

Deeper – Listen to God: Open Up
October 15, 2017
Title: You have the Wrong Number
Text: Acts 9:10-19

Sometimes I am amazed at the speed of the change of technology. In 1903 the Wright Brothers made the first controlled, sustained flight of a powered, heavier-than air aircraft of 852 feet. And then, a mere 66 years later, NASA succeeded in travelling 238,900 miles and landing a man on the moon.

And then there are telephones. When I was younger, phones were a little different than today.



Wait – that’s not right. I’m not that old.



That’s better. But you can see, there was no place, or technology, that would post a phone number. And there was no answering machine. If you didn’t answer the phone, you didn’t know who called. I remember one time, shortly after Michelle and I were married. For more than a week, every night between midnight and 2:00 am, we’d get a call from somebody asking for Roger. I’d explain that he had the wrong number. He’d argue some nights – others he’d just hang up. Every night I knew it would be the same guy. But what if it wasn’t? What if it were a family emergency? I had to answer to make sure. Today, we can check the caller ID and see if we know the person calling. Or we can screen our calls and listen to a message and decide what to do. We can even block numbers that we don’t want coming through to us. And since there was no answering machine or voice mail, the caller could just let the phone ring, and ring, and ring...

Yesterday's wrong numbers are more likely to appear in other ways. Text messages for example.

- Cables & cats



- Wrong # from Sophia



- House on fire



Or by e-mail

A Minneapolis couple decided to go to Florida to thaw out during a particularly icy winter. They planned to stay at the same hotel where they spent their honeymoon 20 years earlier.

Because of their hectic schedules, it was difficult for the couple to coordinate their travel plans. So the husband left Minnesota and flew to Florida on Thursday, while his wife planned to fly down the following day.

The husband checked into the hotel. There was a computer in his room, so he decided to send an email to his wife. However, he accidentally left out one letter of her email address, and sent the email without realizing his error.

Meanwhile, somewhere in Houston, a widow had just returned home from her husband's funeral. He was a Baptist minister who was called home to glory following a heart attack.

The widow decided to check her email, expecting condolence messages from family and friends.

But after reading her very first email, she screamed and fainted.

The widow's son rushed into the room, found his mother on the floor, and saw the computer screen which read:

To: My Loving Wife

Subject: I've Arrived

Date: March 21, 2012

I know you're surprised to hear from me. They have computers here now and you are allowed to send emails to your loved ones. I've just arrived and have been checked in.

I've seen that everything has been prepared for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then! Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was.

P. S. Sure is hot down here!!!

How about when God calls you? Maybe not audibly (although who's to say we can't?), but feeling that He is directing you in some way that either you can't understand, scares you or is just something you don't want to do. How do you react? Do you check that caller ID, and refuse to take the call? Do you answer, and then spend most of the conversation trying to convince Him, although really more yourself, that He has the wrong number? That this isn't your "strength". That we actually know better than he does?

A number of years ago I completed a "What are your Spiritual Gifts questionnaire." I think it came back with 5 strengths. Three of them I could understand: Leadership, writing and serving. They made sense to me. The other two??

One of them was music. My daughter Lizz laughed out loud when I told her. Now I'm okay with raising up my hands during worship. And I can clap – as long as it is not too complicated a clap. But music, as a spiritual gift? I sing just loud enough so that the person next to me can't hear me. And yet when I once shared this with Doug he pointed out that through my ministry work with CLPRM, I've been blessed to be able to bring many outside worship bands to Woodside.

Speaking of which, let's not forget that Dave Pettigrew will be returning to Woodside for a night of worship on Saturday, November 18th. Tickets are available now!

The other one that surprised me was, Evangelism. I even had to look it up, just to confirm what I thought it truly meant. And I was right.

e·van·ge·lism (*noun*) - the spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness.

Really? How so, I thought. Well it wasn't that many years after that I found myself preaching at a prison chapel, followed by a couple of times preaching on a street corner of the Dominican Republic. And of course recently I have been asked to join the sermon rotation here.

Most of us know the story of Saul, who became Paul. Saul was a devout Jew, a Pharisee and quite possibly a member of the Sanhedrin. Saul was probably considered a zealot in his time - we would probably call him a terrorist today, and was on his way to Damascus to track down, arrest and persecute followers of the way - Christians. During his travels he experiences Jesus and is struck blind and told to go on to the city. Let's pick up the story.

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

Let's stop here. There appeared to be no hesitation at all on Ananias's part. He knew immediately who was calling him. That is an important point and indicates that Ananias had a relationship with Jesus at this point. Like Jesus referred to in John 10:27, "My sheep know my voice," Ananias knew His voice. And he accepted the call.

¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

Ok. So now Ananias has another choice to make. He can continue the conversation, or he can just assume Jesus has the wrong number and press "End Call." This is the spot where many of us hear the suggestion, the idea, to do something that we are not comfortable with and immediately decide that it's not for us. We name it differently. It's not my gift. I wouldn't know how. You have the wrong person. I'm scared.

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

Look at it again. Ananias is explaining things to Jesus. He is effectively saying, "Have you read the press releases on this guy? Do you have any idea who he is? Maybe you should re-check your schedule." I guess he figured Jesus would come back with, "So sorry Ananias. You're right. Rocco is on the schedule to go meet Saul. I need you to go to Elm Street. Little Isaiah fell down and skinned his knee."

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

Ananias tried to talk his way out of it. He preferred that his service to God was on his own terms, but Jesus showed him the truth. He said, “Go!”, and then even took the time to explain why. I did like the way that he through in verse 16. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” Nice touch.

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Ananias was frightened of Saul and he didn’t want anything to do with him. But he overcame his fear and took the steps that God told him to. God doesn’t promise us easy, or painless, or even safe.

When we are given a chance to serve there are steps to be taken.

- Look to God, and listen. An important part of our faith walk is building that relationship with Him. Because of what Jesus did for us, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can now have that direct relationship. But it is not something that just appears one day because you commit to following Jesus. Like any relationship that we have, it is something to work at. Reading God’s Word, and speaking with Him daily allows that connection to grow stronger. In this way we learn His voice and begin to better recognize when He is telling us something.
- Talk to other believers – especially family. This is important for a couple of reasons. As we begin our walk we have not built that relationship with God yet. Sometimes we need the help, or guidance, from others for understanding. That’s why having a mentor, and a bible study group, is so important. Advice, different views and accountability are important always, but especially early on. And discussing with family is important because often our decisions affect others as well.
- Make a decision – Take a chance. You can listen and discuss as much as you want, but at the end of the day you need to make a decision. And to put it simply: that decision ends up being a step towards God, or away from him.

I want to finish with a couple of personal examples that I’ll refer to as, “The good, the bad and the ugly.” I wish I had thought of this section before I turned in my power point. If I had, you would see a picture of Clint Eastwood up there now.

The Bad – The first year that Woodside participated in code blue, a request was delivered to us to sign up for the training program. It was a one hour training that anybody that wanted to participate in the program were required to take. Not taking it meant you could not sign up to help. When I heard about it, I immediately thought, “I’m busy at work, I have family obligations and hey, I’m already volunteering/serving in a number of ways. I don’t have time for another thing.” So I decided not to do it. A week or so later I was thinking about it and came to a realization. What if there was a night that code blue was called and there was one open slot that had to be filled. And what if I was available for that shift, but because I had not taken the training, I could not fill it, and consequently the church would not be able to open its doors? I

also realized that I had nothing planned that Saturday morning the training was being held. I went. It wasn't that I believe I have to sign up for everything. What I faced was the fact that I had made this decision without praying about it, and really, without even thinking about it. I've only served at code blue a few times, when I see an opening for something soon where I have availability on my schedule.

The Ugly – One Sunday in 2007 Woodside had a Mission Sunday. That was a Sunday service where leaders of mission trips that year shared a few minutes during the Sunday Worship Services about where their mission trip went and what they did. I believe there were 4 trips that year: The Dominican Republic, the Bahamas, Pittsburgh and I think South Carolina. All were interesting, but the DR trip really grabbed me. I can only explain it by saying that the Holy Spirit spoke to me that morning. I was so moved by it that immediately after the service I tracked Judy down and told her to put me down for the 2008 trip – period! Then, I went and told Michelle. Not the right move. Why? Because the decision affected Michelle as well as me. There was the cost of the trip. Since the trip would be in the summer, it would probably mean that I couldn't take additional time off for a family vacation. It just was a decision that I should have shared with her before volunteering. We should have discussed it.

The Good – This last February, Michelle and I were sharing our testimony about losing Jimmy at a recovery house in Frankford. We saw a lot of pain and hopelessness that night. On the way home, Michelle pointed out that the people down there struggling with their addiction problems need something besides the day-to-day meetings, counseling and programs. Most of them are stuck in an area where they are surrounded by the drug problem and don't have the means to get to such things as the Conquering Grounds coffee house in Bensalem, or the quarterly recovery service here. She suggested that maybe we could bring a coffee house to them. We talked about it some more. I prayed about it that night, and the next morning asked her if she was serious about the idea. She said she was. So I contacted Billy Donnelly from Addictions Victorious and shared the idea with him. He was excited about it and made a phone call. It may have been later that same day, or at the most the next morning, when he called me back and told me he had spoken with Pastor Jon at St Mark's, Frankford, and that he would be glad to offer his church for us to use. We began working on logistics and on June 9th we held our first Recovery Café with the Travis Lee Band. This last Friday we had our fifth successful coffee house and I'm just thrilled with how God has used us.

One common thing I have noticed wherever I've served is that while it is true that our service gives us the opportunity to bless others, most of the time I come away wondering if it is fair that I feel I've received more blessings than what I've given. There are many among us that go through life wondering where God is going to lead us. And the decisions that we make are often: not now; maybe later; no. And then we wonder, "Why didn't God give me something to do." Next time he calls; don't assume it's a wrong number. Take the call.

Let's pray.