



Confirmation Prayer Retreat

Session 3: Listening to God

Supplies: TV and DVD player; Nooma video: *Open* by Rob Bell; paper and writing utensils

TELL

- In the first two sessions, we've talked about the five components of the Lord's Prayer as well as the "storms" that come up and cause interference when we're trying to be still and listen for/to God.
- In this session, we're going to talk some about prayer as conversation with God.
- So let's start out by talking about conversations.

ASK (possible answers in parenthesis)

- For what reasons do we talk with each other? (transfer of information; a way to grow closer/a form of intimacy; a way to express/relieve what's inside of us)
- When we converse with each other, what are the two main actions that we alternate between – what are those two actions? (talking and listening)
- Overall, do you think you listen more or talk more in conversations?
- Thinking of prayer as conversation, do you think you talk more or listen more when praying?
- Continuing to think of prayer as conversation, for what reasons do you think God listens to us?
- And once more, still thinking of prayer as conversation, for what reasons might God want us to listen to what God has to say?

TELL

- Once we start thinking about prayer in general or as a conversation, certain questions can arise, such as, "Does God answer prayer? And if so, *how*? And what happens if God says to do something I don't want to do? How do I know if I am hearing God correctly?"
- We're going to at this time watch a video as a way to continue our discussion about prayer as conversation.
- The video is part of the Nooma Video Series by a pastor by the name of Rob Bell. You've seen a few of his Nooma videos in class.
- In this video, Bell talks about prayer, mostly as he walks down a road with cars backed up on one side. I'm going to tell you what's happening ahead of time so that you can focus on his words a little bit more, rather than try and figure out what the unfolding story is about:
 - There's a car accident, and that's why the cars are backed up. The hospital scene is of the people who were in the accident. They are banged up, but alive.

WATCH Nooma ~ Open ~ by Rob Bell

ASK

- Let's talk about some of the questions Bell asks in the video:
 - "If God's gonna do what God's gonna do, then why pray?" What do you think?

- “Do you believe God has invited you to take part in the ongoing creation of the world?”
 - “If so, what does that mean in your day-to-day life?”
- “Do you feel comfortable being honest with God?”
- “Are you angry with God about something that’s happened in your life?”
- “Do you tell friends and family what you’re feeling but not God? Why or why not?”

Tell

- There’s a perspective of God that portrays God as this entity that we send prayers up to and then we expect God to respond by pulling certain strings to make things happen down here. The question of “Why did God let one baby live and not another” fits this perspective.
 - In many ways, this is a *Santa Claus* perspective of God. We send letters to the North Pole, explaining what we want and why we should receive it. Then we wait for that thing to arrive. And when the requested thing doesn’t arrive, we wonder what we did wrong and why Santa Claus hates us...Did the baby die because we aren’t *good* enough? Did the baby live because I prayed so well?
- A different perspective, though, is the perspective of us being in a relationship with God. This perspective of God allows God to walk through a situation with us. The focus becomes less about *why* a certain thing is happening (i.e. Why did or didn’t God let this happen) and becomes more about *what* to do and *how* to do it (e.g. Ok, God, what are you calling me to do next?).
 - But in order for this perspective to work, we need to be in actual conversation with God.
 - Is that actually possible? Can God hear us? Can we hear God?
- The short answer is, yes, God can hear us and we can hear God.
- We’re going to focus more on the listening part.
- God speaks not so much into our ears, but into our minds and hearts by using imagery, thoughts, and feelings.
- To listen to God has similar requirements when listening to friends:
 - We have to take the Time to listen – we have to set aside the distractions, be quiet, focus on the conversation, and ask clarifying questions.
 - And, we have to do it often (Practice): The relationship with a friend won’t very strong if you only interact with him/her during crisis moments or just once a month or if you’re the only who talks.
- As you practice listening for God’s voice, you will get better at recognizing God’s voice.
- But this brings up the question, whose voice you are hearing: “How do you know if it is God or some other voice - my own, my parents, the ad on TV last night?”

Some Guidelines to help answer “How do I know it is God?”

- Does the voice and message keep coming? (God is persistent/consistent)
- Is the voice and message consistent with what Jesus (Bible) reveals about how God works? (i.e. God does not call us to exclude, kill, etc.)
- Do I feel a sense of peace about it? (Holy Spirit gives peace within)
- When I discuss with others who are also seeking God/Christ - what do they say as they pray for and with you about this? (God speaks through others)

TELL

- We’re going to do an experiment now of having a conversation with God.

- **Instructions:** On one side of the paper is a place for your prayers - - questions, complaints, thanks, etc. On the other side is a place for you to write what you imagine God would say or hear God saying through your own thoughts.
- We will spend 7 minutes in this exercise.
- Just write whatever comes. And write it like a conversation. Write a question or statement and pretend what you think God might say back to you.
- As words come, don't stop them. Once the conversation is done, come back to the words and use the guidelines to help distinguish God's voice versus other voices.

DO/PRACTICE LISTENING (7 minutes)

MY VOICE OF PRAYER

GOD'S VOICE IN PRAYER

ASK

- What was your experience of this?
- Would anyone care to share excerpts of their writing?

TELL

- Try this prayer practice in the days to come and see what happens.

This is the end of Session 3.

We're going to take a ___ minute break.

Be back here at <insert time> for the start of Session 4.