

## The Art of Following Jesus

### Part 2: How can I hear God?

Matthew 14:22-23 - [watch online](#)

#### Summary:

Can we actually listen to God? What does it mean to be guided by the Holy Spirit? Is it just a Christian version of following our hearts? How do we know we aren't just hearing what we want to hear? If we really want to be able to listen to God we need to practice the art of following Jesus.

#### Main Points:

[00:48] Our lives are noisy.

[01:42] The noise of our lives often muffles the voice of the Holy Spirit.

[02:34] To hear the Holy Spirit we have to purposely choose to listen.

[05:04] *Solitude*: Purposely withdrawing from interaction with other people.

[05:44] Solitude frees us to be ourselves with the God who made our selves.

[07:14] *Silence*: As much as possible, we eliminate the sounds around us that constantly try to grab our attention.

[08:20] Silence provides the space we need in order to hear the Holy Spirit.

[09:42] *Prayer*: A back and forth conversation with God.

[10:32] The size of our problems shrink as our view of God grows.

[20:30] We don't mature without learning to do new things.

[21:33] To follow Jesus we have to be able to hear Jesus.

#### Opportunity to Practice [15:27]

Practice micro solitude-silence-prayer moments.

Pray: Holy Spirit, please use this time as you will. Show me what I need to see. Say what I need to hear. Show me which thoughts are from you.

Then... Be quiet and alone with your God.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. How do you usually try to hear God's guidance in your life?
2. On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you with this practice of prayer in silence and solitude? Feel free to share any thoughts, feelings, or questions that come up.
3. Jon said, "To follow Jesus we have to be able to hear Jesus." Read the famous Psalm 23. What stands out in relation to what we're studying this week?
4. What are some ways you might experiment with practicing solitude, silence, and prayer over these next few weeks?
5. How can your group pray for you this week?

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#### Transcript:

**INTRO:** Can we actually listen to God? What does it mean to be guided by the HS? Is it just a Xian version of following our hearts? How do we know we aren't just hearing what we want to hear?

If we really want to be able to listen to God we need to practice the art of following Jesus so let's talk about it... together.

**WE:** Our days are so busy, full and loud.

- Whether it's talking with clients/family/friends
- Whether it's constantly scrolling and reading other people's reactions to the world and then reacting to their reactions...
- 24 hr News and bingeing shows, or music blaring at us incessantly.

**Our lives are noisy.**

So much so that we rarely have a chance to just sit and think... I mean how productive is that? We need to be doing something!

Trying to navigate our lives in this sea of noise feels hectic, fractured, exhausting, and overwhelming.

BUT There's another way... Jesus said he can give us lives of peace, clarity, purpose, and meaning.

And he promised that those who accept him as their king will be given the HS (personal presence of God himself) to live in them, and guide them... daily.

Jesus said... **John 10:27** To follow Jesus we have to be able to hear him.

We would love to be able to have God's guidance and be able to hear him lead us.

But the problem is... **The noise of our lives often muffles the voice of the HS.**

For 2000 yrs JF's have practiced purposely eliminating the noises and distractions that compete for our attention... and it's freed them to listen to Jesus' voice and follow where he leads.

- It's given them peace, comfort, guidance, courage. Freedom.

Just like playing the scales on the piano eventually frees us to make our own music. Or Learning Vocab in French

These practices can free us to instinctively and effortlessly live the life Jesus would live if he were us.

He wants to lead you. Do you trust him to lead you... then, it's time to be intentional about hearing him...

**To hear the Holy Spirit we have to purposely choose to listen.**

**GOD:** Jesus modeled how to do this over and over in his life.

Show you 1 example...

Jesus was in the middle of a really difficult and busy couple of days. His relative John the Baptist had been beheaded by the king... gruesomely presented as a present to the king's step daughter/niece.

As he went to process this news he's swarmed by over 5000 people wanting him to heal them and teach them.

He sees them, has compassion on them and heals the sick and teaches them all day long... As evening comes the disciples realize they are in the middle of nowhere and there is no food for all of these people...

They tell Jesus to send the people away to go get food... Jesus, "That won't be necessary... you feed them."

"That's impossible, Jesus"

Jesus- "Give me what you have..." and they give him 5 loaves/2 fish that they got from a boy.

Begins breaking it as disciples serve everyone... just keeps multiplying... everyone (over 5000) fed to their limit.

### **Matthew 14:22-23**

In this short passage we see wrapped together 3 things that can help us shut out the noise and actually listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit...

Solitude, Silence, and Prayer. Jesus went off to be alone, with no noise around him, and prayed.

Why these 3? Why were they so central to Jesus' life and to the life he offers us?

Let's look at all 3 on their own to see how they work together.

(Extroverts... you're going to need to bear with me until the end)

(Book plug for [The Spirit of Disciplines by Dallas Willard](#))

### **Solitude: Purposely withdrawing from interaction with other people.**

It's more than just going off to be alone in nature. Which is great. But that's not what this is.

It's purposely choosing to be away from others in order to have the freedom to be yourself with God.

This solitude actually frees us.

It frees us from worrying about what others are thinking.

Frees us from having to prove ourselves,

Frees us from having to think of what to say next, watching our tone, our facial expressions.

Frees us to look at the world without others telling us what to see...

### **Solitude frees us to be ourselves with the God who made our selves.**

But it also, and here's the scary part, it frees us not just to BE ourselves but to **SEE ourselves**.

The masks we love to wear won't help us/the parts we are so used to playing mean nothing when it's just us and God...

- B/c the only people there already know the truth of who we are.

- Can be terrifying if we haven't taken the time to have a true look at ourselves in a while

Which is why this practice of solitude isn't just about being alone w/ ourselves... it's about being alone w/ God.

**Psalm 46:10** "Be still and know that I am God." See, God already knows everything about us... and chooses to love us, like us, enjoy us.

In this solitude we can look at our 'demons' and Jesus says "give them to me... I can handle them."

Solitude also creates a closeness and an awareness of God that we bring back into our interactions with others.

And with this solitude comes another integral practice... SILENCE.

Actual silence is so rare in our lives...

**Silence: As much as possible, we eliminate the sounds around us that constantly try to grab our attention**

- These might include Tv, music, phone, books, conversations, even street noise.

**Silence allows us to have that solitude alone with just God and us.**

Again this can also be *unnerving*...

1st- Just not used to not having noises

2nd- When it's just us and God with no distractions we discover our true depth of our relationship w/ him.

Is there much there?

Is it like old friends interacting or is it like hanging out with a friend and their friend and your mutual friend goes to the bathroom... what do you talk about?

But this kind of **silence provides the space we need in order to hear the Holy Spirit.**

- To use our thoughts to think his thoughts.
- To communicate the encouragement, the direction and the re-direction he has for us.

This silence also trains us to stop talking when we don't need to...

- So much harm in life could be avoided if we learned to keep our mouths shut!

In silence...

- We learn to listen instead of react.
- Pay attention instead of grab attention
- We learn to control our tongues instead of letting them control us. **James 3:2**

So the practice of silence, like solitude, is a practice that allows us to better love those around us.

But the life Jesus offers isn't just about us being quiet while God downloads his info into our minds... the life Jesus offers is first and foremost a *relationship* with our heavenly Father

- And relationships require communication.

Jesus wasn't just alone and quiet... he also prayed.

**Prayer: A back and forth conversation with God.**

- Either aloud or in our thoughts (If never prayed out loud... it might be worth a try)

This kind of prayer isn't just asking for things... though that is involved.

This is active listening. A conversation with God where we expect to hear from him.

We are open and honest about our celebrations, fears, what we are thankful for, frustrations, hopes, dreams, even our disappointments.

We ask for direction, healing, opportunity to bless others.

And when we combine solitude and silence it gives God an opportunity to answer us either directly or indirectly.

Prayer helps us put our problems in true perspective. **The size of our problems shrink as our view of God grows.**

The smaller our view of God the bigger our problems appear. The bigger our God the smaller our problems are.

*[My story of the maple buds]*

As we practice this kind of prayer in our solitude and silence, it trains us to be able to speak to God in every situation we find ourselves... to pray without ceasing as Paul puts it.

The more we pray the more we think to pray in the big, and even mundane parts of our day.

Which in turn allows us to be continually in contact w/ God... w/ his love, grace, patience, encouragement, courage, strength, and power... and then we can't help but be transformed.

And when we have practiced this prayer alone... it trains us to pray for and w/ each other as a community.

- To bless each other, to encourage each other and to do the same for our community at large.

*[Story of Ray Scroggs... "prays like Yoda fights"]*

Now... At this point you might be saying... cute stories Jon. Sure, this sounds great and stuff... but to actually be able to have solitude and silence and pray like this... you'd have to be a monk or something.

It's not like we can just wander around the countryside being alone and quiet and praying... we have responsibilities, we have families!

**YOU:** So how do we actually practice these things?

If this is new to you... some of it is to me... I'm encouraging us to take it small and slow at first.

At some point maybe you'll be at a place where you can take personal retreats for a few days...

But even if you have the availability and time for that, a few days might be overwhelming if you haven't trained...

- Like trying to run a marathon when you haven't even run a non-stop mile yet.

So here's my invitation...

**Practice micro solitude-silence-prayer moments.**

Driving by yourself? Turn off the music or talk radio... and talk to God. Nobody knows if you're hands free or not.

Take a walk at lunch once or twice a week (leave your phone on your desk).

If you tend to have longer bathroom visits, leave your phone and book in the other room. (More hygienic anyway)

Have kids? Partners give each other space to have solitude and silence... I'll take care of any needs this hour tonight. And you take an hour another night.

If you are having restless, sleepless night... what a great opportunity to practice this solitude, silence and prayer.

Instead of stressing that you need to get to sleep for your big day tomorrow...

- Maybe this is God giving you an opportunity to talk to *him* about that big day tomorrow.
- Instead of grabbing your phone... which is proven to actually keep you awake... practice silence and prayer.

So however, you go about finding this time...

As you begin, Maybe start with telling him "thank you" for what he's given and done. Then...

**Pray** something like this: **HS please use this time as you will. Show me what I need to see. Say what I need to hear. Show me which thoughts are from you.**

Then... **Be quiet and alone with your God.**

Don't babble on and on... just be quiet... If concerns come up, then talk to God about them.

If your mind starts to wander... Invite God into the wander... he might have a destination for you that you can only get to if you wander in it together.

Maybe journal your thoughts. And what you think he might be saying to you.

Might be tempted to listen to worship music or read the biblical writings... not bad things... but these practices aren't for that... God can speak through those, but he spoke clearly and powerfully long before either of those actually existed.

So Jon, isn't this just meditation?

No. This is not for the purpose of emptying your mind or finding inner peace... this is for God to speak, to fill your mind, to know him and your relationship with him better and better. This is deeply thinking on the things of God and listening for His voice... whatever way he chooses to communicate.

But Jon, that sounds so unproductive.

We have been trained to "get things done." This solitude/silence/prayer is a chance to trust that God will take care of what needs to be taken care of. To remind ourselves that the world doesn't depend on us or our productivity.

Jesus could've said, "I don't have time for this... I've got people to heal." But would he have been able to heal, and teach, and love without that solitude, silence, and communication w/ the Father/HS?

- But he was God... yes and he was also human. He knew he needed these things.

If you're an extrovert, maybe the idea of being by yourself quietly like this sounds uncomfortable...

Some of these practices will come more naturally to some than others. For example, introverts might think this sounds amazing. Or even easy... Doesn't mean any one person is more or less 'spiritual' "

These are not things we do to make God happy with us or impress anyone with our spirituality.

But training isn't designed to be easy. Many people could use the practice of silence to develop the skill of listening to know and understand instead of to respond or react.

So instead of saying, that's just not me... maybe say... *this will be new for me.*

- **We don't mature without learning to do new things.**

The more we do it, the easier and more natural it becomes... As we build stamina, longer periods will become more enjoyable.

And remember this isn't just a one time thing and we're good to go... as with all the practices we will talk about, this is something, like Jesus modeled, becomes part of our life's rhythm as we continue to practice it

**WE:** If we really want to hear God speak to us... if we really want to be led by our Shepherd we have to make the space and time to be able to hear him.

In our world it will take a conscious effort to turn off the noise and distractions and truly communicate with our heavenly Father.

But if we make the effort to practice it, we will find a well of life and love so deep and refreshing and empowering that we can't help but be changed and transformed.

We will experience a life not just of liking Jesus, but of truly following him.

**To follow Jesus we have to be able to hear Jesus**