



# **INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING INSTITUTE**

*A Seminary Program for Training Christian Leaders*

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## **Knowing the Voice of God**

God does not limit Himself in how He speaks. At different times, under various circumstances, He chooses to communicate differently. His voice is described as a loud thundering voice, a still small whisper and as being like the sound of rushing water. He speaks through angels, husbands, wives, prophets, a voice, visions, or dreams. He has even used a bush and a donkey to speak and promised He would even use stones if necessary. (Luke 19:40)

Often, the Scriptures do not tell us the mode God used to communicate, it simply relates the message, using such expressions as "the Word of the Lord came to . . ." (104 times) or "the Lord said . . ." (232 times) Most prophecies began with a phrase like; 'the Word of the LORD came to ...' It may then go on to tell us where this took place, in what year, and to whom it came, **but it usually does not tell us how God spoke.** It is almost as though there is an unsaid understanding that the way in which God communicated need not be described. The mode by which the Lord speaks is not as important as knowing He is the One speaking, and paying close attention to what He says.

Several of the older denominations teach that after the Apostles died, and the Bible written, there was no longer any need for God to speak directly to His people; everything we need to live life as a Christian is contained in the Bible. With the rare exception of divine intervention to redirect or change the course of human events, God is silent. This conclusion is based on their own reasoning, not on scripture. One passage they cite in

defense of their belief is 1 Corinthians 13:9-10; '*For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.*' They misinterpret this passage as saying that once that which is perfect has come (to them the canonizing of the New Testament) that all prophecy would cease. That once the Bible came there was no longer any need for prophecy (God talking.)

Those who teach this, have allowed their beliefs to skew the way they view this passage. They have replaced the author's original meaning with their own. Paul was not talking about the New Testament writings as perfect. He was referring to Jesus as '*that which is perfect*'. When Jesus returns the need for prophecy will be over. We know this because in Paul continues by explaining (verses 11-12) this will happen when we come into the completion of all knowledge . . . and '*we see . . . face to face.*'

God desires for each of us to know Him and understand His ways. This was the reason He gave us the Bible; In it He tells us clearly about Himself, His desires and His ways. Everything we need to live life as a Christian is there. The Lord does not intend for Christianity to be a giant maze that we stumble through looking for the correct path. We do not have to guess what to do, or how it should be done. But there are times when no matter how much we seek godly counsel, pray, or read the Bible, we are not sure what the Lord wants us to do. It is times like these we need a word from God.

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**What does the Bible say?** The Bible is a written record of God's communications and interactions with man. It chronicles an unbroken chain of communication between God and His people. Throughout the centuries, God has and still does speak to His people, nor does the Scriptures, give any hint that this communication between is ever supposed to end.

In the beginning there were no barriers separating God and man. They talked freely together. Adam had no knowledge of sin nor what it would do. God had given him freedom to eat anything in the garden except fruit from the tree of knowledge. Enticed by the lure of knowing good from evil Adam disobeyed God and ate the fruit. By his disobedience, Adam made the transition from good to evil, as promised his eyes were opened, and he saw the difference.

Later, when God came walking in the garden Adam felt the result of sin in his life, instead of greeting his Lord with joy and excitement, he hid. Sin had disconnected man from God. Sinful man has no fellowship, or way of relating with a holy sinless God. A wall of separation between God and man was established, later symbolized by the veil in the temple. Man's sin acted as a barrier between him and God. God's people did not expect to hear from Him directly.

Before Christ came, man did not have direct access to God. Being in His presence was a revered and scary thing. God is Holy, Righteous, and Pure; man is sinful, weak, and unclean. He spoke only to special individuals chosen by Him to be His representatives (i.e., judge, priest, king or prophet.) People worshiped God as their creator, but had no direct personal relationship with Him. They did not expect day by day input in their lives nor come directly to God with questions. If they needed divine guidance, they would go to a scribe, who would explain the scriptures to them. If the scriptures did not give them the answer they sought, they would go to a prophet to hear directly from God. God had placed His Spirit on these individuals and they heard His words. (Hebrews 1:1) With the rare exception of Moses and maybe David, the concept of man having fellowship directly with God was unthinkable under the Old Covenant.

Nevertheless, God established a covenant with Abraham and Moses. He promised to send a Messiah who would bring restoration. Through Isaiah He promised, that when the Redeemer came (Jesus), He would make a new covenant with his people, and would place His Spirit upon each of us, and put His words into our mouths, *from generation to generation forever*. [Isaiah 59: 20-21]

Until the time when Jesus our Redeemer came, there was a veil in the temple separating the area where God's Spirit resided and the people. If anyone went behind the curtain, God would immediately strike him dead (the price of sin.) Only once a year,

the High Priest, after purifying himself, was allowed to enter, to offer an offering for the sins of the people.

Things have now changed. The old covenant has been abolished. (Hebrews 8:13) When Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the temple, that separated God from the people, tore from top to bottom. (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38) Our sin which separated us from God was removed. We now have a new and better covenant. As Christians under the New Covenant, we have direct access to God. The door is now open for us to fellowship directly with Him. [Read: 1 Corinthians 1:9, 2 Corinthians 13:14, Ephesians 2:10-22; Hebrews 9:3-8, 10:19-22, 2 Peter 1:4, 1 John 1:3]

The New Testament is vastly different from the Old Testament. It centers around Jesus, His death, resurrection, and atonement for our sins. Jesus was God come to earth. He introduced the idea that we can have a direct relationship with God, and taught how that relationship is to be. This was a foreign concept and totally unimaginable to the Old Testament Hebrew mind. When the New Testament uses the words fellowship, communion, or partake, to describe our relationship with God, it is the Greek word *κοινωνία* (koinonia). Koinonia implies intimacy, partnership, and inter-connectivity. Not only do we now have a relationship with God, but it goes much further. He is in us and we are in Him. His Spirit lives inside us and communes with us. [Read: John 14:23, 7:21, 17:23; 2 Corinthians 6:16, 1 John 3:24]

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**G**od speaks directly to your spirit The Scriptures tell us that God communicated with His Prophets, Apostles through the Holy Spirit. God placed His Spirit on them and they would hear His words. God speaks directly from His Spirit to our spirit the same way He did to the Apostles Prophets, and even to Jesus Himself.

The key to hearing God, is being a Christian. This may seem like an overly simplified statement, but it is true. It is not a matter of developing special skills, techniques, following some methodology or receiving an extra gift from God. At the time of salvation, our spirit comes to life (before that we are spiritually dead.) God gives us a new living spirit. Having that spirit inside us is all that is necessary for you to hear Him. God usually communicates from His Spirit directly to our spirit. God is Spirit, and our new living spirit is designed to follow, worship, and commune with Him.

Most of us have heard God, even if we did not recognize His voice. When people come asking me questions about hearing God, I find that once we examine their relationship with God, there are numerous examples of God divinely guiding them, showing them things, placing His wisdom in them at key moments

etc. It is not that they had never heard God, but that they did not know when He was talking, nor recognize His voice.

Have you ever been reading the scriptures and the words were suddenly alive to you? This was God was speaking to you. Have you read a passage and suddenly the meaning exploded in your mind? This was also God. Have you prayed about some issue that concerned you, or others and suddenly have complete assurance and confidence that the issue had been taken care of? This was God was speaking. When you ask God to show you areas of your life He wants changed, do you suddenly begin seeing things you had not thought of or seen before? This too was God. If you have ever experienced any of these, you have heard from God. This is the primary way He communicates with us, Spirit to spirit. Learn to recognize it for what it is, God speaking. This is His Spirit and your spirit communing together. The more you learn to recognize His voice (the same spirit, same reassurance, same authority) the easier it is to know when He is talking to you. It is like answering a phone call and immediately recognizing the voice coming over the receiver as that of a close and dear friend.

*In the next article on 'Hearing God' we will discuss how to know whether a word we believe came from God truly does? If you have any questions or comments concerning hearing God, please e-mail them to me at [Info@ilti.org](mailto:Info@ilti.org) and I will be glad to respond. If you would like a copy of any of these or other articles, we have published, feel free to write to our Florida office requesting a copy. You may freely reproduce and distribute these newsletters in their entirety.*

**Spiritual Drop** Several years ago I was talking to a pastor in his office, when he suddenly asked “when God speaks to you, what does His voice sound like?” I explained that the Lord has periodically given me visions and dreams that were clear concise words from Him. At other times we have had short conversations. But by far the most common way He communicated with me was as if I suddenly knew everything I needed to know. God did not explain something to me step by step, precept by precept, it was an almost instantaneous knowing His thought, mind and precepts concerning something.

As I explained this to the pastor, his eyes lit up. He knew exactly what I was saying because it was the same for him. He described it as a “*spiritual drop*” as if all the information needed was suddenly dropped inside you in an instant. To use a western expression, it is like a light bulb going off inside your head. It suddenly illuminates everything. When God communicates this way, it is a complete packet of information, leaving no question in your spirit of its veracity or accuracy, accompanied by a total assurance of its truth and authenticity.

This did not surprise me that the pastor would experience words of God as a “*spiritual drop*,” most words needed when you are a pastor (Word of Wisdom, Word of Knowledge, and Discernment of Spirits) usually come this way. This is the way Nehemiah describes God giving him the plans for registering the people by genealogy [Nehemiah 7:5] This is also what happened

to the craftsmen making the tabernacle for Moses. God dropped the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary directly into them. [Exodus 35:30-36:1] The plans for the temple that David gave to Solomon had been given to him by God this way [1 Chronicles 28:11-13,19]

My wife, Yai, remembers the first time she experienced this. It was the same moment she became a Christian. She had spent months reading the Bible and asking questions. The part that confused her the most was the statement that you ‘just accept Jesus into your heart.’ How do you do that? It was not logical. For a long time, she wrestled with this, spending days in the library studying everything she could on the topic. The more she studied, the more confused she became. She was driven to find the answer.

Finally one day, she gave up. She prayed telling God, she did not know how to do it. She told Him she believed in Him, and all the things the Bible says about Jesus, but did not know how to accept Jesus. She asked God to do it. Instantly it was all clear. Her spirit came to life and she understood. Not only did she understand letting Jesus into her heart, but instantly understood the other issues about Christianity she had been wrestling with for so long. It all came flooding into her in a few seconds time. [1 Corinthians 2:7-16]

**God speaks directly** At other times God’s Spirit speaks directly to us, using complete sentences. God will often talk to me this way when He wants to confront me in an area I have been resistant, and wanting me to listen.

An example of this was when He was calling me to work full-time for ILTI: I was content with where I was and what the Lord had me already doing. My father had called and asked me to pray about coming to work for them. I told him ‘no, God has already given me a ministry, and I am doing that.’ Dad then asked if I would at least pray about it. I said that I would. After a few days my father called back and asked what God had said? My response was simply that the Lord was already using me, and that I was not called to ILTI. He asked if I had prayed about it? I told him I had not, and again he asked me to pray. I told him I would, but did not make the commitment in myself to pray.

A few days later as I was driving, and not even thinking about it, God spoke. It was the clearest I remember ever hearing God. He said just one word, “LIAR.” I was shocked and stunned at the intensity of it. I asked Him, when I had lied? “When you told your Dad, you would pray about coming to work for ILTI.” In my naivete, I believed God was just rebuking me because I had said I would pray and had not really committed to doing it. Being the literalist that I am, and realizing all I had to do was pray one time, then I would have met those conditions and no longer be in trouble for not having prayed, I immediately said a quick prayer, “Lord do you want me to go work for ILTI?” the answer was also immediate and strong, “Yes!” God knew I was only going to pray once, and he answered strongly, precisely and in a way that I could not misconstrue His message to me.

*God will often talk directly to our spirit when there are specific instructions he wants us to do. One example of this was a couple years ago, when Yai and I were guests at the Christian Missionary Alliance Guesthouse (CMA) in Bangkok. It was early morning and we were preparing to go out for the day, when God suddenly told me in my spirit to go down to the lobby because He had an “appointment” for me. So I went to the Lobby, got a cup of coffee, and sat down. I started looking at everyone in the room, wondering who the Lord had sent me to talk to. No one there seemed to be the one, after a couple of minutes a man came in the door, looked around at everyone, then came over and asked me “Are you my appointment?”*

*God had also told him the same thing. He was a main leader in the Christian Church in Pakistan. He and his wife were flying home and their plane had been diverted to Thailand. Not knowing anyplace in Bangkok, they had asked on the plane if anyone knew a place they could stay? They had been very surprised and thankful when the only place suggested to them was CMA. Given what God had already done to get him there, he was not surprised when that morning God had also told him to go down to the lobby because he had an appointment waiting.*

*He had been praying for some way to train pastors in Pakistan. He had no idea how to find good material. So he had prayed asking God to provide a way. This was God’s way. We spent the day together looking through the ILTI material, and encrypting it onto the hard drive of his computer. (Bringing Christian material into a Muslim country is politically sensitive.)*

**Audible Voice** I hope at this point, you are beginning to understand how God speaks to his people is through His Spirit to our spirits. However the question still remains “Does God speak in an audible voice?” The answer is yes, He does. However, it is very uncommon. One reason many Christians have never knowingly heard God is that they expect God’s voice to be an audible one. This is a common misunderstanding and leads to false expectations.

God may speak to you audibly, but it is rare. I have never personally met anyone that told me they heard a real physically audible voice when God spoke to them. The scriptures, record only a handful of occasions when God spoke aloud. He talked to Adam in the Garden, spoke from a whirlwind to Job, and a burning bush to Moses. He used a thundering voice on Mount Sinai, a voice calling in the night with the boy, Samuel, and a still small voice with Elijah. In the Gospels, God spoke from heaven three times in order to validate Jesus. Other than these times I know of only Ezekiel, Daniel, Philip, Paul, and Peter being mentioned as hearing God’s voice.

*I remember very well the first vision I ever had from God. I was twelve, and God had been asking if I was willing to serve Him my whole life. His questions had gone to the point of asking me whether I would be willing to die for Him. I had been wrestling with this for several weeks.*

*Sunday morning at church, God began asking me again. Finally I said “yes, I am willing to die for you.” Immediately, it was as if I had been transported to the future. I could see myself standing in front of a stone wall in tattered clothing, my hair was stringy, and matted, and my beard was coarse and scruffy. I was about to be shot. As the firing squad raised their rifles to fire, I started singing songs of worship to God. The vision ended as they fired, and an overwhelming sense of peace filled me, greater than I have ever felt before or since.*

*That was the day God put His call on my life. It was many years before I was trained and ready to be sent out but I still remember that vision as one of the most powerful life changing events of my life. I do not know if God was showing me my actual death, or was just confirming in my heart that willingness. What I do know is that since that day I have never known a moment’s fear and walk with the confidence and assurance that comes with having already made the decision that I will always put Him first no matter what the cost.*

**Dreams and Visions** - Recently, I attended a meeting where the speaker was comparing Ezekiel’s vision of water flowing out from the temple, (Ezekiel 47) as rivers of God’s glory flowing from His temple when we praise and worship. He then asked everyone to close their eyes as we worshiped, and picture the temple with water flowing out like a river. Afterward, he asked who wanted to share what they had seen? Who would like to share the vision God had given them? Several shared what they had seen. He then took those “visions the Lord had given” and expounded upon them for a few minutes.

A few weeks later I was in a church service here in Thailand. As they worshiped the leader asked people to close their eyes while they were singing and envision what they were singing. After the worship ended, he asked if anyone had seen a vision, inviting them to come forward and share. It became immediately obvious by the way each described what they had seen, that these people had not seen visions from God, but were just doing as they had been instructed to do, allow their minds to wander, imagining pictures of what they were singing about. *This is not the way God gives visions.*

Just as visions that come from God bear with them their own authenticity and strength, so too do dreams from Him. Dreams from God are not the same as normal dreams, nor are visions just daydreams picturing what is being told. They are not some vague imaginings or impressions conjured in the mind. When God sends a vision or a dream, it is a powerful experience and cannot be confused with the dreams and visions of an idle mind. They bear with them the authenticity, authority, and validity of their sender. For example we see God giving King Nebuchadnezzar a dream that was so different from his normal dreams, and so powerful, that he got angry with his court mystics who could not tell him the dream or its meaning. (Daniel Chapter 2)

When you receive a dream from God, it is completely different from normal dreams. I remember about ten years ago one of my students told me about a wonderful new book she had that explained what different things in a dream meant. Each animal, object, or type of plant, had its own meaning and when you took those meanings and wove them together, you could interpret your dreams. **DO NOT believe it.** If God gives you a dream or vision without its interpretation resist the temptation to guess its meaning. If God sent the dream, He **alone** can give you the correct interpretation. [Please read Genesis 40:8, 41:15-16, Daniel 1:17, 2:17-19, 26-28]

**Messengers** During the Old Testament Period, prophets were the chief means by which He communicated and angels the second most common. (Hebrews 1:1-2) God still uses both prophets and angels today. However, it is less common as we now have God’s Spirit given to all Christians and all can hear God. Although I have known several men whom I consider to be prophets, I cannot say for certain that I have ever seen an angel (*although there have been times I wondered.* - Hebrews 13:2) However, if you do get visited by an angel, or have a prophet bring you a ‘special word’ do not be awed, or overwhelmed into believing everything you are told. There are false prophets, and not all angels are sent from God. (1 John 4:1, Romans 8:38-39, 2 Corinthians 11:14, Galatians 1:8) Judge what is being said the same as you would any other word you believe is from God.

*Doug Heil*