

September 28, 2025

SALT CO

“Guidelines for Hearing from God”

“Those possessed of genuine love have God’s life in them and are well acquainted with him. Those who do not have no knowledge of him, for God is love.” | John 4:7-8, paraphrase

SLIDE WELCOME TO THE SALT CO!

Welcome to the SALT CO! We are glad you are here!

Welcome those who are joining us online.

SLIDE for on-liners,

*Let us know you’re here! Email us at
seasonedadults@calvarywestlake.org*

Anyone here for the very first time? WELCOME!

SALT CO is the HUB of Seasoned Adult Ministry. For anyone new...by SEASONED ADULTS we mean:

SLIDE SEASONED AS IN...

Chronologically-- we’ve lived a lot of seasons of life

BUT more importantly-

Spiritually--- ...like when sodium and chlorine combined are transformed through a visible **reaction** to make a NEW chemical compound called: SALT... by the grace of God’s Holy Spirit in us, when we receive Christ into our lives, we become like THIS [gesture: one hand—two hands—joined together. And we experience **a LIFE LONG transformational spiritual PROCESS** of becoming more and more like Christ himself.

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JESUS CALLS US THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

And this is the SALT CO (where we pull off the road to gather, AND share stories about how to faithfully navigate the ever-changing terrain on (Notice our new view of Route 60+; and Route 60++...and +++...

A place where we:

Re-fresh

Re-fuel

And sometimes even...*Re-tool*

SLIDE. Table Talk I

Share your name and a good conversation you've had recently. Who was it with? Why would you say it was good? (Mary, Scott and I at offsite on Monday just hanging out under a shade tree talking. Don't get that often. About our lives, life in the Third Third. What's really important NOW...)

SALT TALK

Our theme is

SLIDE GROWING A CONVERSATIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

"Growing a Conversational Relationship with God". We're following Dallas Willard's book, now a classic, entitled Hearing God.

SLIDE of book Hearing God (see last SALT CO for slide)

He said later that his preferred title was Growing a Conversational Relationship with God, but the publishers thought Hearing God would sell better. Interesting. What does that imply? That people want to hear from God, get God's guidance, and help with their lives. But, perhaps, they are *less* interested in an ongoing personal back and forth relationship with God? By analogy, it would be like my saying I'm married to Suzanne because she is useful to me living my life, she helps me get things figured out and done. But look at what I would be leaving out!!

BTW, not requiring, only recommending reading Hearing God. We have a copy on each table for you to thumb through. We sold out at the bookstore, but I understand we now have more there. If we run out again you can always ask Amazon to send you one.

Last time we discussed the “paradox about hearing God”. The paradox is that...

SLIDE The Paradox about Hearing God

“On the one hand there is all this testimony to being able to trust in God’s personal, guiding communication with us, but on the other hand there is at the same time a pervasive and painful uncertainty about how hearing God’s voice actually happens and what its place might be in the church and in the Christian’s life (p. 30).

This morning we’re going to work on resolving this paradox. Today Dallas Willard will walk us through three guidelines for hearing from God.

He begins with the film *The Stepford Wives*, perhaps you’ve seen it.

SLIDE of *The Stepford Wives*

Wives who move in with their husbands to the community go away for a brief time to return strangely compliant, efficient in cleaning and cooking and meeting their husbands’ every need. They no longer have opinions, interests or desires to reach beyond their family, home and country club. Spoiler Alert: One couple who just moved in notice how women suddenly change and become suspicious. They figure out what’s going on and expose the scheme.

Willard’s point:

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“In close personal relationships, conformity to another’s wishes is not desirable, be it ever so perfect, if it is mindless or purchased at the expense of freedom and the destruction of personality.” (p. 38)

We are not created as robots but as free people, *conversational* people! This freedom is precious and vulnerable.

-Sherry Turkle, a researcher and professor at M.I.T., has studied how AI robots can be programmed to mimic conversation. In her book Alone Together she described how you can sit a graduate student in front of a computer screen with an AI designed face and in fifteen minutes of “conversation” have that person dissolved in tears.

Turkle and other scholars like Jonathan Haidt are stepping up with substantial research findings that indicate many of the ways we use technology/and their platforms are reshaping our brains- especially those of young people. Ironically the promise of hyperconnectivity often *undermines* our capacity for *embodied conversational relationships*.

She writes,

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“Every time you check your phone in company, what you gain is a hit of stimulation, a neurochemical shot, and what you lose is what a friend, teacher, parent, lover, or co-worker just said, meant, felt.”

Sherry Turkle, Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age

This has not only social implications but spiritual implications as well.

For there to be a conversational relationship there must be two free, uncoerced, *conversationalists*! And prayer, as we saw last time modelled for us from Old to New Testaments, is a *conversational relationship with God*.

Willard reminds us,

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“We must never forget that God’s speaking to us is intended to develop an intelligent, freely cooperative relationship between mature people who love each other with the richness of genuine agape love. We must therefore make it our primary goal not just to hear the voice of God, but to be mature people in a loving relationship with him. Only in this way will we hear him rightly.” (p. 39)

This sets up the three guidelines for hearing God.

SLIDE Guideline One: Love God with All Our Being

Where “loving” is all about being with someone without the need to impress or perform, where they can rest together, discover together. This is a kind of union of souls where it wouldn’t be right for one to always be telling the other what to do.

Willard says,

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“[God] does not delight in having to always explain what his will is; he enjoys it when we understand and act upon his will. Our highest calling and opportunity in life is to love him with all our being.” (p. 40)

The apostle describes this loving union this way,

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“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in (within, among) you enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:12-13)

And in Ephesians 5:10 we are encouraged to find out what spins God’s bowtie (Dick Thompson translation). Actually Paul writes, ***“Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord”***. For the same reason one person who loves another tries to find out what spins their bow tie.

In this relationship with God it matters hugely, then, how we view who God is. In the parable of the talents (read out Matthew 25:14-30?) the attention focuses on the “one talent” servant because of how he sees his Lord- as a “harsh man”, and so out of fear he buries his talent to make sure he doesn’t incur his master’s wrath if he loses it. In contrast the ten and five talent servants trust their relationship with their Lord and so are free to go out to invest what they’ve been given. They can take risks. In the parable Jesus tells, the servants view of their master (as trustworthy lord, as harsh taskmaster) is a role the master accepts.

So here’s the key question: how do you and I see God? Does God hold a clipboard and stopwatch in His hand, with a whistle around his neck? Does God wear a black robe and hold gavel in his raised hand? Is God a sort of cosmic boss?

If this is how we tend to see God it’s time to listen again to God’s word. For example, this from the prophet Isaiah,

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“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from the farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off; do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.’” (Isaiah 41:8-10)

We heard these words of Jesus at our last SALT CO:

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“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” (John 13:13-15)

Here is the point:

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Our communion with God provides the context for communications between us and Him. (3x)

Let’s say this together.

This brings us to the second guideline for hearing from God:

SLIDE Guideline Two: Humans Can Talk with God

My pastor growing up was amazing to me. I loved his voice and his command even if I didn’t follow everything he said. To me he was somehow bigger than life. One day when I went over to his house after church to deliver something. The front door was open behind the screen. I was surprised to see Big Ed on his knees in front of the TV, pounding the floor in protest at some basketball game he was watching. I’ll never forget that. This was my pastor! The same man who that morning was powerfully proclaiming God’s word.

Later when I was in seminary, I was in Big Ed’s office getting ready to lead worship. We went over the service. Then he said, *“Lead us in prayer.”* I closed my eyes and prayed. I came to, “In Jesus’ name, AMEN” and opened my eyes to see Big Ed on his knees with his face buried in the cushion of the couch.

Two stories about the humble humanity of my pastor.

Without even knowing it he freed me by being... human. He showed me you don't have to be someone else, someone "special", to come into His presence. Or, as I think back on him now, to be a pastor. Pastors are human!! BTW, this is what we can also do for those coming up behind us, the younger generations wondering if they can be... human. Our loving honesty about our journeys with Christ helps them.

The bible is full of ways demonstrating to all humankind that ordinary people can and do have real conversations with God! Think of Abraham, Elijah, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul and Peter.

Otherwise, our bibles can become books of doctrine, abstract stories that do not apply to us today because "that was then but this is now" (!). Or we just stop reading the bible altogether.

What CCC excels at in my opinion, we are taught how the experiences of biblical characters inform our own experiences with God. This is done with great care and responsibility. We are invited to compare the experiences of scripture with our own experiences.

Wilard writes,

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"But the Bible itself teaches that we are to understand it in terms of our own experience when it says that Paul, Barnabas and Elijah were human beings like us and that Jesus knows how we feel in our weaknesses because he himself 'in every respect has been tested as we are' (Heb. 4:15) It means that their experience was substantially like our own." (p. 45).

His next point is crucial:

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“If we are to hear God’s voice ourselves and on an individual basis, we must, above all else, observe how his word came to those people described in the Scriptures. How did they experience God’s communication? What was it like for them to hear God? We must prayerfully but boldly use our God-given imaginations as we read the stories of people who encountered God.” (pp. 45-46)

He goes on to ask what would it be like to stand at that burning bush? Or be little Samuel hearing that voice in the night? Or Ananias hearing the Lord directing him to go find blind Saul (Acts 9:11). What would it have been like to see what Peter saw- that vision of the sheet being let down from heaven with all those animals, and to hear the voice say, “Kill and eat”?

We may be asking, “Does God really engage me in my, insignificant, everyday life? My life just isn’t that important!

But by the same token we might also think that if God did engage me in such communication that that would *make* us important!

This is tricky. Our hearts are tricky. Ken Blanchard coined what EGO stands for: Edging God Out.

Willard notices that Moses was one of the most humble, least presumptuous human beings who ever walked the earth. And he may be the all-time record holder for lengthy conversations with God! (p. 52).

Thankfully Willard is a rare teacher on this point because he gives us a way to assess our growth in humility. He gives us three questions we can ask ourselves, a way to check our EGO’s

SLIDE How to Check Your Pride

Am I pretending?

Am I presuming?

Am I pushing?

We all do all three so don't beat yourself up.

But the more you notice, the more you'll notice when you are being presumptuous, when you are pretending (Willard says in academia it sounds like this: "*Oh, yes, I've read that book.*") And when you are pushing rather than maybe persuading or encouraging someone.

Wherever these patterns are at play...pride is at work.

This brings us to the third guideline:

SLIDE. Guideline Three: Hearing God Doesn't Make Us Righteous

As Willard puts this, "*The infallibility of the messenger and the message does not guarantee the infallibility of our reception.*" (p. 53)

This third guideline gets down on the bone of our need and maybe temptation to use God's input as a way to be important, special, to increase our authority, to have others respect us and listen to us.

Willard writes,

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"God's purposes for having a conversational relationship with us are not merely to make us look and feel secure in our roles or to make sure that we are right!" (p. 53)

God has something far stronger, deeper, wonderful in Mind for us.

Let's go to our tables.

Table Talk II

1. Who is someone you have known who seems to view God as generous and kind, loving yet firm?
2. Which of the three general guidelines for hearing from God helps clear up any questions or doubts or misunderstandings you may have had?
 - Guideline One: Love God with All Our Being
 - Guideline Two: Humans Can Talk with God
 - Guideline Three: Hearing God Doesn't Make Us Righteous
3. How do you think people's lack of practical trust in God create problems for them, such as fearing they might disappoint God?
4. I Corinthians 13:4-6 describes how the Lord loves you! Read it together. How might this word challenge what you tend to think about God?

Wrap Up

I said, "God has something far stronger, deeper, wonderful in Mind for us. How describe this? Paul attempted to do this in his letter to the Ephesians. Finally, he just had to pray... this

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“that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3: 16-19)

Our conversational relationship is for the formation of our relationship with our creator in ways that bring us to greater and greater spiritual maturity and character formation.... because

“You are a ceaseless spiritual being of infinite value with an eternal destiny in God’s great universe.”

Next step in Hearing God, that we are “Never Alone”. Read chapter 3.

NEXT STEPS

SLIDE BIG FUN CAR SHOW PARTY! October 18, 4:00-6:00 in MSM and Patio \$15.00 RSVP _____

1. We’re having a Car Show Party and you and your friends are invited but note that space is limited. Get your reservation in asap!
2. Help with décor, hosting use the clipboards
3. Sign up for the **90 Day Reading Plan**
4. What else?

BLESSING

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you this day, now and forever.

Go in peace and serve the Lord. Amen!

