

..And God Spoke

Hearing God speak today

Peter Michell

Introduction

When we read the bible, about times past, very frequently we come across references to God speaking to various people. Indeed, when we read the account of the faith of the patriarchs in Hebrews 11, we find this very thing - their acts of faith were the result of hearing God speak to them.

When we study the New Covenant scripture we will find that we are expected to hear God speak to us today.

Maybe we have lost sight of this wonderful fact - God speaks today. Are we listening?

The first part of this booklet will show God speaking to various people in times past from which we will extract vital truths.

Then the following chapters will deal with the ‘theology,’ that is the biblical doctrine that is there for us to live by. Finally going on to the methodology God uses to speak today with examples.

Contents

PART ONE – examples from times past

Chapter

- 1 It's holy ground
- 2 Take notice
- 3 Whisper it softly
- 4 Be strong and courageous
- 5 Not by might
- 6 Sign ... here
- 7 By the book, miracles and a donkey

PART TWO - The biblical basis

- 8 Is hearing God part of the normal Christian life
- 9 Receive from the Lord - hear for yourself
- 10 Getting ready to hear

PART THREE - the mechanics of hearing

- 11 The mechanics of hearing
- 12 Peace the ruler, safeguard and bringer of everyday guidance
- 13 Practical application, making decisions
- 14 When God is silent
- 15 Go and do likewise

Chapter 1

It's holy ground

Lest we should think it a light and unimportant matter our first consideration is this:

When God speaks to us it is the awesome creator of this world and universe who is speaking.

The Lord God was going to speak to Moses - '*take off your sandals, the place where you stand is holy ground.*' It is true that the way in which God first appeared to Moses was unique and dramatic, and far from what most people experience today. Nevertheless the awesomeness of God and the holiness of God are exactly the same.

The Lord God did not grab my attention with a burning bush - and you can probably say the same. But He did grab my attention! The same awesome and holy God spoke to me in a church meeting. The whole scene went out of focus as Jesus appeared to me and said, 'Peter, I want you to give Me your life.' This was an awesome and holy moment for me. 'Yes, Lord' was my answer - I was 17 at the time.

Not everybody meets Jesus in a dramatic way, some do and some don't. But everyone can hear God's voice - '*My sheep hear My voice.*' As we go on we will seek to bring light and life, treating Jesus statement as a promise to be completely fulfilled.

We will see and consider that our lives, our work and all that we do is like holy ground as we hear and obey the voice of God. He is interested in establishing His eternal purpose and we have a part to play – that involves us aligning ourselves with His word.

Chapter 2

Take notice

We have already seen that the Lord God wants to and will get our attention, giving us the opportunity to respond in the exercise of our free will.

Sometimes the Lord God gets our attention by speaking with an audible voice. Jesus appeared before Peter, James and John in all His glory with Moses and Elijah. Their response, we can build three tabernacles - a sort of tent often made from tree branches! A bright cloud (more of the glory of God) overshadowed them and a voice came from heaven.

'This is My beloved Son, hear Him.' Matthew 17:1-7

It seems that the three were terrified as they fell flat on their faces but Jesus came and touched them and said.
'Arise and do not be afraid.'

The presence and the voice of God can be a bit frightening, after all this is the awesome creator of all things. But He does not want us to fear, rather to listen - 'hear Him.' Take notice, when Jesus the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, speaks it is through His love for us. He speaks as a way of manifesting His grace and His love for us.

This booklet is about hearing God speak - but it is necessary just to note that God has other ways of getting our attention also.

Chapter 3

Whisper it softly

Elijah won a stunning victory over the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. But he became very scared when Jezebel threatened to kill him. Elijah literally ran for his life. It seems initially he ran for about 160 miles! From Mount Carmel to a days journey beyond Beersheba where he rested before continuing a further significant distance to Mount Horeb. You can read the account in 1 Kings 18-19.

Actually we have already been to Mount Horeb in chapter one - it is where Moses saw the burning bush.

There Elijah was holed up in a cave. God spoke to him - '*what are you doing here Elijah?*' We can tell from the account that Elijah was in the middle of a 'pity party' - '*I am the only one left and they seek to take my life.*' God speaks '*Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord.*'

When Elijah obeys there is a great wind, strong enough to break the rocks in pieces, followed by an earthquake, which was in turn followed by fire. God was not in any of these, but there followed a still small voice, a whispering voice - this is God speaking.

Now Elijah is instructed to return all the way he has come and further on to Damascus where he will anoint the King of Israel.

We can extract some interesting points:

- a) The enemy may strike back in response to a spiritual victory.
- b) Don't panic – the victory has already been won, stand your ground.
- c) God does not write us off if we do panic and run, He will restore us.
- d) God's voice can be a whispering voice, small and still. We will see later how this comes from deep within.

Chapter 4

Be strong and courageous.

Joshua was taking over from Moses as the one to lead Israel into the promised land.

(Moses was not allowed to do so because he had disobeyed the Lord – when told to speak to the rock, in frustration with Israel, he struck the rock instead. The first occasion upon which Moses brought forth water from the rock was at Mount Horeb - there the Lord said strike the rock. Moses did and water poured forth. (Exodus 17) The rock is biblical type for Jesus who was struck at crucifixion for our salvation and blessing. The second occasion was later in the wilderness of Zin. The people were protesting – no water. The Lord said speak to the rock. But Moses was annoyed with the people, '*Hear now you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of the rock?*' He struck the rock twice and water came forth. But the Lord was not happy, '*Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.*' Numbers 20.

It is not necessary for Jesus to be struck twice, Moses had 'broken' the type. We speak to our Lord who was struck once for us.)

Taking the people into the promised land was a daunting task for Joshua.

The Lord God had promised the land to Israel and further promised them that He would go before them and they would defeat all the inhabitants of the land. Joshua had to be prepared.

'Be strong and courageous.' This was the message!

Moses instructs Israel – *'be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.'* Deuteronomy 31:6

Moses calls Joshua and instructs him to be strong and of good courage as leader of the people. (verse 7)
Moses prophetically appoints Joshua, commanding him – *'be strong and of good courage; for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land of which I swore to them, and I will be with you.'* (verse 23)

After Moses has died the Lord speaks directly to Joshua
'Be strong and of good courage.' Joshua 1:6
'Only be strong and of good courage.' 1:7
'Be strong and of good courage' 1:9
'Only be strong and of good courage' 1:18

When we read the book of Joshua it is clear he did get the message! It is also a message for us. We have Christ in us – we are to hold fast to Him and to be hardened in strength – even when we face daunting circumstances.

Also from this we learn that God will speak through others in addition to speaking directly to us – in this case Moses speaks with wisdom first and then he speaks prophetically.

There is a principle in the New Covenant that things should be confirmed by two or three witnesses. The Lord was very generous to Joshua, bringing the same message six times.

(Later Joshua speaks it again – to the captains of Israel. They have defeated the 5 Amorite kings. Joshua tells the captains to put their feet on the necks of these kings, their enemies – *'don't be afraid, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage, for thus the Lord will do to all your enemies.'* (10:24-25)

The 5 kings were liquidated.)

Chapter 5

Not by might

At first glance this heading might seem strange after the encouragement to be strong and courageous. But God's way is '*not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit, says the Lord.*' (Zechariah 4:6) For that reason the Lord does not need vast armies - what He does want is obedience.

Consider Gideon. First the Angel of the Lord appears to him and speaks to him. You are a mighty man of valor - go and save Israel. Gideon responds (after seeking confirmation from the Lord) by gathering a huge army of over 30,000 men. It was far too many for the Lord to use and receive the glory and it was whittled down to the 300 who were most alert.

Gideon was instructed to go to the enemy camp at night where he overheard them talking about a dream telling of the coming victory of Joshua and Israel. The Midianites were duly routed. Judges 6 and 7.

We are learning some important things:

- a) When God speaks He has a purpose and a strategy.
- b) God can speak directly.

- c) God can speak through dreams - in this case the dream was given to a Midianite. There are other instances of God speaking through dreams – Joseph, the husband of Mary is a good example.
- d) God does not need human might and power – just obedience. Strength and courage come into play too. For example: Gideon needed a lot of courage to go to the enemy camp and eavesdrop.

Chapter 6

Sign ... here

Sticking with Gideon for the moment - God will sometimes speak through signs.

In the case of Gideon, and of what he was asked to do, he was very unsure so he asked for a confirmatory sign - more than once!

First time the Angel of the Lord spoke to him Gideon asked him to wait whilst he prepared an offering. The offering was put on a rock from which fire then consumed the offering.

Second time Gideon says to the Lord - if you will save Israel by my hand put dew on the fleece I lay whilst the ground all around stays dry. So it happened.

Third time Gideon seeks the final test - this time dry only on the fleece whilst the ground around is wet with dew. And so it happened.

God does speak with signs.

I remember one occasion when I was going to speak at a FGBMI dinner for the first time. I was very unsure, so on the way I asked for confirmation. Immediately a scripture verse came to mind. I stopped the car, looked up the verse - 'you are My witness, says the Lord.' But like Gideon I needed more. Why me Lord, why me? A little later on the journey I passed a huge advertising hoarding bearing in huge letters, 'Father knows best.'

The dinner meeting was well attended and successfully concluded.

Chapter 7

By the book, miracles and a donkey

Daniel was reading the scroll of Jeremiah when something stood out for him. There Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would be in captivity in Babylon for 70 years. (Daniel 9:2) So Daniel responded by praying, confessing Israel's sin and iniquity.

Then the Lord responded to Daniel's prayers by giving him what is known as the 70 weeks prophesy. This prophesy exactly foretells the time when Jesus the Messiah would come.

Jesus spoke many times to multitudes – but not everyone believed. But His actions also spoke loud and clear. When John sends messengers to Jesus, asking are you the coming One? Jesus replies, tell John what you have seen and heard and refers to the miracles they have witnessed. Later John tells us that many believed when they saw the miracles. (John 2:23)

It is said that our actions speak louder than words.

The Lord can speak in any way He chooses. For example poor Balaam, he thought he was onto a nice little money spinner. The offer came from Balak the son of Zippor, King of the Moabites who had witnessed the way Israel conquered all. Just come and curse Israel for me. In a nut shell, Balaam, in disobedience to the Lord, saddled up his donkey and set off.

What Balaam did not know is that the Lord can speak through donkeys. The donkey could see the Angel of the Lord standing in the way and continually refused to proceed. Eventually Balaam hits the donkey who then speaks to him - 'what have I done to you - I have always been well disposed towards you.' Balaam's eyes were opened and he could see then Angel of the Lord.

Read the whole account in Numbers 22.

We cannot put any limit onto the ways the Lord will speak to us and make us aware of His presence.

PART TWO - The biblical basis.

Chapter 8

Is hearing God part of the normal Christian life?

Should we expect God to speak to us today?

There is a line of thinking which says; 'We have the full cannon of scripture, therefore we do not need to hear God speak to us, everything we need to know is in the Bible.'

There are those who say; 'God does not speak to us now, that was just for New Testament times before the Bible was written.'

There are those who say; 'You have been saved, now you are on your own until you die and see Jesus face to face.'

However Jesus says, '*My sheep hear My voice.*' John 10:27

When he was telling the disciples that it was better for them that He went away so that the Helper, the Spirit of Truth could come to them. He said;

'However when He, the Spirit of Truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.' John 16:13-14

Thus New Testament scripture declares that we should expect to hear what God is saying to us through the Holy Spirit.

Believe the word He speaks to you rather than your experience.

Many, many Christians confess with their mouth that they cannot, or, do not hear God speak to them. Then it is a very easy step to go further and say, 'Because I don't hear God speak to me, therefore God does not speak today.'

Likewise it is very easy to say; 'I can't hear God speak, therefore I don't qualify for God to speak to me.'

Allow me to encourage you to see things differently:

Radio stations beam out their message regardless of whether your radio receiver is tuned in to their wavelength. The moment you tune in you receive the broadcast.

The word of God states *'My sheep hear My voice.'*
Your experience states 'I can't hear.'

Both can be true. God is speaking but perhaps you are not hearing. A little adjustment to the tuning is all that is required. This booklet is intended to help you understand how to tune in to the Lord.

Change your thinking

So now is the moment to change your thinking. Instead of saying, 'God does not speak to me,' say 'God does speak and I am going to learn to hear God's voice.'

Then you will be ready to embark upon the adventure of hearing God speak.

The benefits.

Let us consider for a few moments the need. Is it necessary to hear God speak?

To show how things can be spectacularly successful when one does hear God, we will use the entrance of the Israelites into the promised land.

The account is found in Joshua, chapter 6. The Israelites have crossed into the promised land, they have been circumcised, Joshua has met with the Commander of the Lord's army.

Now they face Jericho.

'See I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valour.' (Verse 2)

Jericho was a walled city, securely shut and well defended. Joshua received his instructions from the Lord.

'You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go round the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams horns before the ark.

But the seventh day you shall march round the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. It shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him.'

Joshua 6: 3-5

The instructions were carried out and there was an amazing victory.

Meditate upon it for a while. The walls came crashing down when they blew the trumpets and shouted. Not 'normal' warfare, but very effective. Certainly not a strategy that a human mind would conjure up. The battle is not ours it is the Lord's – our part is to receive from Him the correct strategy for only the Lord knows the best strategy for every situation.

The mistakes.

By way of contrast we are going to use the next two incidents to demonstrate how easily things go wrong.

The next town to conquer was Ai. It was a small place and the spies returned saying,

'Do not let all the people go up, but let two or three thousand go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few.' Joshua 7:3

The result was defeat. The Lord had not been consulted.

It went wrong for two obvious reasons:

i) They used their own strategy rather than the Lord's.
Remember that Joshua had previously met the Commander of the Lord's army - why wasn't the commander consulted?

ii) It became apparent that there was sin in the camp. When Joshua did come before the Lord, God told him about it.

Surely if God had been consulted, He would have revealed the sin and given them the right strategy for victory the first time.

The next incident is the arrival of the Gibeonites (chapter 9). They came with deception. They looked as though they had come a long, long distance. They came to make a peace settlement with Israel because they were afraid of them. It was deception – they had only come a few miles. Israel were deceived and entered into a peace agreement.

Mistake - They did not ask the Lord.

The result was that they fell into the trap of making an alliance with the occupants of the land - they had been specifically instructed not to do that.

How often do you take decisions without even asking the Lord?

Have you made alliances or agreements which you now regret?

Should we expect God to speak?

Yes, we certainly should.

Will there be benefits?

Yes there definitely will.

The Lord will be able to direct us in the positive sense - i.e. show us what to do.

The Lord will be able to protect us by telling us to avoid difficulty.

The normal Christian life.

The Lord knows the end from the beginning. There is no promise that we will avoid all tribulation and difficulty in this life.

However, as we listen to Him we can obtain direction and protection thus increasing the amount of blessing in our lives and reducing the degree of loss and failure.

'Do not be deceived my beloved brethren. Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.' James 1:17.

The desire of the Lord is for our blessing, for our progress in the Christian life. He does not leave us to our own devices. The Holy Spirit will take the words of Jesus and bring them to you and to me - if we will listen we will benefit.

Consider the logic.

We know from Ephesians 2:10 that God has prepared good works for us to walk in. Surely simple logic tells us that He will direct us as we seek to be led into those works. The concept that we will only fulfil His desire and will for us if we happen to stumble across it at some point is clearly nonsense.

'If we ask anything according to His will then we know He hears and we have the request we ask of Him'

1 John 5:14-15

Often we are a problem to ourselves. We come to the Lord with our plans and ask His blessing instead of seeking Him for His plans. We should take seriously the scripture when it tells us;

'You are not your own you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.'

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Wisdom would say to us:

'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, do not lean on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh and strength to your bones.'

Proverbs 3:5-8

In these days it is particularly important for us to know the ways and direction of the Lord, whether we run a small one man business or employ thousands, whether we work for ourselves or are one employee amongst many. We need to hear God speak. We need to see the hand of God in our business lives.

God's desire is that we hear.

Like any father's heart, the Lord wants us to benefit from His wisdom and His knowledge - not that we would act as robots, but that we have the benefit of His character working in and through us.

God has always wanted us to listen to His voice - it started with Adam in the Garden of Eden. (The Lord God spoke to Adam and told him not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil – Adam understood but chose to disobey.) As a consequence the fall of man brought sin into the world, and with sin, man's self -sufficiency was established as part of human nature.

When the Israelites are in the wilderness and God comes to speak with them they react with fear instead of faith. They then tell Moses that he must be their intermediary as they do not want to hear God's voice for themselves. (Exodus 20:19)

There is no need to fear the voice of God. His desires for you and me are good - as we read in James 1. His strategy for your life is better than anything you can think or imagine for yourself. Let us expect to hear God speak and expect Him to use us in His purposes - and our joy will be full.

Before you go on to the next chapter.

Hearing God speak is part of the normal Christian life.

Do you want to lead a normal Christian life?

Do you lead a normal Christian life?

Chapter 9

Receive from the Lord - hear for yourself

Bread is a symbol of life. It particularly represents the necessities of life, indeed it speaks of that which is essential to sustain life.

Jesus said, 'I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for evermore.' John 6:48-51.

Our belief in Jesus is everlasting life.

'Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.' John 6:47

Our faith, our trust in Jesus has fully saved us - we will have everlasting life.

Man does not live by bread alone.

However, when Jesus was tempted by Satan in the 40 day experience in the wilderness, He made this statement - '*Man does not live by bread alone.*'

Let us look at the situation: Jesus had been led by the Spirit into the wilderness after His baptism by John. Jesus had heard the Father say, '*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*'

After 40 days Jesus was hungry - this is when Satan strikes with temptation.

'If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.'

Jesus had received the confirmation from God that He was His Son 40 days before. Was God's statement still fresh in His memory? Do you think He had started to question who He was, or to question the circumstances. Satan will often try to trap us into questioning our salvation and questioning our circumstances with an attempt to get us away from God's purposes.

Jesus was not on earth with the purpose of looking after His own interests. No, He came to suffer and to serve mankind, to bring salvation and deliverance.

'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'

Jesus reply is crisp and to the point and could be interpreted; 'I do not take instructions from you satan, but I listen to My Father and hear what He is saying to Me.'

Man does not live by bread alone.

We should see that Jesus is saying that there is more for us to experience than just believing in Him. Indeed believing in Him secures our eternal salvation and is the absolutely essential starting point - but hearing, 'every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,' will affect the working out of daily life. Hearing God brings essential variety to the diet needed for a fully functioning Christian life – that is in addition to bread.

Salvation is more than a future hope.

Our salvation encompasses more than the expectation of meeting Jesus face to face and dwelling eternally with Him.

Our salvation includes a relationship with the Lord **now**. A relationship in which He speaks to us through the Holy Spirit and in which we can hear what he is saying.

Because He knows the end from the beginning and because He has all knowledge and wisdom, we will benefit when He speaks to us.

Every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

When we talk of 'every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,' we are not referring to the scripture alone, - although quotations from scripture are clearly included. This phrase is in the present tense. *'Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds (now - present tense) from the mouth of God.'*

God will speak now, today, into the situations we ask Him about, He may use scripture, but as we will see, there are other methods He uses as well.

When Jesus faced the temptation from Satan, He heard the Spirit speak to Him with the correct replies to give, which in this case were quotations from scripture. As we face our temptations and our problems let us look to the Spirit to bring the words of Jesus to us; which may or may not be quotations from scripture but will never contradict the New Covenant truth recorded in the bible.

'Man does not live by bread alone but by every WORD that proceeds from the mouth of God.'

WORD

It helps us understand fully what Jesus is saying when we know the full meaning of the Greek, here translated, 'word.'

There are two Greek words which are translated 'word' and they have different meanings.

Logos This is what is said in the sense of, the whole passage, or, the whole statement, or, the whole revelation, or, the whole counsel of God.

Logos is one of the personal names of Jesus (found in John 1). Jesus is the full revelation of the godhead in bodily form. (Colossians 2:9)

So the logos is the full revelation. That includes all scripture, all words from God, all of everything, and is seen in the person of Jesus.

Rhema on the other hand is a part of the whole revelation. 'That which is spoken, a sentence, saying, speech, discourse, a declaration, a command or promise.' (Bullingers Critical Lexicon.)

'The significance of rhema is exemplified in the injunction to take "*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word (rhema) of God,*" (Ephesians 6:17); here the reference is not to the whole Bible as such, but to the individual scripture (or other message) which the Spirit brings to our attention for use in time of need.' (from Vines Expository Dictionary)

So the rhema is the particular message the Spirit is quickening to us NOW – and it is not limited to actual bible passages.

We are not left to fend for ourselves.

The Lord has not left us without His help. 'It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart I will send Him to you.'

John 15:7

The Holy Spirit will help us, He will speak to us the words of Jesus, He will bring us that element we need for life which is in addition to bread.

Hearing is essential to fullness of life.

We should now see that hearing God speak to us is:

Biblical

To be expected

Beneficial

Normal

in fact it is His desire that we are blessed, strengthened, directed and corrected, if necessary, by His voice.

Before you move on to the next chapter.

Are you living on a diet of bread alone? Are you hearing God speak to you? Does God show you what to do when you face problems?

Or do you rely on your own thinking, your own analysis, your own ideas and efforts?

As for me and my house - we want to hear what God is saying right now - we want follow the Masters Voice.

Chapter 10

Getting ready to hear

This chapter deals with our preparation, so that we are in a position to hear and recognise what the Lord is saying to us.

God's plans for you are the best plans.

If we believe that God's plans are the very best plans for our lives we will be more likely to want to hear His voice. For some people God is an awesome figure just waiting for an opportunity to condemn them. For others, they see God as neutral, neither for them nor against them. For me God is a wonderful loving Father, who cares for me, knows every situation I will face, and will help and direct me so long as my life is submitted to Him.

'For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.' Jeremiah 29:11

These words of Jeremiah came in the context of the Israelites going into captivity in Babylon for 70 years. After 70 years God promised to visit them again and cause them to return to Jerusalem.

'Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.' Jeremiah 29:12-13

God's character is revealed in the promises He makes to the Israelites. When you seek Me with all your heart, you will find Me, I will listen and I have plans to bless you.

God's character has not changed. He is still found by those who seek Him. He still has plans to bless those who seek Him.

There should be no fear in seeking God. God is love and perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18). If we are reticent to seek the Lord for His direction, then, we need to check our own motives:

Are we afraid that God will want us to do something we don't want to do?

Are we really ready to do whatever He wants?

Are we more inclined towards satisfying the desires of our own flesh than following in the Masters footsteps?

Is the pull of the things of this world drawing us away from His purposes?

Are we more intent on pleasing either ourselves or other people than we are on pleasing Him?

If you suffer from hesitation in seeking the Lord because of any type of fear or any other reason then this prayer will rectify the problem:

"Holy Spirit please fill me with more and more love for Jesus."

I still pray this prayer often and recommend it - pray it frequently and over time you will find your attitude change, your fears melt away and your desire to please Him increase and increase.

Desire.

We have already said that hearing God speak to us is beneficial. One could argue that it is not necessary, not essential, that we can get by without hearing the Lord direct

our paths. However, as the times become more and more unstable and difficult, I would argue that it is necessary, even essential to hear what the Lord is saying; and that it is becoming more and more important as day follows day.

Let us learn to hear God before we run into a crisis.

Without the desire to hear and recognise what God is saying we are going to find it very difficult to know what He wants to communicate to us.

Unless we want to hear we are not going to hear other than in exceptional circumstances. Sometimes people do not want to hear God speak, but He intervenes. In Acts, there is no record of Saul, who was zealous for the Law, wanting to hear God speak to him. Yet God was gracious, and He desired to use Saul for His purposes.

It would be folly on our part to wait for an experience like Saul's Damascus Road meeting with the Lord. Sometimes we use this as an excuse saying, 'If God wants to speak to me He can give me an experience similar to Saul's, then I will listen.' We should know better than that. It is no excuse for us, neither can we take the attitude of trying to twist God's arm. Because we are blood bought children, because we are promised to Jesus as His future bride we should desire to hear His voice.

The very first commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind. (Matthew 22:37) It would be a very strange type of love if we did not want to hear His voice and through hearing His voice please Him by doing what He wants of us.
Summary - We must desire to hear His voice.

Obedience.

We should settle it in our mind that we will obey what God speaks to us.

The Lord has a purpose for you - settle it in your heart right now. The Lord has a purpose for you:

'I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go, I will counsel you with My eye upon you.'

Psalm 32:8

There is a way in which you should go to please God. You may not have any personal vision for your life right now, but God has a plan. As you come closer and closer to Him, as you love Him more and more, you will come into the knowledge of His plan for your life.

Decide that His plan is the best plan and that you will obey His voice when you learn to recognise it.

Relax and let God work in you;

'For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.' Philippians 2:13

'I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.' Romans 12:1-2

You will see from this passage that God's will for you is good and it is acceptable and it is perfect - what more could we want?

Summary - Decide it in advance - I will obey what I hear from God.

Decide it in advance - what the Lord speaks to me will never contradict New Covenant truth written for us in the bible.

Freedom from interference.

There are two particular areas of potential interference from which we need to be free.

Firstly any occult influence.

If we are participating in any type of occult activity we are a risk to ourselves and other members of the body. Occult voices will be speaking to us and we will be misled.

Occult influence comes about in three main ways:

- a) Our own occult activity. Ouija boards, horoscopes, divination, seances - all these sort of things are direct invitations to the enemy to mislead us. Belonging to secret societies such as the Freemasons also open the door to occult forces.
- b) Through inheritance. Although demons and evil spirits have no rights to oppress any believer they are of the same nature as Satan. They will oppress anyone until stopped. Frequently their activity and presence is passed down from parent to child.
- c) Continued personal sin. If we continue in a known sin it is tantamount to inviting an evil spirit to take up residence with its consequent interference to our lives.

To get fully free from occult influence we must, apologise to the Lord for our involvement, repent - that is turn completely away from such activity, renounce all occult practices, and

destroy all occult artefacts. In addition there is the very strong probability of the need for deliverance from evil spirits.

Secondly, unforgiveness.

In Matthew 18 we read the story of the unforgiving servant. Having been forgiven a huge amount by his master, he fails to show the same forgiving attitude to his fellow servant, who owes him little. The parable tells us that the unforgiving servant is delivered to the tormentors until he pays all his debt.

Jesus warns us - the same will happen to us if we do not forgive our brother his trespasses. This is not loss of eternal salvation for one who is born again, but rather it is unrestrained trouble in this life. Torment for the soul, that is the mind, the will and the emotions.

Unforgiveness is evil, and will place us in the position of being handed to the tormentors. Hearing God will be difficult, if not impossible, until we have repented of our unforgiveness.

Repent therefore, forgive them now, and be ready and prepared that the Lord may lead you to some act of restoration with the ones you have not previously forgiven.

Right attitude to money.

It may seem very strange to think that our attitude to money can affect our ability to hear God. The reason is actually simple logic. When we hear God speak we are sharing in the true riches of being His children, both for ourselves and for others.

'Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?'

Luke 16:11

Here the Spirit is telling us through Luke - If you want to share in the true riches of God you must be faithful over money. How are we faithful over money? We honour God by being changed into His likeness – He is generous, so we need to see our hearts become generous.

Ready to hear.

There are a few imperatives which must be in place when we are asking God to direct us:

1) His instructions will never contradict the principles of scripture. He will never tell you to rob or to commit adultery. He will never tell you to lie, cheat or defraud. He will never tell you to operate in the dark.

'Diverse weights are an abomination to the Lord, and dishonest scales are not good.' Proverbs 20:23

2) We should not expect God to speak to us about something already clearly outlined in scripture. E g;. Should I eat black pudding (black pudding is an English dish made from blood.) See Acts 15:29

Should I take a Christian brother to court? See 1 Corinthians 6

3) Make sure you have acted upon God's last instruction.

4) Be in neutral gear. By this I mean, allow God to say No. We are not to go to the Lord saying I am hoping to do this please bless me. Rather, we seek His will and follow Him.

Be prepared that when you ask for or about some planned action, He might say, No.

5) Deal with any known sin in your life. When we approach God we should have clean hands and a pure heart.

'Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the Lord.'

Psalm 24:3-5

6) Avoid thinking you must make a decision quickly. It is rarely necessary. Allow time for God to speak.

7) There may be other matters which the Holy Spirit highlights to you when you come to ask.

Expect God to answer you.

It is true that God does not always answer by speaking to us. Sometimes He just moves in and deals with the situation we have prayed about. Sometimes He requires us to wait patiently before there will be an answer. Sometimes He does not answer at all – He is the Sovereign Lord and is entitled not to answer if He so wishes.

However very frequently God will answer in one of a number of different ways. We should therefore expect to hear from God as the norm and not be put off by having to wait patiently sometimes, or by not receiving an answer occasionally.

The norm is - '*when you search for Me with all your heart I will be found by you.*'

'My sheep hear My voice.'

Raise your expectation of hearing the Lord speak you, you are His sheep, and My sheep hear My voice.

Before you go on to the next chapter.

Are you ready to hear God speak to you?

PART THREE

Chapter 11 The mechanics of hearing.

In this chapter we will consider the ways in which the Lord speaks to us. God deals with us all as individuals and you will experience some or all of the following ways God uses to communicate - in addition you may experience other ways not listed here.

The strong voice of God.

There are times when the Lord speaks to us in a strong and unmistakable voice. The voice might be audible or it might not - often we don't know. What we do know is that God has most certainly spoken.

When God speaks to us like this we do not have any problem in wondering, has God spoken. Rather we know He has spoken to us.

A biblical example would be Saul on the Damascus road.

Saul is described as '*still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord*' when he went to the high priest for letters to the synagogues in Damascus. He was out to kill the followers of 'The Way.' (Acts 9)

On the road to Damascus he was first surrounded by light, then he fell to the ground and he heard a voice saying, "*Saul, Saul why are you persecuting Me?*"

In this case we know that the voice of God was audible for the scripture tells us in Acts 9:7 that the men who journeyed with Saul also heard the sound of the voice.

The effect of God speaking to Saul in this way was to change his life completely. From this point on Saul becomes a believer, then changes his name to Paul and becomes a most significant tool in the hand of God.

When God speaks in a strong voice He wants and gets our complete attention. He speaks to bring a significant change to our life, maybe to our thinking in a particular realm, maybe with something more dramatic, whatever it will have lasting effect.

In Exodus 19 we read of God speaking to Moses in the earshot of the Israelites who were gathered at Mount Sinai. It was an awesome occasion and the Israelites reacted with fear. In Exodus 20:19 we find them saying to Moses, *'You speak with us and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.'*

When He speaks to us let's remember that he is our loving Father and not react with fear and not seek another to be an intermediary.

In my own experience God has spoken this way. I was facing financial crisis and God spoke to me, "Peter do not worry about money I will look after you." That was now over forty years ago. But God's voice was strong and the experience continues to live with me. Many financial problems have come and gone in the forty plus years - but every time a problem appears I do remind myself and the Lord of that promise. The promise is still valid because God is not like a man that He should change His mind

'I am the Lord; I do not change.' Malachi 3:6
We can call to mind the things the Lord has spoken to us.

Whilst the Lord God does sometimes speak audibly it is not everyone's experience. Most believers will experience -

The gentle voice of God.

Maybe you are asking God something, maybe just worshipping or just going about your normal business when a gentle voice speaks to you. This voice frequently comes from one's own heart, where the Holy Spirit is dwelling. A strident voice from our flesh or from the enemy,, denying the first voice, often follows.

We considered the example of Elijah in 1 Kings 19 earlier.

We easily fall into the trap of 'demanding' that God speak to us with His strong voice, of expecting 'strong winds, earthquakes and fire.' Normally God will speak with a still small voice.

We do not need to see 'fireworks' when God is speaking to us - His normal voice is that still small voice, we need to recognise and trust.

When we pray and ask God something, let us also listen for that still small voice bringing a reply. Often the reply will be immediate - sometimes followed by a louder voice of denial. The denial comes from our flesh. Then there can be a condemning voice – ‘who do you think you are that God would speak to you.’ – this is the enemy.

One day I was walking past my office when the still small voice of God said to me, "Satan is trying to rob part of your business." It would have been easy to ignore the warning by thinking that it was stupid or by thinking it was only my own thoughts.

However I acted by taking authority over the works of Satan (See Luke 10:19). The events that followed showed that the warning was true, and that my prompt action in the spiritual realm had been effective. That part of my business which had been under threat was saved.

We ignore the small still voice of God at our own loss and peril.

Start to trust the still small voice when He speaks to you, particularly when it comes in immediate response to your prayer - you will learn to move in faith. *The word is near, in your heart and in your mouth.* Romans 10:8

Through scripture

There are two ways in which God speaks through the scripture and we need to understand them both.

Firstly the written counsel of God is given to us as guidelines for life. The whole revelation is, in Greek, the *logos* of God and the written down portion i.e. the Bible, is the *graphe*.

God 'speaks' through the bible (the *graphe*), (when rightly divided) in the sense that we are expected to apply all the principles of the New Covenant to our daily lives. Thus when the Bible says 'flee fornication' - we are to avoid fornication always. The more thorough our understanding of the Bible and of the context of each book, chapter and verse, the more we will be able to live our lives in holiness.

When Jesus told the parable of the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7, He said,

'Therefore whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house upon the rock.'

The word 'sayings' is *logos* in the Greek - so we know that Jesus is referring to the whole fullness of the counsel of God and not, in this case, making it specific to a particular word 'quickened' to the hearer.

In this section of our study we are more particularly concerned with the other way in which the Lord speaks through the scripture.

That is the Spirit will quicken to us certain words or verses. Maybe we have prayed and asked a certain question. Into our mind comes a particular verse or the reference for a verse. The verse speaks an answer to our question. The Spirit has 'quickened' a portion of scripture to us - God has spoken.

When the Spirit uses a small part of scripture to speak a particular message to us, He is not limited by the context of the verse.

For example when we had debts which we could not pay we asked the Lord, 'Lord, should we sell our house to pay off the debt.' We would have been left with nothing and would have had to seek housing from the Local Government. As my wife was reading in Jeremiah the next day and she came to chapter 42 and verse 10. At this point she felt the Spirit quicken this verse to her.

'If you will still remain in this land, then I will build you and not pull you down.'

Our question, 'Should we sell the house?' The answer, 'If you stay were you are I will build you up.'

When my wife shared this scripture with me, I can only say 'the Spirit leapt within me,' in agreement that the Lord was speaking in direct answer to our question.

Scripture can be 'quickened' to you just as you read through, or in response to your prayer, or as you hear someone read – maybe in church for example, or by the bible reference

coming to mind when you pray or worship or anytime. Learn to recognise when the Spirit is quickening something to you and to recognise the witness He brings to confirm what He has given to your spouse or friends for you.

Finally remember that when a message is quickened to you out of the scripture its immediate context - that is the chapter and verses around it, are not necessarily relevant to what God is saying to you on a personal basis. In the example I quoted above the Lord was speaking through Jeremiah to the Israelites – but the Spirit was taking that out of its context to speak to us personally.

A good biblical example would be the testing of Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus replied to Satan's tests by using scripture quickened to Him by the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 4)

Prophecy

The Lord speaks through prophecy. Sometimes His word is for a body of believers - a church congregation or perhaps a whole nation. Sometimes His word is just for a few believers or even just for you.

When we come to prophecy we are to look for the confirmation of two or three witnesses. The Spirit, Himself, can give you an immediate witness that the word is for you. Alternatively He may bring the same or similar message through another channel – thus providing a second or third witness.

Because humans are fallible we are particularly told to weigh prophecy. We should be careful therefore, not to assume that a particular prophecy applies to us until we have received second or third witnesses.

For example:

For many years I have had as the desire of my heart to teach within the body of Christ. In 1986 I received a prophecy through Kim Clements which spoke of both speaking and writing. Then in 1989 another prophecy was given through another brother referring to me as teacher, a gift given to the body. A year later another prophecy along similar lines.

Then gradually the opportunities to speak and teach, then the book 'Faith at Work,' then this series of booklets, followed the prophetic word. It was 'in my mind' to write the booklets but nothing had been done and nothing mentioned to anyone. Then, in an ICCC meeting in Moscow, a brother from Singapore got up in one of the public meetings and said, 'Peter, the Lord woke me in the night with a message for you, "You are to write a series of booklets and they will go round the world." Amazing! – and now available on my website - freebiblebooklets.com as PDF files or in printed form from Amazon.

We are told not to despise prophecy, rather we are to weigh it and to be patient. If God speaks prophetically to you on a personal level, it will come to pass. We inherit the promises of God through faith and patience.

According to 1 Corinthians 14:22 prophecy is given as a sign for believers.

There are many, many examples of prophecy in the scripture. i.e. Moses speaking God's words to Pharaoh, Isaiah and the other prophets speaking to Kings and the nations, Agabus warning Paul what would befall him at Jerusalem and so on.

All prophesy must be tested as we are advised that we prophesy in part, meaning either it is not all there or it is not all prophecy from the Lord. But don't be put off - prophecy

is very powerful, so weigh it, test it, seek two or three witnesses.

Visions and dreams

God speaks through visions and dreams. Visions seem to come in different degrees of 'visual' intensity. Sometimes it is rather like looking at a film it is so clear, whilst at other times it is like looking through haze.

Praise the Lord for the clear visions and dreams - rather akin to the strong voice of God. However the hazy or rather unclear visions are more common.

A vision could be described as a mind picture. Whilst praying and seeking God you 'see' a picture in your mind - either for yourself or for others.

For example, on one occasion whilst speaking in Belfast, a young couple came to me for prayer. Not wanting to be influenced by what they might say I asked them to keep silence. The Spirit gave me a picture in my mind of a very deep furrow, very deep with very high sides. I said to the couple, 'I see a very deep furrow, very long and very deep, with high sides. It is as if you are to stay in the furrow and keep going.' There was a certain amount of amazement and tears as they received God's word.

I then asked them why they had come forward. It turned out that the man was a farmer and very unsure of his calling. Did God want him to be a farmer? Did God want him to do something else?

How gracious of God to give such a clear picture for them, and how important in this case that I didn't know they were farmers!

Again there are many scriptural examples of both visions and dreams. Daniel and Joseph received dreams of the utmost importance in the affairs of mankind. Peter received a vision of all kinds of animals lowered before him in a sheet - a vision which opened they way for the gospel to go to the gentiles. Paul was directed to Macedonia by a vision in the night and so on.

It is not a question of **us** imagining what **we** want and then trying to bring what **we** visualize into being - that is an occult practice. No, as we pray and seek the Lord we are open to what He shows us through His Spirit. He is the sovereign Lord. He dictates what is best for us.

Other media

God can speak through other media.

One time I was asking God, 'Is it possible that there could be an army of 200,000,000.' (I had been reading in Revelation.) It does not matter whether you think the reference in Revelation chapter 9 refers to a human army or not, my question was simply, 'could there be an army of this size.'

A couple of days later the Daily Telegraph carried a small announcement - China has announced that it can put 200,000,000 men under arms. My question was answered.

Very frequently God will use books and writing other than the bible itself to speak. He is not to be limited. In the scripture you will find accounts of God using even an ass to speak, let's not limit Him by our previous experience.

The Magi saw a 'star' which they recognised was heralding the birth of the Messiah. The lesson is, 'Don't limit the Lord.'

Other people

God uses others to speak to us. Sometimes they believe God has given them something for you. We should listen and then seek God for confirmation, so that the message can be proved by two or more witnesses.

When someone has a 'word' for you, or thinks that he or she does, then it is his or her responsibility before the Lord to give you that 'word.'

His or her responsibility is ended and now it is your responsibility to seek God for yourself. Maybe as the word was being given to you the Spirit witnessed within you. If not, there must be a second witness from elsewhere. If in any doubt ask God for another witness. Be careful not to assume that because the brother or sister is well known or because you respect him or her, that the word must be from God. You must get your own, personal confirmation from the Lord.

Sometimes just in the course of conversation God will speak to you through a brother or sister without him or her knowing it. Again look for the second witness - either the Holy Spirit direct or through another brother.

If you receive a word for someone else, even if you are unsure, you should share it with him or her. Your responsibility is over and now he or she has the opportunity to ask God about the matter.

Circumstances

Circumstances are not guidance. God is not controlling every circumstance that you come across in life. We must not assume that God is directing our lives by the circumstances we come up against. Circumstances can be just that and circumstances can be created by those who are against us and by our spiritual enemy.

Jesus said, '*In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*' John 16:33.

Whilst we are within adverse circumstances we should turn to God for His wisdom and help (see Hebrews 4:16 for His invitation) and we should expect to hear Him speak to us in one of the ways already discussed or through peace. We will consider peace in the next chapter.

Before you go on to the next chapter

All these ways of hearing God speak are for our guidance. You may know of others not covered here. The way of the Spirit is life - are you following the guidance you are getting?

Chapter 12

Peace the ruler, safeguard and bringer of everyday guidance

'And let the peace of God rule in your hearts.'

Colossians 3:15

Hearing God speak is a difficult area because He deals with each one of us as individuals - therefore no two person's experiences are identical. There are areas of commonality, of course, which allow a booklet like this to be produced. Because the whole issue is so personal it can be somewhat subjective. So the Lord provides us with a safeguard.

The rule of peace

The Lord has provided for us a safety valve, a method of checking what we are hearing and considering. The peace of God in our hearts is God's safety net.

In the quotation from Colossians the word 'rule,' in Greek, is *brabeuo* and it means 'to be enthroned as decider.' This is rather like an umpire - he decides and his decision is final.

I found the translation by D Stern in 'The Jewish New Testament' helpful,

'And let the shalom (peace) that comes from the Messiah be your heart's decision maker.' Colossians 3:15

So, the Lord intends that peace in our hearts be enthroned as decider or umpire - the decision maker. Therefore let us not

embark upon any scheme, or course of action, if we lack peace in our heart about it.

A good motto to adopt would be, 'If in doubt, don't.' This is not to be confused with lack of faith. Faith is not a question of what we can believe, or, what we can trust God for, or, anything like that. Faith comes by hearing God speak to us. For a full analysis of faith read, 'Faith or Presumption' in this series.

Doubt

In considering any course of action there is the possibility of doubt. The only thing that should concern us is whether or not the Lord has spoken about the issue. We should not be overly concerned about the issue itself, what is important is what the Lord is directing us to do.

The Lord wants to be able to lead us through things which are humanly speaking either very difficult or even impossible. At the same time He does not want us taking on things which are humanly impossible on the mere assumption that He is with us.

We need to get this right. The important thing is what God is saying. If we are not clear on that we can ask Him for wisdom and clarity. When we have received His word we can act upon it without doubt.

Faith only comes by hearing God speak to us (Romans 10:17), we cannot somehow work up faith from our own resources.

Peace will help us discern what God is saying.

When others have heard on your behalf

It is common for members of the body of Christ to receive what God is saying for another brother or sister. Someone 'gives you a word,' saying it is from the Lord, now it is up to you to accept it or reject it.

Unfortunately, but not unsurprisingly, many things are said to be from God when they are not. There are a number of reasons for this, here are a few examples:

- 1) The brother or sister did not hear God at all, but has an overactive imagination or speaks out of misplaced compassion.
- 2) The brother or sister did hear God but not with clarity and the message is not correct or incomplete or applied to the wrong person or event or time..
- 3) The brother or sister heard another voice altogether and attributed it to the Lord.
- 4) Malicious troublemaking or from a judgemental attitude.

Testing the word

When we receive a 'word' from another person, whether it comes from a vision or prophecy or whatever, we have a responsibility to test that word. We should not just accept it as from the Lord neither should we reject it out of hand.

I use the following tests:

- 1) Has God already spoken to me about this some other way? Is this then a second or third witness to something I already know about?

In this case, unless lack of peace tells me otherwise, I accept the word as confirmation.

- 2) Does the word in anyway contradict scripture? Is it telling me to do something scripture forbids?

In this case I reject the word as not being from the Lord.

- 3) What was my internal reaction when the word was being spoken to me, or as I read it, if given to me written down? Was I disquieted or was there peace in my heart?
If disquiet - I would not accept the word but would go back to the Lord for further confirmation if indeed it was from Him.
If peace - then accept but still on hold for further confirmation.
- 4) If there was a strong internal witness that this was correct I would accept the word straight away.
- 5) Still not clear - then I would share it with mature brothers and sisters for their insight. (My spouse would be the first mature believer with whom I would test any word.)
- 6) Consider also the life and spirit of the one bringing the word - is there a genuine love present. (1 John 4) A word brought in a wrong or bad attitude is less likely to be from the Lord.

Peace rules

Where there is indecision it is quite in order to ask the Lord to increase your peace or to increase your disquiet. The scripture says that peace is to be the decider. The Lord will often answer this prayer for it is a form of asking Him for wisdom.

It is not lack of faith to ask for confirmation because the scripture expects things to be attested by two or more witnesses. However, we also need to trust what we do hear and not become like Gideon. The Lord speaks - '*My sheep hear My voice.*' This is the normal Christian life.

Recognising peace.

'Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.' John 14:27

This is Jesus promise to every believer. We have received peace from Jesus. How do we recognise it?

We are talking about peace that emanates from the spirit of man, for it is in the spirit of man that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence. So spiritual peace is not to be confused with what our intelligence can accept or reject, it is what the Holy Spirit is doing in our human spirit.

As a state of spiritual peace should be our norm, it is probably easier to describe its absence, rather than its presence.

We know from John 7:38 that it is out our belly, or innermost being, that the streams of living water flow. This shows us that one of the ways the spirit of man is to be recognised is in the belly, or innermost being. When we feel unease from that part of our anatomy - then we do not have peace in the spiritual sense.

If we continue with something we feel this unease about, we are quenching, and ultimately, grieving the Holy Spirit. The unease will increase and increase and can lead eventually to physical sickness particularly ulcers and the like.

Fear is often also recognised by physical reaction in this part of our bodies together with strong feelings in the mind. Take authority over fear so that peace can be restored and so that the guidance that comes from peace can be received.

The voice of conscience

We are blessed with our conscience. It will quickly tell us if a proposed course of action offends the truth. We do need to

attend to our conscience and not act against it. The conscience is the voice of the human spirit in relation to what is morally right or wrong. For the believer, we have the Holy Spirit dwelling within our human spirit and it most important not to go against our conscience.

Peace as the normal rule of guidance

It is wonderful when God speaks through the various mechanics we looked at in the last chapter. However the normal rule of day to day guidance is peace. The Lord will and does speak through the more dramatic methods and we are really blessed when He does. But it is a mistake to think that on every occasion God will speak in one of those ways. Allowing peace to be the decider in our hearts is God's every day way of speaking guidance to us. We should learn to appreciate when we do have peace and when we do not. Why not ask the Holy Spirit to teach you personally how to recognise peace and how to recognise Him speaking.

Peace is closely allied to the internal witness of the Spirit. When we receive the internal witness, peace will certainly be a result thereof. We are talking now in degrees. The internal witness of the Spirit is a positive internal acknowledgement agreeing with the matter in hand. It can be rather like Elizabeth's experience when the babe leapt in her womb. Peace is more like a feeling of well being about the matter.

Peace is the normal rule of guidance - '*Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.*'

Remember also James 3:17 - '*the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*'

Before you go on to the next chapter

Are you following the Lord by letting peace rule in your heart?

Chapter 13

The practical application - making decisions

'Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established.'

Proverbs 3:16

'Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noonday.'

Psalm 37:5-6

'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.' Proverbs 3:5-6

The Lord wants to play a part in our decision making

It should be clear from the above texts that the Lord is interested that we should be careful to commit our ways to Him. He is interested, He will direct our paths.

We should be careful, therefore, not to rely only on our own understanding and particularly our own training and expertise.

I experienced the Lord giving me technical guidance regarding a complicated pension plan on behalf of a client I was advising. A word of knowledge was received. The action the word advised seemed totally impossible, and the insurance companies involved also thought it was impossible or maybe illegal. But, when referred to the Government office supervising pensions, the action proposed by the word of knowledge was approved. So my client was able to proceed with his desired course of action.

Later I was speaking at a lunch time meeting of Christians working in one of the big 4 accountancy firms. Their pensions expert was present. I recounted my experience with the word of knowledge. He came up to me with grateful thanks - he did not know the course of action the Lord advised was possible. The Lord knows more than any expert.

The use of expertise

Equally we are not to ignore or count as nothing the expertise that we have. Rather we should use our best endeavours to understand both the problem we face and the potential solutions, based upon our expertise and our experience.

Frequently the use of our expertise will lead towards the right answer - that is the answer that God has for us. However we should always commit our way to the Lord. We should not rush ahead, but rather wait, pray and look for peace to decide in our hearts with or without the addition of prophecy, visions and so on.

In business life the normal guidance will be found in the diligent use of our or others skill and expertise together with the rule of peace. We should not expect that the Lord will give us a prophecy or a vision about every business decision.

It will be alright, the Lord is in control!

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that you can take a short cut, or even not bother at all, about the decisions that you have to make. The Lord does not want us to take a cavalier attitude.

There may be some occasions when He speaks very clearly at the very beginning of a decision making process - but that is not the norm. Praise Him when He does. When he does not, be diligent.

The actual process

Decisions fall into various categories and various degrees of importance. The principles we will look at can apply just as well to a business decision as to a family decision.

- 1) Is the proposed course of action forbidden by or contrary to scripture?

Stop now. You need go no further. If this is a business matter you probably need to take a stand. You cannot actively and deliberately take part in sin.

- 2) Is the proposed action discouraged but not forbidden by scriptural principles?

You might choose to go no further with this idea.

Alternatively you might proceed to examine the matter more closely, but be careful. '*All things are lawful for me but not all things are helpful.*'

(Paul to the Corinthians in his first letter chapter 6 verse 12)
If you work for a non christian employer you may be able to ask to be taken off this project.

- 3) Other cases - seek to know the will of God in the situation.

Ask for wisdom from the Lord, look for peace. When you know God's will you have the potential resources for success.

- 4) Understand the task. What are you having to decide?

Has God already spoken into the situation?

When the Israelites sent the spies into the promised land they brought back a bad report. God had already told them that He was giving them the land - they were not expected to decide whether they could take the land or not. Their job was, firstly, to confirm that the land was good and, secondly, to

reconnoitre. (See Numbers 13:18-20) Make sure you understand what you are having to decide about.

5) Gather all the facts and analyse them to the best of your ability.

'Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.' Proverbs 24:3-4

'A wise man is strong. Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength.' Proverbs 24:5

As you gather the facts and as you analyse with your expertise listen to the voice of God, particularly to the rule of peace. In the case of considering business ventures it is common for the answer to become apparent during this process as peace is replaced by disquiet.

6) Slow down. Try not to be forced into quick decisions. Give time to assess the facts and give time to ponder and think over the matter. Give time for prayer and for God's answers.

'It is not good for a soul to be without knowledge, and he who sins hastens with his feet.' Proverbs 19:2

7) Consider the alternative courses of action. The rule of peace can be of great help in eliminating bad alternatives.

8) If you can, pray over the situation with mature brothers and sisters. There is safety in many counsellors.

Know that the Lord is with you. Know that the Lord is delighted when His children seek Him. Know that as you ask for wisdom God gives liberally and without reproach. Commit your way, ask and pray - God is with you.

Before you go on to the next chapter

Do you make your decisions on your own or with the Lord?

Chapter 14

When God is silent

There are some occasions when a decision must be made and yet heaven is silent.

In my own experience I faced a decision about a job. The situation was like this:

I was running an accountancy practice. We had one client who accounted for about half the practice income. We did all the book-keeping for this chain of retail outlets.

The day came when my friend and client for over 10 years sold the business to another company. They did not want their book-keeping done by an outside contractor. I was faced with this decision:

Either give up this client all together or agree to take employment with the new owner of this business and give up all the other clients.

I prayed, my wife prayed. We heard nothing.

I was not at ease about taking the full time job so the rule of peace eliminated that option.

When I conveyed to the new owner of the business that I could not take a full time job with them I was asked to consider working a four day week.

I prayed, my wife prayed - again nothing. No words, no visions, no pictures and no prophecies.

However, I felt at peace about working a four day week for this new owner on the basis that I could still run my business on the fifth and sometimes sixth working days.

So we took the following action:

- 1) We committed our way to the Lord:
 - a) 'Lord if job is from you please open wide the doorway.'
 - b) 'Lord if this job is not from you then please shut the door on it - we don't want anything that is not of you.'
- 2) We took authority over the enemy and bound him from having any influence in either direction.
- 3) We proceeded to the next step.

The next step was an interview with the Financial Director of the new parent company. He came to our home. The negotiation went like this:

'How much salary would you like?'
'What car would you like?'
'How much holiday would you like?'
'Is there any other way in which we can help?'

After naming my price, my car and my holiday entitlement I didn't expect the last question.

My quick silent prayer was answered. I explained that under UK tax law changing from mainly self-employed to mainly employed caused a double tax charge in one year.

'To induce you to take the job we will pay the difference.'

The evidence that followed our decision making process showed that the Lord had gone before us. The door was well and truly thrown open.

Within a couple of weeks of starting the employment the Lord spoke to me as I sat at the desk, 'You won't be here very long.'

After a couple of years they decided that I didn't really fit into their profile and terminated the position with very reasonable compensation.

(Whilst I worked in the office two other employees were saved - one of whom, a young man, was later killed in a car accident.)

Principles

Sometimes the Lord does keep silent on an issue we must decide about.

- Commit your way to the Lord. In the above example we would have been happy with either outcome. When you commit your way to the Lord be ready for Him to control events.
- Bind the enemy. Jesus said. '*The enemy does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.*'
John 10:10

This is a most important part of spiritual warfare. Do not leave the enemy free to influence your situations in a case like this.

- Keep praying and listening. Particularly be guided by peace. Unless your spiritual signals turn red, go with the flow.

Before you go on to the last chapter

When you don't hear God speak to you, don't give up, don't think that He does not care. God has the sovereign right to speak when He wants to and to keep silence when He wants to. Commit your way, bind the enemy and move forward prayerfully and watching the signs of His leading.

Chapter 15

Go and do likewise

'Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.'

Matthew 7:24-7

The Christian life is about hearing and doing. Please put the things we have shared into practice in your own life. Don't be afraid of making mistakes. God looks upon the heart of man – not upon his performance.

God is thrilled when one of His children moves into doing what he believes he hears Him say. God is well able to rescue us when we do make mistakes, and even to bring good out of them:

'And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.'

Romans 8:28

If you are born again, then you are called according to His purpose. In addition to that you are being made into the likeness of Jesus Himself. Jesus did what He saw and heard the Father doing. We are to do likewise.

Fearful - If you are fearful of making mistakes or of what others might think, then a change of attitude is necessary.

God is well able to look after you, well able to cover any mistakes you might make, and wants you to enjoy the thrill of hearing Him.

When we hear His voice and do what He says the whole power of God flows into the situation. Don't be bound by fear.

Apathetic

It is time to wake up and get back to your first love for the Lord. He loves you and wants a relationship that is hot. Wake up before it is too late and you find that the enemy has come stealing and destroying.

We are in trying times, they are getting worse. You need to hear and obey the voice of the Lord.

The Lord will direct our paths

'I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.' Psalm 32:8

'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.'
Romans 10:8

The *rhema* word of God is near you. His specific instruction is near you - in your heart and in your mouth, frequently coming from your innermost being. It is not afar off.

The last word

Work at it, God loves you and wants to guide you with His voice so that your joy may be full.

