

**Sermon Study Guide Based on  
Pastor Glen Weber's Message of May 3, 2009  
"Can You Hear Me Now?"**

**[Today's message focuses on prayer but from a different perspective than just requests. Prayer is also a way that God speaks to us.]**

**[Topics: Prayer; Listening; Hearing; Conversation with God]**

**Excerpt:** You've all seen the Verizon commercial where the guy walks all over the place and says, "Can you hear me now?" Of course this is the title of today's sermon. And we'll talk about the concept of hearing God.

The year was 1863. The Civil War was not going well for the Union. The Senate of the United States realized that they are in trouble and requested President Abraham Lincoln to declare day of National humiliation and prayer. It wasn't long after that day of fasting and prayer on April 30th that the war began to turn.

This week millions of people will be gathering all across the nation for the National Day of Prayer on May 7. They will be gathering in churches and parks and all over the place. There will be national television broadcasts as our nation comes to prayer.

For many people, it's just a ritual. It's one more thing they do. Other people take it very, very seriously and they fast leading up to this day. We're part of "Operation Thunder" where many people in many cities across our nation are going to pray from the National Day of Prayer to the Global Day of Prayer 24 hours a day seeking God on behalf of our nation. Just crying out to God that he would make a difference in our country.

Today, let's talk about prayer. And we need to go in a little different direction with it than we normally might. Most of us are really good at prayer requests. We can send prayer requests via email and you will put those prayers on your list. Now that's good. It gives us a focus.

But you know there's also corporate prayer, or prayer when we are praying with another person or even several of you praying for one person. Now what does all of this have to do with the topic, "Can you hear me now?"

Now hearing God is very, very important. Chapters 2 and 3 in the **Book of Revelation** repeat the saying "**He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**" Every single church, the good ones and the ones who had problems all were told this same statement.

Well, what is the Spirit saying to the churches? And how do we find that out? The author of the book of Hebrews starts out by saying, God has spoke to us in many different ways and through many different prophets in the Old Testament. And he says, but now He speaks to us through His Son. And numerous times in the Book of Hebrews it talks about "listening." And so it's important that we listen and hear what God is saying.

The Gospels record that Jesus went up to the mountain with the three disciples and was transfigured before them. And the voice from heaven said, "**This is my Son in whom I love.**" Now what else did he say? God the Father said, "**Listen to him.**" So listening is important to God and how we hear him.

There are many ways to hear God. But it's important that we understand that we need to hear, first. Let's go to **John 10:1**. Jesus said, "**I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.**"

**2) "The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep."** We know from a few verses later that Jesus is the shepherd. **3) "The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."** So Jesus speaks and the sheep hear his voice. They listen to what he is saying.

Now listening is a challenge sometimes. Most of us are really good at talking. We're not so good at listening. Pastor Glen confessed that he's really good at interrupting when others are talking. He has to really concentrate on that. It's habit isn't it? We think of something and it just wants to come out. The way we act, you think God gave us two mouths and one ear, not the other way around. God wants us to listen. God wants us to hear and listen to each other. There are multiple Scriptures in the Bible that uses the word "listen." God wants us to listen.

**4) "When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."** So the sheep hear God's voice; they know God's voice. They can experience God's voice. Now some of you may be nervous because you are thinking, "How do I know it's God's voice? What if it's the devil?"

Well, first of all, if you know God's voice, if you know how God thinks; and you know how the devil thinks, you should be able to tell the difference. One is going to be loving and kind and tell you to honor God and the other one is going to be angry or hostile or tell you to do something that's not going to be Godly. It should be pretty easy to tell if you are listening, especially if you know God's heart.

So we don't have to be all paranoid. We just have to be tuned into God, and what he's saying and how he's saying it. God wants us to hear his voice. He wants to be able to lead us through the gate. He wants to be able to lead his church. That's why he said in Revelation seven times, "**He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**"

With those Scriptures, you get the idea that the Spirit was going to be speaking to the church. How do we survive in today's world without the Spirit guiding us, without the Spirit speaking to us, without the Spirit giving us direction as individuals and as a congregation? It's crucial to hear what God is saying.

Now this is one way God speaks to us. We tend to think that the only way God speaks to us is through the Bible. We tend to forget that there are other ways God speaks. The Bible tells us that when we speak to each other, we are to build each other up in the

Spirit of the Lord. We're supposed to encourage one another in the Spirit. We're supposed to sing songs to one another in the Spirit. Some of the songs we sang this morning we were singing to each other because of what the lyrics said. So there are many ways the Holy Spirit speaks to us. Now the Biblical way is crucial. We don't want to play it down or minimize it. And remember the Holy Spirit won't tell us anything that doesn't agree with what's in the Bible.

But we need to realize that God speaks to us in other ways than just reading the Bible. There are other ways. But it's crucial to what's in the Bible. So God can speak to us in many ways.

Now our current approach is very personal. One person prays and that's it. Even when we're in a group only one person prays. Even when several people are asked to pray over someone, too often we think that if one person prays that's good enough, because God heard that prayer.

But most of our prayers are not to inform God. He already knows about the situation. Many times when someone asks pastor Glen to anoint them, he doesn't take them to a back room, he does it there right on the spot. And if there are others around him, he will ask them to join in.

Prayer in the Bible is almost plural. It's about corporate prayer. It's about all of us together. Did you realize that in Hebrew there isn't even a word for "I"? It's about all of us walking together. And prayer is that way too. So many times we need to have several of us pray over someone or pray about a particular situation.

It's not that we need four of us to pray in order to beat on God's door to get his attention. God already knows. The Bible says that before we ask, he already knows our needs. So prayer is not about informing God. It's partly to open our hearts to God so we can respond to him. But also prayer is a way God speaks to his people through others.

When several people pray for an individual, you will notice that each one prays differently. It's good that we now have women praying in church, because women pray completely differently than we men do. They put a whole different feeling into their prayers. Men tend to pray from the intellect and women tend to pray from the heart. It's a whole different thing. And God can speak to us through that.

Perhaps this Thursday night at our National Day of Prayer service, some of the pastors will ask us to get into groups of three or four and pray about a certain topic. The concept is that each one of us prays and God can speak to the group through each one of us. And we hear how another person prays. And it's amazing how the Holy Spirit will speak to that person who is praying.

And so we see that prayer is not only us speaking to God but also God speaking to us and encouraging us as we respond. In **Romans 10**, we find Paul taking about preaching the Gospel to other people. But let's take a look at the principle here.

**14) "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without**

**someone preaching (speaking) to them?"** Preaching is for us communicating the Word of God to another person.

**15) "And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'"** Now, who has been sent to preach the Gospel? All of us. We are all sent by Jesus. We'll all asked to preach the Gospel. We are sent out to carry the word of God to others.

Now one of the ways Christianity has been unsuccessful in evangelizing is because we've tended to give formulas. Now some of you may have been trained in the "Four Steps," which was written by the Campus Crusade organization.

The problem is – it's like always using a screwdriver for everything. I pull out my formula and bam! But the formula does take in the moment. It doesn't take into consideration where the person is right now. Or what our relationship is like, or how can I most effectively share the Gospel with that person. Formula questions don't always work, like – if you died tonight, would you go to heaven? These don't allow the Holy Spirit to connect with us and that other person.

**1 Corinthians 14** is a great chapter about having church services and the times we come together. It says that we relate to one another in such a way that when new people come in they will say, "Wow, God is here." And the way we communicate with one another causes people to literally hear **"the secrets of their heart."**

Pastor Glen then related a story about when he and a group of pastors went together for three days of prayer and worship. And they put a chair in the middle of the room and they called it the "the lap of God."

And one particular pastor went out and sat in the chair because he was facing a particular difficult issue, which he prayed about. Then about 8-10 other pastors prayed for him. And it's amazing how afterwards, the pastor asked, "How did you know?" Things were said to him in those prayers that came right from the heart of God to him. God spoke to that particular pastor through the prayers of other pastors. Those prayers allowed God to minister to that pastor.

**16) "But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' 17) Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."**

Now so many people assume that the message is heard through the word of Christ – the New King James says the word of God – meaning the message is heard through hearing the Word or the Bible read.

But the Greek noun used here for "word of Christ" is not "logos" but "rhema." Now "rhema" means "an inspired moving of the word." In other words, it's the word of the moment. So when you talk to someone about the Gospel, you don't talk to them with a pre-determined formula, but rather you talk to them with the "word of the moment."

We need to ask God what is the "word of the moment" for this particular person? What's the "rhema" for this person? We need to ask God – what would you have me pray for this

person? Then you open your heart to God and begin to pray. And then just listen what God puts in your heart. And sometimes God will put things in your heart that you never knew before concerning the person. This allows God to speak to individuals and also to the church.

So when we pray for others, it's God's way to communicate with us. Don't be afraid to pray for one another. Don't be afraid of not knowing what to say. It's not about what you would say; it's about asking God to lead you how and what to pray. This allows God to speak to that person, to encourage them.

These kinds of prayers don't have to be profound. Many times the simplest things have the most profound impact on our lives. Pastor Glen encouraged us to pray for one another. If someone asks you to pray for them about some particular need or situation, pray for them right then and there on the spot, even in church. That would be a healthy situation for others to see our members praying for each other before and after services.

Yesterday as pastor Glen was putting the final touches on this sermon, he was on the Internet and he accidentally clicked on a pastor's blog. And what is so interesting is that what popped up on his screen was some information about the message he was going to give today. So here is what he found there.

*Both preaching and teaching are clearly used as ways of conversation. By conversation I am not thinking of an informal exchange, rather intimate acquaintance and relational life. Christoph Schwöbel leads us to a wonderful invitation in his Introduction to Colin Gunton's book, "Theology Through Preaching" by which I trust will delight your hearts regarding the beauty of divine conversation:*

*Luther was so bold as to suggest that communication is not only the paradigm for the relationship between God and his creation, but even more so the mode of the trinitarian life of God. There is, he [Luther] says, in the divine Trinity a pulpit: as God the Father is an eternal speaker, so the Son is spoken in eternity, and the Holy Spirit is an eternal listener. God's triune being is an eternal conversation (my emphasis), and since the Holy Spirit tells us what he hears, we are taken into this conversation.*

Pastor Glen then made these comments about this section. In essence this is saying that the Father tells Jesus; Jesus tells the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit tells us. The Holy Spirit is the "doer" of the Godhead. He's the accomplisher. That's why he lives in us.

So how did we get the New Testament? By the Holy Spirit telling men what to write. The Holy Spirit will tell us as a congregation how to connect with our neighborhood and how to function as a congregation.

*This is not merely talking but intimate relational life. Schwöbel continues,*

*The creation of the world and the story of God's interaction with his creation in Israel and in Jesus Christ is, therefore, about God creating other conversation-partners who are drawn into the conversation of the divine life, distinguished by their created existence but nevertheless enabled in Christ, the uncreated Word of God who became a human speaker and listener, to participate in this conversation.*

God is looking for new conversation partners – that’s us – to speak to us and allow us to speak to others through the Holy Spirit in us. The best way to connect to others is often through prayer – verbal prayer, out loud prayer to the person, because it has impact.

Now if we pray out loud before them, they can hear what the Holy Spirit is putting into our heart. And so prayer with the person is vital – to be part of that conversational partner with God, to allow the Holy Spirit to speak through us to that other person.

Now you can pray for someone and they would accept it. But if you were to say the exact same thing in a conversation, they would reject it. If you try to preach at them, their defenses go up. But you can ask, “May I pray for you?” And hardly anyone turns down prayer. They are more receptive to that. Did you know that most atheists will let you pray for them – just in case!

And so you can say the same thing in prayer and get by with it that you would not be able to say if you were just carrying on a conversation with them. That’s because their defenses go down while you are praying. And this allows the Holy Spirit to work through you and opens their heart to him. So God is looking for conversation partners.

Jesus, the Logos, came down from heaven and became one of us to become a participant in our prayer life, speaking life and listening life. Jesus said that he had done everything his Father had told him to do. How did he accomplish that? He listened. Then what did he do? He went and did. He prayed for people; he anointed people; he touched people; he put mud on their eyes. He acted in all kinds of ways to show what God had communicated to him.

We, as a congregation, need to connect with God so he can be speaking to us. Because God is saying, “Can you hear me now?” God not only wants us to hear him, but also the people we connect with to hear him as well. We can communicate with God through prayer.

And we can communicate God’s thoughts as we pray over people. Ask God to get yourself out of the way, before you begin to pray. Ask God to help you listen to the Holy Spirit so you can pray his thoughts for that person. God can say some amazing things in these situations.

So don’t take lightly how God wants to use you to pray for others. If people call you up, please pray for them right over the telephone if they ask for prayers. You can also pray for them privately afterwards. Now that’s not our culture very much. It takes some time to get use to that. This is a wonderful way for God to speak to us through others.

Now in a few moments we’re going to come to the communion table, which is another way God speaks to us. This is not a dead ceremony we come to. Partaking the bread and wine or grape juice is not just about a ceremony. It’s about God communicating to us. It’s about God touching our heart again.

Come to the table and ask God, “What are you saying to me today?” Maybe it’s a word of encouragement because you’ve gone through a hard time. When Jesus instituted the bread and the cup that night, it was important and meaningful to him.

And Jesus invites us today to come and partake of the bread, which we know from **Luke22**, that it’s a reminder of Jesus broken body for us. We know that Christ’s body

was beaten up and broken so that he can be with us during our suffering and relate to us. And so we take the bread to remind us of that.

And we also take the cup to remember his shed blood that forgives us. And no matter what we've done nor no matter what we will ever do, he forgives us. It's taken care of. And so we invite you to come to the table and listen to God. Open your heart to him and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you.

**Key Scripture: John 10:1-4, "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2) The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3) The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4) When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."**

**General Group Question:** How many different ways does God communicate with us? Describe several of them? How are they different? How are they similar?

**Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.**

1. As followers of Jesus, do we recognize his voice occasionally or often? How can we better hear the voice of Jesus more often in our lives?
2. How can we know that the voice we hear is from Jesus and not from the devil?
3. Is the main purpose of our prayers to inform God of a situation? If not, then what is the purpose of prayer?
4. When two or more people pray in a group, what happens? Are the prayers all the same?
5. Just before you pray for someone, what should you ask God to help you do? Why?
6. Could you briefly relate a situation where God inspired you to offer some information in your prayer to help another person that you were not unaware of?
7. When you have an opportunity to share the Gospel with someone, is it better to use a pre-determined formula or talk to them with the "word of the moment"?
8. Why is praying with someone often more effective in reaching that person with the Gospel than with clever arguments?
9. Could you briefly share with the group how God has recently talked with you?