

Prayer Leaders Share How They Best Hear God Speak

Sidebars from Theme of Issue 16

God's Voice to Me

By Sam Warren

It makes me laugh now, but I still remember the look on my wife's face years ago when I told her I was going to attempt to connect with a biblical author's experience. I wanted her to tie me to a pole in our dark and dirty cellar where bugs and various sounds were screaming for my attention.

Needless to say, it was a far cry from what Paul experienced. But it put me into a situation where I was very much aware of what was going on around me. I listened to every sound, attentive to every detail of sensory input.

For me, listening to God attentively and hearing Him clearly are always connected to context. Unfortunately, when things are going well, my spiritual senses become dull. However, when I don't know what to do or I'm wrestling with my convictions on a given issue—I am “all ears,” spiritually speaking. And while context is important, knowing what I am listening for is essential. If I cannot discern God's voice, I accomplish little.

Years ago, we became separated from our youngest son at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco. You can imagine our fear. I began screaming at the top of my voice, frantically trying to find him. Darrick, hearing the distinctiveness of my voice among the clamor of the crowd, soon made his way through the

people and ran toward me with his arms uplifted.

We fight a tremendous battle today in seeking to hear God's voice. Many things cry out for our attention. One way to ensure we are hearing His voice is to know His Word, which is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17). God will never speak something into our lives that contradicts His Word.

We can take great comfort in knowing God is always present and willing to communicate with His children. "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10) is an invitation to simply sit in His presence and receive what He wants to give us.

—Dr. Sam Warren, director of nurture for the Advent Christian Church, oversees the prayer emphasis there.

God's Voice to Me

By Nancy Wilson

My precious Lord Jesus, I give you this day. I am your ambassador, desiring to be Your heart, feet, and hands today! Please fill me with Your Spirit, and give me Your heart for each person I encounter. I want to love with Your love."

Most days my prayers are a desperate cry to have more of Jesus—and less of me. That is the supernatural key to hearing His voice. I find that when I listen, He speaks—simply, yet clearly, with a gentle prompting of my heart!

What a joy it is to know that He wants to use us as His messengers, His representatives, and His ambassadors! "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:14–15).

A beautiful day in Florida led me to a prayerwalk around a lake, praying and enjoying the beauty. The Spirit within me was drawn to all the people walking.

Suddenly I noticed three teenage girls sitting on the dock, dangling their feet. I heard the familiar soft urging voice within, nudging me. "Nancy, why don't you talk to them? They need Me."

"Oh Lord, I can tell them a story. Which one?"

He whispered, "The story of the sinful woman" (Luke 7:36–50).

"Hi, girls!" I launched into the conversation. "What are you up to?" I began some small talk, and then, "May I tell you a story?"

"Sure," they replied.

I shared this tender story that reveals the heart of Jesus. They smiled—and we discussed it. They loved it, and had not known this kind of love before. The one with a ring in her nose said she went to church but never met Jesus personally. The other two girls live in a broken home.

Before I left, Jesus had encountered them. They all prayed with me to open their hearts to God and to His love. After leaving them with hugs, my book, and a Bible, I promised to call them to meet the next week.

This is the joy of hearing and obeying the voice of God!

—Nancy Wilson is a speaker, author, and global ambassador with StoryRunners, a mission of Cru to unreached people groups (nancywilson.org).

God's Voice to Me

By Dana Olson

I find God consistently speaks to me through what I call “the recipe”:

4 cups of Bible 3 tablespoons of prayer 2 teaspoons of wise counsel a pinch of direct divine guidance

I call this the recipe because proportions are vital. Too often, it seems, we elevate the personal experience of directly hearing from God above the special revelation of Scripture. On the other hand, I can't find my way to the camp that says God never speaks to His children aside from the Bible. Hence, the recipe:

Four cups of Bible: The Bible speaks to Christians every day, without fail, as long as we read His Word carefully and interpret it wisely. This is the main ingredient. The Bible is fully sufficient to guide us in the lifelong journey of faith and godliness. Too often we struggle with choices simply because we have neglected the clear teaching of Scripture on a matter. Most of life's questions—99 percent or more of them—can be answered by taking God's Word to heart and living in the obedience of faith.

Three tablespoons of prayer: I don't differentiate much between the Bible and prayer. The two are inseparable. We pray truth when we pray God's Word, and we are wise to pray God's truth back to Him. Jesus taught us, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matt. 7:7). So it is foolish, when seeking God's direction, to be prayerless.

Two teaspoons of wise counsel: Proverbs 27:9 says, “Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel” (ESV). However, it's crucial

to remember this: although the Bible is infallible in its counsel, human counselors are not. Choose wisely. A godly, thoughtful, wise counselor is invaluable.

A pinch of direct divine guidance: When pursuing truth in a situation, whether it is counseling a troubled soul or seeking to make a decision in a matter, sometimes a thought comes to us that is so compelling, so right on, that it seems to have come directly from the Holy Spirit. It is always a thought that confirms the truth of Scripture. Sometimes it's an insight that opens a new, surprising, unexpected avenue of pursuit. But there it is, and it seems the only Source can be God Himself.

For me, keeping this recipe in mind has proven a wonderful practice in hearing God's voice.

—Rev. Dana Olson is pastor of Faith Baptist Fellowship, Sioux Falls, SD, and a member of the Prayer First team of Converge Worldwide.

God's Voice to Me

By Alvin VanderGriend

God is a talker. Because He speaks, I need to listen. Here's what works for me when I try to hear God.

First, I ask God to help me hear Him speak. Asking for His help to hear is like turning on your mobile device. It's the action step that makes it happen. It's like saying: "God, I can't do it without Your help, so please take the first step and turn on my hearing ear!"

Second, I ask God questions such as, "What do you have to say to me right now, God?" "What are Your thoughts about me?" Then I wait quietly for Him to impress His thoughts on my mind. I am often amazed at the accuracy of His responses. He always

seems to know my heart and knows what I most need to hear. And He is not afraid to say it.

Third, I sometimes recite God-to-me one-liners from the Bible that I know to be true—one-liners such as, “I love you, Alvin!” “My grace is sufficient for you” “Be holy, because I am holy.” In the course of these recitals God brings to mind some one-liners that I really need to hear. Or He stops me on a one-liner and takes me deeper into the implications of its meaning for me.

Fourth, when I need His guidance for a decision affecting the future, I simply lodge the matter with Him and invite His input. When I think I have the answer, I ask Him to confirm it in some definite way. He is always willing to do that and He always knows what’s best.

God wants us to hear Him. But, above all, He wants us to “hear” His heartbeat, a heart that beats with love. If you listen, it’s hard to miss.

—Dr. Alvin Vandergriend is the prayer evangelism associate for Harvest Prayer Ministries.

God’s Voice to Me

By Rebecca Gates

The invitation was issued at the Denominational Prayer Leaders Network meeting to respond to the question, “How do you hear God speak?”

Within a week, I was surprised by a quick and unmistakable experience of hearing from God. During our meetings I had picked up a book, *Go to the Rock*, co-authored by our friend Ruthie Jacobson. A few days later I started reading it, was interrupted, and laid the book face down on a table—intending to finish it later.

The next morning, my husband and I read our regular reading from explorefaith.org. The gospel reading portion of it was shorter than usual: "On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them'" (John 7:37–38).

My husband, a pastor, left the house a few minutes later to prepare for the Sunday worship service. I went to get dressed. On the way out of our bedroom, I picked up the book and carefully noted the page where I had stopped reading the night before.

Once settled in my comfortable chair, I opened the book to finish the chapter. "What's up with all this water?" co-author Dwight K. Nelson asked. "Why, it's the very promise of Jesus Himself echoed in His familiar but stunning words." He then quoted the very words from John 7 that I'd read from my laptop less than an hour before!

He wrapped up the chapter by inviting the reader to pray:

O God, please do a "new thing" in our midst. And start with me. Right now. Raise up a new generation of students and parents and churches and pastors and leaders who will come, thirsty every day, and say, "Here I am, Lord. I'm ready to have You do Your work in me and I'm ready to go wherever You ask and do whatever You say."

"It is time, high time, that you and I listen to that Voice, isn't it?" Nelson concluded.

"Yes!" I responded.

God spoke to me in an unexpected way in my comfortable chair that cold January morning. It's often that way. We just need to be aware of His desire to speak—and then listen carefully and respond.

–Rebecca Gates and her husband Gary are prayer leaders with the Church of the United Brethren in Christ USA.

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