

Series Title: **'Satisfied? What does it take for you?'**

Message Title: **'The Voices that Shape Us'**

Scripture Source: **Ecclesiastes 7:21-22**

Speaker: John Garner

Date: February 2, 2014

Don't Let Just Anybody Mess with Your Head

An engaging ad from the Haircutters company a number of years ago...and what a great set up for today's message! Don't let just any voice have their way in your head and heart. Voices abound in our culture and everyday lives. We are bombarded through social media, ads, TV, conversations and the list goes on. And often the voices have an agenda. 'Pay attention to me...do what I say, buy me, covet me, follow me.' You get my point. Many of the voices are impersonal to us. We don't have a relationship with the 'voice.' Yet, there can still be a measure of influence. But...what about the 'voices' that are personal to us, to some meaningful degree? How do we discern who and what to listen to...and not? How do you go about 'filtering' messages that come your way?

If we are not careful we can become overwhelmed and confused, unsure of who we should pay attention to...and not give much credence to. Do you ever wonder about these things? I do. It is very hard to live with a measure of soul satisfaction if we let 'just anybody mess with our head.' We need to cultivate skills of relational and voice discernment. And then act wisely and courageously as the voices come our way. Remember...the voices we pay attention to shape who we are and how we live. Are you choosing 'voices of influence wisely? Your character, conduct, and unique contributions are in the balance.

Permission Granted: Ecclesiastes 7:21

"Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you..." God expects us to practice relational and voice 'discrimination.' Not every voice merits our attention. We live in a culture of incessant and unending feedback, opinion, judgements, and criticism. Social media is rampant with all sorts of voices...often 'rating and assessing' people on all fronts. Appearance, achievements, contributions, beliefs, decisions, etc. We must choose the voices we pay attention to carefully and courageously. Proverbs 2:12-19. Don't let just any voice mess with your head and heart.

Who Makes the 'Cut' and Who Doesn't?

We are going to look at three kinds of voices and some of the traits of each one. We will see from Scripture the kind of voices to gravitate towards and the voices to steer clear of. Let me set this examination up in the context of a gripping and insightful speech.

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who actually does strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly..." (Theodore Roosevelt April 23, 1910)

Three dominant 'voices' to understand accurately and discern wisely and choose courageously from...easy to remember descriptions!

'Arena voices' 'Armchair critic voices' 'All-over-the-map voices'

1. **'Arena voices':** These are people who love and care for us genuinely. They know enough about us to help us fulfill God's unique purposes for our lives. They cheer us on, with words of encouragement, with prayers of support, with at times, questions that deeply probe us and at times wound us and rebuke us. Their words, attitudes, and behaviours are permeated by 'grace and truth.' John 1:14, Proverbs 27:5-6, Proverbs 10:21, Pr.12:18. These folks are in the arena 'with us and for us.' An 'arena voice' is wise, forgiving, bold, and rooted in grace and truth. And you feel it...that they are 'for you'. Turn up the volume...and build relational bridges with these dear folks.

Reflection: Who is an 'arena voice' to you? _____

Remember...there is one 'arena voice' that stands above all others. Jesus. Hebrews 12:1-3
He longs that we believe He is for us. Romans 8:31-39. More on that voice in 2 weeks!

2. **'Armchair critic voices':** These folks are 'pouncers'. They are quick with a judgment, a criticism, a put-down. Proverbs 12:18 Often, even when truth is spoken, there is poverty of grace and humility. Their presence and words unsettle and unnerve you. You sense that you are never quite 'enough' in their eyes...not good enough, smart enough, spiritual enough, you fill in the blanks. Tough blanks to fill in eh?

Reflection: Anyone come to mind who sits in that chair? _____

Sometimes these voices are from within...we can 'trash talk' ourselves. We need to discern truth from lies and hold onto truth tenaciously. Remember, our spiritual enemy is the 'father of lies.' Reject the lies and hold onto the voice of God's truth.

It's tough when someone close to us is a chronic critic. A parent, spouse, close friend...how do we protect ourselves? Boundaries that are clearly stated and courageously adhered to.

"I only accept and pay attention to feedback from people who are also in the arena...If...you're not helping, contributing, or wrestling with your own 'challenges', I'm not at all interested in your commentary." (Brene Brown) Is this tough to do? Yep. But if we don't and we end up with a 'messed up head and heart'...that is on us. God expects us to take Him...his voice seriously and use his 'voice of truth' as the filter for every other voice coming our way. And to reject the messages that are devoid of truth and grace...without apology. Mute their voice.

3. **'All-over-the-map voices':** These are folks who cheer us on one moment and savagely attack us another. We wonder, 'where do I really stand with you?'

Reflection: Anybody in that chair? _____ Proverbs 14:7, 25:19

Ask that person...'what's with the inconsistency? Are you for me or not? Can I count on you for grace and truth based input/feedback or not? If not, take a step back from their voice as much as possible.

Your Dominant Voice: Ecclesiastes 7:22

What 'voice' are you most consistently...and what would the people around you say?

'Arena voice' 'Armchair critic voice' 'All-over-the-map voice'? Clearly God wants us to be 'arena voices' consistently, courageously, and wisely, with grace and truth evident. Is there a voice that needs to be muted, coming from you? Do you need to come clean with God about a sloppy use of your voice to the people in your world? Do you need to look someone in the eye and apologise in specifics? Will you?

And then, cultivate with God's help and resources an 'arena voice' that is used of God powerfully in the lives of all sorts of people, starting at home, going to work, in your neighbourhood, and at church. Arena voice people taste satisfaction.

The world...your world craves for genuine, grace and truth based, 'arena voices.' Let that voice be heard and felt...reflecting none other than the heart and voice of Jesus.

FURTHER STUDY

The Voices that Shape Me:

Arena Voice: Who is an 'arena voice' in my life?

Armchair Critic Voice: Who is the graceless critic?

All-over-the-Map Voice: Who confuses me and leaves me wondering 'where do I really stand with you?'

The Voice I am:

God wants each of us to be an 'arena voice.' What 'voice' do I tend to give expression to?

Armchair Critic? _____

All-over-the-Map? _____

Let's ask God to help us be far more an 'arena voice' and far less the 'critic' or the 'all-over-the-map'.

Who needs you to be an arena voice for them?