

WALKING THE WALK – Listening & Paying Attention When God Speaks

2 Timothy 3:10-17

January 23, 2022

We are beginning this new year with some discipleship training, on how we are to walk the walk towards godliness, as the Apostle Paul gives these instructions to his young understudy Timothy – **1 Timothy 4:7-9**, *“Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.”* Paul is telling the church that we need to actively seek godliness for this reason – **1 Timothy 4:1**, *“The Spirit clearly says that in the later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.”* We are definitely living in the later times, and we know there is a falling away taking place all around us, so we here at SCCC need to be actively seeking godliness so that we would not become a casualty!

Paul is telling us here that physical training is valuable for our time here on this earth to keep us healthy and fit to do our Heavenly Father’s will, but we are not to neglect the spiritual part of us, which is much more important than the physical part of our lives, all because discipleship training (moving towards godliness and holiness) is not only valuable for us while we’re here on this earth, but will carry forward with us into eternity where we will receive our rewards. So, in order to follow Jesus’ invitation to *“Come, follow me,”* and grow deeper in this coming year of 2022, we need to incorporate the following essential spiritual exercises and disciplines into our daily lives:

1. Worship and Prayer.
2. The Study of God’s Word.
3. Serving others.
4. Generosity.
5. Sharing our Faith.

Last time we looked at the first spiritual practice of worship & prayer – and today we will be looking at the second spiritual discipline **THE STUDY OF GOD’S WORD**, the importance of listening and paying attention whenever God speaks, which takes effort and discipline, being aware of all of the ways that God speaks to us. Our daily lives are filled with all kinds of voices bidding for our undivided attention. Some of these voices are beneficial in that we need to respond, while

other voices are not helpful or beneficial, in fact they are detrimental, and need to be ignored. The challenge is for us to know which is which, discerning all those voices that fill our thoughts and lives!

We recently lost our dog named Thatcher who we had to keep locked up in the garage at night to keep him safe and allow us to get some sleep. We kept Thatcher locked up because he would spend most of the night running around the house barking, keeping us awake, every time he heard a noise outside. And whenever the coyotes in the distance would start yelping Thatcher would get agitated, because the call of the wild would stir something within him to respond. Our dog didn't have the ability to discern any of the noises he heard, he responded to all of them!

Among the most important disciplines of a follower of Christ is discerning and then listening to the Lord's voice and obeying His commands – and like our dog Thatcher, we also hear other competing voices, aside from God's voice, begging for our undivided attention. Those other competing voices may sound alluring to us, begging us to answer, but like the coyotes yelping and howling in the dark, those competing voices are trying to lead us astray into danger places. So, being a Christian involves learning to tell Jesus' voice apart from all of the other competing voices around us that want to lead us astray, lead us down another path away from the truth. In **2 Timothy 3:10-11** Paul is speaking from experience of enduring persecution wherever he went, because of his zeal for preaching the Gospel, and then gives this warning for his apprentice Timothy in **2 Timothy 3:12-13**, ***“For all of you who choose to live godly as worshippers of Jesus, the Anointed One, will also experience persecution. But the evil men and deceivers will progress from bad to worse, deceived and deceiving, as they lead people further from the truth.”*** Don't be caught off-guard by opposition and by false teachers!

This warning is more relevant today than it was back 2000 years, as Satan is turning up the heat as we are getting closer to the time of Christ's return. So, to stay laser focused in these end times, we need to know God's voice, so that we won't become deceived and lead astray as Satan tries hard to blind us to the truth, wanting us to believe his lies and then lead us down the wrong path, a path that will only lead to destruction. Satan would love it if we missed out on our divine calling and purpose and end up living wasted lives! And Satan especially doesn't want us to interfere with his schemes in destroying our families, our churches, our communities, and this nation. Satan and his demons are like those wild yelping

Coyotes trying to lure us into dangerous places. But we have the power to resist the devil when we know who we belong to and know the Holy Scriptures which are able to make us wise and resistant to all of those voices that don't speak the truth, only lies. That was Paul's advice to Timothy, hold onto the Scriptures you have known from childhood!

In **John 10** Jesus confronts the Pharisees about their spiritual blindness, in not realizing who He is, their Messiah, the Son of God. To make His point, Jesus speaks a parable about "*The Good Shepherd and His Sheep*," telling these religious leaders that they don't recognize Him, and they don't know Him or follow His voice, because they're not part of His flock. They have been deceived and lead astray by listening to the wrong voices. They have been deceived by listening to Satan's lies. Jesus tells them in **John 10:3-5** that His sheep (true followers) are not deceived by Satan's lies because they know the truth. His true followers know their Shepherd because they recognize His voice and obey His voice, "*The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.*" Jesus' point is that when we are tuned into His voice and totally committed to following Him obediently, we would run from any voice that would try to deceive us or mislead us; thereby, a false teacher or false prophet could never influence a committed follower. That's the point of today's message – a true disciple learns to hear and recognize Christ's voice loudly and clearly, which will deter them from the lies and any tactics of deception or trickery of the enemy!

So, how does God speak to us today? Theologians tell us that God speaks to us in two ways:

1. **Natural or general revelation:** that is through nature, the arts, our life experiences, through others, and through our thoughts – our conscience, perception, awareness, and reason.
2. **Special or specific revelation:** the work of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures that glorify and declare Jesus as Messiah, the second person of the Trinity, and Jesus' life – His teachings, death, and resurrection that proclaim to the world who He is!

Let's first look at how God speaks to everyone – to believer and un-believer alike through **natural or general revelation**. **Romans 1:20** declares that we are without excuse since the creation of the world because God has spoken to us in these four ways:

- **Nature:** The Psalmist looked up into the clear night sky and declared this fact: *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world”* (Psalm 19:1-4). Nature speaks, it has a voice! The night sky reminds us how small we are and how magnificent God is in comparison. The night sky displays God's glory and magnificence to every person that lives on the face of the earth, so that we are without excuse. The night sky is one of the many ways that God is declaring that none of this could have happened by chance; instead, Creator God made this all happen, and every living thing is called to acknowledge Him as the Creator of this universe and everything within it. All of this had a beginning, and it was God.

The common belief that is taught to our children today that all of this has evolved from nothing is Satan's deception at its worst. The complexity of Science and new discoveries proves that God exists. When Jesus walked this earth, He routinely saw in nature illustrations of the kingdom of God. Jesus used mustard seeds, wheat fields, weeds, sheep, fish, fig trees, microscopic yeast cells and many other examples to illustrate His parables, knowing that all of nature was created by God and reveals truths about God. The point of the theory of evolution is to cause us to believe that God doesn't exist, which is not based on good science, but on Satan's lies, a voice that is especially dangerous to young minds who are impressionable and easily influenced!

- **The Arts:** God had given us humans the ability to create art, music, and literature to be used to reveal God to others. Works of art are found all around us that display God's glory – in stained glass windows, sculptures, paintings, music, plays, movies, poetry, and books that speak to us not only about God, but also about our human sinful condition and our need of a Saviour. I especially love books, and God often speaks to me through the

written word of others. Books are God's gift to me. Art has a voice, and it's another one of the ways God speaks to us!

- **Through Life Experiences and People:** Our life experiences communicate to others how God is working in and through our lives. Our lives are a testimony to how God uses people to carry out His will and His purposes on this earth. We all love to hear those great testimonies of how a lifestyle once filled with sin, addiction, hopelessness, and despair was turned around by the Gospel message, and how that person is now filled with hope all because Jesus touched their lives. God reaches down and uses these people going through their dark hopeless situations, bringing them redemption and new life as a testimony to speak into the lives of others. And then God also uses the testimonies of believers who are going through trials, sickness, and hardships, staying strong in the Lord to encourage us that Christ has overcome this world. As well, we see how Jesus's parables help us see God's kingdom principles through Jesus' stories of people. For example: a shepherd searching for lost sheep; a prodigal son welcomed home by a merciful loving father; a farmer scattering seed; a good Samaritan showing compassion to a stranger. The Bible is filled with stories of people like us seeking God in everyday life and God continues to speak through everyday people and all we need to do is take the time to interact with them and listen to their story.
- **Through our thoughts (Conscience, Intuition and Reason):** Our conscience is that inner voice that helps us to know the difference between right and wrong. Our intuition is that check in the spirit, or hunch, or gut feeling we often get that helps us to stop before we make a bad decision or give us the confidence and assurance that we are making the right decision. And then God gave us the capacity to reason things out. Some call this having common sense, but that's often up for interpretation!

God can speak to us through all of these natural ways, but the problem with all of them is that they can be easily misread, misunderstood, or ignored. We can easily get deceived and have the wrong idea about God, and that's why many don't believe God is always good, whether they are Christians or non-Christians; instead, they believe God has His hand in or is the cause of all of the illness, suffering and tragedies in their lives and in this world. In fact the insurance industry agrees with

them, calling tragedies and acts of nature, “*acts of God,*” as if God is the cause when floods, fires, tornadoes, earthquakes, and hurricanes destroy our homes and lives. That’s why we need something more to come alongside all of these **natural or general revelations** to hear from God, and that’s where **special or specific revelation** comes into the picture. God does that in three ways: by way of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures, and the life of Jesus.

- **The Holy Spirit:** During His last meal with His disciples, Jesus promised His disciples that God would send them a gift, a divine helper who would be with them once He left them and ascended back to His Heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit would come alongside of them and help them in their walk of faith plus help them remember His teachings. This was the promise – **John 14:26, “*But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*”** Later that evening, Jesus gave them another benefit of receiving the Holy Spirit. **John 16:13, “*But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*”** God fully realizes that we need His divine help to walk the walk without stumbling and falling into deception as those foreign voices start speaking lies, and that is why we need to be continually filled and topped up to overflowing with the Holy Spirit, which is our direct line to God, empowering us to take up our true calling of being His representatives here on this earth, carrying God’s presence and blessings to those around us, pointing to what God is bringing to this earth that is coming just over the horizon. We are the first to get a glimpse of it– Heaven on earth Our lives and as we gather as the church is where Heaven and earth meet!

But how does the Spirit speak to us? I have found that the Holy Spirit rarely shouts or pushes us to act, but most often speaks in a whisper or by a gentle nudge, so we have to pay extra close attention to be aware of His presence, and the best way to do this is by getting rid of all those distractions and become still and quiet to recognize that spiritual nudge that is guiding us to speak up in a situation, or visit someone, or go to a certain place, or pray for a certain person or situation. I find that God sends us those “*God-moments or God-incidents*” all the time, but we have to be tuned into the Holy Spirit’s frequency recognize them, and act upon them.

We often forget that the Holy Spirit is a person, the third person of the Trinity, and can easily be ignored, quenched, or grieved by our words, actions or inaction, so we need to be sensitive to Him for He is a gentleman and easily offended, and when He is offended or quenched or grieved, He will grow silent, waiting for us to repent and welcome Him back into our lives!

As well, the Scriptures also make it clear that we need to test those thoughts we get, those nudges we feel, or ideas we have because it may not be God trying to get our attention, but our own thoughts, or the enemy trying to lead us astray. This is what **1 John 4:1-3** warns us about, *“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can realize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.”* How we test the spirit is by way of the Holy Scriptures because the true Spirit of God will never-ever contradict Scripture and deny that Jesus Christ has come in human flesh from God, becoming one of us.

- **Holy Scripture:** Among the most important ways that God speaks to us is through His Word. Concerning Scripture, Paul writes to Timothy, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servants of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Even though Paul states that the entire Bible is *“God-breathed,”* which means it’s without error, it always tells the truth because it is inspired by an all-wise all-knowing God, even though it is written by unwise and imperfect humans. The Biblical writers were just like us, they had real personalities, concerns and life experiences that must have influenced their writing, but there was a divine breath behind their writings, as well as many checks-and-balances in place so that God’s eternal Word would be always trustworthy and true! As Jesus was fully man and fully God, the Bible is both a fully divine and a fully human book!

While I believe that every word in the Bible is there because God wants it to be there, yet some of it is confusing, hard to understand, seems contradictory, and often leaves us scratching our heads. One of the dangers is that we can take verses out of context, so we need to be careful that we always read the verses in context, trying to understand what God is telling us from what comes before and what comes after, and even in the context of the entire book as a whole. Over the centuries the Bible has been misunderstood and misquoted by people who have claimed the Bible says things that God never said. If we pick-and-choose verses and read them out of context to create our own story, rather than God's story, we will run into all types of heresy and start walking down the wrong path. Good commentaries help us out here, as well as studying God's Word in community with other believers!

The entire Bible is definitely the inspired word of God, which helps us to walk the walk, but the danger is that in the wrong hands it can be misused and cause a great deal of harm. That's why Paul warned Timothy to be aware of false teachers who twist the Scriptures according to their agenda. And that's why it's important that we know God's Word, so we will not be deceived by false teachers in our day as well. While individual study is important, I believe that it's critical that the Bible also be studied in small groups, and the most important aspect of reading and studying the Bible is not to become rigid and unwilling to change your view. You could be wrong!

The Bible is a wonderfully rich and diverse collection of writings, composed over a period of about 1400 years, written by numerous authors and includes 66 documents or books, which are 66 love letters from God to us humans with one basic theme throughout. The basic point of the Bible is that it teaches us how to love God, love others, and love ourselves, showing us how God so loved the world that He sent Jesus to become one of us and dwell among us, so Jesus is the central figure of God's Word. The Bible discloses Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, the Risen One who wants to be encountered. Jesus is the fulness of God's revelation! Jesus is the way God is encountered and known! Jesus is the picture of human life as it's meant to be lived out! Every book of the Bible revolves around Jesus! Jesus is the

central story, and the cross is the bullseye event! This means we don't just read Scripture; instead, we read through Scripture like a window. We read until the ink becomes a portal to a place where the living Christ is met and discovered.

And then, we not only need to read and understand God's story, but let God's story read us, our human condition, so we can enter into His story, becoming part of His story. In that way the Bible is not only words on a page, but comes to life, so that when people spend time with us, they know we have been with Jesus. Once we are filled to overflowing with God's words, then we are not like the rest of the world, because the Good News of the Bible has set us free from the emptiness, and all of that striving for happiness and wealth, which can never satisfy or bring us peace and contentment.

- **Jesus – God's Word in the Flesh:** When God decided it was time for Him to come down to this earth and speak directly to the human race, He did not send a book; instead, God sent a Person, the second Person of the Trinity, His Son Jesus Christ. The Apostle John tells us in **John 1:1,14** that Jesus was God's message wrapped in human flesh, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."* The reason Jesus came to represent God, our heavenly Father, is so that we would no longer be deceived or mislead but know God's goodness and character. That's what Jesus told Philip, one of His disciples, *"Don't you know me Philip, even after I have been with you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father?"* (John 14:9). Like Jesus' disciples, we as well can easily get confused about God's true nature by just reading the Old Testament, so thankfully, we also have the New Testament, especially the life of Jesus told to us in the four Gospel accounts, making it plain to us how Jesus came to reveal God to us so that we would not be confused about our Heavenly Father's goodness and loving nature. Jesus' life is our example of godliness and holiness!

After worship and prayer – if we want to become the people God wants us to be in 2022, we have to learn to pay attention and listen to God whenever He speaks and in whatever way He speaks to us. With the constant noise of life bombarding us today, it's becoming harder-and-harder to listen to God than it had been in the past,

so it takes commitment and effort to hear His voice clearly, but if we make the effort and pay attention and listen in the ways we've talked about today, God is faithful, and will speak loudly and clearly to us. In that way you'll grow deeper in your faith, walk closer and more in step with God, as you follow His lead.

Through reading Scripture, our minds and imaginations are shaped, page by page, into the mind and imagination of Christ, helping us to see past the surface of this broken soil that God has planted us into in this specific place and in this specific time, and see the seeds of possibility that have been planted within us by God that are waiting to germinate, be watered, weeded and cultivated so they will grow and develop deep roots, and mature, producing an abundant crop of good quality fruit.

The church has passed down through the centuries not just a book – the Bible – but the interpretive key to unlocking it. The core of God's story, what is found on every page, is how God acted to rescue the world through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the centre of the church's message from the very beginning. Jesus is the anchor that keeps Biblical interpretation from being carried too far off course as we respond to the Holy Spirit's movement and not simply be driven along by the shifting winds of our times, the secular society we live in. God took a great risk in giving us the Bible that can be misread, misused, and abused. We may not see or hear or interpret God perfectly every time we pick up the Bible, but God will be found on every page of the Bible, either way, all because He wants to be found, and He is worth the adventure!