



Confirmation Prayer Retreat

Session 2: The Still, Small Voice in a Loud, Chaotic World

SUPPLIES: Timer; Candle and matches; sanctuary or other prepared place for the class to sit silently for 12 minutes.

INTRO

- As we talked about in the first session, Jesus tells the disciples what the components of prayer look like. And when we include these components in our praying, then our prayer life is more likely to be a powerful experience.
- One of the components is asking. If we're having a conversation and we ask a question, and we want an answer, what do we have to do? Wait for it, right?
- And there are some things that make waiting for an answer from God a pretty hard thing. We're going to talk some about those obstacles to waiting for an answer from God in this session.

ASK

- Thinking mechanically, what are some methods we use to transmit communication? (wires, wireless, radio waves, light waves, smoke signals, etc).
- No matter what the method, we can agree on one thing, right? That in order for communication to be transmitted, a message has to be sent and it has to be received, right?
- What are some things that can disrupt transmission? (static, obstacles, loss of power, interference from other forms of communication, storms, solar flares, etc)
- Now, let's think about how God communicates with us.
- What would you say, thinking biologically, is the communication center of the body? (the brain)
- Let's assume that our communication center is not just for us to communicate between one another.
- Let's say our communication center is also there for us to be able to receive messages from God.
- First, how might God send those messages? (Through the scripture stories. Through others – but how do they know what God's saying? By sending wireless communication to our brains in the forms of thoughts, ideas and insights – aka prayer)
- Second – what might disrupt the transmission? (interference from other forms of communication; not knowing there's a message to be received; distraction; noise/static, lack of practice).
- Third, when you're in a conversation with someone else, what are some things you need to do in order to listen well? (repeat what you hear, make eye contact, reduce or remove distractions, think ahead of time about what you want to say, ask questions that clarify areas you aren't fully clear about, don't interrupt).
- Let's look at a scripture story where a prophet, Elijah, is told to listen for God.

1 Kings 19:11 – 16 11 The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, and I will speak to you there." When Elijah heard this, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not heard in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not heard in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the

Lord was not heard in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 13 Then in the silence came a still small voice to Elijah that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14 He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking to take away my life, also." 15 Then the Lord said to him, "Go, return home. When you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. 16 Also you shall anoint Jehu as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha as your student to become a prophet and take your place later on."

ASK/TELL

- Where is Elijah told to go in verse 11? (on the mountain)
- What is he told to do in verse 11? (go on the mountain and stand at attention before God)
- When Elijah does this, what does he experience? (wild wind, an earthquake, a fire and then silence)
- So what do you think about Elijah being in this very unlikely string of natural disasters?
- I encourage us to consider the perspective that these natural disasters are literary devices used to demonstrate the distractions we experience *internally* when seeking to be still and hear God's voice.
- Once Elijah does hear God's voice, what does God tell Elijah to do? (anoint people as kings; get a student)
- So what do you think about this as a response to Elijah's complaint about being alone and all the other prophets having been killed? (basically, God is telling Elijah that he, Elijah, is going to be God's answer to Elijah's complaint by "growing" another prophet, and in the process, not being alone.

EXPLANATION OF ACTIVITY

- So in this story, we see that as Elijah is quiet, he experiences a number of storms before he can hear God.
- This is a pretty typical experience when we try to be quiet and listen in prayer – we are (often) inundated with thoughts and ideas that are not about God or listening to God. Our minds can be quite stormy.
- And the way to get through this "stormy-ness" is be still and wait.
- Also, the more often we practice being still is that the stormy-ness, though always available, weakens.
- So, today, what we're going to do is go to the sanctuary.
- Once there, each of us needs to find a seat that is away from each other, because we can sometimes be distractions to one another
- Once we're seated, I'm going to light a candle up at the front of the sanctuary (or say "Go" or something that says, "We're starting.")
- Once that candle is lit, then we are going to be silent for 12 minutes.
- During that 12 minutes, practice inviting God into what we'll call your "inner self."
- A good way to do this is to think about your breathing as a way of inviting God into yourself.
- Imagine that you are breathing God in and breathing out the wind storms and earthquakes that are inside you.
- This is similar to what we talked about in class with the lesson with the Nooma video, "Breathe" (remember, where he calls us "holy dirt clods?")
- As you do this, you might notice that your mind will be tempted, or just will, wander.

- Take note of your wandering mind/thoughts (don't get mad at yourself) and then remind yourself to go back to focusing on your breathing.
- Once I blow out the candle then we'll come back downstairs quietly and we'll talk some about the experience.
- Any questions?

DO Silence activity

Return to Class area

ASK

- Was being *in* the quiet hard?
- Did being in the quiet make the thoughts in your mind louder?
- Did you like your thoughts being louder?
- Did you get to a point at all when your mind went quieter or more focused?
 - When this happened, did you feel or think anything about God?
- Throughout your conscious/awake day, how much silence do you think you experience?

TELL

- Our own thoughts can be pretty loud sometimes.
- And sometimes, we don't like our thoughts.
- So we might seek out ways to ignore those thoughts – by being busy or being loud.
- But when we do that, then we're also making it that much harder for God to speak to us directly.
- If we practice listening to God's voice, then we get better at hearing it.
- Over the course of time and practice, we can come to hear God's voice even when the world is loud around us.
- But for that to happen, we first have to spend time listening in the silence.
- So I encourage you to find time each day, 5 to 10 minutes a day, to be silent and still and breathe.
- Give yourself a chance to recognize that God is with you during your busy day.

That's the END OF SESSION 2

Take a break. Lunch is next, at <insert time>. Session 3 is at <insert time>.