

What helps you hear the voice of God speaking to you?

What helps you to know what God is saying to you?

We hear God speak through the Bible.

The Spirit helps us hear and understand the voice of God. (new slide)

In this podcast we'll be thinking about hearing the voice of God

and doing what he tells us to do as we look at the story of Gideon in **Judges 6.25-40**

But first lets pray (stop filming)

Help us, Lord, to hear beyond the noisy world.

Help us to recognise your voice,

to listen to what you have to say to us,

and to hold your word in our hearts.

(pause)

We draw near to you, gracious God,
laying aside the things that hinder us,
focusing on you and your will for us,
opening our hearts and minds to you.

(pause)

Forgive us, God of grace, when we have
listened to other voices instead of yours,
(pause)

Forgive us, God of love, when we have refused
to give up our bitterness, our selfishness, and
all the 'stuff' we should not keep inside us.

(pause)

Forgive us, God of our salvation, when we have
forgotten who you are,

what you have done for us,

and who you call us to be.

(pause)

Forgive us, God of justice, when we have treated others badly or neglected their needs, when we have closed our eyes to suffering, not acting in your mercy, but in our own impatience or busyness.

(pause)

Cleanse our hearts, O God we pray.

Forgive our guilt, and instruct us in the days ahead, for Jesus' sake, **Amen.**

You might want to pause at this point and read **Judges 6.25-40**

(pause)

Sermon

Hearing the voice of God is often hard.

Gideon could hear God

We don't always

But how did he know he could trust God?

How was he to know that what he was hearing was right?

That was the issue for him in our reading today.

He heard God speak

But he wasn't sure He could trust what he heard.

He became unsure as to whether it was really God's voice speaking to him.

He was unsure if God was really calling him to do what he had heard.

(pause – new slide)

I'm sure all of us at times have struggled both to hear God speak

And then when we do hear God speaking to us we struggle to obey

We find it hard to do what he says,

To trust that we can really do God's will.

Even it its only a small thing that's being asked of us.

(pause)

What was being asked of Gideon was a big thing.

What was being expected of Gideon was not easy

So he struggled to obey

He struggled to go ahead and do it as it was going to cost him a lot.

It could ultimately cost him his life.

(pause)

'That night the Lord told Gideon,

"Take your father's bull and another bull seven years old,

tear down your father's altar to Baal,

and cut down the symbol of the goddess Asherah, which is beside it.'

Gideon heard God speaking

He heard the Lord's message and he obeyed.

He did what he was asked.

'So Gideon took ten of his servants and did what the Lord had told him.'

I wonder if we can say the same when we look at our own lives.

We hear the Lord's message

We hear it clearly

Maybe not in a voice like Gideon did

But we know what the Lord wants from us

We know what God wants us to do but do we do it.

Do we obey like Gideon did?

Or do we sling God a deafy?

Do we pretend not to have heard?

Or even do we do what the Israelites so often did and just downright disobey.

Do our own thing and go our own way.

(pause)

Gideon was scared about what might happen if he obeyed God but he still did it.

He was worried about what might happen to him if he was seen to destroy the altar to Baal but he went ahead and destroyed it.

‘He was too afraid of his family and the people in town to do it by day, so he did it at night.’
And he was right to be afraid.

When the people of the town saw what had been done they investigated

And when they found out it was Gideon who had done it they wanted to kill him

'They said to Joash, "Bring your son out here, so that we can kill him!'

(pause)

There is a cost for all of us in doing what God tells us to do.

Maybe not potential death like Gideon faced

But costs all the same.

A number of years ago I faced a big cost if I was going to obey God.

And my whole family were going to pay a cost

To obey God meant we were going to become homeless.

(pause)

I was a parish minister at the time

I wasn't sure about staying in the parish I was in but didn't feel called to go anywhere else

So do I stay or do I go.

At first God said stay

So I stayed

I kept serving Him as best I could where I was.

A few months later I heard a different message from God.

It was time to go now

God called me to leave where I was but didn't call me to go anywhere else

He called me to put my trust in him for all my needs

And for the needs of my wife Kath

And my four young children,

One at primary school, three in secondary

(pause)

If I left my job I would have no house and no money.

But we heard what God said and I demitted my charge

We listened to what God had to say and obeyed as best we could

And put our trust in our loving heavenly Father that the needs we had would be met.

‘Even the hairs of your head have all been counted.

So do not be afraid;

you are worth much more than many sparrows!’
Luke 12.7’

(pause)

God did work everything out for us

In sometimes quite miraculous ways.

We did manage to buy a house that was big enough for us all to stay in,

My wife managed to find paid employment in a job that she enjoyed

And my children were all able to continue at the schools they were at

And did well in their exams when they came.

We put our trust in God and obeyed and were rewarded for it.

(pause)

I'm sure we can all reflect on times when we have heard God speak to us.

At times we will have obeyed

At other times we maybe hesitated.

Not quite sure if we were hearing right.

Not quite sure about exactly what God was saying.

Needing reassurance that we'd got the message right.

That we'd heard correctly.

Gideon needed reassurance the next time he heard God speak to him.

It had been scary enough to hear God the first time and obey.

He knew his family would be mad.

He's killing one of the families bulls as well as getting rid of their altar to Baal.

The people of the town were also angry about what he had done.

But he had done it as bravely as he could at the time.

Though for Gideon that meant doing it at night so that only those who helped could see. And he trusted them to keep his actions secret

(pause – new slide)

The next thing God asked of Gideon was an even bigger task

And would take a lot more bravery on Gideon's part.

The call that God was making on Gideon's life now was to rescue Israel from its enemies

To be its Saviour.

'Then all the Midianites,

the Amalekites,

and the desert tribes assembled,

crossed the Jordan River,

and camped in Jezreel Valley.'

The enemy had gathered.

Ready to attack and destroy Israel.

Gideon's task was to rescue Israel

Was to save Israel.

Not on his own but with God at his side

With the help of his fellow Israelites

(pause)

‘Then Gideon said to God, "You say that you have decided to use me to rescue Israel.

Well, I am putting some wool on the ground where we thresh the wheat.

If in the morning there is dew only on the wool but not on the ground, then I will know that you are going to use me to rescue Israel.’

This is one of the best known stories of the Old Testament

Gideon’s fleece

People may not know the story around the fleece

but they have heard about Gideon laying out a fleece to be sure of what God is saying to him.

(pause)

Gideon had called all the people to come follow him.

The spirit of the Lord had taken control of him

The spirit was directing all his actions.

He knew what needed to be done and he was in the process of getting ready for it.

He blew a trumpet to call people to him.

He sent out messengers for those who were to far away to hear the trumpet.

He got the people ready for action.

Ready to fight their enemies

He had gathered an army and then he hesitated.

He paused

He wasn't sure anymore of the right way ahead.

He needed reassurance from God that what he was doing was right.

That the plans he had made were the right ones.

Then Gideon said to God,

"You say that you have decided to use me to rescue Israel.

Well, I am putting some wool on the ground where we thresh the wheat.

If in the morning there is dew only on the wool but not on the ground,

then I will know that you are going to use me to rescue Israel.

(pause)

He set a test for God

A way for God to prove to him that what he thought God was saying to him was right.

'If in the morning there is dew only on the wool but not on the ground,

then I will know that you are going to use me to rescue Israel.'

(pause)

Gideon is taking steps in obedience

He's trying to follow God

He's trying to be a good disciple

But the tasks God is calling him to do are getting bigger so he asks God for reassurance

And God is especially patient with Gideon

Is tolerant even when after answering his prayer,

After answering the fleece that Gideon had laid Gideon asks for it to be done again.

'Then Gideon said to God, "Don't be angry with me;

let me speak just once more.

Please let me make one more test with the wool.

This time let the wool be dry, and the ground be wet."

(pause)

I'm sure many of us have done what Gideon did

Laid a fleece for God to confirm to us what we think He is saying to us.

I know I have

I did it again just a few years ago.

9 years ago I went to be a parish minister in Orkney.

To South Rondaldsay and Burray Church

At my interview I was asked how long I would stay for

So I said 4.5 years as that was what I calculated was the average minister's had stayed in the last 50 or so years.

My arithmetic was out.

It should have been 5.5 years.

(pause)

When I got to near the 4.5 years I began to think about whether I was going to stay longer

Or whether it was in fact time to go.

I struggled to hear God speak

I looked at various charges but wasn't called to them.

(pause)

I managed to get time off from work and used that to reflect on my future

I made all sort of plans about how I could minister in the future in Orkney

The changes I thought needed to take place in the church.

(pause)

I planned on staying

But all my plans depended on having first the support of the elders

And then of the congregation

I couldn't stay unless the elders made it clear that they wanted me to stay

I couldn't go on ministering there unless I had support for change

And moving forward in new ways.

(pause)

My fleece was that God would make it clear to me that he wanted me to stay by the elders clearly supporting me.

Not necessarily agreeing instantly to all the changes but showing support for me personally

And being open to look at new things.

And so I returned to Orkney full of hope and looking to do new things

But it very quickly became clear that some on the Session would not support me going forward

so I decided it was the right time to leave and we returned to our house in Edinburgh

There wasn't a big cost this time as we all ready had a house to return to

And my wife got a job there before we returned

(pause)

But was that the right thing to do

The majority of the elders supported me but just enough didn't to make it hard to stay

And my struggle then was one many of us have

Where to now

If I made the wrong choice in leaving Orkney
will God actually call me somewhere else and
give me a new job to do.

How long do I have to wait?

How patient do I have to be?

How do I find reassurance from God that I
made the right decision?

And how am I going to know what God wants
me to do next?

How will I clearly know where he might be
calling me to go?

(pause)

It was 2 years before i fell a new call

and came to work at Kelso Country Churches

and live in Stichill

(pause)

How do any of us know when God is telling us to do something?

How do we know that we have heard right?

Do we lay a fleece like Gideon did?

Do we pray and meditate as we know Jesus did?

Do we study the scriptures and try and make sense of things from them as we know the apostle Paul did all his life?

And when we know that we have heard God correctly are we willing to obey no matter the cost to ourselves?

(pause – new slide)

I do know one thing that God is telling us all to do.

That we can know for sure

That we don't need reassurance for

That we don't need to lay a fleece to know that it is definitely what God wants us to do.

God wants us to obey his commands
And what is his command

What is it that Jesus told us his disciples that they had to do?

That he tells us that we have to do

To make disciples

To share our faith

(pause)

If we really believe in God we need to be telling other people about him

If we really believe in Jesus we need to be sharing our knowledge of him with others.

No matter how hard that is

Or how embarrassing

We need to tell people about Jesus

Share our faith

Share our knowledge of Jesus.

Not just so that we have more members in the church

Or so that the Church of Scotland might continue for years to come

But because Jesus is important to us

And we want others to know what we know

We want others to have the joy of being disciples as we are.

‘Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples.’ Matthew 28.19

Will we obey the command of Jesus to his followers

Will we go wherever Jesus is calling us to go

Whatever that might cost us

Because we want the whole world to come to believe as we do

To know Jesus as we know him, **Amen**

Let us pray (new slide)

Father many voices speak to us as we go through life.

Our parents,

Our teachers,

Our friends,

Our workmates.

At times these voices are telling us different things.

And we don't know who to listen to.

We don't know who to follow.

Who to obey.

(pause)

Father help us to listen to your voice.

Help us to hear you clearly.

To follow what you say to us.

To obey.

(pause)

May we learn Father from the example of Moses.

He heard you speak in the burning bush.

He knew that it was you speaking.

He listened to what you had to say and he obeyed.

(pause)

We don't hear you as clearly as that Father.

We don't see a burning bush and hear a voice coming out of it.

But we want to hear you Father.

We want to follow you Father.

We want to obey.

(pause)

May we learn Father from the example of
Elijah.

He listened to you

And he spoke what you would have him say.

Even though at times he risked his life in doing
so.

May we have the courage to speak the words
that you would have us say.

(pause)

May we learn from the example of Gideon.

If we're not sure we've heard you properly to
check it out.

To set a fleece.

May we not be afraid to ask you to confirm
clearly what you are saying to us,

What you are asking us to do.
(pause)

Above all Father may we learn from the
example of Jesus.

He heard the devil speak but didn't succumb to
the temptations he offered.

He held true to you.

Even when it cost him his life to do so.

(pause)

May we hear your voice speaking clearly to us
Father.

May we listen to what you have to say.
And may we obey.

May we go out into the world and make
disciples

Sharing our faith with our sisters and brothers

That they might come to know Jesus as we do

That they might come to experience your love
as we do.

(pause)

In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**

(end keynote)

Start filming

Take sometime to reflect about when you have
heard God speaking to you

Think about all that he has said to you

Or is saying to you

Will you obey as Gideon did -

even if you need to lay a fleece for reassurance

Will you hear the call of Jesus, the Good
Shepherd

And follow his voice

wherever he leads you

Benediction

This week, Lord, help us to know,

wherever we are,

and whatever we are doing,

that we belong to you.

(pause)

Help us to listen to you,

to do what is right,

avoid what is wrong,

and love you with all our hearts.

(put the go and make disciples jpeg at the end

of the movie)