

For those of you whom I haven't met yet, my name is Shelley Bloomer. My husband and I started attending Catalyst when it was still just a glimmer in Rowlett's eye, 7 years ago. Now I am on the Leadership Team and cannot imagine a place more like family. I don't know about you, but it is very difficult to find a place, let alone a church, that is quite like the people and passion we have here. Well, I love to talk. It's my job...I'm a teacher. Right now to 7th graders. Longest 2 years of my life. Everyone who asks me what I do is always like, "Oh Shel, you are crazy. They couldn't pay me to do that job!" But I LOVE middle schoolers! They are a crazy bunch. They are extremely emotional and need you to hear their life story in 1st period but are embarrassed when you wave at them in the hall and see how their day is going. I mean, who else can forget everything you just taught, but be so meticulous as to remember the day I wore this shirt last? I mean that's just awesome. But seriously, I love them. Sort of. In a weird "I hate myself" way. You try telling 7th graders to do ANYTHING. Some of you parents to teens know what I mean...I see you. So if we can get through this morning without anyone pointing out my EVERY imperfection, then I'm already doing better than 5 out of 7 days of my week!

So we have been talking about hearing God's voice and there have definitely been times in my life where God has given me some warm fuzzies in a direction I felt Him calling. But one time I actually heard God's audible voice. I get nervous telling y'all this because I know some of you already think I am crazy and after JR's preaching on the little old lady and how people thought she was crazy, I wasn't too sure about bringing this up. But see, this is how much I trust y'all! So, I was in college and was praying over whether or not to spend a summer in Calcutta, India. I usually have a gut feeling on those things but in this case, I had nothing. I will never forget where I sat, the gorgeous blue sky and sunshine when I simply heard the word, "Go." Scared me to death because I thought someone snuck up behind me! I jumped up and took a quick glance around, then got really embarrassed, hoping no one had seen me acting so ridiculous. Once I calmed myself down and realized I had heard God's voice, I resolved right then and there to make the journey. And it was an AMAZING trip. I didn't ever want to talk about that day because I thought it was weird. I had never heard His audible voice before-and haven't heard it since-and I knew that when people talked about "hearing God's voice" that THIS was not what they were talking about.

The other day I was looking through my box of photo albums and came across my binder from the summer I spent in Calcutta. (picture) Inside were pictures and memories from my incredible time there. Calcutta is one of the most crowded and dirty cities and yet by the end of my summer, I had decided I could never leave. The people and places had become so dear to me. From the bustling markets that begged for a good haggle to the quiet Homes For the Dying that bore pictures of Mother Teresa, I fell in love with it. From the adventure of a crazy cab ride or a little girl, obviously homeless, walking up to hold my hand-nothing could replace that summer. Every day was an adventure for me emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

As I was flipping, I ran across the ragged spiral I had written in every day, sometimes twice a day that sweaty summer. Wow. I didn't even recognize myself. I had so much quiet time and reflection time in those few months. I sounded what you could call "super spiritual." You know those people who just seem to be perfect, who are so in tune with God that it's like they're not even walking the same ground we are? Well, that's NOT how I felt when I was IN India, but it was how I felt when I was reading back through India-Shelley's journal. India-Shelley responded to the beauty of a rainbow splashed against the bluest sky, God's promise, over a row of open-air shacks made from trash. India-Shelley felt God's

presence in every sad and worn face who stared as I was walking down the filthy, crowded streets. India-Shelley saw God *everywhere*. God was so clear to India-Shelley.

[We can split-screen this – India-Shelley and Mom-Shelley] When I was done reading, I kind of sat there in a funk. I mean, I know I wrote those words. I have memories, I am the girl in all the pictures. But I am so far from that girl in India. She almost seems like a stranger to me. She spent *so much time* with God. She was *so close* to Him. I look at my life now and I can't help but feel inferior to India-Shelley. I thought, "Man. I just can't...I just don't have time...to even think about being that girl again." I am just too busy. I have 5 year old twins...GIRLS...who NEVER let anyone else talk. Quiet time is an elusive activity that just doesn't happen at my house. Close any door, try to be sneaky, and there they are, "Momma! What are you doing in there? Bangbangbang! Mooooommmmaaaa!!!" Right?!?! The little sweeties. Do you feel that way? I mean, I'm not alone, right? We are just too busy for God sometimes? I know that sounds awful but let's be honest with each other. Life is here and demanding. It's in your face and it's All. The. Time.

A lot of us can relate to that, can't we? We see other people in our lives who just seem to have it all together. Especially at Church, we see people who just have this God-thing figured out. They read the Bible and find all these amazing insights. They spend hours every day in prayer. They are just awesome. And we compare ourselves to them and we're *not*. We're ordinary. We can't help but feel inferior, as though we're doing something wrong because we simply can't imagine being able to take the time to STOP and spend it with God. But what I want to submit today is that God is big enough to speak to us in the vortex of our crazy lives. Not just in the Calcutta, quiet, reflective times. Not just in once-in-a-lifetime trips to Calcutta. Not just in Church on Sunday morning. Not just if you stop and pray for an hour every day.

In our new series, we have learned that God's "voice" is not always what Webster would agree is a good definition of "voice." He can speak to us in and through many ways. So just because we don't HEAR with our ears, it doesn't mean he isn't speaking. In fact, I have come to believe that God is in constant conversation with me...having a conversation I can understand. I just have to START listening. But that idea flies in the face of ALL that we have talked through so far in this series. We are supposed to STOP not START. We even got those awesome foldable things to help us remember to STOP. I mean, all growing up, the principles of sitting still and finding a quiet place were instilled in me from Sunday School to Church Camp to Contemporary Christian Music. It was all about stopping.

But some of us can't STOP – we have kids or jobs or lives that simply won't give us a break. And we end up feeling defeated, guilty, ashamed, inadequate because we're told God only speaks to us when we STOP.

But what if we're wrong? What if – as we've seen in this series - God is speaking to us all the time? What if all those crazy moments in our lives are ALSO opportunities to hear from God? What if we don't need to STOP, but START?

That would be pretty good news, wouldn't it?

I want us to read something written in Isaiah 40. It's verses 21-26. If you grabbed one of our Bibles in the back, that's page (###). You are welcome to take that Bible home if you would like. It's yours! What Isaiah has done here was won a rap battle. When they would go to war with other nations, it was always more than just a simple take over. It was proving whose deity was the strongest and mightiest. Isaiah is

explaining the “bigness” of God to his enemies before this war. And this is the part just before he throws the mic down and walks off stage. Let’s read it...

²¹ Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

²⁴ No sooner are they planted,
no sooner are they sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground,
than he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

²⁵ “To whom will you compare me?

Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:

Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.

Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.

Now, that sounds like a pretty big God there. I mean, Isaiah kind of makes me feel like an idiot even thinking anything differently after all that. And here I go getting nervous about that journal from Calcutta. This is the God India-Shelley knew. This is the God she spent hours with every day. Because she had time every day to stop and sit with this God. How can I reach that BIG of a God if I can’t quiet myself and sit still and listen in that prayer closet away from my insane life? I don’t know about you but this is kind of what I took from all my growing up. God is this phenomenal being that we CAN and SHOULD talk to every day. When we quiet our hearts and stand in awe of the King of Kings, Ruler and Creator of all, he speaks. And He IS that. All of that CAN happen. Again, not very comforting, though, when my life is a tornado of timelines and boxes that need checking. But during this series, we have been pairing scriptures. So hang on...there’s something interesting in Mark 1. Flip with me to verses 29-39, that’s page (###). Since this is the beginning of the entire book that Mark wrote, we kind of see the way he is introducing Jesus and His journey. He starts off the chapter by just telling us simply that this is good news, y’all! What I love most is that he doesn’t mess around. He gets down to business about this Jesus guy and what he is like to hang out with.

²⁹ As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰ Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about

her. ³¹So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³²That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

³⁵Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” (Sounds familiar...bangbangbang! Jeeeeesuuuuuuusss!!!)

³⁸Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” ³⁹So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

See! Even Jesus has a hard time meeting his quiet quota! He was constantly being interrupted by life and circumstances! When I read these verses, I thought to myself, “Man, that’s it. There it is.” JESUS is every day. So here we have 2 scriptures in our Bible that are portraying God in 2 very different ways. In Isaiah, He is this amazingly powerful, wonderful, almost unreachable God and then Mark is all like, “Hey, He just walked into Simon’s crazy life filled with sickness and was all like, ‘You’re healed. Let’s eat!’” like it was part of a normal day. Such a huge contrast to the Isaiah passage. So which is it? Is God the unreachable deity sitting on clouds, or the blue-collar woodworker running to and fro, his sleeves rolled up, healing and helping?

So have any of you seen the show “Undercover Boss”? If you haven’t, it’s a genius idea. The CEO of a company will disguise him or herself and will go in and do the dirty jobs and work the difficult hours of their employees. He gets to listen in on the conversations, the gripe sessions, the problems. He sees the hard-workers and gets a feel for what his company is truly about. It’s easy to think from reading Mark that Jesus is sort of the “Undercover Boss”. God stepped down off his throne for a bit to get dirty and see what’s what down here. But, just like those CEOs, after not too long, he had to go back to the throne, wash all the humanity off and go back to ruling from afar.

But that’s NOT what’s happening here. In Jesus, God is not in disguise. He’s not hiding from us, or trying to trick us into thinking he is one of us, to blend in. In Jesus, we finally see who God REALLY is. In Jesus, God walks into our crazy scheduled, hair-pulling, always messy lives, without a disguise and is like, “Hey. What’s up? Let’s talk.” And forever my response was, “Oh yes. We totally need to talk. Let me get home, get dinners, get homework done, get kitchen cleaned up, check up on my friends, talk to Brad, zzzzz...” And there it went...another day without quiet time with God. Arg. I kept missing it and felt like I was not fulfilling my quiet time quota. I HATE messing up. That’s what it felt like. I kept foregoing my quiet time. That beautifully elusive quiet time that was a spiritual practice I knew I needed to do. It was a box that I was not getting checked by the end of each day.

But aren’t we thankful that our God is not a God of check boxes?

He is SO much bigger than my check boxes. He is SO big, in fact, that He is here, with me every hour. When we read that piece of Isaiah, it all sounded intimidating. But Isaiah’s God is most fully revealed in Mark. So this King of Kings, Creator of All is so big that He is here with me. Right now. Always. He is in the EVERY moment. He’s the God of stillness and busy-ness. He’s the God of calm and chaos. I can hear God’s voice in the every day. When I AM cooking dinner, or struggling to make sure my daughter can

add pennies to nickels, or texting a dear friend...God's voice is big enough to be heard in those mundane, scheduled-out moments if we can just START listening. We can't always stop. Life won't always let us. BUT we CAN start.

What does it look like to START listening? Well, consider this: Have you ever had one of those times someone just randomly popped in your head? You just can't get them off your mind and you're so busy but after a while you text or FaceBook message or, do something crazy like use your phones for its original purpose and call them. And the response I love is, "I really needed to talk to someone today!" or "This was JUST what I needed!" Totally a coincidence, right? Hmm...those "coincidences" happen much more frequently when I am in conversation with God in every aspect of my life. We can never be sure of what God's voice "sounds" like until we START listening in the noise.

So, God is in the START. So does that mean God isn't in the STOP? Does that mean I can forget about stopping...do I just forget about quiet time??? Do I forget about stopping my Sunday to go to church? No, of course not. That time is invaluable. But if that's ALL I'm allowing God...I am missing the biggest part! If I am so focused on the small bit of quiet time I get with God or the hour I spend at church, I am MISSING the other 23 and a half hours of the day to hear God's voice! So many opportunities that I have missed hearing God's voice because I was waiting around for a good time to STOP for about 30 minutes to listen and check off that box when all I had to do was START listening to God. In the midst of my crazies all I have to do is START listening. That sounds completely doable.

Let's check this video out. Some of you may have seen it already, so don't spoil it for everyone else!
(Awareness Test)

Did you see all that crazy going on there? And right in the middle of all that was something we totally missed.

God's voice is like that.

So now as I still reflect on my Indian summer and the beauty of who I got to be spiritually, I realize I may NEVER be in that place again...never reach that quiet quota again. For a long time, I carried guilt about that. I love God. He deserves the attention of a quiet time. Those check boxes really got to me. But here I see that I have to begin thinking of what that conversation between God and me is going to look like and sound like and the space it will take as I am frantically cleaning up spilt milk, extinguishing emotional fires that burn deep within a 7th grader, or even trying to keep up with a hurting friend. What will God say? THESE are the moments I need to practice STARTing.

Well, all that sounds easy when you say it like that, but what about in practice? What about when I leave this awesome church today and the quiet and peace disappears and I go pick up my kids from the back or I have to start on a project for work or worse-I have NO project for work and there is no space for that quiet in all my worry? Start there. Know that, as you swirl around in the tornado of activity of life that there is always a voice, God's voice, there waiting to be heard. Choose to hear it. Choose to start in those moments when life says you can't stop. And here is the awesome thing about God...he's the "Boss" of surprise endings. Let's go back to the Isaiah passage and finish out the end of that chapter.

**27 Why do you complain, Jacob?
Why do you say, Israel,
"My way is hidden from the Lord;**

my cause is disregarded by my God”?
²⁸ Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
³¹ but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

They will parent twins and never get tired.

They will teach 7th graders and not check into a mental institution.

They will make every deadline without freaking out.

They will...now YOU fill in the blank.

So “Those who hope” get all that? So if I START hoping, START listening in the drudgery of daily circumstances...He will be there. I believe that my God is so powerful and worthy that He deserves even my every day. Not just my quiet times. Not just my Sunday morning check-ins. He IS the God of “Be Still and Know” but also the God of “Craziness and Unexpected.” Start there. Find Him there. Hear Him there.

Communion and Prayer of Examine

We are going to share communion today. On Jesus’ last night before He was crucified, He shared a meal with his followers. He passed around a loaf of bread and broke it and told them it was His body, broken to cover our sins. Today the wafers will represent that brokenness for our sins. He also had a cup of wine that he passed around and told them it was His blood, poured out for them; a sign of a new covenant. Today we will dip our wafers in grape juice as a reminder of that covenant. A reminder that God is sitting at the table with us, undisguised, waiting for us to start listening.

1. When in your last week was your life the craziest?
2. When in the last week did it seem God was speaking to you?
3. When in your life will be most difficult to converse with God this week?
4. What does it look like for you to START listening to God this week?

Benediction

Now Catalyst, may we be a people who, in the busy-ness of crazy lives, can start listening and know that the God who is calling us to start will meet us there. Go in His grace and in His peace.