

# How Do You Hear From God?

Tim Conway | *illbehonest.com*

**Question:** This question comes from Joshua. He asks this question, "How do you hear from God? How can you tell when He's trying to talk to you?"

## **Discussion:**

**Tim:** That stuck out. "When He's trying to talk to you." I always cringe when people use terminology about the Lord that makes it sound like God tries to do something, but He's just not quite able.

And I was thinking, in my own devotional reading over the last couple days I have been in the part in Acts where Peter is... you remember James was put to death by Herod. And Herod saw that it pleased the people and so he went and apprehended Peter and he threw him in there and he's got chains coming off of him and guards around him. And, I can tell you, when God means to wake Peter up, the angel kicked him in the side. He woke him up. God doesn't just try to wake Peter up. He gets him up. And I thought too about Jonah. When God wants Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah goes to Nineveh. We do have a God who is quite capable of doing exactly that which he wants to do. But anyway, that's not at the heart of this.

"How do you hear from God? How can you tell when He's trying to talk to you? Is it just from reading His Word? Or does He actually speak to you in some way like everybody else talks to you? You may not hear Him audibly, but does He actually speak to you in some way like you would with other people? I'm still new in being radical about Him and I really want to know how to communicate with Him. I know deep inside that I won't get anywhere in life nor be close and intimate with Him if there's no communication. I don't want to just be praying to Him and say what's on my mind and not taking time to listen to what He has to say. Can you help me?"

So what do you say to a guy like that? He wants to hear from God. A guy comes along and he wants to hear from God. Now listen, we don't know him but let's say, let's give him every benefit of the doubt that he's genuinely converted, genuinely saved young man, he comes to you and he says, "How do I hear from God?" Is it just in Scripture or...? What do we tell him? How do you help a guy like that?

I think first we need to think about the ways biblically that we can verify that God speaks. Now, in what ways does God speak? Right here at the beginning, let's not get so uncomfortable with the dispensation that we're in. What I mean by that is, if God spoke in certain ways in the Old Testament and you just feel like He doesn't speak that way anymore, or if He spoke to the apostles in a certain way, but you don't feel He speaks that way anymore, so-be-it. We're not going to argue about that right now. But just what are the ways, at least at one time or another, God has spoken to men? How has He communicated to men?

Let's just throw the ways out. Dreams. Yeah He communicated with Nebuchadnezzar by way of a dream. He communicated with Joseph by way of dreams. We could go on with that, but what are other ways? So in a dream, God can communicate in a dream. Prophets, yes, God communicated through prophets in times past. Hebrews 1:1. He spoke to our fathers through prophets. Yes. And we know that there even is such a thing as a New Testament prophet. Agabus was a New Testament prophet. We know that there were prophetesses. Wasn't Anna a prophetess in the New Testament? Weren't the daughters of Philip? What other ways has God spoken? Through a burning bush. He audibly spoke to Moses out of a bush. What else? I mean, sometimes I don't think it was out of a bush, sometimes I just think it came out of the sky. Like Abraham, he's out under the night's sky and God's telling him, look, if you can count all those stars, you'll be able to count your offspring. Probably just came from above. Or Elijah - there was a whisper.

What other ways has God spoken? Angels. God has sent angels to communicate, "He's risen." He's used intermediaries like Moses, or angels again. The Bible. Well how come we haven't thought of that one yet? God has spoken to us through His Bible. We call it God's Word. All Scripture is God breathed. Yeah, holy men carried along by the Spirit. How else? Casting lots- God has communicated through that. Animals? I can think of a donkey. Through the Urim and Thummim? Do you even know what that is? What was it? You're nodding, yes, what was it? I don't know if we know exactly what they were but they were on the priest's garment. What does a lot look like? Not a lot, but a casting type of lot. What would it look like? How many of you have a picture of a dice in your mind, a die? We don't know what they looked like either.

How else has God spoken? Through visions, and visions are different than dreams. Because remember what happened to Peter? The sheep came down from heaven. That's different than being asleep and having a dream. How about in the past, in the past days, previous times, God spoke to us to our fathers through the prophets, but in these last days He's spoken to us by what? By the Son. Jesus Christ is...have you ever thought about that... Jesus Christ is the Word of God. Why would John use such risky terminology like that, "the Word"? Because words express. Jesus Christ is the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of His nature. He came to declare God. How else? Theophany. So sometimes God, in human form, either as an angel of the Lord. I mean, we know that Abraham was visited by God. Jacob wrestled with somebody that was peculiarly much like God Himself.

How about through creation? Have you ever heard that the heavens declare the handiwork of God? You have this idea of just this speech that's poured out from day to day. "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." Who's voice? Well, the voice of the heavens. And we know that all of creation declares who God is. So much so that men are without excuse. We recognize that in Scripture.

How about Providence? You think God can speak to us just by the things that happen? I mean can you think of just any thing that just happened in Scripture that somebody looked at and just

recognized, "Wow, God is directing me," or "God is speaking to me"? The seventy years, they knew that from a prophet. What I'm looking for is providence that somebody just looked at the providence, aside from anything revealed by the prophets or in the Word of God, and they just looked at that providence and said, "Well, that's God." "God is doing this" or "God is directing me." Just by the providence, just by the circumstance that they... The fleece, see there's something. God communicated to him by whether it was wet or not wet. How about, I mean when you think about the storm that came upon Jonah. Jonah began to interpret lots of things about that storm. In fact, so much so that he said, "You guys just need to throw me over. I'm the problem, obviously. My God is the God of the land and the sea." And they thought, "This is not good. Jonah, why have you done this?"

What are some other things where people just looked and they saw in the providence of things? Esther and Mordecai. Is God mentioned in Esther and Mordecai? I mean, there were things there. There definitely were things. I mean Mordecai could look at this and say, "You may have very likely been raised up for such an hour as this." But definitely looking at circumstances. The heathen tried to read things into it, Paul never makes any comment on it. He just goes on. I'm trying to think, David. Is David interpreting certain things based on the circumstances that arise in his life? I mean, he definitely was told that the child would die. So he had a word from a prophet there. Was he able to interpret? Jesus said that the works that He did declared who He was. Right. I was thinking about that too. I was trying to draw from that. Are there things where David actually looked at some of that and said, "Okay, I can tell what God's doing." He knew that he was the anointed of the Lord, he was going to leave it in God's hands as far as when God would exalt him.

Anyway, there are many ways here. Really it was Nebuchadnezzar that said, "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing and He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay His hand or say to Him, 'What have you done?'" I mean, it's like everything that happens in this world is scripted by the Lord. We have the circumstances speak about God. For us, a lot of times circumstances might be just an answered prayer. I mean God can speak to us by answering the prayer that we ask for. I mean what's He telling us? "I'm pleased with that. I'm pleased to give you that." We can see that. We pray for something, God gives it to us. I mean, God speaks that way. We see the heavens, they declare things. The creation declares things.

How about the Spirit itself? We're told in Romans 8 that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we're children of God. Well, I think a lot of times the Spirit is working through the truth of Scripture. We have 1 Corinthians chapter 2 that talks about just that reality that the Spirit of God is taking the things of God and He's teaching us, He's opening these things up, as far as revealing what these things mean. How about conscience? I mean conscience is another thing. God has obviously equipped us with a conscience. We read in John 16 about the Spirit who is going to convict men of sin. There's conviction, there's conscience. Men have consciences. We see in Romans chapter 2 they accuse or they excuse. God has designed that into men. Now, I

recognize we need Scripture to enlighten that conscience. But we have all Scripture that is breathed out by God.

Another way that you might think, and again, this plays together with Scripture. But we are told in Scripture that God raises up apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers. So you have men that stand up and teach. Oftentimes, God is speaking to us by how God moves that preacher to preach what he preaches from the verses that he preaches from. You have that kind of thing going on. So, here's the thing. The reason I go through all of those things is because, look, if we want to hear God's voice, where are we going to be listening? Well, we're going to be listening to the Word. And we're told to test everything. We're told to test the spirits. Well how do you do that? Well, Scripture... You know what? A prophet comes to me - I can test that prophet. Ultimately, Scripture is the authority. Ultimately, Scripture is that which I know to be God breathed. Why? Because Scripture itself is self-witnessing to the fact that it is God breathed. I know this - I know that the Christ that's revealed in the Scriptures is the true Christ. I know He reveals God to me. I know He speaks to me. I know He speaks through the pages of Scripture. I know that His works speak to me through the pages of Scripture. I don't know about any other Christ that's not the Christ of Scripture.

You tell me about what Christ did and I can't find it in Scripture? I don't know if that's the true Christ or not. How do I tell a true prophet? Well, I test it by Scripture. How can I even know if a dream... you know the devil's pretty active in trying to imitate the things that God does. How do I know if a preacher preaches the Word of God? How do I know if he's speaking to me from God? Well, I test it by Scripture. How do I know if my dream's right? I mean, if you're going to grant that we might still have dreams today or a New Testament prophet might speak something, what do you do? Well, it all comes back to Scripture. Not to say that God doesn't speak through His Spirit, through moving us, convicting us, speaking to our conscience. But how? I mean what truth is going to be the standard by which the Spirit of God is going to convict us? Certainly, the Word of God. That is always the test. That's where we come back to. So we want to be immersed in that.

Now creation, even in creation, if I'm going to properly interpret creation, I need to be reflecting back on Scripture. Because I can recognize there's a Creator out there just by the fact that I look around at this created universe and I recognize, "Wow, there's intelligence." Brethren, I can tell you, these people that tout Intelligent Design, they really do God great dishonor. Because I'll tell you, Scripture tells us that Jesus Christ created everything. It's not just an Intelligent Designer. The Bible tells us who this Intelligent Designer is - it's the Lord Jesus Christ. It tells us lots of things about His greatness and His beauty and His glory and the fact that He is the Savior.

If I'm coming to a young Christian and they're saying to me, "I want to hear from God. Is there any way besides Scripture?" Well, I would say this: You don't want to ignore Scripture, but Scripture is not all. You can have lost people that just sit and camp in Scripture. They can read Scripture. But here's the thing, here's the thing that I have found. That, look, in true Christianity, there is a way that God communicates with His people that is intimate. There is fellowship on a

sweet level. There is more about knowing God than just getting bare minimum facts from His Word. There is Him communicating His love, His delight. The Spirit of God just doesn't bear witness. The Spirit of God causes us to cry out, "Abba Father." There's closeness, there's intimacy, there's family relation, there's husband/wife relationship. We're betrothed to Christ.

And the thing is, how is this to be had? How do we dive further in? I mean, if I want to hear His voice, not audibly, but I want to hear it. And I want to hear it more than just some dry time in the Word of God everyday. I want it to be rich. Well, for one thing, you've got to be in the Word. But if you're seeking, brethren, Scripture says that, in Jeremiah 29:13, "that you will seek Me and you will find Me when you seek Me with all your heart." And who is it that said that everybody has or everybody gets what they want? In other words, what you really desire, God will give to you. And if you really desire Him, He will give Himself to you. But a lot of our desire for Him can be measured by the amount of energy we are willing to put into seeking Him.

And I can tell you this, that those who give themselves, not just to the Word, but to serious seeking of Him in prayer. And I mean, I mean more than casual praying. I mean you spend quality and quantity time with God speaking to Him. Thinking on His Word, having a Bible in hand. And just walking the fields, wherever you go, and spending time just speaking with Him and meditating on His Word. Seasons like we just came out of where you're fasting. But seeking Him, regularly taking time, specifically when you're putting everything else out of your life and you're going to be with Him.

I'll tell you this. If you work at your relationship with God, and I mean you're pursuing it with a passion because you really want to hear Him and you want to find Him, you want manifestations... Look, all you have to do is read the biographies. You know there are Christian men and women who have gone deeper than most everybody else. And if you look at their seeking after God, it's never casual. Those that have drank deepest from that cup of fellowship with God, they have given... isn't it like any relationship? You'll never have a friendship unless you work at being a friend. You'll never have a good marriage unless you work at that marriage. You're never going to have a deep relationship with God unless you nurture it. Just like a garden. I mean, you have to water that thing. You've got to put forth that effort.

You say, "What?! You're talking works?" I'm talking this. Yes, when there is a relationship... I'm not talking about this is how you're saved. We're talking about going deep. We're talking about hearing God speak to us in ways that lots of other people maybe perhaps don't know or know very infrequently. If you're wanting to go deep, who is it that gets to ascend the hill of the Lord? Who is it that gets to dwell in the glory, I mean, just dwell in the Shekinah Glory where it so overwhelms your soul, where maybe, I mean, when you're actually enjoying God in a way that it's just eclipsing the rest of this world, where you're feeling like I just want to be swept away into glory? How do you get there? Well, you get there through pursuing God. I mean, Scripture says to us that everyone who asks, receives; the one who seeks, finds. God wants to be sought. I not only could prove to you from Scripture that God wants you to see... it's the glory of God to hide things. Have you ever read that? Well, it's the glory of God to hide not only truth, it's the glory of

God to hide Himself. And He will be found by those who are desperate to find Him. Just like truth needs to be dug, you will find treasure if you dig for it.

Listen, God is a treasure to be dug for. And He'll not be had cheaply. I mean His intimacy and His fellowship and His closest manifestations are not to be had casually and cheaply. And it's just true, I mean, look at the people in Scripture. Look at David. Do you not find David and you just see him, his prayer life, all you have to do is read the Psalms to know how his prayer life was. He panted after God! That's not casual, that doesn't lead to a casual life.

I encourage you all. Just, seek the Lord. Seek the Lord, and it takes prayer, and it takes seeking His face. It takes meditation. Oh, there's nothing like just getting in those places where you're undisturbed, and you can think on His person, on His Word, you can talk to Him, you can sing to Him. Just getting alone where you can sing to the Lord. Where you can talk to Him. Where you can open up the Word. Maybe you're memorizing some Scripture, and you're working through the words and you're thinking what that teaches you about Christ or about His salvation, about the character of God. You're just meditating on the person of God and communicating with that God who you're meditating with. If you're given to reading Scripture for 15 minutes a day and praying for 5 minutes a day and some it's like every other day, or every third day, you're not going to know that kind of life. But you can read somebody like Hudson Taylor and you find how just swept into glory... Somebody like Jonathan Edwards or his wife. Pessen, Edward Pessen. I mean, you just read some of these lives or even some people you know that are alive that have had tremendous experiences with God, you'll never find that they deal with their relationship with God as though it's some cheap thing, some trivial thing. They take it dead serious, and it is THE PRIORITY in their life. I mean, second to none. I want more of God. If God's second, third, fourth on your list, you're just not going to have what the people have that put Him first. And in fact, if you just regularly can live your life and without Him first, you know Jesus would call into question whether you can even be His disciple.