

## God Speaks In Different Ways

Part 2 - Can You Hear Me Now?

Job 33:14

Rev. Jean Smith

God really does want to talk to us. He's like the guy in the Verizon commercial running around trying to get through to someone. He keeps asking, "Can you hear me now? Can you hear me now?" It shouldn't surprise us that God really wants to talk to us. The entire Bible is an example of how God talks to people. We wouldn't have the Bible if God didn't talk to people. In the Bible we find God speaking to hundreds of people in a variety of ways.

Some of the ways God has spoken to people are actually pretty bizarre. He spoke to Moses through a burning bush. He spoke to Jacob through an angel. He spoke to the nation of Israel through a cloud. One time God spoke to a guy named Balaam through a donkey. Imagine that. I often think if God can speak through a donkey, surely He can speak through me.

In Job 33:14 it says, "***God speaks in different ways but we don't always recognize His voice.***" God has many, many different ways to speak to us. He's not limited to any one single way of communicating. The problem is we don't often recognize that it is God speaking to us. This is something we have to work at in order to improve our connection - in order to pick up the signal and hear God clearly. This morning I want to share with you **six ways God talks to us**. These aren't the only ways God chooses to communicate, but they are the most common ways. Maybe you're not quite sure God is speaking to you. After examining the most common ways God talks to people, just maybe you'll begin to hear God speaking more clearly to you, because God really does want to talk to you.

**THE FIRST WAY GOD SPEAKS TO US IS THROUGH THE BIBLE.** In fact, this is the number one way God speaks to us. It's true that the Bible was written thousands of years ago, long before we were born, and yet it is as if it was written just for us. When we read it there is such power in it to change our lives. The Bible is God's Word to us this very day. God speaks to us through the Bible but we won't hear Him speaking unless we pick it up and read it. The Bible is so important. Even when God chooses to speak to us in other ways, if we don't know our Bible we won't be able to recognize that it's God who is speaking. Reading the Bible enables us to get to know the sound of God's voice and the way He thinks.

In 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16 it says, "***Everything in the Scriptures is God's word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live.***" Why did God give us the Bible? This verse tells us four reasons: **one**, to teach us; **two**, to help us; **three**, to correct us; and **four**, to show us how to live. Everything that is written in the Bible is designed to help us live our lives in a way that pleases God. The Bible is not only completely reliable; it is also completely practical. You can apply it to your life. I'll admit that some parts of the Bible are difficult to understand. I read some things and I wonder, "Why did God put that in the Bible? How is that supposed to help us live our lives?" But it's all there for a reason and that reason is to teach us, help us, correct us and show us how to live a life that pleases God. We may not always understand it, but we can be sure it's there for a reason.

God wants us to take hold of it. He wants us to grasp what He is saying.

There are **five ways** to grasp what God wants to tell us through the Bible. This is so important. We grasp what God wants to tell us by hearing, reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on His Word. We grasp things with our hand, so here's an easy way to remember the five ways using your hand. The little finger stands for **hearing** God's Word. That's the weakest way to grasp God's word because you so easily forget what you hear. The ring finger stands for **reading** God's Word. Just reading something doesn't give us a good grasp of what God is trying to tell us either. We need something more to help us understand. The next finger stands for **studying** God's Word. When we study a passage in the Bible, we take it apart and examine it. We look at what it might have meant to those who heard it for the first time. We consider how it impacts our lives today. The pointer finger stands for **memorizing** God's Word. This enables us to point to it later, to remember what God is telling us, and yet it doesn't necessarily mean we have a firm grasp of its meaning. We need something more. The thumb stands for **meditating** on God's Word. The thumb is the strongest appendage and enables us to really grasp things. Meditating on what you have heard, read, studied, and memorized gives you a firm grasp of God's Word. It gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to work in your life and bring understanding.

When you have a firm grasp of God's Word, it can not be easily taken away from you. It will enable you to grow deeper in your faith and become a mature spiritual person. If you're not hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditation on God's Word, it can be snatched away from you very, very easily, when you most need it, leaving you with nothing to hold on to - leaving you unable to hear God speaking to you. He is always speaking to us as long as we hear, read, study, memorize and meditate on His Word. We need to do this each day, even if it's only ten minutes. Read His Word out loud. Listen to it. Let God speak to you. Every day stop and think about what you read. Talk to God about it through prayer. Give God your undivided attention for at least ten minutes every day. Give Him the opportunity to speak to you. Memorize a verse over time and think about what it meant to those who first heard it and how you can apply it to your life.

Why is this so important? The writer of the Psalms said, **"Your word [O God] is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path."** We live in a world darkened by sin, with all kinds of pit falls. God's Word is like a high intensity beam of light to show us where to step. God guarantees enough light for us to take the next step. Step by step we make our way through life, using God's Word to light our way. When we read God's Word, we get enough light for the next step of faith. He doesn't give us light for way down the road, only for the next step. That is why we need to focus on God's Word daily - to gain light for our next move.

There's a **SECOND WAY** God speaks to us. The Bible tells us that **GOD SPEAKS TO US THROUGH GIFTED TEACHERS**. That's what the Bible is talking about when it says, **"Christ gifted some to be apostles, prophets, missionaries, pastors and teachers..."** (Eph. 4:11-12). Why does God do this? Let's read on to find the answer. It says in the rest of the verse, **"...so that His people would learn to serve and His body [the church] would grow strong."** God

has blessed the church with gifted teachers to teach people to serve the Lord and help them to grow stronger in their faith and witness.

Now how do you know if someone is a gifted teacher? Did you know there's a way you can tell? There really is. When you're listening to someone teaching and all of the sudden you get this feeling that God is speaking directly to you as if you were the only person in the room, that's when you know the person is a gifted teacher. That's how you know God is working through that person. God has gifted that person so you can learn to serve God and grow stronger in your faith and witness. That's what it's all about.

There's another test concerning whether someone has the gift of teaching. The Bible says, **"God in His kindness gave each of us different gifts. If your gift is speaking God's word, make sure that what you say agrees with the faith"**(Rom. 12:6). That's a second test. Does what the teacher is saying agree with the faith that has been handed down by those first teachers, Jesus and His apostles. Someone may be an engaging, convincing, even persuasive teacher but not agree with the Bible. The person who has been truly gifted by God will be in agreement with the Bible. Paul explains, **"We don't speak in words taught by human wisdom. This is something different. We speak in words taught by the Spirit as we explain spiritual truths to those who have the Spirit"**(1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 2:13). True wisdom and understanding is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in complete harmony and agreement. The Holy Spirit is incapable of teaching something that contradicts what the Father or the Son has already told us. If someone teaches you something that contradicts the Bible, don't believe it.

**THERE IS A THIRD WAY GOD SPEAKS TO US AND THAT IS THROUGH GODLY FRIENDS AND FAMILY.** This is a way we often ignore. We often discount those who are closest to us or dismiss what they have to say. She's just my mom, what does she know? He's just my father, what does he know? She's just my wife, what does she know. He's just my husband, what does he know. We dismiss those closest to us. We don't realize that God often puts wisdom in the minds of those closest to us so they can tell us what God wants us to know. Another thing - the more Christ-like a person is the more weight we should give to what they say. That's really a no brainer. While it's true that God can speak to us through anyone, we would be wise to listen more carefully to those family members and friends who have a Christ-like character. Proverbs 12:26 says, **"The godly give wise advice to their friends. The wicked lead them astray."**

We all need advice from time to time. We all have blind spots. Some of us even have bald spots, but we all have blind spots - areas in our lives that we can't see that need improvement. God puts people around us to tell us the truth. Jesus says, **"Know the truth and the truth will set you free"** (John 8:32). We all need people who are wise and can see the truth and offer it in love. Do you have someone like that in your life? Do you have someone who is perceptive and won't just tell you what you want to hear? They are the people who help us grow. They are the gifted teachers.

### **THE FOURTH WAY GOD SPEAKS TO US IS THROUGH THOUGHTS AND IDEAS.**

Did you now that? Did you know that God speaks directly to you through thoughts and ideas he puts into your head? When God puts a thought into your head, we call it an *inspiration*. When the devil puts something into your head, we call it a *temptation*. Jesus says, *"The Holy Spirit will be your teacher and will bring to your mind all that I have spoken to you."* (John 14:26) The Holy Spirit is like a personal coach or mentor. He helps you to remember what you need to know and what you need to do. God speaks to us through our thoughts and ideas.

I have to warn you about thoughts and ideas, though. There's one problem with them. You don't just get impressions from God. You can get them from everything and everyone around you. You have to be very careful how you react to what pops into your mind. All thoughts and impressions aren't from God. You need to discern whether God is speaking to you through your thoughts and ideas. The Bible tells us, *"God speaks again and again in dreams, in visions of the night as they lie on their beds. He opens their ears in times like that and gives them wisdom and instruction causing them to change their minds and keeping them from pride and from falling into some trap"* (Job 33:14-17).

God does speak to us directly at times because he wants to keep us out of trouble, he wants to keep us walking in humble obedience. Often God speaks to us in the quiet of the night. That's when everything else in our lives is turned off and we can hear God, maybe for the first time all day. But you can't just give in to a thought or idea. You have to first test it. You have to ask: Is this impression I'm getting consistent with the Bible? If not, you can be sure it's not from God, because God never contradicts what He's already said.

**THE FIFTH WAY GOD SPEAKS TO US IS THROUGH OUR PAIN.** God speaks to us through our pain. God gets our attention through our pain. C. S. Lewis said, *"Pain is God's megaphone."* Sometimes pain is the only way God can get our attention. Proverbs 20:30 says, *"Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways."* Unfortunately, pain is the only way God can get our attention at times. Sometimes we don't look up until we've hit the bottom. The Psalmist says, *"The suffering you sent was good for me. For it taught me to pay attention to your principles."* (Psalm 119:71) C. S. Lewis also said, *"God whispers to us in our pleasures but He shouts to us in our pain. God may be shouting to you right now. It might be His big HELLO! The pain is saying, 'Watch out! You keep going that direction and your life is going to get destroyed.' Or the pain might be saying, 'I love you. I have a different plan for your life.'"*

If you want to avoid unnecessary pain and suffering in your life, then pay attention to what God is trying to say to you in the Bible, through gifted teachers, through godly friends and family members and through your thoughts and ideas. But understand, there are some things we can only learn through our pain.

**THE SIXTH WAY GOD SPEAKS TO US IS THROUGH SILENCE.** Sometimes God speaks by saying nothing. This is extremely frustrating. But God has His reasons for being silent. When you run ahead of God you end up getting into trouble, like Saul in the Old

Testament. He got into trouble not waiting on God to answer him. In 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 28:6 it says, ***"Saul prayed to God but God didn't answer. Neither by dream nor by sign nor by prophet."*** So Saul got impatient and turned to the occult for an answer. He knew it was wrong, but he did it anyway. We are not to look for guidance from sources other than God. If you are looking for guidance about the future from any other source than God and the ways God speaks to us, then you are consulting an idol. God has forbidden our use of idols. A Christian should never consult a palm reader or psychic.

We are to wait on God when He is silent. Job says, ***"If God is silent what is that to you? Since He turns His face away what can you do about it? But whether silent or hidden He is there ruling."*** (Job34:29) When God is silent we must remember that He is still there ruling. He's is still presiding over the universe. He may not be sharing His plan with you, but that doesn't mean He doesn't have a plan for you. He has a plan and a purpose for everything and everyone. He wants you to trust Him even when He is silent. God says, ***"I want you to trust Me in your times of trouble so I can rescue you and you can give Me the glory."*** (Psalm 50:14)