

Decision Making and Hearing the Voice of God
Session 3

Reflection

*"Understanding is the basis of care. What you would take care of you must first understand, whether it be a petunia or a nation. If you would care for your spiritual core – your heart or will – you must understand it."
(Dallas Willard)*

1. Becoming self aware

- Extravert vrs Introvert

*The preferences for **extraversion** (thus spelled in Myers-Briggs jargon) and **introversion** are sometimes referred to as attitudes. Briggs and Myers recognized that each of the cognitive functions can operate in the external world of behavior, action, people and things (extraverted attitude) or the internal world of ideas and reflection (introverted attitude). The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator sorts for an overall preference for one or the other of these.*

The terms extravert and introvert are used in a special sense when discussing the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. People who prefer extraversion draw energy from action: they tend to act, then reflect, then act further. If they are inactive, their level of energy and motivation tends to decline. Conversely, those who prefer introversion become less energized as they act: they prefer to reflect, then act, then reflect again. People who prefer introversion need time out to reflect in order to rebuild energy.

The extravert's flow is directed outward toward people and objects, and the introvert's is directed inward toward concepts and ideas. There are several contrasting characteristics between extraverts and introverts: extraverts are action-oriented and desire breadth, while introverts are thought-oriented and seek depth. Extraverts often prefer more frequent interaction, while introverts prefer more substantial interaction.

Jung identified two pairs of psychological functions:

- *The two perceiving functions, sensing and intuition*
- *The two judging functions, thinking and feeling*

- Sensory vrs iNtuition

According to the Myers-Briggs typology model, each person uses one of these four functions more dominantly and proficiently than the other three; however, all four functions are used at different times depending on the circumstances.

Sensing and **Intuition** are the information-gathering (perceiving) functions. They describe how new information is understood and interpreted. Individuals who prefer sensing are more likely to trust information that is in the present, tangible and concrete: that is, information that can be understood by the five

senses. They tend to distrust hunches that seem to come out of nowhere. They prefer to look for details and facts. For them, the meaning is in the data. On the other hand, those who prefer intuition tend to trust information that is more abstract or theoretical, that can be associated with other information (either remembered or discovered by seeking a wider context or pattern). They may be more interested in future possibilities. They tend to trust those flashes of insight that seem to bubble up from the unconscious mind. The meaning is in how the data relates to the pattern or theory.

- Thinking vrs Feeling

Thinking and Feeling are the decision making (judging) functions. The thinking and feeling functions are both used to make rational decisions, based on the data received from their information-gathering functions (sensing or intuition). Those who prefer thinking tend to decide things from a more detached standpoint, measuring the decision by what seems reasonable, logical, causal, consistent and matching a given set of rules. Those who prefer feeling tend to come to decisions by associating or empathizing with the situation, looking at it 'from the inside' and weighing the situation to achieve, on balance, the greatest harmony, consensus and fit, considering the needs of the people involved.

As noted already, people who prefer thinking do not necessarily, in the everyday sense, 'think better' than their feeling counterparts; the opposite preference is considered an equally rational way of coming to decisions (and, in any case, the MBTI assessment is a measure of preference, not ability). Similarly, those who prefer feeling do not necessarily have 'better' emotional reactions than their thinking counterparts.

- Judging vrs Perceiving

Myers and Briggs held that types with a preference for judging show the world their preferred judging function (thinking or feeling). So TJ types tend to appear to the world as logical, and FJ types as empathetic. According to Myers, judging types prefer to "have matters settled." Those types ending in P show the world their preferred perceiving function (sensing or intuition). So SP types tend to appear to the world as concrete and NP types as abstract. According to Myers, perceiving types prefer to "keep decisions open."

<http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/JTypes2.asp>

- Facing your pain (getting stuck in a moment)
- Being aware of your anxieties
- Being prepared to risk again

2. The Shaping of the Heart

"Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of invisible and visible winged seeds, so the stream of time brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men. Most of the numbered seeds perish and are lost, because men are not prepared to receive them."

(Thomas Merton, Seeds of Contemplation)

Matt 13:1-23 The parable of the sower

This is really the parable of the soils. The human heart is compared to different types of soils

- Compacted busy path soil
- Shallow, rocky soil
- Cluttered weedy soil
- Good soil

To produce something of worth the soil will need work...

"Mixed with the manure left behind from passing animals. Rotted by the moisture and the mold and the mildew. Mulched by insects. Eaten by bacteria. Stirred by the slow tunnelling of earthworms.

Each of us wants a fruitful life, but who wants to go through that to get it? The organic material that has been broken down to give soil its richness is called 'humus'. Our word 'humble' is related to it, meaning 'to be brought low'. That is the process which God uses to make us receptive to His word.

Sometimes He Himself is the one who brings us there."

(The Receptive Life, p54)

It should also be noted that the shaping of the heart is also a relational/communal process. It is in the impact of real humans upon us – direct and indirect, intentional and unintentional – that God speaks to us and transforms us.

- Discipleship

- Mentoring/supervision

- Counsellors (for advice)

- Friends

"God designed us in such a way that the measure of our communion with him is reflected in the depth of our relationships with others... Soulcraft insists that true spirituality is worked out in true relationships."

(Webster, p71)

3. Living reflectively (rather than reactively)

"Over the margins of life comes a whisper, a faint call, a premonition of

richer living which we know are passing by. Strained by the very mad pace of our daily outer burdens, we are further strained by inward uneasiness, because we have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence, a life of unhurried serenity and peace and power."

(Thomas Merton, A Testament of Devotion)

"The Hebrew word for wisdom means 'the skill of living life'. That skill is learned by cultivating habits of the heart that heighten our sensitivity to hearing God's voice, whether his words come to us generally in the form of universal wisdom or specifically in the form of personal revelation."

(The Reflective Life, p46)

"Solomon states that God's revelation goes beyond the universal to the personal. God, he tells us, 'is intimate with the upright' (Prov 3:32). The word intimate means 'private counsel'... There is a difference between a personal relationship with Christ and an intimate one. In any relationship, it is the depth of the relationship that determines the depth of the conversations within the relationship."

(Reflective p46-7)

God does speak – but the challenge lies in being in a place that can hear. And all of us need different things. Given your profile/wiring, what do you need to do to make it easy to hear God and come to understand what He is seeking to do in you and through you?

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4. The Ways God Speaks

God speaks in different ways. It is foundational to our work that we know His voice - that we realise when God is speaking to us. We will look first at God speaking directly to us and then at ways to confirm and clarify guidance.

a) An audible voice

It is obvious that God spoke audibly in the Garden. This would seem to be the ideal as far as we and God are concerned. Samuel received his call through such an experience (1 Sam 3). Jesus had His sonship confirmed (Matt 3). Even such a sign can be rationalised (Jn 12:28-29). People who have had the experience say the voice is lovingly familiar.

b) The Spirit's voice

There are many examples of the Holy Spirit speaking in the New Testament. One example appears in Acts 8:29 "Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near and join yourself to this chariot.'" We are not told that this was audible but at the very least it was close to audible. The Holy Spirit can speak. His

usual method is to speak to our spirit (1 Cor 2:10-12) - it seems like a voice inside us or behind our minds. In other places the Holy Spirit spoke to more than one person - it would seem to be audible (see Acts 13:2).

In my opinion this is the most important realm of direct guidance. Here God is able to direct us each moment of the day, to go somewhere unplanned or to say something to a person. It is also the most subjective form of guidance. We cannot make major decisions on this basis alone - but often a major change is started by God speaking and gaining our attention.

The Holy Spirit can also stop us from an action. In Acts 16:6-7 Paul and his team were seeking to preach the gospel yet the Holy Spirit restrained them in order to get them into God's will.

c) The word of the Lord

In Jeremiah 1:4 we see "The word of the Lord came to me saying 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you ...'" We are not told whether Jeremiah was reading at the time but this verse comes from Isaiah 49:1. It is more likely that this verse, read a long time ago, was quickened to Jeremiah. After this God begins speaking directly to him. God speaking from His word is a common way God speaks. It is different from just reading the Bible - it is when words on the page suddenly become Spirit and life. This is called a *rhema* (or living word).

d) Pictures/impressions

Another common way God speaks to us is visually rather than verbally. The method can be a physical object we observe (Jer 18:1-5) or a picture we see in our spirit/mind. At the start of Jeremiah's ministry God coaches him in the realm of seeing pictures (Jer 1:11-14). Sometimes we cannot literally 'see' the picture but we get an impression of something being in our spirit (generally an object or picture). Generally the message is simple yet profound.

e) Visions and dreams

It is promised that in the last days young men and women will see visions, old men will dream dreams. These are moving pictures not static images. This is a common method in Scripture that God speaks by. In Revelation John describes it as being "in the Spirit (Rev 1:10). God clearly speaks through visions and dreams - much revelation can be received but we won't necessarily understand it or be able to 'earth' it (Dan 5:15-16, 8:26-27). Visions can also be life changing - a personal dealing with God that has transforming power (Is 6).

f) Angelic visitation

Angels turn up surprisingly regularly in Scripture. They have a ministering, protective role (Heb 1:14) but their name means 'messenger' - and that is a role they are used for at times. They foretold events (Lk 1:11-13, 1:26-38; Zec 1:7-17) and gave guidance to individuals (Gen 19:1-17; Mt 2:13,19; Acts 10:30-33, 12:7-11, 8:26). It is reasonable to expect more obvious angelic activity in our lives.

g) Finding ourselves in the story (Job or Ruth?)

h) In nature (do you see the almond tree?)

i) The arts (the unknown god)

j) Film (Secondhand Lions)

k) Reading (the Ethiopian reading the scroll)

l)

m) Research and analysis

n) Being asked the right question

5. Conclusion

Ken Gire suggests three habits to practice to help our reflection process:

- *Reading the moment* is using our eyes to see what's on the surface
- *Reflecting on the moment* is engaging our mind to see what's beneath the surface
- *Responding to the moment* is giving what we have a place in our heart, allowing it to turn us to God and people

There is a lot here to ponder – and hearing is only aspect of decisionmaking. We can hear right and still make the wrong decision! Because hearing is so subjective we need to develop a grid to assist us – to help us avoid getting tunnel vision. To help us have courage to step forward and own our destiny (sins of omission...).

The four elements in our 'grid' will be:

- Vocation
- The Word of God
- Circumstance and providence
- Community/wisdom

