



# THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO HEARING GOD'S VOICE

Pastor Derek Sanford

a whoisgrace resource

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I found I had less and less to say, until finally, I became silent, and began to listen. I discovered in the silence, the voice of God.

Soren Kierkegaard

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# HELLO I'M DEREK SANFORD

lead pastor | grace church



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to view a sermon on persistent prayer

# PART ONE

## The Voice of God

Our priorities should be:  
recognizing the voice of God and  
responding to the voice of God.

John Ashcroft

# SEARCHING FOR A SIGNAL

One of the most frustrating words to see pop up on your mobile phone is the word “searching...” What is your phone searching for exactly? Well, built into the hardware and software of every cell phone is a primary function that causes it to search for a signal – a network – after it’s been disconnected. When you get off an airplane and turn on your phone, it will go into full signal-searching mode. In that moment, you realize that your phone was not primarily designed to play Candy Crush, it wasn’t designed to be a calculator or a podcast player, it was designed to connect to a network signal. And once it connects to that signal, your phone comes to life. It’s power and functionality go through the roof. Apps allow the phone to do things that it couldn’t do when it wasn’t connected. It activates and updates stuff that you didn’t even know needed activated or updated. The point is, when your phone finds the right wireless signal, it will finally operate at its full capacity.

In the same way, YOU were built to connect with God. It is hardwired into how you were designed. But many times, we find ourselves “searching for a signal.” Disconnected, spinning, and not operating at full capacity. The question is, how can we hear his voice? How will we recognize it if he does speak? This e-blook will explore some of the ways we can hear God’s voice and provide some practical steps for connecting with Him more.

# DO YOU WANT TO HEAR GOD SPEAK?

Have you ever cried out in a desperate moment, “God, where are you? Why are you so silent? Please speak to me! If I could only hear your voice!” I have said those words from time to time. God has always been patient with me and tender in his response. The truth is that God is not silent. God is not withdrawn and uncommunicative. Often when this frustration rises up in us, it’s after a season of struggle. In many cases, we haven’t put the time and effort into our relationship with God. It was only when we found ourselves in a crisis that we started throwing out desperate prayers and blaming God for the relational distance.

But the truth is: God doesn’t have a speaking problem; we have a listening problem.

I ask again, “Do you want to hear God speak?”

## TAKE ACTION

In your own words, invite God to speak to you.  
List out some reasons you need His voice in your life.

# GOD IS SPEAKING

One of the greatest benefits of the Christian life is the fact that God communicates to us personally. Faith is about a relationship and a key foundation for any relationship is communication. It is really important that you learn how to hear God's voice so that you can grow in your relationship and deepen your walk with him. Instead of going through life blindly, you can walk with confidence with the wisdom of God to guide and protect you. The good news is that God is speaking.

It's never God who is not speaking, but it's we who are not hearing.

Jesus referred to himself as 'the shepherd' and his followers as 'the sheep' in John 10. There he made some insightful statements about the ability of the sheep to recognize his voice. He said,

The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

God wants to speak to you. Notice Jesus didn't say that the sheep can hear his voice or should hear his voice. He said they do hear it. They know his voice. When he speaks, they recognize it. Which means all true believers have the ability to hear and follow the voice of God. The following are just a few examples in the Bible of God speaking.

Then God said to Noah... (Genesis 8:15).

Now the Lord said to Abram... (Genesis 12:1).

The Lord said to Moses... (Exodus 24:12).

Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah... (Isaiah 38:4).

But it wasn't just the super-saints that God spoke to, but ordinary people as well. In this e-book we're going to explore the variety of ways that God speaks to us.

# ...IN A VARIETY OF WAYS

The letter to the Hebrews begins with these words:

Long ago, at **many times** and in **many ways**, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

He spoke at many times and in a variety of ways. I've learned over the past few decades that communication is more complex than one would think. I have received a Masterclass in communication skills. You guessed it – I'm married. In the early days, I mistakenly thought that simple verbal communication was enough. A few basic "I love you" would do the trick.

But I've learned that there are many factors that contribute to whether what I'm communicating actually gets heard. It didn't take me long to discover the truth of the age-old adage that, "It's not what you say, but how you say it that matters." And there are many other contributing factors like body language, and tone of voice, and acts of service, and buying gifts, and text messages, and old pictures taped to the dashboard, and picking certain things up, and putting other things back down. These were all ways to make sure the message, "I love you," was really getting through. I didn't want just her ears to know it, I wanted her heart and soul to know it too. Which meant that I had to communicate at many times and in many different ways.

This is what God has done for you. He is speaking in a variety of ways. He speaks through prophets of old that you can read about in the Bible, he speaks through the life and teachings of Jesus, he speaks through nature, through your circumstances, through godly people. The reason for this e-book is to explore the 'variety of ways' through which God speaks.

# OTHER VOICES

Sometimes it's hard to hear the voice of God because you are bombarded with other voices every day. Your newsfeed buzzes away in your pocket, song lyrics ring through your headphones, social media posts cry for your attention, political commentators, friends and family, co-workers all want to have your ear. Netflix series, YouTube channels, TikTok videos all present your mind with a way to view the world. Where does the urge come from to reach for the knob when you get in the car? Flip on the TV when you walk in house? Turn on a podcast when you work out? Scroll your social media feed while you're stopped at a traffic light? We've become addicted to the voices.

Sometimes the urge to fill our mind with external voices comes from the desire to silence the internal voices that are even louder. The voices of lust, worry, shame, guilt, regret, revenge, fear, rage. Voices that say, "You stink as a parent. You will never love your husband like you used to. You're not good enough to pursue that career path. You would lose that friend forever if you told him what you were really thinking. You don't have time to get involved and advance your spiritual life." Sometimes we're just too afraid to be alone with the voices in our head. So, we reach for our

devices and turn up the noise.

But what if you could tune in to the life-giving voice of God? Like noise-cancelling headphones that drown out certain voices so you can listen clearly to another. What if you could navigate through the noise of the world's voice, and the devil's voice, and your own voice, and truly tune in to the voice of God. He is kind, loving, inspirational, wise, healing, and convicting without being condemning.

God is constantly speaking, but few are tuned in to listen. For many of you, your lifestyle is too busy and noisy, and it's not conducive to hearing the voice of God. So where do we begin?

## TAKE ACTION

List the top three "other voices" that you are listening to right now.

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# FINDING A LISTENING POSTURE

Hearing the voice of God will not happen regularly without some intentionality. You must learn to posture your life to hear his voice. You must set your frequency to God's channel. The Prophet Habakkuk said,

*I will take my stand at my watch-post and station myself on the tower and look out to see what he will say to me.*

Notice, it's what HE will say to ME. Prayer is not just informing God of our list of needs and areas where we could use his help. Prayer is a two-way conversation – it involves both speaking and listening. But notice, the voice of God came as Habakkuk 'stationed' himself and was on the 'look out' to see what God would say. It didn't happen automatically but through assuming a listening posture.

There's another example of this in the New Testament book of Acts. The early church was preparing for a huge decision to send Paul and Barnabas out as missionaries into the world, and it says in Acts 13:2,

*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said...*

Now, look at that for a minute. While they were worshipping and fasting, while they were in this surrendered position before God—the Holy Spirit spoke to them. Do you think it was a sheer coincidence that He spoke to them while they were engaged in these spiritual practices? Or do you think maybe their regular pattern of fasting and praying and worshipping increased their likelihood of hearing God's voice?

Let's push it further... Are you most likely to receive a prompting or whisper from God... in the middle of an episode of *The Walking Dead*? While you're talking on your cell phone in traffic? While you're at a noisy restaurant with eight friends? While you're chasing three preschoolers around your house?

Or are you more likely to hear from God when you quiet yourself down and carve out a space and time where you can lower the ambient noise and listen to the still small voice of God? Again, and again, the Bible tells us to be still. Be still and know that I am God. Reduce speed. Stop multitasking. Quiet down. And then you'll be aware when God is speaking.

# A TIME, A PLACE, AND A PLAN

What does it look like in real life to find a listening posture? I think it's as simple as finding a time a place and a plan that works for you. We can see this modeled clearly through the life of Jesus. There's a passage in Mark 1 where Jesus is staying at the house of Peter's mother-in-law. People find out that he's there and the crowds start pressing in at the doorstep. So, Jesus obliges, and he heals people and teaches and casts out demons. It was a pretty intense day. Everyone goes to bed and Mark 1:35 says,

*And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.*

There is no question that God can speak to you spontaneously throughout the day. But in the life pattern of Jesus himself, we see that he created time and space and a plan to pray. He was incredibly intentional about it.

**A Time:** What is your best time of day or night where you can spend a few undistracted moments listening for the voice of God? I think it's good to give God your best. Are you a morning person or an evening person? Find a time each day and put it in your calendar as a non-negotiable appointment.

**A Place:** We talk a lot at Grace about "finding your chair." It's that place where you can go to meet with God every day. Maybe it's a chair at your kitchen table over a cup of coffee before everyone else wakes up. Maybe it's a side chair in your office at work. Maybe it's the front seat of your pickup truck during your lunch break, or your porch swing at night. It's very helpful to designate a place where you will go to meet with God.

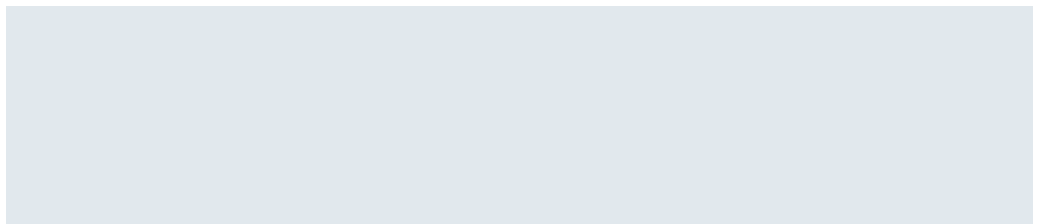
**A Plan:** It's good to have a plan in place. Keep a notebook or journal where you can chronicle the ways God is speaking to you. Light a candle to signify a listening posture. Play some worship music that will help you to tune in to God's voice. Use a Bible-reading plan so that you have a regular starting place for your God encounters.

Sometimes people say, "I don't have time to find my chair and listen for the Spirit's voice every day." I say back, "You don't have time not to!" Because there is wisdom that God will pour into your heart today that could save you from a huge mistake that could take you out of the game for a month, a year, a decade. Listening to the Spirit doesn't take time, it saves you time. It could save you a year or two of digging out of a pit you never needed to be in. So, make time and space and a plan to listen for his voice.

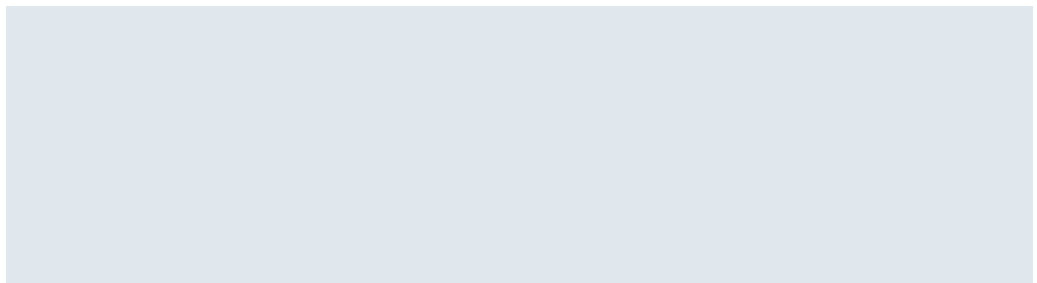
# TAKE ACTION

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Use this sheet to make a time and space and a plan to listen for his voice.

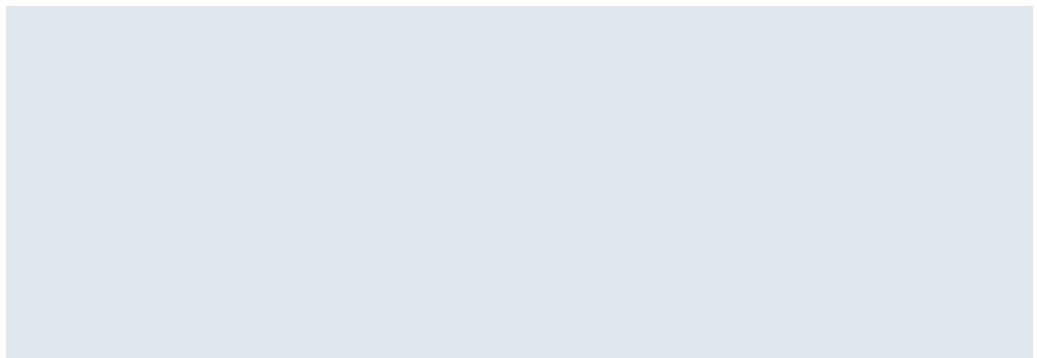
MY TIME



MY PLACE



MY PLAN



# PART TWO

## How God Speaks

Every happening, great and small, is a parable whereby God speaks to us, and the art of life is to get the message.

Malcolm Muggeridge

# THE BIBLE

The Bible is the #1 best-selling book of all time. It is utterly unique in its composition. It is actually a library of 66 books written over a span of 1,600 years. Forty different authors from every walk of life wrote the Bible. It was written by kings and servants, philosophers and fishermen, poets and military leaders, doctors and herdsman, prophets and even a first-century IRS agent. Despite their varied backgrounds, this book was written with amazing unity. The authors wrote from different places like deserts, dungeons, palaces, islands, battlefields, hillsides, and prison cells. They wrote on three different continents (Europe, Asia, and Africa), in 16 different countries, and in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). Their writings cover hundreds of controversial subjects, yet they speak in striking unity. This can't be explained by coincidence or collusion. God was behind it.

In fact, the most amazing thing about the Bible is that it is God's primary way of speaking to us. More than 3,000 times the Bible says the equivalent of, "Thus says the Lord." It boldly asserts that God guided the thoughts and hearts of people in order to put his inspired thoughts in written form. In fact, 2 Timothy 3:16 makes this claim:

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*

I would urge you to read a little portion of the Bible every day and see if it doesn't pierce your soul. If you are just starting out, you don't need to start at the very beginning in Genesis. In fact, try starting in the gospel of John. Then maybe move on to the letters of 1, 2, and 3 John near the end of the Bible. Before you read, invite God to speak to you. Then as you read, apply a simple series of questions to help you process how to respond. It's a silly acrostic that spells SPACEPETS. Simply ask God, "In what I just read, is there any . . ."

- » **S**in to confess? Do I need to make any restitution?
- » **P**romise to claim? Is it a universal promise? Have I met the conditions?
- » **A**ttitude to change? Am I willing to work on a negative attitude and begin building toward a positive one?
- » **C**ommand to obey? Am I willing to do it, no matter how I feel?
- » **E**xample to follow? Is it a positive example for me to copy, or a negative one to avoid?
- » **P**rayer to pray? Is there anything I need to pray back to God?
- » **E**rror to avoid? Is there any problem that I should be alert to, or beware of?
- » **T**ruth to believe? What new things can I learn about God or other biblical teachings?
- » **S**omething to praise God for? Is there something here I can be thankful for?

# TAKE ACTION

Read John 3:22-36 and apply the SPACEPETS devotional method.

- » **S**in to confess? Do I need to make any restitution?
- » **P**romise to claim? Is it a universal promise? Have I met the conditions?
- » **A**ttitude to change? Am I willing to work on a negative attitude and begin building toward a positive one?
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- » **S**omething to praise God for? Is there something here I can be thankful for?

# JESUS

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. - Hebrews 1:1-2*

What the writer of Hebrews wants us to see is that this latest communication from God in Jesus is greater and better than any other ways He has communicated in the past. Because in Jesus we have the exact personification of God. He is the perfect revelation. We learn about Jesus mainly in the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. If you research the ways of Jesus in these four books, God will speak to you through Jesus in at least two ways.

First, he will speak to you through Jesus' TEACHINGS. Jesus' words are God's words. So, the words he spoke while he was on earth that were recorded in the Bible are God's words. He was a master teacher. He taught about money and anger and prayer and sex and worry and fear and servanthood and caring for the poor and work and success and death and life and priorities. He taught through parables, and statements, and object lessons, and speeches, and sermons. Always profound, always thought provoking, always creative, always cutting right to the heart. Here is the critical thing. Jesus is right about everything. He is the embodiment of truth. He made the earth. He made you. So, if you say that you "trust Jesus," you are simply acknowledging that he is right about stuff. He is right about everything he ever said.

The second way that God will speak to you through Jesus is in his EXAMPLE. Jesus said in John 14:12, "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing." Not only do we have the wisdom of the teachings of Jesus in the gospels, but we also have the example of his life. We must embrace the idea that Jesus' life is not something to be reflected on, but something to be copied. His life is not to be admired; it is to be imitated.

# THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus makes this stunning promise to his followers in John 14:16-17:

*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*

The amazing promise of God is that He will be “with you” and “in you” in the form of his Holy Spirit. Which means that you are never alone. The Spirit is the life-giving oxygen of the Christian life. He is not a subject of theology; he is the very breath of God that has been given as a gift to us to be experienced every day – every second of every day. He is the friend that is closer than a brother comforting us and encouraging us, correcting us and guiding us.

Paul says in Galatians 5:25, Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. He walks with us as a moment-by-moment guide. The guidance we can access through the Holy Spirit is not primarily a matter of us learning a new “spiritual technique.” It is primarily about being in a relationship. If you want to hear God’s voice and sense his promptings, you must invest in the relationship he provides to you through His Spirit. If your time with the Spirit is haphazard, or non-existent, you may learn ABOUT him, but you won’t actually get to KNOW him. It’s all about relationship!

The Holy Spirit will guide you. He’ll lead you step by step. Which means, it is possible to be led, not by your fears or your faults, your desires or emotions, but you can be led by the voice of the Spirit Himself. He’ll say, “Stop. Don’t go there. Take a step this way,” and you follow the voice of the Spirit. “There’s something dangerous. Watch out! You’re out of God’s will. Wait a minute.” And you follow. “There’s a person who needs you to reach out to them. They need encouragement. They need prayer. Stop and pray for them. Give something away.” Step by step, you follow the voice of the Spirit.

# PROMPTINGS

Usually, the voice of the Spirit of God is not audible. It is a sense deep inside, a whisper, a prompting. We would probably all prefer God to speak in a loud and bombastic voice. So as to make no mistake that it's him. There is a biblical example of God speaking to his prophet named Elijah. God tells Elijah to go stand on a mountain in the presence of the Lord and wait for the Lord to speak. Elijah experienced a powerful wind, then an earthquake and then a fire. But the Lord didn't speak in any of the fanfare.

*...after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him... - 1 Kings 19:12-13*

God's Spirit spoke to Elijah in a gentle whisper. Which means that it's in stillness, not busyness, that we tune our spiritual ears to hear the promptings of God's Spirit. One of the ways to slow down and tune in to the Spirit's voice is to practice what's called...

Listening Prayer. Prayer is often viewed as a one-way conversation where we make our requests to God. But true prayer is a conversation: sometimes we talk and sometimes we listen. Listening prayer is when you take the time to ask God to bring to mind any guidance, any encouragement, any corrective measures.

I often like to begin my times of listening by asking God, "what's next?" I'll say things like, "God, what's next in my spiritual development? What's the next adjustment for my heart? What's next for my family life? What's next for my ministry? My work? My relationships? My confessions?" Then, I leave space for God to prompt me. I like to keep a physical or digital journal handy so I can write down whatever I sense God saying to me. But without slowing down and providing some space, we will consistently miss the promptings of God.

To be clear, when something comes to mind, I don't automatically assume that whatever pops in there is the voice of God, I have to test it out. Write it down. Then I can sit with it for a bit and ask the Spirit to confirm whether He's put that in my heart or it's just my own idea. I can explore the Bible to make sure it squares with what God has said in other ways. I can ask a trusted friend or mentor if the prompting I received sounds consistent with what he or she knows about God.

# TAKE ACTION

Practice Listening Prayer. Ask God the following questions and write down any promptings that you receive.

What's next for my spiritual life?

What's the next adjustment for my heart?

What's next in my relationships?

# CIRCUMSTANCES

Listening for God's voice isn't confined to a quiet prayer closet though; God also speaks through your life circumstances. The easiest way to describe this might be through the metaphor of open and closed doors. Psalm 37 says that the Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in each detail. So sometimes God speaks to us by opening and closing doors in the situations of our lives. The Apostle Paul provides an example of both instances in his writings. In 1 Corinthians 16:8-9, Paul says,

*I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*

But in Acts 16:6-7, Paul and his team were trying to go into a new region, but the door was closed.

*...when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.*

There was something about their circumstances that acted like a closed door to Paul. He and his team were prevented from spreading the gospel in these new regions. Notice the Spirit stopped them from something that seemed good on the surface (spread the good news), and he opened the door for something that seemed bad on the surface (stay and preach where there were many adversaries).

This one is tricky. Just because an opportunity presents itself, and it looks appealing, doesn't necessarily mean it is from God. And likewise, just because looks uncertain and difficult, doesn't mean you shouldn't pursue it. The key is your ability to discern if an opportunity is from God. So, you should check to make sure the situation lines up with God's word. He would never ask you to do something that contradicts the Bible. He would also never ask you to do something that compromises your faith. It is best when discerning if an open or closed door is from God, to involve a trusted spiritual friend or mentor.

# TRUSTWORTHY PEOPLE

One of the most common ways that God speaks is through trustworthy people. This can come in the form of a word of advice from a godly friend, a sermon or podcast from a trusted pastor, or encouragement from a mature family member.

It is so important for you to have a go-to spiritual advisor. Someone who loves you but is not impressed by you. Someone who will listen to God on your behalf. Someone who has joined you side-by-side in your spiritual journey. I'm convinced that it is impossible to live out a purposeful life without a godly truth-teller. We drift too easily.

I have been blessed with many spiritual mentors along the way- my life and leadership would not be the same without these people. My mentors have provided scriptures, they have listened, offered advice, they have prayed for me, and challenged my thinking. If you don't have this person in your life, you are truly missing something, including an increased chance at hearing and discerning the voice of God.

The Holy Spirit can speak to you through people, it may be a friend, a teacher, a parent, or a preacher. Their words may come as a warning, a blessing, or as a prophetic truth about your life. But be incredibly discerning about from whom you take advice. You may have friends who love you dearly giving you advice, but they don't know Jesus and don't know the scriptures and, quite frankly, they'll give you bad advice. If you're struggling in your marriage, you could go down to the bar and find a bunch of half-drunk buddies, tell them your side of the story, and in no time, they'll be saying, "Ditch her! Dump her! Free yourself so you can spend more time here at the bar with us." Be careful who you listen to. The Holy Spirit will give you guidance through people, but those people should be godly and trustworthy.

## TAKE ACTION

Write down the name of a trustworthy person in your life to whom you could take spiritual questions:

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# THE EXAMPLE OF OTHERS

You can gain wisdom for life in a couple of ways. One, you can make your own mistakes and learn from them. Stick your hand on a hot stove, and then say, “Wow I don’t ever want to do that again.” Or two, and this is the much better way, you can observe the experiences and mistakes of others and learn from them. You watch them touch the hot stove and see the blistered hand and the ER visit and you say, OK I’m not going to do that. The second way allows you to save yourself all the pain, and agony, and time of going through that experience yourself.

The truth is, you don’t have enough hands to burn to accumulate the amount of wisdom that you’re going to need to be the husband that you want to be. You don’t have enough appendages on your body to accumulate the amount of wisdom you’re going to need to be godly parent or businesswoman or neighbor. You’ve got to obtain wisdom beyond your experience. So, how in the world are you going to do that? God will speak to you through the example of others. One of the best sources of those examples, is the pages of the Bible.

In the Bible you have mentors who will show you the way. Amazing lives of incredible men and women through the ages who have loved and served God. You get to see their triumphs and their tragedies, and to learn from them. In the Bible you have a training manual that the Holy Spirit can use to mold and shape your behaviors and attitudes and emotions to line up with what God has for you. You may have heard of Cain and Abel back in Genesis. The first of Adam and Eve’s kids in the original Garden of Eden? Well, Hebrews 11:4 says,

*Abel, though dead, he still speaks.*

He can be a mentor to you from thousands of years ago. Learn from him. Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:11 says,

*...these things were written for our benefit, as examples and as warnings to us.*

So, you see, even if you don’t currently have the perfect mentoring relationship with someone in the flesh, there are spiritual, godly mentors waiting in the pages of Scripture to teach you the wisdom of the ages. All you have to do is make time to meet with them and learn from them.

# HOLY DISCONTENT

Sometimes God speaks with no words, but instead, He gives clear direction through your holy discontent. Your circumstances, your conscience, and your ambitions collide, and you are almost forced into action. You may have heard about the biblical story about David and Goliath.

What you may not know is that scripture never records God verbally telling David that he wanted him to fight Goliath. God never said, "OK, David, there will be a giant there, and he will say this... and that's when you get five rocks ..." It never happened that way. David simply found himself in the same place at the same time, when a defiant giant was degrading the God of Israel. Every day David got up, and heard this giant saying, "The God of the Israelites is weak, and impotent," and one day David said, "I don't know if you so-called soldiers are going to do anything about this, but I'm doing something about it." He got five smooth stones, and he ran full speed toward the giant. This thing that everyone else was just living with, it was causing unusual angst in his spirit. A holy discontentment. I think the Spirit was speaking to him.

Nehemiah was an Old Testament saint with a cushy job as a cupbearer for a foreign king. One day he got bad news from his hometown. The walls of the city Jerusalem were in ruins, and his people were vulnerable. Now, surrounding nations were circling and saying, "The God of the Israelites is weak; powerless." Nehemiah thought about it; prayed

about it; and finally said, "I can't stand this anymore. God's people need me." At the risk of his life, he negotiated a leave-of-absence and got permission to go back. He led one of the most aggressive and creative construction projects in history. The thing that lit a fire under him... was holy discontent. He couldn't stand the thought of the city of God in disrepair, he couldn't stand embarrassing the name of God.

Sometimes the Spirit of God will guide you by these stirrings inside. An ambitious fire that burns in your gut. A good starting place is to ask yourself, "what problem needs solved that just won't let go of my attention?" You need to pay attention to it. Do you sense that God is not ok with that problem either? Maybe your family is in a dry spell with no real connection to each other, and it's driving you nuts. Or hundreds of foster kids in your community are passing from home to home with no one to ever love them consistently, or young girls are being trafficked in the sex slave trade, or a local school has kids who are struggling with terrible home lives. And the thought of it won't let you go. Maybe the Spirit is guiding you to do something about it. Sometimes God speaks through your holy discontentment.

## TAKE ACTION

If you knew you couldn't fail, what is something you would attempt for God?

# CREATION

God also speaks to us in nature. When He created the heavens and the earth, he gave us an incredible, complex, beautiful, orderly universe. Have you ever seen something in nature that took your breath away? Maybe a sunset, or a giant redwood. Maybe you looked out at the vast ocean or the Grand Canyon. Or maybe it was an incredible animal creation like a giraffe or a koala or a white tiger. Creation is an amazing thing to behold.

The more we fix our eyes on the wonder of creation, the more we must conclude that these things could not make themselves. The world seems to be fine-tuned for life and function and beauty by an intelligent and loving designer. The Bible is clear that this is one of the ways that God speaks.

*His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made... - Romans 1:20*

Some people come alive from head to toe whenever they get themselves into natural splendor of some kind – be it mountains or deserts or plains, the woods or the beach. Being in these environments can increase your awareness of the voice of God. The feelings of awe that come over you as you watch the waves pound against the rocks at the beach or hold a newborn baby for the first time are in fact God speaking to you through his masterpiece. Psalm 19:1-4 puts it this way:

*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above[a] proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*

# DREAMS AND VISIONS

God spoke throughout history in dreams and visions, especially during times when written communication was not as accessible. That being said, nothing in Scripture indicates that God has stopped speaking in these ways. In fact, listen to what Acts 2:17 says as Luke quotes the prophet Joel,

*And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams*

In recent years, I have heard most often of God using dreams to reach people who are in impossible personal trauma or who live in countries that have no access to the written word of God. Entire villages have come to faith in God because of dreams. But, closer to home, I recently spoke with someone who recounted the story that as her marriage was disintegrating God began to give people in her friend group all over the world dreams of her. As they shared the dreams with her, it brought tremendous hope and encouragement. Then God gave her a dream that propelled her to not lose hope and to pursue joy. So, God can also speak to us through dreams and visions still today.

Just like all the other methods God uses, you must be cautious about reading too much into every dream. Not all of them are from God. Sometimes a weird dream is because you ate too many Doritos too close to bedtime. You need to cross check these things against trusted sources, but it's true that God still speaks through dreams and visions.

# HOW DO YOU KNOW IT'S GOD WHO IS SPEAKING?

Whether it's related to dreams and visions, or promptings, or circumstances, one of the most common questions around the topic of God speaking is ... "How can I know it's God?" How can you be sure you're tuned in to the right channel? How can you know that it's not your own thoughts or indigestion? Well, there are three checks that are very important in discerning the voice of God. I've mentioned some of them throughout this e-book, but it's worth collecting them all in one place.

- 1. Check with SCRIPTURE.** Ask the question, does this prompting square with the teaching of Scripture? Investigate. Look into it. If it does, that's a green light. If it doesn't, that's a red light.
- 2. Check the CHARACTER of JESUS.** When God's prompting you to do something; always ask yourself, "Can I imagine Jesus doing this?" If you can't imagine Jesus doing it, you may have your wires crossed.
- 3. Check with trusted Christian ADVISORS.** When God prompts you, you want to always check with a spiritual mentor. Find a pastor, a small group leader, another Christian friend who's further down the road than you and invite them into your concern.

## ONE MORE THING...

# GOD CAN SPEAK THROUGH YOU TOO!

Here is an incredible truth. Not only will God speak to you, but sometimes he will also speak through you. There are people in your life who need to hear from God through your words. The truth is the people all around you are listening to a variety of voices every day: the world, their insecurities, their guilt, their shame, their past, their greed, or lust, social media advertisements. Don't you think God wants to cut through all those voices with his voice? What if he wants to speak to them through you? What if he has positioned you right in front of them to be his mouthpiece and offer them guidance from the Spirit? 1 Corinthians 14:3 says,

*The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.*

Paul uses the word 'prophet' here, but he's not talking about sidewalk prophets who hold up billboards screaming into a bull horn declaring gloom and doom and everybody's going to hell. A simple definition of prophecy is "hearing God's voice for someone else." It's cool to hear God's voice for yourself, it's cooler still to hear His voice for someone else. Look how Paul describes these prophetic words – he says they will be for the person's upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation.

I believe that these expressions are not just reserved for a pastor with a microphone each weekend but something that should be sought out by everyone in the church because of its huge potential impact. **Will you let God speak to you and through you?**

# ABOUT US

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Grace Church is a multi-site church located in the Erie, PA area. We exist to MAKE and BE fully devoted followers of Jesus. Grace is characterized by it's outreach, visibility, and help in the Erie Community, as well as its high-level volunteer culture (we help people discover their God-given gifts and give them amazing opportunities to use them).

We believe in the power of God to work and change lives here and now. In fact, you reading this Ebook is no accident. He has the absolutel best in mind for you, and we would love to help you discover and grow in your relationship with him!

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