

1 Hearing God . . . and recognizing his voice

2 Sneak Previews

- Sneak Previews was an American film review show, running for over two decades on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).
- It was created by WTTW, a PBS affiliate in Chicago, Illinois.
- It premiered on September 4, 1975 and by 1979, it was a weekly series airing on over 180 stations, and was the highest rated weekly entertainment series in the history of public broadcasting.
- It featured Gene Siskel, a film critic from the Chicago Tribune, and Roger Ebert, a film critic from the Chicago Sun–Times.
- It was from these two men that we get the much coveted and trademarked – “Two Thumbs up!” rating that often meant the difference between a movie being a box–office hit or a bust.

3 Gene Siskel

- In 1998, Siskel underwent surgery for a cancerous brain tumor.
- He announced on Wednesday, February 3, 1999 that he was taking a leave of absence but that he expected to be back by the fall, writing “I’m in a hurry to get well because I don’t want Roger to get more screen time than me.”
- On Saturday, February 20, 1999, Siskel died from complications of the surgery at the age of 53.
- Roger Ebert continued on with the weekly movie review TV program, through various co–hosts, until in 2006 complications from thyroid cancer stopped his involvement.

4 Roger Ebert

- Since initially discovering he had thyroid cancer, Roger has undergone 10 surgeries.
- He has lost the ability to eat or drink, and uses a feeding tube.
- His whole lower jaw has been removed, along with tongue, salivary glands, and voice box.
- Surprisingly, Roger can still talk and some say, it is a miracle.

5 Roger and “Alex”

- At first Roger was reduced to scribbling notes on Post–its or a white board.
- But a confessed technology junkie, Ebert wasn’t content with such limits on his “voice.”
- He turned his critical ear toward computer text–to–speech reading voices.
- After trying several that did not suit his standards for rhythm and intonation, he settled on Alex -- the now standard reading voice that comes on every Mac.

6 CereProc

- He’s also worked with a Scottish company called CereProc to create his own computer voice called Roger 2.0.

- Ebert is in the rare position of having over 30 years of voice recordings from his television career, and CereProc used them to piece together Roger 2.0's vocabulary.

7 CereProc

- But it still lacks the natural human qualities that most of us never think about when speaking.
 - Dramatic pauses on big words.
 - Upward inflection before question marks.
 - The ability to selectively emphasize words for effect.
- These types of qualities are what help us recognize a person's voice as uniquely that person.
- In other words, our voices represent our relational connection with others.
- Why? Because our voices are unique to us and they are personal, relational, and in this sense, very powerful.

8 Know His Voice

- In fact, doesn't Jesus say something about this? My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27 NIV)
- Jesus also says, "the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know (recognize) his voice." (John 10:3-4 NIV)
- In fact, Jesus says, "But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." (John 10:5 NIV)

9 The Big Question

- So how can we tell God's voice over all of the other voices we hear?
- How can we tell it is God talking to us and not someone else?
- To tell the truth we have two major problems in discovering God's voice.
 - People who say emphatically we can't hear God's voice, and those
 - People who say emphatically that God speaks to them casually all of the time.

10 Psalm 29

- The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. (Psalms 29:4-5 NIV)
- The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh. (Psalms 29:7-8 NIV)
- The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. (Psalms 29:9 NIV)

11 1 Kings 19

- After Elijah won the contest between himself (God’s prophet) and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Jezebel threatened his life.
- So Elijah ran off to hide in the desert of Judah.
- There an angel of the Lord came and fed Elijah with food and water.
- Then Elijah journeyed to Mount Horeb and there God spoke to him.

12 God Speaks to Elijah

- The first thing God spoke to Elijah about was to question the reason for his “pity party.”
- And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:9 NIV)
- He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” (1 Kings 19:10 NIV)
- So the Lord told Elijah, go to “Inspiration Point.”
- The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.” (1 Kings 19:11 NIV)

13 God Speaks to Elijah

- Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind.
- After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.
- After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire.
- And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. (1 Kings 19:11–13 NIV)

14 God Speaks to Elijah

- Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:13 NIV)
- He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.” (1 Kings 19:14 NIV)
- However, this time the Lord commanded Elijah to resume his ministry and shared with him that he’s not the only one left.
- Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel — all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him. (1 Kings 19:18 NIV)

15 What’s The Point

- Elijah had problems with discouragement, because he had false expectations relating to God’s will.
- Jezebel’s reaction of defiance wasn’t final.
- God had other plans and things weren’t as bad as Elijah thought?

- Elijah’s “pity party” wasn’t the answer, but Elijah’s listening to God’s voice and doing what God said was.
- When he did, Jezebel (the mocker) was totally destroyed.

16 Does God Speak to Us Today?

- In Scripture, people like Elijah were regularly led by God, and they described it in terms of God’s speaking to them. Abraham, Moses and Aaron. Gideon, David, and Samuel.
- In the Bible, God didn’t just speak to important people for special works of redemption. He spoke to normal people like Hagar (Genesis 16) and Ananias (Acts 9).
- We have some decisions to make here. Is the Bible a collection of examples of life with God, or is it a collection of exceptions to normal life with God?
- So we can expect that since God spoke to normal people in the Bible, he can speak to normal people today.

17 Listen . . . I stand at the Door!

- We should note how Jesus describes our very conversions in Revelation 3:20: “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.”
- Christ describes our relation with Him as hearing his voice and responding.
- The result is an intimate picture of communing together over a meal.
- We probably cannot describe many intimate dinners with a person when we did not speak to and hear from the other person . . .

18 How Does God Speak?

- The primary means that God speaks to us is through Facebook. Right?
- No it is through the Scriptures.
- We call the Bible the “Word of God,” and believe it to be God–breathed (2 Timothy 3:16).
- This is a perspective that should shape how we read the Bible.
- We should engage Scripture with a practical theology of inspiration.
- The Bible is not just conceptual—words that we read as information.
- The Scriptures are words spoken and inspired by God, and thus reading them is listening to him speaking still.
- This is why Bible reading is relational first and informational second.

19 How Does God Speak?

- But beyond the words of Scripture, people may be led by God’s Spirit in some specific ways.
 - An internal voice.
 - A sense of conviction.
 - A seemingly inspired reflection.

- Experiences that undoubtedly defy coincidence.
- People often describe these experiences as “God speaking” or “hearing God’s voice.”
- However, we should be cautious about these forms as they are the most unreliable of all the ways that God speaks to us.

20 When God Does Speak

- Be humble . . . say things like,
 - I feel in my spirit . . .
 - I got this impression in my heart . . .
 - I’m feeling led to . . .
 - I feel a witness in my spirit . . .
 - I got goose bumps on my goose bumps . . .
- Be careful not to break the third commandment. If we say, God said this or that, and He hasn’t, then we are using the Lord’s name in vain.
- Also, don’t invoke God’s name just to win an argument, get out of trouble, or save face.

21 The Early Methodists

- The Early Methodists used what was called the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral,” which described four sources in developing theology or hearing from God.
- The primary source is Scripture, but it is supported by the Tradition of church history, our Reason in thinking and interpreting, and lived out in Experience -- the most personal of all forms of support.

22 How Does God Speak?

- Applying the quadrilateral we could say . . .
- That someone’s Experience—hearing God’s leading—should be in harmony with what is confirmed by Reason, demonstrated in Tradition and primarily revealed in Scripture.
- In other words, anything we think God is saying to us should make sense according to our circumstances, be consistent with universal Christian principles, and be biblical.

23 Differentiating God’s Voice

- Dallas Willard a writer on spiritual formation notes three qualities by which we can know God’s voice from others.
 - Quality. God’s voice carries substance and weight. It makes an impact -- bringing peace, inclining us toward ascent and inspiring compliance.
 - Spirit. It is rarely loud, flashy or dramatic. It doesn’t argue, but calmly assures us of itself.
 - Content. Words from God will always conform to God’s nature, God’s Scripture, and his heart as revealed in Christ. God’s voice will never tell you that you’re worthless, encourage you to lie or mislead you about God’s character.

24 Important Point

- When a voice consoles us—brings peace, calm, assurance, worship -- it's more likely from God because it draws us toward him.
- When a voice leaves us desolate—confused, chaotic, anxious—it's rarely from God because it pulls us away from God.

25 Listening for God's Voice?

- Silence, solitude, journaling, mentors and trial-and-error all create the space to listen for God. But it takes practice.
- Living in wisdom, knowing the Scriptures, trusting community, making mistakes—these are all part of learning to listen for God's voice over time.
- In fact, when we abide in the truth the Lord has promised us intimacy, when we have intimacy, our ability to hear the Master's voice is greatly enhanced.
- Therefore, let us open the door and let the Master in so that we can have the intimacy that he has promised, then we can hear clearly the encouraging words that stop dead in the tracks all “pity parties.”

26 The RCA Victor Dog