

FIND YOUR VOICE

by Bob Branch

I'm a reluctant conservative. I have stayed safely inside the church walls, teaching the Bible, making disciples and caring for people. That's enough, right? I have, however, steered clear of all things political.

That has been changing. Recently we had my friend, Scott Scharpen, speak to our church about God's heart for the unborn—thinking biblically about abortion. As I prayed about this event, I found myself asking God to help us “Find Our Voice” on the issues we face in our society today. Find Our Voice. In the case of abortion, we must find our voice for the unborn. Proverbs 31 puts this poignantly:

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves” **Proverbs 31:8**

Find our voice. We must find our voice and speak up. Those three words would not leave me alone. Find our voice.

It's another way of saying we must speak up in the places where God has given us influence. To influence people, events and trends for him—with him—and reveal his heart and his ways. In matters large and small. In the here and now, and with an eye on the future.

When we find our voice, things start happening.

- In 1789, William Wilberforce found his voice and eventually ridded the British Isles of slavery.
- Martin Luther King found his voice and squarely addressed the injustice and prejudice in our country, and mobilized people for peaceful protest.
- Mothers who have lost their kids in drunk driving accidents, banded together in their pain, found their voice and formed M.A.D.D..
- Scott Scharpen found his voice for the unborn, opened a mobile ultra-sound clinic to talk with pregnant women who are considering abortion, showing them the life inside them and giving them hope and viable alternatives to abortion.
- A tiny, shy, Albanian nun's heart broke and awakened to the poor in Calcutta, India, and

Mother Teresa found her voice and the world joined her. Find your voice.

- Doug McAllister, a former pastor, found his voice, ran for Murrieta city council, won a seat and changed the long-corrupted political dynamics there.
- When parents find their voices for their children, they start talking to them about Jesus, his Word, and the stories of how he changed their lives. They set and keep boundaries.

You may be thinking, “Look, I'm a nobody.” Or, “I'm a student, or a truck driver, or a homemaker.” That's your sphere, but not your only sphere. There is your marriage, your children, your parents and relatives. There's your neighborhood, your friend group and school. It works outward from there.

God is challenging us, calling us to *Find Our Voice*.

The Bible is full of stories of people finding their voices. Moses overcame fear and inadequacy to find his. Samuel called out a king in his sin. Esther spoke up and saved her people from annihilation. An outcast Samaritan woman became the first evangelist.

Nehemiah was an exiled Jewish man who served as the cupbearer to Persian king Artaxerxes, in what is modern-day Iran. A cupbearer was the king's confidante who tasted food and drink before the king to keep him from being poisoned. A job O.S.H.A. would quickly outlaw! The story starts with a report he receives from back home in Jerusalem.

“Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.” **Neh. 1:1-4**
The news cuts Nehemiah like a knife. He is alarmed with God's alarm. He weeps and mourns for days. It drives him to fast and to pray. (2 Cor. 7:11)

Finding your voice starts with *finding God's heart.*

There is an awakening. An urgency. A concern. Something is not as it should be and must be changed to set things right. Your heart is pricked, disturbed, alarmed. Awakened.

Parents, this is where it all starts with our kids. We see the tide of culture—the distortions, craziness, boundary-less culture. Anything goes. Nothing is enough. This should alarm us!

God used Scott Scharpen to awaken me (and the church where I serve) to the injustice of abortion, and to respond in ways specific to where we live and the people we know. God is compelling us to get involved, join the discussion, and find our voice.

The main issues that keeps us on the sideline is *apathy.*

We simply do not care. The apathy of good people lets the culture (and the evil one) dictate what will happen. Edmund Burke said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

We are too busy, too numbed-out, too occupied with our own small world to care. Apathy is perhaps the greatest enemy of God's people today. We must be awakened from our sleeping by God and by others who are finding their voice, calling us out. We must have a “heart awakening.”

My wife and I had plenty of chances to be awakened as we were raising our children. Two of them went sideways for a time, and this drove us to our knees. It broke our hearts. Many nights we cried ourselves to sleep desperately praying. We would not give up being “parents,” in favor of the easier “best friends.” We had to speak up, pray our hearts out, call out bad behavior, lies and sin. Hold the line. In these ways, we found our voices and eventually they returned to Jesus and to us.

Finding your voice will mean finding God's heart. This starts by asking God to awaken us to what He cares about. Here's a start: “Jesus, awaken my heart to *what* you care about and *who* you care about. Do not leave me in my apathy. I open my heart to you.” Then, get ready!

Nehemiah's heart was awakened and broken, which drove him to pray, which is the second phase of finding our voice. **Finding our voice in prayer to**

God is the beginning of change. Listen to Nehemiah's prayer:

“Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.... Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.” I was cupbearer to the king.”

Nehemiah 1:5-7, 11

He is torn up over his people's condition, so he prays and fasts. **He found his voice with God.** When we call out, God answers. When something needs changing, the incessant biblical answer is: Ask God. Pray. God has chosen to operate in partnership with us through prayer. John Wesley said that “God does nothing but in answer to prayer.” It matters that much!

Finding our voice means seeking and finding God in prayer. Its what God said to Israel:

“...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” **2 Chronicles 7:13-14**

There is something powerful that happens when God's people find their voices in prayer. Jesus said:

“... keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. ¹⁰ For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” **Luke 11:9-10 NLT**

For Scott Scharpen (my story de jour), it started with God putting the unborn on his heart. Then, he started to seek the Lord in prayer and fasting. As he did the Lord ignited his imagination and directed

him to fund and create a GoMobileForLife mobile ultrasound clinic, with the vision of helping women see that there is a living baby inside them, not a “choice” and to provide alternatives to abortion.

Scott was on the sideline (like me). Then, his heart awakened. Then, he found his voice with God in prayer. This led him to find his voice in the real world! It’s what happened with Nehemiah.

“I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before, so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”

I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

The king said to me, “What is it you want?”

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it.” **Nehemiah 2:1–5**

Nehemiah found his voice with God, and shortly afterward, found his voice in the public sphere. God placed him there on purpose. He was to voice God’s heart and purpose to a pagan king, and when he went for the ask, the king accepted! Incredible!

Notice that he was scared to death! Finding our voice may mean facing some of our biggest fears. It doesn’t mean we galivant into danger without a care in the world. It means that in the midst of the injustice, in the middle of the opposition, we are able, with God’s gracious strength and boldness to go for the ask. To speak into the situation. To give voice to God’s heart, God’s truth, God’s ways.

Also notice Nehemiah’s tone and demeanor. He is gracious, humble and respectful. He prays silently the whole time. He’s looking for openness, for God’s answer, God’s movement. He’s driven by care, not by anger. These matter, a lot!

As we pray, God will begin to give us a voice to speak into areas that need change. To speak for him.

As with Nehemiah, forging this new ground for something bigger than ourselves is difficult. But, this is how God has chosen to get his purpose

advanced: through people like you and me, who at one point did not have a voice, and then, did!

Nehemiah cared, prayed, went for the ask, and followed through. He went back to Jerusalem, rebuilt the walls, united his people, and worked as God’s change agent.

His assignment was unique to him. It was not his brother’s assignment. It was his! A few month ago, I was sitting at a conference table with seven other pastors in Washington, DC, talking with our Congressman, Ken Calvert. As we talked, I noticed that he would answer each of us, but primarily talk to one pastor. Calvert’s attention continued to go back to him. For about 10 nanoseconds, I felt the green sting of jealousy. Then, I thought, “Lord, I see that you’ve given him favor in this arena, to speak with officials, senators and such. Use him.”

Later on, I was able to tell him what I saw and encouraged him to seek the Lord and see where that favor might take him. We want to find *our* voice, and help each other find *their* voices.

You were made with a purpose. God’s purpose. You were created to speak up for God in some arena(s). Now is the time to let your heart be awakened. To ask and pray, and then to step forward as God provides the vision.

- Jim Domen leads a movement of Christian leaders and pastors looking to find their voice and change the direction of our state, and our nation. “As goes California, so goes America!” He is a man of humility and prayer. He is rallying leaders to find their voice. I am a poster-child of his ministry.
- Scott Thomson, pastor of River of Life Church in Oroville, CA felt God call him to run for city council. Actually, he felt someone should run, and everyone said, “Why don’t *you* run?” He did. He won, and he is a change-agent there. He is finding his voice.
- My friends, Allan and Jessica Jimenez, felt God’s tug toward the Spanish-speaking friends of our city, and have fearfully, but faithfully moved to gather and start a church. They are finding their voice.

How about you? Where has God placed you to voice his heart, his ways, his message? Find your voice!

Sharing the Gospel with others is a given. Here are some other examples of finding your voice to get your imagination going:

- Talk to your kids (or your friendship sphere) about sex, integrity, character, and generosity.
- Consistently express your love verbally to your spouse, children, relatives and friends. Say, “I love you” and keep saying it!
- Run for city council or your public school board, which needs sane, Christian voices steering the discussion.
- Join a “pro-life” ministry and help pregnant women with viable alternatives to abortion.
- Find homeless people in your area and take the time to listen and pray with them, as well as meeting their practical needs.
- Ask a sick co-worker if you can pray for them (on the spot).
- Share the story of how Jesus became real to you with a co-worker, family member or friend.
- Be a reconciling-agent in your extended family by helping them forgive and come together.
- Ask a struggling neighbor “how can I help?”
- Give someone a word of encouragement who is sad or depressed. And, sit with them.
- Write a song, a poem, or blog about things you care about.

These are just to get your imagination engaged. Where has God placed you, and how might he want you to find your voice and speak for him?

“Lord Jesus, we open our minds and our hearts for you to awaken us to what you care about. Awaken us now. Breathe into each of us with vision and concern and care. Let us find your heart. Birth in us a spirit of prayer. A boldness in asking, seeking, and knocking. Let us find our voice with you, on our knees. And, then, unleash us in your Spirit’s grace and boldness to find our voice in all the areas where you want to see your kingdom come through us. Lord, help us find our voice, our purpose. In your name, we ask this. Amen.”