

# ***“Hearing From God”***

Advanced Individual Training (A.I.T.)

September 13, 2014

## **INTRODUCTION:**

(Pastor Jeff Pearson)

### ***Question:***

*"If a tree falls in a forest...  
and no one is around to hear it,  
does it make a sound?"*

### ***Answer:      YES!***

Just because YOU didn't hear the sound... doesn't change the reality that a sound was made.

***NOTICE*** how the very question itself places an undue, almost God-like level of reverent respect into the experiences of humanity. It is as if the “created” are erroneously endowed with the characteristics of the Creator.

# I. HEARING

## ***A. God Speaks***

(see Charlie Bethmann's notes)

(Pastor Jeff Pearson)

**T/S:**            ***(A Basic Guide to Understanding the Bible)***

“In all communication three distinct components must be present. The *Author*, the *Text*, the *Reader*. Linguists say, the *Encoder*, the *Code*, and the *Decoder*. Still another way of describing this is: The *Sender*, the *Message*, and the *Receiver*. Unless all three elements are present, communication is impossible.”

**- Robert Stein**

## ***B. Soils Respond***

1. Parable of the Soils: *(explains results)*

**Luke 8:4-15**  
(NASB)

<sup>4</sup> *When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable:*

<sup>5</sup> *"The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up.*

<sup>6</sup> *"Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.*

<sup>7</sup> *"Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out.*

<sup>8</sup> *"Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great." As He said these things, He would call out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

<sup>9</sup> *His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable meant.*

<sup>10</sup> *And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, so that SEEING THEY MAY NOT SEE, AND HEARING THEY MAY NOT UNDERSTAND.*

<sup>11</sup> *"Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God.*

<sup>12</sup> *"Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved.*

<sup>13</sup> *"Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.*

<sup>14</sup> *"The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.*

<sup>15</sup> *"But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.*

## 2. Four (4) types of soil:

- **Hard ground**     *(no soil)*
- **Shallow soil**    *(no roots)*
- **Crowded soil**    *(no weeding)*
- **Good soil**        *(no stopping!)*

## 3. A closer look at “good soil”

***“the good soil...  
are the ones who have heard the word  
in  
an honest and good heart,  
and  
hold it fast,  
and  
bear fruit  
with  
perseverance.”***

- Jesus, the Christ  
(Luke 8:15)

## The “signature of the Spirit” on one’s heart:

- *Spirit “changed”*
- *Love-centered*
- *Obedience-committed*
- *Faith without compromise*
- *Counter-cultural* (Beatitudes)
- *“All-in” living*
- *Missional commitments*
- *Teachable spirit*
- *Sacrificial priorities*
- *Surrendered Joy*
- *“Want-to” & “Get-to” attitude*
- *Intimacy/koinonia* (vert. & horizontal)

# How To Hear:

- **Head** - “Knowing”
- **Heart** - “Peace”
- **Hands** - “Experiencing”
- **Eyes** - “Seeing”
- **Ears** - “Christ” and/or “Christians”
- **Dreams** - “Dreams & Visions”
- **Reading** - “God speaks thru His Word”
- **Music** - ie. “Walk By Faith”
- **Miracles** - ie. Red Sea “opens” & “closes”  
\* Speaking to *both* Moses & Pharaoh

**T/S:**                   \*\*\*\*\* **Cautions:** (Charlie) \*\*\*\*\*

**T/S:**   NOTE – we listen with more than our ears... **John 10**

***“...He calls His own sheep by name...  
He goes before them and the sheep follow Him,  
because they know His voice.”***

- John 10:3-4

(BREAK #1)

## II. FROM

### A. *God's Word*

2 Timothy 3:16-17  
*(HCSB)*

<sup>16</sup> *All Scripture is inspired by God  
and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking,  
for correcting, for training in righteousness,  
<sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be complete,  
equipped for every good work.*

## a. Teaching

- See *John 8:32*... (truth sets free)
- Contrast with *1 Cor. 2:14*

### Psalms 119:33-37 (HCSB)

- <sup>33</sup> *Teach me, LORD, the meaning of Your statutes, and I will always keep them.*
- <sup>34</sup> *Help me understand Your instruction, and I will obey it and follow it with all my heart.*
- <sup>35</sup> *Help me stay on the path of Your commands, for I take pleasure in it.*
- <sup>36</sup> *Turn my heart to Your decrees and not to material gain.*
- <sup>37</sup> *Turn my eyes from looking at what is worthless; give me life in Your ways.*

## b. Rebuking

**Quote:** (John MacArthur)

A second work of the Word in the life of believers is that of **rebuke**. *Elegmos* (**rebuke**) carries the idea of convicting of misbehavior or false doctrine. As with teaching, Scripture's work of rebuking has to do with content, with equipping believers with accurate knowledge and understanding of divine truth, in this context divine truth that exposes falsehood and sin, erroneous belief, and ungodly conduct.



Richard Trench, a noted nineteenth-century British theologian, comments that *the Greek word* refers to rebuking "another with such effectual wielding of the victorious arm of the truth, as to bring him not always to a confession, yet at least to a conviction of his sin."

Regular and careful study of Scripture builds a foundation of truth that, among other things, exposes sin in a believer's life with the purpose of bringing correction, confession, renunciation, and obedience.

### c. **Correction** (a.k.a. "restoration")

**(correction)** is used only here in the New Testament and refers to the restoration of something to its original and proper condition.

### d. **Training in Righteousness**

- "building up" / "instruction"
- See **2 Timothy 2:1ff**

*...be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.*

*<sup>2</sup> And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

## Quote:

The whole Bible is God's inspired Word. Because it is inspired and trustworthy, we should *read* it and *apply* it to our life. The Bible is our standard for testing everything else that claims to be true. It is our safeguard against false teaching and our source of guidance for how we should live. It is our only source of knowledge about how we can be saved. God wants to show you what is true and equip you to live for him. How much time do you spend in God's Word? Read it regularly to discover God's truth and to become confident in your life and faith. Develop a plan for reading the whole Bible, not just the familiar passages.

**3:17** In our zeal for the *truth* of Scripture, we must never forget its *purpose*— to equip us to do good. We should not study God's Word simply to increase our knowledge or to prepare us to win arguments. We should study the Bible so that we will know how to do Christ's work in the world. Our knowledge of God's Word is not useful unless it strengthens our faith and leads us to do good.

*- Life Application Study Bible.*

## ***B. Prayer***

### What is prayer?

***Answer:*** Communication with God in worship.

***Answer:*** “Intentionally conveying a message to God.”

# Why do we pray?

1. To **Obey** *“Pray without ceasing.”* 1 Thes. 5:17
2. To **Be Christ-like** – John 17 & Mark 1:35, Luke 6:12
3. To **Be Biblical** – God’s people are people of prayer.
4. To **Receive:** (UPS distribution vs. phone/info)
  - a. Holy **Spirit** of God
  - b. **Forgiveness**
  - c. Saving **faith**
  - d. Saving **repentance**
  - e. **Persevering power**
  - f. **Mercy**
  - g. **Grace**
  - h. **Strength**
  - i. **Peace** in the midst of pressure
  - j. **Joy** – (John 16:24)
  - k. **Desires of your godly heart**
  - l. **Power**
  - m. **People** (Larry Wolfe – after 32 years)
5. To **Get-Ready** – Luke 21:34-36 (*“Be on guard...”*)
6. To **Fight** – 1 Peter 5:8 & Ephesians 6:12
7. To **Win** – God’s people/plan are blessed thru prayer

*Our “why” puts the heart  
in our “how.”*

# Seven Barriers to Prayer

1. *Selfish Motives*
2. *Unrepented Sin*
3. *Personal Idols*
4. *Hard-Heartedness*
5. *Unforgiveness*
6. *Wrong Relationships*
7. *Unbelief (“lukewarm” belief)*

## ***C. Christians***

1. O.T. Prophets
2. N.T. “sent out, set apart” ones...
3. Today – loving truth-tellers
  - a. *Christian leaders...* (proclaimers)
  - b. *Christian lovers...* (presence)

**John 17:11&21**  
**(HCSB)**

***11 I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them by Your name that You have given Me, so that they may be one as We are one.***

***21 May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me.***

c. ***Christian listeners...*** (Tom Lyons)

## ***D. Circumstances***

***God speaks.... however He wants!***

- a. Drive to Florida
- b. September trip to St. J

***God is speaking all over the world all the time!***

(BREAK #2)

# III. GOD

## *A. Messiah*

*John 3:16*

*2 Corinthians 5:17-21*

*John 14:15*

*1 John 2:6 & Luke 9:23*

# ***B. Message***

***1 Peter 5:8***

***Romans 3:23; 6:23; 5:8***

***Ephesians 2:8-10***

***John 15***

***Ephesians 4:14-16***

***1 John 3:18***

***Ephesians 6:10ff***

## What God tells us (walk thru the Bible):

- In the beginning God created... (vs. bang)
- All Scripture is God breathed & purposed
- Genesis 3: the fall & the gospel... the plan
- Sodom & Gomorra... culture matters!
- Miracles are real & come from God
- Ten Commandments: ...God's standards
- Joshua & Caleb: courageous obedience...
- 10 other spies: cowardice consequences...
- Rahab/Saul: God changes/uses all kinds!
- Walls of Jericho: do it God's way (alone)
- David & Goliath: Philippians 4:13
- David & Jonathan: true brotherly love
- David & Bathsheba: intimacy with who?
- David & Nathan: true love confronts...
- David & Prayer: see the Psalms (passion)
- **Esther**: power/role/responsibility of one
  - a. God's Word (God's promises)
  - b. **Prayer (and fasting 3 days)**
  - c. Believer (Mordecai)
  - d. Circumstances (Haman)
- Job: God uses pain & suffering
- Song of Solomon: God speaks on sex
- Jonah: attitude matters
- Malachi: motive & money
- Jesus: John 1:1; 14:6 (liar, lunatic or Lord)
- Love God, Love People, Serve the World
- Sermon on Mount: "how to live life"
- What we do: Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8
- Roman road...
- Family: see Ephesians 5 & 6



- Spiritual warfare: Ephesians 6:10ff
- Struggles: see Paul & Silas in jail...
- James – “faith without works is dead”
- Our walk & witness matter! (1 John 3:18)
- Titus 1:11 – silence the wolves
- Revelation – 7 letters to the 7 churches
- Revelation – “the end”
- Matthew 24-25 – the sign of the end times
- 1 Cor. 12:7 – Spirit = for benefit of others!
- Revelation 22: “...I am coming soon”

*Regardless of the way God chooses to reveal  
Himself or “speak” to us today,  
remember one truth...*

*He will never contradict His Word, and the  
message He gives will always bring glory to  
God. The Bible warns about adding anything  
to the already written, God-breathed Word of  
God, or accepting any other messenger who  
claims to be superior to Jesus*

*(Revelation 22:18-19; 2 Corinthians 11:4).*

### **Ways God does NOT speak:**

- God does not “bless our plans”
- God never “gives you power of attorney”
- God will never speak in falsehoods...
- God will never contradict Himself...
- God does not speak “out of context”
- God never speaks out of His character...

### **Things you’ll never hear God say:**

- Oops
- Oh, no...
- Give up!
- I don’t care.
- “Good” is good enough
- Don’t sweat the details
- We’ll work it all out at the end...

## ***C. Mission***

**God speaks strategically in SPECIFICS!**

- \*\*\* See **GIDEON & his 300** as an EXAMPLE
- \*\*\* See **Saul / Ananias** (Straight street example)
- \*\*\* See **Joshua & “walls of Jericho”** example
- \*\*\* See **Peter’s release** from prison example
- \*\*\* See **Johah’s** being **sent to Nineveh** example
- \*\*\* See **Paul/Ephesian elders** (bound with belt)
- \*\*\* Specific Instructions:
  - a. **Abraham...** “Go” & “sacrifice”
  - b. **Noah** – how to build the boat
  - c. **Moses** – how to lay out the Tabernacle
  - d. **David/Solomon** – the Temple
  - e. **Paul** – the “Macedonian Call”
  - f. **Revelation 2-3** (7 letters/churches)

*"He who has an ear,  
let him hear what the Spirit says  
to the churches."*

**Close:**     God has spoken PERSONALLY to EVERY biblical believer!

## **Matthew 28:18-20**

*<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.*

*<sup>19</sup> Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

*<sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

## **Acts 1:8**

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

## **John 20:21**

*<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”*

# Let's Pray!

## Additional RESEARCH Gathered:

### **How Has God Spoken To His People Throughout the OT and NT?**

We know that God is a God who speaks to his people.

Isa.43:11-12

We know that God is fully capable of speaking to his people at any time in any way he so chooses.

Ps.115:3 God does whatever he pleases.

We also know that God never changes. That means that God's nature as a God who reveals himself to people never changes.

Mal. 3:6 The Lord does not change.

But did God always speak to his people the same way in every age? Did God speak to Israel, the same way he spoke to Adam and Eve? Did God speak to the NT church the same way he spoke to Israel? In other words, does God demonstrate in the pages of his word that he speaks differently at different times? Did the fall of man affect how God spoke to people?

The Scriptures indicate that in God's plan of revealing himself to mankind there were changes.

The first and most dramatic change in God's plan took place after the fall.

Gen.3:23 Adam and Eve were banished from the garden of Eden. What did that mean in regard to God speaking to them?

Gen.2 indicates that God spoke to Adam about his needs both personal ("I will make a helper suitable for you") and in regard to civilization ("Be fruitful and multiply").

Gen.3:8-9 indicates that everyday God met Adam and Eve in the cool of the day.

God obviously spoke with them and fellowshiped with them. There was most

likely direct communication with Adam and Eve.

When God banished Adam and Eve from the garden, they forfeited this direct communication and fellowship with God on a regular basis.

After the fall, what we see throughout the Scriptures is God communicating with specific individuals at specific times for specific purposes that always involve his redemptive plan and never personal issues of life.

Heb.1:1 shows God's plan for communicating with man after the fall.

God spoke to our forefathers (OT believers) through the prophets and has spoken to us (NT believers) in his Son

God spoke to the people of Israel through intermediaries, the prophets. When he spoke to the prophets, it always had to do with his redemptive plan, not personal issues in their lives.

God spoke to the NT believers through the ultimate intermediary, his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus sent his apostles out to be intermediaries for him (Eph.2:20) to NT believers.

The pattern in both the OT and NT is God speaking to his people through intermediaries and those intermediaries receiving revelation only regarding matters involving God's redemptive plan.

Even when God spoke to these intermediaries, we see infrequent communication rather than frequent regular communication.

He spoke to Noah 5 times over 950 yrs, Abraham 8 times over 175 yrs, Isaac 2 times and 1 time to Rebekah over 180 yrs, Jacob 7 times and 1 time to Laban over Jacob's lifetime. These are just some examples.

We also see that God does not address personal issues, only issues that involve his redemptive plan.

In the OT, God did not speak to his intermediaries regarding personal matters.

In Gen.20 God rebukes Abimelech for trying to take Sarah as his wife when Abraham indicated to him that Sarah was his sister. There was deceit on Abraham's part and yet God does not rebuke him for that. At least it is not recorded. The whole incident is used by God in his redemptive plan to help protect Abraham and to help him financially while he was on his journey.

God does not rebuke Rebekah or Jacob or Isaac for their personal sins of lying

or showing favoritism, but rather uses it for his redemptive plan.

God does not speak to Rahab about her prostitution (personal sin), but only deals with her role in his redemptive plan (saving the Israeli spies). In Heb.11:31 and Jas. 2:25 Rahab is praised for her role in God's redemptive plan and is even called Rahab the harlot. Yet no mention that harlotry is wrong. It is not that God is condoning Rahab's harlotry, but rather that God speaks directly regarding his redemptive plan, not personal sin issues. Personal sin issues are dealt with through his Word. Most likely Rahab realized that she had been wrong about prostitution when she began to live among the people of Israel (Josh.6:25) and understood God's ten commandments.

In Gen. Joseph's brothers are never rebuked directly by God for selling Joseph into slavery. In Gen.45:4-12, Joseph emphasizes how God used their evil in his redemptive plan.

What about the apostles?

The pattern in Acts is God speaking to Peter and Paul at key times, but not regularly on a daily or weekly basis.

In Acts 2, Peter received the power of the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues and spoke divine revelation. In Acts 10-11 Peter received revelation regarding Cornelius and the sharing the gospel with the Gentiles. In Acts 12 he is rescued from prison by an angel.

Jesus speaks to Paul on the Damascus Road in Acts 9. In Acts 22:17-19 Paul says that he received a revelation to flee the city of Jerusalem (probably the event later in Acts 9). In Acts 13:1-2, the Holy Spirit speaks about the mission of Paul and Barnabus. In Acts 16:9 Paul received a vision of a man calling him to Macedonia. In Acts 18:9 Paul received a revelation from the Lord to stay in the city and minister. In Acts 23:11 in Jerusalem Paul was encouraged by the Lord that he would testify in Rome. In Acts 27:23-24 Paul was visited by an angel.

In Gal.1:15-17 Paul seems to imply that he received more revelation from God for a period of time (Gal.1:15-17) after his conversion (cf. Acts 26:16 "and what I will show you"). Then fourteen years later he received a revelation to go up to Jerusalem (Gal.2:1-2).

Two major things we notice, the revelation from God was infrequent and it was purposeful, always concerning Peter and Paul's ministry, not personal matters.

Most of the time, Peter and Paul were ministering for the Lord without receiving direct revelation from the Lord.

Even at important times of decision the Lord did not always speak to them. In Acts 1:21-26, Peter used the casting of lots to determine the Lord's will. In Acts 6:1-7, there is no record of revelation regarding the selection of men for the widow's ministry. In Acts 15, there is no record of revelation in the first doctrinal crisis of the early church regarding what is necessary to be saved.

In the Scriptures what do we see God doing?

We see that man forfeited at the fall, direct communication with God on a personal basis. He then only received direct revelation through intermediaries. God communicated infrequently and only as He deemed necessary to fulfill His redemptive plan.

When we get to heaven we will have direct communication with God again. That is part of the blessing of redemption.

2 Cor.5:8 "absent from the body present with the Lord."

1 Cor.13:12 "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known."

Praise the Lord!

Then how does God communicate to His people today?

Through His Word, the Scriptures.

2 Tim.3:16

Rom. 15: 4

1 Cor.10:11

We are to live by faith in God's word.

Gal.2:20

Heb.11



## 8 Ways God Speaks to Us Today

Rebecca Barlow Jordan

He conversed with Adam in the first garden. He told Noah to build an ark. He spoke to Moses in a burning bush. He promised Abraham a son. Paul heard His voice on the way to Damascus. But does God still speak to us today? If so, how? When? Where?

Often when people ask this question, they are talking about an audible voice. And God can do that. He can do anything He wants. He's God. Why then, can't I hear God speak to me audibly, someone might ask?

I can't answer questions that the Bible does not make clear. And the way God works is one of those questions. I do think "hearing God speak" may mean different things to different people. To some, it may suggest, "I need answers for my life, or this particular crisis." Another may say, "I've asked God for \_\_\_\_\_, but He never answers me."

God treats each of us as unique children. None of us are cookie-cutter Christians. Because of that, God doesn't "speak" the same way to all of us. However, here are eight ways God often uses to communicate with us.

### 8 Ways God Speaks to Us Today

#### 1. Through His Word in general.

[2 Timothy 3:16](#) says that all Scripture is "God-breathed." His Word sometimes gives us a warning, a word of encouragement, or a lesson for life. It's "His-story"—written with love as God's guide for life, "so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

That means God is whispering, and sometimes shouting, all through His Word, giving us instructions and principles for life. As we interpret Scripture by other Scripture, we avoid the false logic and misinterpretations that sneak into our world. If someone claims, "God told me to go kill my neighbor!" would you believe him? Of course not! God never violates His own Word or principles. That "voice" does not belong to God.

I needed help for raising my children. God "told" me about that in His Word, especially in [proverbs](#). [Marriage](#) difficulties? God spoke about that as well. Times when I was afraid? I "heard" Jesus' words to His disciples as they feared for their lives one stormy night: "Peace, be still!" and it was as if God was speaking to me, too ([Luke 8:23-25](#)).

#### 2. Through His Son, Jesus Christ

The New Testament was the fulfillment of God's special plan. It's the gospel: the good news of Jesus Christ. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at

many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” [Hebrews 1:1-2](#), NIV).

Through the words of Jesus in Scripture, we can “hear” God’s heart and God’s voice—and know what God is truly like. These words were not written for a few, select individuals who could jump through the right spiritual hoops (“For God so loved the world...”). Someone in Africa, in Germany, in China, and in Alabama can “hear” Jesus’ voice by reading the same Bible.

Comparing us to sheep and He as the Shepherd, Jesus says in [John 10:27](#), NKJV: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” Why? Because the sheep know who He is. They belong to Him, and they recognize Him by the sound of His voice. And He’s the one who will always lovingly lead them on the right path—again and again.

### **3. Through Nature and God’s Creation**

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse ” [Romans 1:20](#), NIV). Through the intricate details and magnificent beauty of all that God has made, we can “hear” His voice. How? By observing the ant’s strength to store up food all summer long, we learn about wisdom and industriousness. By studying the heavens, we understand more of God’s greatness. And through planting and growing a garden, we “hear” about miracles of death and rebirth. God designed—and spoke them all into existence.

### **4. Through Other Believers**

God may use a friend, a teacher, a parent, or a preacher to convey His message of truth to us. Their words may come as a warning, a blessing, or as a prophetic truth about our lives. Whether we choose to hear it or ignore it, depends on us. Do their words line up with Scripture? Will God confirm or affirm that truth in us? “The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere” ([James 3:17](#), NIV).

I’ve “heard” God speak to me numerous times through other people. A good friend once cautioned me about flirting with danger. Words from a speaker or Christian author have both challenged me and convicted me at times. And I’ve “heard” God talking to me through my own children as their pure and honest words cut clear to my heart and spirit, reminding me of God’s true priorities.

All these things may not sound to you like ways of “hearing God’s voice,” but it’s possible to reduce God to our own image if we insist on Him acting or reacting a certain

way. God is bigger than that. He once spoke through a donkey ([Numbers 20:28](#)). Why then, can't He speak through anyone at anytime or in any way He wants to?

Bottom line is that if we are His children, God loves us unconditionally and will spare no expense to show us. Our part? Believe Him!

Hearing His "audible" voice would no doubt cinch His reality in an awesome way. But I've never heard God through an angel's message. I have no taped recordings to tell you what God sounds like. But I have heard God "speak" through the above ways—and in a few more. Read on.

### **5. Through Music**

Perhaps one of the ways I can sense God's presence the most and "hear" His voice the best is when I am praising Him through music. Maybe it's because in times of depression and difficult trials in the past, I would pour over David's songs in Psalms, often singing them back to God with my own tunes. Praise brings me instantly to attention, like a sergeant's command to his soldiers. The words and the notes bring a soothing comfort, excitement, and passion that open my ears and heart and lift my spirits immediately.

In [2 Chronicles 20](#), King Jehoshaphat faced a huge army of enemies who could have easily destroyed His people, but he did a strange thing. With a declaration that his eyes were on God, he sent in a choir of praise singers: "Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: 'Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever'" ([2 Chronicles 20:21](#), NIV).

God "spoke" clearly. He released His power, and Jehoshaphat's army defeated their enemies!

### **6. Through Circumstances**

When others claim to hear God through circumstances, I try to caution them to test their conclusions with other evidence. God is a Holy God, and often uses circumstances to get our attention. But He will usually confirm it in other ways.

This happened to us before my husband and I married. We were dating in high school and were both involved in what could have been a deadly accident, when a speeding pick-up hit our car broadside. Through that accident, my husband felt God had a special purpose for his life. Did he "hear" God's literal "Yes?" No, but through much prayer, seeking God's Word, and talking to others, he felt God's confirmation. Several months later, he committed his life to full-time Christian service.

Someone once told me they just knew God was telling them it was okay to buy a brand-new pickup. They'd prayed about it, and circumstances confirmed it: the local car dealership had just the color and model they wanted. But there was one small problem they were neglecting. They couldn't afford it on their income. And they ignored other red

flags as well.

Through Moses, God used circumstances (plagues) to convince Egypt's leader to release God's people from slavery. But Pharaoh wouldn't listen.

Sometimes God uses our circumstances to test our [faith](#). We don't always know how to interpret the things that happen to us. I recently took my first trip in an ambulance to the local ER—unfortunately as a patient. My pulse, along with my blood pressure, dropped dangerously low. For several minutes my world looked like a spinning photo negative. Scary, to say the least. Four hours of testing later found no cause as to why it happened. The doctor pronounced me healthy and sent me home, after encouraging me to get a follow-up—which I did. Nothing showed up.

I don't know if God was speaking to me about something special, but the first thing I did was tell Him I was listening! If nothing else, life—and loved ones—suddenly became much more precious to me. One of the first things I usually ask God when circumstances change is: “God, is there something you want to teach me through this?” Yes, I know everything is “fodder” for writers. But I want to make it personal and learn the lesson first.

## **7. Through His Spirit**

I once heard someone teach about “minding the checks” in your spirit. Some may call it “God's whispers,” while others say, “God's still, small voice.” We are made in the image of God, and when we confess Jesus and follow Him as our Lord and Savior, His Spirit comes to live in us ([John 14:17](#), [1 Corinthians 3:16](#)). God's Spirit speaks to us through our conscience, helping to make the right decision. When we're tempted, that same Spirit warns and nudges us to do the right thing.

As a writer, I depend on God's Spirit to give me direction. There are times when ideas pop into my mind totally unexpectedly—and sometimes directly after a plea for help from God. The good ideas I credit to God, because after all, He is the source of every good and perfect gift. The others? They're in file 13. Even the good ones need developing and rewriting, but that's a different subject.

Why do you suppose ten people can “hear” a sermon, but each person will walk away with a different truth that applies to him? In some cases, the speaker never spoke what the people say they “heard.” Many times, that may be the result of God's Spirit speaking a personal “Rhema,” a living, breathing word of truth to our spirits. It's when Scripture comes alive to us—because it is truly “God-breathed.”

## **8. Through Prayer**

Each way I've shared that God may speak to us today meshes into the other. God often speaks to us through His Spirit, through prayer. We may not know how to pray, but God's Word tells us His spirit makes intercession for us ([Romans 8:26-27](#)).

Often through a combination of fasting and prayer, our minds become clearer and our hearts are more sensitive to God. Again, we may not hear God's literal voice, but His Spirit confirms a certain direction or answer for us. As the distractions fade, we can sense His leading in a new way. Sometimes while praying, God's Spirit will remind us of a Scripture or a truth in His Word that we can directly apply to the situation.

Does that happen immediately? Not always. There have been occasions where I still had no clue what to do, but in faith I thanked God whenever and however He would answer. A day, a week, maybe even months pass. Then one day in the shower or on a walk, a thought comes—that gentle “whisper” that could only come from Him, accompanied by His peace.

### **You Are Unique**

Does God speak to all of us the same way? No, we are all unique. Are these the only ways God speaks today? No. He's a creative God. He speaks so many ways, including through miracles. In other countries where Christianity is taboo, God is also revealing Himself repeatedly through dreams. Report after report confirms that an unbeliever who has never heard of Jesus dreams of Him—but doesn't know who the “man” is—or what the dream means. Then a messenger comes, shows a film about Jesus' death and resurrection, and the one who has dreamed recognizes the man in his dream: It's Jesus, the Son of God!

### **Remember One Truth**

Regardless of the way God chooses to reveal Himself or “speak” to us today, remember one truth. He will never contradict His Word, and the message He gives will always bring glory to God. The Bible warns about adding anything to the already written, God-breathed Word of God, or accepting any other messenger who claims to be superior to Jesus ([Revelation 22:18-19](#); [2 Corinthians 11:4](#)).

# **9 Ways God Speak to His People in Bible**

Have you ever heard someone's testimony of how God has spoken to them in a clear way in a particular situation? You may always find a few in every **small group or church**, who always have accounts of God's clear voice. Have you ever wondered how could God speak to everyone but you? Does God really speak? Or is it a mere

emotion or feeling? Does He really communicate in a clear (sometimes audible) voice? The answer is of course “Yes!!”. He does. So, what are the ways in which He speaks? Let us look at what the Bible says about the ways in which God speaks to His people.

**Through the Word of God**(2 Tim 3:16, Psalm 119:11, 105):This is the most clear and effective way of God’s communication with His people. If you want to know how things work perfectly, you need to read the manual. The Bible is God’s manual for His people. But as in case with other manuals, we often ignore the Bible. How often do we try everything else, but His word?

**Through the inner still, small voice of Holy Spirit** (Acts 11:12, Acts 13:2, Acts 16:6-7, 1 Kings 19:12, Isaiah 30:19-21)

**Through the advice and counsel of the men and women of God** (Prov 12:15)

**Through the Audible Voice of God** (Acts 9:4-5)

**Through Dreams**(Matthew 1:20-21) – There are many instances in the Bible, where God clearly communicates through dreams.

**Through Visions** (Acts 10:9-18)

**Through Angels** (Luke 1: 26-38) (Check out [Angels and Demons: Bible Study](#))

**Through circumstances:** However there is a danger of opening doors to Satan by letting mere circumstances dictate our lives. . So be wise and discerning with regards to your circumstances and expect God to speak to you through them.

**By Inner Conviction and Peace:** It is similar to the inner still, small voice of Holy Spirit. God can give you deep conviction and inner peace about something. ([Discover God’s Will – Practical Preparation](#))

We have all experienced some of these ways of God’s communications at different times. There is one question though.

**Is there a danger here? Can we misinterpret our voice or desire as God's voice?** After all, sometimes we hear what we like to hear! I believe that it is important to examine it through multiple sources.

It is like three flag poles. When all three poles align in one direction, you can be sure of god's will and direction for the particular situation. These three poles can be

1. Word of God
2. Inner Conviction
3. Circumstances

I hope and pray that 'God will speak to you' through this bible study notes!!

**Question:** To whom did God speak directly?

**Answer:**

God also spoke directly to

- Cain (Gen 4:6)
- Noah (Gen 6:13-21, 7:1-4, 8:15-17)
- Noah and his sons (Gen 9:1-17)
- Job and his friends (Job 38:1-42:6)
- Abimelech (Gen 20:3-7)
- Isaac (Gen 26:24)
- Jacob (Gen 28:13-15, 35:1, 9-12 ... maybe 32:26-29)
- Joshua (Jos 6:2-5)
- Samuel (1Sa 3:4-14, 15:10, 16:7)
- David (1Sa 23:2, 23:4, 30:8; 2Sa 2:1, 5:19, 5:23-24)
- Nathan (2Sa 7:4-16 ... 2Sa 12:1 by implication)
- Solomon (1Ki 3:5-15 ... maybe 6:11-13)
- Jehu (1Ki 16:1-4)



- Elijah (1Ki 19:9-18)
- Isaiah (2Ki 20:4; Isa 6:8-12, 8:1-11)
- Ahaz (Isa 7:10-25)
- Manasseh and his people (2Ch 33:10)
- Jonah (Jon 1:1-2, 3:1-2, 4:4, 4:9-11)
- Ezekiel (Eze 1:3)
- Hosea (Hos 1:2-5)
- Haggai (Hag 2:10-23)
- Zechariah (Zec 1:1-17)

- People at Jesus's baptism (Mat 3:17)
- Paul (Act 9:3-6, 18:9)

... I don't think my list is complete

- God spoke as He inspired Bible writers (2Pe 1:21)
- God spoke as to Old Testament Prophets (Heb 1:1)

## **Personal notes from Charlie Bethmann:**

Hi Pastor Jeff.

I have written some scratchy notes to myself about hearing God's voice. **In Christ, there exists the obvious relationship types; the obvious relationship of Husband and Bride, Father and child, Friend to friend, Master to grateful servant, God to his creature. All about relationship, and this means communication and this means speaking to one another.** The obvious essential is God speaks to His people and we speak to God. **There is a fallacy to think that the Holy Spirit/God/Jesus has given us His Word through the written pages only to give us history, character and commands that we read, but not that He speaks to us daily through His voice on all details of our life.**

God wants us to be totally dependent on Him and thus we need to seek His every moment guidance, (NOTE: caution needed to not misinterpret so as to paralyze believers as they "wait to hear" on "every" fork in the road – even the mundane), not just know how to be saved or generalities of the Christian faith. **Most Christians worldwide**



likely do not own Bibles and we know the early Christians did not even have the New Testament. So how were they led.... by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit....Christ in you, the hope of Glory. (*Colossians 1:27 = To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*).

God has given us the ability to hear His Voice that comes not only through His Word but the whispers of his Voice. Every Christian has heard His Voice, they had to. for He has spoken to us and drawn us by His Spirit. The first Voice print we all should have at least most was His voice that called us. **Revelation 3:20.** , "If any man HEARS my voice and lets Me in ..." That could be one's first Voice Print of God.

He then says in **John 10:27** " My sheep hear my voice and they follow Me. " and **John 10:4 =** *When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.* So here God makes it so clear He has a voice and He speaks to His sheep.

I love **Acts 13:2** where it says, "as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, THE HOLY SPIRIT SAID. " The brand new sold out believers heard His voice and it is the same today.

How did Peter know Ananias and Saphira did not give all their money to the church, The Holy Spirit spoke.

God speaks to His people and in the Scriptures it is clear it is to the surrendered and obedient ones. If you look at **1 Kings 8:23**, it says that He keeps His Covenant (His Word and promises... ie, to lead you) to all those who come to Him with all their heart.. In **Jeremiah 29:11** , a favorite passage of many, God promises us a future and a hope, but the condition, only to those who seek Him with their whole heart which is contained in the next 3 verses. In **Romans 12:1** it says to present your bodies a living sacrifice, which is reasonable. Why? Because He is worth it and commands it; but also, in the next verse, it is so you can know His perfect will.... How does He reveal His will? Answer: through His Word and His Voice.

**The Bible does not give us specifics regarding a number of personal decisions,** such as: which person we are to marry; nor the church body we are to pour ourselves into, nor the specific person to whom we are to minister or disciple. **Nevertheless, God will direct us when we ask. How does He do it? His Voice.....**

**God wants to be in the details of our life** and as we learn to follow Him, we want Him too. **His Peace is our gift, reward and promise from Him.**

**If one looks at the building of the Ark or the Tabernacle, you will see the extraordinary details. God SPOKE these instructions to Noah and Moses. He has**

**not quit speaking.** He says in **Proverbs 3: 5-6**, (*I will instruct you in all your ways*), but **the condition is to acknowledge Him and trust Him.... Hearing God's voice is conditional.** So ask...

In **Isaiah 30:19 -21** = God says, I will be gracious to you at the sound of your cry, when He hears it, He will ANSWER you. . . your ears shall hear a word behind you saying this is the way, walk in it.....".

**19**People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. **20**Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. **21**Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

**? Jeremiah 3:12** = *Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, "Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the LORD; I will not be angry forever.*

**The truth of God in us is so clear in the Word, and if God is in us, He speaks to us.....** Scriptures that state this truth:

**1John 4:4** = *"Greater is He who is in you , then He who is in the world."*

**1 Cor. 6:19** = *"do you not know your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit"*

**Romans 8:16** = *"the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."*

**Galatians 2:20** = *"...it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."*

Another condition is that God calls us to believe... in **Hebrews 11:6** = *"without faith it is impossible to please God and must diligently seek Him..."* also **Proverbs 2:3** = *"...if you cry out for discernment and seek her as silver and search for her as hidden treasures..."* In **Numbers 12:3-5** we see how **God spoke to Moses vs. Aaron because of His Humility.** In **12:7-8** says, *"not so with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My house, I speak with Him face to face and plainly, not in riddles or dark sayings."* **So God seeks to speak clearly to those faithful in all His house and to the humble...**

There can be those who think, **when a certain person is speaking to God (and God is speaking intimately back)** that this is "unfair" or **some how worthy of resentment...** Aaron felt that way but the most dramatic example that comes to mind is

in **Numbers 16**. Herein we find the description of **Korah and his infamous rebellion**. In verse 3 the rebellious elders say to Moses, (basically paraphrased), "**Do you think you are the only one who hears from God?**" Korah and his supporters were jealous grumblers... **Moses knew He had heard and was solid to challenge them. God speaks as clear today to the totally surrendered, humble & faithful who are forever seeking and depending.**

Then we get the beautiful promise in **Psalms 32:8** = *"I will guide you with My eye."*

## How does God speak?

The psalmist wrote in **Psalm 86:8** = *"I will hear what the Lord will say, For He will speak peace to His people the Godly ones."* In the **Psalm 29**, it also says **the voice of the Lord is powerful and majestic and can shake wildernesses and strip the forest bare. And for the righteous, He guides them in paths of righteousness. Psalm 23:3**

**As we mature God's voice becomes more clear... as He tests us to see if we are listening...** At first, we may need help from more mature brothers & sisters to help us discern "self-voices" from that of the Spirit... **In 1 Samuel 3 we see Samuel getting help from His mentor Eli.** However, **(for true biblical Christians) ultimately, we have the Holy Spirit that will teach us.** Such is stated in **1 John 2:27**, *"But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you..."*.

**To know Him, that is all Paul wanted,, to know Him...Phillipians 3:8...** (*"What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ"*) **to hear His voice...** To heed His voice is the constant warning... To seek His every direction... **To hear Him and be in His Presence is our greatest reward...**

**John 17:23-26** talks about the Holy Spirit bringing His word to remembrance...

**God speaks to us by His Word and by His Holy Spirit...** to those who are humbled, born again, faithful in all, ever-seeking (like hidden treasure), and finally, to those who cry out to Him.

Lastly, it is His prerogative to use "other means" as He wishes, the specifics of which will be revealed in His time and in His way.

Personal experiences are available to share if ever need.

Pastor this is most of what I wrote down and alot of examples not mentioned.

I love you.

Charlie

*Acts 17:11*  
BIBLE STUDIES  
**Hearing God**

Rev 3:22 (NIV) "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

**Sandy Gregory's Story Of The Remote Employee**

Imagine you are hired to open up an office in Anchorage, Alaska. Your new boss gives you a high-tech looking two-way radio, a policy and procedure manual, and tells you that you will receive instructions once you arrive, and off you go. Upon arrival you hear your boss's voice over the radio, saying, "I will communicate to you through this radio unit. But take note: our competitors, our enemies, also have access to this channel. They will try to impersonate my voice with false messages to thwart our purposes." "Oh no!" you panic, "Then how will I know if it is you or the enemy giving me instructions?"

Your boss's voice comes back over the radio: "Three ways. First, considering the situation, *check every message* supposedly from me against the policy and procedure manual. Since I wrote it, I'm not likely

to ask you to violate it, right? Also, if I am not talking, don't focus in on the noise, pretending that I am. If I am not speaking, let the manual be your guide. Don't let any impersonating voice mislead you, or your own overactive imagination."

"Second, since the Manual does not cover every situation, you will have to *get to know my voice*. I know, this will take time, and so I am not likely to ask you to do anything radical until we both have some low-risk successes under our belts. Remember, I understand the situation perfectly well, so I'll go slow at first. A time will come when I will be able to tell you to do the wildest things, and you will know it is me. In the short-term, you must be trained through low-risk experience."

"Third, over time, *my overall purpose* for your work will begin to come into focus. You will begin to see the grand strategy in the policy and procedure manual, and the overall pattern of my true instructions. When this happens, you'll know instantly if what you hear through your unit is 'of me', just your imagination, or enemy misinformation. False instructions will begin to appear silly to you then. So take heart, and get to work."

After reflecting on this a few moments, you hear your boss's voice again on the radio unit. "Take all of the money from petty cash and give it the next person that walks in, no questions asked." Hmm... You look in the policy and procedure manual, and this is specifically forbidden. Besides, you know your boss wouldn't tell you to do something that risky right off. And also there was an certain "twang" to the voice, an appeal to something different within you, and a plan that was not in the long-term interests of the company. So, even though you are on a hostile channel, you are beginning to have hope that you can indeed do this job.

## **Hearing Things...**

God speaks to us through our minds and hearts. God occasionally speaks audibly to His children when *He has placed them* in situations that require great faith. Thus, the miraculous aspect of a physical voice coming from nowhere *allows us to believe* in situations that are beyond us.

John 12:28 (NIV) [Jesus prayed,] "Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine."

Why did Jesus go out of His way to point out that the voice was not for His benefit? Because He heard God *all the time*. He was in constant communion with the Father. But the disciples needed to hear it, so they could have faith to believe. Remember, Jesus was about to be rejected by the religious establishment, taunted and humiliated, and executed. So God spoke audibly. God knows when we need a sure word, and works around our lack of maturity in times of great need.

2 Pet 1:16-19 (NIV) We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when *the voice* came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

**God Will Do What He Says**

Rom 4:17 (NIV) As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Gal 4:22-23,29 (NIV) For it is written that Abraham had two sons [Ishmael first, and then Isaac], one by the slave woman [Hagar] and the other by the free woman [Sarah]. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way [the flesh]; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise [the Spirit]... At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.

You know the story. God promised Abraham a son in Gen 15:4. The problem came when after receiving this promise, Sarah suggested an idea to move ahead *in the flesh* and "assist" God. The "Ishmael" mistake of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar is not uncommon. We are often deceived into thinking that God needs our help. What is praiseworthy of Abraham and Sarah is that after this *false start*, they remembered God's promise and got back to simple faith and obedience, believing that God would help them... and not vice-versa.

Num 23:19 (NIV) God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

God calls Isaac "Abraham's only son" in Gen 22:2,12,16. From God's point of view, "the flesh counts for nothing" (John 6:63). God did not remember Abraham's sin, only his faith, which was credited to him as full righteousness before God (Rom 4:3). His mistakes were forgotten (Micah 7:19). Like Abraham, we need to enter into God's rest, knowing that what God says *He will do*. For he who enters into rest has ceased from his own works (Heb 4:10).

Isa 55:1-11 (NIV) "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;

and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, *listen* to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live..." Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon... "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but *will accomplish* what I desire and *achieve the purpose* for which I sent it."

### **Discerning God's Voice**

Isa 42:1-2 (NIV) "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets."

Mat 17:5 (NIV) While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"

Outside of miraculous visitations and audible voices, our general problem is one of hearing God's "still small voice". What would the Spirit have us do next? This leadership comes through "promptings" to our hearts or minds, which are generally low-risk until we mature. God tells us to call someone late at night; to give someone the money in our pocket; to offer to pray with someone about something very specific that we couldn't have known. Often, we'll go wrong, but if we humbly reflect on our errors we can gain confidence for future promptings.



Prov 14:15 (NIV) A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.

The problem is that we are on a hostile channel. Our minds can be prompted by God, from our own carnal desires, or from unclean spirits. Some ignore this and naively believe that anything they think or feel is from God, without humility or reflection. This may seem a silly error, but it can become serious when such a person thinks God has told them to "go kill someone". Manson, who still claims to be a Christian, heard from his "god" in this fashion many times.

2 Cor 11:3 (NIV) But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

2 Tim 3:13-17 (NIV) ...evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it... you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Beyond demonic promptings, our routine problem is *the flesh*. We want to look spiritual, we covet something, we want to defend ourselves. These often get blamed on God, and acted upon. These seemingly silly errors can lead to as much *spiritual* mayhem and abuse as Manson's delusions did *physically*. We must learn to walk a straight line before attempting to tightrope across Niagara Falls. Our problem is *lack of reflection* on past performance.

Rom 7:21-23 (NIV) So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging *war*

against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

2 Cor 10:3-5 (NIV) For though we live in the world, we do not wage *war* as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish *arguments* and every *pretension* that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every *thought* to make it obedient to Christ.

If we have learned to discern God's voice in small things by acting on God's *low-risk promptings* and finding them validated with fruit that lasts, then God may prompt us to "tell that person I am going to heal them". At this point of maturity, those practiced at knowing God's voice need not pretend or merely hope. They can speak with authority, conviction, and results (Rom. 12:2). They need not be double-minded or resort to psychological gymnastics (James 1:5-8). They can pray in real faith (James 5:15). For "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the *word of God*" (Rom. 10:17).

### **Who's Not Listening Now?**

Jer 6:10 (NIV) "To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the Lord is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it."

Zech 7:11-13 (NIV) "But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen... So the Lord Almighty was very angry. "When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, *I would not listen,*' says the Lord Almighty."

Mat 13:12-17 (NIV) "Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: [from Isa 6:9-11] 'Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or

understand.' In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become callused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

## **Obeying The Father's Voice**

Often we ask God to speak to us, only to hear back, "if you are so interested in what I think, then why didn't you do the last thing I told you?" Obedience is the response that keeps the dialog going. If we refuse to do what God tells us in the little things, we risk deafening our spiritual ear. If we refuse to do what God speaks in the big things, we risk his active rebuke.

1 Sam 15:22 (NIV) ..."Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings ...as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice..." (Mat 21:28-31)

Imagine your own son coming to you in great earnestness and saying, "Father, please speak to me. What would you have me do?" You respond, "I would like you to clean your room." Thrilled at the sound of your voice, the child goes off elated, but does not clean the room. Later, he approaches again, "Father, please disclose your will to your humble child." You tell him again, "Go clean your room." Pleased, he withdraws himself again, but does not do what you asked. Yet again, your son comes to you, "Oh great father, I long to do your bidding! Grant me the favor of your wisdom and direction." What would you do at this point? Perhaps a stare would suffice... What does God do when we play this

game with Him?

James 1:22 (NIV) Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

### **Orders From On High**

Isa 30:20-21 (NIV) Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice *behind you*, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

John 10:2-5 (NIV) "The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." (<http://www.acts17-11.com/hearing.html>)

# ***“Methods For Hearing God’s Voice”***

by  
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(blog)

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You can hear God's voice as part of a growing conversational relationship with him. Here are some proven methods to help you listen to God.

Many people would say they try to listen to God. But there is much confusion on discerning if you've truly heard God's voice. I know people who were sure they had heard God's voice and so they acted on it only to discover down the road that they were being impulsive. I've made the same mistake. I've also had people say to me, "The Lord told me to tell you..." Usually I was sure that it was *not* God speaking. Sadly, I've also talked with other people who are convinced they're hearing God's voice, but actually they were psychotic.

## Is it Possible to Hear God's Voice with Confidence?

"Hearing God as a reliable, day to day reality for people with good sense" *is possible*, writes Dallas Willard. He says, this conversational relationship with God is "for those who are devoted to the glory of God and the advancement of his kingdom. It is for the disciple of Jesus Christ who has no higher preference than to be like him." (*Hearing God*, p. 70)

It's hard to imagine an intimate relationship with Christ that does not include regular experiences of hearing his voice. An interactive relationship with God is conversational and it helps us to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and to have the mind of Christ about all that we do. *But what does it mean to "hear" God's voice?* The Bible itself demonstrates the answer. On occasion God speaks audibly, through an angel, or accompanied by supernatural phenomena, but in the vast majority of cases the way God speaks is through thoughts or impressions that he gives us.

Furthermore, in our ministry to others, whether preaching to a congregation or leading a Bible study, listening to someone who is hurting or leading an organization or group, we surely cannot have much success in advancing God's kingdom without his words to us, primarily from Scripture, but also *personal words* that are consistent with the Word of God.

## What is the “Word” of God?

But what is the “Word” of God and how does it relate to hearing God’s voice? We use the term “Word” of God sloppily today. We need to differentiate the various types of Words and words! There is the written Word (the Bible, not individual verses, but the whole), the Living Word (the person of Jesus Christ), the word of the kingdom (the gospel that Jesus preached), and the life-giving and life-sustaining words that God speaks (in creation and to us).

The Bible is always our clear authority and guide to help us listen to God and receive his guidance in daily life (2 Timothy 3:16). The purpose of any word or message from God, including in the authoritative revelation of inspired Scripture, is to connect us with the Living Word and if it doesn’t facilitate our relationship with the Lord Jesus than it is in error and *damaging* (John 5:39-40).

Respect for the Bible is essential to life as a Christ-follower, but the Bible is not part of the Trinity! Some Christians seem to put the Holy Bible into the Holy Trinity, not in their official theology, of course, but in the practice of it. Without realizing it they are exalting their own rationalism and putting God into a box that they can manage.

Dallas Willard writes:

The Bible is not Jesus Christ, who is the *living* Word. The Bible was not born of a virgin, crucified, resurrected and elevated to the right hand of the Father.

Neither is the Bible the word of God that is settled eternally in the heavens as the psalmist says (Psalm 119:89), expressing itself in the order of nature (Psalm 19:1-4). The Bible is not the word of God that, in the book of Acts, expanded and grew and multiplied (Acts 12:24). It is not the word that Jesus spoke of as being sown by the active speaking of the ministry (Matthew 13). But *all* of these are God’s *words*, as is also his speaking that we hear when we *individually hear God*. (*Hearing God*, p. 142)

## “Methods” to Hear God’s Voice?

There are some time-tested proven methods we can use to help us listen to God’s voice. I teach these to pastors and ministry leaders in a seminary class that uses as one of its text books Dallas Willard’s book, *Hearing God*.

First a word of caution. By speaking of “methods” for hearing God’s voice I don’t want you to misunderstand me. Hearing God is certainly not a mechanical sort of process in which we put our prayers into the vending machine and out comes the answer we want! It’s not like if I do A then God will do B. No! We can’t engineer our way into hearing God’s voice. The Lord God is sovereign in all things and in any given situation he may choose to speak a message to us or not. God is the initiator in the spiritual life — always. This is why when we hear God’s voice it’s often a surprise to us that he’s spoken or what he’s said.

On the other hand, we can’t be *passive*, sit back and just expect that we will hear God without preparing ourselves in any way — rarely God may break in that way, but that is not the normal way that we grow in a conversational relationship with God. Normally, we need to seek God, for instance by meditating on Scripture, spending extended time in solitude, or seeking godly counsel. Having a method to hear God just means we have an approach that we’ve found helpful to submit ourselves to the Lord who speaks.

Of course, like anything else in the spiritual life, it takes time and practice to learn to discern God’s voice and respond to it. Hence, the problem that we’ve all experienced: *we’re in a critical situation of discernment and we feel we need to hear God’s voice soon, but we really haven’t yet learned to grow into that kind of a relationship*. We need to accept that in that particular situation of need we may not have enough time to learn how to hear God’s voice. However, it can motivate us to learn so that next time we’re more prepared and better able to hear God if there is something he wants to say to us personally.

When it comes to seeking to hear God speak the most important thing to remember is to set that in the larger context of our discipleship to Jesus. We

are talking about growing in an intimate, conversational relationship with God in which we are learning to abide in Christ and bear fruit for him – that is what is important (John 15).

But we may become consumed with urgency about “knowing God’s will” and having his help to make the best decision. This is telling of a deeper problem. Dallas says, “My extreme preoccupation with knowing God’s will for me may only indicate, contrary to what is often thought, that I am over concerned with myself, not a Christ like interest in the well-being of others or in the glory of God” (*Hearing God*, p. 28).



## God Still Speaks Today

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, says, “My sheep know my voice and they follow me” (John 10:4).

What a blessing it is to hear God’s voice! His words bring his life. God spoke the creation into existence (Genesis 1) and sustains all life by his words (Hebrews 1:3). Today he is still speaking to our hearts in “gentle whispers” (1 Kings 19:12) that create and renew life in us and around us. He speaks to comfort us, correct us, and guide us. He speaks because he loves us and wants to be in an interactive, intimate relationship with us.



So we pray with the Psalmist, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Psalm 23:1-3).

Did you notice the context of Psalm 23? Do you know when it is that we sheep are guided by our Shepherd onto the right path? It’s when we’re delighting in him as what we want — so much so that we lie down with him in green pastures, beside still waters. We hear God’s voice when our souls have been restored by resting in his grace. But many of us are rushing around, stressed out, too busy, straining to make things happen for ourselves.

Jesus says to us, “Come to me... I will give you rest for your soul... My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). It’s by learning to live and work in the “easy yoke” of Jesus that we are able to hear his voice regularly.

## Is God *Always* Speaking to Us?

In one sense God is always speaking. All the life that we see in nature and people, including ourselves, is a result of God’s words that have given us life and continue to sustain our lives. Dallas Willard says, “Christ the Son [is] continuously ‘sustaining all things by his powerful word’ (Hebrews 1:3) and as the very glue of the universe” (*Hearing God*, p. 75). Truly, “In [Christ] all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). Furthermore, God reveals himself to us in birds singing and ocean waves flowing and all the aspects of his creation. Certainly, his words in Scripture are alive and continuously speaking knowledge and application into our lives (Hebrews 4:12).

In another sense there are many situations in life in which God does not want to tell us what to do or even to speak a personal message to us. *God is not a blabbermouth!* He appreciates some silence. He does want to tell us what to do all the time, treating us like robots, but to give us room to act as responsible adults and make decisions. Of course, in all this *God is with us*. As is the case in ordinary human relationships, God’s most important “communications” to us often are nonverbal.

If we take this broad view of God “speaking” then we can say that God wants all of us to live in a conversational relationship with him. Brother Lawrence, Frank Laubach, and other devotional masters show us a way of life that is intimate with God in which we “practice God’s presence” or “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Not perfectly, of course, but more and more so. The emphasis here is on our *awareness* of God’s presence and activity around us and being *responsive* to his leading. But within this close relationship with Christ we can discern God’s “higher thoughts” and thus walk in his “higher ways” (Isaiah 55:9).



## Hearing God as an Inner Voice (The Candle of the Lord)

Dallas Willard teaches that “the content or meaning of his detailed and individualized communications to us always finally takes the form of the inner voice, a characteristic type of thought or perception” (*Hearing God*, p. 195). The Bible teaches that this inner voice in our spirits is like “the candle of the Lord” (Proverbs 20:27, KJV). Dallas elaborated: “The thoughts and feelings in the mind and spirit of one who is surrendered to God should be treated as if God were walking through one’s personality with a candle, directing one’s attention to things one after the other.” (p. 102)

The ideas that God impresses upon our minds are always consistent with the Bible and often they arise in response to study or reflection upon Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Sometimes God’s thoughts come to us through what a person says to us. Occasionally God communicates to us in special ways through dreams, visions, angels, and other mystical experiences. Of course, the most common way God “speaks” to us is *nonverbally*, just being present with us to love us. For instance, God is present to us in nature and in the circumstances of our lives. We can *notice* God — his beauty and love, and wonderful works — all around us.

To hear the thoughts that God impresses into our minds is not automatic — we must *learn to hear God’s voice by effort and experimentation in the course of our normal daily life*. Each of us needs to learn from *personal*

*experience* what it means to hear God given our unique background, personality, and life situation. The way that you hear God is likely to be somewhat different from how I hear God. In fact, hearing God's voice is so personal that most people are not even able to recognize God's voice without someone to help them discern it! Remember that Samuel was taught to hear God's voice by Eli. Later Samuel taught David to "inquire of the Lord" and discern what God was saying to him.

Dallas Willard says, "Generally, it is much more important to cultivate the quiet, inward space of a constant listening than to always be approaching God for specific direction" (*Hearing God*, p. 200). To reiterate, the critical issue in hearing God's voice is to grow in a *conversational relationship with God*, training with Jesus to become the kind of person who walks with God continually and is prepared to hear God's voice and obey.

## Discerning God's Voice from Other Voices (What God's Voice "Sounds" Like)

Those who have walked with God for years will tell you with confidence that God's voice has a *distinctive quality*. They are able to cite many examples of God sending them important messages. Over time they have developed spiritual discernment.

The Bible teaches the importance of "discerning spirits" (1 Corinthians 12:10) or "testing the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). But we who trust in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ don't need to be insecure or fearful about discerning between good and evil spirits — we can actually grow to be *confident* because Jesus has given us an Inner Teacher, the Holy Spirit, as an "anointing" that "abides" in us and teaches us all that we need to know (1 John 2:27).

Jesus says that he is our Good Shepherd and we are his sheep that he cares for and guides safely. He gives his all for us — he even lays down his life for us! Jesus speaks to his sheep and we can learn to hear and know his voice and differentiate it from that of the "hired hand" (the false shepherd) who leaves us vulnerable to the thief (Satan who comes to steal, kill, and destroy) and the wolves (John 10:1-21).

What is God's voice like? Five hundred years ago Ignatius of Loyola gave some very helpful teaching on discernment. Regarding the different spirits that may move us he says:

The good angel touches the soul gently, lightly, sweetly, like a drop of water going into a sponge. The evil spirit touches it sharply with noise and disturbance, like a drop of water falling onto a stone (*The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, p. 127-128).

Dallas Willard emphasizes that God's normal way of communicating with us simply to impress thoughts or perceptions into our minds. He says that God's voice has a particular quality that with experience we can discern:

The quality of God's voice is more a matter of the *weight* or impact an impression makes on our consciousness. [Its] certain steady and calm force... inclines us toward assent... We sense inwardly the immediate power of God's voice... the unquestionable authority...

It is a spirit of exalted peacefulness and confidence, of joy, of sweet reasonableness and of goodwill. It is, in short, the spirit of Jesus, and by that phrase I refer to the overall tone and internal dynamics of his personal life as a whole... Those who [have] seen Jesus [have] truly seen the Father, who shared the same Spirit. It is this Spirit that marks the voice of God in our hearts. Any word that bears an opposite spirit most surely is not the voice of God. And because his voice bears authority within itself, it does not need to be loud or hysterical (*Hearing God*, page 175, 177).

We know that Satan "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14) and this is why we need to be careful to discern the spirits. But we also know that Satan is "the father of lies" (John 8:44) and "the accuser" (Revelation 12:10, KJV) and he can't help but give himself away if we pay attention. When he speaks to us it's with shiftiness and aggression. He argues, condemns, pressures, and tries to convince us to do what he wants.

Our own "internal critic" or legalistic conscience may sound pressuring or

harsh, as may a loved one or another person who has an agenda for us. But as we've said, God speaks matter of factly. He doesn't need to push or pressure us. He encourages us in a gentle but strong, assured sort of way. Even when God convicts us of sin or challenges us we sense the goodness of what he's saying and the gracious, life-giving purpose he has for us. "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17, NIV 1984).



## Some Methods to Discern God's Voice

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know" God said to Jeremiah (33:3). God is not reluctant to speak to us if we need to hear from him and could be trusted to make good use of a personal message from him. He loves to speak and so the Bible begins in the creation account of Genesis 1 with the refrain, "And God said..."

God loves to speak, but are we listening? Jesus often said, "If you have ears to hear, listen!" Listening to God is so easy that *even a child can hear God*. My favorite example of listening to God is the story of the little boy Samuel who learns to pray, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:9-10). And he hears God's voice.

I heard God speak to my heart as a child. Perhaps you did also or one of your children. Sadly, as adults we may lose the childlike trust that is needed to hear God — we may complicate things, get distracted, or harden our hearts so that we have great difficulty hearing what God wants to say to us.

Hearing God's voice and sensing his guidance can be part of our normal lives. We can think of the general way that God guides us in daily life as being like a GPS Navigation System that we may use when driving to an unfamiliar destination: **God's Word**, **Providence (Circumstances)**, and **Spirit-impressions**. These are also referred to as the "Three Lights" (FB Meyer, *The Secret of Guidance*, written in 1896). (In "[Hearing God's Voice Today](#)" I briefly explain this GPS.)

### The Peace Plan

As a boy when I asked my mother for help discerning God's guidance she always asked me, "In which scenario are you at peace? Where God guides he gives peace."

But probably you've noticed that when you're seeking God's guidance or needing a word of encouragement from him often you're not at peace! In fact, we may find ourselves so torn and distressed about a difficult situation or decision that we're quite anxious. Anxiety is a sign that you have conflicting emotions and probably some repressed emotions too, like fear, anger, sadness, or shame. It's not likely that you'll hear God's voice when you're emotional pipes are backed up with negative feelings! So the first need is to address your anxiety and emotions. Then you may be able to hear God's voice.

A case in point is grief. When you lose a loved one you go through a lot of emotions, like shock, sadness, anger, fear, confusion, and loneliness. You wonder who you are and if you'll be okay. It's similar with other losses like divorce, losing a job, or a health crises. It takes a lot of energy and time to work through the emotions of grief, to get the help you need from people who support you, and to re-stablize your identity and life. In time God's peace *will* settle back into your soul, but in the early stages of recovery from a loss waves of grief will overwhelm you.



It's difficult to endure grief so many people find that they want to make a big change in their life with the hope that things will get better for them. I've seen this many times in counseling. Someone is depressed about a loss and so they get married, move to a new house, change jobs, or make a major purchase. If we ask God to provide for us in this way he may do it because he is so generous, but it's usually not the best thing. Changing your circumstances might change how you feel temporarily but it won't change you; it'll distract you from your grief, but it won't bring true comfort or healing.

Even if you pray and seek God about the decision it's difficult to hear his voice in a season of unrest.

So the "Peace Plan" for hearing God's voice is to talk with a friend you trust or journal some prayers to process your emotions. The Apostle Paul, perhaps the greatest psychologist of all time besides Jesus himself counseled us: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God and the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

If we're full of inner turmoil how can we expect to hear God's voice? If we don't even know how we feel about something what makes us think we could begin to know how God feels about it? Taking time to talk and pray through your emotions with someone who serves as "Christ's ambassador" (2 Corinthians 5:20) for you will help you to settle down and get into a position where you can better discern God's guidance. In the case of grief or another major life disruption you probably need at least a year to get support and to re-stabilize.

Then beside the "still waters" you'll be better able to discern Good Shepherd's "path of righteousness" (Psalm 23:2-3).



### Ignatius' Method

It was in 1544 that Ignatius of Loyola developed the classic model for discerning God's voice and leading in *The Spiritual Exercises*. His book lays out a practical manual for doing a four-week retreat featuring meditation on Gospel readings that engages the senses, reflection and listening prayer, and spiritual direction. It includes teaching about listening to God's voice. I'd like to emphasize one part of his teaching that I've found especially helpful: becoming, as one Jesuit (a monk who follows Ignatius' way) said, "*passionately indifferent*" to all things except loving and honoring the Lord Jesus Christ. Along these lines Ignatius says:

It is necessary to keep as my objective the end for which I am created, to praise God our Lord and save my soul. Furthermore, I ought to find myself indifferent, that is, without any disordered affection, to such an extent that I am not more inclined or emotionally disposed toward taking the matter proposed rather than relinquishing it...

Instead, I should find myself in the middle, like the pointer of a balance, in order to be ready to follow that which I shall perceive to be more to the glory and praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul.

I should beg God our Lord to be pleased to move my will and to put into my mind what I ought to do in regard to the matter proposed, so that it will be more to his praise and glory...



Which choice helps me to love God better? How would I advise another person I have never known? If I were at the point of death what would I wish I had done? On Judgment Day how will I wish I had decided? (*The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, p. 77-78).

To achieve this indifference in a situation of decision or opportunity you may have to begin by processing through your emotions as described above. You become indifferent about which direction to go when you have the matter fully submitted to God — you've abandoned the outcomes to him and settled in your heart that in either scenario you can be happy because you *belong to the Lord and you're serving him in his kingdom*. However your situation turns out the Lord is your portion and his love is better than life (Psalm 63:3) so you are fulfilled!

A simple abiding prayer that helps me submit a matter to God and stay in a neutral, listening position is:

“Lord, I want your will, your way, your time... Your will, your way, your time...”

I repeat the prayer gently in quiet, focused prayer. Then throughout the day whenever the issue comes to mind I return to the prayer, even if only for a few moments.

I can testify from personal experience that achieving true neutrality under God about an issue helps you to discern God's wisdom. Of course, it takes time and training truly to become passionately indifferent to all things except Jesus. We discover that the more this is true for us then the easier it is for us to be content “in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry” because, like Paul, we can “do all things through Christ who strengthens us” (Philippians 4:13).

### Fast and Pray

A fruitful method to help us listen to God and discern his guidance is fasting and prayer. Fasting from food (and to a lesser extent fasting from other things

like media) can help us to break free of the sins, distractions, and emotions that may be inhibiting our ability to hear God's voice.

Fasting was often used by people in the Bible and it's been used by God's people over the ages. Jesus fasted for forty days to help him hear God at the start of his public ministry. The prophets fasted continually to help them proclaim the word of the Lord to people. In the book of Acts we see the Apostles fasting to help them receive God's guidance.

Fasting is a discipline of self-denial — we go without food for a period of time to train our bodies to be submitted to God. While we fast we learn to draw our nourishment from the manna of heaven. Some people fast for physical cleansing, but the real cleansing is spiritual and emotional: hidden problems in the body and soul will come to the surface and can be brought into the healing light of God's mercy and grace. Another thing about fasting is that it clears space in our souls: the time we would've spent eating is free for prayer and continually we can re-direct our attention to God.

One caution about fasting as a method for hearing God's voice: it usually doesn't work very well to fast about an urgent matter unless prior to doing this you've *already learned how to fast*. When you first try fasting you find that you keep thinking about your experience of fasting: being hungry, having headaches, wondering if you're doing it right, trying to make something happen. But fasting is not about you, it's about God. The point of a fast is to feast on God, to hunger for him and his words and to keep your attention on him and what he is doing.

### Dr. James Dobson's Method

Dr. James Dobson, a Christian psychologist, best-selling author, and the founder of Focus on the Family is very deliberate about listening to God in his life and ministry. He describes a simple, very *practical* way of praying to help him listen to God and receive his guidance:

I get down on my knees and say, "Lord, I need to know what you want me to do, and I am listening. Please speak to me through my friends, books,

magazines I pick up and read, and through circumstances” (quoted by Dallas Willard in *Hearing God*, p. 199).

This approach is quite simple and yet it is profound at the same time. Notice that Dr. Dobson is active in his listening to God for discernment. He’s submitting himself and all that he’s involved with to the Lord and to his Word. He is alerting and mobilizing himself to be prepared for how God will speak to him through a variety of inputs in his daily life. He is paying special attention to what’s going on inside his soul and outside in his circumstances.

Dallas Willard has followed Dr. Dobson’s method and testifies:

I have followed this simple method of listening for God’s voice in many situations — in university teaching, research and administration; in family and business affairs, in writing and conducting sessions in conferences and seminars. It is the furthest things from a legalism or formality for me, and God also takes ample occasion to slip up on me by speaking to me words that I am not seeking in this way (*Hearing God*, p.200).

### Observing Regular Times for Listening to God

Just like we set aside time to read or study the Bible, pray the Scriptures, practice Abiding Prayer, intercede for loved ones, or serve food to the homeless we are wise to make a space devoted to listening to God — to be still and quiet and simply ask God, “What do you want to say to me? What are you doing that you want to participate in with you?”

This is what Samuel learned to do. Beginning as a little boy he prayed, “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:9, 10). Through his life he inquired of the Lord matters and he taught David to do the same. Early in his years as King David was careful to follow Samuel’s mentoring on many occasions when enemies were attacking or he had important decisions to make. But later David stopped seeking to hear from God. Right after he had the affair with Bathsheba.

Dallas teaches that if we maintain a usual practice of setting aside time to be

still and attentive to God then when the situation comes that we need to hear a particular word from God we will be better able to listen confidently and wait patiently for what God has to say.

To listen to God is a spiritual discipline. It's a discipline that we practice alongside of other disciplines like Bible study, meditation, and contemplative forms of prayer. It's like learning a subject in school or exercise at the gym in that as you gain new knowledge and strength it becomes part of your foundation that helps you to gain still more knowledge and strength. So the more we take God's Word into us and recognize his hand moving in our life and in our heart the easier it is for us to recognize God's voice with clarity and confidence going forward.

I find it helpful when listening to God — whether it's part of Lectio Divina, in response to a dream in the night, or in regards to a decision I need to make — to get out paper and pen and write down what I think God *might* be saying to me. When I do this *I turn off my internal editor* who is prone to say, “Did God really say that? How do you know it's not just your own thoughts?”

When I set aside concentrated time to listen to God I just *let my pen flow*. Or if I'm at the computer I just let my fingers type what God seems to be saying. I may start by writing down my name because I'm receiving a personal message. I open my mind to the stream of God's thoughts. Of course, after I'm finished journaling what it seems to be that God is saying to me then I review it carefully, examining the message in the light of the Holy Scriptures, perhaps seeking feedback from spiritual friends, and always watching for God's confirmation over time in my circumstances and the ongoing impressions he makes on me.

I have been doing this for many years. It is so encouraging for me to go back and read my journals. Time and again I have been encouraged when something challenging that I discerned God to tell me to do worked out well. And there have been times that I have been amazed when I sensed God say that he was going to do something unlikely and as I did my part by waiting, trusting, and observing that he actually did what he said he'd do! (I shouldn't be amazed when God does what he says he'll do!)

## Dallas Willard's Paradoxical Method

Dallas' personal method to help him listen to God is quite pragmatic and helpful. He begins by setting aside time for concentrated listening to God in the way we've just discussed: he talks to God about the situation, asks God's counsel, meditates on Scripture, quiets himself to listen, and waits. Sometimes he does this for hours.

Then Dallas adds some wise, paradoxical counsel about stepping back from intensive focus on discerning God's will:

Personally I find it works best if after I ask God to speak to me in this way, I devote the next hour or so to some kind of activity that neither engrosses my attention with other things nor allows me to be intensely focused on the matter in question. Housework gardening, driving about on errands, or paying bills will generally do. I have learned not to worry about whether or not this is going to work. I know that it does not *have* to work, but I am sure that it *will* work if God has something he really wants me to know or do. This is ultimately because *I am sure of how great and good he is.*

Often by the end of an hour or so there has stood forth within my consciousness an idea or thought with that peculiar quality, spirit and content that I have come to associate with God's voice. If so, I may write it down for further study. I also may decide to discuss the matter with others, usually without informing them that "God has told me..." Or I may decide to reconsider the matter by repeating the same process after a short period of time. Remember Gideon (Judges 6:11-40). Remember too that scientists check their results by rerunning experiments. We should be so humble. (*Hearing God*, p. 199-200)

The beauty of this approach is that it guards us against *straining* to hear God's voice. If we press too hard or if we worry it inhibits us from discerning what God may be saying. But when we step back from active listening in meditation and prayer and instead *relax* about the whole issue by engaging lightly in a mindless activity it puts us in a different space. Insight from God is liable to just pop in!

It's a paradox: we strain to hear God's will on a matter and hear nothing, but we let go and trust that God will speak to us if he has anything to say and we hear his wisdom.

I have often strained to hear God on an issue and then when I finally relinquished the matter to God and stopped pressing I was able to hear him! In particular I have experienced this when I'm jogging long distances. Running on trails by lakes or up in the hills in solitude relaxes me. (I'm sure the endorphins help!) As I'm running along I enjoy the beauty of nature and meditating on Scripture and sometimes my mind wanders onto the situation I've had a question about. Sometimes God's wisdom suddenly comes to me just then as I'm jogging!

## Re-Run your Experiment

What do you do when you think you've heard God's voice?

We should always hurry to obey the teachings of the Bible. But personal messages we receive from God about specific situations are different — even if we receive them in the context of studying or meditating on a Bible passage. We're wise to be careful about acting too quickly on our personal discerning of what God is saying to us, as we may need to wait longer. Dallas says, "Remember too that scientist check their results by rerunning experiments. We should be so humble" (*Hearing God*, p.200).

## When God is Silent

What do you do when it seems that none of your methods to hear God's voice work?

We need to be careful not to use methods as gimmicks to obtain guidance from God to secure ourselves. If what's truly most important to us is *growing in relationship with God as an apprentice of Jesus* then we'll understand situations of not hearing God's voice as a *learning opportunity*. God may want us to make a given decision without his specific directive, but by relying on him with us.

Understanding the meaning of  
[When you Don't Hear God's Voice](#) is essential.

(excerpts from...)

## ***“When We Don't Hear God”***

What does it mean when you can't seem to hear God's voice? **What do you do?**

### [Does Prayer Feel Like Talking to a Wall?](#)

Maybe you feel like you're praying to a wall!

We *all* feel that way sometimes. There are times when it seems like God isn't answering our prayers. There are times that we don't hear God's voice. Even if we know the Bible and are filled with godly wisdom there are some situations in which, at least for awhile, we don't know what God's thoughts are.

What are we to do when we don't hear God's voice?

### [What Dallas Willard Does when He Doesn't Hear God's Voice](#)

Does the author of *Hearing God* always hear God's voice? No! He readily admits that sometimes he does not. What does he do then?

**Obey the Lord: love God and your neighbor.** Dallas says **that is always the best advice in any situation of uncertainty or distress.**



In addition Dallas says that when he has sought God on an issue and doesn't have clarity *he lets go of seeking an answer from God*. He says he's not disappointed or worried. Instead he goes about his business, maintaining the general attitude of listening to God as part of his daily conversational relationship with him, and he trusts that God will speak to him as he proceeds if God wants to.

And Dallas trusts that if God does *not* explicitly direct his steps that it means that God wants Dallas to make the decision himself.

Dallas elaborates on his thinking:

*It is God's will that we ourselves should have a great part in determining our path through life.* This does not mean that he is not with us. Far from it. God both *develops* and, for our good, *tests* our character by leaving us to decide. He calls us to responsible citizenship in his kingdom by saying – in effect or in reality – as often as possible, “*My will for you in this case is that you decide on your own...*”

A child cannot develop into a responsible, competent human being if he or she is always told what to do...

What we want, what we think, what we decide to do when the word of God does not come or when we have so immersed ourselves in him that his voice within us is not held in distinction from our own thoughts and perceptions – these show *who we are*: either we are God's mature children, friends, and coworkers, or we are something less (*Hearing God*, p. 204).

We need to remind ourselves that the main point of “Hearing God” is *our opportunity to grow in a trusting and responsive interactive relationship with God.*



Hearing God is not primarily about receiving detailed directions for our daily life decisions.

Hearing God is about learning to submit to Christ in all that we do and to develop an overall relationship with him as Jesus' apprentices in his kingdom.

At times God is present with us in loving silence.

Growing in a conversational relationship with God is not so much about getting directive messages from God when we need them — it's really about doing all that we do in the presence of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

## Why We May Be Upset if We Don't Hear God

Many people I talk to get upset if they don't hear God's voice. I've had the same struggle with God many times. But I've had to reckon with Dallas' challenging words: "We may insist on having God tell us what to do because we live in fear or are obsessed with *being right* as a strategy for *being safe*" (p. 205).

Maybe we want a life without risk? But Dallas teaches that only risk can produce character. In the spiritual life to risk is to venture beyond our merely natural abilities by relying on God's upholding power with us.

Paul teaches us to "***Walk by faith and not by sight***" - (2 Corinthians 5:7). In other words, "Walk by trust in God and not by your emotions." (It's always helpful to be aware of our emotions, but never good to be dependent on them — they make wonderful servants but terrible masters!) Our walk of faith is tested when we don't hear God's voice.

## The Dark Night of the Soul

Sometimes the challenge of not hearing God's voice is part of a larger experience called the [Dark Night of the Soul](#). You may have heard of this, but do you understand what it is and how to deal with it?

Saint John of the Cross taught about the Dark Night of the Soul in the 16th Century. Long before this Psalmist prayed many times in the midst of a Dark Night, crying out to God, "Why is your face hidden from me?" (Dark Night Psalms include Psalms 13, 42, 46, 59, 77, 88, 91, 143.)

The Dark Night of the Soul is a time in which we don't feel God's presence, we don't hear his voice, and it seems that God has left us on our own. It can be a depressing time; it is quite a trial. All depressions and all trials are not examples of a Dark Night of the Soul — only those in which we feel spiritually dry and distant from God.

The Dark Night is *not* a time in which you're being punished by an angry God for your sins. It is a kind of loving discipline, a testing to encourage growth. It's because of your growing righteousness and maturity in Christ that the Sovereign Lord brings a Dark Night.

And the Dark Night is not resolved by trying harder to be a good Christian so that you can feel his love or get his blessings!

The Dark Night of the Soul is a certain kind of trial in which God is working in a very specific way with a mature Christ-follower. God withdraws the felt sense of his presence for a season to take the disciple of Christ on a deepening of journey of opening up his or her heart.

It doesn't feel like it at the time, but the Dark Night is actually an opportunity to develop a stronger faith seen in the capacity to express love for Christ and to worship God *for nothing* – as Job did, or Abraham leaving his son on the altar, or Paul when his thorn in the flesh was not taken away, or Jesus on the Cross.

The Dark Night is a time to *experience a deep, deep longing for God* and to learn to find meaning and joy in the longing. It's a time to remember past times of experiencing God's grace. The Dark Night is a time to trust the light of Christ within even though it's dark all around you.

- **Soul Shepherding** (blog)

## ***“Desiring God”***

(blog)

It is very easy to slip into what Scripture calls “dullness of hearing,” to hear the weekly sermons without faith, and to see little or no moral fruit in our lives as a result. As Jesus makes clear, ultimately it is how we hear that reveals who we are (John 8:43, 47, 10:4, 27).

Take Care How You Listen is an ebook on listening well. It is comprised of five unedited sermon manuscripts from the preaching ministry of Pastor John. We pray this resource will serve your personal reflection as you heed Jesus' command to “take care how you listen” (Luke 8:18).

- **John Piper**

“The Bible teaches the importance of “discerning spirits” (1 Corinthians 12:10) or “testing the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). But we who trust in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ don't need to be insecure or fearful about discerning between good and evil spirits — we can actually grow to be *confident* because Jesus has given us an Inner Teacher, the Holy Spirit, as an “anointing” that “abides” in us and teaches us all that we need to know (1 John 2:27).

Jesus says that he is our Good Shepherd and we are his sheep that he cares for and guides safely. He gives his all for us — he even lays down his life for us! Jesus speaks to his sheep and we can learn to hear and know his voice and differentiate it from that of the “hired hand” (the false shepherd) who leaves us vulnerable to the thief (Satan who comes to steal, kill, and destroy) and the wolves (John 10:1-21).”

The good angel touches the soul gently, lightly, sweetly, like a drop of water going into a sponge. The evil spirit touches it sharply with noise and disturbance, like a drop of water falling onto a stone (*The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, p. 127-128).

Dallas Willard emphasizes that God’s normal way of communicating with us simply to impress thoughts or perceptions into our minds. He says that God’s voice has a particular quality that with experience we can discern:

The quality of God’s voice is more a matter of the *weight* or impact an impression makes on our consciousness. [Its] certain steady and calm force... inclines us toward assent... We sense inwardly the immediate power of God’s voice... the unquestionable authority...

It is a spirit of exalted peacefulness and confidence, of joy, of sweet reasonableness and of goodwill. It is, in short, the spirit of Jesus, and by that phrase I refer to the overall tone and internal dynamics of his personal life as a whole... Those who [have] seen Jesus [have] truly seen the Father, who shared the same Spirit. It is this Spirit that marks the voice of God in our hearts. Any word that bears an opposite spirit most surely is not the voice of God. And because his voice bears authority within itself, it does not need to be loud or hysterical (*Hearing God*, page 175, 177).

We know that Satan “masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14) and this is why we need to be careful to discern the spirits. But we also know that Satan is “the father of lies” (John 8:44) and “the accuser” (Revelation 12:10, KJV) and he can’t help but give himself away if we pay attention.

When he speaks to us it's with shiftiness and aggression. He argues, condemns, pressures, and tries to convince us to do what he wants.

God loves to speak, but are we listening? Jesus often said, "If you have ears to hear, listen!" **Listening to God is so easy that *even a child can hear God*. My favorite example of listening to God is the story of the little boy Samuel who learns to pray, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:9-10). And he hears God's voice.**

**Sadly, as adults we may lose the childlike trust that is needed to hear God — we may complicate things, get distracted, or harden our hearts so that we have great difficulty hearing what God wants to say to us.**

Hearing God's voice and sensing his guidance can be part of our normal lives. We can think of the general way that God guides us in daily life as being like a GPS Navigation System that we may use when driving to an unfamiliar destination: **God's Word, Providence (Circumstances), and Spirit-impressions. These are also referred to as the "Three Lights"** (FB Meyer, *The Secret of Guidance*, written in 1896). (In "[Hearing God's Voice Today](#)" I briefly explain this GPS.)

"Methods" of Hearing God:

### 1. [The Peace Plan](#)

As a boy when I asked my mother for help discerning God's guidance she always asked me, "In which scenario are you at peace? Where God guides he gives peace."

Anxiety is a sign that you have conflicting emotions and probably some repressed emotions too, like fear, anger, sadness, or shame. It's not likely that you'll hear God's voice when you're emotional pipes are backed up with negative feelings! So the first need is to address your anxiety and emotions. Then you may be able to hear God's voice.

It's difficult to hear his voice in a season of unrest.

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God and the peace of God that passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”*  
(Philippians 4:6-7).

## 2. Ignatius’ Method

It was in 1544 that Ignatius of Loyola developed the classic model for discerning God’s voice and leading in *The Spiritual Exercises*. His book lays out a practical manual for doing a four-week retreat featuring meditation on Gospel readings that engages the senses, reflection and listening prayer, and spiritual direction. It includes teaching about listening to God’s voice...

“By becoming, *“passionately indifferent”* to all things except loving and honoring the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Along these lines Ignatius says:

It is necessary to keep as my objective the end for which I am created, to praise God our Lord and save my soul. Furthermore, I ought to find myself indifferent, that is, without any disordered affection, to such an extent that I am not more inclined or emotionally disposed toward taking the matter proposed rather than relinquishing it...

Instead, I should find myself in the middle, like the pointer of a balance, in order to be ready to follow that which I shall perceive to be more to the glory and praise of God our Lord and the salvation of my soul.

**I should beg God our Lord to be pleased to move my will and to put into my mind what I ought to do in regard to the matter proposed, so that it will be more to his praise and glory...**

**Which choice helps me to love God better?** How would I advise another person I have never known? If I were at the point of death what would I wish I had done? **On Judgment Day how will I wish I had decided?** (*The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, p. 77-78).

You become indifferent about which direction to go when you have the matter fully submitted to God — you've abandoned the outcomes to him and are settled in your heart that in either scenario you can be happy because you *belong to the Lord and you're serving him in his kingdom*. However your situation turns out the Lord is your portion and his love is better than life (Psalm 63:3) so you are fulfilled!

A simple abiding prayer that helps me submit a matter to God and stay in a neutral, listening position is:

“Lord, I want your will, your way, your time... Your will, your way, your time...”

I repeat the prayer gently in quiet, focused prayer. Then throughout the day whenever the issue comes to mind I return to the prayer, even if only for a few moments.

### 3. **Fast and Pray**

A fruitful method to help us listen to God and discern his guidance is fasting and prayer... Fasting was often used by people in the Bible and it's been used by God's people over the ages. Jesus fasted for forty days to help him hear God at the start of his public ministry. The prophets fasted continually to help them proclaim the word of the Lord to people. In the book of Acts we see the Apostles fasting to help them receive God's guidance.

Fasting is a discipline of self-denial — we go without food for a period of time to train our bodies to be submitted to God.

Remember, fasting is not about you, it's about God. The point of a fast is to feast on God, to hunger for him and his words and to keep your attention on him and what he is doing.

#### 4. [Dr. James Dobson's Method](#)

Dr. James Dobson, a Christian psychologist, best-selling author, and the founder of Focus on the Family is very deliberate about listening to God in his life and ministry. He describes a simple, very *practical* way of praying to help him listen to God and receive his guidance:

**I get down on my knees and say, “Lord, I need to know what you want me to do, and I am listening. Please speak to me through my friends, books, magazines I pick up and read, and through circumstances”** (quoted by Dallas Willard in *Hearing God*, p. 199).

This approach is quite simple and yet it is profound at the same time. Notice that Dr. Dobson is active in his listening to God for discernment. He's submitting himself and all that he's involved with to the Lord and to his Word. He is alerting and mobilizing himself to be prepared for how God will speak to him through a variety of inputs in his daily life. He is paying special attention to what's going on inside his soul and outside in his circumstances.

#### 5. [Observing Regular Times for Listening to God](#)

Just like we set aside time to read or study the Bible, pray the Scriptures, practice Abiding Prayer, intercede for loved ones, or serve food to the homeless we are wise to make a space devoted to listening to God — to be still and quiet and simply ask God, “What do you want to say to me? What are you doing that you want to participate in with you?”

This is what **Samuel learned** to do. Beginning as a little boy he prayed, **“Speak Lord, for your servant is listening” - (1 Samuel 3:9, 10).**



Through his life he inquired of the Lord matters and he taught David to do the same. Early in his years as King David was careful to follow Samuel's mentoring on many occasions when enemies were attacking or he had important decisions to make. But later David stopped seeking to hear from God. Right after he had the affair with Bathsheba.

Listening to God is a spiritual discipline. It's a discipline that we practice alongside of other disciplines like Bible study, meditation, and contemplative forms of prayer.

## 6. [Dallas Willard's Paradoxical Method](#)

Dallas' personal method to help him listen to God is quite pragmatic and helpful. He begins by setting aside time for concentrated listening to God in the way we've just discussed: he talks to God about the situation, asks God's counsel, meditates on Scripture, quiets himself to listen, and waits. Sometimes he does this for hours.

Then Dallas adds some wise, paradoxical counsel about stepping back from intensive focus on discerning God's will:

Personally I find it works best if after I ask God to speak to me in this way, I devote the next hour or so to some kind of activity that neither engrosses my attention with other things nor allows me to be intensely focused on the matter in question. Housework gardening, driving about on errands, or paying bills will generally do. I have learned not to worry about whether or not this is going to work. I know that it does not *have* to work, but I am sure that it *will* work if God has something he really wants me to know or do. This is ultimately because *I am sure of how great and good he is.*

Often by the end of an hour or so there has stood forth within my consciousness an idea or thought with that peculiar quality, spirit and content that I have come to associate with God's voice. If so, I may write it down for further study. I also may decide to discuss the matter

with others, usually without informing them that “God has told me...” Or I may decide to reconsider the matter by repeating the same process after a short period of time. Remember Gideon (Judges 6:11-40). Remember too that scientists check their results by rerunning experiments. We should be so humble. (*Hearing God*, p. 199-200)

**The beauty of this approach is that it guards against straining to hear God’s voice.**

If we press too hard or if we worry it inhibits us from discerning what God may be saying. But when we step back from active listening in meditation and prayer and instead *relax* about the whole issue by engaging lightly in a mindless activity it puts us in a different space. Insight from God is liable to just pop in!

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**Sometimes God’s wisdom suddenly comes to me...**

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What do you do when you think you’ve heard God’s voice?

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- **Soul Shepherding** (blog)

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Does the author of *Hearing God* always hear God's voice? No! He readily admits that sometimes he does not. What does he do then?

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In addition Dallas says that when he has sought God on an issue and doesn't have clarity *he lets go of seeking an answer from God*. He says he's not disappointed or worried. Instead he goes about his business, maintaining the general attitude of listening to God as part of his daily conversational relationship with him, and he trusts that God will speak to him as he proceeds if God wants to.

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God for your sins. It is a kind of loving discipline, a testing to encourage growth. It's because of your growing righteousness and maturity in Christ that the Sovereign Lord brings a Dark Night.

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- **Soul Shepherding** (blog)

\*\*\* **Cautions: (Charlie)**

- Good but not God
- Late night pizza vs. truly Spirit
- Satan disguised as an angel of light
- Out of plumb-line
- Self-deceived
- Works
- Better of two evils/wrongs

- "Religion"
- False gospels
- Scripture "out of context"
- Wolves & goats
- Wrong priorities (ministry vs. Messiah)
- Not knowing God's character
- Sincerity (but not true)
- Wrong motives
- Coming/Going message-shopping
- Presumptions (assuming "next steps")
- Partial-hearing
- "Selective-hearing"
- SIN..... (many categories)
- "Good intentions"
- Bad theology
- Demonic responses
- Using a single filter
- Open/Closed doors
- Cowardice/fear
- Selfishness
- Pride/Embarrassment