

Beyond Bible Roulette: Actually Hearing the Divine

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning, Table Church. It's good to see you all. So today you will notice that our kids are in our room with us. Today is the fifth Sunday of June and on fifth Sundays our kids are in the room with us. So let's welcome our children.

It also means that it behooves me to preach a more fun, more entertaining, and shorter sermon. So you all can be happy about that as well. So let me do a little bit of introduction and then we'll do some fun things together.

So we're in the middle of a series called What Lies Beneath? And we're talking about moving from clouded to clear as discipleship, disciples of Jesus. We've been using this metaphor of the iceberg that 10% of our lives are what we see.

Our actions, our behaviors, our language, and then 90% of our lives are below the surface, just like an iceberg where our thoughts and our feelings and our values and our fears and our insecurities are all underneath.

And as disciples of Jesus, it can be easy to focus on that top 10% of the iceberg of just the stuff that people can see and visualize. But we want to spend some time talking about what lies beneath.

And we've been talking about 2 Corinthians. Paul says that when we gaze at God, when we look at Jesus, we are transformed from glory to glory, being transformed into the image of God.

[1 : 28] We've talked about language about the wilderness, that God often seems to send people out into the desert or the wilderness, and that's where God does some of their best work.

And I want to ask you all, what do you think one of the most common questions I get as a pastor is? What's one of the most common questions that I get as a pastor?

If somebody's going to set up a pastoral counseling meeting with me, what is the question that they want to ask? Yeah. I feel like it's particular to you being at the table here, but like, are gay people good in the eyes of God?

Are gay people good in the eyes of God? I'm going to repeat just so our live stream can hear. Are gay people, yeah, that actually is a pretty common question. People will come to the table church and they may be wrestling with, if, yeah, if gay people can be allowed, and not just allowed, but celebrated.

Shay? Is hell real? That's a real question, a very common question. Yes. Why do bad things happen to good people or just at all?

[2 : 31] Yep. Any kids want to make a guess? My daughter Audrey, what do you think? Why did God make mosquitoes? That's a great question.

It's a wonderful question. Yes, Ryan. Am I living according to God's will? Am I living according to God's will? Well, that is the number one question. Go ahead and put that up on the screen.

How do I know God's will? And like, as a pastor, I know that we could set up a class or a course, and we could fill that class every single time if we just did a class on God's will, hearing God's voice, hearing God's will.

And if you're anything like me, this is a question that I wrestle with. I've been a Christian since I was like 12 years old, and I still don't have like perfect answers for this. And so, you know, I think lots of us do lots of interesting things to try to figure out God's will.

Anybody ever play Bible roulette? Bible roulette. So, you open up a Bible, you sort of flip through it, and then you point your finger at a verse, and you're like, okay, there is no God.

[3 : 38] Oh, the fool says there is no God. Okay, that's not right. Okay, flip through it, flip through it. Okay, oh, okay, you will surely die this day. Dang it, that's not the one I wanted.

Okay, Bible roulette. Anybody familiar with the game Padiddle? Padiddle. Anybody know Padiddle? Beck? Beck, what is Padiddle? Maybe it's a country thing, but like you drive on the highway, and if

you see someone with just one headlight, you like tap the top of your car and say Padiddle. That's exactly right. If you see someone with one headlight coming towards you, it's a race for everybody in the car to hit the top of the roof and say Padiddle because you saw somebody with one headlight.

Okay? Okay. Now, I was pining after a young woman named Emily V. Okay. And I had asked her out earlier that summer.

She had told me no. I've told that story before. But still didn't feel like that was the end of the story. And so I was taking a walk along the perimeter of our college campus.

[4 : 39] And I was just like begging God, God, tell me, am I going to date and therefore marry Emily? God, if it's your will that I'm going to date and marry Emily, when I turn this corner onto McKinley Highway, if I see a Padiddle, that means that I'm going to date Emily.

And did I see a Padiddle? Well, you bet I did. Now, is this a particularly theologically deep way of pursuing God's will?

No, it's pretty questionable. And I'm not sure, like, how many cars drove by first before I saw that Padiddle, right? I remember throwing darts at a dartboard if I hit a bullseye.

Like, I remember all doing all these things. So we sort of move into these desperate measures. Can we hear God's voice? Can we know God's will? So that's what we're going to talk about today. Now, the main thing I want us to take away is that God created us for friendship with them.

God created us for friendship with them both now and forever. So friendship with God is not just something that happens in the future. It's not just something that happens in kingdom come or heaven.

[5 : 52] God's friendship with God can start now. But hearing God is hard. So go ahead and put up that quote, the Dallas Willard quote. This is what Dallas Willard wrote about hearing God. It says, Among our loneliest moments is the time of decision and the need for guidance.

The weight of our future life clamps down upon our hearts. Whatever comes from our decision will be our responsibility. And our fault. Good things we have set our hearts on become real only as we choose them.

But those things or other things yet undreamed of may be irretrievably lost. If our choices are misguided, we may find ourselves stuck with failures and dreadful consequences that we must endure for a lifetime.

And then quickly, second thoughts dog us. And then third and fourth, did I do the good and wise thing? Is this what God wanted? Is it what I even wanted? Can I live with the consequences?

Others think I'm a fool.

Is God still with me? Will God be with me even if it becomes clear that I made the wrong choice? Anybody resonate with this? Yes. Hearing God's voice making choices for our lives is tough.

[6 : 55] So to illustrate this, we're going to play the telephone game. All right. So we're going to have two teams. This team and that team. If you guys want to name each other, it's fine. I am going to go in the back and I'm going to whisper to you a phrase.

And you're going to go row by row, passing that phrase back and forth until we get to the end. So Antonio up here and Miriam up here. And tech team, I need you to play some music on Spotify.

So we're going to turn the volume up and make it that much harder to hear. Okay. So telephone game with some music in the background. And then I'm going to whisper this phrase to you.

And we're going to see how it goes. All right. Team left. What is the phrase? God loves you. God doesn't love cats.

God loves your children. Loves what? She loves you. Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh. Team right.

[8 : 00] God is yours. He doesn't love cats. He doesn't love cats. Okay. Put the phrase on the screen. God adores you. Doesn't like cats.

And has something fortuitous to say. Who was the last person to hear the word fortuitous?

Yeah. Over there. Way in the back. Yeah. All right. So very quickly. This is for the adults in the room. This is my theory on biblical inspiration.

Okay. That God speaks to creation. God speaks to God's people. But there are layers of confusion between God speaking and us hearing.

Okay. Layers of confusion. History and culture and bad intention and sexism. All of those things get in the way between God's good voice and God's good plans for our lives.

[8 : 59] And then what we end up hearing. Does that make sense? So I think we end up playing this massive game of telephone between what God says and what we receive. Which means our work as people who want to hear God's voice is to begin to sort of dig through those layers and get closer to the lips of God.

All right. Is that a word for us this morning? All right. So the world is really noisy. The world is super noisy. Even right now there's noise.

Right? And we've got music playing and all that stuff. Like I got a text saying like, hey, can we turn it down? It's a little bit of sensory overload in here. Which is like, yes, I understand that from an accommodation perspective. And also, that was the point.

There was a little bit of sensory overload. And so then we, you see, we're turning off the lights for the sensory overload. Right? So then we try to like, you know, spend most of our week and most of our lives hearing things other than God's voice.

And then we get to like the 10 minutes in the morning or at night when we pray. Or the 75 minutes that we're in a worship service. And we're like, what does God have to say? Let me hear it now. And of course, all that sensory overload is still bubbling around in our soul.

[10 : 09] Now, our scripture this morning comes from Exodus chapter 3. I've got two kids who've already volunteered to come up and read scripture. So Audrey and Nia, come on up.

Do I have a third? Do I have a third who's willing to read scripture for us this morning? All right. Well, we'll start with these two. All right. So I broke it up into paragraphs.

If you can take the mic and then read that first sentence. One day Moses... Oh, turn it up. I think you're good. Green or blue mic. Here we go.

One day Moses was tending the flock in his father-in-law... Jethro. Jethro. The prides of Nia. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. All right. Hand the mic to Audrey.

[11 : 05] Verse 2. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of the bush. Moses stared in the basement.

Through the bush was engulfed in flames. It didn't burn up. All right. And verse 3. You can go back to Nia. This is amazing Moses that could be himself.

Why isn't this bush burning up? I just go see it. All right. Thank you, readers. I'm being upstaged.

The main thing I want to say about this passage is that God often speaks in the middle of our ordinary and everyday lives. Notice what Moses is doing. Moses is not at a church service.

He's not at synagogue. He's not at temple. He's not at the tabernacle. He's working. He's tending sheep. He's not saying prayers. He's not reading his Bible. Moses is just at work.

[12 : 18] And as he's at work, he notices a burning bush. And he sees this burning bush, sees that it's interesting, and stops what he's doing, and he pays attention.

Now, Trevor's going to be talking more about the art of paying attention next week. But I want to at least for us to notice the action of paying attention. And going into the world, going into our days with some sort of belief that there are things worth paying attention to.

And that God can speak when we begin to pay attention. And God can speak in the ordinariness of our lives, even when we're at work.

Not just in these sort of created moments that we make together, which are good and holy and beautiful, and I love, but also in the so-called mundane, the so-called secular, the rest of our lives. We have to think of ourselves. This is Dallas Willard again. Think of ourselves as having the same kinds of experiences, of it even being possible, to having the same kinds of experiences as Moses and Elijah and Mary and Deborah or Paul.

[13 : 29] That we don't opt ourselves out because we think of ourselves as normal or ordinary. And having that sort of belief that I can have the same kinds of experiences as the folks of the Bible can be very sort of mind-altering.

That we can believe that that's not just for back then, but it's for now as well. Now, the scripture goes on. It says, The Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look.

So the bush is burning no matter what. God is there no matter what. Moses pays attention, turns aside off the road, and the Lord sees this.

And God calls to Moses from the middle of the bush, Moses, Moses. Here I am, Moses replied. Verse 5. Don't come any closer. Here, the Lord warned.

Take off your sandals for you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. When Moses heard this, Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

[14 : 36] And then the Lord told him. And listen to all the verbs, the action words in this sentence. I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. Let me hear you say see.

See. And I have heard their cries. Let me hear you say hear. Hear. Of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware. Let me hear you say aware. Of their suffering. So I have come down. Let me hear you say come down. Come down. To rescue. Let me hear you say rescue. Rescue. Them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out. Let me hear you say lead them out.

Lead them out. Of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey. Look, the cry of the people has reached me. And I have seen. Let me hear you say see. See. See. See. How harshly the Egyptians abused them. So notice the progression here. Moses saw something unusual. Moses investigated.

[15 : 31] And then God speaks. Moses sees. He turns inside and investigates. And then God speaks. And I believe that God often wants us to pay attention before revealing more.

That God wants us to actually turn our attention of our own senses. Of our sight and our hearing. Of even what we smell and taste and touch. So that then we can hear God more.

To see what God is going to reveal. It's like we don't do this a lot anymore. So this metaphor is dying. But like trying to tune a radio. Or trying to like move the antenna for an old television.

Or you know. The boats. They would sail through the ocean. And they would have a compass on the boat. And as the friction of the water against the boat moved against the front.

The compass would begin to get more and more off track. And so this was actually the metal of the boat getting magnetized by the friction. And so you'd have to do something called degaussing the boat.

[16 : 35] Which was to get the compass to turn back towards true north. And so paying attention. Listening to God. Stopping. Being willing to stop and investigate. Is like re-attenuating.

D-gaussing the compass of our own hearts. So that we can pay attention to God. What does it mean? What does it look like to pay attention? It's the stuff. That nobody likes it when I say to them in those pastoral counseling appointments.

What would it mean for us to be silent? And still. And alone. And dare I say bored for a little while. Kids. Do you like boredom? No. No. Guess what? Adults don't like it either. That's why my kids are very good at this.

Always pointing out. Dad why do you always have your phone in your hand? Like oh yeah. Because I hate being bored. I'm afraid of all the fears and anxieties that are going to come top of mind.

[17 : 33] To be still and to be silent and to be alone. And to let the waters of my soul settle. One of the hardest things I can do. It's so difficult to just stay still.

But that's one way to pay attention. Another way to pay attention. Is being super familiar with God's character and God's voice. So that you can recognize them anywhere. We believe.

That every single person. Every single human being. Is created in the image of God. The imago Dei. As Genesis 1 says. Which means that. Every single person has the ability to show me something true about God.

Which can be really tough to believe. Almost as hard as being still and silent as bored. As believing that. Even the person that I don't like. Can show me something true about God. Now some of us might be thinking.

Hey this is great for Moses. Who had a literal burning bush. But God doesn't speak to me like that. And you're right. Most of us don't get burning bushes. But what if God's voice comes through.

[18 : 41] A friend's encouragement. When we're struggling. Or a verse. That jumps out while we're reading. And not just Bible verses. But fiction and non-fiction. A persistent feeling that.

Yeah I should text that person. I should give them a call. Or a sense of peace about a difficult situation. I think the way that we begin to hear God's voice. Is that silence. And that solitude.

And that boredom. And being so familiar with God's voice. That we would recognize it anywhere. And we wouldn't confuse it with anything else. Right. Alright. So let's play another game. Audrey come on up.

You're going to be my quiz master. Here. And this game. Is it a movie. Or is it a Bible verse? Alright. So here's your microphone.

And then we're going to do this super uncasually. We're not going to. Super casually. We're not going to keep score or anything. Audrey's going to read out a quote. Not the answer. Don't read the answer. You're going to guess.

[19 : 37] Just with like a show of hands. Or shouting it out. Is it a movie or a Bible verse? Okay. So here you go. I think the quotes are also on the screen. Go ahead and read number one. And we won't do all of them.

Don't worry. Time is a fire. It makes me burn. Alright. Bible or movie? Anybody dare to say Bible? Okay. We got one. We got one. Alright. And the answer is? Movie. Go ahead and put it on the screen. I think my slides didn't sync. Dang it. What movie is it from?

Star Trek. Star Trek Generations. Yes. Alright. Next one. Yep. No, no.

The one about it. The lights that burst twice. And the lights that burst half as long. Movie. So we have some Bibles.

[20 : 31] A lot of movies. Alright. What is it? Movie. Anybody know the movie? Go ahead. Play. Blade Runner.

Alright. Alright. Next one. Iron serpent iron. And one man serpent another. Bible. Bible. Bible. You all know too many Bible verses.

Alright. Next one. The path of the righteous man is the step of all time. But in. Inequities. Inequities of the selfish and the desire. Tyranny.

Tyranny of people then. Bible. Bible. Movie. Alright. How many say Bible? How many say movie? Bible. Put up your hand.

Bible. Movie. Put up your hand. Alright. So we have some uncertainty. It's a movie. It's a movie. It's a movie. It is. It's a fake Bible verse.

[21 : 29] It's a fake Bible verse. In pulp fiction. Samuel Jackson. books books.

books. books. books!!!! Bible, that's right. Next.

Movie. What movie? Dune. That's right. That's right. Let's do this one. Movie. What movie? Streetcar named Desire.

Let's do this one. Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. But today is it. That's why they call it the present.

Kongpoo Panda. That's right. I don't want to do any more. I think we're good. I think we're good. Thank you, Audrey.

[23 : 25] So, in order to hear God's voice, we have to train ourselves to be able to recognize God's voice and God's character so that we could understand it anywhere and not get it confused with anything else. So, often in these pastoral counseling conversations, how do I know God's will?

How do I know God's voice? I, yeah, encourage people to move into boredom, begin to confront the anxieties and the uncertainties of the soul, and when praying, when meditating, when contemplating, to fix, you know, this is a Bible verse, fix your eyes on Jesus.

Fix your eyes on the prize, right? And that means to begin to meditate on the character of God. If 1 John 4 says God is love, and that perfect love casts out all fear, well, that tells me something about what I should be hearing in God's voice.

Should God's voice make me fear? No, no. If 1 Peter tells me to cast all my anxieties on Him because God cares for us, well, if I feel like I'm receiving a voice or a message that feels like God doesn't care about me, or that is giving me more anxiety and less hope, well, that must not be God's voice.

Now, and listen to what God says in this passage. God, before God says anything to Moses, before God asks anything of Moses, before God reveals God's will for Moses, God reveals their own heart to Moses.

[24 : 55] I have seen, I have heard, I am concerned, I will come down, I will rescue. So God speaks what God's going to do, what God cares about, before asking one single thing of Moses.

God's voice often comes after they prove that they've been listening to us. I have heard your cry, I have heard the cry of your people.

Some of us may have had somebody say, hey, God wanted me to tell you, use as a weapon against you. God told me to break up with you, right?

God told me you need to, you know, lose some weight. Did they? Did they? No. No. God told me that your lifestyle is a sin.

God told me to tell you. But here's the test. God's voice will sound like verse 7. Full of compassion for those who are suffering.

[25 : 59] A voice committed to justice for the oppressed. I have seen, I have heard, I have come down, I will rescue. When we truly hear God's voice, it calls us towards love.

Love for God and love for others. The great commandment, right? Love God with all your heart and your soul and your mind and your strength and love your neighbor as yourself. And so when we hear God's voice, it should be a voice that's moving us and calling us towards love.

And it's calling us towards God's mission. Because God does have a mission for the world. A mission of redemption. A mission of removing injustice. Of making a place where justice can make its home.

As 2 Peter says, God has a mission of bringing people out of slavery and out of bondage and out of oppression. And yes, that will require work. And God does call Moses into that work.

Go before Pharaoh and say, let my people go. And so God's voice, don't take away this morning's message to say that God's voice is always easy. Right? Because sometimes God will call us to do hard things, difficult things.

[27 : 07] God will call us to stand up for what's right. But it's a voice that moves us towards love, not shame. Towards courage, not fear.

It's a voice that moves us towards loving others well. And so we're just going to do a little bit of practice right now. I want you to just pair up or groups of three or four at most.

And ask the simple question, what's a place where God might be calling us to show love this week? What's a place that God might be calling us to show love this week? So you could talk about work. You could talk about camp. You could talk about your family. Talk about your neighbor. Talk about the person that you walk by on the streets. Maybe some situation in your life where you know you need to show love, but it seems really difficult.

You don't want to. Let's spend a couple minutes talking about that question. Where's a place that God might be calling us to show love this week? Where are you going to show love this week?

[28 : 05] Let's just have a couple shout outs. California. Family vacation. Great place to show God's love. Show love to your mom.

Show love to your mom. Anyone else? Where are you going to show love this week? Yourself.

Hallelujah. Yourself. Anyone else? Immigrant neighbors. That's right. That's right. So, to wrap up, my encouragement this week is to look for God in your ordinary moments because it might be in the ordinary that you find something supernatural and extraordinary.

When something unusual catches your attention, be willing to pause. Brian Regan has a joke about Pop-Tarts. He says, you ever look at the back of a Pop-Tart box and notice that it has instructions for a microwave?

You're supposed to put the Pop-Tart in for two seconds. He's like, if you don't have time to toast your Pop-Tart, you might be packing your schedule too tight. Are our schedules packed so tight that we don't have the ability to stop and pause when something catches our attention?

[29 : 25] God, are you trying to tell me something? They may not be, but you'll miss out on the moments when they are. Remember that God's voice comes in a variety of ways.

Not just burning bushes, but through community and scripture and prayer and circumstances and the unexpected. And that there is a game of telephone going on.

My own inner voice can get in the way. The culture, the things that I was taught, distractions. And my work, and it's a lifetime's worth of work, is to simply begin to get closer to the source so that game of telephone doesn't take 15 minutes.

Couple warning signs. God's voice will never contradict their character of love and justice. It will not contradict that. Be suspicious, on your own behalf, be suspicious of any word of God that makes you feel superior to others.

True, thank you, thank you. Dang it, now I feel superior. Jeez. Discernment, true discernment happens in community and not in isolation.

[30 : 42] All right, that's the test. That's how you test the word of God. And when in doubt, you ask trusted friends to help you listen. Thank you.