

How Do You Discern the Presence of God?

- All right, we are two thirds of the way through our study of Elijah. I hope you've enjoyed it. If you've got a Bible, go in the Old Testament to 1 Kings 19, and we're gonna answer this question, how do you discern the presence of God? And this is a significant moment in history where God speaks to a man of God and he obeys that word of God and it changes his life. So the big issue is, how do you know that God is present in your life and speaking into your life? I'll start with a bit of a story. I've been a senior pastor now for 27 years. And one thing that always happens is, people are like, "I just need to meet with a senior pastor or a pastor so they will tell me what to do." And I'll tell you, we don't know what to do, let alone for you. And the thought is that, "Well, surely God would speak to the leader." Having been the leader, I can assure you of this, we don't always know what we're doing. Usually, that's called Monday through Friday. And so what happens is, people just think God will speak to the leader in a way that he would never speak to them. The truth is God's a father. He loves all of his children. I've got five kids, I love 'em all with my whole heart. I don't have any favorites. And I talk to all my kids and I listen to all my kids. It's not like I only talk to one and then say, "You tell the other kids that dad loves 'em." And so because God's a father and he's got a father's heart, he loves all of his kids, he speaks to all of his kids, he listens to all of his kids. And if you're one of his kids, you can go directly to him and you can hear from him. I'll give you an example. I've learned this the hard way in pastoral ministry. Some years ago, I was talking to a man and he really made a series of decisions that really wrecked his life. I mean, just made a disaster of his life. And he met with me. He's like, "Why did God allow this to happen? I thought God was good and God was loving and God was kind. And why didn't God show up and deliver me and save me and fix this?" And I said, "Well, it looks to me like you made a series of decisions that were all disobedience and folly, and then everything cratered, but it was a long time coming." I said, "So how many times did God speak to you and you just disobeyed him before crisis came?" He said, "Well, God never said anything to me." I said, "I don't think so. I've got five kids. And if one of the kids was making a series of self-destructive decisions, at some point, I would start speaking to them." I said, "I'm sure God was speaking. Maybe you weren't listening." He said, "No, God's never really spoken to me." I said, "Okay, I know that's not true." I said, "So here's what I want you to do. Go home, pray, repent of all the sinful, foolish decisions that you believe that you made that led up to this crisis in your life. Just be honest." I said, "And ask the Holy Spirit to convict you and show you, not condemn you and shame you, but to convict you and to show you." I said, "Then I want you to write out every time that God spoke to you and you ignored him." He said, "Well, how do I know that he spoke to me?" I said, "Well, just in a certain moment, maybe he brought to mind a scripture. Write that down. Maybe he brought to mind a teaching or a book you've read or a lesson you've learned. Jesus said he would bring things to remembrance. Maybe as well the Holy Spirit was just convicting you and in you're conscience you're like, 'I shouldn't do this.' Or maybe you were going to do something you weren't supposed to do and God was trying to move you, and actually you had to work around a lot of inconvenient things to get yourself into trouble." I said in addition, "Just every time that the Holy Spirit sort of gave you that sense of uh-oh," I said, "write all of that down." "Those are all ways God is speaking to you in addition to any other supernatural way that he showed up." He came back. He said, "I disobeyed God at least 20 times before I had a crisis." And he just journaled out every time he

just ignored God. And I explained it to him. I said, "Well, here's what happened. It was like there was a collision in your life in the middle of an intersection, but before that, you ran through 20 red lights. You just drove through 20 red lights, and then you're in the intersection like, 'God, what are you doing?'" And he's like, "I've been pulling the E-brake for about five miles and you just keep throttling down on the gas and running through the red lights, not paying attention." This sermon could change your life if you will hear and obey what God says to you. And my thesis is this, I believe that God is speaking and hardly anyone is listening, and virtually, no one is obeying. Let's jump into the story. Discerning God's presence. We're gonna look at the man of God, Elijah. God is present in his life and speaks to him. This will be a case study for all of us. I don't want it to be condemning, I want it to be encouraging. I don't want it to just cause you shame in your past, I want this to cause you hope for your future. I'm super excited. I believe God has great things for you. And even if you've not been listening, he's still been speaking. And if you'll start listening, everything will start changing. Here's the story, 1 Kings 19. "Then he," this is the man of God, Elijah, "came to a cave and lodged in it." "And behold, the word of the Lord came to him." God speaks to him. Over and over and over, we hear the word of the Lord came to Elijah. He listens, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah says, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts." And the word host there is for an angelic army. It's the same army that previously brought the lightning strike, or I should say, the fire strike from heaven. So God is a military commander of the heavenly host. "For the people of Israel," God's people, "have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword." What he's saying is, "God, nobody's been listening to you, but I'm listening." Everything changes if one person starts listening. That could be true in your family, that could be true in your business, that could be true in our government. Goes on to say, "And I, even only I am left, and they seek to take my life and take it away." "And he said, 'Go out and stand,' God told him, "on the mount before the Lord. And behold, the Lord," there's only one Lord, there's only one God, "passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces, the rocks before the Lord." So it's like a hurricane. "But the Lord was not in the wind." "And after the earthquake, a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire." "And after the fire, the sound of a low whisperer." God speaks quietly, faintly, softly. "And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak." Something similar happens in Isaiah 6. Isaiah gets to see Jesus. High and exalted, seated on the throne. It's this Lord Jesus. John 12:41 says that Isaiah saw Jesus in his glory. Just a bit of a rabbit trail for a moment, and I'll come back to my point. Jesus Christ, before he walked on the earth and after he exited the world, rules and reigns on a throne in glory. He had a few short years of humility, the rest are in glory. When Isaiah saw him, he said, "I saw the Lord high and exalted," it's the same Lord who is speaking and meeting with Elijah. And he says in Isaiah that when the angels were surrounding the throne and they were singing in the presence of the exalted, Jesus, holy, holy, holy, the Lord God Almighty, heaven and earth are full of his glory that the angels took their wing and covered their face. Because even a perfect sinless angel struggles to gaze on the glory unveiled of Jesus Christ. And suddenly Elijah here, he's a sinful being unlike the angelic beings, and he's not just seeing the presence of God, he's hearing that God is present and he covers his face. There's humility here, a recognition that he's not fit as a sinner for the presence of God. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face and his cloak and he went out and he stood at the entrance of the cave. And

behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I've been very jealous." He's gonna repeat himself. You ladies just need to know, this is what men do, okay? You're like, "You've told me that story." Well, I'm getting old. You're gonna hear it again. But what's happening here for Elijah, he's got a loop narrative in his brain. Everybody's evil, I'm the only man left, and God needs to get him out of his narrative into God's narrative, out of the loop and into the future, okay? Sometimes the way you see it is not the way God sees it. So he repeats himself. "He said, 'I've been very jealous for the Lord, the Lord of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, killed your prophets with a sword, and even I, I only am left, and they seek to take my life away.'" God pivots the story. How many of us, we've told God multiple times, "Here's what's happening," and God's like, "listen, I think it's different." "Don't tell me what you think, listen to what I think." It's not a rebuke, it's just a loving course correction. He goes on to say, "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.'" This is amazing. God gives the prophet the authority to choose the king. And this is all prophetic. God is telling us what the future holds. "And Jehu the son of Nimshi, you shall appoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha," very important person, "the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah." And some of you have been around for a while, some of you're new. Some of you're new and you're wondering, "Did he say it right?" And the point is, say it fast and confident. That's just how you do it when you're reading the Old Testament. Nobody knows, nobody knows. Nobody knows. Say it confident. Just say it like a clinging on, just say it loud and proud, okay? "And you shall anoint to be prophet in your place." You've been the prophet, Elisha is coming to be your successor. "And the one who escapes from the sort of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sort of Jehu shall Elijah put to death." We'll deal with this a little bit further in the storyline as we continue. "Yet, as I leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal," the Demon God, the counterfeit, "and every mouth that has not kissed him." First and foremost, the man of God is in a cave. The story previously as we examine is that he had the showdown on Mount Carmel. It was God versus the demonic false gods, Baal and Asherah, and it was the true prophet against the false prophets. And ultimately, there were 450 false prophets of Baal, 400 false prophets of Asherah. Fire comes down from heaven, Elijah slaughters all the false prophets, Jezebel puts a bounty on his head and a curse to oppress him. He so overcome the man of God. He fled out into the wilderness, he laid down under a tree and he said, "I just wanna die." God shows up not to rebuke him, but to restore him. Sometimes you're not bad, you're just broken. You've not done anything sinful, you've just reached the limits of your humanity. That's where he was. So God ministers to him for 40 days, 40 nights, bakes him a cake, gives him a nap, comforts him, gives him water to be hydrated. Now he's restored, and then he goes to a cave. And he is there basically in hiding to hear from the Lord and get his next assignment. As we read the Bible, I always like doing anything I can to encourage you to believe that everything in the Bible is true. Where a Bible believing church, a hundred percent. And when it says that a person, a place, or an event happened, anytime I can bolster your confidence in the scriptures, I like to. And what's really cool about this is we know exactly where this cave is, where Elijah is. You can actually visit there. Elijah's cave is open as a tourist attraction. Previous to the days of Elijah, it was used for the worship of the Demon God Baal, perhaps even sexual sin and child sacrifice. But today, it's near the Israeli city of Haifa.

And it's a place that tourists go. We know exactly where it is. As soon as Elijah showed up, they stopped worshiping the Demon God there and they started worshiping the real God. It's on Mount Carmel. It's about 131 feet above sea level. It's a very nice place to be. The walls are all limestone. And it's about 1,350 square feet, and they say that the ceiling height is 15 to 16 feet. So this is pretty much a two bedroom apartment with limestone, natural cooling, and high ceilings. I mean, in Scottsdale, it's kind of bougie. It's pretty nice. Right? And so this is Elijah's cave where God shows up and speaks to him. We know exactly where this is. So that's Elijah's cave. Let me talk to you about the Elijah Complex. A friend of mine, R.T. Kendall, who preached for us recently. And he did a great job, and he's gonna be back next year by the way, and we're looking forward to seeing him again. But in his book on Elijah, he talks about the Elijah Complex, right? He says some people have an inferiority complex. Like, "Oh, I'm inferior." Other people have a superiority complex. "I'm better than everyone." Some people have an Elijah Complex, "It's all up to me," right? And what he talks about in the Elijah Complex is there are certain people that think, "I'm the only one that you can trust, I'm the only one you can depend on, I'm the only believer left. If it wasn't for me, Christianity would come to an end." Okay, yeah? All right, and if you've been watching the news, you may feel that way. You know? How many of you watching the news and you're like, "I think I'm the only..." "Did I miss the rapture?" "Jesus did you take everybody home, and I was napping? Like, what happened?" And it can feel that way as the whole culture gets darker and more demonic, and more disgusting. And we live in a world like their world where government was against God, and ultimately, culture was against God, and education was against God, and even religion was against God, that's the day in which we live. We live in the dark demonic days of Elijah. And if you're a true believer and you love the Lord and you're paying attention, you can sometimes feel like Elijah. I'm the only one left. Now, in the New Testament, Paul quotes this section of the Elijah narrative in Romans 11:5-6. He says, "In the days of Elijah..." Remember, God said, you're not alone. There's 7,000 that have not bent the knee to Baal or kiss the ring of Baal, the Demon God. And then in that section, the Apostle Paul, or I should say the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul talks about this as the remnant. We visited this a few occasions. I'll hit it briefly. The remnant are those who really do love the Lord. And the point is this, not everybody who goes to church is going to heaven. In fact, there's a lot of pastors, they're gonna be kindling.

- [Congregation Member] Yeah.

- I've met them. They can comment online. We have a delete ministry standing by. I'll never forget. I'll just give you an example. I'll just verbal process a bit. I'll never forget, I was a brand new pastor and I got invited out to speak at a conference in Florida to a mainline denomination, a liberal, progressive, woke apostate denomination. A woke, apostate, liberal, progressive abomination/denomination. And when I arrived there, they wanted me to speak on how to get young people to come to your church. Obviously this was a long time ago when I was young. And I got up and I said, "Well, you gotta preach the gospel of Jesus Christ for its the power of God to everyone who believes, and there's no power apart from repentance of sin, faith in Jesus Christ." And I just went for it, and a couple of the pastors raised their hands. They said, "What if you don't believe that?" I said, "Well then you're a non-Christian. You're going to hell." Okay?

And I was in my twenties. I didn't know you weren't supposed to tell the truth. I didn't know. And they looked at me, they're like, "Well, we don't believe that." And I said, "Well, then you're gonna go to hell." I said, "I hope no young people come to your church." I said, "You know, it says in the Bible, your blind guides leading people astray." You cross land and sea, make them twice the son of hell." I just went for it. And at the time, we were next to Disney World, and so it was kind of prophetic, you know. Like, where we're going? And now that I think about it and I'm verbal processing, and so then they came up afterward. They're like, "That was very offensive." I said, "Well, God's very offended. You guys went to school and you got a degree and you get up and your false prophets and you lie to people and you don't preach the gospel, you don't tell them about Jesus, you don't tell them about sin, you don't warn them about hell." I said, "You guys are an absolute abomination. I didn't even know there were people like you." And I had three sessions left to preach. I was done early. I went to Disneyland. I mean, I wouldn't today 'cause those people have taken over. But nonetheless, they've taken over Disneyland. Nonetheless... Or Disney World. Nonetheless, the point is simply this, there is always a remnant, but there are times that even the pastors are non-Christians, even the churches are non-Christians, even the denominations are non-Christians. And you can feel like, "My goodness, is there anybody left?" Yeah, there's always a remnant. And Jesus calls the remnant, quote, "the little flock." It's the flock within the flock. And so ultimately, here, Elijah's got the Elijah Complex. It's all mean. God's like, "Actually I got 7,000 other people." Like, "We actually could have a pretty good size get together." So within this, a couple of things, the Elijah Complex can get you to feel like it's all over, but it's not over. Like, there's no hope when there is hope. That nobody's listening, but there are some who are listening. That nobody really belongs to the Lord, but sometimes there's a lot more than you think. So a couple of things. Number one, be the remnant. Just be a true believer. All right, if you're gonna say you love Jesus, love Jesus. And if you say you're gonna follow Jesus, follow Jesus. And if you're gonna quote the Bible, then be willing to quote any or all of it. Number two, find the remnant. We saw this in Elijah's life. He encountered a man of God named Obadiah. He was part of the remnant. In a moment, God just prophesied, here, he is gonna meet Elijah, who is also part of the remnant. Find the remnant. And ultimately, find the remnant, number one, at home. In the days of Noah, the whole world had gone astray except for Noah and his family. If nothing else, make sure at your house, it's part of the remnant. At least there's worship at your house, there's prayer at your house, there's love for Jesus, and life in the spirit at your house.

- [Congregation Member] That's right.

- This is why we build men up to bless women and children. Because men, you and I, you know what, like, I'm not gonna stand before God and give an account for the universe, but I will my address and what goes on in my house.

- [Congregation Member] Amen.

- Number two, find the remnant at work. If you have a job, look for the believers who do know and love the Lord. Get lunch with them, pray with them, love them, encourage them, you know,

make decisions together. Ultimately, this happens in the days of a guy named Daniel. Dark demonic days in Babylon, like the days of Elijah. And so he's got three guys. He's working for a demonic government. So Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. If you watch the "VeggieTales," it's Rack, Shack & Benny. And they... They roll like a force through Babylon, loving and serving God. You're like, "Well, at work, is there anybody there who loves Jesus?" Stick together, pray for each other, encourage one another. And then in addition, find a church that is part of the remnant. And many of you are watching online, hundreds of thousands of you are watching online, and some of you online have told us repeatedly, "I can't find a church that actually teaches the Bible." "It's crazy." Well then, find a church that maybe has a remnant in it. If you can't find a church that is in the remnant, find a church that has a remnant. Maybe it's a department, Bible study, Sunday school class, small group something. And this Jezebel spirit is always trying to cancel the prophets and close the churches and castrate the next generation. That's what happens with the Jezebel spirit. The Jezebel spirit goes from the days of Elijah to the days of the New Testament church. We looked at this in Revelation 2, the church at Thyatira. And Jesus, a thousand years after Elijah, rebukes the church at Thyatira and says, "You tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a teacher, seduces and leads my people astray." And then Jesus says to the church of Thyatira, "The rest of you who do not hold to this teaching of Satan." Even though in the days of the New Testament, the spirit of Jezebel, because people come and go, but the demons remain the same, this is why you see patterns throughout history, people come and go, but the demons remain the same that ultimately, even though the Jezebel spirit that was at work in the days of Elijah, was at work in the New Testament church, even within that church, there was still a remnant. There were still people in there who really did know and love God. We're seeing a day of decline of Christianity. We're seeing a massive decline in church attendance. But even in some bad churches are some true believers.

- [Congregation Member] Yeah.

- And they do love and serve the Lord. And so if you're in that place, find those people. What I wanna talk about now is really hearing from God. And the point is this, in Elijah's life, God is present, and he speaks. In your life and mine, god is present, and he speaks. In fact, God told us, through the Lord Jesus Christ, that he would never leave us nor forsake us. The Holy Spirit is within the child of God, meaning God never departs from his people. And God does speak to us as he did to Elijah. And what I love about the story of Elijah, and this is a major theme that keeps happening in the storyline of Elijah, there's the word of God and the power of God. And some churches and some Christians, they're word people. Bible, Bible, Bible, Bible, Bible. Other people are power people. Prayer, worship, faith, action. The truth is, what I really appreciate is number one, Elijah is a man of the word. It keeps saying that the word of the Lord came to him. But he's not just a man of word, he's a man of power.

- [Congregation Member] Yeah.

- And this is where you don't need either or, we really need both end. And we need the word of

God and the power of God.

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- We need God to tell us what to do, and then give us the power to do it. That's why after Jesus rose from the dead, before he ascended, he said, "Don't go just yet, the Holy Spirit will come with power." And so what we want is we want the word of God to direct us and we want the Spirit of God to empower us. If I could use an analogy, it's like sailing. You need a rudder and a sail.

- [Congregation Member] Yeah.

- You need a rudder and a sail. And Jesus says the Holy Spirit is like the winds. So think of the Holy Spirit as the powerful force of God driving the believer in the church forward, and the word of God is the rudder that keeps it on course. If you're only a word church, you're tied to a doc.

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- If you're only a spirit church, you're adrift at sea. If you're a word in spirit, church, or person, you are powerfully driven into the will of God to accomplish what God has called you to do. And that's... I'll just be honest with you, that's exactly who we wanna be.

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- We wanna be word people and power people. We want to know what the Bible says and we want the Holy Spirit to show up and give us the power to do exactly what he's called us to do. And so what happens here, God is present in his life, empowering him and speaking to him. And how does God speak to Elijah? Now, let me just say, who wouldn't wanna hear from God, right? I mean, as you look at our world, wouldn't it be nice if God said, "Here's what you need to do." You're like, "Thanks 'cause I was not sure." Okay? And as we look into the future, you're like, "I don't know where we're going economically, politically, socially, morally, culturally, and I don't know how to navigate myself, my family, my business through what is coming," you need to hear from God. How does God speak? This is so crucial. There's actually a theology called cessationism that God doesn't really speak anymore. That's not true because we need him as much as we ever have.

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- And what it says is, he goes outside. God says, "Go outside, son," so he goes outside. And it says there's a hurricane wind. Previously, God spoke through the wind. He did this in the days of Noah. All of this is in the study guide, by the way. It's free in the back or online at realfaith.com. I show my work. But God spoke in the wind in the days of Noah and Moses, dried the ground as God's children were delivered. And he spoke in the wind previously in the life of

Elijah. 1 Kings 18:45, after it didn't rain for three years, there was a strong wind, and that was God's signaling rain is coming. So sometimes God speaks in the wind, but not on this day. And then there was an earthquake, the ground shook. Previously, God had spoken in an earthquake in the days of Moses, Jonathan, the days of Jesus, and the days of Paul. Previously as well, God spoke to Elijah through quake and ground. When it hadn't rained for three years, and then the monsoons hit, the ground would've shook. In addition, when they're on Mount Carmel and fire comes from heaven and consumes everything, the ground would've shook. God sometimes speaks through shaking ground, but he didn't on this day in the life of Elijah. And then God sends a fire. Well, God frequently speaks through fire in the Bible. He does this in the days of Moses, he does this in the days of Aaron, he does this like tongues of fire in the days of the New Testament church, and he previously did this in the days of Elijah, sending fire from heaven. Three ways that God had communicated to Elijah is not the way that God communicated to Elijah on this day. Instead, God comes in a low whisper. This is a new way that God has spoken to Elijah. Various English translations, I think, are helpful. Let me share some with you. Here's how God spoke. A voice. A soft whisper. A still and soft voice. A quiet whispering voice. The soft whisper of a voice. A quiet and gentle voice. A gentle whisper. A gentle and quiet whisper. A tiny whisper. I love that one. And a still, small voice. God still speaks, but two things I want you to know. Number one, he's free to speak however he wants. And two, he's creative. What sometimes happens is God speaks to you one way, and you think that's the only way he speaks. And sometimes it's like, "I read this book and it changed my life. Everybody has to read this book." Oh, maybe not. "This song changed my life. Just listen to this song and it'll change your..." Well, maybe not. "I went to this camp, I went to this conference, I took this class, and it changed my life." Okay, great, praise God, but God may not choose to speak that way to another person. God's very creative. And sometimes what happens in our life, we're like, "God spoke to me this way, so that's the only way I listen." No, you need to be flexible 'cause God is free, and you need to be considerate 'cause God is creative. Maybe he speaks to you this way on one day, and this way on the next. And here's what we see. Sometimes God comes boldly. We see this in life of Elijah. Sometimes God comes humbly. On this day, he came humbly. Some days in Elijah's life, in our life, God comes powerfully. Fire from heaven, monsoon reigns after three years, sometimes gently. That's on this day. And sometimes God shows up in a big way, and sometimes in a little way. And it's interesting because we need to be very much aware and self-aware of God's presence and be open to hearing however God is speaking. Because when God comes as Jesus Christ, here it says that he was meeting and hearing from the Lord. When that Lord showed up on the earth, Jesus Christ, how did he come? Humbly, gently and tiny. That's how Jesus came. So let me explain God's speaking to you. God speaks to you. Now, you need to hear and listen, and then you need to summarize, interpret, what you hear, and then you can communicate it to others, and then they hear it, and then they interpret it, and communicate. You can see there are multiple places where failure can occur. First, you could want something so bad that you think God said it, but that was just you. Have we ever done this?

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- We've all done this if we're honest, right? You're like, "I want something so bad. I kind of talked myself into it, but maybe that wasn't God." In addition, can Satan and demons communicate to us?

- [Congregation Member] Yeah.

- Yeah, so you're like, "I heard something." Well, 1 John says, "Don't believe every spirit but test the spirits, 'cause not every spirit comes from God." So I was like, "Okay, I heard something. Is this me, was this Satan or demons, or was this really the Lord?" So, we gotta be careful. In addition then, we can mishear. Have you ever misheard something? Okay, if you're married, you're like, "Yeah, yeah." "I said take out the trash, and they didn't hear me." Okay, that's my wife laughed. And so... This explains 30 years of our relationship. And so sometimes God speaks, but you don't hear. How many of you have heard something, but then the way you understood it was wrong, so the way you communicated it was wrong? Or you communicated it right, and then that person heard it, and the way they communicated it was wrong? Again, back to marriage, this happens all the time. So the point is, we need to be careful that we're listening, interpreting, communicating, and that they're listening, interpreting and communicating accurately. This is very important. But that being said, there are times that the only thing that can help us is to hear from God. And the most powerful times in my life are when I carve out silence and solitude to hear from the Lord. I'll speak personally to you. As a brand new Christian, God spoke to me at the age of 19. I was on a silent walk in the woods and God said, "Mark and Grace, preach the Bible, train men, plant churches." So that's what I've been doing since 19. At various points along the way, God has spoken to me. And what I find is that when I hear from the Lord, I have a clarity and a confidence that otherwise I don't have. I like, "I gotta do this." If you're like, "How about this?" You're like, "I don't have time for that. I gotta do this." And a confidence. Like, I'm gonna go do it 'cause that's what I was told to do.

- [Congregation Member] Yeah.

- And just as your pastor, I'll tell you, this is now something that I've put into my weekly routine. I take a day or two a week of... And we don't have little kids anymore. We have one gonna be a senior. So if you got little kids, you gotta be like, "Mark said two days off. I'll see you later." You know, so... But what does it look like to intentionally put solitude and silence into your schedule, even if it's a couple hours or part of a day? I now go oftentimes 48 hours a week in total silence. Just silence. I like it. In fact, what I find is, the more I get silence, the more I like it, and so does Grace. Okay? And what I find is, as I'm listening and processing and talking to the Lord, it becomes very conversational. It's like me and my father. In fact, it is me and my father, so I talk to him and I listen. We verbal process and I go for hikes in the woods. And what I'm finding is, that I need this more than I thought that I did. And the more that I do it, the more I need it. And I've had some really profound incredible encounters with the Lord. I'll share one with you, and then we'll jump into a few details. I was getting ready to teach this Elijah series, and it was after Christmas, and Grace and I were up in the mountains, and I was thinking about the Elijah story and studying and trying to get the study guide ready and trying to figure out, okay. And I felt like

the Lord was trying to say a lot of stuff to me that I was supposed to share with you. And some of it was stuff I'd thought about, some of it was stuff God brought back to mind, some of it was stuff like, "I've never even heard of that." And I'm thinking about it and processing. I'm like, "Okay, Lord's got my mind going." So I sat down to collect some of my notes, and I sat there for 24 hours straight. Grace kept coming over, she's like, "You okay?" I was like, "I don't know." She give me something to eat, something to drink, 'cause she's seen this before. I kind of get in these deep, manic grooves. And I sat there for 24 hours and I wrote a book. And I had no outline. I didn't know I was gonna write a book. I thought I was on vacation. But as I found that, as I turned the phone off and turned the TV off and just had spent a few days with the Lord, I was hearing so much that by the time I was done, it was a 60,000 word book in one sitting. And it's everything I'm sharing with you on Elijah, and it's the most popular sermon series I've ever preached. The book will be out in July. I'll explain it. This is not a book pitch by the way. I'm not taking a dime. It'll be free online. Nobody's gonna publish it, so we're giving it away. Nobody will publish it. I'm sure... So you can't cancel me, I have no publisher. You can't criticize me, I'm not taking any money. You can't attack my friends 'cause it has no endorsements. And, you know, you get what you pay for. It's free, lower your expectations, but I just want to give it away. So it's called "New Days, Old Demons." And I did a refresh and an edit on it. It's at the publisher, it'll be out in July. The subtitles on the back, "A study of Elijah, sex, gender, ancient paganism, masquerading as progressive Christianity, victims of nothing, woke politics, the transgender, Jezebel spirit, the castrates men and the passive Ahab, soft woke Christian beta male spirit, leading the Congo line to shield carrying a rainbow flag." Comes out in January. So... So, it comes out in January. And we've got a list of woke pastors. We're gonna send a free copy and trigger them, and trigger them. So... And the point is though, sometimes just listening, it's amazing what you can hear. And some people are like, "How do you know it was of the Lord?" Well, read it and tell me. Send an email to nobodycares@realfaith.com. Okay? So... Then the question is... It's a lot funner than I thought it was gonna be. Thank you for participating. And so the question is, is God still speaking?

- Yes.

- Yes.

- And the question is, is anybody listening?

- Yes.

- Yes.

- See, this is... And I wanna share something with you. So let's talk about the biggest threat to your relationship with God.

- [Congregation Member] Amen.

- Your phone, okay? Your phone. I'll check here. Let me see if I got any texts or emails. No text, one email. It's actually a promotion from Real Faith, which is curious. True. How many of us do that over and over and over and over throughout the day? We're just... What's really interesting is I think that if God is speaking, we may not be listening because we're distracted. Let me share with you a little bit about screen time. This is kind of shocking. People average about seven hours a day of screen time. Gen Z, nine hours a day of screen time. And the amount of time on a screen has gone up about 50 minutes a day every year since 2013. Just think about that. Every year, we spend almost an hour more a day looking at a screen. Now, what this results in is constant noise. So back to the story of Elijah, if God is whispering, it needs to be quiet to hear what he's saying. The average person is on their phone five plus hours a day. The TV is on for upwards of four hours a day. Let me say this, if you've got kids and your TV's always on, you're not setting the culture, the news is. In addition, music, we listen to upwards of four hours a day. Phone calls, up to three hours or three plus hours a day. Radio, usually on our work commute, two hours a day. Face-to-face conversation, one hour a day. The total is 19 hours a day, and some of you'll be like, "How can we do that many?" Sometimes we're on more devices at a time than one. How many of you watch TV while you're on your phone? Okay, you guys are addicted. And then the average American sleeps less than seven hours a day, and you need more than seven hours a day of sleep. What that means is, we spend three quarters of our day with noise and one quarter of our day asleep, and we have zero minutes a day for silence or to listen. How many of you, there's someone you love very much and you talk to them, and they just don't hear you?

- Okay. Okay. For that woman's husband, we have a prayer ministry in the back and we have a garbage can for his phone. All right. Okay. So, let me ask you this. How do you think God feels all the time? "Hey, son. He's not listening." "Daughter, please no, that's not a good idea." "Not listening." How many of you find that the more you're on your phone, the worse your mental and emotional health is? What we find is now, this is just statistically true. The more time you spend on this, the more you have depression, anxiety, mental health, and suicidal ideation. Because all you're getting is bad news, not good news. All you're getting is fear, not faith. All you're getting is the spirit of the world and not the spirit of God. I'll just check it real quick what happened while we've been here? Let me check what's going on in the news. Don't check your phone. I'll just tell you. Our government still sucks. And we're in debt, big time. Our borders open, our football team sucks. And, yeah, and it's not gonna get better. Okay? That's the news. Okay. Now the question is, what are we gonna do? And the point is, we need him to tell us. I'll say this, the most... Let me make a parenting lesson. The most important thing you can do if you have a child is help them to personally hear from God. A lot of times what religious parents do, they live in this world and they say it's dark and horrible and it's gonna destroy our kids. And they love their kids so much, they don't want their kids to make bad decisions, so they just tell their kids, "Just do everything we tell you," as if the Lord wouldn't speak to the kids, right? There's a guy in the Old Testament named Samuel. He is a little boy and God speaks to him. The goal is, as early as possible for your kids to have a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit to where he speaks to them. Because number one, the parent can't always be there.

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- And number two, the parent is not always right.

- [Congregation Member] Right.

- When our kids were little, it'd like, "Hey, dad, I wanna talk to you about something great." I'd say, "Okay, have you heard from the Lord on that?" As early as possible. I just say, "Okay, here's where you go in the Bible." "Go do a Bible study on that." The first place you wanna hear from God is the word of God. "Your friends are not being good. Okay, read Proverbs, there's a proverb. You can read a proverb a day for a month and look at the wise, foolish, and evil people, and figure out if you're wise, foolish, or evil. And if your friends are wise, foolish or evil, and then come back to me and tell me what God is saying to you." Just direct them toward a study of the Bible. In addition, "Did you pray about it? What did God speak to you? Go spend some time, not in your room, in silence for punishment, just go sit on the swing and spend some time with the Lord and come back and tell me kind of what you're thinking." And at a very early age, what I found is, each of our kids had a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit, and they would come back and they would say, "Well, here's what I'm thinking. Here's what I think he said. Here's where I think he wants me to go." And then they would confirm that with their parents, 'cause every once in a while you get a sneaky kid who will manipulate this. "The Lord's spoke to me dad, and he said I need more ice cream." You're like, "I don't know, I don't know. I don't know." "That was the devil." "You're lactose intolerant." And so... But what I found is, very early on, the kids would come and they would hear from the Lord. And doesn't it make sense that the Lord would love our kids more than we love our kids?

- Yes.

- And wouldn't it make sense that he would speak to them just like we would speak to them? And my kids have come and they've said some things like, "God's told me to do this or do that, and I pray about 'em." I'm like, "Okay, I'm gonna trust your relationship with the Lord." And so Elijah is this guy who, he hears from the Lord and he understands, but to do that, he's in a cave without a phone all alone. And so, you know, I'm not saying that technology's bad, but here are what I am saying. For some, this is an iPhone, for some, this is an idol.

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- And you can't see what God is doing and you can't hear what God is saying because the idol has taken over the presence of God. And for many of us, I just thought about this, this is the omnipresent thing in our life. You're like, "What? I never have it more than an... It's in the car, it's at the bed stand, it's at work. I go to the toilet and I bring it with me just in case." Like, what could possibly happen there that you need to live stream? You know, you don't need that. But if someone or something other than God is omnipresent in your life, you may not be leaving space for God. Now, that being said, I wanna hit one more thing. And sometimes God is directly

present in your life 'cause we're talking about how God is present in your life and speaks into your life. Sometimes it's direct, sometimes it's through godly people. It's nice if you're like, "God, speak to me." He's like, "I was, your friend was telling you the whole time." Sometimes God speaks to you, sometimes God speaks to you through them.

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- Because if someone has the Holy Spirit, God's present in them. And when they're present with you, God could speak through them. This is the role of a man named Elisha. He enters the story here. Up until this point, Elijah's been very lonely. Some of you have been very lonely. You're like, "I just don't have any believing friends, somebody to pray with." Well, you know what, you just need to keep your eyes open and wait for God to send that person that he did Elijah. So 1 Kings 19-21, God just prophesied that he was sending Elijah. "So he departed from there," Elijah did, and he found Elisha, the guy that God prophesied. Here's what's amazing. God calls Elisha by name and God knows Elisha by name. God calls you by name, God knows you by name. See, we look at a bunch of people and all we see is faces and God knows names.

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- He knows you. "The son of Shaphat, who was plowing with 12 yoke of oxen." He's a farmer. "In front of him, and he was with the twelfth." "Elijah passed by and cast his cloak upon him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, 'Let me kiss my mother and father, and then I will follow you.' And he said, 'Go back again, for what have I done to you?'" He is like, that's fine, we're good. "And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and he slaughtered them," he sacrificed them. This is a barbecue. This is how you know who the man of God is. He has a barbecue. Okay? It's right there. "And he boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and he gave it to the people," huge barbecue party, and then he rose, "and he went after Elijah and assisted him." So God is present with Elijah, and then God sends Elisha to be present with Elijah. Now he's got a faithful friend. Let me say this, one Godly spirit-filled, faithful friend changes her whole life.

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- Okay? The best way to find that friend is to be that friend. And I just wanna honor my wife, Grace. She's my Elisha. I'm not saying I'm Elijah, but she's my Elisha. She's the most faithful, loyal, fierce, spirit-filled friend I've ever had, and I'm so glad it's a cute girl. I'm so glad. And so thank you, baby, for being my Elisha. And so here, we meet Elisha, he enters the scene. And sometimes, everything changes when the person who's filled with the Holy Spirit and loves the Lord shows up. Like, life changes. It's a world filled with horrible people, but here's one great man of God. That makes all the difference. You don't need a lot of friends, you just need one or two that really love the Lord.

- Yeah.

- Okay? It's not about how many, but about how deep.

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- And so here, Elisha, his name means, God saves. He loves the Lord. He did really exist. Jesus mentions him in Luke 4:27. And Elijah is older and Elijah is younger, and so it's like a spiritual father-son relationship. We have physical fathers and mothers and we have spiritual fathers and mothers. There's a corollary of this in the New Testament with a man named Paul, who's like Elijah, and he has Timothy, he calls his son, five times, Titus and Onesimus, he calls, my sons. And they work with him in ministry, and they become his successors. Starting this week on Wednesday nights for Real Men, I'm doing an informal 12-week, 13-week bible study for the men. We're gonna go right through 1 Timothy looking at spiritual father and spiritual sons and we'll simulcast it online. That being said, what is happening here, Elijah's not alone anymore. He's got somebody he can trust and count on, and that's Elisha. And what Elisha is doing for a job before he enters into ministry, he's got 12 ox. What does an ox do? We'll you yoke them together, and they plow your field, you're a farmer. So you're a rancher caring for your livestock and a farmer plowing your field. And the question is, "Well, how in the world is that guy prepared for ministry?" Sometimes the Bible colleges and seminaries are run by Jezebel and Ahab.

- Yes.

- Yup.

- Sometimes the teaching is anti-God, not pro-God. Sometimes the people who get sent into ministry are not sent by the Lord. In that day, Jezebel closed all the Bible teaching schools. Canceled, killed the prophets. So if you went to school to study religion, you were going to get demonism. The same is true in many places. I went to a good school. I've got a master's degree in Bible. But if Elisha had spent years every day without any technology in the field, what was he doing? Spending time in God's presence and listening. You wonder, "How can plowing a field prepare a guy for ministry?" Well, if he's in God's presence, singing, praying, and listening, those years are not just for farming, but to be preparing for prophetic ministry. I didn't mean to share this, I'll just share a quick analogy. Some years ago, I was a brand new Christian and I was in... Got into one of my, I think, it was my first men's Bible study. And they said, "Hey, we've got a group for all you college guys." I was like, "I don't wanna go to that. They don't know what they're doing." "Do you have any grown men? I wanna go to that Bible study." So I went to the grown men Bible study. And I showed up and there were a bunch of good men, and they were much older, married, kids, grandkids, seasoned men of God. And there was one guy, I just thought of him, he hardly ever said anything, but as soon as he did, everybody literally got quiet and grabbed a pen. Whatever he said, we're writing that down. And so I'll never forget. He was a very quiet, humble, unassuming man, but when he spoke, it was golden wisdom, like, that was from the Lord. So I went up to him afterward. He's literally wearing overalls, good old guy. I said, "What do you do?" He said, "I'm a farmer. I'm a wheat farmer." We were in a college town in the

middle of the wheat fields. I said, "Well, tell me about... How did you learn the Bible?" He said, "I didn't graduate from high school." I said, "So you're not formally educated?" He said, "Nope." I said, "Well, what do you do?" He said, "Well, I've been working my dad's farm since I was a little boy, and then I inherited the farm, and so I've been plowing the fields my whole life." And I said, "What do you do?" This is a long time ago. He said, "I have the Bible on cassette." He said, "So pretty much every day of my life, there's nobody out there, there's nobody to talk to, so I just listen to the Bible and I talk to the Lord." This is... I'm in the presence of one of the holiest men I've ever met in my entire life. And he didn't come from an institution, he came from a tractor.

- [Congregation Member] Yes.

- Because he spent time in God's presence, and he spent time in God's word. Elisha is a man like that. If he showed up with his resume, he's like, "Well, I'm good with ox and I can plow a straight line. Can I be your senior pastor?" "No, you don't qualify." No, instead it's what's your relationship with the Lord.

- Yeah.

- Yes.

- Because here's what I don't think, I think oftentimes in ministry, we called the trained, and I think God would rather that we train the called. He doesn't yet have the training, but he has the calling. Guess who's gonna train him? Elijah. Elijah. And what he does then, he drops his entire business. Once you burn your... What's it called?

- Yoke.

- Your yoke, thank you. I should have studied that this week. I got busy. Once you burn your yoke and you eat your ox, you're outta business. You're like, I'm all in. This is like when Jesus comes along and he tells the disciples, "Come follow me." And what do they do with their fishing nets? They're gone. They walk away from everything. He walks away from... What he's saying is this, I will not turn back once God has called me, I literally have slaughtered my oxen, I've given myself holy to the work of the Lord. That's Elijah. Now, what's amazing about him, he goes on to have 60 years of effective ministry. 60 years. What God is going to do is have him and Elijah be together like a father and a son, and he's called, now Elijah's going to train and prepare him. This is a failure in my early years as a pastor. I knew the Lord's calling, but I didn't wait for the Lord's timing. And so I was aggressive and ambitious and I got ahead of God's timing. It would've served me very well to find my Elijah and be under that man of God for an extended period of time. As a result, I said and did things as a young man that I regret. And as a result, I have a heart to raise up young men so that they don't find the same landmines that I found by driving over them. That's kind of my heart. If you're a young man who wants to serve the Lord, find an older man who is faithfully serving the Lord and just submit to his authority and learn humbly and be patient. And when it's time, God will send you into your ministry. God does that

for Elisha. But then he has 60 years of faithfulness, which is really quite incredible. Let's say a couple of things, and then we'll spend some time praying and worshiping and hearing from the Lord. What I love here is this is what the business world would call succession. So Elijah's been running the ministry, now he's gonna hand it to Elisha. Elijah, as we just saw previously, he was burned out. He's had an exhausting life. What God is gonna do is gonna, literally, coming up in, 2 Kings, send a chariot to take him to heaven before he dies. That's the best first class flight of all time.

- Yeah.

- And God's like, "Son, you've served well. I'm taking you home." And so what happens is, God takes Elijah to heaven. And Elijah's been on a few thousand year sabbatical. I'll show you this as we get further into the story. Before the second coming of Jesus is the second coming of Elijah. His ministry's not done. He was taken to heaven. He'll be sent back to preach in the last days, and then he will be slaughtered and raised from the dead, and then Jesus will return. Elijah is getting a break from ministry, but his ministry is not yet concluded. And so what happens is, he's taken up to heaven, and then Elijah fights the demons in government and politics and education and entertainment, the same demons we're battling today, for a full 60 years. Let me just close with a few questions. Who's your Elijah? Who's the person that you're gonna listen to, you're gonna follow, you're gonna learn from, you're gonna submit to as Elisha did? Number two, who's your Elisha? Who's the person who's a little younger or new believer, or new at their career, or new at ministry? Maybe they're gonna get married, and you've been married for a while. Maybe they're gonna be a parent, and you've been a parent for a while, and you can put an arm around them and you can help bring them along. That's why we wanna have an intergenerational church family. That's why we want to help one another and build up legacy in future.

- [Congregation Member] Amen.

- And then the last question is simply this, I'll bring the band up at this time. And what we're gonna do in just a moment, we're gonna spend time in God's presence. The Bible says that God inhabits the praises of his people. We're his people. And if we praise him, he promises to be present. And what I want you to do is not turn on your phone and not get distracted and not think about what you need to do next, but just to hear from the Lord. What does he need to say to you? What do you need to say to him? Is there something that you need to ask of him or apologize to him? Are there some ways leaving here that you are going to covenant to carve out and set aside time that belongs to meet with and listen to him? What does God need to say to you? What do you need to say to him? This is why we come together and we come together as God's family. And for some of you, this will be new and perhaps uncomfortable. But when you're born, you don't know how to speak and you don't understand what other people are saying. And as you grow up, you sort of learn to speak and then you learn to understand what other people are saying. The same is true when you're born again. You become a Christian. Like, "I don't know how to pray. I've never done that before." Well, just like a kid that's born, you gotta learn

how to speak to your father. And just like a kid who doesn't understand what their parents are saying when they're little, as they grow up, they're better at listening and interpreting and understanding what the parents are saying. And so what we wanna do now, we're gonna spend some time together and we're gonna pray, and we're gonna sing, and singing is how we pray together. We wanna talk to our Father, we wanna listen to him. Some of you are mature. You know how to do this. Some of you are brand new, and it's new for you. Holy Spirit, we invite you into this place. We know you're here, but we pray that you would manifest your presence with power. Holy Spirit, we love you, we trust you. We need your power to hear what you would say to us to do, what you would call of us to be, what you've destined for us. Holy Spirit, right now, please quiet our minds, please quiet our hearts. If the enemy is bringing accusations or distractions or convictions, we say we rebuke you. In the Lord's name, the Lord rebuke you. Holy Spirit, we ask for clarity in the hearts and minds of your people. We pray that right now, this would be a sacred place of your presence. Lord, would you hear the needs of your people, and would you speak what your people need? Lord, would you just speak to your children just like you did Elijah. And God, we come in this quiet moment, we come in this sort of proverbial cave, this safe place, carved and set aside for your presence. And as we now come to worship, Holy Spirit, we invite you to speak. In Jesus' name, amen. Love you, guys.