
Authentic Relationship

In your relationship with God, who does most of the talking?

Do you think God has things he would like to say to you personally?

Does God still speak to his people in direct ways today?

In what various ways did God speak throughout scripture?

We know that the primary way God chooses to speak to us is through his word, but sometimes he chooses other ways as well.

Read the following scenarios and discuss whether or not you believe God might still speak that way today.

Samuel

1 Samuel 3:1-14 (NIV)

The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.

² *One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³ The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the Lord called Samuel.*

Samuel answered, "Here I am." ⁵ And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

⁶ *Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."*

⁷ *Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.*

⁸ *The Lord called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."*

Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ *The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"*

Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

¹¹ *And the Lord said to Samuel...*

Means of Communication: Voice in the Night

Do you think God may still speak through an audible voice? Have any of you had an experience with hearing God speak audibly to you?

Abimelech

Genesis 20:1-7 (NIV)

Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, ² and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.

³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman."

⁴ Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? ⁵ Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands."

⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die."

Means of Communication: Dream

Have any of you ever had a dream where God communicated a message to you?

Peter

Acts 10:1-16 (NIV)

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. ² He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. ³ One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

⁴ Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.

⁵ Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. ⁸ He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

⁹ About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. ¹³ Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

¹⁴ "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

Means of Communication: Vision

What is a vision?

A vision often refers to a vivid mental image that one sees while one is awake, whereas a dream occurs while one is asleep. However, in scripture, the words “dream” and “vision” are often interchangeable and visions are also spoken of as occurring in dreams. In each case, though, they refer to a divine message given to the person through visual representation. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Have any of you ever experienced a vision from God? What did you see?

Peter

Acts 10:17-21 (NIV)

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸ They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there. ¹⁹ While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them." ²¹ Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

Means of Communication: Voice of the Spirit

What do we mean when we talk about the “voice of the Spirit”?

When we hear **words spoken in our mind** as opposed to audible, external words, we refer to that as being the **voice of the Spirit**.

Have you ever had the Holy Spirit speak distinguishable words into your mind? What was spoken?

Isaiah 30:21 (NIV)

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

Paul

Acts 20:22 (NIV)

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.

Means of Communication: Prompting

What do we mean when we talk about promptings of the Holy Spirit?

A **prompting** is a **compelling sense** that God is directing us to do something. It's not so much a message as it is a heavy burden that must be responded to.

Have you ever experienced a prompting of the Holy Spirit? What happened?

Agabus**Acts 11:27-28 (NIV)**

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.)

Means of Communication: Prophecy

Prophecy is not always about foretelling the future; it is more often a message God wants communicated to a specific group of people regarding a specific issue.

Have you ever had a prophetic message given to you, or have you been given a prophetic message to pass on to someone else? Share your experience.

Acts 2:17-18 (NIV)

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

Why might God need to speak in some of these more dramatic ways?

- To be a sign of God's presence to both believers and unbelievers
- To be very clear on a specific point
- To tell us to do something we wouldn't normally do
- To tell us something we need to know
- To give a word of warning
- To give a word of encouragement
- Etc.

**How does talking about this sort of communication make you feel?
Does it make you feel uneasy, excited, or curious? Share your thoughts.**

Do you think this type of communication should be evident in the church today?

Is it something people should seek after?

In scripture, these types of messages were never something people sought after; in fact, they often came as a complete surprise. We are never told to chase after the dramatic, but simply to pursue a steady relationship with God through prayer and scripture. When God wants us to know something, he will let us know. However, there are some things that can prevent us from ever hearing the voice of God.

What are some hindrances that might keep us from hearing from God?

- Disbelief that God still communicates in such ways
- Lack of an intimate relationship
- Disinterest in hearing from God
- Busyness and distraction
- Sin
- Etc.

Mark 1:35 (NIV)

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Jesus was clearly led by the Spirit and knew every step of the way what the Father wanted him to do, what the Father wanted him to say, and how the Father wanted him to say it.

What does the above scripture passage reveal about how Jesus developed such an ear to hear?**What principles can we learn?**

- Talking with the Father was a priority with Jesus
- Praying in the morning set the stage for being led through the rest of the day
- When life got too busy, Jesus took extreme measures to make alone time with the Father
- Solitary places give opportunity to listen as opposed to just talking

How can we develop a sense for “listening” to God within our group prayer times?**Acts 13:2-3 (NIV)**

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

If you sense the Holy Spirit speaking a message for the group during a prayer time, how should you respond to that?

In your own prayer times this week, try to find a quiet place where you can talk to God, but also spend time listening to see if there is anything he wants to communicate to you. Sometimes it simply involves asking questions and being ready to listen in case God chooses to speak in such a way.

1 Samuel 3:1-14 (NIV)

Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

CAUTION: God's primary way of communicating with us is through his word. It **must always** play a priority in our lives. Always seeking a "special revelation" can lead to some dangerous opportunities for the evil one to counterfeit God's voice. Next session we will discuss how to discern between the spirits, and how to discern whether or not their messages are from God.