voice sometimes screams at us and we can't avoid it, but more often it is not so obvious. Elijah has an interesting with God in the Old Testament.** In 1 Kings God tells Elijah that his presence is going to pass by him. So Elijah gets ready and an earthquake comes, but God is not in it. Then a fire came, but God was not in it either. Then a gentle whisper comes and Elijah encounters God.

**Elijah was listening.** He does not complain that God was not in the earthquake or in the fire . . . he stays attentive, listening intently for God and he is able to hear him in the gentle whisper.

***How often is our life so noisy and loud . . . that we miss the gentle whisper of God.***

In 1 Samuel, God tries to get Samuel's attention and while Samuel is sleeping he awakes him and several times in a row Samuel runs to his father presuming that his dad, Eli, is the one calling for him. Each time Eli tells him to go back to bed. The final time Samuel awakes, Eli realizes it is God calling Samuel and instructs him to tell God, **“Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.”**

**Speak Lord, for your servant is listening** seems like a pretty good place to start in our prayer lives.

**I mentioned last week that we often forget aspects of Jesus prayer in the garden when we pray.** We say Lord, you are great. Lord, I want X, Y and Z. Amen. We do not pray as Jesus did that we ultimately desire that God's will be done.

In a similar way . . . **when we pray we are very quick to speak.** We enter into prayer and we just start talking and talking and when we have run out of things to say . . . we say amen and the prayer is over. Then we are back to our tasks.

**Speak Lord, for your servant is listening is powerfully different way of approaching God.**

**This past week I was on the farm in North Manchester.** In the afternoon, before the pastors spend time discussing some theology, we spend time in prayer. During our prayer time there was a great deal of silence and then a few prayers centered around people that were sick or the activities of our weeks. Then one of the pastors simply prayed, **“Lord, forgive me for not confessing my sins and for not wanting to hear the sins of others. Amen.”**

We talked about her prayer then and she shared of how **God had convicted her of this sin during our prayer time.** She had simply listened to God and responded with a confession.

**How do we listen to God?**

**The first thing we must do is slow down.** I realize that this has become a joke for us. We make fun of folks that move too slowly.

**We imagine our lives to be a race.** We must run from here to there in an effort to accomplish and get as much as we possibly can done. And we imagine our spiritual lives like this too.

And we even invoke Paul's language when he says, **“let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”** But Paul is not talking about a sprint that we run full speed in, he is talking about a long-distance race that we will not finish if we run full speed.

**Unless we slow down, we will only hear a handful of words from God in passing.** We will read our Bibles to get chapters done or books done or through the whole thing . . . we will not read it to hear from God. We will have conversations with people to fill time and get things we need, but we will not seek to hear from God as we interact with a beloved part of his creation.

**In Psalm 46:10, God says “Be still, and know that I am God”**

In Bill Hybel's book, “Too Busy Not To Pray,” he says, **“the archenemy of spiritual authenticity is busyness, which is closely tied to something the Bible calls worldliness - getting caught up with society's agenda, objectives and activities to the neglect of walking with God.”**

**This past week at the farm, the farmer shared that one thing that he has noticed that has changed for him over the years is that he spends less time with just himself and God.** He said in the evenings he used to sit out on the porch and watch the sunset and simply process his day and the next in conversation with God. Now he says, he plays a game on Facebook or looks something up or watches TV.

**We desperately need time to stop and listen to God.** Because unless we learn to hear God's voice by being still we have no hope of regularly hearing his voice when we are moving from place to place in our daily lives. Hearing the voice of God – seeing God in everything is a developed gift.

**So what might help?**

1. Journaling. (Justin Gravitt – writing God's words/response in red)

2. Write out your prayers.

3. Solitude. Silence. You can't be intimately connect with God through lots and lots of activity – even if it is all church related.

4. Posture. (kneeling, hands folded (submission))

### **How do we know it is God speaking?**

**We discern God's words to us through the Bible and through other people.**

**I believe that God is persistently trying to get our attention throughout every aspect of our lives.** And that God's Spirit dwells inside of us groaning for us to interact with God in every aspect of our lives. The Spirit is helping us to experience God's fullness in everything. And God repeatedly speaks into our lives through our digesting of the Bible, creation, one another, circumstances of life and the bold visions and the miraculous in our lives.

Are we listening though? Do we take the time? Do we maintain the focus? Do we have ears ready to hear?

**Listen for God this week. Don't make God yell. Listen for his whisper . . .**

Brother Lawrence in his small book, **“Practicing the Presence of God”** reminds us, **“There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with God; those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it.”**

**This life begins with listening.**

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