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Experiencing God Part 4: "Out of the Dead Zone"

John 16:13-14

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*God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances,
and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.*

** This Sermon Series is based on the Experiencing God Workbook, by Blackaby and King*

Introduction to Worship: Can you even remember the world before cell phones? Remember when they were called car phones? Remember when you didn't have to spend 1/3rd of your time looking all over your house for the phone, because it was always attached to the receiver? Remember when having a mobile phone meant having one with a long extension? Remember the days when your phone was never stuck somewhere in your couch and never ran out of batteries? Remember when you could *understand* the person on the other line?

"When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." John 16:13-14

Sermon: I love the beautiful drive along N. Territorial. I also can't stand the beautiful drive along N. Territorial. Why? Because it's a dead zone. My (hands-free) cell phone doesn't work there. The reception is terrible. It's a dead zone. What's your least favorite dead zone in our area? Let's vote: M-23? N. Territorial heading east? Downtown Dexter? Up North? In the church buildings? (that's to keep you from text-messaging your friends during the sermon. "I-M-SO-B-O-R-E-D" ☺) As potentially in touch as we are, people are still unreachable because they're in a dead zone. Or, just the time you want to use it you're out of batteries. Or, like my wife, you sometimes don't take your cell phone with you because you can't find it.

The fact is, our friends are still out there. Our family still wants to talk with us. Why can't we connect? Dead zones. Doesn't it drive you crazy when you've got the time to talk, and a message to share, and you know you've hit one? A dead zone, that is. The really sad fact is, many Christians have spent their whole lives in the dead zone. Often, we create the dead zones.

DOES GOD REALLY SPEAK TO HIS PEOPLE IN OUR DAY? The Sunday School answer is "yes," but come on: Just like Moses? Just like the disciples? Can you and I honestly be face-to-face with God? Most of us believe Moses was face to face with God at the burning bush, and the disciples were face-to-face with God in a personal relationship with Jesus. Their encounter with Jesus was an encounter with God. To hear from Jesus was to hear from God. I believe that.

BUT, FROM THEN TILL TODAY, we often change our whole mindset. We think we're left with just the teachings, the stories, and the morals. We live as if God quit speaking personally to His people. We're stuck in a dead zone because we fail to realize that an encounter with the Holy Spirit

is an encounter with God. All the way to today, God has been speaking to His people by the Holy Spirit. **Jesus said**, *“When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.”* John 16:13-14

The Holy Spirit takes up residence in the life of a believer. *“You yourselves are God’s temple and... God’s Spirit lives in you.”* (1 Cor. 3:16). *“Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God”* (1 Cor. 6:19). Because He is always present in a believer, He can speak to you clearly and at any time.

When God spoke to Moses in the Old Testament, those events were encounters with God. An encounter with Jesus was an encounter with God for the disciples. In the same way, an encounter with the Holy Spirit is an encounter with God for you.

If you have trouble hearing God speak, chances are you’ve entered a dead zone, and you are in trouble at the very heart of your Christian experience.

HOW DO WE CREATE DEAD ZONES?

1. By not responding when we know God is leading us.

Biblically, God doesn’t often give you all the directions up front. Most of the time, Jesus simply said “Follow me.” Matthew 4:18-20 (Simon Peter and Andrew), 4:21-22 (James and John), 9:9 (Matthew), Acts 9:1-20 (Paul). Now, God gave Moses a bigger picture, but in every case, the individual had to stay close to God for daily guidance.

Often times, whether we respond or not, we go through lengthy times when God seems silent. The silences of God are difficult to understand, but often that is the time when God is preparing to bring a greater revelation of Himself than you have ever known. But every time we choose not to respond, or choose to get distracted, we create *“a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.”* Amos 8:11.

2. By believing God doesn’t speak anymore.

You and I can experience God Himself. We can know and do the will of God. The fact is, God is at work all around you, and God is pursuing a love relationship with you that is real and personal. God invites you to become involved with Him in His work. As a matter of fact, God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways.

Hebrews 1:1 *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”*

John 14:26 *“The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”*

John 16:13-14 *“When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.”*

These verses say: In the Old Testament God spoke at many times and in a variety of ways. Through Jesus, God Himself spoke to His people during His lifetime. Now God speaks through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will teach you all things, will call to your memory the things that Jesus said, will guide you into all truth, will speak what He hears from the Father, will tell you what is yet to

come, and glorify Christ as He reveals Christ to you.

God is still speaking today! The Holy Spirit is with you. God through the Holy Spirit speaks to you, through the Bible, through prayer, through circumstances, and through the church, to reveal Himself, His purposes, And His ways.

3. By putting any inkling from God through a litmus test.

When we have what might be a word or a thought from God about something, we put it through a litmus test. When we read something in the Bible that says something like “Don’t lie,” “Was there lightening? Was there a burning bush? Was it an audible voice?” ... and then we get it through the other litmus test: “Is it convenient? Will it hurt? Will I lose face? Will I get what I want?” And you’ve entered the Dead Zone...like you’re back on Highway 23. Of course it never makes it.

What if instead we took what we know to be God’s will, and instead put ourselves through the litmus test: “Is this what God wants me to do?...Does it reveal truth?...Is this what will be happening in the heavenly banquet? Is this what the Kingdom of God will be like?” And if it is, do it!

4. By focusing more on ourselves and what *we* will do for God than focusing on what God is already doing around us.

Speaking of litmus tests, I say DON’T bother putting yourself through the litmus test. Don’t ask yourself “Am I moldable? Am I willing? Will it cost me personally?” because if you do, the focus will still be on you yourself. It’s reverse humility. Even though you’re beating yourself up, you’re still worried about and focusing on yourself!

Focus on God, focus on others, and then enjoy yourself and do whatever you want, because then you’ll be in balance with the natural and spiritual order of the universe. You really should enjoy yourself, you know. You are one of God’s greatest creations! You are in the image of the Great I AM. You are an unrepeatable miracle. There is a place in God’s heart only you can fill. Now—get that, and then get over it! 😊

Shifting your focus will get your eyes off of yourself and you’ll be able to better see where God is at work, so you can join Him! God-centeredness requires a daily death of self, and a submission to God (John 12:23-25).

“Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The one who loves his or her life will lose it, while the one who hates his or her life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” John 12:24-25

5. By holding back parts of my life from Jesus Christ.

We want to experience God. We just don’t want to do the harder work of tackling the spiritual problems we have. We keep hitting dead zones. We keep trying to solve our spiritual problems with worldly solutions. That way, we don’t have to go into uncharted territories. But that never gets to the root. Like when my mom pulls weeds and one breaks off at the root; she says “See you later!” The weed is still there.

HOW DO I KNOW WHEN GOD SPEAKS?

This is hard, because sin has so affected us (Rom. 3:10-11) that you and I cannot understand the truth of God unless the Holy Spirit of God reveals it. He is the Teacher.

Here’s a hard one. Jesus said *“The person who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason*

you do not hear is that you do not belong to God” John 8:47. I find that really difficult, because I want to think that I belong to God. Jesus is saying, “If you have trouble hearing God speak, you are in trouble at the very heart of your Christian experience.” Maybe I don’t belong to God as much as I think I do. And I confront myself: The fact is, that there are parts of my life I never would give to God, because I want to control them. I know they’re wrong. I know I haven’t given 100% to God. Maybe I’m afraid to try jumping in with both feet, because life will be different if I do. It might be unpredictable. I might have to do something different.

4 IMPORTANT FACTORS TO GETTING OUT OF THE DEAD ZONE:

1. **When God spoke, it was usually unique to that individual.** Moses had no precedent for a burning bush experience. It was unique. God wants it to be personal. He wants us to look to him for relationship, not a formula or technique.
2. **When God spoke, the person was sure God was speaking.** Moses had no question that his encounter was with God—the “*I AM THAT I AM*” (Ex. 3:14). He trusted God, obeyed Him, and experienced God responding as God said he would.
3. **When God spoke, the person knew what God said.** Moses knew what God was telling him to do. He knew how God wanted to work through him. That’s why Moses raised so many objections! He knew exactly what God was expecting. Moses knew what it would take to free the Hebrews from Pharaoh because he’d lived there! He was a prince of Egypt. If God wants to grow a great church here, and you’re a leader in business or community, you might be afraid. You know what God expects, and what hard work it is! Some of you know how to build a business and get the job done! If God wants to educate His people, you know what God is saying if you’re a teacher. If God wants this church to be a loving community, and you have gifts with people and caring, you know it’s hard work too!
4. **When God spoke, that WAS the encounter with God.** Moses would have been foolish to say “This is a great experience with this burning bush. I hope this leads me to an encounter with God!” It WAS the encounter with God! When God reveals truth to you, by whatever means, that is an encounter with God. That is an experience of His presence in your life. God is the only one who can cause you to experience his presence.

Church, can you release your life to God? Because if you can, God can begin to accomplish His purposes through you!

Get out of the dead zone! Come back—to the more clear communication that can only come from a relationship with God through Christ.

Don’t try to skip over the relationship to get on with the doing. God is more interested in a love relationship with you than He is in what you can do for Him.

When the Holy Spirit reveals truth to you, He is not leading you to an encounter with God. That IS an encounter with God! And he’s calling us out of the dead zone into a living faith that just might change you, those around you, and thus the world.

Can you hear me now? Amen.