

## **Series: Too Busy Not to Pray**

March 13, 2016

Stop, Look, Then Leap

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Some of you know that I have 3 children...2 girls and boy. This picture was taken in 1997 when they were ages 5, 3 and 6 months. They are cute aren't they? But don't let them fool you. They were 3 of the loudest children on the planet. For years the volume control in my house was set on maximum. The kids would shout, the phone would ring simultaneously the doorbell would chime which made my dog bark just as the clothes dryer would peal "the clothes are done!" And of course the t.v was always blasting.

In a futile attempt to be heard amid this domestic noise pollution I adopted what I thought was a vital coping strategy...If at first you don't succeed...yell a little louder!

But then...I lost it. It wasn't particularly sudden or surprising. I could it feel it happening. And it rendered me speechless. Thanks to a bad case of laryngitis I completely lost my voice.

I thought this was going to be a terrible handicap! What would happen now that I lost my reliable but admittedly rather ineffectual communication policy?

An amazing thing happened. My house got quiet.

My kids, who preferred to communicate by bellowing MOM from wherever they were in the house, actually came looking for me when I didn't bellow back.

And when they realized I couldn't speak...they got still and quiet and paid attention to me. Even though I couldn't speak to them audibly I was still able to communicate with them and they were still able to understand...by my presence, by my demeanor, by gestures...they understood me! I didn't have to shout. I didn't have to be bigger or louder than anything else in my house to be noticed.

I wonder what would happen if we treated communication with God the same way? We long to hear his voice but when we go to him in prayer are we bellowing at him for guidance? Are we expecting him to bellow back a reply? Will it be a bolt of lightning, a crack of thunder, a burning bush? It would have to be something big and dramatic...otherwise how could we hear him as we rush to the answer the door, or the phone, feed the dog, fold the clothes?

We are in week 4 of our message series Too Busy Not to Pray. We've looked at how we should be purposeful about taking rest "stops". We've looked at how we can pray using the ACTS model of adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication which means asking God what we want and last week Gloria added another S to ACTS, Submission, advising us to align ourselves to God's will when we pray.

This week we are going to look at prayer as more than just speaking to God or talking at him...it's about speaking **with** God and feeling his presence and promptings and acting on them even if we don't audibly hear his voice.

Have you ever audibly heard God's voice? I hear people say things like: The Lord told me to do this. God spoke to me about going here. God put this burden on my heart. God showed me this. God revealed this to me. But what if you don't hear God's voice? Does that mean he's not speaking to you?

Why doesn't God call us like he did Samuel?

Samuel heard God's voice. Samuel was a Prophet, Priest, Judge, Statesman, Leader – Samuel rallied the people of Israel during the last chaotic days of the Judges. Samuel was never a king. But he was a visionary and he made himself available to God. And his journey didn't start with a crack of thunder or bolt of lightning. It all started as a child, when he got quiet and listened for God's voice.

When Samuel was a little boy, he served the Lord under the direction of an elderly priest named Eli. Outside the Temple, Eli performed sacrifices on the altar while people gathered around to worship the Lord. Inside the Temple, sat the Ark of the Covenant. And little Samuel Eli's assistant. Those were evil times in Israel. "In those days," the Bible says, "the word of the Lord was rare: there were not many visions" (1 Samuel 3:1). It's not that God was silent. The people were not paying attention to Him. They went through the motions of worshipping but their hearts were attracted and distracted by idols and other gods.

One night as, Eli and Samuel sleep, Samuel is startled awake. "Here I am," the boy cries. "Here I am. Why did you call me?" Eli replies, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." An hour later his sleep is interrupted again, "I'm here," Samuel says, "At your service. What do you want?" Again, Eli says, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed."

Still a third time, Eli's slumber is disturbed, "Here I am. What do you want?" Eli must be thinking what the heck is this kid's problem? And then he remembers that Samuel sleeps in the Tabernacle, next to the Holy of Holies, next to the Ark of the Covenant. Could it be the Lord is speaking to Samuel? "Go and lie down, Samuel" Eli advises him, "and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening'" (1 Samuel 3:9). So Samuel laid down on his bed near the Ark. And the Lord came and stood over him and called, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel spoke into the darkness, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

And that little boy, Samuel, did listen. Even though at first he doesn't recognize it is God that is speaking...He made himself available to God. And it is the beginning of his relationship with God.

To have a personal relationship with God means we must be open to the fact that even if we don't hear God voice like Samuel did, he is guiding us. How do we make ourselves available to experience it?

When I joined Woodside 21 years ago I was baptized by Pastor Doug. Now this was a big deal for me. Most people are baptized as babies or youngsters. I wasn't really raised in a Christian household, we went to church sporadically, mostly Christmas and Easter, so coming to Woodside and making the decision to join this community was a small step for Christianity but a giant leap for Martha-kind. I kneeled down on the steps in the front of the sanctuary and Doug performed the sacrament of Baptism. I felt the water on my head, I waited and then I heard a voice in very distinctly in my ear..."You can get up now"...Doug whispered.

So...there was no crack of thunder, no voice from the clouds...I didn't hear God's voice. I actually have never audibly heard God's voice. But I do believe he was communicating with me then and is now... in the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit. My baptism was the beginning of my journey - spiritually I, like Samuel, was just a child. I had to learn what it meant to have a personal relationship with God. I had to learn how to be open to the possibility that God is prompting me and guiding me all the time, even if I don't always recognize his voice. I had to learn how to be available to his leadings.

I need to confess something about me and when I was baptized and joined Woodside. I was prepared to answer the questions of faith, which includes "Who is your Lord and Savior?" My head answered" Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior...but my in heart I answered: Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior...I think.

I think so. I think this is what I am supposed to do.

Now maybe you are thinking what's the big deal? You are just joining a church? But as much as I felt compelled to take that step in a way I felt I was stepping off a cliff. I couldn't say with 100% certainty that I understood what it meant to call Jesus Lord and Savior. I had no audible affirmation and I had some doubt.

But ultimately I decided to stop. Stop putting doubt first. Stop focusing on fears. Stop being distracted by busyness and make myself available to God.

And what I've come to understand over the last 21 years is that being baptized and joining the church in spite of my fears and doubts, became the platform from which God prompted me to take many more leaps - leaps which led to experiences and service, all of which He's used to bring me to this very moment in time. All because I said, Ok Lord. I think so. I think this is what I am supposed to do. So I'll leap.

Notice, I didn't say, I'm not gonna look Lord, I'm just gonna leap. Because I think you and I should look before we leap. Leaping doesn't mean we ignore reason or evidence. But understand that leaping might not be neat and tidy. It might take you out of your comfort zone. It can be scary. And we might not recognize where or why God wants us to leap. So sometimes we ignore it...we just go about the busyness of our lives. Or we wait for something audible or demonstrative for confirmation.

But If you spend too much time waiting or too much time looking or too much time on analysis it can lead you to paralysis and you may become a victim of, what Bill Hybels in his book, *To Busy Not to Pray*, calls “anti-supernaturalism”.

Bill defines this as “a dynamic espoused by folks who are squeamish about letting the Holy Spirit begin a supernatural ministry in their lives.” They wish for a package that was tied up a littler neater...to be quantified and described.” Page 132

God is indeed speaking to us today in a super natural way through the Holy Spirit. But

Bill Hybels says:

“Promptings from God seem elusive and mysterious, and the whole idea unnerves us. So some of us tend to resist...we analyze and conclude it isn't logical, therefore we won't pay attention to it.”

I can tell you that's it not one bit logical that I'm standing here today sharing God's word with you. I'm not seminary trained. I'm not a prophet. But it's due in large part because I was asked to leap out of my comfort zone in 2002 and be a youth leader for a trip to Creation Fest. There is nothing neat and tidy about Creation Fest. It's an outdoor Christian rock concert with campers, tents and porta potties. It is 5 days and 4 nights of hot sun, cold showers and crowds. It wasn't logical that I was asked to go on this trip; I didn't have kids in youth group. I couldn't have told you the name of one Christian singer or band. Maybe God prompted the trip leader, Ken Parker, to ask me. I don't know... But I didn't spend a lot analyzing. So I said “I think maybe God is prompting me to do this... I think so. I think this is what I am supposed to do. So yes, I'll go.

And it changed my life.

There was a huge thunderstorm and wind there but that's not where I heard God's voice. I actually didn't hear God's voice at all, but I experienced his presence in a way I never had before and as a result was prompted – no – compelled to become part of the praise team – to sing and help lead worship. Now, this was not one bit logical. I sang in the shower, I sang around the house, I sang in the car. I didn't “sing”. I didn't even attend the contemporary worship service.

But a day after returning home from Creation Fest I went to Darlene Stevens, the leader of this ministry, and told her about my compulsion. She was very sweet and polite as she asked me what my experience was.

None. That was the extent of my experience...I never stood up before anybody and sang or spoke publicly. I'm not saying I was completely void of some natural singing ability although Darlene did suggest I would benefit from some voice lessons. But the bottom line is I was prompted and I acted upon it even though it wasn't really logical. And, according to Bill Hybels this should be all our mind set.

“When God tells us do something, as long as it’s within the limits set by Scripture, we don’t have to understand it. All we need to do is obey...and then trust God to use our obedience to accomplish his will.” Page146

So I obediently took voice lessons.

Now, if I had come home from Creation Fest and suggested to my husband we sell our house and belongings and move our family to Hollywood so I could pursue my fame and fortune as a singer it would be safe to say that was NOT a Godly prompting.

As Bill says, a prompting is from the Holy Spirit when it calls me to humble myself, serve somebody, encourage somebody or give something away.

Page 152

John Orbterg says: The promptings of the Spirit are generally in line with the gifts the Spirit gives. If somebody says, "I want to sing in the choir," but they have a terrible voice, that is probably not the Spirit leading them.

Remember I told you I took voice lessons.

Here’s something else I’d like to say about leaping as a result of God’s promptings...we leap with trust even when we don’t know for sure what will happen. Because here’s what is for sure...If you don’t leap you will never know.

I could have ignored it. And no one would have been the wiser.

Bill writes: “Promptings are intensely private phenomena. You get them and I get them, but unless we share them, nobody knows what we do with them.” Page 147

I could have come home to my family, my laundry, my loud house and barking dog. I could have said...I need to analyze this, is this really from God...? Where is my thunderclap or raging wind of affirmation? I could have waited for confirmation from his still small voice or simply waited for the prompting to pass. But all that analysis not only invites paralysis...it also invites a different small voice to speak to you... the voice that says who do you think you are? You’re not a praise leader...you’re not a leader at all...in fact you’re a different kind of “L” altogether.

And I can tell you in all honestly if that is what I did, I wouldn’t be standing here today sharing God’s word.

Because I wouldn’t have joined this church I wouldn’t have been asked to go to Creation Fest so I wouldn’t have started singing and leading worship which led me to writing and led me to acting in crazy VBS skits led me to being on staff here which led me to be a part of the sermon writing team. Why am I on the sermon writing team? It’s not logical – I’m not a preacher I am not theologically trained. Nor was it logical when I said at one of

those sermon writing meetings: “I think we should raise up lay leaders to deliver the Sunday messages!”

Oh...I didn't mean me per say....I was just saying that we should raise up SOMEONE.

Let me offer a word of caution here about promptings...sometimes they do come out audibly...of your own mouth!

So here I am. I can't honestly say when I'm asked to deliver the message I don't think “Oh Boy Oh Yay, I can't wait!”

I do not say that. But I am humbled and grateful for the opportunity because I always learn something new and different about myself but more importantly, about God. It's a small step for Christianity, but always a giant leap for my spiritual and personal growth all because I responded to a God-given prompting with I think so. I think this is what I am supposed to do. So yes God. I'll go.

When promptings come I encourage you to do the same. Say: Here I am Lord, send me! Maybe he'll prompt you to leap to Haiti, or the D.R. or the Bahamas, or Urban Promise in Trenton, or Appalachia, or the next cubicle or to your neighbor or a homeless camp or a soup kitchen or maybe Creation Fest!

If it's for God you will never be sorry you took the leap. But you may just find yourself growing and excited about what God can and will empower you to do.

What are you going to do when you think God is prompting you? Bill Hybles advises we listen for all we are worth, even if his prompt is not an audible voice in your ear. And that we:

“Roll the spiritual dice and take a faith gamble. Say yes to cooperating with God even if it seems risky or illogical.”

I did. It changed my life. And I can say I know, without question who my Lord and Savior is. Stop, Look and then Take a leap. I promise He can change your life too.