

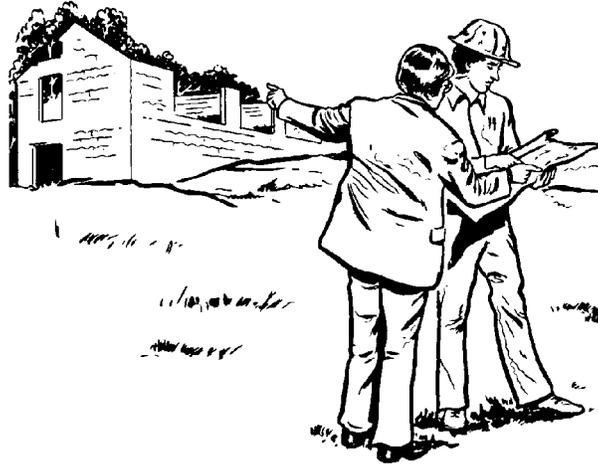
Lesson
6

How Can God Speak to Me?

. . . I've never actually heard Him.

"Go out; touch no unclean thing." The voice was insistent; it had authority; it was convincing. Manuel was on his way home when he heard it. He had an important position in a business that paid him very well but was not honoring to God. The voice interrupted his thoughts; it was real. Manuel knew it was speaking, yet he was not sure if he was hearing it with his ears or in his heart. Somewhere he had heard the words before.

Manuel had grown up in a Christian home; he had memories of going to Bible classes as a boy. His brother and sisters all served the Lord, but early in life Manuel had been attracted to the "good life"—big money, big houses, and plenty of comfort. And so his life had gone in a different direction from the rest of the family. He had not allowed his conscience to disturb him. He was young, his goals were set, and he was well on the road to "success." Then this voice. *Where was it coming from? Who was speaking?* he asked himself.



As Manuel listened, he became sure of one thing: the voice was God's voice. He remembered the words from stories in the Bible, but this was more than a memory. He completely stopped in the middle of his way home, turned his thoughts toward God, and answered the voice with a dedication of his life.

God does speak. He can be heard. Sometimes it is in the manner that Manuel "heard" Him; sometimes it is in a different way. This lesson will help you discover how God speaks to you.

In this lesson you will study . . .

Ways God Speaks to Us
Reasons Why Some Do Not Hear God's Voice
Assurance That God Will Speak

This lesson will help you . . .

- Describe several ways God speaks to us.
- Explain why some do not hear God speak to them.
- Gain assurance that God will speak to you.

WAYS GOD SPEAKS TO US

Objective 1. *Recognize examples of different ways God uses to speak to us.*

Some people spend a lot of time worrying about whether God can communicate with them. *Can God speak to me? How can He speak?* they ask themselves. It is interesting that God, who created us and gave us the ability to hear and to communicate with other people, is often thought to have difficulty speaking himself! But God does speak. He has chosen to use several ways of communicating with us.

God Speaks Through the Bible

The primary way in which God speaks to us is through His written word, the Bible. It seems impossible that a book that was completed almost two thousand years ago could speak to individuals today concerning the will of God for them. But the Bible is more than a book. It is a message to us from God himself. This fact assures us that it can speak to us and that we can understand it.

The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible. He is the Third Person of the Trinity. He is as much God as the Father and Son are God. Every quality the others have He also has, including that of having complete knowledge. He knows everything. He knows the present; He knows the past (He does not forget). He knows the future. He knew *you* before you were born, before your parents were, or before anyone else was.

He is the author of the Bible. He guided its writing; He made sure of its accuracy (2 Peter 1:19-21). It is the revelation of God's design for humankind. Not only is it able to lead you into salvation, but it is also sufficient for further guidance. The Holy Spirit included in the Bible everything you need for a successful Christian walk.



For You To Do

1 Read in your Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and write in your notebook an answer to this question: How will Scripture help the person who serves God?

The miracle of Scripture is not just in how it was written, but also in how it is understood. For the Holy Spirit is still alive. He was the agent of the Bible's authorship; He is the agent of its understanding.

Think of some of the Scripture passages you studied in Lesson 2 which assure us that the Holy Spirit is able to lead us. For example, remember the teaching of Christ in John 14 and 16 concerning the Helper or Comforter who would come—the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 16:12-15). Remember the assurance given in Romans 8:26-27 that the Spirit knows the mind of God and will direct our praying. Christ even said that the Holy Spirit would bring to our mind His teaching (John 14:26). How does the Spirit do this? Through the Word, of which He was the author.

Have you ever read Scripture and suddenly a verse or passage seemed to stand out? It spoke to *your* need—you were not sure why—but it gave an answer or a guide point. It may have given assurance. We do not experience this as we seek Scripture verses to support our ideas, but as we seek to know God's mind through the Scriptures.

Christ was well aware that the Holy Spirit spoke in such a way, for He often quoted Old Testament passages and said that they referred to Him. Without the aid of the Holy Spirit, the truth or direction would have been missed (see Luke 4:18, for example). Others have also experienced this kind of revelation (such as Peter in Acts 2:14-21).

Manuel, whom you read about at the beginning of this lesson, is a close friend of mine. That voice he heard was the voice of God speaking through Isaiah 52:11, though the words there were originally spoken to other people. This is an example of the Holy Spirit using the words of Scripture to speak and making their message understood.



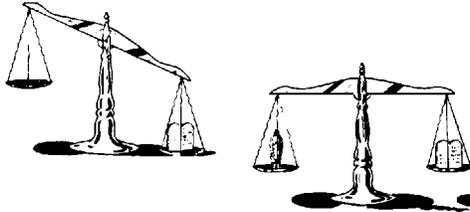
For You To Do

2 Suppose you were trying to explain to someone else how the Holy Spirit can use the words of Scripture to speak to us. In your notebook, describe an example of this from your own life, the life of someone else you know, or this lesson.

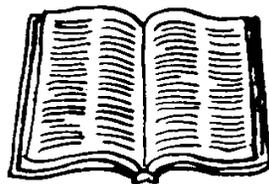
The Holy Spirit will guide us to apply Scripture according to the principles that are clearly taught. He will not contradict himself.

If the principles of Scripture are going to help us follow God's design, then we should understand how they are given in the Bible. The Bible is not simply a collection of ideas about life. It is the record of God's speaking to people and their responding to Him. Principles are presented, and we understand their meaning by examining the record of their effect on individual lives. This record shows us how principles are applied and keeps us from becoming unbalanced in our view of them.

For example, Christ taught the principle of the final victory of meekness or humility (Matthew 5:5). But what is humility? We understand how it works in balance with other qualities through studying the life of Moses (see, for example, Exodus 12).



We understand the difference between repentance and sorrow by looking at the lives of David and Saul, two kings of Israel. It wasn't the greatness of Saul's sin that caused him to lose the kingdom. It was the fact that he reacted with sorrow but never truly repented and changed his ways. In contrast, David repented with his whole heart. (Compare, for example, 1 Samuel 13:8-14; 15:17-25; 2 Samuel 12; and Psalm 51.)





For You To Do

- 3 Read Acts 5:40-42 and the verses referred to below. The event described in Acts is an example of the principle given in
- a) Matthew 5:7.
 - b) Matthew 5:11.
 - c) Luke 6:37.

We may say, then, that the Holy Spirit applies the Word to guide us within principles that are consistent. These principles are understood as we see how they have operated in the lives of others.



For You To Do

4 We have studied three kinds of guidance we receive through the Scriptures. Read each Scripture passage referred to below and match it to the phrase describing the kind of guidance it represents. Write the number of the phrase in front of the reference.

- 1) A direct command given to a person or group
- 2) A principle of behavior
- 3) An example of a principle in someone's life

... a Joshua 6:4

... b Matthew 5:44

... c Matthew 19:21

... d Acts 7:54-60

God Speaks Through Others

God also uses others to explain His will to us. He may use Christians or non-Christians to do this.

We work and live within structures or relationships based on authority, such as those of our government, family, business, and even church. Each of these is responsible for a certain area of guidance. Scripture recognizes each as a means by which God speaks. For example, parents of young children give them direction, and God's Word says it is His will for the children to obey (Ephesians 6:1). Rulers of a nation have a right to direct citizens of that nation, and God's Word says it is His will that the rulers be obeyed (Romans 13:1).

Beyond these kinds of relationships, there are also those we may have with certain people whom God chooses to bring into our lives. They may be wise because of a longtime walk with God; often their advice is priceless because they know the ways of God.



For You To Do

5 Read in your Bible Exodus 18:13-26. In your notebook, write an answer to the following questions.

- a What was Moses' problem (vv. 13-17)?
- b What was Jethro's advice to Moses (vv. 18-23)?
- c What was the result (vv. 24-26)?

King David, however, fell into sin by numbering the people of Israel because he ignored the advice of Joab (2 Samuel 24:3-4, 10). Jethro and Joab did not have "authority" over Moses and David; in fact, Moses was leader, and David was king. But there was value in counsel.

God might even use a test or examination given by your school to show you that He has given you certain gifts or abilities. He can speak through teachers who often recognize special talents.

What happens if the advice we receive is not in agreement (as is usually the case)? Some advice should be ignored because it goes against the directions of Scripture. Sometimes we need to consider the person who has advised us: what are his or her intentions concerning us? But with these safeguards against confusion, remember, the confidence is that God *can* speak clearly and *will* speak clearly.



For You To Do

6 Kenneth works hard at his job and feels he is not paid enough. He asks his friends what to do. Read Ephesians 6:5-8 and decide which advice you think he should *reject* based on those directions.

- a) Carl advises him to make up for low pay by leaving work early when his employer is gone.
- b) Bob tells him to have a talk with his employer and explain his grievances.
- c) Jim advises him not to work quite as hard since he isn't receiving a fair wage.

God Speaks Through Past Experiences

Past experiences of following God's direction will help you learn to hear the voice of God more clearly through whatever channel He wishes to speak. As you think back over your life, you will recognize that God has been faithful; He has spoken. Each time you are able to identify His voice or leading in your life, you become better able to recognize it.

In the same way that God worked in people's lives in Scripture according to certain principles, He will work in your life according to certain principles. You will probably view God's work in your life as a series of unconnected events at first. Then you will possibly be able to see a pattern. Finally, from your own experience of following God, you will discover the principles by which He is working. The following illustration is an example of this.

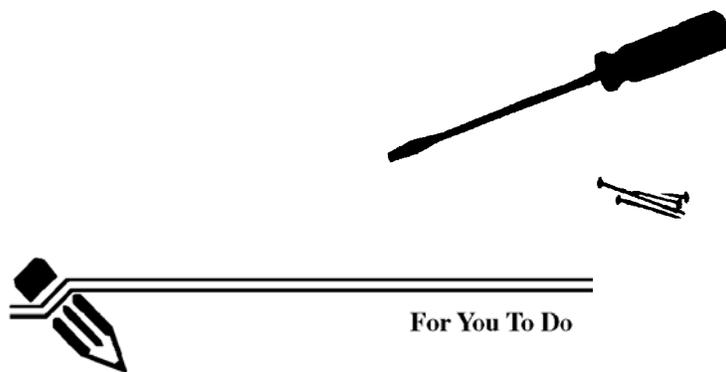
When Jim graduated from Bible college, two different churches asked him to come and be their pastor. He prayed, read the Bible, and sought advice from spiritual leaders. Nothing seemed to be clear. No principles of Scripture would be violated if he were to choose one church and not the other. His Bible college teachers advised him to choose one of them; a spiritual elder advised him to choose the other. Finally he could wait no longer and had to make a choice. Almost in fear he made the choice and told the churches. Now he was committed. He had done everything he knew to do.

The amazing thing was that his fear of choosing was replaced by a confidence in his commitment. He became sure he was in God's will.

Did Jim get lucky and make the right choice? No. His choice was not made by luck . . . it was the result of the direction of God. For along with all his seeking of advice, Jim honestly wanted to do God's will. He was walking after the Spirit. He had a renewed or changed mind (Romans 12: 1-2). His decision was actually made—without his conscious knowledge of it—in response to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Several years later Jim was called on to make another important decision. Again he sought God, prayed, listened to advice, and looked at the different possibilities. Again there was no voice from heaven. Again he reached a time when he could wait no longer and had to make a decision. He made it, and again his fear was replaced with confidence as he followed God.

Jim began to realize that there was one principle that remained constant in his pursuit of God's will. When he had been sincere in seeking God, God had led him each time it became necessary for him to make a decision. That principle became the basis of a confidence. He saw that the principle given in Psalm 37:23, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (KJV), was being worked out in his own life. He could rely on it. There was never a voice he could identify, yet God was speaking. God was actually speaking in a variety of ways. As they blended, Jim's decision was actually a response to God.



7 We have just studied an example of how God led a person who wanted to do His will. Think about how God has led you in your own life. Then write a short answer in your notebook to the following questions.

- a How did God lead you into salvation?
- b What people has God used to guide you?
- c What message in God's Word has given you special direction?
- d What circumstances has God used to shape you?
- e Have you observed a pattern or principle of guidance in your life? What is it?

God May Speak Directly

Besides using His Word, other people, or past experiences to speak to us, God also speaks directly on some occasions. How often does God choose this way? If we include our conscience as representing the voice of God, we could say that God speaks directly to us quite often. If we have in mind just audible words, we would say that God more often chooses to use the Bible. But He does speak. And remember, the message will *never* be in contradiction to what He has already said in His Word.

How do you know if the voice you hear is the voice of God? The Bible gives two checks that balance each other. The first is subjective. As sheep know the voice of their shepherd (John 10:4),

you will know the voice of your Shepherd (John 10:14-15). When you have sought God, filled your mind with His Word, and followed the Holy Spirit, you can know it is God speaking.

The second check strengthens the first: God's direction will always agree with His written Word (Isaiah 8:20).



For You To Do

- 8 Read Acts 10:9-33 and write an answer in your notebook to the following questions.
- a In what two ways did God speak directly to Peter (vv. 9-16, 19-20)?
 - b How was God's message confirmed (vv. 14, 17-18, 22)?
 - c How did Peter respond (vv. 21-23, 28)?

REASONS WHY SOME DO NOT HEAR GOD'S VOICE

Objective 2. *Match examples of people who have missed God's message to reasons why they have done so.*

There are usually two major reasons why people miss the voice or direction of God. One is that they cannot accept God's method of speaking. The other is that they have not obeyed what God has already said.

Rejection of God's Method

First, some people have already determined how God must speak. When He chooses another way, they are not prepared. Sometimes they miss His voice altogether; sometimes they reject the message because of the medium (how it appears).

Hebrews 1:1-3 tells us that God changed the way He spoke to humankind. Prior to the coming of Christ, He spoke by the fathers or ancestors and the prophets. But then He chose to supersede that way of speaking by speaking through His Son. The message of *who God was*, was perfectly given in Jesus Christ. But because some people did not accept the medium (Jesus), they missed the message (who God was).

Naaman was a great general, successful in everything (see 2 Kings 5). But there was a blight on his life: he had leprosy, a dreaded skin disease. God used different methods to speak to him and finally led him to Elisha the prophet. Naaman expected Elisha himself to speak to him, but Elisha's servant brought the message instead (vv. 9-12). Naaman no doubt had problems with the message partly because he did not like the messenger. But when he obeyed the message, he was healed (vv. 13-14).

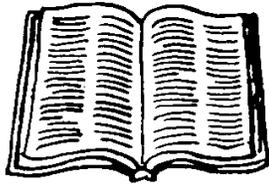
Sometimes God may choose to speak in a way to which we are not accustomed. That is His privilege and right as God. Don't miss His message because of the means He may use.

Disobedience

Second, some people miss the leading and voice of God because of disobedience. I have already said how necessary obedience is to hearing God's voice (see Lesson 2). But I repeat this principle now because it is so important. So much of what God says is progressive; that is, it is revealed to us one step at a time. We are not shown the whole plan at the beginning.

Gideon was preparing an army to free Israel. He was taking orders from God in how to do this. If at any time he had disobeyed, he could not have expected God to continue to unfold His plan of action. But as Gideon followed each step, the next was clearly communicated to him. Finally he had the handpicked force of three hundred that defeated thousands of Midianites (Judges 7:1-25).

Gideon's experience suggests this advice: if you are having difficulty hearing from God for direction, begin to search God's Word to find out where you have failed to do what God has already revealed to be His will.



For You To Do

9 Match each description of a person who has missed God's leading to the phrase giving the reason why he or she has done so.

- 1) Rejection of the method
 - 2) Disobedience
- ... a Olav knows that God wants him to forgive a friend who has wronged him, but Olav hasn't done this. Now he finds that his prayers for further direction seem to be unanswered.
- ... b Dan has been seeking God's leading. His parents have also been praying about what he should do. They advise him to work for a year and save his money for further training. But Dan rejects their advice; he hasn't been expecting God to speak through them.
- ... c Linda wishes she knew what God wanted her to do next. She knows that God wants her to help teach a Bible class now, but she hasn't yet done this.

ASSURANCE THAT GOD WILL SPEAK

Objective 3. *Meditate on facts which give you assurance that God will speak to you.*

No one who desires to do the will of God needs to have any fear that he or she will be incapable of hearing God's voice. The power to communicate does not depend on us but on Him.

God does speak; He will speak to you. In this you can have confidence. And He can make himself heard. The Bible records numerous examples of God's speaking and being heard even when people were not listening for His voice (see, for example, Jonah in Jonah 1:3 and Saul in Acts 9:1-6). He will certainly speak to the one who is listening.



For You To Do

10 Read and meditate on the passages of Scripture given below. In your notebook, write an answer to the question about each one.

- a** Psalm 19:7-11: What does God's law or Word give to us (v. 11)?
- b** Psalm 23:1-3: Why does God guide us (v. 3)?
- c** Psalm 25:8-10: Why does God teach us (v. 8)?



Check Your Answers

6 He should reject

- a)** Carl's advice and
- c)** Jim's advice. Can you explain why?

1 It will equip him or her to do every kind of good deed. (Your answer should be similar.)

7 Your answers. I hope that your response to these questions will help you as you seek to understand God's leading in your life more completely.

2 Your answer. You could have described the experience of Manuel or a time when something similar happened to you or to someone else you know about.

8 a Through a vision (vv. 10-16) and a voice (vv. 13, 15, 19)

b Peter recognized God's voice (v. 14), and circumstances confirmed it (vv. 17-18, 22).

c He obeyed God's voice (v. 23) and accepted those whom God told him to accept (v. 28).

(Your answers should be similar. This event is a good example of how God may speak directly.)

3 b) Matthew 5:11.

9 a 2) Disobedience

b 1) Rejection of the method

c 2) Disobedience

4 a 1) A direct command given to a person or group

b 2) A principle of behavior

c 1) A direct command given to a person or group

d 3) An example of a principle in someone's life

10 a It gives us knowledge or warning.

b He guides for His name's sake or to fulfill His promise.

c He teaches us because He is good and righteous.

(Your answers should be similar.)

5 a He was judging all the people by himself, and this work was too much for him to do alone.

b Jethro advised him to appoint capable men to help him.

c Men were appointed, and the problem was solved; Moses was enabled to properly lead Israel.

(Your answers should be similar.)