

I. DOES GOD STILL SPEAK?

- A. Samuel heard it and mistook it for the voice of Eli. It was an audible voice, just like a human voice (1 Sam. 3:2–14). Moses heard it too (Exod 3:1–4:17). Elijah had to go all the way to Mt. Horeb to hear it, and then it came in a still whisper (1 Sam 19:9–18). Jesus heard it at his baptism (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; cf. Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35; John 12:28) and so did Paul (Acts 9:1–9) and Ananias (Acts 9:10–16), and we could go on. Throughout the history of God’s people and even unto today people have been hearing God’s voice. What characterizes most, if not all these direct communications is that they are brief and direct, and often they involve the direct calling by name of the human being involved. Sometimes they are call experiences, sometimes conversion experiences—to be sure, everyone Jesus converts, he calls to do something.
- B. Many struggle with saying the words, “God spoke to me,” because they fear to be regarded as bizarre or crazy. Nonetheless, why is it that when we speak to God it is called prayer but when God speaks to us, we are considered schizophrenic. Like the Sadducees in the days of Jesus, many church leaders discourage the idea that God could speak. There are also those leaders who would prefer that God speak only to them and not their congregations. It goes without saying, that people get into all sorts of errors and become unmanageable once God begins “talking” to them.
- C. All of that said, as noted by the late great Christian philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard, “As Christians we stand in a millennia-long tradition of humans who have been addressed by God” (e.g., Exod 25:22; Deut 4:33; Luke 1:11–21; Psa 143:10).¹

Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.... 10 Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path (Psa 110:8, 10).

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.... 11 The Lord will guide you continually (Isa 58:9, 11).

¹ Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship With God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 25. The words of Brother Lawrence serve us well here: “There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God. Those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it; yet I do not advise you to do it from that motive. It is not pleasure which we ought to seek in this exercise; but let us do it from a principle of love, and because God would have us” (*The Practice of the Presence of God: With Spiritual Maxims* [Grand Rapids: Spire, 1967], 44).

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I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd....²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me (John 10:16, 27).

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father (John 15:15).

- D. A benefactor, no matter how powerful, kind and thoughtful, is not the same thing as a friend (cf. Matt 28:20). The juxtaposition between friends and slaves is readily apparent even in our day. Under Jewish law, a slave could not inherit goods left to them unless the will of the deceased freed the slave or gave him all his master's goods.² Furthermore, masters/benefactors did not share their secrets with slaves or their clients, and vice-a-versa.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:13–15).

Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37).

- E. As articulated by Cal Rychener, “It is actually quite normal for God to speak to us. It is a learned skill to hear him and we get better at it with practice. We must learn to recognize and tune in to the various ways in which the Holy Spirit speaks.”³ John and Sonja Decker build off this logic while discussing the words of Jesus in John 5:19–20 by saying that “the secret of Jesus’s perfect ministry of healing and setting people free was that He did everything by revelation.”⁴ Jesus perfected his dialogue with the Father, resulting the ministry we documented in the Gospels.

Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.²⁰ The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. (John 5:19–20)

² Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1005-1015; Cf. *m. Pe'ah* 3:8.

³ Cal Rychener, *Doing What Jesus Did: Participant Guide* (Northwoods Church, 2021), 36.

⁴ John and Sonja Decker, *Doing What Jesus Did: Ministering in the Power of the Holy Spirit* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2015), 114.

- F. People are to live in an ongoing conversation with God, speaking and being spoken to. From the very beginning of humanity God has intended to visit with us (e.g., Adam and Eve). There are also examples of Enoch walking with God and Moses conversing with him face to face. These are “examples,” as identified by Willard, “of the normal human life God intended for us: God’s indwelling his people through personal presence and fellowship.”⁵
- G. St. Augustine, Teresa of Ávila, St. Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, George Fox, John Wesley, C. H. Spurgeon, D. L. Moody, A. W. Tozer, and Henri Nouwen are a handful of examples of those who regarded personal communion and communication with God as both lifechanging *and* as daily bread. Moreover, there are untold thousands of Christians whose names will never be on a book, will never preach a sermon or a class, or be widely known but who can testify equally to the same kinds of encounters with God as are described by the greatest of those that went before us in the Way.

II. THE PRACTICALITY OF THE PROCESS

- A. God speaks to us because he loves us (Gen 3:8; Zech 3:17); to give instruction (Gen 6:13; Acts 5:1–5); to give direction (Luke 1:28–38; Acts 8:26–31); to comfort (2 Cor 1:3–4); to strengthen (Josh 1:8–9); and to correct (2 Tim 3:16; i.e., he does not condemn but trains/disciplines the ones he loves [Heb 12:5–11]). To this end, misconceiving our heavenly father’s nature many times creates a roadblock in understanding God’s communication with us—his redeemed friends and children. Therefore, the Bible is vital to gaining insight into God’s communication methods. Indeed, “all human troubles come from thinking of God wrongly, which then means, thinking about ourselves wrongly.”⁶
- B. Examples of ways to hear God⁷
 - 1. Scripture
 - a. Scripture plays a vital role in learning to discern the voice of God. Cal Rychener highlights that many times the Holy Spirit speaks to us when a word or phrase from the Bible jumps “off the page at you” or when others “come to mind and seem to have significance” (Dan 9:2; John 1:23).⁸
 - 2. Impression

⁵ Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship With God* (), 21.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷ Although not listed here, the revelatory gifts, our five senses, God orchestrated events (not coincidences), worship, and nature are all other avenues that God may choose to speak.

⁸ Rychener, *Doing What Jesus Did*, 39.

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- a. This can be subtle or quite strong. It has been described as a gentle nudge in your inner person by some—“It’s a sensing, and sometimes hard to articulate, but you know it is coming from God.”⁹ Paul in Acts 20:22 speaks of a strong compulsion from the Holy Spirit to go up to Jerusalem, with no knowledge concerning what will transpire upon his arrival.
3. Other people
 - a. God can use other people in our lives to give us a message from himself. This can be something as simple as a word of encouragement that comes in a timely manner. Any directional or life-altering words given should always be tested over time, through counsel, and in prayer (i.e., be very prudent so as to not hastily make life-changing decisions based on the words of another—just because someone says, “God told me to tell you,” does not mean it is from God nor that it needs to be acted upon immediately; cf. Luke 2:33–35).
4. Picture or trance
 - a. This, along with those below, is a much more direct means that God communicates with us (Acts 7:56; 10:9–10).
5. Dreams
 - a. Dreams can be a powerful way for God to meet and converse with us. Daniel received profound insight on God’s character and his plans for the people of God through this line of communication. Joseph was addressed by the Father multiple times in Jesus’s infant years (e.g., Dan 7:1–28; cf. also Gen 28:12–15; 37:5; Matt 1:20; 2:12, 13, 19, 22).
6. Angelic visitation
 - a. There is a plethora of examples in the Bible of angels visiting humans with a message from God (e.g., Gen 19:1; 22:15; Judges 2:1–4; 6:11; Exod 3:2; Zech 1:9).
7. Audible voice
 - a. The audible voice of God has been described as both a whisper and as thunder (1 Sam 2:3–14; 19:9–18; John 12:28; Acts 9:14).

III. IS GOD SPEAKING OR IS IT MY OWN THOUGHTS?

- A. The words of G. Morgan Campbell are helpful here:

⁹ Ibid., 39.

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The doctrine of the inner light is not sufficiently taught. To the individual believer, who is, by the very fact of relationship to Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, there is granted the direct impression of the Spirit of God on the Spirit of man, imparting the knowledge of his will in matters of the smallest and greatest importance. This has to be sought and waited for.¹⁰

- B. One of the simplest ways we can know whether we have heard from God is to see if it corresponds with the Bible—that it is consistent with the sound interpretation of Scripture.
- C. Beyond this, however, the answer to this question is *by experience*. Even an exact quotation of scripture can be used as a message from oneself or Satan (Luke 4:3). The dangers of proof-texting is well-known—taking biblical passages out of context to serve a presupposed purpose.¹¹ This signifies the importance of being those who are learners of God’s word. A text without a context is just a pretext for whatever you want.
- D. As signified by Campbell’s quote above, *time* is important for both discernment and listening. Over time, you will begin to recognize his voice over your own.
- E. *Practice* is key. We must be willing to make this a journey in which we will continue to grow and learn.
- F. *Test it*. Ask the questions: What will be the fruit, or results, of what I’ve heard? Does it agree with Scripture? Is it something God would say? Is it kind, encouraging, loving—is it something that our heavenly Father, who sees us as his redeemed children, would say (e.g., God is not condemning or accusing)?
- G. Ask God for confirmation and pay attention to what your spirit is saying to you. Do you have a check in your spirit?
- H. *Community* is also a significant part of this. Test what you are hearing with others in your believing community. Be willing to acknowledge that you missed it!

IV. PUTTING IT TO PRACTICE

- A. Take the time to sit down, quiet your thoughts, and let God speak to you. Write down what you believe God is saying. Try not to judge, analyze, or be critical toward the thoughts you are having. Just jot them down for now. You can nudge and dialogue more with the Lord about what you hear later. Remember, the first step to hearing is *listening!*

¹⁰ *Gods Perfect Will* (Eugene, OR: Wimpf & Stock, 2004), 157.

¹¹ As articulated by Willard, “A single statement taken directly from the Bible, even statement that are often invoked for personal application, may be used in ways *contrary* to the purposes of God, contrary to any meaning he may have in mind for us” (*Hearing God*, 219).