

[Slide 1: **Cesar Millan**] Cesar Millan helps many dogs and owners learn how to live peaceful lives.

A dog owner has a problem with their dog, and the owners can't relax, some of them even in their own home, because the dog is such a nuisance. The kids can't pet the dog, or walk the dog because of fear of getting bitten, or the dog attacking someone. They feel trapped.

Then in walks Cesar, the Dog Whisperer. He watches, for a minute, assesses the situation, and then he goes to work. It may take time to work through *all* the behavioral issues, but there is nearly always an instant change in the dog's behavior.

[[VIDEO - Dog Whisperer](#)] (1:00)

That poor lady. Before she met Cesar, the Dog Whisperer, everything felt chaotic and stressful. After Cesar, things were peaceful and calm. It's just like our lives. We're pulled in so many directions. Life is crazy and chaotic. At times, it would be nice to have our own people whisperer to help make us peaceful and calm.

For many of us, that's why we are even here this morning. That's why we come to church. The way things are going isn't working, and we want God to speak to us, to calm our anxious hearts, so we can navigate through the chaos.

Well I've got good news. God is speaking to us, to you even. And actually, God spoke to you this week? We say it every week at Catalyst, "if you're open to it, God will speak to you." But not just here. We believe that God is speaking to you everywhere. It's a matter of hearing God's voice amidst all the other voices that are vying for attention. And what we're going to see today is that we hear God's voice through attending to moments of calm, clarity and flourishing, what the scripture calls shalom.

If this is your first experience of church and God-stuff, then you're probably a bit confused. You thought, I'm pretty sure I would know if I heard a voice out of nowhere.

But I'm not saying that you knew God was speaking. And I'm definitely not saying that it's an audible voice. I'm saying that God spoke. It's an internal voice, a spiritual nudge. And that's why it's so hard. When life is chaotic and we are surrounded by voices calling us this way and that, discerning God's voice is difficult. It takes practice. But thankfully for us, we aren't the first people to struggle to hear God's voice among the many.

This is what we are exploring in this series, Identity Crisis. When the people who claim to follow Jesus aren't discerning what God is saying, if we can't figure out how to pick up the cues of our Whisperer, then we end up not looking much like Jesus. We end up pursuing and defending a way of being the Church that's actually counter to the way of God.

It's what has happened with those dogs that are running wild in their homes. They think they're the leader of the pack, so why should they listen to their human? In the same way, if we're not careful, we can be running around and barking out orders and handing out judgements, thinking we know what God wants. We must learn to hear the voice of our Whisperer and follow Him. I believe we want to be faithful, we desire to be the body of Christ. The issue is not the want to, it's the *how to*.

[Scripture slide 1] So if you have a bible, turn with me to Revelation chapter 7. If you grabbed a bible from the back, it's on page XXXX. And if you don't have a bible of your own, please keep that one, it's our gift to you. These questions that we are asking are the same questions that were being asked by the Church that heard this book for the first time. They were living in a world that was hostile to them. Honestly, the stakes for these early Christians were so much more than anything we have ever faced. Yet they remained faithful.

John the revelator is using all of this fantastical language to reveal Christ, that's why it's called the Revelation. He's attempting to pull back the curtain on their reality to show who Jesus is, and that God has not abandoned them in their time of need. That God is still at work, even in the midst of their chaos.

The image that the revelator uses when talking about Jesus is the image of a lamb, but even more than that, it's a lamb slaughtered, and as we heard last week, this isn't an accident, this isn't a hiccup, this is the way of Christ. We saw that there was a scroll that couldn't be opened by anyone, and then stood a Lamb slaughtered who was able to open the scroll. As the seals are being opened, all hell is breaking loose on earth, and once again, we get a heavenly counterpart to the people on earth.

As we read this passage, imagine how it would sound to a person who was in the middle of persecution. In the midst of the chaos of having your job ripped away from you because you wouldn't worship the powers of the day. Not being able to provide for your family because you believed that Jesus was the only one worthy of praise. A family who is fearful for their lives because they could be next to face execution. This is a reminder to them that the One who provides for you is not a tyrant on an earthly throne, but the God of the universe, who laid down His life for you.

After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar,

“Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne
and from the Lamb!”

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and

worshiped God. They sang,

“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom
and thanksgiving and honor
and power and strength belong to our God
forever and ever! Amen.”

In the scene before this, we had a picture of all the people on earth being marked for God, and now the cosmic counterpart reveals a number too great to count, from every tribe, and every language, the 4 living beings representing all created beings, falling on their faces in worship of God, who is sitting on the throne of the universe.

It's an announcement that after all is said and done, every voice that calls for our attention and claims to have the answers, submits to God.

Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, “Who are these who are clothed in white?
Where did they come from?”

And I said to him, “Sir, you are the one who knows.”

Like, “How should I know man, this is your deal.”

Then he said to me, “These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white.

“That is why they stand in front of God's throne
and serve him day and night in his Temple.
And he who sits on the throne
will give them shelter.
They will never again be hungry or thirsty;
they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun.
For the Lamb on the throne
will be their Shepherd.
He will lead them to springs of life-giving water.
And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”
Revelation 7:9-17

Seeing this group, especially while you're struggling, makes you want to be a part of that. You can't help but think HOW CAN I BE THERE? These are the people who remained faithful in the face of chaos. They remained true to God even when going through great persecution and hardship. Because of their faithfulness, the Lamb has purified them. It then goes on to describe what they receive. In Hebrew, this would best be described by the word *shalom*. Most of the time *shalom* is translated as peace, but what it's really getting at is this idea of flourishing, it's God setting them up to succeed. The images of shelter, hunger and thirst being quenched forever,

being out of the scorching heat, given life-water, and even though they may have tears in their eyes, God will comfort them, God will wipe them away. All of these things add up to paint a picture of God's *shalom*.

So, we want to flourish and this passages says to get it we have to be faithful. But that begs the question, how do we remain faithful? How do we know that we are on the right track? How do we make sure that we are following the Lamb?

[Scripture slide 2] For that, turn over to John 10, if you grabbed the bible out of the back that's on page XXXX. In this series, as we've been looking in the book of Revelation for these pictures of the cosmic Christ, we are also looking at the Gospel of John where Christ is telling about himself. In the passage today, we jump back to before he was crucified to see him following where he healed a man born blind. Even after these signs, the people still don't believe he is who he says he is. Jesus has something to say about that, and something to help us know how we make sure we are following the Lamb.

It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication. He was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon's Colonnade. The people surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Jesus replied, "I have already told you, and you don't believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father's name. But you don't believe me because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

John 10:22-30

He says, "I have told you. But not with words. I've told you by my actions. But you don't believe because you are not my sheep." They are so distracted by the voices of power around them, the voices that immediately after this call for Jesus to be stoned. The chaos around them continuing to tell them what the messiah *should* be doing and *would* be doing according to their religion. All the while, everything he does is pointing to his Christship, but they can't hear it's announcement.

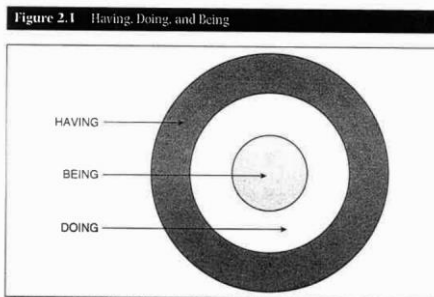
What Jesus offers his sheep is eternal life. And while this does extend into the next life, the key to this word is that it is perfect tense, meaning that it begins now and is ongoing. In essence, this eternal life that Jesus is speaking of is the *shalom*-life, flourishing. God is found in the peace.

Some might say, I do, or try to do, all the right stuff. I've been at this a while. I've tried everything that you've suggested, and I still haven't heard God's voice. And that is definitely possible.

There are plenty of people that go to church and follow the rules and try really hard to be good people, and still aren't really following God.

More isn't always more. Faith is more than a to-do list. Just adding a bunch of things to your to-do list doesn't *guarantee* that you'll hear from God. In fact, the church has a history of slapping these to-do-and-don't-do lists on people who are just coming to faith. And that's a problem because then we equate spirituality with doing things that look spiritual. And that's what we call legalism. We must work smarter not harder. We must learn and teach others to discern God's voice. The voice that is already speaking, all around you. So they can then follow him.

This may sound somewhat contradictory because we talk a lot about spiritual practices, and how important they are in forming us and making us faithful followers of Christ. Spiritual practices *are* key to growing in your walk with God, but it's not a doctor's prescription or a home shopping network pitch: "do these 5 things and you too can follow Jesus." Merely following lists does not guarantee life transformation. What do I do? Is not a good starting point for faith.



Source: Coaching School Results, 2009

[circle - having] According to *RESULTS Coaching: The New Essential for School Leaders* when we approach goals in life, we usually start with what we want to have, let's call this the *having*. This can be the tangible things such as nice house or good job, but also intangible like a loving spouse. [circle - + doing] Then we figure out what we need to do to accomplish it, let's call this the *doing*. And that's usually the extent to how we approach life.

[circle - + ??? in middle] The problem is we leaves out the core, the center point, and that is "who do I want to be?" [circle - + being] This is the most important part. As a healthy individual, the doing and having, flow out of your being. Having a good job is more than accomplishing tasks at work, it's being a good worker.

When we apply this to flourishing in spite of our chaotic lives, we recognize we can't just start adding things to our spiritual to do list, our "being" must be transformed. This is where spiritual practices come in. Spiritual practices are not about getting, or doing just to show how spiritual we are. Spiritual practices form us into people who can hear the voice of God and follow where he leads. Especially when it's not where we were expecting to go.

Remember, our Shepherd is a slaughtered Lamb, not a bloodthirsty lion. His path is not something we can do on our own. It's only when our being has been formed to follow, that we

can do what's asked of us. And it is then that we flourish. The Lamb is my Shepherd... I have all that I need.

The Dog Whisperer says that the one of the reasons that dogs behave badly is because they have low self-esteem. They don't know where they fit. They need a pack leader to show them how to *be*, not just what to *do*. And when Cesar takes the pack leader position, the dogs listen to him, and they calm down and become greatly behaved dogs, you might even say they flourish in all their dogness.

My job can get pretty stressful. I have a number of tasks on my plate each day, and there are times when I get interrupted, or a particular task takes longer than expected and at the end of the day when it's quittin' time, if I didn't finish a project it can really stress me out. And what I've come to realize is that it really messes with the way I husband and father.

If I'm in unrest because I felt like I didn't accomplish enough that day or there's some issue out of my control, it can bum me out and make me not be someone that my wife or my kids want to be around. One of the main reasons it stresses me out is because I feel this constant need to prove that I'm a good worker, to prove that I can do what I'm paid to do. And so if I didn't accomplish that thing, for that day, than I feel like I've failed.

But what I've come to figure out is that there's only so many hours in the day and not all of them can be worried about work, and tasks, and projects. Some of them need to be spent resting and being a dad and a husband.

The spiritual practice of Sabbath is meant to form us into people that are human beings, not just human doings. We can't be slaves to the work and flourish. That's not how it works. So I have to take time between when I quit my work to prepare to be with the family, a mini Sabbath. I listen to fun songs, or a podcast, or something to get me out of work mode so I can be in dad mode. And when I do this, I hear God's voice reminding me that my worth is not in how much I get done, but in who I am as a father, husband and friend.

The Lamb is our Shepherd. By attending to God, we learn to hear God's voice. And it's hearing God's voice that calms us. The chaos doesn't go away, we just learn to follow the leader of our pack. Life is chaotic, life is hectic. But the chaos doesn't have to consume us. We can keep moving forward when we hear God's voice and follow Him. If we continue to pursue Him, remain faithful, God will do the work of shaping us, purifying us and making us flourish.

What would life be like for you if you were able to find God's flourishing? How would it change the way you approach each day? How would it change the way you are as an employee? How would it change how you interact with friends and family?

Catalyst can continue to be a place where shalom is found. We can continue to be followers of Jesus who trust God to transform people. Who announce every chance we get that no matter

how bad life seems, Jesus, the Slaughtered Lamb, is the path to life. He is our shelter, our provider, and our life-giver. Jesus is. Not any set of dos-and-don'ts.

Communion Setup

Our journey to flourishing begins at this communion table. This table calls us back to the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples the night before he was killed. Jesus took bread and broke it saying, this is my body broken for you. Take, eat, all of you. Do this in remembrance of me. Likewise, after dinner he took a cup and said this is blood poured out for you and the sins of the world. Take, drink, all of you. Do this in remembrance of me.

This meal reminds us that it is God that empowers us, transforms us and gives us peace. It reminds us that no matter how many voices are screaming at for our attention, and telling us they have the path to life, our God is the one that gives us living water. It reminds us that no matter what pain and hardship we go through, it does not have the final word.

[Communion slide] You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to come to the table today. If you are someone who wants to be generous, who wants to throw off the chains of consumerism and embrace generosity, then you are welcome to come. I want to close today with a prayer of examen. This gives us an opportunity to think on what we've heard and where it connects with our lives. I'll read these questions with some space for you to think on them. After the questions, I'll pray. Feel free to come forward when you're ready.

Examen

1. When in the last week was my life chaotic?
2. When in the last week were there moments of peace?
3. When in the next week is their potential for chaos?
4. What can you do to live in peace this week, even in the midst of chaos?

BLESSING

Catalyst, may we be a people that recognize by attuning our ear to hear God's voice, He will bring peace in the midst of the chaos of life.