

Hearing with Faith

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I. INTRODUCTION

Well, today we're continuing on in our faith study and, as promised last week, we're going to focus today on practical ways we can grow our faith and begin experiencing those amazing fruits of faith walking we examined last week: power, stability, joy, fearlessness, lovingkindness, spiritual success, healthy growth and fruitfulness in any circumstance, and perfect peace. These and more are the blessings awaiting each of us as we learn to walk by faith into the unknown and through whatever circumstances we face in our lives.

As we begin, I'd like you to think back into ancient history to that time when you were a teenager. For some of you that truly may be ancient history (though I won't name any names 😊), while some of you may still be teenagers or feel like it was just yesterday that you were one. But either way, I'd like us all to get ourselves back into that teenage mindset for a moment...that period of our lives when we were starting to grow up and feeling pretty confident in our own knowledge and wisdom and getting really tired of our parents telling us what to do or sharing their well-intentioned or not-so-well-intentioned words of wisdom with us constantly.

So back in that time period of your life, can you remember a situation where your parents were giving you some instructions about life or about right and wrong or about how to do something, and you heard the words coming out of their mouths, but you just let it go in one ear and out the other because you knew you already had a better grasp on the situation and really didn't need their help or words of wisdom? Your parents probably sounded a lot like this:

PLAY CHARLIE BROWN VIDEO

Do you ever remember experiencing something like this with your parents or other adults in your life? Or if you have kids or teenagers of your own, have you ever felt like your kids were hearing about as much as Charlie Brown was hearing

in that scene? Have you ever said this to your kids: “DO YOU HEAR THE WORDS THAT ARE COMING OUT OF MY MOUTH?” Even if you’ve never said it, you’ve probably felt it before. And I’m very sure that all of us have been guilty at times of not truly hearing what other people are saying.

Well, today we’re going to work on our listening skills, because we’re going to need them if we ever hope to grow our faith.

II. FAITH COMES FROM LISTENING TO GOD’S WORD

In my study of faith in Scripture, one thing has become very clear: faith comes from hearing or listening. And if we don’t know how to listen, or if we never slow ourselves down enough to hear what’s actually being said, we have no hope of really growing our faith and learning to walk out in God’s power as we trust him. Romans 10:17 says:

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Faith comes from hearing. That’s a pretty clear statement, isn’t it? And if faith comes from hearing or listening, what happens if we’re not listening? Faith doesn’t come, does it? And what we’re to be listening to is God’s Word. So the question we need to ask ourselves today is: “Are we listening?” Or have we filled our lives so full of activity that we have no time to listen and hear what God is saying to us? Are we so busy talking about our own ideas and dreams and complaints and issues that we can’t hear what’s being said to us? Does our constant frenzied activity and talking and pursuit of what the world has to offer, keep us so distracted that the words of God sound to us like the adult voices in Charlie Brown’s world... “Wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah.”

Ecclesiastes chapter 5 has some great advice for us in this area. Listen closely to these words beginning in verse 1:

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. For a dream comes with much business,

and a fool's voice with many words. And then verse 7 sums it up for us: ***For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity.***

When we completely fill our lives with activity and words and pursuit of our dreams, there is vanity. We're chasing after the wind, something it's impossible to ever catch. Instead, we're instructed here to draw near to God with the purpose of listening. And to do this we need to create space in our lives and close our own mouths so that we can hear what he's saying to us.

Has anyone ever tried to talk with you while you're consumed with a task you're trying to get done or a text message you're trying to send? Usually you don't hear a lot of what they're saying, do you? We catch a few points here and there...hopefully enough to convince the other person we heard what they said when they inevitably ask us if we've heard even a word of what they've been saying to us. But in any of these situations, we always miss a lot of what's being said to us and good communication breaks down. And everything seems to take twice as long when we're trying to listen AND continue on with what we were doing at the same time.

Sadly, this is so often what happens in our listening to God's Word. We're so distracted and busy that we don't truly hear what he's saying to us. Many times we approach God's Word as something we just need to get through and check off our list for the day. And as we read our minds are so distracted by other thoughts or thinking about what we need to get done for the day, that we really don't absorb or even hear what God is saying to us.

But one thing is clear: If you want to grow your faith...if you want to become a faith walker...you need to learn to stop and listen and truly hear what God is saying to you in his Word and as you walk with him throughout each day. And this will mean saying no to some things you may really want to do or accomplish. There are a zillion things we can do with our time each day and if we don't make a concerted effort to say no to some of them, we won't have time to listen. We'll be too busy to hear God's voice. Faith comes from hearing God's Word, and until we learn to stop and listen the growth of our faith will be slow and stunted.

III. FAITH GROWS AS WE UNITE THE HEARING OF GOD'S WORD WITH BELIEF

Secondly, as we seek to become a faith walker, we not only need to listen and hear God's Word, but we need to unite the hearing of that Word with belief. Just hearing God's Word is not what grows faith. Hearing it is great, but if the hearing is not united with belief in its truth, it does us no good.

Let's look at a few passages of Scripture that line this truth out for us clearly. Hebrews 4, verses 2 to 3, says this:

2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Here we have a situation where two groups of people heard the same message. They both had the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ preached to them. They both listened and heard the message. However, the message did absolutely no good for some of the people because they chose not to believe it. They didn't unite the message they heard with belief that it was true, and as a result it didn't profit them at all.

This same truth applies to us as we listen to God's Word in our walk with him as his children. If we read the Bible, but don't believe in our hearts that what it says really applies to our lives or can actually be put into practice, it doesn't profit us at all. It's just like learning head knowledge that we'll never actually put to use. When we don't unite the hearing of God's Word with belief that it's true and applicable to our lives, it does us as much good as some those courses we took in high school or college that had no application to anything we would ever do in our lives. Probably we learned the minimum necessary to pass the course and then never thought of it again.

I'd like to challenge you to listen to your internal conversation as you read God's Word this week and try to notice how your mind is reacting to what you read. Are you accepting it as truth and figuring out how you can put it into practice, or are you letting it go in one ear and out the other, failing to see how it's relevant or

useful to your daily life or allowing yourself to believe that it's just not realistic for you?

Believe me, this is a major battle we each face, and I think we might be surprised if we could truly see how often we read God's Word without actually believing it...without being convinced in our minds that it has everything we need right now to thrive in the midst of any circumstance in which we find ourselves and experience the fruits that only come through faith walking.

Hearing God's Word with faith is the key to growing our faith and learning to walk in his power. Listen to this passage from Galatians 3, verses 2 to 9 and notice how Paul uses the phrase, "hearing with faith," and the results that come about when people unite the hearing of God's Word with faith in its truthfulness:

2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? 4 Did you suffer so many things in vain — if indeed it was in vain? 5 So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 6 Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. 7 Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. 8 The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

Hearing with faith seems to be the key to it all here, doesn't it? We see first of all that our very salvation came about through hearing with faith. As we listened to the gospel and chose to believe the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, we were born again and received the Holy Spirit. We weren't born again because our good works outweighed our bad or because something about us deserved salvation, but rather we were born again because we heard God's Word and believed it. Hearing with faith was the key to our very salvation and new life in Christ.

But we also see that hearing with faith is just as crucial to our continued walk with God as it was to our very salvation. Verse 5 makes this clear as Paul shows us that those who are filled with the Spirit and operating in the realm of the impossible, are not experiencing God's power because they've carefully kept God's list of rules and have finally reached a point where God thinks they're worthy. But rather, they were filled with the Spirit and experiencing God's miraculous work in their lives because they'd chosen to listen to God's Word and believe it. And when they began to walk out the truth of God's Word in faith, God showed up in a big way and they began experiencing the fruits of faith walking.

And notice how Abraham, our father, is identified at the end of that Galatians passage. He's called, "Abraham, the believer." His defining characteristic is that he was a man who believed and trusted God...a man who operated his life by hearing God's Word with faith. I don't know about you, but I hope that as I walk through my life with God, people could accurately describe me as, "Joe Davis, the believer." May the defining characteristic of my life and your life be that we listened to God's Word and believed it and in so doing walked through our lives by his power and for his glory.

J. G. Machen has said this: "The more we know of God, the more unreservedly we will trust him; the greater our progress in theology, the simpler and more childlike will be our faith." Regularly listening carefully to God's Word and challenging ourselves to believe it is how our faith begins to grow and blossom and we begin to operate in the realm of the impossible.

IV. TRUE FAITH RESULTS IN ACTION AND OBEDIENCE

Thirdly, in seeking to become a faith walker, we need to recognize the importance of walking. So far we've seen that faith comes from hearing, and that hearing only profits us when we believe the message. But the final step in this process involves action and movement. What we learn in Scripture is that if we've truly listened to God's message and believed it, we're going to act on it. If we've just heard it, but not actually believed it, our faith is dead and nothing comes of it. Just saying we believe something doesn't mean we actually do. But if we actually do believe it, we'll take action.

Some of you may have heard this illustration from the life of the missionary, Hudson Taylor, but I think it bears repeating here:

When Hudson Taylor went to China, he made the voyage on a sailing vessel. As it neared the channel between the southern Malay Peninsula and the island of Sumatra, the missionary heard an urgent knock on his stateroom door. He opened it, and there stood the captain of the ship. "Mr. Taylor," he said, "we have no wind. We are drifting toward an island where the people are heathen, and I fear they are cannibals." "What can I do?" asked Taylor. "I understand that you believe in God. I want you to pray for wind." "All right, Captain, I will, but you must set the sail." "Why that's ridiculous! There's not even the slightest breeze. Besides, the sailors will think I'm crazy." But finally, because of Taylor's insistence, he agreed. Forty-five minutes later he returned and found the missionary still on his knees. "You can stop praying now," said the captain. "We've got more wind than we know what to do with!"

There are a couple points I'd like to emphasize in this account from the life of Hudson Taylor. First, Hudson was expressing his faith in God's power to bring wind at his request by taking action. In asking the ship's captain to set the sail he was showing that he believed God would very likely send wind at his request. He believed that God could answer his prayer and he wanted to be ready when the wind came. His faith was shown to be real by the action he took.

Secondly, taking action based on our faith is like setting the sails for God's miraculous work. If we say we trust God and believe his word, but never take action on what he's clearly telling us to do, then when the wind comes our sails won't be ready to receive it. The wind will blow on by and our boat will stay in the same place.

We miss our opportunity to experience God's power and miraculous working in our lives when we don't set the sails by taking action on what God has shown us is true.

This is that old principle of walking by faith. Walking by faith indicates movement and action...belief and walking together...believing God's word and stepping out based on that belief so that God can fill us up and empower us for what he's

calling us to do. Our faith is shown to be real when we take action based on that faith. This principle is clearly outlined for us in James chapter 2, verses 17 to 23:

17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18 But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God.

What if Abraham had said, "God I trust you," but then failed to take action on the clear command of God to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on the altar. He would have been showing God that he didn't really trust him by not taking action on God's instructions. And he would have forfeited his opportunity to experience first-hand God's mercy and miraculous provision for those who will trust him and take action based on that trust. Instead, Abraham believed God and took extremely difficult action based on that belief and trust, and God provided in a miraculous way.

V. CONCLUSION: LISTEN, BELIEVE AND ACT

So as we wrap up today, I think we could say that we've uncovered another trinitarian principle this week. Last week we talked about that trinity of strength, steadfastness and love that God pours out on those who trust him. This week we've seen that the way we grow our faith and begin to experience the fruits of faith walking is centered around three important activities: 1) listening; 2) believing; and 3) acting. And this trinity of activities is all centered around God's Word.

Do you want to be a powerful faith walker? Regularly listen carefully to God's Word. Say no to some activities in your life so that you can spend quality time every day meditating on God's Word and talking with him about it. And as you do

that challenge yourself to truly believe what he's telling you in his Word. And ask him to help your unbelief. He will do just that when you persistently seek him for it.

Do you remember the way Jesus interacted with a man who brought his demon possessed son to him for healing? The man said to Jesus, "It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity of us and help us!" Jesus, of course, noticed the doubting that was revealed by the man's use of the phrase, "If you can," and said to him, "If You can? All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief." He knew he had a strange mixture belief and unbelief and he admitted it to Jesus. And what did Jesus do? Did he say, "Sorry, you don't have enough faith so I can't help you?" Absolutely not, he honored the man's honesty and healed the boy. He helped the man's unbelief in a big way. In the same way, he will help our struggle with unbelief when we honestly acknowledge it to him and ask him to defeat it.

So listen to God's word, challenge yourself to believe it, and finally start taking action on what God shows you in his Word. When you begin believing it's true and relevant to your life, the action will follow. You'll be setting up your sails and watching as God fills them up with the powerful wind of Holy Spirit. And the fruits of faith walking will begin to grow in your life, bringing great glory to God! Listen, believe and act...that's the clear path to growing our faith and learning to walk by the power of the Spirit.