



Hearing and Obeying: A Roadmap for People in Exile

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul declares that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” When we submit our lives to Jesus, we receive new life as he strips away the dead layers of who we once were and resurrects them into something beautiful. As we continue to wade the depths of a relationship with Christ further, we’re inevitably beckoned to move beyond our comfort zones and into unfamiliar territory. It’s here we are called to step out in faith, empowered by the Spirit, to act on our new identities as children of God. The following passage highlights various people in the Bible who did exactly that – they followed God’s voice in their lives despite it being uncomfortable, difficult, or even costing their lives. As children of God, they didn’t act naively, but rather walked confidently in the knowledge of who they were and where they were going. Ultimately, hearing and obeying God not only blessed their lives and those around them, but became the roadmap by which they found their way home.

Read: Hebrews 11:1-40

Questions for Reflection:

1. The author of Hebrews writes in verse 16 that the people of faith acknowledged they were strangers and exiles on earth, but that they desired a better country. What is the “better country” referring to and how did this overall desire shape their actions?
2. Where in your life are you currently experiencing God calling you to act beyond your comfort zone?
3. What’s keeping you from taking the next step, and how can your identity in Christ empower you forward?

“God had envisioned that he would have an alternative community of people who belonged to Him in a world that had been hijacked by spiritual and national powers. In the midst of many dark stories, a people who lived into the story of God would be a light in that darkness. Their life together would speak to a goodness and beauty that people living out the dark stories longed for. As a result, the people of God would be a

blessing to the world around them. In the surrounding stories of death, they would be telling a story of life.”

– Rick McKinley, Faith for this Moment

“Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God’s will.”

– Eric Metaxas

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, I praise you and thank you for pouring out new life into my heart every day. I pray that as you call me past my comfort zones into a deeper relationship with Christ that you give me the strength, power, and courage to embrace the beautiful unknown. Amen.



Hearing and Obeying: Following the Voice of the Shepherd

Let's face it – we live in an extremely loud culture. From every direction we hear voices screaming at us, telling us both who we are and who we should be. And even though we know we've received a new identity in Christ, the competing voices often drown out the one voice worth listening to. But, when we choose to intentionally turn down the volume of our culture's noise and instead take a posture firmly planted in listening to God's Word, we uncover a wellspring of life and power for living as the people of God. We become familiar not just with the stories of the Bible, but the very voice of God who's sung over us songs of grace, love, and compassion since the very beginning. In the following passage, Jesus explains that he is the Great Shepherd, not just because of who he is as the Son of God, but because he's given his very life for his sheep – he provides for us, he keeps us safe, and he sustains us. This passage reminds us of the tender value of listening for the voice of the Shepherd, and the confidence we have in following after it.

Read: John 10:7-30

Questions for Reflection:

1. What are all the reasons Jesus gives in this passage for why he's the Good Shepherd worth following?
2. Where in your life are you following another voice besides Jesus? Was this an intentional choice or something you weren't aware of until after you stopped to reflect?
3. How does the Church being "one flock" under Christ affect your relationships with other believers? With non-believers?

"The Voice of God is a friendly Voice. No one need fear to listen to it unless he has already made up his mind to resist it... Whoever will listen will hear the speaking Heaven. This is definitely not the hour when men take kindly to an exhortation to listen, for listening is not today a part of popular religion. We are at the opposite end of the pole. Religion has accepted the monstrous heresy that noise, size, activity and bluster make a man dear to God. But we may take heart. To a people caught in the

tempest of the last great conflict God says, "Be still, and know that I am God," and still He says it, as if He means to tell us that our strength and safety lie not in noise but in silence."

- A.W. Tozer

Prayer:

Jesus, I praise you for who you are! Help me remember all of your goodness, mercy, compassion, power, and meekness as I navigate the tough terrain of this world. Humble me when I try to take the reins, and help me to keep you as my strong foundation, anchor, and guidepost towards abundant life and joy. Amen.



Hearing and Obeying: Acting on God's Voice

As we read God's Word and become more attuned to the voice of the Great Shepherd, we are more and more able to distinguish the Spirit against all the competing noise. But, Jesus doesn't want us to stop at merely recognizing his voice in our hearts, he wants us to act on it too. In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus illustrates this by saying anyone who both listens and obeys is like a wise man who built his house on the rock, but someone who merely listens and doesn't obey is like a foolish person having built their house on sand. However, Jesus doesn't call us to obey out of a sense of duty or obligation, but because it's the path towards life. The following passage illustrates hearing and obeying the voice of God from two very different perspectives. The first, Cyrus the King of Persia, not only obeyed God's call to release Israel from under his rule, but lavished love on them in the process. The second, leaders from among Israel, listened to the Spirit speaking in their hearts and rose up to help rebuild the Temple. In both cases, discerning the voice of God led to action, and action brought a newness of life to where death once reigned.

Read: Ezra 1:1-11

Questions for Reflection:

1. Why is it significant that Cyrus returned to Israel the vessels from Nebuchadnezzar?
2. Where in your life do you feel the Spirit stirring up a desire to do something?
3. Is there anyone in your life that you need to make amends with? If so, what are ways that you could go above and beyond to lavish love on them in the process?

"Every happening, great and small, is a parable whereby God speaks to us, and the art of life is to get the message."

-Malcolm Muggeridge

Prayer:

Jesus, help me move away from simply being aware of your active presence, towards also acting on your voice. In your power and wisdom, guide me in my steps as I discern how to navigate your call to action and help me be known as someone whose life is marked by love and service towards others along the way. Amen.



Hearing and Obeying: Acting Individually

As Hebrews 11 showcased earlier, the Bible is filled with a multitude of people who obeyed the voice of God. He used many methods to speak guidance and direction over his people – from talking one-on-one or speaking through the prophets, to talking from a burning bush or even a donkey. Sometimes he gave great details about what lay ahead, but other times it was as simple, or as big, as “Go.” In today’s culture, the idea of a perfectly mapped out blueprint of our lives is very appealing and we’re drawn to wanting exact Do’s and Don’t’s for obeying Jesus. The thought is comforting and gives us a sense of security that we’ve “figured it out.” But Jesus has invited us into something bigger, something more challenging, and something far more beautiful as we rely on the Spirit to help us hear and obey in the moment. In the following passage, Jesus does two things. First, he tells us who we are – a people sent out to make disciples of Christ. Second, should we choose to obey, he reminds us that we are far from alone as we navigate our life as a child of God, for Jesus will always be with us, to the end of the age.

Read: Matthew 28:16-20

Questions for Reflection:

1. According to this passage, what are all believers called to do?
2. What significance does Jesus’ presence with you have on your desire and ability to hear and obey the word of God?
3. At times the words of Jesus in this passage can feel too broad – what are ways that it affects your day-to-day life? How would you bring this to the commonplace – your workplace, commute, spending habits, community or global engagement, eating habits?

“There is no magic program for Hearing God’s word and obeying it. The practice is simple but profound and too often left unpracticed. Throughout our week, we find times to place our lives under God’s Word personally and with others. We do this with the intent to respond to what we have heard. Repenting when needed, turning from

the ways of Babylon toward the God who gives us life and sustains us by his word. We listen to obey, not to debate.”

– Rick McKinley, Faith for this Moment

“Remember this. When people choose to withdraw far from a fire, the fire continues to give warmth, but they grow cold. When people choose to withdraw far from light, the light continues to be bright in itself but they are in darkness. This is also the case when people withdraw from God.”

- Saint Augustine

Prayer:

To echo the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, “Most High, Glorious God, enlighten the darkness of our minds. Give us a right faith, a firm hope and a perfect charity, so that we may always and in all things act according to Your Holy Will. Amen.”



Hearing and Obeying: Acting in Community

As we navigate this world, listening for and discerning the voice of God in the moment, it may at times feel very isolating. Either we feel alone, or we think we can do this all by ourselves. But God, in his goodness and wisdom, has not left us to tackle the Christian life alone. Instead, he has called the Church to live intentionally with one another – to build each other up, to serve as support, and to bring us home when we wander astray. The following passage highlights the significance of this by illustrating a time when the Israelites suffered from the lack of obedience of a few. Instead of trusting the steady and powerful voice of God who had rescued them from Egypt, Israel wept in fear over the reports of a few. But, just as a few acts of disobedience were enough to push Israel off course, the obedience of Caleb and Moses were enough to correct it. What this emphasizes is that we are not called to simply hear and obey God for our own benefit, but for the flourishing of the community, too. We are one member in the greater Body of Christ that's collectively advancing the Kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven.

Read: Numbers 13:25 – 14:1

Questions for Reflection:

1. Instead of focusing on the character and provisions of God, where did the people fixate their worries as they cowered in fear?
2. Does fear play a big role in your own walk with God? How might meditating on who God is affect these fears?
3. In the lives of believers close to you, where have you seen fear of a few lead the group astray? How might you instead choose to reflect the courage of Caleb in those moments?

"The people of God are an interdependent community. When we listen to Scripture together, we hear it in a larger capacity. More ears more listening. We listen in small groups, we listen with friends, and we listen in the congregation. As we hear God's Word together, we are also able to discern together what obedience looks like. We discern collectively what it means to obey, and we help each other in practicing hear

and obey. It may mean helping discern how a teacher can bless her class room by being a faithful presence to her students, or helping a business woman discern how to resist the corporate diminishing of her holy work. We listen together so we can obey together. We carry each other through the streets of exile in collective community."

– Rick McKinley, Faith in this Moment

Prayer:

Father, I confess that I have viewed my challenges as only my own and faced them alone. Now I choose to worship You as the One who has all strength and who is present with me. I have been afraid that where You have asked me to go I would have to go alone. Would you reveal to me how Your presence and strength reshapes the geography and battle plan of my life? Amen.