

How God Communicates *With Us*

| **Cultivate the habit of listening to God** |

There were special reasons for the methods which God chose to use throughout history to communicate with His people. The fact that God chose a particular method in the past is no guarantee that God will use that method today; He may do so if He wishes.

He has given us His Word as the primary means of communication as an absolute guide to faith and life. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Through the Old Testament and During Christ's Ministry

In Old Testament times (prior to the cross) God spoke to key individuals, but not in general to the ordinary men and women. He appeared individually to men like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Samuel and through them to the people. Under the Law the individual was represented by the priests who acted on their behalf.

Person to Person

"Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice . . ."

1 Kings 11:9

Genesis 2:19; 3:9; 17:1

Through Christ

"Moreover, the angel of the LORD said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they shall be too many to count."

Genesis 16:10

Genesis 16:7-13; Genesis 18:1-33; Exodus 3:2 - 4:17

During His Ministry

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John 1:14

John 14:7; John 15:15; John 17:26; Hebrews 1:2

Through the Scriptures

"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, . . ."

Joshua 1:8-9

Exodus 20:1 onwards; Psalm 119; Proverbs 2:1-8; Hebrews 1:1

Through the Prophets

"When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him."

Deuteronomy 18:22

1 Kings 14:18; 2 Kings 17:23; Hebrews 1:1; James 5:10

Through Dreams and Visions

*"After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."
Genesis 15:1*

Genesis 46:2; Psalm 89:19

Through Angels

"And when he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him; and when he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth . . ." (two were angels, the other the Lord)

Genesis 18:2

Genesis 19; Daniel 9:21; 2 Samuel 24:16

After the Resurrection

After the resurrection everything changed. God had revealed Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ in person who, in turn, made God known to the disciples. The disciples (apostles) preached the Gospel with God's authority without, in the beginning, any New Testament writings. During this period of change we find God still speaking through some of the ways we noted in the Old Testament.

The individual believer no longer needed to come through the priest but could now come directly and boldly to the throne of grace, to the Father Himself. In Matthew 27:41 we read how the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. God was no longer to be found in the temple, the way to Him was open to every believer.

"The rending of the veil symbolised the wonderful truth that the way was now open to God (Hebrews 10:14-26). There was no more need of temples, priests, altars, or sacrifices. Jesus had finished the work of salvation on the cross."

Warren Wiersbe

The individual believer was, and is now, a 'new creation' indwelt by the Holy Spirit and no longer under the dominion of the Law. This personal access to the God Himself was a major change from Old Testament times.

Through the Apostles

"This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour spoken by your apostles."

2 Peter 3:2

Ephesians 4:11; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Jude 1:17

Through the Holy Spirit

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words."

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Matthew 4:1, 10:20; Acts 1:2, 2:4, 10:19-20, 11:28, 13:2, 13:4, 15:28, 16:6

After the Lifetime of the Apostles

Gradually the New Testament writings took form from about AD 45-50 to AD 95, and as the apostles themselves died the emphasis switched from direct revelation through Christ and then the apostles to the written letters, now themselves considered as Scripture.

Through the Scriptures

"All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

2 Timothy 3:16

1 Timothy 4:13, 5:18; 2 Peter 1:20-21; John 10:35; Galatians 3:8

Through the Holy Spirit (as above)

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words."

1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Matthew 4:1, 10:20; Acts 1:2, 2:4, 10:19-20, 11:28, 13:2, 13:4, 15:28, 16:6

God's Communication Today

God may if He wishes communicate to us today in any of the ways in which He has in the past - He is, after all, God.

Consider the privilege we have. In the Old Testament men and women had to come through the designated authority, e.g., Moses or the priests. But now every individual believer has direct access to God Himself and God communicates with each believer on an individual basis. Is that not incredible?

We become aware of God's communication to us through His Word and through His Spirit, in our mind where we think, evaluate, meditate, feel emotions, understand and make decisions.

Our minds are the subject of constant bombardment from a number of sources which we will consider later. Paul tells us in Romans 12:2 . . .

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

The Word - God's Primary Means of Communication Today

God's primary means of communicating with us today is the Bible. Its teaching and principles, correctly interpreted in the light of context, history, language and grammar is our supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

God may also use Scripture to speak personally through the Holy Spirit to an individual. Such use of the Word is subjective and does not have the same authority as Scripture itself.

Through the Holy Spirit

God may also communicate with us directly through His Spirit . . .

"For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words."

1 Corinthians 2:10-13

The Spirit may communicate with us through the Word and also by putting thoughts directly into our minds as we listen to Him and discern His voice.

Through Others

God speaks to us through other people. Through Pastors and teachers, through other believers, through those to whom we are responsible. We are to . . .

"Exhort, encourage, instruct, teach, admonish and provoke one another."

Through the Preaching and Teaching of the Word

God speaks to His people through the preaching and teaching of the shepherds He has placed over them.

The Clamour for Attention

There are four inputs into our minds, into our thinking processes, the 'voice' of the flesh, the 'voice' of the world, the 'voice' of the enemy and the 'voice' of God. Often the first three come with an incessant clamour drowning out the 'voice' of God.

We need answers to several questions. How are these voices manifest to us? How can we tell the difference between one 'voice' and another? How can we cultivate the habit of listening to God?

The 'Voice' of the Flesh

"For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Romans 8:5-8

The flesh in essence is neutral but is used here in the sense in which Paul uses it in Romans seven as the seat of the principle of sin.

The flesh is, in essence, self, the self that Jesus said we are to deny (Mark 8:34). It sets its desire against the Spirit and its deeds are evident, immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, disputes, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, bitterness, wrath, clamour, slander and the like. (Galatians 5:19-21)

The flesh is the source of the evil desires to which James refers in James 1:13-14. It reminds us of memories of past sin and temptation. Replays old records from the past and seduces us down the same paths again.

Living in the flesh is using the idols and coping mechanisms which we have developed to meet our needs for love, acceptance, security, assurance and forgiveness; needs which only God can really meet.

The 'Voice' of the World

"Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever." 1 John 2:15-17

The 'voice' of the world comes through what we see, hear and read in the world around us. It comes through what others in the world are doing and, apparently, getting away with. It can result in envy of the wicked and their prosperity. It can cause our standards to change as the moral climate in the world around us changes.

Inputs from the world can effect how we think, and behave, and often do. Often the ideas sound plausible and attractive. We think the world is real because we can see, feel and touch it but God says it is temporary and will disappear one day. The only lasting reality is the spiritual realm (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

The inputs from the world often match the desires of the flesh and are to that degree more potent.

The 'Voice' of the Enemy

"But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?" Acts 5:3

The enemy is the deceiver of the world sowing lies and deceit in the hearts and lives of men and women everywhere (2 Corinthians 11:3). Satan does not care what the nature of the error is as long as it draws men and women away from the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. So the cults, evolution, new age teaching all come from the same source, our spiritual enemy.

"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies." John 8:44

Scripture is not very explicit about the means by which the enemy can communicate with believers. Some passages give us clues . . .

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road." Matthew 13:19

In the verse above the enemy takes away the truth that has been sown.

"But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." Mark 8:33

In the verse above the enemy has used Peter to try and side-track the Lord Jesus.

It would seem that the enemy can put ideas, thoughts, temptations into our minds. It is unlikely that he can read our minds or be aware of our thoughts. Just as someone may speak to you and you hear the words in your mind but they can not discern what you are thinking.

The thoughts put into our minds by the enemy are always destructive and deceitful. Just as Satan deceived Adam and Eve he tries to deceive us. His input involves lies, seduction, suggestions about the prospective pleasure of some sinful behaviour which is still in our memory and personal attacks. The enemy tells us; “you’re useless,” “you’re ugly,” “nobody loves you,” “you’re stupid,” “you’re a failure,” “you would be better dead.”

Thoughts like, “everybody else does it,” “the Bible isn’t relevant today,” “its not really God’s Word,” “you don’t have to be fanatical about it all.”

The 'Voice' of the Lord

“And a voice came to him, “Arise, Peter, kill and eat!” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean.”

Acts 10:13-14

The 'voice' of the Lord in contrast is different from all the others. He says in His Word that we should seek wisdom, insight and understanding. What He says to us may not sound as loud as the other voices but it is the most precious.

God’s 'voice' always speaks truth, He never lies and never fails to keep His promises. He never tempts us to do wrong. What He says is always in line with the teaching and principles of Scripture. It always honours Himself, will further His Kingdom and build His people up. It is always for our highest good and His glory. He always speaks out of love.

God speaks to us primarily through His Word as we read, study and meditate on what it teaches; and also through His Spirit as we listen to Him.

The bottom line is that faith is living in obedience to the Word of God, even when it seems to conflict with human reason . . .

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.”
Proverbs 3:5-6

“There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”
Proverbs 14:12

Proverbs 16:9, 20:24; Psalms 31:3, 48:14, 73:24; James 4:15

Take time to cultivate the presence of the Lord and learn to distinguish His 'voice' in the midst of the clamour of daily life.

How Do we Know Whose the 'Voice' is?

We can discern the origin of the 'voice' through what is said and how this relates to the teaching of Scripture and God’s revealed purposes.

The origin of some thoughts is easily discerned, others are more subtle. Satan even appearing as an angel of light at times.

Listening to God

Conversation has to be two way. If only one person speaks it is not a conversation. Remember God speaks to us primarily through His Word but also through His Spirit; He knows every thought and hears us as we pray to Him.

Cultivate the habit of listening to God

Learn to abide in Christ, moment by moment.

As you read, study, memorise and meditate on the Word ask Him to give you understanding and insight. **Take time to listen for His answers.**

Don't be in hurry when you pray, take time to be quiet in His presence and learn to discern His 'voice' speaking to you.

Learn to be comfortable with silence, at first in private prayer then in public prayer.

Learn to bring everything to Him in an attentive attitude.

Confirm your thoughts with the Word itself and God's revealed purposes.

Learn to discern His 'voice' through listening habitually.

Bob Cass (UCB notes 17th August 2000)

1. Listen to His voice before you listen to the voice of doubters.
2. Listen to His voice before you listen to the ideas and suggestions of others
3. Listen to His voice and your attitude will change miraculously. When you've heard from Him, you can face anything.
4. Listen to His voice before you make any commitments of your time, your resources or your strength. What you have is too precious to waste.
5. Listen to His voice before you make any significant change in your life, or you may regret it.

Recognising His voice is what will enable you to . . .

Know your assignment.

Discern the pitfalls.

Release your faith for the next season of achievement.

Why do We not Listen to God's 'Voice'?

There are many reasons and those that follow are not necessarily in any particular order.

Pride and arrogance, we set our minds above the Scriptures and God Himself.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Neither are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

Isaiah 55:8-9

We want to retain control of our own lives and are unwilling to really make Him Lord.

We feel guilt and shame over our own sinfulness.

We are often afraid of what God may ask us to do.

We often fear what God may ask us to give up.

We live in the flesh rather than the Spirit.

We lack real commitment.

We are often too busy with all sorts of things, some good, some bad.

We may not be saved and have no desire to hear what God has to say to us.

We allow the clamour of the world, the flesh and the enemy to drown out His 'voice'.

We often make our prayers a long list of requests so that we don't have time to listen.

The Christian Life

Jesus said in John 12:24 . . .

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

The seven metamorphic changes in a grain of wheat parallel the growth of a Christian, to full maturity, as a fruit bearing disciple of Jesus Christ, and are also good signs which confirm disciple potential. They are . . .

1. Softening of the grain of wheat when it is placed in the soil.
2. Enlarging of the grain of wheat as it begins to grow.
3. Changing its chemistry from starch to sugar.
4. Breaking the hard shell so that root formation can begin.
5. Growing roots downwards to develop a root structure to support a plant above ground.
6. Growing of a sturdy green shoot above ground.
7. Bearing fruit.

"I have been told of an experiment in which one grain became 32,500 grains within three years.

It is significant to note that most of this development takes place underground."

Charles W. Dunn

Groping for a Pole

"Every year I plant a row of pole string beans in our backyard. Soon after a seed sprouts in the damp spring soil, its tendril begins to reach upward, moving back and forth, searching, groping for something that will direct its climb. Eventually, if it finds nothing, it will collapse to the dirt. Continuing to twist and turn it will often grab hold of itself in a desperate attempt to find some support for climbing. Ultimately it will become a tangled confusion with pittance of the harvest it might have had.

But if it finds a pole . . . it will become artistry in motion. Climbing higher and higher, lush foliage, blossoms and long crisp string beans.

Biblical truth concerning God and His Lordship is that pole, the Person around whom the Spirit will entwine God's child. By nature God's child reaches upward; by the Word of God he finds direction."

David C. Needham