

Inspiring Moments

Distinguishing God's Voice

Tan Sin Liang

Mr Shogi is the leader of the 'Tokyo Night Owl Brigade'. His job is to locate underground pipe leakages and to repair them. He and his team do their work at night (hence the name 'Night Owl Brigade') when the city is quiet. Many of the underground pipes in Tokyo are old and rusty, hence they leak, causing loss of water supply. Shogi's job is challenging because he must be able to locate the leakage with pin-point accuracy. Otherwise, his team will be digging at the wrong place and incur costs in patching up the road or pavement. This lesson was made clear to Shogi one day when his boss scolded him: "Next time you should repair the road with your own salary!"

One of Shogi's biggest challenges was to distinguish the sound of underground pipe seepage from other sounds underneath. He decided to master his ability to listen to the right sound (underground seepage) and to ignore other sounds. He did this by inventing his own hearing devices (in the form of a stethoscope and a copper hearing tool). When asked, after many years working in this job, how he managed to get it right. He said: "I listen not with my ears but with my experience."

Likewise, in our daily life, we hear all sorts of 'voices'. Not all 'voices' are helpful. We need to learn to 'tune-in' to God's voice and to 'tune-off' certain voices that are harmful or not edifying. The challenge is: "How do I distinguish God's voice from others voices?"

We can learn from Elijah's experience in 1 Kings 19. You will recall that prophet Elijah had just triumphed over the false prophets at Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18. In the next chapter, we see a defeated and suicidal Elijah hiding in a cave in Mt. Sinai. Bible scholars have debated over the ages why Elijah, a hero, became 'zero'. Those of us who serve God will know that this 'Elijah syndrome' is not an uncommon phenomenon. It was in this dark, cold cave in Mt. Sinai, God spoke to Elijah.

As Elijah stood at the mouth of the cave, he witnessed a series of spectacular display of God's awesome power as God passed by.

First, Elijah witnessed a terrific windstorm. It was like the deafening sound of a squadron of fighter jets and the force of a tornado that tore the rocks on the mountain side asunder. Elijah stood there like a withered leaf, filled with fear and trembling. But God was not in the windstorm. Next, he felt a terrifying rumbling of an earthquake which shook the whole of Mt. Sinai. He must have thought the whole mountain would collapse on him and he would die. But God was not in the earthquake. Next, he saw a great fire; the searing heat was so intense, he feared that he would be burned alive. But God was not in the fire. What is the point of God speaking to Elijah in a fire? He had seen enough fire in Mt. Carmel. Hidden deep in the recesses of this dark, cold cave was a suicidal man. A frightened man. A broken, exhausted, lonely man. He had had enough serving God. Ever felt this way? Take comfort that God knows how much we can take. God said to Israel: "A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick will not snuff out." (Isaiah 42:3)

Then, in the stillness of the aftermath, Elijah heard a sound, a different sound. It was the soothing sound of a 'gentle whisper' (verse 12, in some version 'still small voice'). Unlike the previous deafening sounds, this sound was almost inaudible. But Elijah immediately recognized the voice. He knew this 'voice' before. So he quickly covered his face with his cloak in deep obeisance. He recognized that it was God's voice.

How did Elijah recognize it was God's voice? As he stood at the mouth of the cave, he heard other noises, other sounds. How did he manage to distinguish God's voice from others? Surely God would speak through the spectacular. But that is not always how God reveal himself to us. For Elijah to hear the 'still small voice' of God, he must be still and quieten himself to recognize God's voice. Likewise, in our life. When we seek God, we must learn to stop running around and to stop struggling. Be still and listen. Otherwise, we won't be able to hear God's 'still small voice'.

Also, Elijah was able to ignore the deafening sounds of the windstorm and the earthquake and to listen to the inaudible 'still small voice' of God. He recognize God's 'still small voice' because he heard that voice many times before. So like Shogi, Elijah listened with his experience. That means walking close to God in our daily lives. The more we walk with God in our lives, the easier for us to recognize God's voice and to distinguish it from 'other voices'.

We must learn to 'tune-in' to God's voice and 'tune-off' other 'voices' that may harm us.

As I shared earlier in my other sermon, I was struggling with a cash flow problem in my law practice earlier this year. Suddenly, a neighbour just told me (out of the blue) that he had made more than \$3 million within this same period! Instantly, I recognized that it may be the devil's way to make me feel envious of other's achievement. This was the period I have just set up this website to share God's message of encouragement. I saw it was the devil's way to 'de-value' my work for God and my own professional work. So I ignored this 'voice' and I continue to write these 'Inspiring Moments' messages today. God has blessed me since.

So learn to 'tune-in' to God's voice and 'tune-off' other voices that are not edifying.