

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, May 7, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

LISTEN  **Up**

LEARNING TO LISTEN TO GOD

“God’s Goal in Communicating”

Various Scripture

“There is no such thing as an accident in the life of a child of God. There are some things God may allow. There are some things that God sends. There are attention-getters that God brings into our lives, but there are not accidents.” – Dr. Charles Stanley

“A child of God, walking in the Spirit, is to look for the handiwork, the footprint, and the handprint of almighty God in every single situation of life. God is sovereign, and we are His children.” – Dr. Charles Stanley

God never says anything unless it is important and worth remembering. He doesn’t engage in chitchat. He doesn’t preface His remarks with anything. God is always to the point. He has something to say, and he says it precisely and concisely.

God speaks clearly because He has specific objectives in mind. Thus it is to our great benefit to know His goal in speaking to us. During my ministry, I have seen that God’s purpose in communication seem to fall into three primary areas.

3 Primary Purposes for God’s Communication with Us:

(1) That we may comprehend the truth – When God speaks to us, His first goal is that we may comprehend the truth. He desires that we understand fully what He is saying. Why? Listen to what Jesus says in John 8:31-32, *“³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching (if you really listen to me, really hear me, really take in what I am saying and let it change your life), you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”* Truth here has reference not only to the facts surrounding Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God but also to the teaching that He brought. I believe that God has three areas in which He wants us to comprehend: He wants us to understand the truth about Himself, He wants us to understand the truth about ourselves, He wants us to understand truth about others. When we begin to understand the truth of who God is and have a better understanding of ourselves as well as others, we are thoroughly equipped to be fruitful, productive servants on earth. Listen to what God instructed Moses to say to His people in Deuteronomy 32:46-47, *“⁴⁶ He said to them, ‘Take to heart all the words I have*

solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. ⁴⁷ *They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”* What God communicates to us is life to us.

- (2) **That we may conform to the truth** – The second part of God’s goal in communicating to us is that we may be conformed to the truth. In **Romans 8:29** Paul wrote these words, ^{“29} *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”* Paul wrote that the Lord has predestined us “to be conformed to the image of His son.” How is God going to conform us to His image? By revealing the truth of His likeness. As we are confronted with the truth, we can do one of two things: we can refuse to be pushed into God’s mold; or we can yield to Him and fashioned into His likeness. As Dr. Charles Stanley says, “God never speaks in order to entertain us. God speaks that we may be made like Jesus.” We are not simply to hear but also to obey – not simply to glance at the Word but also to grasp the Word. WE are either in the process of resisting God’s truth or in the process of being shaped and molded by His truth.
- (3) **That we may communicate the truth** – The third objective God has in speaking is that we may communicate His truth. God never gives us anything to keep for ourselves. Whether it is money, insight, or truth, it has to be shared. Jesus said in His great command in **Matthew 28:19-20**, ^{“19} *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ²⁰ *and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* To those who witnessed His Ascension He declared in **Acts 1:8**, ^{“8} *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* Jesus very clearly let His disciples know that the truth He had taught them during the past three years was not to be kept in a personal reservoir of knowledge. They were to give away everything they had received. And in **2 Timothy 2:2** Paul admonished his young pupil, Timothy, with these words, ^{“2} *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”* Timothy was to communicate the truth he had learned through Paul’s instruction to others who would, in turn, pass it along.

We must be honest in evaluating our responses to God’s communication. Considering what God has graciously taught us over the years, are we deliberately applying these truths to our lives on a daily basis? When we comprehend the truth, are we conforming ourselves to the image of Christ? Are we communicating this truth to others? Are we even recognizing His message when it comes? And how can we know He is speaking to us?

HOW GOD GET OUR ATTENTION?

We must recognize that His message is of utmost importance, deserving our full and complete attention. Lest we become dull and insensitive to His voice, God has His ways of gaining our undivided attention.

When we walk in the Spirit, our spiritual antennas are alert to God, and we can hear what God is saying. This should be the normal Christ life, living keenly responsive to the voice of God in

whatever fashion He may choose to speak to us. We can be involved with our business or our family life and hear God say something, and we immediately know what to do.

The problem is that we don't always walk in the Spirit. There are times when we choose to do things our own way. We are headed so fast in a given direction that if God spoke, we couldn't hear Him because we simply are not tuned in to Him.

God is aware of the problem. To rectify it, He uses many ways of getting our total, absolute attention to what He wants to communicate. More than likely you will discover that God has already used one or more of these principles in your life to get your attention. Perhaps you will discover the solution to a problem that has been hampering your spiritual effectiveness over a period of time. You may find that the problem you thought you had was simply God's way of trying to get you to focus on Him.

5 Ways God May Get Your Attention:

- 1. A Restless Spirit (Esther 6:1ff)** – The 6th chapter of Esther is a beautiful example of God's working through a restless spirit. In this case, it involved King Ahasuerus who had been unwittingly duped by his prime minister, Haman. Because Haman hated all Jews, especially Esther's relative, Mordecai, he had tricked the king into signing an edict for the destruction of the Jews – men, women, and children – all in one day.

After he had signed the proclamation, the king could not sleep because of a restless spirit. **Esther 6:1** reports, *“that night the king could not sleep, so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him.”* That is when the king discovered that Mordecai, whom Haman wanted to kill (along with the other Jews), had actually saved the king's life earlier by reporting a death plot by two men. Instead of the Jews being killed, Haman was executed and Mordecai honored. And it all started with a restless spirit, sent by the Lord to King Ahasuerus.

I believe that one of the simplest ways God can get our attention is to make us restless. We may call this a lack of peace, or an uneasiness inside, but whatever we call it we need to listen to that restlessness that we are feeling. We may be going about our business, at work, at church, at home and a restlessness sets in on us. We can't put our finger on it; we don't know why it is there; we can't identify it, we don't even know exactly what is happening... but we have an uneasiness in our hearts. When such a time comes, the wise thing to do is to stop and ask the Lord what He is trying to say. When you become restless in your spirit, don't run. Simply stop and listen to the voice of God, pray and ask Him what He is trying to say to you.

- 2. A Word from Others (2 Samuel 12:1ff)** – A second way that God gets our attention is speaking to us through others. Probably the best known Biblical example of this is Nathan's confrontation with David in 2 Samuel 12. Having sinned against God in the incident with Bathsheba and Uriah, David apparently continued his reign without any visible evidence of a guilty conscience. **2 Samuel 12: 1** sets the stage, *“The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said...”* God had given insight to Nathan which David desperately needed to hear.

This has always been a mode of God's communication to others. Certainly He spoke through Moses, and Joshua, and He spoke through the prophets of old to His people. He spoke through the Apostle Paul and through Peter, through John. He has spoken throughout the history of Christianity and the church to bring about Great Awakenings and Revival that spread throughout the world. He spoke through men like Martin Luther, and John Calvin, through George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards. He spoke through Charles Haddon Spurgeon and D.L. Moody... today through men like Billy Graham, and Charles Stanley. God still speaks today through preachers, evangelists, missionaries and Christian teachers, but it doesn't stop there. On a more personal level God sometimes speaks through a Christian brother or sister in our church family who shares an encouraging word or a word of caution or warning. He speaks through family members and friends. Actually, the people we ought to listen to the most are those we live with every day. Those people who love us the most, those who pray for us the most, are often the instruments God uses to reveal Himself to us. I can name several who, in passing conversation, have said something that has altered the course of my life to some degree and they may not even know it, but God used them. Just a simple passing word, just a word here or there from someone close to us (or on rare occasions from a casual acquaintance), can have dramatic consequences.

That is why we need to be very careful about what we say. Recognizing that we can be used as God's spokespersons should cause us to soberly examine our dialogue. Perhaps God has a message for the listener that he has chosen to deliver, and our talking about the weather or a football game would detract from the message. We should seek to be alert, sensitive, and available to God's voice.

A Word of Caution: I do want to give a word of caution here. Although God can and sometimes does speak through others, beware of those who come to you and say, "God told me to tell you..." and then proceed to tell you what God has supposedly told them to tell you. I am always a bit skeptical and leery of this line of conversation for any number of reasons, not the least of which is that it is a bit presumptuous for anyone to think that they speak for God. Second of all, I believe that most of the time when God does speak through someone to an individual that "someone" He chose to speak through more often than not doesn't even know it... that God spoke to you through them.

4 Applicable Principles for Discerning if Something is From God:

Principle #1: God will never ask you to do something that is against His Word or inconsistent with His Word.

Principle #2: God will not ask you to do something is inconsistent with His character and who He reveals Himself to be in His Word

Principle #3: If God is not getting the glory or being glorified through our actions in some way it's not from Him.

Principle #4: Always allow for the possibility that there could be external influences on what you are dreaming of seeing.

3. **Blessings** – A third way God speaks is through blessing us in most unusual ways. This is the sort of attention-getting method we really enjoy. Paul illustrated this idea in **Romans 2:4** when he said, *“Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance.”* God can use unusual, abundant blessing to gain our attention. The blessings may be spiritual or financial, or they may have something to do with the home or a vocation. Whatever they are, God just seems to pile them upon us. God can’t use that method on everyone, because selfish people would get more independent, more self-centered, and more self-seeking and would totally ignore God. But He does get our attention by blessing us because the motive behind each of His methods is His love for us.

Have you ever thought of God’s blessings as His voice? In the chart below see if you can come up with what God might be saying from each of the unusual blessings listed in the left hand column.

GOD’S BLESSING SPEAKING	
GOD’S BLESSING	GOD’S VOICE
A rainbow in the sky (Gen. 9:13)	“I will protect and shelter you.”
Manna from heaven (Num. 11:7-9)	“I will provide for all your needs.”
A leafy shade plant and a worm (Jon. 4:6)	“I will show mercy on who I show merch!”
A baby for a barren couple (Lk. 1:5-25)	“The Messiah is coming, prepare the way!”
A rushing mighty wind (Acts 2. 1-2)	“The Holy Spirit will fill and empower you!”

4. **Unanswered Prayer (2 Corinthians 12:7ff)** – The fourth method God sometimes uses to get our attention is through unanswered prayer. As long as our petitions are sufficiently granted, we can cruise along, enjoying God’s blessings and provision. But when a particular urgent need arises and the heavens are brass, God has our complete attention.

Often, such seeming silence is a ripe time to conduct a spiritual self-examination under the illumination of the Holy Spirit. God’s Word indicates there are reasons why some supplications are not answered:

Some Reasons Prayers Go Unanswered:

- (1) **Wrong motives (James 4:3)** – *“³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”*
- (2) **Disobedience (1 John 3:21-22)** – *“²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.”*
- (3) **Asking outside the will of God (1 John 5:14)** – *“¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”*

Think about this... the Lord used Paul’s thorn in the flesh as a teaching tool that has ministered to countless millions of believers. Listen to it in **2 Corinthians 12:7-9**, *“⁷ or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, ‘My grace*

is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” Paul’s prayer went unanswered, but at the same time, his focus shifted from considering the severity of his problem or trial or hardship to a new understanding of God’s grace. When Paul opened his letters with his familiar “grace and peace” salutation, he well knew the meaning of the phrase. Unanswered prayer brought Paul into a new dimension of dependence on God.

- 5. Unusual Circumstances** – Unusual circumstances, the fifth method to get our attention, often causes us to turn our eyes and heart to God. The story of Moses is a vivid example. Moses had grown up in Pharaoh’s household. No doubt he was a tremendous warrior and a competent military strategist. One day, however, he decided to take things into his own hands... he killed an Egyptian soldier. He fled for his life, and the next 40 years he spend on the backside of the desert in Midian, wearing the same old odorous clothes that smelled like a bunch of dirty sheep.

Because Moses was a strong-willed man and had to be broken, God got his attention. We read in Exodus 3:1-4, *“Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.”* Moses had seen lots of fires and lots of burning bushes, but he had never seen a bush that blazed and was not consumed! His response was this... *“So Moses thought, ‘I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.’”* *“When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’ And Moses said, ‘Here I am.’”*

Out of an unusual experience, God got his attention. Moses had to stop his daily routine to see what was going on. When he did, God spoke to him. We must learn to live for the presence of God in every circumstance of life. Let me remind you of the two quotes we began with in this study:

“A child of God, walking in the Spirit, is to look for the handiwork, the footprint, and the handprint of almighty God in every single situation of life. God is sovereign, and we are His children.” – Dr. Charles Stanley

“There is no such thing as an accident in the life of a child of God. There are some things God may allow. There are some things that God sends. There are attention-getters that God brings into our lives, but there are not accidents.” – Dr. Charles Stanley

God knows exactly what it takes to get our attention, and often it is through highly usual circumstances that we stand back and take note of what God is doing in our lives.

Some Unusual Circumstances God May Use:

- (1) **Failure** – Biblical example = Ai (Joshua 7:5)
- (2) **Financial Collapse** – Biblical example = Midian (Judges 6:1-6) *Judges 17:6, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”*
- (3) **Tragedy** – Biblical example = Firey Serpents (Numbers 21:4-7)
- (4) **Sickness and Affliction** – Biblical example = Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:24-25)

IDENTIFYING THE VOICE OF GOD

People often say, “When I listen to God how do I know if it is God speaking or some other voice?” Or, “I’ve asked the Lord to give me direction, but it’s as if I hear two voices. How do I know which is the Lord’s?” These are legitimate questions that need to be answered. Identifying God’s voice isn’t always easy, but it is absolutely essential that we learn to discern and listen accurately. The following are the questions we must ask and their corresponding principles that are worthy of our review:

4 Applicable Questions to Ask and Corresponding Principles for Discerning if Something is From God:

1. **Is it inconsistent or contradictory to the Word of God?** - If it is not consistent with the Word of God reject it. A dream or a vision is never to supersede or take the place of what God has revealed in His Word. Remember the cannon of Scripture is closed! There is nothing being added or subtracted from it ***Principle: God will never ask you to do something that is against His Word or inconsistent with His Word.***
2. **Is it inconsistent with the character of God and who He reveals Himself to be?** – For example **1 John 4:8** reveals God to be a God of love when it says, ***“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”*** So when the Westboro Baptist Church in Kansas says God appeared to them and told them to carry pickett signs that say “God Hates Queers” that was not God that told them to do that. God doesn’t hate people. He love man... all mankind. He sent His son to die for man... all mankind. He hates sin... all sin (no matter what it is), because it destroys man, and ruins lives, but he doesn’t hate people. He is not going to instruct you to do something to communicate the message that He hates people. ***Principle: God will not ask you to do something is inconsistent with His character and who He reveals Himself to be in His Word***
3. **Is it going to glorify God or me?** – Who will get the attention, the praise, the glory, be magnified by this. This may also cut to the heart of the matter... the question of motive may help us discern what we are really hearing or seeing. ***Principle: If God is not getting the glory or being glorified through our actions in some way it’s not from Him.***
4. **Could this be coming from something or someone other than God?** – If there is a question in your minds, wait, process, pray, let God make it more clear before you move. Remember **Romans 14:23** says, ***“²³ ...for whatever is not from faith is sin.”*** ***Principle: Always allow for the possibility that there could be external influences on what you are seeing or hearing.***

FACTORS THAT DETERMINE HOW GOD COMMUNICATES

3 Factors that May Determine How God Communicates with Us: (Luke 15:

1. **Your relationship with Him** – Your proximity, relationally to the Father will determine your ability to hear him.
2. **Your understanding of Him** – Your grasp of your Father, who He is, what He does for you will enable you to want to hear Him.

- 3. Your attitude of Him** – How did the prodigal son's attitude to the Father change and how might that have may communication with Him better?