



INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE

A Seminary Program for Training Christian Leaders

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Vol 37 • Summer • 2007

I want to thank each of you who responded to our first article on 'Hearing God' by sending questions, comments, and testimonials. Most responses fell into two categories. Some came from those who have never heard God and want to know how. They believe God speaks with His people but have never experienced it. However the majority of responses came from those who had received words (either personally or delivered by the prophecy of another) which later proved false or contradicted other words they believed to be true. Some of the words which seemed alive and real at the time they received them later proved to be false. As they examined other words from the past, they realized that many seemed to be a mixture of truth and error. How could they have been so wrong? Because some of the words they receive come true and others do not, they have become confused not knowing when God really is speaking to them and they want certainty. Both those who have never heard God and those that are confused have one central core problem; **they don't know how to hear God.**

How God Speaks - Basic Principles

We will begin our study by covering some basic principles taken from scripture about hearing God. As you study the Scriptures you will find patterns in the way God communicated with His people. These patterns apply to all of God's communication with man throughout history and are constant, never varying. The Bible does not record even one incident when God deviated from these patterns. Because these patterns never vary, we are able to extract principles from them. Each of these principles is also constant. Once we learn and apply these principles it becomes much easier to discern if the methods we are using to hear God are valid. If a word you received or a method you used violates any of these principles then it was not God talking to you.

Those to whom God speaks hear Him - God is fully capable to get His message through no matter what the surrounding conditions. No one ever had to hush the people around them nor ask God to repeat Himself. There is never a need to say, "What did you say; I didn't quite catch all of that?"

When God speaks, His words carry His authority and power God's word carries the authority and authenticity of its author, and is to be taken seriously, to disobey or ignore it is sin. The word of God is held with great reverence. His word is described as a living thing with power of its own. (*Hebrews 4:12*)

God speaks with purpose - When God speaks, He speaks with defined purpose and meaning based on His agenda not ours. *We do not get to decide its meaning; God does.* God does not speak of trivial things nor without reason. Each time He speaks, He has intent, meaning and purpose. He may teach, give instruction, mandates, or directions, or He may pronounce forgiveness and renewed blessing upon those who have repented and turned back toward Him. At other times, He proclaims His judgments and curses over those who have walked away from Him. His word has a purpose accomplishing everything it is sent out to do. (*Isaiah 55:11*)

God does not mumble - When God speaks, *He speaks clearly.* No matter how God spoke, whether audibly, or in their spirit, in every case, the person being spoken to by God heard Him

clearly. There is never any confusion about the content of the message. The hearer may not fully understand the meaning of the word until later, but the message itself is precise and distinct. He does not give one part of the message clearly than trail off slowly becoming indiscernible from our own thoughts.

God does not ramble - God does not idly chit chat nonchalantly over trivial matters. When we speak with each other, we often include gregarious interactive conversation that has very little real function or purpose, such as asking how someone's day went, or commenting about the weather. When God speaks, He is concise and to the point. Nor does God speak gushy words of inner healing, to mend our broken heart. God does not give personal words of comfort to those who nurture a wounded spirit and go about in search of consolation and comforting. (He does heal the broken heart. But like so many other issues, those that need inner healing receive it only when they are obedient and lay aside their hurts, forgive others, stop looking at self, and focus completely on God, accepting His purpose and mission as their own.)

God is not fickle - God does not change what He says to people, nor apply His word one way to one person and another way to another person. Nor does He give one set of instructions, then change or modify them later to meet new circumstances.

False Teachings & Deceptive Practices

Before we study how God talks with us, (discussed later in this series) we will first look at some common techniques mistakenly used by some, as they attempt to hear God. Most of these at first seem to be valid teachings, but if you examine them closely they are a mixture of truth and error. Each of these methods is not found in the scriptures and is false. They each have just enough truth that if we are not careful we would think they are biblically sound.

Tuning In Method - This very deceptive teaching is based on the assumption that there is so much 'noise' going on within us it hinders us from hearing God. It teaches that we need to get away from all the distractions around us and quiet the stray thoughts in our minds so we can 'tune in' and hear God's voice. The premise is that our own mind gets in the way of hearing God and that we need to practice emptying our mind. The more we can clear our mind, the easier it is to hear that still small voice [God's voice - taken from Elijah's experience at Mt Horeb - 1 Kings Chapter 19] and not have it obscured by all the chatter within our head.

Those who teach this method take Jesus' instruction not to make a public spectacle out of ourselves, [showing off] but to pray privately, (Matthew 6:5-8) and change it into a need to have a 'quiet time' in our own prayer closet where we can go to be alone with God. Preferably this prayer closet should be a place that hinders interruption, where we can focus on God. They then expound upon this by teaching the importance of quiet listening, and explain the need to silence our inner spirit, and clearing our mind of every interruption.

Open Bible & Point Method - This method is just as it sounds. People ask a question, close their eyes, open their Bible at random, point, open their eyes and read. They then look at the passage they pointed to and try to figure out how it answered their question or solved their problem. The concept is very simple. People believe God will guide their hands when they open the Bible so that it will open where He wants it and they will point to the reference He wants them to see. They then have to figure out how the passage applies to their situation. [A person may have to repeat this process several times before they find a passage that fits their circumstances.] This practice is just superstitious nonsense which has plagued the church since its early days, and has been condemned in the writings of several of the first and second century Church Fathers as well as some of the early church councils.

The Open Bible & Point Method is actually a form of divination. There are several problems with using this method. Just as a fortuneteller trusts in spirits to guide their hands or the hands of their customer when using an Ouija board or picking a card from a deck of tarot cards, so too you are trusting spirits to guide your

I too enjoy spending good quality time in prayer, and often seek solitude when praying. However, the rest is pure rubbish. God does not speak by vague impression in the mind. When you have to stress and strain yourself trying to discern a word, or receive an impression deep inside you that can be interpreted as God speaking, it is wrong. God does not, has not, nor ever will speak that way. Nor is it '*stepping out in faith*' to act upon some small vague impression deep within, it is presumption and foolishness.

Nowhere do the scriptures command, nor even suggest, we sit in quiet solitude, emptying our mind, listening to hear a small voice speaking to us. In fact, this practice is borrowed from eastern meditation practices and is a form of *channeling*. This method is used by mediums in seances to hear from the dead, and pagan religions as they attempt to hear their gods. It is also the method used by Buddhists as they clear their minds in search of enlightenment, and Khmer witch doctors so demons can speak through them. We do not have to borrow our practices, procedures, beliefs or techniques from the heathen. God's ways are much better.

hands [presumably and hopefully God's spirit]. Although it has been dressed up to look proper by using the Scriptures as means of divining what God says, it is the same. The 'Open Bible and Point Method' not only violates the prohibition God places on divination [Leviticus 19:26] but allows the user to decide for themselves what God is saying without truly listening, making the Bible subjective and subservient to private interpretation, which is also not allowed. When speaking, God has a purpose and meaning. We are not allowed to change their meaning nor reapply them in different ways to suit our circumstances. [2 Peter 1:20]

People have used this method to decide which job offer they should take, what ministry to go into, which church to join or even whom they should marry. It is also commonly used by people seeking permission to do something that is already clearly prohibited in God's Word, but feel under their present circumstances God may allow or even ordain it. One of the most common examples of this is when a pastor or layperson, searches for a sign God wants them to divorce their wife and marry another.

A reliable source told a story which happened in a church he was affiliated with. One of the elders of the church was attracted to a woman who sang in their choir. She loved the Lord and had a gentle spirit, he liked everything about her. He felt the two of them could minister well together and she would make an excellent wife. He firmly believed she would be much better than his current wife who was non supportive and critical. He felt God was drawing them together and making them a team. He prayed asking God whether he should divorce his wife and marry this woman. God said nothing. (God already clearly answers this in the Scripture.) He decided to use the Open Bible and Point Method. He opened his Bible and found his answer. His Bible had opened to Colossians 4:18 where it read ". . . Grace be with you. Amen." The name of the woman in the choir was Grace. Because he only wanted to justify himself, had no regard for truth, and a heart full of sin, he was led astray.

Giving God a Choice Method This method is very deceptive, and allows people to believe they have a word from God when they do not. It usually begins when a person has narrowed down to a few options what they believe are their best choices. Instead of waiting and listening for God's commands, they set up a test based on the options they have preselected and look for a sign from God indicating which one of those He chooses.

I know a man who came to work in Thailand based on this method. He had decided that he wanted to live in Asia and evangelize. He prayed repeatedly for God to show him which country he should go to, but received no answer. While waiting for an answer, he began to narrow down the countries he was considering. Soon he had reduced his choices to Thailand or China, and wanted God to tell him which one, so he devised a test. He was scheduled to attend a cell group meeting that night, while there he would listen to what people said. If someone mentioned a train then God wanted him to come to Thailand (the meeting was in Singapore and it is possible to travel to Thailand by train from there.) However if they mentioned an airplane, he knew he should go to China (it would require flying to get there.)

As the night progressed neither was mentioned, so before the meeting ended he explained to them that he was waiting on a sign from God. He asked each of them to picture something in their mind and tell him what they saw. One by one each pictured something in their mind, and told him what they saw, but no one mentioned either train or airplane. He had them repeat this process several times before finally someone said they saw a train. He took this to be the confirmation he sought and knew God was sending him to Thailand. He has been here several years now, and still does not have any specific goals nor instructions from God. But because of his 'test' he still believes God sent him here.

The young man in this example wanted to serve God. He also wanted to live in Asia. Instead of submitting his will to God, and being obedient, he chose what he was willing to do for God based on the desires of his own heart. By Giving God a choice based solely on the list of options he had pre-selected, he could fool himself into believing it was God's will.

Often people use this method' when they are not truly receptive to what God already has said about something, yet want to ease their conscience by letting God choose. When we decide what we want, and give God a choice based on those options is presumption and sin.[Read: Numbers 14:40-45, 15:30-31, Deuteronomy 1:41-45, 17:12, 18:20-22, Psalms 19:13]

Emotional Confirmation Method - Feelings can easily lead us astray. I am sure we all at one time or another have listened to our emotions instead of God. We may have even mistaken those emotions for God's approval or disapproval. When we consider something and have an immediate negative feeling we might say "I have a real check in my Spirit about . . ." At other times when our initial response is one of peace, or excitement we might say "I have a real peace about . . ." or ". . . really bears witness to me."

God does not speak through our emotions. Yes, hearing God often brings with it a supernatural peace, but that peace is not, nor cannot be construed as a word from God. Just because you feel an excitement welling up inside you when you think about some contemplated action does not mean it is of God. [Remember temptations, lust, and sin may also bring temporary peace, joy or excitement.] Emotions can be very deceptive. If we allow ourselves to be governed by them or even receive

guidance based on them we WILL go into error. Using our feelings as the sole or primary means of determining whether something is of God, is not reliable. You cannot allow yourself the luxury of believing you have received divine guidance based on whether your 'spirit bears witness to it' or not.

Whether we 'have peace' about something or a 'check in our spirit' does not excuse us from the responsibility of listening to God. Our feelings often do not match up with God's. Feeling a peace in our spirit when a word is given, does not mean it is from God. However if we have a lack of peace it should set off a warning inside us. At that point we need to find out why we do not have peace. Is it because it was not God speaking? Or was it because the word was contrary to our own thoughts or desires? Or is there some other thing robbing us of our peace? *(We will go into this in-depth later in this series when we discuss how to know if a Word is from God.)*

In the early 1980s I helped co-lead two weekly Bible studies, one for Christian singles, another at a home for battered women. Because of time constraints, we eventually combined the two groups. This worked well as both groups were able to meld and strengthen each other. One evening, one of the ladies from the home came up to me beaming from ear to ear. She told me that she and one of the men from the group were getting married. I could see she expected me to be excited and congratulate her. She was a street wise woman, and already had several children, whereas he was one of the most naive young men I knew. I immediately had a 'check in my spirit.' I had no peace about it and was sure this marriage was wrong. To me there was no way a marriage like this would work. Although I smiled lamely, my feelings shown through. I could see the hurt on her face as she turned and walked away. I determined that by the time I saw her the next week; I would have answers.

I spent the week praying and seeking God for answers. What should I do about it? How should I stop it? I felt doubly responsible as they were both under our leadership and would never have met if we had not merged the two groups. Finally after a week of wrestling, God spoke, although it was not the answer I expected. He said simply “. . . loves me doesn't she?” I said “Yes Lord. She does.” He then said “. . . loves me doesn't he? I said “Yes Lord. He does.” God continued by saying, “they have already asked me to bless their marriage, so I will bless it.” I hesitantly said ‘yes’ and waited for God to continue. He then rebuked me saying “if I have agreed to bless their marriage who are you not to?” God never did tell me if He had ordained their marriage, nor if it was His plan. All that did not matter. They already had asked God to bless their marriage and He had agreed.

Open Door Method - When facing a decision, many Christians ask God to open a door for them. They then base their decisions on whatever seems to be the best or most obvious choice, trusting it was God who ‘opened the door.’ Yes God is the one ‘opens and closes doors’ for us, and *sometimes it really is the one that seems wide open before us.* However, we should never assume, just because a door looks like it is open that God is the one opening it or leading us that direction. Nor should we believe that just because a way seems shut or a dead end, with no openings, that God closed it.

Asking God to open a door for us and then looking to see which way seems the easiest or the best relieves us of the responsibility of knowing God’s true direction. This method also relieves the person of any particular responsibility for choices they make and allows them to follow the easiest or most profitable path. It is far better to know God’s path and follow it, even though the way seems to be blocked, than to run headlong down the wrong path just because it seems wide open. God’s road is often the more difficult one not the easy wide one [Read: Matthew 7:13-14]

God reinforced and drove this lesson into me in 1996. In November of the year before, God had instructed me to put together two newsletters discussing the purpose of signs and wonders. After writing them I waited. We did not have money to print nor mail them, but I knew that when the time was right for us to send them out, God would ‘open a door’ for us to get them

out. As the weeks dragged by, I began asking the Lord what to do with these articles. He responded by saying “Send them out.” Each time I answered, “OK, give us the money and we will get them printed and sent out.” But the money never came. Every few weeks, God and I would have the same conversation all over again, and He would give me the same answer.

I knew there was a problem but could not figure out what it was. It took several months before I realized the problem was that I was looking with my eyes to see God’s provision to come in before I obeyed. I knew and trusted God for the finances, but was waiting for an open door. This was wrong, nowhere are we commanded to wait until we see God moving on our behalf before we obey, we simply obey.

Once I realized what I had been doing, I repented. We set a date for printing the newsletter; then the office staff and I formatted and prepared it for printing. The morning it was scheduled to be printed, I received a phone call from a friend who worked for another ministry. He said “Doug a very rare thing has happened. As you know we run our printing press virtually nonstop, but today we have nothing to print.” He didn’t want to send his workers home, and wanted to know if we had anything that needed printing. If we could get it to them right away, they could print it the same day. Praise God, what a miracle. If we had waited to see the open door before we walked through it, we would have been too late. *“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” 2 Corinthians 5:7*

Summary

Each of these ways, we have discussed, is false, because each violates several of the principles by which God speaks. These methods are subjective and can be interpreted any way we want. In none of them does God speak clearly. We do not have to invent our own methods of discerning God’s will, nor copy the world’s. If we truly hunger to live our life God’s way, He will make His way abundantly clear.

*In Christ
Doug Heil*

As we continue this series, we will discuss topics such as: How God speaks to us. What the voice of God sounds like. Having a heart that is receptive. Things that can block our communication with God. How to test a word to know if it is from God.

If you did not receive our first newsletter on ‘Hearing God,’ or would like us to send a copy to a friend, simply write to our Florida office requesting a copy. Please include the complete name and address where you want it sent (phone number and e-mail addresses are also helpful.)