

WHISPER



by

Mark Batterson

Sermon Notes

“Whisper” Sermon Series

Sermon Notes: 2/2

“A Pierced Ear”

- For additional church resources visit MarkBatterson.com/Whisper
- To inquire about bulk book order discounts on *Whisper* visit the [Multnomah Purchasing Page](#) here.

On December 26, 2004, the largest ever recorded by seismograph erupted 19 miles beneath the Indian Ocean. It registered 9.1 magnitude on the Richter Scale. It generated the energy equivalent of 23,000 atomic bombs and the shock waves produce tsunami waves measuring over 100 feet in height traveling 500 miles an hour, reaching a radius of 3,000 miles. That earthquake tragically claimed the lives of 227,898 people. There was one people group living right in the path of the tsunami who somehow survived without a single casualty. The Moken are an Austronesian ethnic group.

They live their lives on the open seas from birth to death. They're sea based nomads. Their boats, called Kabangs, are their homes. Their children learn to swim before they learn to walk. They see twice as well underwater, as we do. As you would imagine, they have an intimacy with the ocean. They read ocean waves the way that we read books. On the day that the Indian Ocean earthquake hit, an amateur photographer from Bangkok was taking pictures of the Moken. There was a moment when the sea began to recede and the Moken began to cry.

They knew what was about to happen. The birds had stopped chirping. The elephants headed toward high ground and the dolphins were swimming farther out to sea. The Moken, who were near the coast of Thailand, beached their boats and hiked to the highest elevation. Those who were out to sea, went farther out to sea to deep ocean where they knew that the tsunami crest would be minimized as it passed them. The Moken survived because they knew how to look, they knew how to listen. They knew a language that others did not.

Six times in the Gospels, eight times in the book of Revelation, Jesus says something. Six words and there's an urgency to the exhortation and I think the implications are exponential. He says, "Whoever has ears, let them hear." He's not just talking about the audible voice of God within the human range of hearing. This weekend, we continue the series, *Whisper*, how to hear the voice of God. The first language is Scripture and it's in a category by itself.

Timothy II 3:16 says that all scripture is God breathe. When we open the Bible, God opens his mouth and he whispers to us through his word. There are six secondary languages that God speaks through in Scripture. Let me tell you what they are. The first language is the language of desire. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." The word give, in Hebrew, means to conceive. In other words, God will birth new desires within you. I think we have this mistaken notion that if we do what God wants, he's going to send us somewhere we don't want to go to do what we don't want to do and we're going to be miserable.

All right. Listen. That is not the heart of God. That's not the way that God works. Now, we got to be careful. There are sinful desires, there are selfish desires but, when we delight ourself in the Lord, when we seek first his Kingdom,

what happens is, God sanctifies our desires, he gives us new desires so that those desires actually become compass needles that point us towards God’s good, pleasing and perfect will. The second language is the language of dreams. It’s the Lingua Franca. Acts 2:17 says, “I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams when God fills you with his spirit.”

Dreams are the supernatural byproduct. God wants to anoint your right brain imagination. He wants to give you what I call God ideas and I’d rather have a God idea than a thousand good ideas. Listen, God whispers, God works in those synapses, in those 86 billion neurons that crisscross the human mind. The third language is the language of yours. One of my most prayed promises is Revelation 3:7-8: what he opens, no one can shut. What he shuts, no one can open. See, I have placed before you, an open door.”

Let me say this, we love open doors. Closed doors, not so much. It’s a package deal. The older I get, the more I realize that some day, we will probably thank God even more for the closed doors than the open doors. The fourth language is the language of people. God used a prophet named Nathan to rebuke a King named David. He used an uncle named Mordecai, to [exhort 00:06:28] a queen named Ester and he used a spiritual father named Paul, to encourage Timothy. Numbers 11:29 says, “I wish all the Lord’s people were prophets.”

Listen, God wants to speak to you, through others and he wants to speak to others through you. It’s the language of people. The fifth language is a language of prompting. Isaiah 30:21 says, “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it.’” Scripture is our map but the Holy Spirit is our guide.

Listen, God is ordering your footsteps. He is preparing good works in advance but we’ve got to discern the promptings of the Holy Spirit if we want to get where God wants us to go. Finally, the sixth secondary language is the language of pain. C. S. Lewis said that God whispers to us in our pleasures but he shouts in our pain. You know what? You can ignore the Bible. You can leave it on the shelf. You can leave it on your bedside table.

You know what you can’t ignore? Pain. Now listen, pain is a byproduct of the curse, Genesis 3. The day is coming where there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. Revelation 20. In the meantime, we better listen to pain. Pain is a marriage counselor. Pain is a life coach. Pain is a professor of theology. Pain teaches us some of the toughest lessons but some of the most important lessons we can learn.

Now, let me go back to this phrase. “Whoever has ears, let them hear.” Jesus is not talking just about physical ears. This isn’t about the audible voice of God and the human range of hearing, this is about learning to discern God’s voice in these different ways. It’s discerning desires and dreams and doors. It’s reading people and promptings and pain. It’s easier said than done but that’s what this series, that’s what the book you got last week is about.

Author Diane Ackerman tells a funny story about traveling from her home in Waukegan, Illinois to Fayetteville, Arkansas. She had heard about the hot springs. When she got there, she asked her host in a Midwestern accent if there

was a spa. She immediately knew that something got lost in translation. With a confused look on her face and a pretty thick Southern accent, the host said, “Spa? You mean Russian spas?” Might have gotten lost in translation again.

Right now spa and spy, potato potato. We generally hear what we want to hear. We don’t actually hear what’s being said. Is that not the problem with most relationships? It’s true in a relationship with God too. Sometimes, it’s what we want to hear least that we need to hear most. If we aren’t willing to listen to everything God has to say, eventually, we won’t hear anything he has to say.

Let me zoom out for a moment. Studies have found that different countries hear differently. The French ear hears best between a thousand and 2,000 hertz. The British bandwidth, a little bit larger, between 2,000 and 12,000 hertz. The American ear hears best between 750 hertz and 3,000 hertz. In other words, there’s a French ear, there’s a British ear, there’s an American ear. Can I suggest that there is a Catholic ear, a Baptist ear, a Pentacostal ear. There is a Democratic ear, there is a Republican ear.

There is a male ear. There is a female ear. Some would suggest that one words and the other doesn’t. We listen through the filter. We listen through the filter of our history. Our personality, our theology and that sometimes makes it very difficult to actually hear what God is saying. When Jesus said, “Whoever has ears, let them hear.” Here’s what the Jewish ear would have heard, they would have heard, an echo of Psalm 40:6. Here’s what it says, “Sacrifice an offering you did not desire. But my ears, you have opened.”

The Hebrew word for open is archeological. It means to excavate. It means to dig through dense material but it also means to pierce, which has lead many Bible scholars to believe that David was tipping his cap to an ancient ritual that was outlined in Mt. Cyanide. After serving for six years, Hebrew servants would be set free in the 7th year. If that servant loved that master so much that he did not want his freedom, he was given the option of becoming a servant for life.

The physical symbol of that ancient ritual was a pierced ear. Exodus 21:6 says, “He shall take into the door post and pierce his ear with an awl. Then, he will be his servant for life.” The Latin word for obey is obedire and it means to give ear. It’s literally giving God your ear. It’s saying, “God, you get the first word and the last word.”

It’s saying, “God, you’re going to be the loudest voice in my life.” It’s listening to God’s whisper even if a thousand people are screaming something different. Why? Because you have a pierced ear. You have an ear that has been consecrated to the Lord Jesus Christ. Surrendering yourself to his Lordship, it starts with a pierced ear. Over the past decade, I’ve recorded about a dozen audio books with the same sound engineer. We’ve become friends. Brad Smiley. Good at what he does.

One day, we’re having lunch in the middle of one of those recordings and he shared something with me I didn’t know. He said that standard operating procedure for sound mixers in the sound and music industries, before going into the studio, they let their ears relax and recalibrate through absolute silence. Acoustic ecologists called the process

ear cleaning. By definition, white noise is a sound that contains every frequency the human ear can hear. Because it contains every frequency, it's very difficult to hear any frequency, especially the still, small voice of God.

Listen, chronic noise is one of the greatest impediments to our spiritual growth and here's what I know for sure; your life is too loud and your schedule is too busy and that's how and why and when we forget that God is God. In the words of John Dawn, the English poet and clergyman, he said, “I neglect God and his Angels for the noise of a fly.” We are so easily distracted. I fully appreciate what Jesus said. I think a little ear anatomy might help.

When sound waves hit our ears, they travel through a labyrinth. Diane Ackerman describes as a menial, miniature golf course. The outer ear functions like a funnel. It catches the sound travels through the ear canal, hits the ear drum and those vibrations bump into three of the tiniest bones in the human body, the hammer, the anvil and the stirrup. From there, those vibrations spiral through a snail shaped tube called the cochlea and it contains thousands of microscopic hair cells that amplify sound along the way. From there, the 8th cranial nerve transmits impulses almost like Morris code, to the auditory cortex and that's where pitch and volume and tone and distance and direction and meaning are translated into actionable information.

Can I just pause right here and say we're fearfully and wonderfully made? We read verses like Proverbs 20:12, “Ears that hear and eyes that see, the Lord has made them both.” We don't even stop to think about it. What a miracle. When I played basketball in college, no matter how many people were yelling and screaming, I could somehow always hear my dad's voice. Few weeks ago, when I ran the Chicago Marathon, a million people there to cheer for me and the 45,000 other runners in that race. You know who I heard? Laura and Summer and Josiah.

One of the most mysterious capabilities of the human ear is the ability to tune out certain sounds while turning others in and the reason is because we actually hear things twice. Audiologically, there's a short time delay between sound waves hitting the outer ear and then reaching the inner ear. I go back to what Jesus said. It makes me think, how often are we guilty of listening to God with our outer ear and it's in one ear and it's out the other and God is saying, “I'm speaking to you. I'm giving you this desire. I'm closing that door. This dream is from me. No, I'm using this person to speak it. No, that prompting is from me. Would you listen to the pain?”

God is speaking but so often, it's just the outer ear and I think part of what Jesus is saying is, “You've got to listen with the inner ear. You've got to listen twice.” If you're anything like me, it's usually the critical remarks that seem to get to the inner ear and that's how they get in our spirit and they echo don't they? Sometimes it's our own negative self talk and we beat ourselves up over and over and God is saying, “Hey, by the way, your sins' forgiven and forgotten. Now, if you could just forgive yourself and maybe forget for a minute, then we can get about our business.”

I think sometimes, we let the wrong thing get in our spirits and it starts with an ear that is pierced and that means tuning some things out so that we can tune in the voice of God. Let me switch gears a little bit. This is tough to talk

about because it’s hard for me to even know how to define it for you and what it might look like in your life.

Henry Nowlin says, “Silence is an act of war against the competing voices within us and around us.” Some of you need to go to war with those competing voices. I love what else he said. “Every time you listen with great attentiveness to the voice that calls you the beloved, you will discover within yourself, a desire to hear that voice longer and more deeply.”

Here’s my prayer for you, it’s Psalm 46:10, “Be still. Be still and know. Be still and know that I am God.” There’s a story told about European missionaries who went to Africa and they hired some of the locals to porter some of their supplies and to guide them to where they wanted to go. Well, those guides went at a slower pace than what the missionaries wanted and so, after the first two days, they pushed the pace.

On day three, they went twice as fast and went twice as far as day two. The missionaries were thrilled with the progress but on day four, their guides refused to break camp. The missionaries asked them what was wrong and the guide simply said, “We went so quickly yesterday that we must wait here for our souls to catch up with us.” I need my soul to catch up with me.

If there’s anything I learned from running that marathon, it’s that you better run at a sustainable pace if you want to finish the race. I also know how driven I am. This is a tough sermon to preach because I’m not sure I’m great at this but I’m trying. I went too fast to get to here and I’m guessing some of you feel the same way.

Isn’t it interesting how often we try to just manufacture the miracle and our default setting is ASAP as soon as possible. We want God to do what God does, yesterday. The process is so hard for us but sometimes, less is more. Sometimes, slower is faster and sometimes, quieter is louder. For the past 30 years, an acoustic ecologist named Gordon Hempton has compiled what he calls the list of the last great quiet places. Consists of places with at least 15 minutes of uninterrupted quiet during daylight hours.

At last count, there were 12 quiet places in the entire United States and we wonder why the soul suffers. As Hempton noted, “Quiet is a think tank of the soul.” Simply put, God speaks loudest when we’re quietest. Let me close with this, one of the most played pieces of classical music is Beethoven’s Symphony 5 in C Minor. Immediately recognizable because of that four note motif, the iconic opening. Did you know that it actually begins with an eighth rest?

Beethoven put it right at the beginning of the symphony and listen, I don’t know exactly what Beethoven was thinking. I know it was very unique when he did it but I do know this, that that eighth rest was a sonic buffer. If you’ve been to a concert you know that there’s some ambient noise at the beginning. There’s conversation between concertgoers. There are a few stragglers who always try to find their seat, usually in the middle of the row.

There’s the rustling of programs. I wonder if he wanted a bit of silence at the beginning of the symphony as a form of ear clearing. All I know is this, we probably need more eighth rests, don’t we? I don’t know exactly what that looks like for you. Social media’s white noise and if it’s the first thing we check every morning and the last thing we check every night,

as is the case for many of us, many mornings and many nights.

Then I wonder if that’s one way we’re actually deafening ourselves to the voice of God. Whatever you listen to most, the volume is going to get turned up. I don’t know if you can afford to do this but man, maybe a two day silent retreat wouldn’t hurt. Even if you can’t do that, somehow finding a way to put an eighth rest at the beginning of your day, I bet it’ll be more of a symphony.

Putting an eighth rest at the end of your day might help you go to sleep a little bit better. All right, I have three conclusions, here’s the second one, there are really two ways to read the Bible. Reading the Bible for breadth is called *Electeo Continua*. I think back to our long story short series, 13 weeks through the books of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It’s reading for breadth.

The goal is to get the big picture. Listen, that’s important. There’s this thing called Herman Newtics, it’s the science of interpreting Scripture and the most basic principle of Herman Newtics is this: let Scripture interpret Scripture. You’ve got to let the Old and New Testament do a little dance. You’ve got to let different principals and different passages juxtapose with one another.

Why? Because text without context is pretext. *Lecteo Continua* is important. You’ve got to have the big picture. There’s a second kind of reading and I think it’s more of an inner ear kind of reading. It’s *lecteo devina*. The Bible was not meant to be read. Reading without meditating is like eating without digesting. I think the bible was meant to be meditated on and prayed through and contemplated on.

Lecteo Devina’s been likened to a meal. There are four steps or four stages and you can jot these down if you want but it’s been likened to a meal and I rather like that analogy. Can I tell you what I did on Tuesday night? When a book releases, we have a little habit that we do a dinner celebration and I felt like it had been a little too long since I had been to fogata chow.

Can I just say this, any restaurant that hands you a green card that says, “Yes please,” that comes to the table with 13 cuts of meat and it serves these cheese rolls, 16 of which, I ate. Don’t judge me, I ran a marathon three weeks ago. I am still in the grace period. That meal was *electeo devina*. There was this one lady, bless her heart. She came around, one of our servers, she came around bottom sirloin wrapped in bacon.

I feel like crying right now. She would come to the table. I eventually would started clapping every time she came by and eventually, every time she came by, I would just clap for her. I didn’t know what else to do. Do we enjoy the Bible like that?

In fact, let me take one step back and you tell me how much you enjoy God and I’ll tell you how spiritually mature you are.

Many of us I think, still relate to God out of this place of fear. The perfect love casts out all fear. Listen, these

languages are love letters. You don't need to be afraid of what God's going to say. He loves you.

When you succeed, he says, “I love you.” When you fail he says, “I love you.” When you have faith, “I love you.” When you die, “I love you. I love you.” That's who he is. That's what he does. All right, *electeo devina*, reading is taking the first bite but let's not stop there. Meditating is chewing on God's word. It's not just reading the Bible, it's letting the Bible read you.

It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart but here's what I found, just like pace of life, the pace with which you read the bible is a good indicator. You know what I found, just confession. When I get to parts of the Bible that I find convicting or confusing, my tendency is to speed read. I'mma just read right past them. Let's get to the good parts, right? No, that's when we need to slow down and actually let that get into the inner ear so that we really hear what God's saying.

The third step is prayer and I think this is huge. As you pray through the word of God, what happens is ... in fact, 11 times in Psalm 1:19 it says, that the word quicken is repeated. In the Psalm it says, “Quicken thou me according to thy word.” The word quicken is the word that means physical resurrection. It's one of the jobs of the Holy Spirit. As we read the word, and you have to hide it in your heart first, but as you read the word, the Holy Spirit begins to quicken it.

Every time you read the bible, there ought to be a littler resurrection. He wants to bring faith and hope and love back to life. You can't just read it, meditate it and pray it, I think you have to contemplate on it. This is where we absorb the word and we absorb its nutrients. It's how the word gets from our head into our heart. It's how the word gets from the outer ear, to the inner ear.

Reading, meditating, praying, contemplating. *Electeo devina*. It's drilling down on Scripture. James 1:22 says, “Do not merely listen to the word and so to save yourselves, do what it says.” Let me close with this. I know we focus more on the first language, on Scripture but I think that's a good starting point. If you want to learn to discern the voice of God, it starts with Scripture. Peter Marshall, former Chaplain of the Senate said, “I wonder what would happen if we all agreed to read one of the Gospels until we came to a place that told us to do something then went out to do it and only after we had done it, began reading again.”

I'll tell you exactly what would happen, his Kingdom would come and his will would be done on Earth as it is in Heaven because that's what happens when hearers of the word become doers of it. “Whoever has ears, let them hear.” Let's pray. Father help us. We want to hear your voice. We need to hear your voice. Lord, there's a lot of white noise, there are a lot of competing voices. There's a lot of self talk.

I pray that you would help us to experience an ear cleaning. God, I pray that you would pierce our ears this weekend. That we would give ear to you and really begin to hear and discern. Not just your voice but God, your heart. In Jesus' name, amen.