

REVEAL THE KINGDOM



HEARING GOD

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FOREWORD

This is a brief and high level overview regarding how to hear from God. Consider it like an introduction to dating, with tips on how to engage in a conversation with someone you haven't much talked with before. It points you in the right direction, but it's contingent on you taking steps to actually try to hear from God. As you'll discover, God has a lot to say. We just need the ears to hear.

This short eBook is mostly derived from a couple of chapters in my book, *Kingdom Warfare on the Home Front: Spiritual Cleansing of Life and Land*, to be released in the Summer of 2016. I hope you get some value out of it.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BAKER AND THE SHEPHERD

*He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*¹

In January, 1534, a very unique baker entered an important city in Germany. This baker claimed a unique property: he could “hear” from God. And people believed him. This baker, Jan Matthyas, sometimes walked along, stopped, cocked an ear towards heaven, listened to his heavenly Father, and spoke back. Those nearby heard one side of the conversation, as when a modern person hears someone speaking into a telephone.

Obviously, possessing such a unique ability to exclusively hear the voice of God qualified him to be a prophet and he looked the part: he wore flowing black robes and had a long, scraggly beard. By the time Jan Matthyas entered Munster, Germany, the seat of a religious rebellion, he had quite a following. Because he was a prophet who had God’s ear and heard God’s voice, Matthyas’ orders and interpretation of scripture had the authority of being inerrant and authoritative: to counter him would be to counter God’s word, or so he argued and his followers thought.

Eventually, the local prince raised an army and besieged Munster, but God told Matthyas that judgement was coming and God would destroy the army and save the people of Munster, turning the town into the New Jerusalem.

One day, at a wedding reception in Munster, Mattyas' body jerked suddenly, as if a bolt of electricity had struck him. He cocked his head to heaven and responded in the affirmative. He declared that God had told him that God was going to liberate Munster on Easter Sunday 1534 and that Jan Mattyas should ride out to the besiegers to smite the enemies of God.

And so on Easter Sunday, Jan Mattyas rode out with a few followers to destroy the thousands that besieged the town, just as he heard God order. And that day, Jan Mattyas was torn to pieces by his enemies. They placed his head a pole for all of Munster to see what their fate beheld.

Perhaps Jon Mattyas wasn't hearing from God after all.

To this day, many look askance when someone claims to hear the voice of God. And to my mind, rightly so. As a society, we have lost the ability to hear from God. We have lost the able to recognize his² voice when he speaks. For many, the idea of God speaking is quite outside the realm of possibility. Thus many of us tend to think anyone who claims to hear from God is crazy.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-V) specifically mentions "hearing the voice of God" in its consideration of a mental health professional diagnosing someone with schizophrenia. The DSM-V is the tool used by mental health professional in the United States for the purposes of diagnosing mental health disorders, and it allows that some religious experiences include visual or auditory hallucinations and wouldn't be counted towards a diagnosis of schizophrenia.³ So, the DSM-V at least doesn't consider someone crazy who claims to hear God speaking. Maybe Christians shouldn't either.

Speaking of crazy, some people think that God no longer speaks *at all*, but *if he did*, those words should be considered the "Word of God" and *should be added to the Bible*. Some even suggest that even if God was speaking, we don't need to hear his voice because scripture *is sufficient* to communicate what God wanted to say. Both perspectives miss the point.

After Jesus went to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to begin the process of calling people to join God's family by becoming a believer in Jesus. A believer is someone who believes in his or her heart that Jesus came in the flesh, died on the Cross, and rose again. Through the Holy Spirit, God calls to people to believe, and when they do, the Holy Spirit sets up his residence in them.

Why would God make his home on earth in believers? Well, God *really* wants a family, and healthy, loving families involve healthy and loving communication. What better place to have healthy and loving communication with someone you really love than from within the heart?

Don't take my word for it. When in doubt, go with Jesus.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens.

*The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for **they know his voice.***

A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”⁴

The act of the shepherd calling is a function of God speaking. The act of the sheep hearing and following the shepherd is a function of hearing and following God's voice. But just because God calls and guides people does not mean the words people hear God speaking should be recorded in the Bible.

For instance, sometimes God speaks his heart through us for other people. These are God's words spoken through us. This is called *prophecy*. In the Bible, four daughters mentioned in the book of Acts were good at prophesying.⁵ And yet, none of God's words that they spoke were recorded in the Bible.

In addition to the gift of prophecy, God also gifts his body of believers with *prophets*. A prophet is someone God raised up to provide corrective guidance to leaders, usually with an eye to enforcing the operating covenant. If you don't understand what that means, that's okay. But just understand that the New Testament also mentions prophets, whose words are *not* recorded in the Bible.⁶ So both those who prophecy and the prophetic words spoken by prophets are *not* to be considered holy writ nor should they be considered equal to the Bible or placed *in* the Bible.

Of course, this is obvious. Recording each message from God is *not* the point of the Bible. The point of Bible was to record *God's plan to bring the Kingdom of God to earth*, and the point of God continuing to speak to his

people is *to implement this plan through his family*. The plan is set, and implementation is ongoing.

CHAPTER TWO

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

*But seek first the Kingdom of God...*⁷

The Kingdom of God is the *dynamic rule and reign of God*.⁸ The Kingdom of God, along with its stylistic variation “Kingdom of Heaven,” means the activity of God’s government.⁹ God’s active rule and reign exists perfectly in heaven. About 2000 years ago, Jesus began the Kingdom’s invasion of earth to overthrow the forces of darkness. Said another way, Jesus began to invade the activity of darkness that reigned supremely on the earth with the activity of God’s government. Jesus sent out his followers to continue that work, and they have been doing so ever since, albeit with varying levels of success. Today, God’s rule and reign continues to break into lives around the world now, but it still hasn’t fully manifested yet on earth. While the Kingdom of God is fully in heaven, it is not fully on earth yet. God is sovereign and his rule is here, and his rule is *not yet* fully here, and won’t be fully here until Jesus returns.



Jesus began the invasion of the Kingdom of God into the earth, resulting in the tension between good and evil in our age. We currently live in the Kingdom Conflict until Jesus returns.

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Understanding the nature of the Kingdom of God requires us to don a growth mindset. It requires us to be willing to be stretched by God, to willingly approach the Father as a child, and to change our existing fixed mindset to one willing to learn and grow.

Similarly, understanding the nature of the Kingdom of God provides an important context to hear God’s voice and a filter to understand what he is saying, because basically all that God wants to talk about relates to extending the Kingdom in your life, the lives of everyone else, and all across the world. Therefore, it is important to recognize that, despite living in a culture that is tone deaf to the supernatural, God is still speaking because the Kingdom is not fully here yet.

Hearing God Accurately is Important

*And after the fire the sound of a low whisper.*¹⁰

It’s really important that we not just can hear God’s voice, but that we can accurately determine the meaning of what he is saying. We don’t, after all, want to end up like Jan Matthyas. Jesus went so far as to say if we don’t hear correctly, we can actually *bind up* what God wants to release from heaven. Let’s examine this further.

One day, Jesus was leading his leadership team towards Mount Hermon in the region of Caesarea Philippi, a week’s journey north of Jerusalem. During the history of Israel, that location was the heart of darkness and the center of demonic activity. In Jesus’ day, dozens of occult temples and sites for demon worship existed there. It was the veritable “gate to hell.”¹¹ In that region, Jesus reflected with his leaders on his celebrity status among the public. Then he asked an important question.

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."¹²

In that heart of darkness, Peter received the revelation of who Jesus was and confessed Christ. In response, Jesus released Peter's destiny. Part of that destiny was to establish a body of believers set apart to advance the Kingdom right on the gates of hell. This involved binding the Domain of Darkness, those demonic spiritual forces loyal to Satan, on earth and loosing the Kingdom of God from heaven. Jesus declared that hell would be in perpetual retreat from the advance of God's body of holy ones (the "church.")

It was more than fitting for Jesus, the light of the world, to take his team of world-changers there and then boldly declare that God was invading the earth to overthrow the works of the darkness, renewing the earth through this mission of loosing the rule and reign of God on earth. In case the Domain of Darkness missed the gravity of what Jesus was declaring, six days later, Jesus took his core team leaders up Mount Hermon, flipped off the forces of darkness with a cosmic, "Can you hear me now?"¹³

Satan and his Domain of Darkness responded and a couple weeks later, they nailed Jesus to the Cross.¹⁴ Only then did they realize they were playing directly into God's hands, sealing their doom and the inevitable global expansion of the Kingdom of God.¹⁵ After Jesus' resurrection, he unleashed on the Domain of Darkness his 120 transformed disciples, who did what they saw the Father doing and said what they heard the Father saying. Today, hundreds of millions now are in the family of God and positioned to hear God speak.

Thus, while "hearing God" may sound mystical and mysterious, it is in

fact key to cooperating with what God wants to do in releasing the Kingdom of God in your life and on earth. We'll explore this concept and give prudent steps on how you can hear from God and discern what God is trying to communicate. We'll examine how to measure what you hear to better determine if you are actually hearing from God or if you are hearing from another spirit or just your imagination. Please understand, this is just a general overview and a basic introduction on hearing and recognizing God's voice.

Typically, God doesn't speak audibly to us like other humans speak. It's not like Charlton Heston in *The Ten Commandments*, with God's booming voice coming from the sky. In addition, hearing God is not related to self-promotion or control or power over someone else. That's not how God operates, although many people will use the ability to hear from God and operate that way. Generally, the who abuse the information they receive from God do not understand Jesus' mission to bring the Kingdom of God on earth, and so they operate out of a poor understanding of the role of Christianity and their purpose on earth. The error in their behavior flows from errant views of their identity. The gift or ability to hear and recognize God's voice is not the error.

Jesus stated that he only did what he saw the Father doing and he only spoke what he heard the Father say.¹⁶ In addition, Jesus explained that he would send the Holy Spirit to dwell in us and we would do the same and greater works as he did.¹⁷ By establishing the New Covenant, God dwells with and in his people, speaking to each of us individually. Christians can learn also to see what the Father is doing and hear what the Father is saying, and then choose to cooperate as Jesus did. From this standpoint, hearing God should always be in the context of serving and loving God and serving and loving others to expand the Kingdom of God on earth, starting with your life.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

*...and God changed his mind...*¹⁸

Jesus explained that serving others is exactly how God's sovereignty works. Unlike Satan and the Domain of Darkness, God is not a top-down tyrant who mandates things from on high and forces them onto people.

*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones execute authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever shall be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*¹⁹

God is sovereign and His sovereignty manifests through serving others, from the bottom up, according to his purposes, and he makes his purposes known through speaking to his people.

He speaks when he wants to make something new. He speaks in answer to the inquiries of his people. He speaks when his people want to converse with him. God sometimes initiates the conversations to those who care to listen and sometimes God responds to his people's request for conversation. He's a good Father who enjoys speaking with his

children. God will talk with his people about a lot of things, but the thing most on God's mind is his people working his will on the earth. The activity of his people have consequences and can shape the future.

While God's will is perfectly executed in heaven, it's not perfectly executed on earth. God delegated stewardship over the earth to humans. He actually designed humans to be his representatives on earth, with the mission to extend God's perfect rule and reign throughout every aspect of their lives across the planet. This is what bringing the Kingdom of God to earth entails. This is what it means to release heaven on earth.

God prefers that we listen to his guidance in how to do this. It's human nature to do things our own way, according to our own desires rather than according to God's desires.

Instrumental in extending God's government on earth is to listen and hear the King's instructions, advice, and plans, and then to act on what we hear. God wants to converse with you and to listen to your own ideas. He wants you to offer your insight and to receive his feedback, to learn and to grow. Many times when we ask God what he wants us to do, we miss his response: "I trust your judgement. I'll be with you either way." Sometimes when we face a troubling time and we start to pray, God's response mirrors his message to Moses, with Pharaoh on his heels and the sea in front of him: "Enough prayer. Time for action. Go!" This is the nature of prayer, and when considering how to pray, we look to the perfect imprint of God on earth: Jesus.

When Jesus taught us to pray, he said to pray God's will to be released on earth, as it is in heaven. In heaven, there's no poverty, no hunger, no sickness, no sorrow, no fear. There's no demonic oppression. There are no massacres of innocent bystanders and no injustice of any kind. The state of affairs in heaven is God's will for the state of affairs on earth. Thus God tasked his covenant people throughout time to bring God's Kingdom, his dynamic rule and reign, to earth. The supreme architect of enacting God's will on earth was Jesus, and Jesus tasked his followers to make it so, in cooperation with the Father's will and the power of the Holy Spirit. This involves both prayer and action.

When Jesus walked the earth and prayed, the Father always answered the Son's prayers because the Father always responded to his Son, who always heard and recognized the Father's voice, saw and recognized what the Father was doing. While on earth, Jesus was a mortal man and his power came through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, working in

accordance with the Father's will. Jesus always had access to heaven's resources: healing, deliverance, control over matter, over weather, over justice, over death, and even access to angels and their services. Jesus' continual access to heaven's resources was a function of his being filled with the Holy Spirit and working in one accord with the will of the Father. He was never of two minds and never at odds with the Father's will. He always subjected the desires of his flesh to the desires of his heavenly Father. With this set of conditions, the Father will always respond to the Body of Jesus on earth. Today, the Body of Jesus on earth is his Church: the community of Jesus' believers, disciples, and servants.

Jesus talked about his Church just twice while on earth, and each time was in the context of a binding and loosing things in heaven and on earth. Two things can bind or loose heaven on earth.

1. The *actions* of the members of his church.
2. The *cooperation* among members of his church.

Whenever members of Christ's body are *not acting* or are *not in unity*, then heaven's resources get bound up and cannot be released on earth.

If a Christian wants a specific prayer answered, he or she needs to pray specifically according to God's will and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Christian can learn to discern God's will by tuning in to God's voice.

God will tell you how to pray, if you develop the ears to hear him, and the spoken words of your prayer will release the power of God's will to work. This is the principle of creation. In the beginning, God's will was to create, and the Holy Spirit hovered over the waters of chaos until the spoken Word released God's will, and the ordering of the world happened. The same thing happens when you pray according to God's will now. If you ignore his will, then his power will be bound up, unless he moves sovereignly on his own or by the power of prayers you are unaware of.

The chronicles of Jesus' actions and words were recorded in Greek and are made accessible to us through various English translations. But translating thoughts and words from one ancient language written in and to an ancient culture into a modern language with a different culture can be tricky business. Nuances and layers of meaning can be lost. So understand that you are missing layers of meaning when you read, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever

you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” The Greek verbs used there have dual meanings. The passage also means, “Whatever you bind on earth *has already been bound* in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth *has already been loosed* in heaven.” In other words, God doesn’t have to wait for your prayer to move sovereignly. Sometimes your prayers are in response to God’s sovereign action already in motion.

Here’s a real world example of this principle. Once at the end of a conference, a lady stood up to give a testimony. She said the night before, during the time of the service when we prayed for each other, God told her to go and pray for the worship leader, who was a woman on the stage playing a keyboard and leading a band. But she resisted and did not go to pray for the woman.

She didn’t know exactly what she was going to pray, but she knew urgently that God appointed her to do so. As she resisted, suddenly the urgency to pray left her. She realized she missed out on an opportunity to bless someone else and to be blessed in the process, because it’s better to give than to receive.

Her point was to encourage us to listen to God’s voice and obey his will. Then, she added, someone else ended up going to pray for the worship leader, so she was glad the worship leader didn’t miss out on what God had for her.

Well, guess who the person who ended up doing the praying. Yes: me.

That night, I happened to be sitting in the front row, listening to a student tell a story of his supernatural experience.

Suddenly, I felt a heavy presence fall on me. I entered a kind of trance. I recognized some reading this are already uncomfortable with some of these descriptive words, but these kinds of experiences are all throughout the Bible and my advice is to *get over it*. Do not limit your acceptance of what God did, does and wants to do by your past experiences, your limited theology, your understanding of scripture, or perceived abuses among God’s people or God’s enemies. When it comes to spiritual experiences, accept as much as the Biblical authors accepted. When your blinders are lifted, you’ll see they accepted some pretty incredible experiences as normative.

So anyway, in that trance-like state, I looked up at the worship leader, stood up, walked onto the stage behind her. Although she is my friend, she had her eyes closed and later acknowledged she had no idea who was praying for her. I lightly placed the tip of my fingers on the center of the

back between her shoulder blades and began to pray in the Spirit for her.

She immediately reacted like she had been jolted with an electric power source and stopped playing the keyboard. She leaned back slightly, her arms outstretched in worship and fell to her knees. She had a very strong reaction, just like some of the priests in the Bible when the Holy Spirit filled the Temple. I prayed for a few minutes, and then it was over. The heavy pressure on me simply lifted and my praying stopped. The spiritual download God wanted for her had been released, so I stopped praying and left her worshipping Jesus on the floor. I went to sit back down by the student.

He said, “Wow. That was awesome. So anyway...” and continued on with his story.

Through this process, God unlocked a spiritual gift or tool she needed, and he used me to do so. Couldn’t God have done this by himself? Did he need me to cooperate?

The fact is, God’s needs are not the issue. His sovereignty is and for whatever reason, God chooses to work through flawed human beings he made to be his representatives on earth. This is how God’s sovereignty works: bubbling up from his obedient people who hear his voice.

God’s Foreknowledge

There are lots of beliefs about predestination and freewill, and I don’t hope to settle any disputes but I want to point out three examples of God working through free will agents that demonstrate that God hasn’t set the future precisely and that he likes working through people to enact his will. God does not rule through authoritarian measures. God rules through serving.

God exercises authority and sovereignty through serving his free willed creations. Consider these three episodes from the Bible.

1. Jonah and Ninevah

The Word of Yahweh comes to Jonah and tells his prophet:

“Get up! Go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to it the message that I am telling you.” And Jonah began to go into the city a journey of one day, and he cried out and said, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be demolished!”²⁰

* * *

Forty days came and went, and the city was *not* demolished. God changed his mind towards Ninevah because the people of Ninevah repented of their evil ways. The king ordered a national change of heart and the people consented, although no one knew if that would matter or not. The king even admitted, “Who knows? God may relent and change his mind and turn from his blazing anger so that we will not perish.”²¹

If God had predestined the city for destruction in 40 days, then God is a liar because he did not destroy the city. If God knew the city would repent and he would not destroy it, then God lied to Jonah and the people of Ninevah by telling them they would be destroyed when he knew they would *not* be destroyed. Either way, this makes Jonah a bad and lying prophet because he said God would do something that God didn’t end up doing.

But actually, Jonah heard God correctly and Biblical text makes it clear, God did not lie:

And God saw their deeds—that they turned from their evil ways—and God **changed his mind** about the evil that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it.²²

Jonah wasn’t a bad prophet. The fact is Jonah’s convicting preaching and the city’s sincere repentance changed God’s mind, and God changed his plans, for the better.

Prayer matters. Your actions matter.

2. David and Keilah

Israel’s first king, Saul, was chasing down the young upstart David. His intention was to kill David, who in this particular situation was hiding out in a town. David discovered that Saul found out he was hiding in the town. David prayed and asked God if Saul would come to the town for him.

God replied, “Yes.”

David then asked if the townspeople would turn him over to the king.

God replied, “Yes.”

Except they didn’t because Saul didn’t come because after receiving this news, David got out of Dodge. Read it for yourself in 1 Samuel 23. Did God lie? Is David a false prophet? No. God can see the end of various possible events, and in the timeline of David not leaving town, he

saw a certain event. Based on this prophecy, David left town, thus changing the timeline and invalidating the prophecy.

Prayer matters. Your actions matter.

3. Peter and the angel

A few years after Jesus went to heaven and sent out his disciples to continue bringing the Kingdom of God to earth, one of their leaders, Peter, was tossed in jail. The government had already killed another leader with the sword and everyone assumed Peter was going to be next. The government assigned several squads of soldiers to guard him. The night before the big day, Peter was literally sleeping between two soldiers, and bound with chains. In addition, guards were at the door.

An angel suddenly appeared, filling the room with light. The angel struck Peter on the side, waking him (apparently the room filling with light didn't do the trick). "Get up quickly!" the angel ordered, and the chains fell off. He instructed Peter to get dressed and to follow him. Peter didn't have to follow him, but he did, although Peter thought he was having just a vision. The angel led him to the street and left him: Peter finally realized God had sent an angel to free him! So he walked to his house church, which at that very moment was praying for Peter to be released. God was answering their prayer even as they prayed!

The servant who peered through the gate was so excited to see Peter, she forgot to open the door for him. The disciples were praying for Peter's release, but *did not believe* the girl that Peter had been released! So praying with unbelief has power too. Imagine if their unbelief had prevented them to pray: Peter likely would have been killed that very day. Read about this event in Acts 12.

In other words, prayer matters. Actions matter. And faith is helpful but not always required. Faith is the power to live out the Kingdom of God, and sometimes we just don't have it. But pray anyway that the Kingdom will break through and maybe God will provide you the faith you need. The disciples, despite their wavering belief, had the power to release freedom from heaven and bind up the works of the enemy.

If you want to be able to cooperate with God's sovereignty, to converse with him and to learn from him, then you'll first need to learn to recognize God's voice.

CHAPTER FOUR

RECOGNIZING SOMEONE'S VOICE

Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy.²³

We have more tools to communicate than just vocal chords. We communicate our thoughts through a glance or a gaze, a wave or a hug, a sigh or a gasp. We communicate our voice through how we stand, sit, or walk. Sometimes how someone stands, glares and breathes can be deafening, conveying far more than the spoken words, “I am angry.”

During the months a baby is developing in mother’s womb, the baby is learning to listen. All sorts of sounds are conveyed through the enveloping fluid: the sounds of mother’s heartbeat and blood rushing, the sounds of mother’s breathing, and muted sounds from outside mother’s body. The baby also begins to notice other voices. Most distinctly, the baby discerns the voice of the baby’s father, usually because male voices have a deeper tone that resonates more fully through the womb. Over time, the baby can not only discern the voice of his or her parents but also the baby can determine what ideas are being conveyed through voice: love, anger, concern, happiness, or sadness.

After birth, an onslaught of new sounds and voices assail the baby’s ears, but in many cases, the baby will respond first to the deeper tones of father and the soothing voice of mother. While developing he or she learns to better understand the thoughts being communicated by the

voice of his or her parents, and to communicate clearly thoughts, wants, and needs. From the earliest of ages, however, baby has learned to recognize the voice of mom and dad.

How a child recognizes the voice of his or her parents can be distilled down to four points:

1. The child knows who the parent is.
2. The child knows who the child is.
3. The child understands the nature of the child/parent relationship.
4. The child spends lots of time in the presence of the parent.

Imagine meeting a man at work one time and you don't see him again. A week later, that man calls you on the telephone for the first time, and says, "Hi! It's me." How likely is it you'll recognize his voice?

Now, imagine a close relative calls you, and greets you with a "Hi! It's me." Will you recognize his or her voice? What's the difference? Of course, the difference is you have a lot more practice hearing from your close relative than the man you met last week.

Many evenings, after our children are in bed asleep, my wife and I sit on the couch to watch a show together. My voice is communicated by where I sit in relation to her, how I'm sitting, and whether or not I give her a foot rub during the program. She can recognize my voice loud and clear, whether or not I speak. Such familiarity comes from long years of intimacy and strife, good times and bad. The keys to my wife recognizing my voice in all the myriad ways I communicate can be distilled down to four principles:

1. She knows who I am.
2. She knows who she is.
3. She understands the nature of our covenant relationship.
4. She spends a lot of time in my presence.

Learning how to hear and recognize God's voice has many similarities to these earthly examples.

How Jesus Heard God's Voice

*I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.*²⁴

* * *

When his disciples asked Jesus how he got such amazing results to his prayers, and he simply said he only did what the Father was doing. Many want to use this as a cheat, in a way, because people want to shortcut themselves to see what the Father is doing and hear to what the Father is saying. But there is no short cut.

Jesus knew what the Father was doing and saying because

1. He knew who the Father was
2. He knew who he was.
3. He understood the nature of their covenantal relationship
4. He spent lots of time in the Father's presence.

If you are a Christian, then the Holy Spirit lives inside of you and you can learn to tune into what God is saying. Like us, God doesn't often resort to spoken words to communicate. God speaks to us through our bodies, minds, and emotions. The Bible is filled with God speaking to people through pictures, nature, and even emotional responses and feelings.²⁵ He is in us so emotions are an obvious tool through which to communicate. We'll examine many of the ways God speaks to us and how to recognize his voice. Our goal is to legitimately discern God's voice, not to become like a Jan Matthyas.

The keys to recognize that it's God speaking, and not our own wills or a different spirit, can be distilled to four points. Can you guess what they are?

1. Know who God is.
2. Know who you are.
3. Know the nature of the covenant relationship through which God relates to you and you to God.
4. Spend lots of time in God's presence.

Let's touch upon these points briefly.

Knowing the Father

Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them

*is that you are not of God.*²⁶

In many ways, knowing who God is can be both simple revelation and a lifetime pursuit. Many people choose to understand God only through looking at the messy world around us. They try to determine all of God's attributes through the chaos and determine that God is incompetent or untrustworthy, or both. They reject this deity and go their own way.

Many will try to know God as an impersonal Force revealed through meditating on nature through an effort to become "one with the universe." This pursuit to empty oneself of emotions, reason, and experiences achieve "one with god" karmic nirvana misses the fundamental reality that God is a Person separate from the created universe.

Others choose to try to know God through sacred texts such as the Book of Mormon, the Koran or the Hebrew Testament. In these cases, the picture of God is muddled and confused. Even in the case of the Old Testament, God is imperfectly revealed, and yet many people choose to define God by the attributes revealed in the Old Testament.

This is another area where Jan Mattyas and many other so-called prophets who claim to hear from God miss it. Jan Mattyas understood God through the Old Testament and so any supernatural messages he discerned had the wrong filter. Even today, many people think the Old Testament reveals that God is angry, bitter, and maybe even genocidal. Their thinking is distorted and confused because they don't understand what the Old Testament is, but more to the point, God is not accurately revealed in the Old Testament.

In fact, if you want to understand who God is, then you need to look to Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus flat out declared, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" and "The Father and I are one."²⁷ Bold. That kind of talk makes the demons tremble and got him killed, but it was the truth, and the Father proved it by resurrecting the Son.

The New Testament declares Jesus is the *exact imprint of God's nature.*²⁸ If you want to know God, *then know Jesus.*

Through Jesus, we learn that

God is Good.²⁹

God is Light.³⁰

God is Grace.³¹

God is Truth.³²

God is Life.³³

God is Love.³⁴

And of course, God is a talker. Jesus talked a lot. He said God was talking. Are you listening?

When we strive to recognize the voice of God, we need to understand that God's voice will not contradict what God has revealed in the person of Jesus. Study Jesus. Look at his words and his actions. Look how he responded to people and to situations. Jesus reveals the truth about God.

Know Yourself

*Beloved, we are God's children now.*³⁵

People have very confused ideas of who they truly are. They search and strive for a sense of belonging, clinging onto a myriad of labels and identities.

Think about the labels and identities people cling to:

- Political parties
- Political orientation
- Sexual orientation
- Sports team association
- National orientation

Member of the

- Dance Team
- Rotary Club
- Daughters of the American Revolution
- Who's Who
- Communist Party
- Masonic Lodge
- Basketball Team
- Cheerleader
- Band

The list is endless, and our behavior will flow from our sense of identity.

Think about that. *Your behavior flows from your sense of self, and your sense of self is rooted in how you self-identify.*

But what if how you self-identify is wrong? What if it's based on a lie?

Oh sure, you might belong to a national party and because of your favorite sports team, you can never be seen rooting for certain other sports teams, but what if you have an identity that transcends these beliefs and how you self-identify?

Indeed we all believe lies about ourselves. Some of us have had certain identities and labels so strongly embedded in us from such a young age, its almost inconceivable to believe something else. We know in our innermost being, our deepest feelings, what our identity is.

But what if your feelings are lying to you? What if your innermost being is wrong? In the Star Wars films, the Jedi are constantly told to 'trust your feelings', with the added caveat, 'except when your feelings are anger and hate.' Of course, this is contradictory and we shouldn't get a life philosophy from Star Wars, but too many people trust their feelings, their gut instincts, their inner voice, without measuring what their feelings are saying to absolute truth.

History proves it's wise to not trust your feelings. Hitler and countless of his countrymen trusted their gut instinct and innermost feelings regarding Jews. They knew in their hearts they were right, and yet, they couldn't be more wrong. How do I know this?

Because I know a man who is the source of absolute truth about mankind, and that source is absolutely trustworthy.

God has given you a true identity. Shouldn't his beliefs about you override what you feel and believe about yourself? Perhaps God's label on you should shape your actions first, and then any other label can define you secondarily.

Actually, any human-designed label should pale in defining us in comparison to the identity God has given us, and make no mistake: God has defined every human being, whether or not they believe in him, whether or not they are evil or good.

All human beings are "in the image of God." This is the ultimate identity statement. But what does it mean to be made "in the image of God?"

It's simple really. Humans are to function in the capacity of God on the earth as best they can. It doesn't matter what their cognitive or physical abilities are. Every human is God's representative on earth.

God designed and tasked them to rule and reign on earth as God would rule if he were walking the earth within the limits of their abilities

and circumstances.

This means every human has value that cannot be measured. It doesn't matter who you are, what you've done, or what's been done to you: you are unbelievably important. God defines you as his imager. It's what you are. It's who you are. God's hope is for you to live like it, and to demonstrate what God's image looks like on earth, Jesus came.

Since humans were formed, God has delegated to humans dominion over the earth and everything in and on it. Instead of living as God would have them, they have ruled according to their own selfish desires or according to other spiritual powers.

But now, all dominion, power, and authority rests again with a human: Jesus Christ. Christ's followers are by faith placed in Jesus and thus granted the same authority and power to rule and reign as Jesus has. They have the same access to God the Father as Jesus has.

When someone is born again as a Christian, the Holy Spirit begins dwelling in that person and begins the transformation into the image of Jesus Christ. For most of us, this takes time as we slowly come to the realization of who we are: the image of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to continue the works of Jesus, according to the Father's will.

As Christians come to terms with their true identity, they find their desire to sin stops. Not only are they freed from the power of sin and death, they actually stop sinning on their own accord. In other words, their activity flows from their identity.

When you look in the mirror, shed the laundry-list of identities you cling to, and begin clinging to the identity God has given you. This identity applies to all humans, no matter their religion or creed or sexual identity or nationality or sports team they root for.

All humans: In the Image of God.

Live like it. If you can't, (and if you're not a Christian, you can't), then first believe that Jesus died and rose again and now sits on the throne in heaven. When you do, the Holy Spirit will dwell in you, and empower you to live out your true identity, even adding some layers of distinction:

All Christians are

- Sons and daughters of God
- Brothers to Christ
- The Image of Christ on the earth

While not all Christians live like this, in fact, this is how God sees them.

If you are a basketball fan, then celebrate your favorite team as Jesus would. If you belong to a political party, then flavor your party activities as Jesus would. Consider any other manmade identity, and dim it as the radiance of Jesus' identity in you shines forth. Jesus considers you a sibling and is conforming you to his image. This is who you are.

Live like it. Live like Jesus did.

As we learn to recognize the voice of God, we should recognize that God's voice will never speak less of you than what the Bible declares you already are.

To this point, we've considered how to know God and how to know yourself. The answer this far is both profound yet simple.

If you want to know the truth about God, look to Jesus. If you want to know about humans, look to Jesus.

Know the New Covenant

"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."³⁶

Much confusion reigns among Christians about the covenant in which they live and how it impacts their faith. This confusion shapes their understanding of God, themselves, and how to they view the world. Jan Mattyas, for instance, was firmly rooted in a distorted Old Testament understanding of God and the Old Covenant way of thinking. He did not understand either the Kingdom of God or God's intentions to fill the cosmos with it and certainly the New Covenant was foreign to his thinking. No wonder he could not recognize the voice of God or correctly interpret what God was saying.

A covenant is a sacred agreement that essentially combines two parties into one family. The Old Testament chronicles many covenants between God and various people. However, all of these covenants have been subsumed by the New Covenant. It's a far better covenant than any in the Old Testament.³⁷

Several Old Testament prophets revealed points about the New Covenant. Two of them were contemporaries and saw the judgement of God fall on the ancient people of Israel because of their unwillingness to remain loyal to Yahweh. The operating covenant stipulated God had to punish them. In Jeremiah, Yahweh actually complains that the covenant between God and Israel was flawed. God wanted a better covenant, one

with only blessings and not cursing.

Ezekiel explains many aspects of the New Covenant, but lets just consider four points brought out in this passage:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.³⁸

1. God cleans us from our sins, turning us into sacred space and fit homes for his presence.
2. God removes our old stony heart and gives us a new heart of flesh.
3. God makes us his home and sacred space by putting the Holy Spirit within us.
4. God causes us obey his rules. We are convicted towards living as the righteousness of God.

Jeremiah adds more depth, here quoted in Hebrews.

*I will put my laws into their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor
and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.
For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more.³⁹*

1. God will put his laws in our minds and hearts.
2. He'll relate individually to each believer.
3. Access to the Father won't be barred by genetics or priests: everyone can know God personally.
4. God will no longer remember our sins.

In fact, through Christ, God has reconciled the entire world to himself,

no longer holding the sins of the world's people against them. That is such good news, it's hard for a lot of people to believe.

The author of Hebrews goes on that the old covenant was passing away. Peter saw the principle elements received from heaven that made up the Old Covenant would actually burn and melt with fire.⁴⁰ Their predictions came true when the Roman armies obliterated Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple and the Old Covenant system forever.

This New Covenant is made between God and the House of Judah and the House of Israel, so how can you participate in it? Through faith in Jesus! When you have faith, you are in Christ, and Jesus is the true Israel of God. The name Israel means "Will Rule as God." Ancient Israel was a picture of Jesus and the Word came to embody Israel in human flesh. As both Man and God, he made a new covenant with God. While Adam failed and Israel failed, Jesus triumphed. Jesus is the House of Judah and the House of Israel, and when you are in Christ, you are in the family also. To enter the Covenant, you must enter the Son, and to enter the Son, you must believe that Jesus died and rose again. It's pretty good news.

When we practice hearing the voice of God, we need to recognize that God's voice will never contradict the New Covenant.

Get in God's Presence

When the priests went out from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of Yahweh.

The priests were not able to stand to minister because of the presence of the cloud, for the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh.⁴¹

In the Old Testament, God's people went to the Temple to worship. If they had built the Temple according to God's plans, then God's presence would fill the Temple so thickly that sometimes the priests could not even stand up in it. But we know that these days, believers individually and collectively are the Temple of God, and God wants to fill his house with his presence. Unsurprisingly, this is a great way to become familiar with the voice of God. If you want to recognize God's voice, you need to get in God's presence through worshiping God.

As God's imagers and representatives sent to bring the Kingdom of God to earth, all of the activity in our lives are acts of worship. But what I'm speaking about here is intentionally worshiping God through song,

music, and celebration. You can do this with a group of other Christians during a worship service or by yourself privately. I suggest doing both.

The Bible offers numerous scenes of God's people worshiping God and God responding to worship. Actually, when God's people experienced the worst situations and then turned to God in worship, God tended to move more powerfully than when they came to him in pleading prayer. To worship God when things aren't going well is powerful act of faith.

King David worshiped with such emotional abandon, his own wife mocked him, and that's a good lesson for us: true worshipers may be mocked by other believers. So be it. He set up a 4000 voice choir complete with a light show and burning incense; he set up periods of 24 hours of worship. David was desperate for the presence of God, and he understood that God was enthroned on the praises of God's people.

In my culture, it's generally acceptable to get excited at sporting events, political rallies, secular concerts, or when opening Christmas presents, but many look askance when Christians get excited or emotional while worshiping God. As we shift to a Kingdom of God worldview we need to learn how to worship appropriately, because understanding what Jesus has accomplished for us demands a response of worship.

Worship is an encounter with the living and holy God.⁴² Worship is reserved for God alone.⁴³ It affirms who God is and ascribes to the Lord the glory due him.⁴⁴ We should worship with reverence and as we draw to him in worship, he'll draw near to us.⁴⁵ If you can't think of anything to worship God for, start with Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.⁴⁶

Worship is affirmation, where the believer acknowledges that God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ demands a response. God has revealed himself and he awaits a reaction from his creation, one that his people have a duty to initiate. Worship also preserves and transmits faith. Through worship, believers and even nonbelievers increase their understanding of God and truth, because true worship transmits theology. Yes, I mention nonbelievers because they too can worship God, through which they can experience God's revelatory call into relationship through faith in Jesus. Worship is also celebration, as believers rejoice in their union with the Father through Christ.⁴⁷

Worshippers celebrate the Kingdom of God invading the earth past, present and future, and this brings many emotions and attitudes, including eager expectation, joy, fear, and unrestrained devotion⁴⁸.

Worship should be from the heart and not mechanical.⁴⁹ Neither the mode nor the place of worship matters much.

I could be in an ornate sanctuary with stained glass windows, a storefront church building, my home, my garage, or my car. I could worship with a guitar, piano, organ, or with no music at all. The externals of worship don't matter. It's not the art of worship that is vital; it's the heart of worship that counts. Certainly, I must worship according to God's directives, but the important issue is that my heart is involved and that I'm not focused on outward appearances. There must be sincerity and truth. The truth I am applying to my life is that God wants me to worship in spirit and in truth.⁵⁰

Worship of God in ancient Israel included singing, dancing, playing musical instruments, and responsive readings. They created an atmosphere that facilitated a physical encounter with God, including worshipping in incense-filled spaces lit with multi-colored oil-burning lamps.⁵¹ Early Christian worship included reading scripture, singing songs of praise, praying to God, and including the service of Holy Communion.⁵² Over the millennia, Christians have explored many aspects of worship. If you don't enjoy worshipping, worship anyway. It's not about you. Although God will bless you during worship, it's not really *for* you. It's for God, and God will bring you into his presence when you worship.

If these concepts of worship are new to you, I invite you to engage with God through playlists I have created on my Seers See Youtube channel. Navigate to <https://www.youtube.com/user/seerssee/playlists>, and open one of the "Worship for House Cleansing" playlists. The "Modern" playlist opens with some instructions on how and why we worship. The other playlists include styles from different eras and traditions.

Get in God's presence. The more you do so, the more you'll recognize God when he speaks.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH READING THE BIBLE

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*⁵³

The primary way God speaks to his people is through the Bible. We can hear God and learn to recognize his voice when we read the Bible. We can discern what he is saying when we read the Bible through the lens of a Kingdom of God mindset, the New Covenant and Jesus. The overarching theme of the Bible is to reveal God's plan to bring the Kingdom of God to earth.

I often wince when I hear someone say, "The Bible said so." The Bible does not "say" anything. It's a collection of written works. Ultimately we use words to communicate thoughts, and they often don't communicate thoughts well. Think about it. Have you ever received a text message or email and you misunderstood the thought behind it? Why would we be so confident in using our feelings to "know" what the "Bible says" when it was written in a culture and language vastly different than ours today?

Recently, I received a text message from my wife: "I cannot believe you wasted my coveted salted caramel yogurt." What thought is being

conveyed? Is she amused? Angry? Disgusted? Teasing? Is there a command implicit there? Such as, “Never eat my coveted salted caramel yogurt again” or “If you get my coveted salted caramel yogurt, be sure to eat it instead of letting it sit on the table to spoil,” or “You better go to the store and buy me some more coveted salted caramel yogurt,” or “Ha! You rascal! You’re so adorable! I knew you liked my coveted salted caramel yogurt!” or “Was it you or one of our kids that wasted my coveted salted caramel yogurt?”

I started to craft an “in my defense” text back, but stopped. Then I began a “blame our oldest daughter” text, and then I deleted that one too. I finally tapped out, “sorry!” and even deleted that too. I ultimately didn’t respond. Frankly, I was at a college basketball game and did not want to try to think through what was being communicated, to ask a clarifying question or to consider how I should respond, so I ignored it. (Isn’t that what a lot of us do with the text of the Bible? *Don’t distract me from my game by making me think!*)

In the Recognizing Someone’s Voice chapter, I mentioned the four principles to help us understand the thought behind messages, and although I know my wife, and know myself, and understand our covenant relationship, and have spent lots of time in my wife’s presence, I still wasn’t sure. So consider the Bible. Although you may know God and yourself, although you may understand the New Covenant and spend lots of time in God’s presence, and although you may already have a Kingdom of God mindset, frankly there are times God will speak to you through the Bible that you just don’t understand the message. That’s fine! God is calling you into a deeper relationship of two-way communication. When you read something weird or confusing in the Bible, it’s important. Dig deeper!

But just what is the Bible?

The Bible is a library of documents written down and compiled over a period of several centuries. The Bible consists of poetry, liturgical texts, histories, military annals, prophetic judgements, promises, press releases, wisdom literature, fictional stories, biographies, sermons, legal discourses, theological debates, private correspondence and public sermons. Each genre of literature followed specific conventions that make sense within that genre, but not another. A legal contract, for instance, follows different rules to understanding than a military annal or a worship song.

Since the Hebrew Bible was written to Ancient Israel and New

Testament was written to Jews and Gentiles in the Roman Empire, the writers used languages most of us don't understand in cultures most of us would find alien. To bridge the gap from the past to the present, most of us rely on scholars who have translated the Bible into modern languages and produced countless works to help us understand what was written.

The original human authors wrote, edited, and compiled the scriptures under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Many of them *did not* realize what they were writing was inspired by God. They had agendas to their writings; they had a target audience and were writing within a certain context and responding to a certain situation. But they did not sit down one day and say, "I think I'll write some of the Bible today." Instead, over time, scholars and theologians recognized that what they wrote was in fact inspired by the Holy Spirit, and useful for training people up in righteousness. No where does scripture say it is useful in training up in science or history or sports medicine or accounting or mathematics or civil engineering or music theory. It is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training *in righteousness*. The Bible unfolds God's plan to release the Kingdom of God on earth and through that plan, we learn how to live according to God's purposes: *as the righteousness of God*.

Therefore, it is very important when reading scripture to recognize that the Bible was not written *to* you. But God inspired the scriptures so it's written *for* you. When understood in the proper context, the Bible reveals a lot about how God works and how God has related to people and nations over the ages. But it was written in a culture and language that is essentially an alien world compared to our own, and much is lost in translation. It's popular for readers to pull a scripture out of the Bible and make it a "life verse" or apply it in ways that the writers did not attended.

For example, I know many who make a life verse out of Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans that I am planning concerning you", declares Yahweh, "Plans for prosperity and not for harm, to give to you a future and hope."⁵⁴

It's a nice verse, but please read the rest of the chapter. This verse is not meant to be applied individually, but corporately to God's covenant people in a time when God was about to send Babylon to obliterate their nation through slaughter and exile. God sent this literally before the exact opposite happened: poverty, death and a life without hope. But the promise sustained the survivors in Exile for the subsequent 70 years,

when God restored their prosperity and health, redeemed their future and hope. Is it truly wise to apply take this message to a covenant community about to be judged and apply it to you as an individual? *Maybe.*

This verse is profoundly rooted in the Old Covenant relationship between God's covenantal people and himself. Do you really want to apply that to yourself?

The New Testament equivalent is Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Yes, God's New Covenant people have spread across the planet, but many individual and communities of Christians have suffered terrible fates in that spreading. So yes, God makes all things work together for those who love him, which means the Church is prospering, but individual fates vary.

Maybe my caution is a too strong. Perhaps the Holy Spirit will inspire in you hope and raise your faith through this verse. That's fine. He's God. Listen to him *and* take care in how you pull verses out of scripture to "speak" to you.

Christians have the Holy Spirit living inside them and thus when they read the scriptures, the ultimate Author will actually make the Bible come alive when they read it. And yes, God will speak to you through the written word of the Bible, even by taking verses out of context. Just take care that you aren't imposing your own will to make scripture say what you want it to say or what you've been taught it says.

It's true you don't even have to fully understand with your mind what you're reading. Somehow, reading the Bible with an open heart and an open mind will allow God to speak to your heart.

Yet, understanding with your mind what you're reading is useful. Sharpening your mind through study of the Bible and other books is important to living a life of virtue, wisdom and grace.

If reading the Bible sounds daunting, then good. Be daunted and do it anyway. Freedom isn't free. It's worth fighting for. Hearing and knowing God is worth working towards. A proverb says that it's the glory of kings to search a matter out, and God has granted the position of kingship to you, so take the effort to search matters out.

Read the Bible with an open mind. Approach it like fiction, not like a textbook. Try to discern who is writing and why. What's the agenda? Who is the intended audience? What message is being conveyed?

If you want to start simply, I suggest starting simply. Try looking up the “One Year Bible” and subscribe to a biblical aid produced by trusted scholars like *Bible Study Magazine*.

The “One Year Bible” breaks the Bible into a short reading each day of the year. Each day’s reading is about 15 minutes, depending on how fast you read. There’s a passage from the Old Testament, the New Testament, a Psalm, and a Proverb. But that’s not how we’d read a fiction novel or even a textbook. While there is value in following a plan, sometimes it’s good to break from the plan and read a whole book or two in a single sitting. Carve out a couple of hours, grab a favorite beverage, put some music on, and read it like you’d read a bestseller: because it is.

As you read, have a little notebook and pen nearby and jot down thoughts or questions that come to you as you read. This is called journaling. Many people get bogged down in certain Old Testament legal codes and descriptions of architectural drawings or obtuse prophecies long fulfilled. Don’t beat yourself up if you get bogged down or confused. Feel free to skim the boring parts. It’s the Bible. It’s hard, but it’s worth it. Try getting a commentary to help walk you through what you’re reading, but understand that commentaries are thoughts of scholars who have their own agendas and grids of understanding: they aren’t scripture. Still, they’re useful.

In your journal, jot down questions you have, any prayers that arise in your heart as you read, and ideas that flow to you from what you read. If you do this even semi-regularly, I promise you, by the end of the year, you’ll be amazed what God begins to show you. When you thumb through your journal, you’ll begin to see how God spoke to you, answered prayers, and revealed more of him to you through the Bible.

If you are following a reading plan, do not beat yourself up if you miss a few days or weeks. Just skip to the present to keep abreast with the calendar. The point isn’t to judge yourself but to learn to hear from God.

CHAPTER SIX

GOD SPEAKS DURING PRAYER

And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.⁵⁵

Prayer is conversation with God. It can be speaking to God, listening to God or speaking with God. When someone asks me to pray regarding something, I will ask the Holy Spirit right then to tell me how to pray. And then I'll wait to see if he responds. I've learned to recognize his voice sometimes, although other times I'm certain he spoke, but I missed it or didn't hear properly, or got distracted or whatever. Doesn't that happen with our human interactions, too? When my wife speaks to me, and my phone vibrates with a text at the same time and I rudely look at my phone, I'll miss what she's saying. The same principle happens with God.

Sometimes when I ask God how to pray, his response is simply, "I trust your judgement. Uncover for yourself how I want you to pray." God wants to train us up in righteousness, not be a crutch with all the answers. And again, this reminds me of raising my children, when they ask me to answer a puzzle, and I respond, "What do you think? Figure it out for yourself!" My job as a parent is to train my children up, not give them all the answers.

There are many kinds of prayer. The Bible is chock full of prayers

and they illustrate good ways to pray. Jesus' disciples asked his advice on how to pray. His reply, which included giving The Lord's Prayer, was that we should not vainly repeat the same phrases over and over again. It's funny that many Christians tend to quote The Lord's Prayer, vainly, repeating it over and over again. While that might be worship or meditative, it's not prayer. Jesus' entire life suggested that God was interested in a relationship and a conversation, not a meaningless recitation of words.

If praying is new to you, then I suggest *using* The Lord's Prayer as a guide and an outline, while the Lord trains you how to pray. Have a notebook handy, and take time to listen to God. As you talk with him, he'll reply back. Ideas and thoughts will pop in your mind. Those ideas and thoughts could be God speaking to you, so jot them down.

Daily Prayer Outline

*...as we pray most earnestly night and day...*⁵⁶

Here's an outline in how to pray, based on The Lord's Prayer. First, invite the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, direct and empower your prayer time. I suggest praying out loud, like God is right there in the room with you. Because he is. Remember? You're the Temple. He's living in you, and there is power in your spoken word released with faith. Besides, when you converse people, you normally converse out loud, don't you?

1. "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."⁵⁷ This is a fancy way of saying, "may your Name be honored." The Name is the personal presence of God. Acknowledge God the Father through praise and worship. Honor Jesus' work and victory and transforming power in your life. Point out to God the things you are thankful for or in awe of. Allow the Holy Spirit to reveal who God the Father is.

2. "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Ask for the God's government to breakthrough into your life, your family, home, finances, health, church, employment, school, neighborhood, city, state, and nation. Get it?

3. "Give us this day our daily bread." Another way to say this is, "Give

us what we need to live for today,” which strongly suggests you should pray every day. Make specific, daily requests for financial and material needs: food, clothing, health, shelter, and provisions. Ask for the “daily bread” to help others.

4. “Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.” Another way of saying this is “Forgive my sins as I forgive those who have sinned against me.” *Sin* means to *miss the mark*. God has already forgiven your sin through the Cross (notice this prayer was taught before the Cross and so before forgiveness was granted to everybody). But there is value in confessing your sin to God, so that nothing stands in your way to hear from him. Apologize and ask for grace to not sin anymore and power to live out the Kingdom of God. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart regarding relationships. Receive forgiveness. Extend forgiveness to others. Purposefully bless those who have wrongfully treated you

5. “And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” Said another way: “Do not let me succumb to the attacks of the Satan and deliver me when the forces of the Domain of Darkness attack.”

6. “Yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.” Close in worship!

During your prayer time, did you pause and allow God to speak to you?

Healing Prayer

*And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.*⁵⁸

Sometimes, God will speak to you while you are praying for healing. He may instruct you how to best pray, in fact. Sometimes, you may feel faith rise up to you and see something in the spirit realm and simple command healing. Other times, it’s an exploratory process. However, most of us need to start more simply.

The Bible doesn’t provide a formula to pray for healing. God’s instructions are simply to go and heal people. The reason he doesn’t give a formula or magic words is because the the power to heal is in God’s

presence releasing the Kingdom of God on earth. In heaven, there is no sickness, and it's God's will for there to be no sickness on earth too.

While there is no magic formula, by examining the many healing prayers in the New Testament, a pattern emerges. When you pray for healing for someone else, try following these three steps:

1. Ask
2. Pray
3. Ask

1. Ask.

Ask specifically what is wrong. Sometimes, you will be able to see what is wrong, but otherwise, ask. If the issue that is wrong is pain, ask where. Ask what caused it. Try to determine the pain level. I often will say, "From 1 to 10 with 10 being excruciating, what number is your pain?" Get some basic information so you know exactly how to pray. If you want a specific answer, then pray specifically.

As you listen to the person, also listen to the Holy Spirit. Perhaps God wants to minister to the person in a way besides the pain or in a way related to the pain, but unspoken. God might pop his thoughts into you, directing how he wants you to pray.

2. Pray.

When you have enough information to pray, then pray. Do not say, "God, if it's your will..." Jesus *never* prayed that way. In fact, the Bible never recorded anyone praying that way when it came to healing the sick. Why should we? Just recognize that Jesus wants to heal. God is good and wants good things. The Bible reveals that our cosmic enemy, Satan, causes the roots that result in sickness and suffering. One of God's name means "I am your healer."

Learning to pray for healing takes practice and experience. One Christian I know prayed for 600 people before seeing anyone healed. One church prayed for 6 months before seeing someone actually healed. They learned a lot during those "failures," but when breakthrough occurred, healings came all the time. So pray.

Generally, I start with asking the Holy Spirit to show me how to pray. I listen. If I don't hear from God, then I usually thank God for a whole body and I command the issue to be healed, in the name of Jesus. This is basically how Jesus and his disciples prayed for healing. Sometimes, Jesus

dealt with other spiritual or mental issues before healing was released.

Often when I pray for healing, I consider the future perfect state that will be on earth and attempt to release the future perfect body into the present. I always say, “in the name of Jesus.” These are not magic words, but I think it’s important to focus on just who is doing the healing, especially if the person receiving prayer is not a Christian. The Name is Jesus’ actual presence, and since he is in us, it’s his power that flows through healing.

3. Ask.

After you finish praying, ask the person to test out the pain. If they had a pained back, for instance, ask them to move around and test the pain level.

One of three things will happen and each is equally valid.

1. The healing will have happened (pain will be gone), maybe even during the act of moving. Be sure to explain that Jesus did the healing and loves that person and wants a personal relationship.
2. The pain level will have reduced. In this case, I usually get excited and feel faith raising. Then I ask to pray again to see if God will continue the healing process.
3. Nothing happens. The pain is the same. I’ll either pray again, or acknowledge that healing won’t come today for whatever reason, but that this is not a reflection of God’s love or his will to heal.

There are lots of reasons why healing doesn’t always happen. Most of them are related to the conflict between the Domain of Darkness and the Kingdom of God, but also sometimes people choose to not receive healing. It’s not because someone’s faith wasn’t “enough.” Jesus was often surrounded by unbelief when he healed.

In this situation, I usually say something like, “It looks like healing isn’t going to happen right now. And God loves you. I hope you can see that by my willingness to pray for you.”

The fact is, we are in a cosmic war between good and evil, and until Jesus returns, sometimes the evil prevails. But don’t let that stop you from praying for others!

Sometimes when I pray for someone, the Holy Spirit will reveal an underlying issue he wants to heal. For example, once, a woman I didn’t

know asked me to pray for her painfully tense shoulders. I asked the Holy Spirit how to pray. I said this out loud. And then I waited a moment and paid attention to my mind and heart. The woman waited, with her eyes closed.

A thought popped in my head: “stabbed in the back at work” and my heart leapt at the thought. It was faint and fleeting. I assumed it was God, and I asked if she was having a hard time at work. She said no. I asked if she had been stabbed in the back by coworkers or her boss. She looked at me a moment and said no.

I sensed that she wasn’t being honest and went ahead and prayed for her work situation. I prayed out loud about it. It was just a minute or so. At the end of the prayer, the shoulder tension suddenly released and the pain went away, and she became somewhat emotional. She later came up to me and said actually, the “stabbed in the back” situation was correct. I had heard correctly from God how to pray for her and God physically and emotionally healed her of the situation.

Some might ask, “You mean to tell me if you had just prayed for her shoulders, they wouldn’t be healed, but since you prayed about the stabbed in the back thing, they were healed? Wouldn’t God just know how to heal her no matter how you prayed? What kind of God would withhold healing because you didn’t pray the right way?”

The short answer is the kind of God who delegated physical and spiritual authority of the earth to humans. It’s not God’s fault, in other words, that we are too obstinate to not pray specifically or choose not to be healed. We are complex creatures, and our spiritual health is impacted by our mental health is impacted by our physical health is impacted by our spiritual health... Sometimes to receive physical healing, we need to forgive someone. Sometimes to receive mental healing, we need our sins dealt with. Sometimes to receive spiritual healing, we need our bodies healed. And so on. Get it? If God reveals how he wants you to pray, then pray that way. God has made a way to fix this broken situation.

We must also recognize that sometimes healing will come by our conscious choices, not through a miraculous healing. An obese man receiving prayer to be healed of obesity probably needs to be delivered from numerous lies he is believing before he can make choices to improve his health. It’s unlikely God would zap off his body the fat. Prayer is needed in this situation to get to the emotional or spiritual root

of the man's issue, and physical healing will follow. In other words, physical things on earth will follow as things in the spirit are healed.

God wants us to be wholly healed: spiritually, emotionally, and physically. This is God's will, and he has tasked his body on earth the Church to enact it. Much more can be said about healing, and if this interests you, I encourage you to continue researching and learning.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH FRIENDS

*Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good.... Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you..."*⁵⁹

Besides reading the Bible and prayer, there are other ways to hear God. For instance, one way to hear God's voice is listening to the advice of other believers. There is wisdom in seeking advice, in bouncing ideas off, and in discussing decisions with pastors or other ministry leaders and friends in the faith.

The advice should be measured with what you are reading in the Bible. Not all advice from friends in the faith comes from God. I know a situation where a woman who attended a church regularly was cheating on her husband. Some of her friends in that church conspired to help deceive the husband so the affair could continue. God was not speaking to her through the counsel of these other women. How do I know this? I know that God does not *ever* endorse adultery because of what I've read in the Bible, what I know about Jesus. These women were sinning in their encouragement of the woman's sin.

Anything you think you hear from God should be measured against what is revealed in the Bible through the Kingdom of God filter and the New Covenant. And this leads to the second instance of Jesus talking

about the binding and loosing principle: unity in relationships.

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”⁶⁰

Here Jesus reveals that broken relationships can bind up the things God wants to release from heaven. Jesus gives a step-by-step method to reconcile two people who are at odds.

1. Work it out together in private. If that fails, then
2. Take two or three others and try to work things out with their mediating help.
3. If that doesn't work, stand before the body of believers and work it out. If that doesn't work, then you are irreconcilable and dismiss the party in the wrong from the fellowship. Otherwise, the disharmony will bind the things in heaven that God wants to release.

Paul reaffirms this when he moans about Christians taking each other to court or before law enforcement.

When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints?

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to

judge angels?

How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church?

I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?*⁶¹

Paul is reminding people that they are the holy ones of God and will someday be judging the immortals who have sinned against God. Can't they figure out their disputes in peace, living out who they truly are? Instead, too many Christians go to nonbelievers who are not part of God's government, but part of some earthly government under some demon spirit, and somehow justice is supposed to happen? Don't you recognize, Paul says, that the Domain of Darkness promotes injustice? So settle disputes in the church among believers who are part of God's government!

This applies to married couples who are not on the same page. Your broken relationship binds up the freedom God wants to release in your life. First, be reconciled to your partner. This can be an major act of spiritual warfare all on its own. Learn to put your partner first and regularly pray this prayer:

Father, release the Kingdom in my marriage! Extend God's government to the relationship between me and my spouse! Restore us to how you envision marriage! Come Holy Spirit! Teach me to be a good spouse and heal the rifts! Help me to serve and love my spouse as you want to love and serve them! I ask this in Jesus loving Name! Amen and amen.

If that prayer spoke to your spirit, then pray it every day and go after the redemption of your marriage.

CHAPTER EIGHT

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH GOVERNMENTS

*“...the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men...”*⁶²

The New Testament writer Paul indicated that the judgements of government officials should be construed as God’s judgements, since God appointed rulers. In other words, God speaks through the judgements of national rulers.

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.*⁶³

This is a hard concept for me to stomach. Why? Because I am an American, and *my nation was founded by rebelling against a government* that the Apostle Paul suggested was appointed by God. My nation’s founding documents are founded on distrust of its own governmental branches and much national discourse is related to the different branches and federated levels jockeying for power and authority through disunity. I have inherited this spirit of rebellion against governing authority that is intrinsic in my culture. And yet Paul insisted that God ruled through

earthly governments.

*For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.*⁶⁴

Yes, Paul says those in government are serving God and are in fact ministers of God.

*Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.*⁶⁵

Keep in mind, Paul's government ultimately executed him. He says to consider ministers of God the most corrupt tax collectors imaginable. If you think *your* government is corrupt, study a little about the graft that greased the Roman Empire, whose iron fist destroyed countless millions. Paul's point: God speaks through his earthly governmental rulers, so honor them and submit to them. When earthly rulers don't represent him, God removes them. They will be accountable for their actions. Clearly, God doesn't remove unjust governments according to our timeframe, but according to his.

I admit, my knowledge of history and even the current world system causes me to protest against Paul, but really, modern governments do not compare to the Roman Empire, which openly ruled under pagan deities. And Paul recognized that behind the earthly governments, a spiritual hierarchy called the Domain of Darkness ruled. And yet, despite that, he ultimately knew that God appointed these rulers, unjust that they may be, and ultimately God would judge them, and so to rebel against your government is to rebel against God. Therefore, I should believe what Paul said, and not trust the sickening feelings that rise up in my heart when I consider that God might be speaking and ruling through my government. My emotions, in other words, are lying. Trust God, not your emotions.

Peter says, “Honor the Emperor”, the same emperor who killed him and may have used Christians as human torches to light his dinner parties.⁶⁶ Don’t honor these wicked leaders for their sakes, but for God’s sake, and ask God to deal with them in his justice and mercy. The New Testament writers never suggested rebelling against the earthly government. Their focus was on explaining the good news that God’s kingdom was invading the earth through Jesus. They admonish us to pray for our earthly leaders and obey.

While we can acknowledge and attempt to address unjust and ungodly behavior from our governments, we must also recognize that the Bible insists that God appoints governments and rules the earth through them. When we don’t obey laws of earthly governments, we experience God’s wrath through the earthly government.

These governments do not always enact God’s will, but neither has God’s Church always enacted God’s will. And by examining history broadly, as we can see God bringing reforms to the Church to correct the errors, and we can see broad historical trends of evil governments collapsing or reforming, giving rise to more just governments. For instance, the Roman Empire, the superpower of its day, brought peace to a region by killing everybody who lived there. Today’s global superpower, the United States, goes to great lengths to prevent injuring civilians in its efforts to bring peace to warring regions. That is progress.

The answer to unjust behavior by the Church or by earthly governments isn’t to replace or rebel against the church or your government, but to expand the dynamic rule and reign of God on earth one person at a time. This leads to a cosmic reformation of the earth according to God’s plan.

I have just begun to turn my mind to considering that God might speak through earthly governments, and so these thoughts are not well vetted yet. My American-ness protests even as I write these words. But I am a citizen of heaven first, and therefore, I must consider God’s instruction to his people as supreme.

CHAPTER NINE

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH DREAMS AND VISIONS

But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, “Behold you are a dead man...”³⁶⁷

One of the most dramatic and common ways God speaks is through dreams and visions. In the Bible, hardly a page of historical narrative passes without someone having a dream or a vision through which God imparts information, warnings, advice, commands, judgement, aid, or gifts. God was always revealing information to his people directly.

He did this through

- Visitations from angels
- Visions while awake
- Visions while in a trance or through meditation
- Visitations from Jesus
- Dreams (visions while asleep)

Because God’s people understood who God was, who they were, the operating covenant, and because they had spent time loyally worshiping God, they were able to discern that these visitations were in fact from God, and not some enemy spirit. Even when God had a terrifying message to impart through a dream, the people in the Bible had a

sufficiently supernatural worldview as to accurately interpret the message.

We should apply this biblical principle to us today.

God is still speaking to his people through angels, visions, trances and meditations, personal visitations from Jesus, and perhaps most commonly, through dreams.

This should go without saying, but we don't want to end up like Jan Mattyas, so I'll say it anyway: any information given us by any supernatural means should be measured to what we know about God, what we know about our identity, what we know about New Covenant, and our time spent in worshiping God. We should apply a Kingdom of God mindset to any and all dreams or visions.

Many times, visions or dreams impart a message that we don't truly understand in the moment. Once the Apostle Peter was meditating, fell in a trance and had a vision that contradicted his understanding of scripture. He was perplexed about what the vision might mean. He recognized it was from God, of course, and came to realize that he could no longer view scripture through his cultural lens. It needed to be filtered through Jesus and the New Covenant. See Acts 10 for the entire account.

Peter's experience is instructive for us as well.

Therefore, if you receive a vision or a dream that you know is from God but you do not understand it, that is acceptable. Journal it. Ponder it. Pray over it. Search the scriptures through the lens of Jesus. Spend time in the presence of God. An interpretation to what you saw may come, *sometimes years later*. Remember, it's the glory of kings to search out a matter, and God has made you a royal priest.

Dreams

Everyone dreams. And while God will speak to us through dreams, not every dream comes from God.

Dreams have at least three sources.

1. Your mind
2. Demonic spirits
3. The Holy Spirit

Let's briefly consider each of these sources.

Your Dreams

The modern scientific convention assumes that all dreams are the

result of your mind's chemical processes working something out in your dream state. Certainly everyone dreams every night, and most people do not remember most of their dreams. Some don't remember *any* of their dreams. To be sure, often dreams are simply your mind working out the stresses, hopes and concerns you have in your life.

Sometimes you have given your body certain chemicals that trigger unsettling dreams. My wife and I call these "pizza dreams", as in, "I shouldn't have had that late night pizza before going to bed. It gave me crazy dreams." That's fine. Some of these dreams are really interesting, good or bad, but completely unrelated to any supernatural source.

Dreams that come from your mind will usually be in regular colors and won't be confused as real. You know you're dreaming.

Demonic Dreams

Demons can afflict nightmares, night terrors, or other horrific dreams on people. These dreams tend to be black and white, grey or very muted colors, and are always bad.

If you are being assaulted by demonic dreams, there is a sin condition or curse that needs to be dealt with in your life or in your thinking. In other words, there's an aspect of your life that you haven't submitted to God's rule and reign. Do so, and the demonic dreams will cease. In the meantime, if nightmares wake you up and you sense a demonic presence in the room, command it to leave in the name of Jesus.

Dreams from God

These are my favorite. They tend to seem very real, in bright, vivid colors. Dreams from God can be frightening or uplifting.

Frightening? Yes indeed. A passage from Job clearly indicates a dream from God that terrified the dreamer into giving up a sin:

"Now a word was brought to me stealthily;
my ear received the whisper of it.

Amid thoughts from visions of the night,
when deep sleep falls on men,
dread came upon me, and trembling,
which made all my bones shake.

A spirit glided past my face;
the hair of my flesh stood up.

It stood still,
but I could not discern its appearance.
A form was before my eyes;
there was silence, then I heard a voice:
‘Can mortal man be in the right before God?
Can a man be pure before his Maker?
Even in his servants he puts no trust,
and his angels he charges with error;
how much more those who dwell in houses of clay,
whose foundation is in the dust,
who are crushed like the moth.
Between morning and evening they are beaten to pieces;
they perish forever without anyone regarding it.
Is not their tent- cord plucked up within them,
do they not die, and that without wisdom.’⁶⁸

Many in the Bible had dreams from God that were frightening. Kings dreamed of coming environmental disasters and the collapse of empires. Joseph, Mary’s husband, dreamed of danger coming to baby Jesus. In each case, these are good dreams, although they scared the dreamer, sometimes into taking drastic and immediate action. They came from God as a warning, and the dreamer took strong action to mitigate the peril.

But other dreams can bring better news: Joseph later dreamed when it was safe to return his family back to their homeland, for instance.

Dreams from God can provide spiritual insight to the activity going on around you and in your life. God can provide direction or wisdom or answers to prayer in dreams. Often God’s message in a dream will take on characteristics of whatever you’ve been setting your mind on. Your brain applies symbols meaningful to you to filter God’s message. It’s up to you to discern what the message behind the symbols is.

Do not make rash or life changing decisions based on a single dream, unless you are Joseph who is caring for baby Jesus.

Because we as humans will remember dreams better if we wake up once or twice in the middle of the night, if you want to remember your dreams, then drink a large glass of water right before bed. When your bladder wakes you in the middle of the night, there’s a good chance you’ll recall the dream you just had. Record a few notes from it before

the memory fades.

But the Bible also indicates that sometimes God will simply bypass your conscious mind with instruction in dreams that you cannot remember. So do not fret if you never remember your dreams: God's messages are going straight to your spirit.

Record Your Dreams

Dreams are fleeting. You may wake up with a clear memory of a dream you are certain is from God, only to have it fade from your mind by the time you flush the morning toilet. So immediately jot some of the memories from your dream down, or share them with someone. The first thing many people do when they wake up is check their social media on their phone. If this is you, go to the Notes section on your phone and tap out a few memories of your dream. Later, record it in more detail.

Some people do best with digital journals. Others better with analog. Try both and see what works best for you. Journal your dreams: all of them that you remember. In some cases, you might want to journal the activities of your life, as this may shed light if a dream is from your mind or an enemy spirit. Discuss your dreams with loved ones. Mull them over.

Over time, you'll come to understand which dreams are from your mind, which (if any) are from demons, and which are from God. As you value your dreams, discuss them with others. Do not get a dream dictionary or consult a psychic for an interpretation. Many dream dictionaries are proffered by demon-inspired New Age interpreters and psychics rely on dangerous knowledge. These should be avoided because they can obscure what God is saying. Many Christians can interpret dreams. People in the Bible clearly understood the meaning of many symbols in dreams and could easily interpret their meaning. Some dreams in scripture, however, defied any interpretation unless God supernaturally gave it. This is a key to understanding how dreams operate today.

As you value your dreams, you'll come to interpret many and have many more, but others will simply baffle you. Don't fret. Enjoy the process of learning to hear God speak through your dreams. Just understand that it is the glory of God to conceal matters, but the glory of kings to seek them out. God sees you as royalty, so seek them out.

Visions

Visions are dreams in a waking state. Some people will receive angelic visitors or personal visits from Jesus. Record those in your journal as well. Personally, I approach angelic visitations with an unhealthy dose of skepticism. But by now, you should have a good filter to understand if the message from the angel is from God or not. Any message that contradicts the New Covenant, the nature of God as revealed in Jesus, or your identity is false. The ultimate test to whether or not an angel is from God is simply to have it proclaim that Jesus came in the flesh, shed his blood on the cross, and rose again. No enemy spirit can proclaim that.

I once had a vision, and I asked the person, "Are you Jesus?"

He responded, "Yes."

But then I said, "Tell me that you are Jesus."

He responded, "I am he."

Then I demanded, "Use the name of Jesus."

He was silent, and I commanded him to leave, and he did.

Then later, Jesus did appear, and he said, "I am Jesus. I came in the flesh, died on the Cross and rose again."

This specific situation is deeply personal, and I won't go into further details, but understand that Jesus is not afraid to use his name or declare what he did for you on the Cross. The enemy, however, cannot use his name nor declare what he did on the Cross.

CHAPTER TEN

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.⁶⁹

God will speak to you through spiritual gifts. Many Christians do not have the Kingdom of God worldview and so they are not aware of the purpose of spiritual gifts and some are not open even to the possibility of spiritual gifts. The purpose of spiritual gifts is to reveal and release the Kingdom of God on earth. Many Christians who use spiritual gifts don't use them to advance the Kingdom and thus miss their true purpose.

There are many spiritual gifts and lots can be said about them. The Apostle Paul's essay on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14 lists a few, but he also adds that there are other manifestations of the Holy Spirit which he did not list. So this Paul's brief overview of the spiritual gifts was not meant to limit how God may want to release or reveal the Kingdom of God. Paul offered just the briefest of overviews, mainly to bring correction to that specific situation, which was causing division in the body. Remember that division locks up what God wants to release.

Some of the gifts that the Holy Spirit releases are grouped as *gifts revelation*, which reveals information you could not otherwise know. These include messages (or "words") of wisdom and knowledge, discerning of spirits and prophecy. We've already briefly examined that prophecy is speaking God's heart towards someone or a situation.

Messages (or “utterances” or “words”) of knowledge are points of information that God supernaturally tells us. God’s message can come as a word through someone or through other forms of communication. These are things that we did not or could not know, but the Lord reveals to us, often to boost faith or to direct us in how to pray, so we could reveal and release the Kingdom. Messages of knowledge are received in many different ways:

- Seeing picture of something, sometimes visually or sometimes as a mental picture.
- Feeling something, either emotionally or physically, revealing an issue someone else is dealing with. For instance, if God wants you to pray for someone’s sore ankle, your ankle may start hurting to signal to you where to pray. This also may indicate that God is releasing grace to heal that ankle.
- Knowing something, such as an inner feeling or sense about a specific issue.
- Speaking something. Words just tumble out of your mouth having bypassed your mind.

All of these types of revelation are very faint, they are with us for a moment and then gone, like a still small voice amidst the tornadoes of life imprinted on our spirit.

Messages of wisdom operates similarly and imparts direction to us by the Holy Spirit. They often point to a solution to a particular problem. They are measured by a body of believers, not privately by individuals.

Discerning of spirits is the supernatural ability to identify what type of spirit is interacting with a person, place or situation. The types of spirits include angelic, demonic, human, or the Holy Spirit.

We need to learn to step out in faith and share or write down what God gives us. As we do so we’ll learn to distinguish what comes from God more effectively.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SEE THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ACTION

*He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well...*⁷⁰

There is a difference between the Holy Spirit being *in* someone and *on* someone. The Holy Spirit resides *in* Christians. And the Holy Spirit is hovering **above all** flesh, having been poured out by God when Jesus ascended into heaven.⁷¹ When he physically touches someone or rests *on* someone, discernible things happen, and this is a way to hear what God is saying and do what God is doing.

Learning to see the presence of the Holy Spirit on someone or on yourself comes with practice and paying attention. Different people tend to experience him differently.

Discerning the presence of God on someone may include when a person seems like he or she is highlighted, more real than other people nearby. In that situation, God is doing something, so pay attention and cooperate with what God is doing so you can release the Kingdom. There is a host of physical signals of the Holy Spirit moving on someone, including tears, fluttering eyes, physical warmth, trembling, sensations of power (like electricity), peace, trances, and exhilarating joy. When God is moving on me, I often feel a tingling in my brain behind my temples. There are other signals too, and as you practice, you'll learn to recognize

them. When that happens, pay attention because he's doing something.

Some skeptics will mock these ideas, and claim they are rooted in the New Age. To them, I try to explain they are simply calling something real as something counterfeit. Yes, the Domain of Darkness counterfeits the things of God, but the counterfeit also points to the real. As counterfeit money indicates real money exists, so do counterfeit manifestations indicate real manifestations exist. The Holy Spirit is real and very powerful, and when he touches people, they react. It's like plugging a toaster into an outlet designed for a clothes dryer: the toaster is going to react to the power!

Do not attribute the manifestations of the Holy Spirit as demonic: danger lurks when you do so. It's your heart condition that matter. When you focus your heart and mind on God and confess with your mouth that Jesus came in the flesh, died, and rose again, then the enemy cannot invade because the Holy Spirit is working. Jesus actually said that when you ask the Father for the Holy Spirit, a demonic spirit will not respond.⁷² Instead, the Father responds by sending the Holy Spirit. He's a good Father and wants to give you good things. So don't be afraid when God is moving. Trust the Lord.

The Bible is replete with examples of some of these manifestations when the Holy Spirit was on someone and when you don a Kingdom of God mindset, you'll have eyes to read and see. There's no need to develop a detailed apologetic of God's power in this book. Suffice it say that the Apostle Paul stated many manifestations were possible, not just the ones specifically mentioned in scripture.

As we learn to discern the work of the Holy Spirit and learn to move with God and hear his voice, our prayer effectiveness and ability to release the Kingdom will dramatically increase.

CHAPTER TWELVE

PRACTICE HEARING GOD

*Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.*⁷³

Learning how to hear God is different than learning how to hear humans. The Holy Spirit lives inside you and you can learn to tune into what God is saying, because God speaks to us through our bodies, minds, emotions, and so forth. I invite you to practice hearing from God.

Some people are going to have a problem with the idea of practicing how to hear from God. Some are going to say, “Where does it say to practice this in the Bible?”

Actually, the biblical authors encourage practice quite a lot.⁷⁴ If you have a problem with these ideas, then you haven’t yet changed your perspective to adopt a Kingdom of God mindset. I’m asking you to turn away from what you have believed and seek the Kingdom of God’s activity of breaking into the present from the future so God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. The Lord will confirm these thoughts in the Bible and in your experience, if you allow him to change your heart.

Once I lost my job. I was going through a trying time. Soon after that, my wife was in Evanston, Illinois at a conference for a few days, and we decided I would join her. I wanted to have a little retreat to reconnect to the Lord. I took a 3 hour train trip to Chicago from our home in downstate Illinois, packing a Bible and prayer journal. I asked the Holy

Spirit if he'd want to join me.

He said yes.

On the way up, I asked God if he wanted to go to the Art Institute of Chicago with me before heading up to Evanston.

He said he'd love to.

I sat there on the train, journaling my prayers and other thoughts. I had a picture in my mind of Jesus walking with me through the Art Institute, taking in and sharing our thoughts together on the works of art. I wondered if God cared enough to have lunch with me. I asked him.

He said that sounded awesome.

I asked if he cared about the little things like where to eat.

He said yes, he did care about the little things.

So I said, "Okay, Lord. Show me where you want to have lunch. And if I may, I'm hoping for sushi. I haven't had sushi in months, and we don't make it to Chicago that often."

God said, "Okay, I'll show you where to eat."

So I got off the Amtrak at Union Station, and began to walk to the Art Institute, about a mile away. I was very hungry. I kept my eyes and ears open, waiting for God to show me where he wanted to have lunch. I especially kept on the lookout for sushi places.

Now, before I describe this next part, you need to understand something about my body: it does not agree with pork. What I mean is, my body reacts violently to pork. I take extra care in avoiding pork. If there's even a hint of pork in hotdogs, corndogs, sausage, and pepperoni, then I avoid it. I don't make a big fuss about it: I'm kind of embarrassed about it. I simply avoid the appearance of pork, and my body is happy. When I error and accidentally consume pork, my body is definitely not happy, sometimes for many hours.

So the Lord and I were walking, and we passed sushi places and fancy places that would have made for a nice dinner date with God. I wondered if he'd surprise me by taking me a Buena Beef, one of my favorite places. But I didn't think there was a Buena Beef downtown; still God would know. So I kept my eye out. But he did not highlight any of the places I would have picked, and there was no Buena Beef. I was very alert, looking around as we walked, wondering what God had in mind.

And then he highlighted a place. It seemed more real than the surrounding areas. It was like I was seeing everything in muted colors, but this restaurant was bright: America's Dog, 21 East Adams, Chicago,

Illinois.

Yes. A hotdog joint.

I thought God must be joking. I kept walking. I passed America's Dog, and felt my heart tugging back to go in.

"Fine, Lord. Ha ha." City of Chicago. Home of thousands of restaurants, many I love. And God picked a hotdog joint: literally the last place I would go.

It wasn't even a sit-down restaurant. I had to wait in line to order. The line was almost out the door. These must be good hotdogs, in the City of Chicago with a thousand other restaurants I'd rather be at.

"Excuse me," I said to the cashier when I finally made it up there. "Are your hotdogs 100% beef?"

The cashier answered affirmatively, so I relaxed and ordered a Jumbo Dog. "He must really want a hotdog, to wait in a long line just to ask that," the cashier must have thought. He looked at me quizzically as he gave me the receipt and I sat down and waited for my number to be called.

I took out my Bible and prayer journal and began writing. Eventually, I realized they were calling out numbers and I didn't realize what my number was.

Five-Thirteen. They called out. *Five-Thirteen.*

I looked at my receipt. 513.

May 13 is my birthday.

Yes, I heard God correctly. This is where he wanted me to have lunch. And yes, I teared up a little, knowing my Father, the creator of the universe, really loved me enough to have lunch with me.

Well, sure enough, in this crazy busy hotdog joint, God said, "Turn and look who just walked in the door."

I did so. It was a young couple. I didn't know them, but I said "Uh-oh."

God said, "Yeah, go and pray for them."

I said, "About what?" but the Lord didn't respond. I sighed. "Fine, Lord. I bet you think I won't do it, but I will."

So after finishing my hotdog, I gathered my courage and went up to them. By then, they were seated and eating.

"Excuse me," I said. "This is going to sound weird, but I think God sent me here to pray for you."

They were a young African-American couple. I'll never forget them, as

they glanced at each other with knowing eyes, and then at me and said, “Alright.” And then they grinned, held hands, and he said, “This is so awesome!”

So I did, standing there, not making a scene. I spoke God’s heart to them and prayed for them, releasing more of the Kingdom in their lives. When I was done, she had tears and he just grinned. They thanked me.

And then me and the Lord... well, we went to the Art Institute together. And we shared our observations about the artwork we enjoyed together.

The next day in Evanston, my wife was at her conference, so I asked the Lord if he wanted to have lunch again. This time, I had my mind set on praying for someone, instead of being taken by surprise like the day before. But God said to take the fiction book I was reading with me, instead of my Bible and journal.

So the Lord and I walked through downtown Evanston, and this time, he almost immediately highlighted a place for me. So I stepped in and looked around for who God might have me pray for.

No one was there. The place was empty.

I frowned a bit as the waitress sat me down. I asked God, “Am I hearing from you God? Is it really you?”

I glanced at the menu and on the window next to me was a poster advertising a local play. In big letters, it said, “It’s God.”

And I realized that God reserved the whole restaurant for me and him, so I could enjoy my book in peace and quiet, because resting in God’s peace is part of the Kingdom too. Introvert that I am, I was deeply touched. And the Lord and I had a wonderful time together.

God is speaking to you. Take steps to learn how to hear his voice. Measure what you hear according to the filters we’ve examined. Always remember that God speaks to us in order to advance his rule and reign in our lives and in the world around us. He’ll never contradict the scriptures as revealed through the love of the Father, Jesus Christ, and the New Covenant. Happy listening!

Activities

The Bible offers many examples of God speaking through works of art, architecture and of course music. Some readers will be more artistic or musically inclined than others. No matter your artistic ability, give this

shot. For some readers, many years or even decades will have passed since you picked up markers or crayons to draw or color, and you are resistant to this exercise. Get over yourself. It's not about you. It's about God. Become childlike in this exercise. No one has to know, except you and the Lord.

Prophetic Art

It's time to step back into our childhood. Get some blank sheets of paper and coloring items: markers, crayons, colored pencils, watercolors, or ink pens. Put on some worship music that you enjoy. If you are unfamiliar with worship music, go to my YouTube channel and put on one of the House Cleansing Playlists.⁷⁵ Fix your heart on heaven and invite the Holy Spirit to reveal something about Jesus or about God's heart for you through your art. And then make art. Begin drawing or coloring, and see how God leads you.

Later, record your thoughts about this experience in your journal.

Prophetic Music

If you are a skilled musician, go to your instrument. Warm up with some scales or chords, or other regular warmup exercise. Set your mind on heaven and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal something about Jesus or about God's heart for you through your music. And begin improvisational playing. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you.

Later, record your thoughts about this experience in your journal.

Highlighted Object

This activity is based on Jeremiah 1, when God used highlighted objects to prophecy to Jeremiah.

You will ask the Holy Spirit to highlight something in the room. And then you'll ask God to reveal something about his heart for you through that object. First, dial down your emotions. Quiet the room somewhat. Take stock of what you are feeling and experiencing emotionally and physically.

Now, ask the Holy Spirit to highlight an object in the room. Pray something like this:

Holy Spirit, I ask you to reveal the Father's heart for me through an object in the room. Please highlight something in a way that I can detect it. I ask this in Jesus' name.

Scan the room with your eyes. What is popping out at you? What is your eye being drawn to? Don't overthink this. Go with the first thing that your eyes are drawn to more than once. What is it?

Now ask the Holy Spirit to reveal something about the Father's heart for you through this object. Pray something like this:

"Holy Spirit, I see a _____. Please speak to me through this the Father's heart. I think I'm hearing..."

Wait a moment for the Holy Spirit to respond, and either speak or write down what comes to you.

Example: As I was writing this, I tried it out. I'm currently sitting in my living room, waiting for my wife to come down from kissing our oldest daughter goodnight so we can watch a *Doctor Who* episode. I took stock of what I'm feeling: I'm tired and am ready for bed, but am wanting to spend some time with my wife. I'm also cozy, as it's winter and bitterly cold outside and I'm in warm and comfortable clothes.

I asked the Holy Spirit to highlight something, and my eyes immediately went to the shelf of DVDs against the wall. And the thought immediately popped into my mind: "I am rewriting the story of your life, and burning it onto a DVD, because I love a good story and I really love you, and your story will be worth saving on my heavenly DVD shelf."

And that's it. I think that's a pretty encouraging message. Of course, it's loaded with metaphor and symbolism. Now, you try it. Don't be discouraged if nothing comes to you. This is just practice. Try again some other time. But also, don't be surprised if something comes that is really touching.

If you are in a group, try to get a word for someone else. Don't fear getting it "wrong." Your goal is to share the Father's love for someone else, and that is always right.

Discussion Questions

* * *

How can viewing God through the Old Covenant distort your interpretation of a message from God?

A prophet is God's covenant enforcer. What kind of enforcement activities would New Covenant prophets engage in?

Prophecy are words from God that reflect his heart for someone or something. They will only confirm the New Covenant and God's declaration that he has reconciled the world to himself. What actions should prophecy result in?

Give a biblical example of God speaking through friends. (Hint: Exodus 18 and Acts 15).

Give a biblical example of God speaking through a message of wisdom. (Hint: Acts 15).

Give a biblical example of God speaking through the scriptures. (Hint: Acts 15)

Give a biblical example of God speaking through prophets. (Hint: Acts 15. Turns out, Acts 15 contains many examples of God speaking through various gifts).

ENDNOTES

¹ Matt. 11:15

² Many authors capitalize personal pronouns referring to Jesus or God. I will not. *The Chicago Manual of Style, 16th Edition* directs writers and editors to not capitalize pronouns referring to God or Jesus, just as they are not capitalized in most English translations of the Bible.

³ DSM-V, 103.

⁴ John 10:1-5, emphasis added.

⁵ Acts 21:8

⁶ Acts 11:27-28. A number of prophets are mentioned, but none of their words are recorded. Agates was considered a prophet before having two of his prophecies recorded in Acts.

⁷ Matt. 6:33

⁸ George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 11, 122-148. See also Bernhard W. Anderson, "The Kingdom, The Power, and the Glory: The Sovereignty of God in the Bible," (*Theology Today*, vol 30, no. 3 October 1973). 5-14, and C.C. Caragounis, "Kingdom of God / Kingdom of Heaven" (Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

⁹ W.W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London: International Critical Commentary; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 389–

392; Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 22.

¹⁰ 1 Kings 19:12

¹¹ See W. Rollig, “Hermon”, Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van Der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, 2nd Edition (DDD)* (London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 411-412; J. J. Collins, “Watchers”, *DDD*, 893-895 and Jennifer Wilkinson, *Mark and his Gentile Audience: A Traditio-Historical and Socio-Cultural Investigation of Mk 4.35-9.29 and its Interface with Gentile Polytheism in the Roman Near East*, (Durham theses, Durham University, 2012, available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/4428/>) p253,n797.

¹² Matt. 8: 15-19

¹³ Matt. 17:1-22

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 2:8

¹⁵ Acts 28:31, Rev. 11:15

¹⁶ John 12:49

¹⁷ John 14:12

¹⁸ Jon. 3:10 LEB

¹⁹ Matt. 20:25-28

²⁰ Jon. 3:2-4 LEB

²¹ Jon. 3:9 LEB

²² Jon. 3:10 LEB, emphasis added.

²³ 1 Sam. 3:8

²⁴ Job 4:20

²⁵ i will defend this supposition in a subsequent book.

²⁶ John 8:47

²⁷ John 14:9, John 10:30.

²⁸ Heb. 1:3

²⁹ Mark 10:18

³⁰ John 5:1

³¹ John 1:14

³² John 1:14

³³ John 10:10

³⁴ 1 John 4:8

³⁵ 1 John 3:2

³⁶ Luke 22:20

³⁷ Heb. 7:22

³⁸ Eze. 36: 25-27

³⁹ Heb. 8:10-12

⁴⁰ 2 Peter 3:3-12, Heb. 12:19-25.

⁴¹ 1 Kings 8:1011

⁴² Exod. 3:1-6

⁴³ Exod. 34:14

⁴⁴ Ps. 29:1-2

⁴⁵ Heb. 12:28, James 4:8

⁴⁶ Heb. 10:1-10

⁴⁷ Kenneth Gangel and James Wilhoit, *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Spiritual Formation* (Wheaton, IL; Victor Books, 1994), 119.

⁴⁸ Ps. 27:4, Ps. 84:1-3, Ps 96:3-4, 1 Chron 29:9

⁴⁹ Isa. 29:13, John4:23-24. See Martin Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009), entry 8627.

⁵⁰ Skip Heitzig, *How to Study the Bible and Enjoy It* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2002), 136.

⁵¹ David Seal, "Incense, Critical Issues" *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited John D. Barry David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). See also Dennis Cole, "Lamps, Lighting, Lampstand" in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, edited by Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, E. Ray Clendenen, and Trent C. Butler (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).

⁵² Gangel and Wilhoit, *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Spiritual Formation*, 100.

⁵³ 2 Tim. 3:16

⁵⁴ LEB.

⁵⁵ Mark 1:35

⁵⁶ 1 Thess. 3:10

⁵⁷ Matt. 6:9. Subsequent verses in the Lord's prayer are from the same passage.

⁵⁸ Matt. 10:7

⁵⁹ Ex. 18:17-29

⁶⁰ Matt. 18:15-20

⁶¹ 1 Cor. 6:1-9, emphasis added.

⁶² Dan 4:17

⁶³ Rom 13:1-2

⁶⁴ Rom 13:3-4

⁶⁵ Rom. 13: 5-7

⁶⁶ 1 Pet. 2:17

⁶⁷ Gen. 20:3

⁶⁸ Job 4:17-21

⁶⁹ 1 Cor. 12:1

⁷⁰ Acts 14:9

⁷¹ Acts 2

⁷² Luke 11:10-13

⁷³ 1 Tim. 4:15

⁷⁴ Ps. 111:10, Matt. 23:3, 1 Tim. 4:14, Heb. 5:14, 1 John 3:10.

⁷⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/user/seerssee/playlists>.