

Listen Up

God Still Speaks Today

By Kathy Branzell

I was sitting with my friend drinking a cup of coffee when she announced, "God spoke to me." She paused to see how I would respond. I put my cup down and asked, "What did He say?"

She felt the freedom to continue. "Surprisingly, He told me it is time for me to leave my job and stay home with my children. I just wish God would tell my husband, too," she added. She had my full attention. Fourteen years ago I left a lucrative job to go into full-time, unpaid ministry. I had also asked God to "tell" my husband—and thankfully, He did.

The tragic part of this story is that even though I was not the first person she told about God speaking to her, I was the first person to believe her. She was very successful and happy at her job; leaving was the last thing on her mind. But God had other plans for her—and He spoke to her during her prayer time while she was sitting quietly, pondering a work project. She clearly remembers asking God to show her His path and to be glorified in her efforts. God responded in a way she did not expect and with authority He knew she would not reject.

God Continues His Conversations

From the very first words of Scripture, "In the beginning," we learn God speaks to set His plans in motion. God spoke to Adam and Eve; He spoke to Noah throughout Genesis 6–9. He spoke to—and through—Abraham, Moses, the Prophets, and many others throughout the Old Testament, so that His people would be instructed, inspired, disciplined, discipled, and directed in

the way they should go.

In the New Testament God's voice came down and spoke face-to-face with us: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This voice was Jesus: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). Christ's disciples and apostles scattered to spread the message Jesus had given to them.

Then God continued His conversation when He sent the gift of the Holy Spirit to live in us.

God is unchanging. The same God who spoke with Adam and Eve in the garden desires to speak to you in your quiet time, in your crisis time, in times of change, challenge, and celebration. The key to hearing God's voice is taking the time to listen to Him.

You may be thinking, I pray every day, even several times a day, and God has never "spoken" to me. You may believe this, but more than likely He has spoken to you in one way or another. You may have dismissed it. Or you may not have equated common things with God's voice to you: the prompting to speak up, the push in the right direction, or the discernment in a decision. But I can assure you that God desires to speak to you as your sovereign Father, Author of your days, Counselor, Creator, King, and the One who loves you more than you could ever understand.

The question is not, "Will God speak to me?" The question is, "Are you taking the time to listen?"

Get Ready to Listen

So how can you begin to hear God speak to you? First, begin your prayer time by confessing any sin you know stands between you and God. Ask His forgiveness and allow Him to silence the

voice of guilt and shame that discourages you from seeking His presence.

Second, spend periods of your prayer time in complete silence, listening for God to respond to your praise, appreciation, questions, and pleas. I have always wondered why we call it our “quiet time” if we spend the whole time talking. As with any communication, we need to listen with an open mind and a closed mouth.

Third, listen with a discerning heart and an open Bible. God will not contradict Himself; He will not lead you down a path of unrighteousness or turn His head for the sake of your earthly “happiness.” He will not give an approving nod to sin and He will not send you out on a journey alone. God’s desire is to be with you every step of the way so that your Kingdom purpose is fulfilled. As He speaks, His Kingdom will come and His will be done.

God also speaks so that He receives glory in the story of how He made the impossible, possible—how He provided in your need and how the blessings that follow obedience to His ways always exceed anything the world has to offer. Even in our time of reading and studying His Word, we can get so caught up in the information and education that we do not pause, in stillness and quietness, to hear the inspiration and engaging conversation God really desires.

As you read Scripture, ask God to reveal His message to you. Show your respect and love for Him with praise and thanksgiving. Offer a pure heart ready to obey, no matter what He says. Sometimes we do not hear from the Lord because we have not settled the issue of obedience in our hearts. Instead we have tuned our ears to get our way, refusing to listen to any voice that does not agree with our desires.

Lose the Distractions

Finally, get rid of anything that will distract you from

listening intently and intentionally. This type of listening comes only with deliberate, deep, honest, times of prayer where God has all of your attention. One of the main reasons we may experience difficulty in hearing God's voice is because we are too wrapped up in listening to what everyone else has to say.

If you have your cell phone with you during your prayer time, let me encourage you to turn off the ringer and leave it in another room. Imagine that you are walking toward the throne of God and suddenly you stop and turn away because you get a call. Imagine interrupting God in mid-sentence because you get a text. Envision yourself breaking eye contact with Jesus to lean over to check your email inbox. Sadly, we do this to our friends and family all the time. Even more tragic, many of us are guilty of putting God "on hold" to hear from someone else.

John 10:10 warns us that Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy. For those who choose to be "followers of Christ," Satan delights to distract, discourage, and detain. He will do anything he can do to get you to tune out God's voice. If He can get you to play instead of pray, or to work instead of embrace the Sabbath, he has just stolen the pleasure of God's purposes from you. Thankfully, in John 10:11 Jesus assures us that He is the good Shepherd. He knows His sheep and His sheep know Him. Furthermore, His sheep know and follow His voice. Do not allow anything to distract you from hearing or recognizing Christ's voice.

Practice and Learn

God still speaks directly to His people, just as He did in biblical times. Take some time to study the different ways God communicated in the Bible. Then practice being in His presence, as if face-to-face, giving Him your whole heart, mind, and undivided attention. Demonstrate your trusting faith. When you immerse yourself in Scripture, you will see and hear God's words straight off the pages before you.

Trust the Holy Spirit to convict and prompt, guide and guard, instruct and inspire your heart—just as He did with Paul in Acts 20:22–23: “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.”

And remember that God still speaks to some of His people in dreams and visions, as He did to Joseph (Gen. 37), Daniel (Dan. 7), Ananias (Acts 9:10–16), Peter (Acts 11:4–9), and John (Rev. 1)—to name a few. Once in a while, He actually speaks in an audible voice: Jesus spoke to Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–7), God confirmed Jesus as His Son when John was baptizing Him (Matt. 3:17), and the Lord called to a young Samuel in the night (1 Sam. 3).

Be open to however God might choose to reveal His voice to you. God is speaking, so lean in and learn to listen.

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