



Growth Questions

“Given what has been revealed and what I’ve come to know about God through the life of Jesus, is the message harmonious?” Is what I’m hearing (sensing) a good reflection of how Jesus might respond?

“Have you ever considered that God might be trying to get your attention through the voice of another human being? Who do you trust in your own life as someone who can provide wise direction and confirmation?”

“What am I hearing? Is that what I want to hear? Is it helping to affirm my own self-directed path or allowing me to more fully participate in what God is doing within and around me? If you respond as if it’s true, will it produce truth?” (a fuller experience of what it means to be human)

“If I need to be told what to do all of the time, can I really say that I am coming to know his heart? How is my life demonstrating to God that I can be trusted?”

Teaching Notes

Perhaps, like me, your phone has some form of intelligent personal assistant: **S**peech **I**nterpretation and **R**ecognition Interface (SIRI). At times, **SIRI** can be incredibly intuitive and helpful. At times, though, there are glaring inconsistencies between what I actually “say” and what SIRI “hears me saying”.

It seems, at times, to exemplify the apparent glitches I experience in my interactions with God: *repeating myself, announcing more clearly; wondering if he heard me correctly?*

The fact is, we feel the weight of our decisions. We feel inadequate. Unprepared. The decision, in the moment, creates momentum (lit. ‘movement’) and that momentum creates a trajectory for our lives--- a future which we are, in large part, creating for ourselves.

Include, as well, the paradox of our faith which allows for **seasons of intense clarity** and **times of almost debilitating uncertainty**.

We would admit that although relating to God has many of the same characteristics and qualities that are necessary for any healthy relationship, it’s also dramatically different. We don’t have the tactile or the visible benefit. **And**, we confess, that when it comes to the notion of God communicating with us, he is the one who is significantly ‘handicapped’ in that arrangement. We’re the ones with the “spiritual ADD”. We’re the ones who have been notoriously indifferent and unresponsive.

I return to Jesus to mine some rudimentary truths:

“... the sheep recognize his voice and come to him... they follow him because they know his voice... they will run from a stranger because they don't recognize his voice.” John 10:3-5

► **God speaks to us:** from the opening scenes of the Story, it becomes evident that ours is a communicating God.

Genesis 3:8 “... in the cool (delight) of the day...”

Apparently, one of God's favorite times of day was his evening walks with his creation. It was offered as a part of the rhythm of the Edenic existence.

It doesn't appear that this interaction is ever meant to be exceptional or uncharacteristic.

These interactions are never to be understood as a “breaking in” (as if God is an unwelcomed interloper), but an awareness of the God present to us.

► **We're all meant to be “followers”:** it means that we're not “self-explanatory”; that in the midst of any number of possibilities for us, we have come to find in Jesus an appealing “example” of how to be “human”; how to live the life filled with “love” (Ephesians 5:1-2).

► **The Spirit is our intrinsic “voice recognition”:** It is “*having the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2); an exchange of thoughts, intentions, hearts. Within that exchange, there is to be an increasing capacity to distinguish his voice in order that we might discern the appropriate life-response.

I defined **discernment** as...

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

I said, previously: *Having, first, given ourselves to God, we must routinely determine that to which we will give ourselves. Life requires this constant process of discerning (sifting apart).*

Discernment is first a heart posture before it is a decision. We become the kind of people with whom God feels free to speak, not simply because we are attempting to avoid some unfavorable consequences in our lives, but because we “**want to want to**” do what pleases him.

“*I desire to do your will, O God...*” Psalm 40:8

Because life is not scripted or scheduled, we must be able to develop what I call “uncommon sense”.

Our faith is not simply some ‘catechism’ where we memorize certain God-facts and then become proficient at regurgitating the right answers. Life frequently takes us into “uncharted territory, therefore, there must be an avenue in which God is able to communicate what I call **“situational truth”**. Situational truth means that, at times, we need something more than God in “generalities”. *Here or there? Right or left? Plain or peanut? Paper or plastic?*

Listen, we as Christians hold to the conviction that the Bible is the Word of God. Not simply that it records for us the ‘*words of God*’, but the “word” of God: the reasons for the words; his desires; his intentions; his heart.

Yes, it is God’s story, but it’s not the whole story! We are also called to become part of the unfolding narrative; to continue *“all that Jesus began to do and teach”* (Acts 1:1). That seems to imply that the continued work would require our participation, as well as our willingness and ability to receive direction/guidance.

“There so much that I want to tell you now, but you are not ready to hear it. When he, the Spirit of truth comes... He will bring me glory (cause to be recognized) by telling you whatever he receives from me.” John 16:12-14

Probably the only thing more important than “truth itself” is our readiness to hear it, receive it and respond appropriately to it, without which, there can be no wisdom [practical application of truth].

“That doesn’t sound like something God would say.”

The writer of Hebrews tells us that *“in the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son.”* Hebrews 1:1-4

After centuries of being misunderstood and misrepresented, God determined that he would offer humanity a 3-D representation of who he was and what he was up to in the world: incarnation... God with skin.

So, from that point in history, we would say, ***if you want to know who God is, refer to Jesus!***

“This *is* God. *This is* God.”

It is essential that we find ourselves as a participating member of a *“listening community”*; that we surround ourselves with those who are often able to assist us in our awareness because discernment practiced solely in solitude becomes myopic and, often, self-deceptive. We see only what we want to see and hear only what we want to hear.

1 Samuel 3:8-9 (Eli and Samuel): *“the Lord called to Samuel...”*. *He did not yet know the Lord. The word of the Lord had not been revealed to him. Speak, Lord...”*

“Is it me or is it God?”

Because of our new life in the Spirit, anytime that we set out to hear God, we should not expect his voice to come from outside of us. [*“The word is near you... it’s in your mouth, it’s in your heart.”* Romans 10:8]

It’s the interface of heaven and earth; flesh and spirit; human and divine.

The voice doesn’t seem to be us. We don’t seem to be the source [God most often sounds more like **me** than like Charlton Heston]. It often comes as an impression on our heart that is so subtle it can be ignored, yet so compelling that we can’t let it go.

“What do you want to do?”

I would suggest that in the absence of any conflicting emotions, any clear prohibition from the Story, any conflicting counsel from Godly friends, or a sense that you are to simply *“wait”*...you are apparently free to choose [*“Well, that doesn’t help!”*]

The vast majority of decisions that I have made in my life have come in response to this God-inquiry. It’s unnerving. I don’t know what I want. There’s too much margin for error. I’m too fickle. I can’t be trusted!

If it’s of any consolation to you: there’s not been a week in my life that I haven’t had some fleeting moment when I have second-guessed most of those decisions.

Perhaps in those times when some specific guidance doesn’t come, we should not presume either God’s distance or his displeasure with us, but his confidence in us. He is leading us toward a “better obedience”; a more age-appropriate response (law and grace). We are growing up into love.

I am convinced that when we are able to form a healthy, biblical response to the **“Who am I?”** and **“Why am I?”** question, the **“What should I do?”** question will more easily resolve itself, because it will be guided by an identity which is convinced of God’s goodness and good intentions toward us **and** his capacity to redeem even the occasional *“foolish”* choices, because I love him and he loves me (Romans 8:28).

What is God’s will? That we are becoming the kind of people who are so immersed in the story--- so surrendered to accommodating the God-life--- that we find ourselves routinely approving and choosing what pleases God, not because we don’t know anything else, but because we don’t know anything better!