**Series: Hearing God 2016**

**Message #1. How do you uniquely hear God's voice and recognize his presence?**

**Book Reference**: John Ortberg's *God is Closer than You Think*

**These are the summary Notes**:

**Spiritual growth and formation**

* Is “increasing our capacity to experience the presence of God” (Ortberg 25).
* The most frequent promise from God in all of Scripture is God promising to be with his people, but often has his people, we do not recognize him; his presence and his voice.
* We all want to hear from God, to know that he is with us, to hear him and grow in a real relationship with him
* BUT, like my hearing, we are often deaf to him and fake that we heard what was said for fear of admitting that we can’t hear.
* Dallas Willard states this:  “How lonely life is! Oh, we can get by in life with a God who does not speak.  Many at least think they do so.  But it is not much of a life, and it is certainly not the life God intends for us or the *abundance* of life Jesus came to make available." (Hearing God, p.186)

**Spiritual hearing aides**

* Part of not recognizing the presence of God is that we think there are only a few ways to that we can hear or see him – personal devotions, bible study and prayer being the most accepted ways in our evangelical churches.
* Gary Thomas states it this way in his book, *Sacred Pathways:*“All too often, Christians who desire to be fed spiritually are given the same, generic, hopefully all-inclusive methods – usually some variation on a standardized quite time.  Why? Because it is simple, it’s generic, and it’s easy to hold people accountable to.  But for many Christians, it’s just not enough”
* God has fearfully and wonderfully made each of us in his image but also uniquely in how he relates to us and we relate to him – no different than how we relate to our own children who are different in how I need to communicate with them.

Throughout this 6-week series we are going to unpack how we recognize God’s presence and how we hear from God. This morning we are going to discuss seven different ways that Christians hear from God most naturally and experience spiritual growth and develop a greater passion to be a follower of Christ. The seven paths Ortberg references are as follows: intellectual, relational, serving, worship, activist, contemplative, and creation.

**Intellectual Path**

**Romans 12:2…**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)

**Philippians 4:8…**Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. (NIV)

Paul is the classical example of someone whose path to better hear God and grow was an intellectual Path

**If this is your primary path you hear from God most when:**

* You are learning and studying
* Reading, thinking deep thoughts, be taught, learning new ideas
* Analytically approach spiritual challenges

 You read the psalms and get most excited when you can point out the inclusios, the parallelism and the structure of the psalm.   You love to read Theology much more than any so called practical guide to Christian living. The music in a worship service is something you endure to get to the sermon

**Potential concerns with this Path**

* All head, but no heart.  God and His word become propositional truth with little love for God or your neighbor
* Paul’s warning that “Knowledge puffs –up and love builds up is something that you will always have to keep in mind.

**Areas to focus on for spiritual growth and hearing God**

* Be more attentive during times of worship, seeking to grow in adoration for God

**Relational Pathway**

**Matthew 18:20…**For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."(NIV)

**If this is your primary path you hear from God most when:**

* You are with people, in small groups, often feeling that God spoke to you through a conversation with someone else
* You best engage in spiritual practice when you are with others. (prayer groups work better for you than prayer when your alone)

 Those on the relational Path love to come to church not for the music or sermon but for the hangout time before and after the “service”.  Interacting with other believers rejuvenates them on their spiritual walk

**Potential concerns with this Path**

* You become superficial – knowing everyone, but not getting deep with anyone
* Can become dependent on others for approval; potential waffling on core beliefs

**Areas to focus on for spiritual growth and hearing God**

* Spend time alone reading, praying and reflecting

**Serving Pathway**

 **Matthew 25:40…**"The King will reply, `I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'(NIV)

**If this is your primary path you hear from God most when:**

* You are actively meeting the needs of others
* When you are sitting to listen, study, or read, God seems distinct.

**Potential concerns with this Path**

* Look down on others who do not serve as “hard” as you do
* Think you can only connect to God and others when you are serving

**Areas to focus on for spiritual growth and hearing God**

* Learn to receive service from the community as well as offering it

**Worship Pathway**

**Psalm 100:1-3…**Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he, who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. (NIV)

 You have a natural tendency to expression and celebration

**If this is your primary path you hear from God most when:**

* Your soul is moved towards God especially during times of singing and music.
* You often experience times of transformation and intimacy with God during times of worship

**Potential concerns with this Path**

* Judging people who are not as naturally expressive as you
* Dependent on hearing God only in the “experience” of worship

**Areas to focus on for spiritual growth and hearing God**

* Spending time in study to become more firmly rooted in the knowledge of God

**Activist Pathway**

Nehemiah 2:4-5… **4**The king said to me, “What is it you want?” Then I prayed to the God of heaven, **5**and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.”

 For activist prayer and action go together. You can’t just pray for justice you must act to bring it about.

**If this is your primary path you hear from God most when:**

* When you are in the middle of fighting for justice, for the “cause”.

**Potential concerns with this Path**

* People become objects to be used for your cause
* Can struggle discerning God’s will from their own cause

**Areas to focus on for spiritual growth and hearing God**

* Slowing down and spending time in solitude and reflection, hearing God in the quiet not only in the action.

**Contemplative/creation**

**Matthew 14:13…**When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place….

**Matthew 14:23…**After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,

**Mark 1:35…**Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (NIV)

Psalm 8 .... O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!...When I look to the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars...

 You are an observer of life and God's creation.

**If this is your primary path you hear from God most when:**

* You have large blocks of time in solitude to reflect and ponder
* To many people, noise or busyness, keep you from feeling connected to God. Being in creation to see, hear, smell, touch, and taste the goodness of God’s creation

**Potential concerns with this Path**

* Failing to engage in the world and community around you and not simply escaping.
* Failing to make time for solitude, reflection, and time in creation

**Areas to focus on for spiritual growth and hearing God**

* Developing relationships within the Christian community

**Concluding cautions and encouragement**

**Cautions:**

* We can’t judge others for different ways of connecting to God that our different than ours
* We are not off the hook for engaging different paths – “I’m an intellectual Path so I can skip worship’ etc.
* We need to guard against thinking there is a mass production way of hearing from God and experiencing his presence but seek to understand the Path that is most applicable to how God has made us.

C.S.Lewis states it:  “Why else were individuals created, but that God, loving all infinitely, should love each differently…if all experienced God in the same way and returned Him an identical worship, the song of the Church triumphant would have no symphony, it would be like an orchestra in which all the instruments played the same note.”

**May Pathway be a symphony of joy and grace as we grow in God’s presence and hear his voice.**