



Growth Questions

“Can you think of a time in your life when there seemed to be an incredible amount of clarity around God’s presence and how he might desire for you to respond in a particular season? Have you had episodes/seasons when things seemed a bit more ambiguous? How did you find yourself responding in healthy ways to either condition?”

“Although it is true that God has designed us for relationship, what are some of the inherent challenges you have encountered in your attempts to communicate well with him?”

“What are some of the practices that you have put in place in your life in order to make yourself even more present “to” and present “for” God?”

“How has recognizing your posture of obedience assisted your pursuits when God’s will (desires) lacked clarity? Do you think such ‘obedience to the obvious’ actually makes us more inclined to respond well when things don’t seem as clear?”

Teaching Notes

Pentecost; the Feast of Weeks - In a very real sense, it commemorates the birth of the church. It was originally a festival celebrating the harvest, but it came to include a recognition that due to their infidelity and failure to live into their chosenness as the unique people of God, his presence had “left the building” (I can’t endorse that; I can’t be identified by that anymore). As a people, they became directionless and voiceless: no common vision, no common voice.

Pentecost involved readings of the sacred text which celebrated the giving of the Law and also prophetic texts which celebrated the promised return of God’s presence to the Temple to, once again, live among them.

In last week’s considerations, I said that *“Life will always require discernment (sifting apart). Having, first, given ourselves to God, we must routinely determine that to which we will give ourselves.”*

In essence, we determine what will get **the best of us** (time, energies, resources). This identifying, this assessing, will always be a central part of our journey and those choices (determinations) always provide some insight into what it is that we value.

Discernment realizes that it's decision time and the decision that I make, at the time, will determine whether that moment was a '*chronos*' moment (time passing) or a '*kairos*' moment: when a friend is in crisis, when there is a need that I can meet, when there is a role I can fill, when there is a child I can sponsor, when there is a word of truth to be spoken or an embrace of grace to be offered.

Discernment is knowing God, knowing our situation and knowing God in our situation.

I have realized, over the years, the inherent paradoxes of my faith: the moments/episodes of almost **unmistakable clarity** and the seasons of almost **debilitating ambiguity**.

There have been times when I seem to be navigating well through the unfamiliar surroundings and the times when the reality I'm seeing out of the front windshield isn't consistent with the guidance being offered by my GPS. Do I: remain confident in the viability of the direction being provided, or do I make the necessary adjustments?

I am convinced that there is enough biblical evidence to suggest that being in communication with God was never meant as a phenomenon for the exceptional few. It was to be the normative experience for all who "*believed that he is and that he desires to reveal himself to those who seek him*" (Hebrews 11:5-6; Isaiah 30:21; John 10:3)

In 1 Corinthians 2:10-16, Paul contrasts (2) human conditions:

"with the Spirit"- aware; responsive to a new (renewed) order for life.

"without the Spirit"- unresponsive to God; purposed to rely solely on human reason and logic for explanations of reality [*"We have the mind of Christ..."*]

Paul identifies an advantageous way of understanding and relating to God now available to us by the Spirit which is actually the fulfillment of a way of life envisioned by both Ezekiel (36:26-27) and Jeremiah (31:33).

With the coming of the Spirit, we discover that God's desire all along has not simply been to offer us his **list of demands**, chiseled onto stone tablets, and then await our compliance. His dream had been that, just as he had chosen the tabernacle (Temple) as a place where he could meet with us, that our hearts would actually become his new home (dwell) and we not only know what **he wants**, but we find ourselves increasingly **wanting the same things**.

I actually have a suspicion that we have **all** heard God's voice, but because of the baggage attached to such an admission, we've been hesitant to go public. In fact, to suggest to another human that you "*hear voices*" is probably more acceptable than declaring that you hear "*God's voice*".

I think there are some basic premises from which to begin our journey...

❖ **First, know that our humanity does not prevent us from hearing God, but actually makes it possible!**

Our humanity is never the problem. Our humanness never precludes us from hearing God. God has actually designed us in such a way that necessitates communication with him.

❖ **Second, it's about becoming the kind of people with whom God feels free to speak: being present to and present for God.**

Present “to”:

First, a mutually-satisfying relationship with another can never be fostered in the frenetic pace of life to which we have become accustomed. At some point, our ability to multi-task has not served us well. Sadly, we often fail to see the incongruence in the possibilities being offered in, *“The Busy Christian’s Guide to Intimacy”* or the *“One Minute Devotional”*.

Second, know that, most often, God whispers [Psalm 25:14; 1 Kings 19:11-12]. If God has to shout to get our attention, it’s likely that we’re not in a place (condition) which is conducive to hearing.

Present “for”: As a general rule, if you are not postured to follow God in areas which offer some degree of clarity, you will likely find it difficult to respond when things seem more substantially more ambiguous.

This is the best place to start because there are times when the right decision is undeniably clear. In those instances, what we need is not confirmation, but simply the courage to respond to what has been revealed.

❖ **Third, discernment involves having some “history” with God.**

Having *“history with God”* means that we have some level of understanding which makes each life-decision feel a little less risky; a little less like a blind-leap of faith. And, it’s knowing that your present experience of grace will not be sufficient for future testings (e.g. the faith that Abram had to ‘leave Ur’ when God said, *“Bring your family and let’s go for a walk”*, would not be sufficient for Moriah when God says, *“Take your only son, the one that you love, and sacrifice him...”*)