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Luke 24:13-35  
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### How to Hear God<sup>1</sup>

The first time that I recall hearing God speak was when I was a newly commissioned naval officer attending school in San Diego. It was such an exciting time of life. And I lived with a buddy in an apartment right on the Sunset Cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean. We were so close to the water that thirty feet below my bedroom window was the crashing of the waves against the cliffs. I loved that place!

On my last night in San Diego before heading out for the next stage of my adventure in Newport, Rhode Island, I was very sad about leaving. So I stood out on my deck, poured out my heart to God and looked out at the stars, and I heard, “Chris, I have great plans for you.” And I had this sense of peace, knowing that God was with me as I went.

The next day, I left San Diego with this anticipation of how God’s adventure was about to unfold.

Author, pastor, and founder of the 24/7 Prayer movement of which the Lectio 365 App was born, Pete Greig in his book, *How to Hear God, A Simple Guide for Normal People*, says that “Nothing could possibly matter more than learning to discern the voice of God, but few things in life are more susceptible to delusion and deception.”<sup>2</sup>

And so how could I know that what I had heard many hears ago back in San Diego was actually the voice of God and not just something I had made up in my head? That is what we are turning our attentions to over the course of the next ten weeks. We will be using Pete Greig’s book as a guide throughout this series and discussing it during our Adult Sunday school hour. If you haven’t gotten the book, I highly encourage you to do so. I especially appreciate the tag line, “A simple guide for normal people” because it implies that ordinary people like you and me can hear God, and not just the Mother Theresa’s or Billy Grahams of the world. But you and me!

This morning we will be considering Luke 24:13-35 which frames much of Pete Greig’s thoughts. It’s a familiar story about two disciples who were walking

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<sup>1</sup> This series follows along with and adapts much of the content taken from concepts in Pete Greig’s book, *How to Hear God, A Simple Guide for Normal People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Pete Greig, *How to Hear God, A Simple Guide for Normal People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022), backside of the book jacket.

home from Jerusalem on the Road to Emmaus the same day immediately after Jesus' resurrection. Listen now for the Word of the Lord.

**13** Now that same day two of [Jesus' disciples] were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. **14** They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. **15** As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; **16** but they were kept from recognizing him.

**17** He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. **18** One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

**19** "What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. **20** The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; **21** but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. **22** In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning **23** but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. **24** Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

**25** He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! **26** Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" **27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

**28** As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. **29** But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

**30** When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. **31** Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. **32** They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

**33** They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together **34** and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." **35** Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

This morning we are going to look more at this story in more depth and ask the following questions. What kept these two disciples from recognizing Jesus as they walked and talked along the way? How did they come to authenticate that it was actually Jesus? What was it that “opened” their eyes? And that will lead us to then answer several follow up questions for ourselves. What might be keeping us from hearing God in our ordinary lives? How can we come to authenticate that what we are hearing is actually from God? How can we open our eyes and ears to recognize when God is speaking to us?

What kept these two disciples from recognizing Jesus as they walked and talked?

One can assume that if these were two of Jesus’ disciples that if he had come up to them that they would have recognized their rabbi. They would have known his voice, his looks, what he wore, and even his walking gate. Much of his teaching was a long the way as they walked together. So all sorts of alarms should have been going off in their heads.

“Ding, ding, ding!!! It’s Jesus!” But they didn’t.

They were “kept” from recognizing him.

Sometimes our rational minds can keep us from recognizing God when God speaks. In this case, certainly their rational minds, as they were walking and processing all that they had just experienced with Jesus told them that Jesus was dead and buried. At this point in Luke’s account of the resurrection, Jesus had not appeared to anyone of them. The disciples at the tomb were left bewildered, wondering what had happened.

The Greek word for wondering is *thaoumazon*. There are some 44 occurrences in the Greek New Testament. It means to admire, or marvel as in one who was struggle to put all the pieces together to form a coherent picture or thought. Certainly these two disciples were still in this sense of wonder themselves. Was Jesus’ disappearance from the grave a robbery? Was it a terrible trick being played on them by the religious leaders? Or was it something else that was going on?

So certainly their human understanding could have kept them from recognizing him.

It could have been that they were so focused in their conversation that that kept them from recognizing Jesus. Have you ever experienced that yourselves that you were so caught up in conversation with someone that you seemed oblivious to the noise or presence of other people?

Sometimes I think it can also be our misunderstanding and misplaced expectations that cloud our perspective. Notice how when they were telling Jesus about what had just transpired in Jerusalem, they revealed their hopes and dreams

for Jesus. Verse 21, “But we had hoped that he was the one who would redeem Israel.” They were disappointed when their expectations for the Messiah didn’t come to fruition as they had hoped. Israel was still an occupied nation. Nothing had changed. Jesus was a great disappointment.

Still, I think verse 17 provides the most reliable insight as to what kept them from recognizing Jesus. Grief. Notice how when Jesus came up alongside and asked them what they were talking about, it says, “They stood still, their faces downcast.”

The Greek word for stood still is *histemi*. It means literally to stop dead in one’s tracks as if in a trance. The Greek word for downcast is *skythrowpoi*. It means gloomy or affecting a mournful appearance.

So we get this picture that these two disciples were still so overcome with grief that it kept them from recognizing Jesus.

Certainly God wasn’t the one who was keeping them from recognizing Jesus. No! God wants to communicate with us. In fact, in the Old Testament alone there are some 2,000 phrases like “God spoke to Moses,” “the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah,” or more simply “God said.”

I love how Jesus didn’t force himself upon them, however. But he did ask a lot of questions. “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” “What things happened?” “Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”

Let us be certain of this. Whenever Jesus asks a question, it is never because he doesn’t know the answer to the question to it. He asks to see if we know the answers to his questions.

So how then did Jesus actually authenticate that it was actually he himself who was walking and talking with them?

Pete Greig said it was a “Bible Study.” Verse 27 says, “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” The phrase “Moses and all the Prophets” was a common way of designating the entire Old Testament.<sup>3</sup>

They studied the entire Old Testament. Talk about a lengthy sermon. I don’t ever want to hear how long-winded I may be at times. Apparently Jesus literally has all the time in the world!!! Amen!

How fascinating that must have been! To hear how everything from the beginning of time pointed not only to Jesus’ coming, but to his death and resurrection. Why he had to suffer those things and then enter into his glory.

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<sup>3</sup> *NIV Archeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), Footnote 24:27, 1717.

Now something at this point was clearly stirring within themselves because later they talked about how their hearts were burning within them as Jesus talked with them on the road and opened up the Scriptures to them.

But still they were not aware that it was Jesus who was talking with them.

What then we ask was it that “opened” their eyes to his real presence?

It was physically participating in something they had experienced time and time again with Jesus throughout the years. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Verse 30 says’, “When Jesus was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them.” Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

The Greek word for opened is *dianokethansan*. It means to open thoroughly, literally as first born. The Greek word for recognized is *epiknosen*. It means to be fully acquainted with.

The picture that comes to mind for me is that first moment after a baby is just born and it looks up at its mother or father with these big beautiful newborn eyes. They know their parents’ voices but have yet to be able to put a face to the voice. There is a sense of deep wonder as they make that connection in a brand new way.

That’s what happened with the disciples. It’s like they were newly born, as if they were really “seeing” Jesus for the very first time after having heard his voice for so long.

And as soon as they knew him, he disappeared from their sight.

They got up, ran back to Jerusalem, and told the Apostles and the others that they had really “seen” the Lord!

And that’s the way it is sometimes when God speaks to us. You wonder, ask questions like “Did I really just hear that? Or was it my imagination.” Somehow, like these disciples, when one has an encounter with the living Christ, you just know it...and you can’t keep it to yourself.

So with this in mind, let us see how this might apply to us.

What might be keeping us from hearing God in our ordinary lives? Like these disciples, it could be grief.

It could be our Biblical ignorance. Maybe we just don’t know God’s word enough to be able to discern whether or not what we are hearing is actually from God. The truth is that God will never contradict what is written in God’s word. That means we need to know it.

I am super excited about two things that are starting soon.

The Women’s Bible Study will be starting up on Monday September 25 with both a morning and evening option on the same day. Dian Poujade will be leading discussions on Laurie Polich Short’s book, Faith, Doubt and God’s Mysterious Timing. This is an incredible opportunity to learn, grow, and process God’s Word

with other women in our congregation. This will definitely complement what we will be learning on Sunday mornings.

And also, we are going to start a new once monthly Saturday morning Men's Bible Study and Breakfast here at the church. We will meet for food, fellowship, a short devotional. We will see what this could become. We will announce our first date soon.

Another thing that hinders our ability to hear God could be unrealistic expectations. We can be certain that God wants to speak to and with us. But this is not something we can control or contain. God is free to communicate however and whenever God chooses. We just need to be open and receptive when it happens.

It could be being too busy and distracted. In C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, the young demon named Wormword is worried that his new Christian charge was getting too involved in their church. Screwtape tells him, "Don't worry about that. Just get them so busy that they don't have time to let anything register." [My paraphrasing of the text]. And so we can be so busy and distracted from doing even good things that we can't hear God when God speaks.

Fear could create another barrier to hearing God. "Fear is from the enemy. Faith is from God. Fear has a way of distorting truth and eats away at what God is doing in our lives. When we are afraid, it's difficult to discern whose voice we are hearing. We need to have faith that Scripture is true. If we are God's children, we can hear and know His voice, and triumph over the voice of the Liar."<sup>4</sup>

Pride or over self-confidence could also be a barrier. When we say, "We don't need God. We can do it ourself. We don't need to hear from God." God, like a good parent, can back away, and say "Ok, let's see how that works out for you."

Another barrier could be shame. Shame tells us that we aren't good enough or worthy enough for God to speak to us, so why bother to listen. "Sometimes people allow shame, condemnation or a sense of unworthiness to make them feel as though they are separated from God and therefore, unable to hear God's voice."<sup>5</sup>

And finally our sin-consciousness could be blocking our ability to hear God clearly. Now we believe that Jesus destroyed the dividing wall of hostility between us and God. So God sees us as forgiven people. But nothing will blind the eyes of OUR hearts more than a blatant disregard of God's way for our lives.

So let us keep short accounts of sin and exercise the discipline of repentance.

How can we authenticate that what we are hearing is actually from God?

Psalm 109 says, "Your Word is a light to my feet and a light for my path."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Blessed Transgressions Website, March 15, 2019 at <https://blessedtransgressions.org/eight-hindrances-gods-voice/>

<sup>5</sup> IBID.

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 109:105

The Apostle Paul exhorted young Timothy, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”<sup>7</sup>

And to the Hebrews, Paul wrote “In the past God spoke to our forefathers and mothers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom God appointed heir of all things, and through whom God made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of God’s being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”<sup>8</sup>

So we can tell that we are hearing God when it is confirmed by God’s word as spoken to us by Jesus Christ.

When I recall God’s voice on that wintry night San Diego back in 1990, God’s word spoken through the Prophet Jeremiah confirm that it was actually God. “For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future.”<sup>9</sup>

Again, God will never contradict his written Word with what he says to us!

And finally what can we do to open our eyes and ears in order to recognize when God is actually speaking to us? We can come here to church. Weekly worship is the minimal spiritual diet to sustain God’s people. For it is at this table when we share in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, that the Jesus feeds spiritually from his real presence of his body and his blood. And we believe that as we take Jesus in, we become like him through the power of his Holy Spirit that lives within us.

So, in closing, let us serious consider joining either the Men’s or Women’s Bible study later this month. “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. And let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”<sup>10</sup>

As we do that, God will speak.

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 1:1-3

<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah 29:11-13

<sup>10</sup> Hebrew 12:1