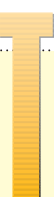


God Told Me

16

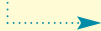


THE ROOM WAS FULL OF TWENTYSOMETHINGS waiting for an answer. The topic they'd asked me to address was how to know where God wants them? About midway through my presentation, a young woman raised her hand. A little surprised, I paused to let her ask her question.

"You keep saying 'God told me' or 'When God says' or 'do what God tells you.' Are you telling us He talks out loud to you?"

The room filled with murmurs and a few laughs, but I could sense there was widespread interest in the answer I might give.

What would you say?



Scripture Passages

Full text of passages printed in this study.

Introduction

If you've followed this study series from the beginning, you'll recall we've attempted to make three changes in our life patterns:

1. Shifting from driven ambition to a healthy work ethic.
2. Shifting from moral relativity to a steadfast character.
3. Shifting from being spectators to being ambassadors for God.

The first two shifts help us fulfill the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40). The third one makes us aware of our roles as verbal spokespersons for Christ in the workplace and teaches us how to prepare for that role.

With this study we begin our fourth shift, moving from serving self in the workplace to serving God and others. This service, which gives legs to the words we've learned in the third shift, positions us to have the strongest possible impact on the lives of our coworkers. In that way, the third and fourth shifts equip us to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

Here are some prerequisites for making this next shift.

- We must have a relationship with Jesus Christ makes it possible for us to be in the

presence of God. This presence is most keenly felt in prayer.

- We must have spiritual mentors who know the Bible and teach us what it means. Usually a pastor in a pulpit, but also often a lay person in addition to the pastor, someone who can translate spiritual language into terms we understand.
- We must have, or be developing, a working knowledge of the Bible for ourselves. Reading books about the Bible, or hearing sermons or homilies on the Bible, are simply not enough.
- We must be part of a support group that strengthens our walk. This is the church, and there is no replacement for it. Small groups can hold onto us until we find a church, or they can serve to augment the church, but they can never replace it.
- We must be willing to sacrifice our own wants and desires to what God tells us when we hear Him.

Introduction

One of the first ways to start the shift from serving self to serving God and others is to seek God's counsel when making job and career choices. As it did in the presentation described in the snapshot above, this always begs the question: "How do I hear God?"

List the ways you think we hear God.

Below is a list of ways Scripture describes people hearing God. As a group, or privately using your Bible and a concordance, describe examples from Scripture of times when people heard God in these ways.

1. Through Scripture
2. Through prayer
3. Through being silent
- *4. Through "still, small voice"
5. Through the Holy Spirit
6. Through the witness within your spirit

- *7. Through an inner voice
- *8. Through strong impressions
- *9. Through visions
- *10. Through dreams
- *11. Through revelations
- *12. Through angels
- 13. Through other believers in the Body of Christ
- *14. Through gifts of the Spirit
- 15. Through circumstances and events
- 16. Through “open” and “closed” doors
- *17. Through Creation
- *18. Thunder

While God can still speak through any of the ways noted above, the primary way He chooses to communicate, especially to Western Christians where the Bible is most readily accessible, is through Scripture itself. In fact, we suggest the items with asterisks above are (and should be) rare and highly unusual occurrences in the Western culture today.

(We say “western culture” because there are still many places in the East where it is difficult to have easy access to God’s written word. Because God will be known to His people, in those places it is logical and reasonable to assume He will act supernaturally with greater frequency than He does in the place where He’s made His Word readily available to us.)

Too many Christians are waiting for God to answer their questions miraculously, when all along their answers have been awaiting them in His Word.

In answer to working Christians’ questions about how to know where God wants them to work, we suggest the following template. Describe your reactions to our suggestions below:

1. When seeking to know if a job choice or a job decision is right, ask yourself if it violates any of the principles of Scripture. If the answer is yes, then you have your answer already. This may sound simple, but among the most common

counseling complaints I hear as a chaplain is “...but it feels right.” God’s Word is as practical and applicable in today’s workplace as it was in the workplaces of the day it was written, and anything that violates those principles gets a hearty “no” from God. (React to this statement.)

2. Since God is most interested in being in relationship with us (remember “The Reason We Exist”), His heart is pleased when ours seeks to be faithful to Him. So, if we’ve passed the first test in our decision-making process, next we need to ask: “Is my heart’s desire to be a faithful and useful servant?” If the answer is yes to that question, then if we go right, God will bless us in that direction, or if we go left, God will also bless us in that direction. Remember its fellowship and faithful hearts He wants more than service. (For an example of this in Scripture, see Genesis 13:5-9, where Abram lets Lot pick the best land, even though Abram had God’s promise of a blessing.) (React to this statement.)

3. Has God already made it clear what He wants you to do and you’re simply ignoring Him or running away from Him? God is not the author of confusion (that’s how the Bible refers to Satan), and He doesn’t play head games with us. If He intends to use us in a specific way, He will make that way known to us if we’re honestly seeking Him. If you study the lives of Moses, Jonah, Jacob, Joseph and others, you’ll see that when God decides to use us in a specific manner, He will make it clear. If he has, then all the wrestling and rationalizing in the world won’t change His course. We can either go willingly (Joseph) or go the hard way (Jonah). (React to this statement.)

4. What if God is silent? God's silence often means we already have all the information we need to make a decision. Either it's available to us in His Word and we've chosen to ignore it (as the Jewish leaders of New Testament times did when Jesus came as the Messiah), or we haven't equipped ourselves to be able to test what we hear because of our Biblical illiteracy (as the Israelites did again and again during the time of the Judges), or we're looking for a sign (which Jesus downplays as the sign of weak faith). God also uses common sense and circumstance to present us with His answers, but we have to be careful here because we often let what's best for us govern our decision instead of what's best for our faithfulness to God. (For example, if a job, any job prevents a mother or father from actively spending the time and energy necessary to care for and raise children and pay attention to their spiritual training, then unless God has specifically told them to sacrifice in this instant their normal Scriptural duties, the job's got to take second place. Even if common sense dictates they work to have a better lifestyle for their families, if it sacrifices the eternal for the temporal, then they are exactly like Esau when he sold his birthright for stew). (React to this statement).

5. What if we don't know our Bibles well enough to test what we think we're hearing from God? The beauty of God is His ability to see our failures ahead of time and to plan for them. In this case, Scripture tells us to seek the counsel of godly older men and women. Most young working Christians I know do a good job of asking for advice from older, wiser workers. The mistake they often make, though, is in asking older wiser workers with little knowledge of Scripture. It is not nearly enough that our counselors are wise in the ways of commerce, they must also be wise in the ways of Scripture. Otherwise, the advice they offer is based on what seems best to them, and not on whether it's consistent with Scripture. (React to this statement.)

6. This then opens another door for workplace counsel. If one of the most important aspects of decision-making is testing the options against the Word of God, then the counsel of pastors takes on new value. (React to this statement.)

Knowing how we hear God is only part of the story. We must also know the barriers that prevent us from hearing God if we seriously want to be where He wants us. Read and discuss the following Scripture passages that teach us about barriers Christians have to hearing God.

PROBLEMS IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR SPOUSES

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)

SELFISHNESS

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. (James 4:3)

UNFORGIVING SPIRIT

²²*But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. ²³Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. (Matthew 5:22-24)*

DOUBT

⁶*But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6-8)*

[Author's note: We all doubt at times whether God is willing to answer, or willing to intervene. That is natural, and in itself is not a barrier. The doubt this passage is talking about is a doubt God is able to intervene, answer, etc. That is a barrier to hearing God.]

HARBORED SIN

If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.... (Psalm 66:18)

Additionally, here are people who cannot hear God, according to Scripture. This group includes both Christians and non-Christians:

THOSE WHO MAKE IDOLS OR TRUST IN THEM FOR THEIR SECURITY.

¹⁴*For the LORD will judge His people and will have compassion on His servants.*

¹⁵*The idols of the nations are but silver and gold, the work of man's hands.*

¹⁶*They have mouths, but they do not speak; they have eyes, but they do not see;*

¹⁷*They have ears, but they do not hear, nor is there any breath at all in their mouths.*

¹⁸*Those who make them will be like them, yes, everyone who trusts in them.*

(Psalm 135:14-18)

THOSE WHO ARE SO PREOCCUPIED THAT THEIR EARS ARE NOT ATTUNED TO GOD.

¹⁰*And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"* ¹¹*Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. ¹²For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. ¹³Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; ¹⁵For the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.'* ¹⁶*But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. ¹⁷For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. (Matthew 13:10-17)*

THOSE WHO HAVE NOT YET ACCEPTED CHRIST, AND ARE THEREFORE "NATURAL MEN."

¹⁴*But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. ¹⁵But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. ¹⁶For who has known the mind of the LORD, that He will instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

(I Corinthians 2:14-16)

THOSE WHO DOUBT.

⁵*But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸being a double-minded man,*

unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8)

THOSE WHO ARE BITTER, SELFISH OR JEALOUS.

¹³Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. (James 3:13-16)

God desires to be known and heard among His people. We make it harder because we choose to wait for signs instead of doing the work of reading His Word. Commit yourself to a disciplined interaction with His Word right now, so in the future you can not only measure what you hear from Him with wisdom, but also that you can be the wise counselor to others as well.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- God makes Himself known in many ways, but for Western Christians, the pre-eminent way is through His Word.
- Anything that contradicts Scripture isn't from God.
- God honors our desire to be faithful and will bless whatever path we walk when our heart's desire is to serve Him.
- God's blessing does not necessarily mean material, physical or career success, but rather a certainty of His pleased presence with us as we work.
- God's silence often means we already have enough information to make a decision.
- God does not play head games with us.
- If God has a specific task in mind for us, He will make it known to us.
- Our career advisors are only partially useful to us unless they also have a solid understanding of God's Word, and are using it to help advise us.

For more on where God wants us in our jobs and workplaces, be sure to see study 21 in this series.