

**Psalm 95 p.499**

1 Oh come, let us sing to the Lord;  
 let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
 2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
 let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!  
 3 For the Lord is a great God,  
 and a great King above all gods.  
 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth;  
 the heights of the mountains are his also.  
 5 The sea is his, for he made it,  
 and his hands formed the dry land.  
 6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
 let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!  
 7 For he is our God,  
 and we are the people of his pasture,  
 and the sheep of his hand.  
 Today, if you hear his voice,  
 8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
 as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,  
 9 when your fathers put me to the test  
 and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.  
 10 For forty years I loathed that generation  
 and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,  
 and they have not known my ways."  
 11 Therefore I swore in my wrath,  
 "They shall not enter my rest.

**John 10:1-16 p.896**

1 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." 6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.  
 7 So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

## Hearing the Voice of God the Father

### Army

#### Teeth arms, Support arms.

Teeth arms – infantry, front-line fighting.

Support arms – anything which makes this possible – logistics, mechanics, medical facilities, catering.

Teeth arms people will tell you how important they are. While all soldiers are trained to fight in battle, those on the front line do most of it, and like to remind you of that.

But teeth would not be teeth if there wasn't something to hold them in place. (As some of us come to realise later in life.)

One crucial example is the bit of the army I was involved in in a small way: the Royal Signals.

- Communication
- First in, last out.
- *Enemy wants to disrupt and destroy communications*, because that will destroy all cohesion, comprehension and control in any situation.

#### Telephones.

Why are *phones* so popular?

It used to be telephones connected to wires; now just about everyone wants a mobile phone as well, or instead.

Even people who get uppity about mobile phones end up borrowing someone else's sooner or later, once in a while.

Again, it's about communications – hearing someone's voice.

Away on work, or in prison, or living abroad or somewhere else in the country, it's so important to hear a wife or husband's voice, to speak to the children, to talk with a friend.

Whether in war or peace, we need to hear voices we know and love.

### Inner voices

Have you ever stopped to listen what goes on in your mind, hour by hour, moment by moment?

I know there's a lot of junk floating round my mind and I'd be really embarrassed if you ever saw a printout of it.

What script is running, and when your thoughts turn, what do they turn to, especially when you're not very busy?

What's the last thing you hear at night?  
What comes into your head when you wake up?

What aids good communication, and what prevents it if hinders it?

In the comms wars, jamming is used to interfere with and prevent voices being heard altogether.

### Heavenly Father, Adopted Children

Last week we spoke about the importance of knowing God as our Father, and knowing ourselves as his much-loved children, adopted into his family.

We took hold of some Biblical truths about God as our Father, and our place in him as his children. The suggestion was this:

“If you are a Christian and you are not convinced of God’s love for you then confine yourself to this topic. Confine yourself to your study to passages that reference adoption. Confine yourself for a season of time to the study of the doctrine of adoption.”

And that of course, is fine; I hope you have done just that, and will continue to do that.

But there’s more.

Whether you’re in war or at peace, or both, not only do you need to know about God, you need to hear and listen to God’s voice. To pick it out and tune in to it. To have a loving conversation from time to time.

#### God speaks to us in lots of ways:

1. Nature – the joy and beauty of creation. Psalm 19 – The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. 2 Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. 3 There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. 4 Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.
2. Circumstances – the way things happen when we’re looking to him and acknowledging him and seeking him, “doors” opening and closing.
3. The Bible – his inspired word, spoken through human history and experience.
4. Jesus – “If you’ve seen me you’ve seen the Father”. The Bible is all about him.

These are wonderful, and we can make the most of them.

But it gets better: God doesn’t just speak to us indirectly, but also *directly*, and *personally*.

And again there’s evidence for this in the Bible itself. The Bible itself teaches us we can hear from God personally.

Take Moses:

#### Exodus 33:7-11

##### *The Tent of Meeting*

7 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. 8 Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. 9 When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. 10 And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. 11 **Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.** When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

Take Elijah:

#### 1 Kings 19:9-15

9[Elijah] came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 10 He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” 11 **And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. 13 And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”** 14 He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” 15 And the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria

Take Jesus:

**Mark 1:9-11 – Jesus’ Baptism**

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

**Mark 9:2-8 – The Transfiguration**

2 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. 5 And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” 6 For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” 8 And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only

It seems God does have a voice and he does speak to people – occasionally out loud, more often quietly.

Jesus himself heard the audible voice of God – but most often, it seems he went off to a quiet place, early or late, to spend time listening for the “quiet whisper”, the “still small voice” of God.

And just as we want to hear the voices of our friends and loved ones, so, once we’re adopted into the God the Father’s family, we should expect to hear and know and love God’s voice too.

Jesus talks about it in terms of a trustworthy good shepherd:

**John 10:1-16**

1 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. **The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.** 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and

the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 **A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”**

There’s a good shepherd, and the sheep learn to trust him. How?

1. They hear his voice
2. They hear him call their name

You can be standing on a station platform and hear the train announcer speak to you. That’s helpful. But this is more than a general purpose announcement. It’s specifically *personal*.

Jesus / The Good Shepherd / God wants to speak to *me*, *by name*.

It turns out God wants to speak to us just in the same way that we so often want to speak to our loved ones. That’s as it should be: if we’re adopted into the family, we can expect the Father to want to speak to us.

Does that sound weird to you? Somewhat out of the ordinary? The idea that God, the good shepherd would speak to *me*, and by *name*?

If so, don’t worry: it seems to have caught Jesus’ disciples off guard as well:

6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but **they did not understand what he was saying to them.**

So Jesus had another go at explaining it.

7 So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.** 11 **I am the good shepherd.** The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 **I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my**

own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

This time it's the Good Shepherd contrasted with

1. A Thief  
v.10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
2. A wolf  
v10 the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

This is more like the battle scenario: the enemy wants to come in and steal and kill and destroy.

Jesus wants us to ignore and run away from the enemy voice, and hear and respond to his voice.

### Examples

#### Jem's Apple

Jem Hicks: "When i was maybe 10 or 11 I remember being at this church weekend thing and being told to listen to God to tell us what he thinks about us or something. Anyway all I could see was this apple and felt really silly so tried to ignore it and didn't tell anyone at first, but the apple thing didn't go away. So eventually I told this lady about it. Anyway she went off and looked in her bible to find some thing and read Deuteronomy 32 v 10 -

"He found him in a desert land,  
and in the howling waste of the wilderness;  
he encircled him, he cared for him,  
he kept him as the apple of his eye

coz of the apple and it's still my favourite bible verse!"

This wasn't a frontline emergency – it was the peacetime personal affirmation of the kind we can and should expect God the Father wanting to love and affirm his adopted children.

I really got to know God as Father when I took time to listen to God regularly and repeatedly, over and over; listening time and again to get a sense of what he might be saying.

I'd heard people say "listen to God and write it down" but never really done it. I was lazy/sceptical/proud all at the same time. But once I did, it began to change my life.

I recommend it to you now too: listen to God. Ask him things. Read your Bible every day, and when something sticks out for you, ask God to talk about it to you, to help, to explain.

Alan (not real name) in Betel in a mess, struggling with addiction and wanting to go back to old life, struggling with new Christian life and wanting to hear God.

He was in a bad way, fearing the worst about himself and life and what others thought, and he was caught up on all the shoulds and the oughts and the musts, and he was on the merry-go-round, of self analytical, self-destructive thoughts, so much so that there was no room to hear from God at, no space for grace; his head was just full of condemnation and pain and temptation and fear and anxiety. He was worried about what had gone wrong in the past, what was going to go wrong in the future, and what he was doing wrong in the present, condemning himself for his temptations to go back to drugs and for not being spiritually alive in the ways he expected people to be expecting of him. "I'm not hearing from God," he said, which wasn't really a surprise. His head was jammed to breaking point with other stuff.

He was actually tuned in to the enemy voices – the wolf/thief, who accused him and lied to him and deceived him about who he was, and what was good in life, and who God was, and what God really wanted for him. Part of it was written in him too his old nature, “the flesh” rather than his new nature based on Jesus living in him.

The enemy was doing a really good job of destroying the communications between Alan and God – getting him to believe lies, cutting off the the true voice of God and the truth and affirmation it brings.

So we sat down, and decided to try listening to God. The ideas was to ask God any question he wanted, listen to see what he said, and write it all down

So he did. He went off by himself for a few minutes, and there was some silence. And then we talked again.

Turned out his question was “Will I ever get it all together?” And I guess that summed up his anxiety in one shot question. He was sick of drugs and destruction, and he was sick of trying so hard to get free and live well and not being free in the way that he wanted. We might be thinking on the same lines. I know I’ve done it a lot in my time – wanting to sort myself out, fix myself, make myself good enough in my eyes and what I think the eyes of others want to see, and for it all to happen immediately, quickly, right here and now, all at once.

So having heard his question, I could see what he’d written on the paper, and there was only a handful words on the page, and I thought “this isn’t good”, but it turned out they were very good.

In answer to the question “Will I ever get it all together?”, I think it really was God who said to him: “I’ve got it all together”.

The answer made me laugh. (It probably shouldn’t have, but it did.) It was God undercutting all the anxiety Alan had about himself, and inviting him to start trusting him in it.

When we’re willing listen and obey God, he starts to speak to us and we have to learn to let him speak to us in new and surprising ways.

He doesn’t engage with the enemy’s lies and chatter. He doesn’t deal with the confusions and hurts that come our way as if they’re true. He just speaks love and truth to us. He does it gently and quietly as a rule. And quite often he tells us how great he is, and how much he loves us.

If it was just another human doing that, we’d probably be right to be sceptical. But when it’s the Creator of the Universe, our true heavenly Father, we’d do well to listen.

### “You don’t believe me”

One person said “Every time I asked God to speak to me, he said ‘I love you’”. It went on for days and days. Speak to me Lord – “I love you”.

Eventually I said God why do you keep saying I love you? Why do you keep saying the same thing?

And then God said “You don’t believe me”.

### Psalm 95

Sheep!

6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

7 **For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand.**

Sheep who can hear his voice!

Today, if you hear his voice,

Sheep who can hear his voice *but harden their hearts*

8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,  
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,  
9 when your fathers put me to the test  
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.  
10 For forty years I loathed that generation  
and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart,  
and they have not known my ways."  
11 Therefore I swore in my wrath,  
"They shall not enter my rest.

You could say that the entire OT is the story of God speaking and the people not listening.

Finally, though, God did what it takes to make his voice audible to everyone: the Good Shepherd finally laid down his life for the sheep.

We're still resistant though. There are many ways we too still harden our hearts:

1. Modern-day **cynicism** and **scepticism**. Rejection of the supernatural. Because it's unusual and hard to verify scientifically.
2. **Ridicule**. "Imaginary friends". "Sky Fairies". Actually the imagination – ability to image – see things in our minds which we're not currently seeing with our eyes – is a wonderful, God-given attribute, one which he uses to make himself known to us.
3. Linked to that is **Fear of making it up**. It might be just me. Well, it might – but if you're a Christian, God's Spirit is in you, and the best in you can come out safely.
4. **Confusion**. Which of the voices in my head is really God?
  - John 10:10 helps: God doesn't seek to steal, kill or destroy; he seeks to bring us life to the full. God will speak life, hope, affirmation, encouragement to us, not hatred, condemnation or venom. Yes, he

challenge us and even rebukes as well – but they will always be to build us up in love, not to kick us and others down.

- Scripture helps: if we're hearing things that are opposed to what God has already said in the Bible, we can be sure it's not his voice.
5. **Pride**. I don't want to. It will make me seem silly. I might get it wrong. Well, you might. But not even trying guarantees you won't hear what you might otherwise.

These are all ways we can harden our hearts.

Don't harden your heart – start to listen to God, start to expect to hear from him. Listen deliberately and carefully, Write it down. Expect to hear the truth about the greatness of God the Father, and Jesus his son through the Holy Spirit, along with affirmation – true and good things to encourage and build you up – such as a real true Father would say.

The Israelites got this wrong, and it cost them dearly: they'd been set free, but ended up wandering around lost in their freedom simply because they wouldn't listen to God.

They heard the lies of the enemy, and missed the affirmation of their Father, the Shepherd of the sheep.

The more we tune into God the Father's affirming voice, the more we'll get to know him, and the less time we'll spend believing the lies of the enemy who just wants to steal and kill and destroy.

This battle happens in our marriages, our families, our friendships, our workplaces, our communities – and our churches.

We have an enemy: The wolf, the thief, who wants to spoil communications between us and God, sow confusion and taking offence and getting wound up and responding angrily.

But Jesus is Good Shepherd: we need to learn to hear him and trust him and obey him, not just in the midst of the battle, but in the quiet every day where we just come to spend time with him, time with our Father, as a child would.

We have hard hearts too: today, it's time to make a radical choice. Today it's time to overrule the hard heart, swallow some pride, try on some humility, and start to learn to listen for God's powerful small voice day by day, moment by moment.

God's got it all together, even though we haven't.  
He's out Father, and he wants to speak to each of us as his much-loved son or daughter.

Will you come and listen to him?