

Reorientation – Hearing God Speaking

Often I find that when I speak to someone for the first time over the phone I picture them in a certain way – based on the sound of their voice, especially if they sound like someone I know.

So, if someone sounds like my brother-in-law Rein, I might subconsciously imagine them to be over 6' tall, graying, with German features, opiniated, stubborn.

However, when I meet them, I am surprised how different they are from my initial impression.

How do we imagine God when God speaks to us?

What images shape what we think God is like?

How does God speak to you?

How do we hear God?

When I was growing up my first impression of God was as a relentless taskmaster, one whom I had to please, work hard to follow, careful to obey – or else (which coincided with my Sunday School experience of revealing a God of law, rather than a God of grace.)

When Scripture was read on Sunday mornings in church – that is the image through which I heard what was read;

When I engaged in devotional reading of Scripture, I often heard Scripture as a list of do's and don'ts, should's and ought's.

I soon discovered I could not please such a God which my mind imagined.

As a result, I struggled with listening to this God.

I could not keep up, I could not follow – perhaps if I was just a better spiritual marathon runner – maybe I could keep up, then
– I would just have to try harder, but I was getting tired of trying harder.

My attempts to sprint after Jesus often resulted in my tripping, falling, scraping my knees and elbows – and by the time I lifted my face out of the dust
– there was Jesus, with the rest of the marathon-running followers disappearing over the horizon.

How long could I keep on such a spiritual journey? Not long!

It was at the point of realizing that, knowing that God existed, I was pretty sure I would never be able to follow God;

It was getting to be too tiring, it took too much out of me
– and so I was ready to give up trying.

It was on a cold October Thanksgiving Monday that I realized it was time to be honest with myself and everyone who was there at this youth retreat I was at

– I was done trying to follow Jesus.

One of the group leaders asked if he and others could pray for me

– “sure, knock yourselves out” (I knew it wasn’t going to do a thing).

They prayed. I gave up – I was done trying. And God embraced me and pulled me in tight (maybe that is one of the reasons I am a hugger) – and Christ received me into his arms.

I did not know how much I needed God’s embrace until God embraced me.

I was renewed, transformed.

I had never experienced God like this before.

My first impression changed when I was embraced by God

I began developing a different image of God. I began seeing God differently, which also changed the way I began hearing God when God spoke to me – in prayer, through the reading of Scripture.

I did not have to be a marathon runner, or even a sprinter to keep up with Jesus.

O, I still would fall, scrape myself up – still do

– but now when I lift my face out of the dust, I see Jesus, hand stretched out, inviting me to grasp hold of it as I hear him say, “Here, Roland, give me your hand – come walk with me.”

I remember what I loathed before, I now couldn’t put down

– I was hungry for God’s Word, reading through The Living Bible

– I was reading it like I had never read the Bible before

– I literally could not put it down.

How do you hear God?

How do you imagine God when God speaks to you?

When you meet God?

How we hear God has much to do with how we see God, and meet God!

Psalm 19 is a reorienting psalm.

It is prayer that leads us to meet God.

And in meeting God we come to realize that our first impressions are not even close.

When I used to hear or read vv. 7-13 – I used to hear these words as a taunt – because I did not experience God’s law in this way.

This description of God’s law, God’s word was not true of my experience;

But now having been embraced by Jesus, in learning to walk with Jesus in the power of the Spirit

– now the word of God became a word of life

– I began to resonate with what the Psalmist expressed.

There are **three movements** in this Psalm that move us to be reoriented in our image of God, to see God in a new way, to encounter God.

(1) Begins with the vastness of God's creation, God's skies (vv. 1-6)

(2) Moves to the beauty, the wisdom, of God's creative word – God's law (vv. 7-10), and then

(3) Moves to us – in which we become worshipers of God, walkers with God, rather than chasers after God (vv. 11-14)

This threefold movement is also reflected in the names of God being expressed – from where we merely hear God's voice over the phone,
to encountering God, face-to-face, in our very being.

The vastness of creation expresses God as *El.*, *El*, in fact is a generic name for God – “God.”

Naming God as *El*, expresses that we have an awareness of God by observing the beauty, the grandeur of creation.

Creation begins to shape our image of God;

It is a hearing God over the phone and creation shapes our initial imagination, impression about God.

So, if that is where you are in your spiritual journey:

Soak it in, connect the vastness of creation with the vastness of God, allow the beauty of creation to lead you to dwell in the beauty of God, the grandeur of God.

We are invited by the psalmist to see God with our eyes and be caught up in God's presence by beholding what God has done with God's hand.

But then our impressions change as we meet God.

In vv. 7-10 God is named as YHWH, the personal name God revealed to Moses in the burning bush

To know God's name is to hear God in a different way.

In hearing the wisdom of God, of witnessing God's creative word, God becomes more personal to us.

God's Law, God's word – leads us to see God **with our ears.**

In naming God LORD, YHWH (God's personal name given to Moses as “I AM,” “I will be what I will be,” or “I will be with you,” – striking similarity to the Hebrew verb for “being”)

– In naming God as YHWH, we move from **witnessing** the works of God to **encountering** God.

Instead of hearing the law of God as words of judgment, as we might often hear the Ten Commandments – as words of what we should not do,

They become words, when heeded, which keep us from falling, refreshing us;

In hearing the trustworthiness of the Lord's statutes, we regard the simplicity of God's wisdom;

In hearing God's precepts ringing true, joy is brought to our heart and lives;

Hearing the glory of the justice of the commands of God, our lives are lifted, our eyes receive understanding,
light

We in hearing, see God as one who is compassionate.

In fact, we come to value God speaking to us, more than silver or gold;

And the things of God are the best of all that we have tasted.

In hearing the words and wisdom of God – **we come to see God more than a Creator,**

We begin to see God as one who encounters, encounter us, encounters all of creation as Life.
YHWH is the One who animates all of life.

In being encountered personally by God, we come to discover that being in community with God is not about our struggling to please God, our anxiety about currying favor with God – rather, we are embraced, we are forgiven, our shortcomings, our failures do not disable us, nor do they have power over us, nor flood us with guilt

– but we are set free

– because God reaches out to us

– and in response we are invited to receive God's reach, God's embrace.

As a result we begin to hear God differently.

But there is one more movement (vv. 11-14) which the Psalmist reveals.
And our imagination shifts once more.

There is a movement to regard YHWH as our Rock and Redeemer.

- It is a term of endearment

YHWH is not merely personal, but we discover we are personal to YHWH.

YHWH loves us deeply and we realize YHWH desires to be in relationship with us.

We are invited into a mutual relationship with God.

We are a people who live in communion with God, gifted with the life of God, re-created, reoriented to be ones who declare the living presence of God

– we enter into being a people who worship God.

And when we worship God, we hear God very differently

– no matter how hard it is to hear God's words, we recognize them as words of life

– which are words meant to bring pleasure, wisdom, joy, life to all who hear God speaking.

Is this the God you see, when you hear God?

Because this is the image of God that Jesus reveals.

Paul writing to the Colossians expresses: “The Son is the image of the invisible God.” (Col. 1:15).

In our following Jesus as disciples of Jesus, are we not image-bearers of the invisible God, God who is personal, and God who reveals how personal all humanity is to God?

Yet, as Paul reveals, “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).

How foolish is it of us to be identified with Jesus, who overcame the power of sin and death.

How foolish is it of us to be image-bearers of YHWH, through Jesus, through the Spirit of God, revealing a God who is personal and embraces the world because all humanity is personal to God.

Being missional is an exercise in being foolish in this world.

Being missional is about being a worshiping people in a mutual relationship with God.

But, we live in a world, where God has a place, yet, especially in our American faith, a place that is given to God to accommodate God to us

- where we set the agenda for our relationship with God
- where we paint a particular image of God that is more in-line with nationalistic and patriotic images, than the image of Christ on the cross.

We are bound to hear God in the way we want God to sound.

Yet, as ones in a worshiping relationship with God, dare we see ourselves amongst “the foolish things of the world, the weak things of the world, the lowly things of the world, the despised things of the world?”

- open to hear God speaking to us in ways which shape us in God’s image, rather than shaping God in our image?

In our places of strength

- where we set our own agendas for living
- we perceive and shape God in our own image
- so that nothing about us has to change.

In our places of foolishness, weakness, lowliness, being despised – we see God, we hear God in a very different way, and we see ourselves in a different way; **open to receive whatever God has to say to us – because we have come to know that God to whom we are personal loves us.**

May we hear God speaking to us

- **as God speaks to us**
- **everyday!**

May we not only receive God as personal in our lives, but may we receive God as our Rock and Redeemer,

Recognize that God speaks to us because we are personal to God who loves us deeply.

Let us hear God in this way!