

Wednesday evening one of the participants in our Experiencing God study had a good question as we were discussing how God speaks to us. The question was one that many had asked me before. Interestingly, the question came the same day I had finished reading a series of messages I shared at the time when people were first asking me that same question. The question Wednesday took me back to many discussions that had surrounded the question previously and I must confess to some periods of uncertainty since I had answered the question originally.

So as we were discussing how God speaks to us; here came the question: "How did you know that we were supposed to build this building?"

Have you ever wondered to yourself *if* God speaks to you?

Have you ever wondered *how* you would *know* God is speaking to you?

Have you ever wondered *what* you would *do* if you knew with certainty that God was speaking to you?

As we move through the seven realities in Experiencing God I think the real challenge for us begins here at the fourth reality. The fourth reality; that God speaks to us, is challenging because of these three questions. I tried last week to answer the first question- that God is speaking. As I said, 'It's not really a question of 'if' God is speaking, but whether or not we are listening.'

And it doesn't matter where you are in this faith journey- whether it is struggling to understand what faith is all about, whether you are new to a relationship with Jesus, or whether you've been walking with Jesus for a long time- God is speaking to you. Not only is God speaking, but most importantly God wants a personal relationship with you where you can more easily identify God's voice.

Join me in reading John 10:2-5.

There are a lot of voices clamoring for our attention. And one of the difficulties we have is tuning out some voices while learning to tune in the voice of God.

So how do we know God's voice? First of all, if we are going to hear and know God's voice, understand that hearing from God is not about methods, or locations or spiritual disciplines, as much as it is about deepening our relationship with God.

If you've ever been in a relationship with someone you know that the relationship grows in proportion to the time you spend together. Keep spending time together; keep getting

to know the heart, soul and mind of the other person and your relationship will deepen and grow. And the principle applies to our relationship with God.

If you want to get to know God's voice it begins by spending time in God's word. If you are not reading scripture regularly and seeking out the opportunity to get acquainted with God who has revealed himself in the scripture then you cannot know God's voice as quickly, clearly or with as much confidence. The more time you spend in the scriptures the larger the vocabulary the Holy Spirit has to access in revealing what God is saying to you.

That leads me into a list of possible ways that God speaks to us. We don't have time to examine each one but let me highlight a few things in this list from Margaret Feinberg's book *Hungry for God*.

Scripture, as I said, is the most important way that God speaks. Every other possibility on this list is subject to what God has said in the Bible. So what else is on the list?

Liturgy – these are the common routines that we engage in weekly as a part of worship. It can be songs, scriptures; they all provide us opportunity to hear God speak. Might I even suggest that on your way to church you make it a habit to ask God to speak to you during the time of worship.

God thoughts – Margaret describes these as the inward impressions, phrases or ideas that resonate within your being and come from God.

Visions and Dreams – sometimes difficult to understand so always use some other items on the list to help your discernment of the dream.

Journaling – write down insights from what you read in the Bible, write out prayers... sometimes God speaks as we write.

Conscience – our conscience is that inward sense or feeling that helps us discern between good and evil. Our conscience can direct and guide us; not just about what we shouldn't do but equally what we should do.

Circumstances – This can be a challenging way to recognize God's voice because it's often unclear where God is leading us. Never allow circumstances alone to direct you but allow scripture and other ideas here to confirm where God is directing.

Counsel – we need people around us who are seeking God. Build relationships with people who are older and wiser in the faith.

Media – God can use the arts to speak to us.

Nature – The heavens declare the glory of God...

Of course all of this needs to be part of prayer; both the act of speaking to God and listening for God!

We could spend a week on each of these but I would encourage you to learn something simple from this list: God is speaking!

But how do I know for certain that God has spoken to me?

Margaret Fineberg lists 6 questions- she refers to them as guiderail questions- that we can ask ourselves to assess if we heard God speak. I want you to take note of these on your outline and then go back and look at these scriptures.

Does what I heard...

1. ... line up with scripture?
2. ... line up with wise counsel? Proverbs 15:22
3. ... leave me with a sense of peace? Philippians 4:7
4. Is what I heard blanketed by love? 1 Corinthians 13
5. ...increase my dependence on God?
6. ...line up with the visions, goals and path of my life

Let me elaborate on that last one. We need to be able to step back and consider how the leading fits into the overall context of our lives. For example, I hear people tell stories about adoption and I think yes, that's what God wants Rita and me to do. I'd take in every kid imaginable if I could, but that wouldn't fit my goals and the path of my life.

That's not to say that at times God doesn't stretch us and invite us into new places and opportunities. But if that is the case we can often see how God has been preparing us for that new direction.

It takes time to recognize, understand, and respond to God's voice in our lives. Along the way we can expect to make mistakes. Mistakes are inevitable. What's important is what we do to respond to God when he speaks. Will we choose to grow discouraged and skeptical over the times God speaks, or learn and grow through them?

So we've answered the first two questions; but the third one is essential before we leave here today!

Let's read that third question again making it personal:

What would I do if I knew with certainty that God was speaking to me?

As important as it is to settle the question of 'if' God speaks or even 'how' God speaks; the real issue for all of us is 'what would I do?'

What is important for us is whether or not we are taking the steps to obey when God speaks.

But here is the challenge; most of us want 100% certainty before we will act. Sadly this side of heaven we will struggle to see with 100% certainty. Paul said in 1 Corinthians that we see in a mirror dimly... The reality is that we need to act in faith.

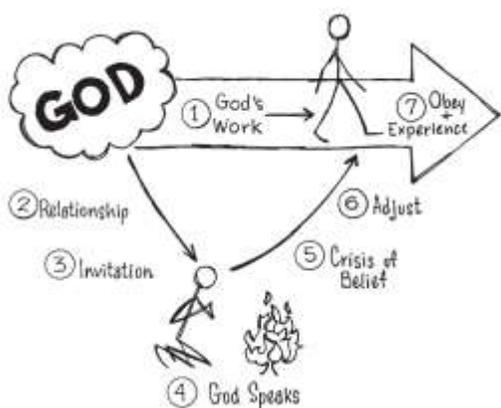
Here is the biggest thing that we struggle with in moving to the place where we obey God and join God in what he is doing; and that is learning to lay aside our wants and desires for what God wants and desires for us. I would say that one reason people don't read their Bible or don't want to hear God speak is simply that they don't want to obey.

As I told the group on Wednesday evening; I believe that God wants to do great things in and through our lives. After all, it was Jesus who told his disciples that they would do greater things than what he had accomplished; but we miss the greater things because we are often too focused on what we want God to do for us rather than being willing to listen to what God wants us to do for him.

I realize I never told you about my answer to the question from Wednesday night...

I responded that I knew we were to build because of all the ways that God confirmed what I believed God was saying. I could run it through those 6 guiderail questions and find confirmation; but eventually I had to take a step of faith. I had to act in obedience.

I believe that God is continuing to show me- to show us- that we not only heard God speak, but most importantly that we were willing to demonstrate our love for God and our love for others by obeying when God spoke.



Have you ever wondered to yourself ___ God speaks to you?

Have you ever wondered _____ you would _____ God is speaking to you?

Have you ever wondered _____ you would _____ if you knew with certainty that God was speaking to you?

Ways God Speaks

Scripture	Liturgy
God thoughts	Visions
Dreams	Journaling
Conscience	Circumstances
Counsel	Media
Nature	

Guiderail Questions

Does what I heard...
 ... line up with scripture?
 ... line up with wise counsel? Proverbs 15:22

... leave me with a sense of peace?

Philippians 4:7

Is what I heard blanketed by love?

1 Corinthians 13

...increase my dependence on God?

...line up with the visions, goals and path of my
life

Obedience

What would I do if I knew with certainty that God
was speaking to me?

John 14:21 Whoever has my commands and
keeps them is the one who loves me.