

Ways God Talks To Us.

2 Tim 3:10-17; Deuteronomy 30:11-20

Talking and hearing God, can be a normal everyday experience. Years ago when Time magazine had the headline, “God is dead,” reporters were outside Billy Graham’s home and asked, “Is God dead?” Billy’s reply, “Are you kidding? I just talked with Him.” The Bible says that God made us in order to talk to us. So all of us can listen to and talk to God.

Job 33:14 tells us, “God does speak, sometimes one way and sometimes another, even though people may not understand it.” So the problem is our perception. We were created with the capacity to hear God’s voice, but we need to be tuned on and tuned in to Him.

God communicates in a variety of ways. At times He speaks in spectacular ways – a cloud, a burning bush, writing on the wall, angels, a pillar of fire, prophets, and a donkey. Today let’s look at the four most common ways God speaks to us.

First, the most common way God speaks to us is through the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us, “The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It is God’s way of making us well prepared at every point.”

The word inspired here means in Greek, “God breathed.” So it’s reliable. It will guide us. It can be counted on. It will correct and comfort us. But if we don’t get in to it, how can God talk with us? That’s why reading the Bible is so important. If we don’t regularly communicate with others, can our relationships grow? No!

Likewise, if we are not allowing God to talk to us by reading the Bible regularly, we are missing the number one way God wants to talk with us. If God’s not talking to us, I suspect we aren’t reading the Bible regularly. Are we cultivating the hearing postures, listening attitudes we looked at last week?

I admit the Bible can be an intimidating book. How many books have a number before each sentence? And some of the laws and stories can be quite weird – but no stranger than some of the fiction that’s available today. This book is our manual for life. It’s like a car owner’s manual. If I follow its instructions the car will last longer and have fewer problems. It’s the same when we allow the words of the Bible to speak to us to help us manage our lives. If you aren’t regularly reading the Bible, I recommend you get started. Today there are many study guides that are very helpful. But make sure you spend time reading the Bible and not just reading about the Bible.

Generally every other year I read through the Bible, picking various chapters or books, reading them through and checking them off on a chart I pick up at a Christian book store. I don’t read Exodus through Deuteronomy one right after the other. I alternate with other books. It’s the same for the gospels as well as the prophetic books. Some variety helps me keep going. Then in the off years I pick a diversity of books to help me grow in the faith and take in some teaching and reflection.

A second way God talks to us is through gifted teachers. I suspect all of us at times have sat in a Bible study or listened to a Sunday School teacher or been in worship and it felt as if God was speaking directly to us. At that moment God was using the speaker or the song writer to talk to us. God uses people to share His Word.

The Apostle Paul (I Thess. 2:13) tells us, “When we preached to you, you didn’t think of the words as being just our own, but you accepted it as the very Word of God – which, of course, it was - and it changed your lives.”

I’ve been at more than one funeral where people shared that the deceased’s Christian Education teaching changed their lives. And I don’t remember the specific content of most of the sermons I’ve heard, but one I remember was when I was in grade 8 at a summer camp.

The speaker talked about the God shaped blank inside each one of us. We are made with this. We were challenged as to how we were going to fill it.

As a preacher I'm not able to communicate what you need to hear or even what God wants you to hear on a regular basis. But God talks. He wants me to say something on Sunday that is going to help you on Monday.

Often I'm amazed at what someone says in a meeting that calms people down, or directs them in the right productive direction or gives a very helpful perspective. How often has a friend given counsel that is a turning point in someone's life or keeps you from further trouble? God has the ability to get into our minds through other people in ways we can't plan, predict or manipulate.

Often a thought pops into our heads. At times it's God speaking. If you are a Christian and are open to listening, God often speaks to you and through you and you don't even know it. It's not supernatural – it's just how God has wired us. God has the ability to get into our minds without us even thinking about it – and we are the better for this. God plants ideas. Gives nudges. Says yes at times and no sometimes. God lays a burden on our hearts and we gradually know where it's coming from. God uses people to reach out to us.

In 1 Corinthians 2:13 we read, "We do not speak in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, as we explain spiritual truths to those who are spiritual." When gifted teachers teach, they are actually talking the words of God, what God wants to say. So the more teaching you hear, the more God can talk to you. Today with our tapes, CD's and internet, we can listen to many good teachers. We need some input from God mid week. Which is going to last – God's Word or the news and television shows? So turn off the noise and position yourself to hear God. God speaks to us through the Bible. God speaks to us through people especially gifted teachers.

Third, **God speaks to us through impressions.** God puts ideas into our minds. Most creative ideas come from the Creator. When you are being creative you are being most like God since we are created in God's image. When God puts an idea in our minds we call it inspiration. When the devil puts an idea in our minds its temptation.

John 14:26 tells us, "The Holy Spirit will be your teacher and will bring to your mind all that I have said to you." A lot of things we think up – we're just not that smart. It's the God who loves us who gives them to us. We were made to receive ideas, impressions, gut feelings, warnings, a sense of caring and passions from God. It doesn't feel like God because it's so natural. I'm constantly amazed when I am preparing a sermon at how an article comes to my attention. It may be a new one or an old one I haven't had time to look at and wow! There it is giving me sermon material.

There is a lot of confusion about how we receive impressions from God so I'm going to talk in more detail about this next week. How can we tell the difference between indigestion and a godly impression? But for now, let's recognize that there are two extremes we need to avoid when thinking about impressions. One is mystic and the other is rationalist.

The *rationalist* denies that God ever speaks to us through the mind. They say God only speaks through the Bible and never gives impressions. This is sad because they think, "God never gives me an idea," so they miss out on God's counsel, comfort, care, concern, challenges and guidance.

The *mystic* thinks that every impression they get is from God. That's obviously wrong. These people tend to embarrass themselves and make a lot of mistakes. They say, "God told me to do this," and then go bankrupt. What happened? They missed God. You hear a TV evangelist and get skeptical and cynical. "There's somebody out there in the audience who is supposed to give my ministry a million

dollars.” Never let a religious nut keep you from experiencing the real thing.

Any time we find something counterfeit, that is evidence there is a real thing somewhere. When we find false teachers, that means there are true gifted teachers somewhere. Wherever we find false prophets, that means there are also real prophets. The existence of something fake, implies there must be something real. Satan does not counterfeit anything that doesn't exist. He's doing his best to throw people off track.

Job 33:15 to 17 tells us, “God speaks in dreams and in visions at night when the deep sleep falls as people lie on their beds. He opens their ears in times like that, and gives them wisdom and instruction that they may turn aside from their deeds and keep them from pride.”

Why does God speak to us when we are asleep? Because we're relaxed and not distracted. Our defenses are lowered. So why not ask God a question you want help with, or are curious about, right as you go to sleep? Ask God a question and you give him an opportunity. We may hear something at times.

Most of our dreams are not God speaking. Our minds are simply reorganizing information. At times Satan talks to us in our dreams.

So, we always have to test an impression. Never make a decision on an impression alone. An impression has to match what the Bible says. God never contradicts the Bible. I ran into a guy at several seminars who said God called him to the mission field but his wife didn't want to go. So he divorced her, kept the 5 kids and went looking for financial support. Don't ignore the owners manual. This man needed to wait until his wife heard from God. He needed to question and test his impression.

Fourth, God speaks to us through pain. We don't change when we see the light. We change when we feel the heat. Once the pain is greater than the fear, we change. Our Redeemer is so interested in speaking to us, in having a

personal relationship with us, and in loving us, that our Sustainer even resorts to using pain to get our attention.

Proverbs 20:30 says, “Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways.” We all know this by experience. Not all pain is God speaking to us. But some of it is. God often has to use pain to slow us down to get our attention. Unfortunately, there are some lessons we only learn through pain.

Smart people learn the lessons so they don't have to be repeated. Smart people pay attention so that further pain doesn't take place. The smartest people see other people's pain, and learn from their experiences, so they themselves have less pain in their lives.

The Psalmist confessed, “I used to wonder off until you punished me; now I closely follow all you say...The punishment you gave me was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me to pay attention to your laws.”
(119:67, 71-72)

Pain – physical, emotional and relational is God's loud speaker. It's God shouting – “I'm here, I love you, I'll help if you pay attention and let me.” Pain often is God's way of getting our attention. Don't rush through pain. Don't ignore it. Don't medicate it in ways that are destructive. Evaluate what God is trying to teach you. I guarantee your church family commits to stand by you and love you.

Church is about learning from each other to hear God speak. When we hear God speak – we mature, grow and become better persons. When Jesus is in our lives – we change and we keep changing. Only a power outside of ourselves, greater than ourselves can make us kingdom focused people. This is why it's important to cultivate the right attitudes so we can listen to God. It's why we need to hear God through the Bible, by exposing ourselves to gifted teachers, by evaluating our impressions, and really listen when we are in pain. This gives us the posture to hear our Creator.