
Hearing God's Voice

*My Sheep Hear My Voice
And I Know Them
And They Follow Me
John 10:27*

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Contents

Introduction

Part One

Uniqueness Of Man

The Shepherds Voice

Clear And Precise

Condition Of The Heart

Faith And Obedience

Still Small Voice

Part Two

The Word Of God

Works Of Faith

Biblical Meditation

Gifts Of The Spirit

Part Three

Without Words

Peace And Desires

And Finally...

Introduction

- *All of the scriptures are from the NKJV*
- *Where the name 'God' is used in relation to hearing Him speak, this includes Jesus and the Holy Spirit. (The Trinity).*
- *As we consider hearing the voice of God it is of great importance that we always test what we hear with the word of God realising that God will never say anything to us in contradiction to His word.*
- *If as a result of hearing God's voice important decisions are to be made, it is always wise to seek counsel from other trusted believers in order to safeguard acting on something which may not have been God speaking to us.*

In the beginning God not only created the Heavens and the Earth along with all living things, but He also created man in His own image. What was His purpose of creating man in His image, it was so that He might have fellowship with man and that man might experience unhindered fellowship with his Creator.

It is inconceivable to think that before the fall man would not have clearly heard the voice of God.

God is the same today, yesterday and forever and His desire to speak to His children has not changed. And yet if there is one biblical subject that most Christians are interested in knowing about it is the subject of hearing God's voice. Why is this? It is because many of God's children are not confident they hear the voice of the Father. How often do we hear words similar to,
“ *I don't hear God speak to me.*”

How sad to realise that Almighty God is our Father who delights to speak with His children and yet it seems many believers are insecure in hearing his voice.

God has not stopped speaking to His children.

May we all become increasingly secure in the knowledge that we are '*Hearing God's Voice.*'

Part One

The Uniqueness Of Man

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1

At the beginning of the book of Genesis we find the account of creation. We soon discover God speaking different aspects of creation into being over a period of six days before 'resting' on the seventh day. When we come to God creating man, we not only discover that he was the final part of God's creative work, but we also discover there was something extremely unique about God's creation of man compared with every other part of His creation:

Then God said, “LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR IMAGE, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” Genesis 1:26 (Capitals used for emphasis).

Man was created in the image of God and according to His likeness! We do not read of any other part of creation being made in the image of God only man. *Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.....*

Why was the creation of man so completely different to every other part of God's creation? Why was it so important that man should be created in the image of God? (*It would take a detailed study to fully answer those questions*). The answer is; God created man in His own image so that man could enjoy unbroken fellowship with God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. Man could enjoy the presence of God walking in perfect harmony with Him. It was not possible for any other part of creation to *fellowship* with God in this way, but the creation of man was different. He was created in the very image of God and because of this was able to fellowship with his Creator.

In considering the above it is unthinkable that man would not have clearly *heard* and *known* the voice of God. God speaking to man, man speaking to God.

As we read the account of creation we find God *blessing* the living creatures with the following words:

And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." Genesis 1:22

As we read on we find God blessing man in a similar way:

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Genesis 1:27-28

Although we find God *speaking* a blessing over the living creatures as well as over man, we do not find God speaking to any other part of His creation in the way He spoke to man. This should not be a surprise. We have already realised that the creation of man was unique. We have also realised that unlike any other part of creation man was created to be able to enjoy fellowship with His Creator.

After speaking His blessing to man, God continues with the following words:

And God said, (to man) “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food”; and it was so. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Genesis 1:29-31

In the above verses we find God *communicating* with man providing him with clear instructions about the food he could eat. Because man was created in the image of God, created for intimate fellowship, it was *natural* for man to hear God speak.

Let's take a moment to consider the conclusions we have realised so far:

- *Man was unique due to being created in the image of God.*
- *Man was able to enjoy intimate fellowship with His Creator.*
- *It was natural for man to hear God speak.*

As we continue reading in Genesis, we discover something else unique regarding the creation of man:

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and BREATHED into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.
Genesis 2:17 (Capitals used for emphasis).

There is no other part of God's creative work where we find God breathing ***the breath of life*** into it. Something very special took place when God breathed into man.....he became a ***living being***.

We find a similar thing taking place in the New Testament:

And when He (Jesus) had said this, He breathed on them, (the disciples) and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. John 20:22

When Jesus ***breathed*** on the disciples they received the Holy Spirit. When God ***breathed*** into man he became a ***living being***.

Not only was man created with a body (flesh and blood,) not only was he created with a soul (mind, will and emotions,) but he was also created with a spirit.

We find the three parts of man (body, soul and spirit) mentioned in 1 Thessalonians:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:23

There is no question regarding the creation of man being unique. Likewise there is no question regarding the intimate fellowship Adam and Eve enjoyed with God. Sadly this all changed after the fall:

And they (Adam and Eve) heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Genesis 3:8

Before Adam and Eve sinned it was *normal* for them to hear ***the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden***. It was *normal* for them to enjoy ***the presence of the Lord God***. It was *normal* for them to have fellowship with God and out of that intimate fellowship to hear God speak. But when sin came in everything changed. No longer could man enjoy the presence of God in the way he had before nor could he enjoy intimate fellowship with his Creator in the way he had before.

Despite the fall resulting in Adam and Eve being driven out of the Garden of Eden, we find God still continues to speak to man. Following on from Adam and Eve we discover God speaking to Cain, Adam and Eve's son:

So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." Genesis 4:6-7

Following Cain we find God speaking to Noah:

And God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Genesis 6:13

After Noah we find God speaking to Abraham.
(Initially called Abram):

Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Genesis 12:1-3

Time after time throughout the bible we discover God speaking to man. Sometimes God spoke directly to man such as with Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah, Abraham, and so the list goes on. At other times we find God communicating his words through individuals such as the prophets.

Throughout the Old and New Testament we discover God continues to speak. From the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation we find God speaking to man.

As we now turn our attention to the Gospel of John we find some wonderful words spoken by Jesus in relation to hearing His voice.

The Shepherds Voice

In the Gospel of John we read the following important and encouraging words spoken by Jesus:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and **THE SHEEP HEAR HIS VOICE**; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. John 10:1-3 (Capitals used for emphasis).

And:

And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they **KNOW HIS VOICE**. John 10:4 (Capitals used for emphasis).

We realise two very important facts from the above verses:

- *God's sheep (believers) **hear** the voice of the Shepherd (Jesus).*
- *The sheep **know** the voice of the Shepherd.*

I wonder how many times we have heard it said,
“*I don't hear God speak to me.*”

or,

“*I find it difficult hearing God speak because I don't know His voice.*”

On the surface these are two extremely reasonable statements for a Christian to make. However, when we hold both of these statements against the light of God's word we realise neither of them are in agreement with the words of Jesus in John chapter 10.

Jesus said His sheep *hear* His voice. He also said His sheep *know* His voice. For us to declare we do not hear His voice or even to state we do not know His voice is to place ourselves in a position contrary to the word of God.

In the book of Amos we read the following words:

Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?
Amos 3:3

In order for us to walk with God we need to be in agreement with Him which means being in agreement with His word.

If we are going to hear God's voice on a regular basis, as well as recognise His voice when He speaks, we need to be in agreement with the words Jesus spoke in John chapter 10. Our starting point is *always* to believe God's word irrespective of our experience. It is *never* to measure the truth of God's *by* our experience.

We might well say,
“*How can I say I hear God's voice when I have never heard Him speak to me?*”

Once again naturally speaking this is a very sensible question to ask. However we are told in the word of God that we do not walk by sight but by faith. It is important to realise that we must first come into agreement with His word irrespective of our experience in order for our experience to come into line with God's word. We could put it like this:

- *Our experience does not evidence truth but the word of God is the evidence for truth.*
- *In order for our experience to line up with God's word we must first come into agreement with His word.*

This principle of agreeing with God's word first in order for our experience to follow is so important. There are so many applications of this in our daily walk:

We may not feel forgiven the moment we confess our sin but the word of God declares we are. It is only as we come in agreement with His word that we begin to *feel* forgiven.

We may not always feel we have been born again. However the word of God makes it clear the moment we accept Jesus as our Saviour we become His child. As we come into agreement with His word our experience begins to come into line and we begin to have the assurance that we are His son or His daughter.

We may not always feel God has heard our prayers. But the moment we come into agreement with His word we begin to experience His peace and realise He has heard us.

(We could go on with so many examples illustrating this very important principle).

So.....how do we begin to hear the Lord's voice?
How do we become secure in knowing His voice?
By applying the above principle of believing God's word irrespective of our experience and coming into agreement with it:

- *Jesus has said we **hear** His voice - we come into agreement with His word – we begin hearing Him speak to us.*

- *Jesus has said we **know** His voice – we come into agreement with His word – we begin to become secure in recognising His voice.*

When God's word becomes the evidence for what is true rather than making our experience the evidence for what is true, it won't be too long before our experience comes into line with God's word.

Let us come into agreement with God's word and in doing so begin to *hear* and to *know* the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Clear And Precise

As we read through the bible and find God speaking to man we notice that His words are both clear and precise. When God speaks there is nothing vague about what He is saying. There are many examples of this throughout scripture but to illustrate this we will briefly consider Noah, Samuel and Ananias.

Noah

Following the fall man increasingly moved away from God, his ways becoming ever more wicked. The wickedness of man became so great that we read the following words:

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness (depravity) of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Genesis 6:5

This may only be one verse but it provides a grave picture concerning the state of man. From this verse we realise three things:

- *The wickedness of man was great.*
- *Every intent of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil.*
- *The thoughts of man's heart was evil continually.*

This is a very bleak picture of the condition of man. The wickedness or depravity of man ***was great in the earth***. Not only that but ***every*** intent of the thoughts of man's heart were wicked. And it wasn't the case that sometimes the intent of the thoughts of man's heart were wicked whilst other times they were good. No, every intent was ***evil continually*** leaving no room whatsoever for any goodness at all.

It is in the context of the dreadful depth of wickedness that man had fallen to that God speaks to Noah informing him of his intentions to flood the earth and providing him with instructions to build an ark:

And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. And this is how you shall make it: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. You shall make a window for the ark, and you shall finish it to a cubit from above; and set the door of the ark in its side. You shall make it with lower, second, and third decks.

And behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, of animals after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them.” Genesis 6:13-21

As we read through the above scriptures not only do we realise that God spoke directly to Noah, but we also appreciate that God's words were completely clear and precise. There was no room for any form of vagueness. Not only was Noah informed of God's intentions to destroy the earth, but he was also provided with *precise* instructions regarding how to build the ark and what to do when it was completed.

Samuel

No doubt many of us have heard the account of God speaking to Samuel whilst he was serving in the temple under the leadership of Eli:

Now the boy Samuel ministered to the LORD before Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation. And it came to pass at that time, while Eli was lying down in his place, and when his eyes had begun to grow so dim that he could not see, and before the lamp of God went out in the tabernacle of the LORD where the ark of God was, and while Samuel was lying down, that the LORD called Samuel. And he answered, "Here I am!" So he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." 1 Samuel 3:1-5

Because this was the very first time Samuel had heard the voice of God, he assumed it be to be the voice of Eli. When God spoke to Samuel a second time he made the very same mistake resulting in Eli informing Samuel he had not called him and instructing him to go back and lie down.

A third time God calls Samuel and a third time Samuel runs to Eli. This time Eli realises that this is the voice of God calling to him and instructs Samuel that should God call again to answer Him with the words, '***Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears***':

And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you did call me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD had called the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.' " So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 1 Samuel 3:8-9

As we continue reading the account of Samuel hearing God speak, we once again realise that God's words are both clear and precise. There is no room for any form of vagueness:

Then the LORD said to Samuel: "Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them. And therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." 1 Samuel 3:11-14

Before moving on from Samuel to consider Ananias it is worth noting that three times Samuel assumed it was the voice of Eli when God spoke to him. It was only as a result of Eli's instructions that Samuel listened to God speak the fourth time. This fact tells us something very significant about the voice of God. His voice is very natural! In other words, it is so natural that we could easily assume we are simply hearing our own voice speaking to us. Because of this, there is a process of *growing* in recognising God's voice. God will and does speak to us, but it is as we persevere in listening for His voice that we learn to recognise His voice. The more we listen, the more we hear. The more we hear the more we will grow in confidence that we are hearing God's voice and will therefore be able to distinguish God's voice from our own voice as well as from Satan's voice.

Ananias

As we read the account of God speaking to Ananias in the book of Acts, we quickly realise he was a man who walked closely with God and because of this, God was able to ask him to carry out a very important task.

Before Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus, he was determined to bring about maximum harm to Christians:

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Acts 8:3

We continue to read about Saul's determination to come against Christians in the following chapter:

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Acts 9:1-2

It was whilst Saul was on his way to Damascus that he experienced an extremely dramatic conversion hearing the voice of Jesus causing him to fall to his knees:

As he (Saul) journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Acts 9:3-4

As a result of the bright light Saul was no longer able to see. The Lord instructs him to go to Damascus and to wait for further instructions as to what he should do. We read that he was three days without sight and did not eat or drink anything.

We are now able to return to Ananias. Ananias knew about Saul and how he brought about much harm to the Christians. He also knew that Saul had been given authority to bind all who called on the name of the Lord. What Ananias *did not know* was that Saul had had a dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus.

The Lord had an extremely important job for Ananias to do and He speaks to him in a vision:

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias."

And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight."

Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name."

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. Acts 9:10-18

We realise several things from the above scriptures:

- *Firstly, despite Ananias having absolutely no evidence at all that Saul had now been converted and was therefore no longer a threat to Christians, on hearing the Lord speak to him, was prepared to be obedient to the Lord's instructions.*
- *Next we realise that the words the Lord spoke to Ananias were both clear and precise. There was no room for vagueness or opportunity for them to be misinterpreted.*
- *The third thing we notice is that the Lord not only speaks to Ananias, but an actual conversation takes place between the Lord and Ananias.*

The fact that a 'conversation' took place between the Lord and Ananias should not be a surprise to us. God's original intention for man in the Garden of Eden was that he would be able to hear the voice of God and in return would be able to speak freely back to Him. God communicating with man and man communicating with God.

When we read the account of Ananias there is just *one* word which speaks volumes regarding the condition of Ananias heart. Despite Ananias knowing the harm Saul had caused to probably multitudes of believers, when he realises from the Lord that Saul has become a believer he addresses him as.... '**brother**'.

This one word provides great insight into the condition of Ananias heart. His heart was a forgiving heart. Despite knowing all that Saul had done to other Christians, Ananias was still able to greet him as 'brother':

*And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “**BROTHER Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**” Acts 9:17 (Capitals for emphasis).*

With such a sensitive and forgiving heart, no wonder Ananias was able to hear the Lord's voice so clearly and was able to hold a conversation with Him. No wonder he was used by the Lord in such a wonderful way.

As we shall discover, the condition of our heart is extremely important in relation to hearing the voice of the Lord.

Condition Of The Heart

We have appreciated that God created man for fellowship. That perfect intimate fellowship was spoilt by sin and yet because of the shed blood of Jesus we have been brought into a New Covenant. Once again we are able to walk in continual fellowship with the Lord and despite our failings and our sin we read the following tremendously encouraging words :

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:7-9

Despite our failings, despite our sin, the above scriptures provide tremendous encouragement to us. The blood of Jesus has the power to bring about complete forgiveness and complete cleansing. The moment we confess our sin acknowledging we have walked contrary to God's way, we are immediately restored back into fellowship with our Father. What an assurance to know ***the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.***

However, what happens if we choose *not* to confess our sin? What happens if rather than walking in God's ways we decide to walk according to our own desires and our own ways. To put it into biblical language, we choose to live according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

Romans 8:5

God has given man the freedom to choose. When God created man He created him with a free will allowing him to freely choose between God's ways or to choose his own way. When we became a Christian God *did not* take away our free will. We still have the freedom to choose. Despite being His children God will never force us to walk in His ways. However, the way we choose to live will have a direct impact on the condition of our heart and as we will shortly discover, will have an impact on our ability to hear God speak.

The bible uses the word '*heart*' primarily to refer to the ruling centre of the whole person. The heart is seen as the seat of the will, intellect and feelings. According to the bible, the heart is the centre not only of spiritual activity, but of all the operations of human life. The '*heart*' is so vitally important that we read in Proverbs the following words:

Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life. Proverbs 4:23

God has placed upon each one of us the responsibility to ***keep*** or ***guard*** our hearts. The keeping of our heart is not God's responsibility but it is our responsibility. Why is it so important that we take this responsibility seriously? It is because out of the heart ***spring the issues of life***. We can be absolutely certain that whatever is in our heart WILL come out. In fact we read in the Gospel of Matthew the following:

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. Matthew 12:34b

No matter how hard we may try, sooner or later whatever is in our heart will come out. It will come out in our words and eventually will be seen in our actions. If our heart is 'God centred' both our words and actions will reflect that. But if our hearts are 'self centred' likewise both our words and our actions will equally reflect that.

As this point we may well be saying:

“OK I can see the importance of guarding our hearts, but what has that got to do with unconfessed sin and hearing God's voice?”

It is because unconfessed sin will lead to a hardening of our heart which in turn will cause our spiritual hearing to become dull affecting our ability to hear God speak. It isn't so much that God is *not* speaking to us but is more about us not hearing what He is saying. Our walk with the Lord, and therefore the condition of our heart, has a direct bearing on our hearing God's voice.

We read in the book of Exodus how time after time Pharaoh hardened his heart. God spoke directly to Pharaoh through Moses informing him of God's command to let the Israelites who were slaves in the land of Egypt go. Each time God speaks to Pharaoh we find him hardening his heart towards God:

But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. And Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said. Exodus 7:11-13

Notice the wording '***And Pharaoh's heart grew hard.***' By rejecting the word of God spoken through Moses we find that Pharaoh's heart *grew* hard. Why is this? It is because the words of God are living and powerful words.

When we hear God speak we have a choice. We can choose to accept God's word in obedience to Him or we can choose to reject His word. However, as we reject God's word our heart grows hard. The more we reject God's word the more our heart hardens. (How reassuring to know the more we respond to God's word in obedience the more sensitive our heart becomes making it easier to hear Him speak).

Following a plague of frogs we read the following:

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, (after all the frogs had died) he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the Lord had said.

Exodus 8:15

Previously we read that Pharaoh's heart ***grew hard***. This time we read that Pharaoh himself ***hardened his heart***. As we continue to read the account in Exodus we see time and again Pharaoh hardening his heart against God.

If we think the hardening of the heart only applied to Pharaoh we quickly realise this is not the case as we read the book of Hebrews:

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. Therefore I

***was angry with that generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' "* Hebrews 3:7-11**

In the above verses we clearly see the connection between *hearing* God's voice and *hardening* our hearts....***Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.***

The effect of the heart becoming hard can be illustrated in the following way:

When I was a teenager I wanted to learn to play the guitar so as soon as the opportunity to buy one I could afford arose I didn't hesitate. The only problem was.....the guitar I bought had steel strings!

I quickly discovered that if I was to get a crisp sound from each string I needed to press down with quite a bit of force. Initially this was quite painful but as I continued to practise I found that the tips of my fingers hardened allowing me to press down on the strings without feeling any pain. This was certainly good news as far as playing the guitar was concerned, I could now hold down the strings without feeling pain! However it didn't take too long for me to realise there was a 'down side' to this.

Due to repeatedly holding down the steel strings with sufficient force so as to achieve a crisp clear sound, hard skin had developed over my finger tips. As a result of the hard skin I had no feeling in the tips of my fingers! A hardness had taken place resulting in a loss of sensitivity.

This is exactly what happens when we choose not to confess our sin or like the Israelites in the wilderness, harden our hearts as a result of hearing the Lord speak. As our hearts become hard we lose sensitivity both to the Lord and to hearing His voice. (Thankfully that sensitivity can be regained).

What can we learn from the above?

- *The condition of our heart affects our ability to hear God speak.*
- *The more sensitive our heart towards the Lord the easier it is to hear His voice.*
- *Unconfessed sin will lead to a hardening of the heart and a dulling of our ability to hear the voice of the Lord.*
- *God will never remove our freedom to choose to obey or to choose to disobey, but disobedience affects the condition of the heart.*

- *The closer we walk with the Lord the easier it is to hear Him.*

Let's finish this chapter by reminding ourselves once again of the importance to *keep* or to *guard* our heart:

Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life. Proverbs 4:23

Faith And Obedience

With respect to hearing the voice of the Lord, both faith (or more accurately trust,) and obedience are required. Faith or trust with regards to what we have heard being the Lord speaking to us, but also obedience when what we hear requires action on our part.

(It is important that we always weigh what we hear by the word of God. If what we hear is not in line with God's word, or worse still contradicts God's word, then we can be sure we have not heard the voice of God. It has either been our own thinking or the voice of the enemy).

The times God speaks to us requiring action on our part, He will always give us the freedom to choose to obey or to choose to disobey. As a loving Father He will never force us to do what He has said but will patiently wait for our obedience. God has given to each one of us free will and He will never go against our free will. However, when He speaks and we disobey His words, He does not change His mind regarding the things He has said. We will quickly discover that He keeps bringing us back to the *same* word. We find a wonderful example of this principle in the account of Jonah:

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah 1:1-3

When the word of the Lord came to Jonah we find him choosing to disobey. Foolishly he attempts to ***flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD*** by finding a ship which was going there. As we continue with the story we discover things get quite unpleasant for the sailors as a storm arises as a result of Jonah's disobedience:

But the Lord sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. Jonah 1:4

Although the sailors had no idea why they had found themselves in such difficulties Jonah knew exactly why this had all happened and instructed the sailors to throw him overboard in order for the storm to cease. Despite their efforts to avoid having to do what Jonah said, they finally and reluctantly threw him overboard causing the raging sea to become calm. As a result of experiencing this miracle they turned to the Lord:

So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows. Jonah 1:15-16

Even though Jonah disobeyed God and attempted to flee from His presence, God in His grace had prepared a large fish to swallow him in order to keep him safe. Jonah prays to the Lord and repents and after being in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights, God speaks to the fish which then vomits Jonah onto dry land.

God has not changed His mind regarding His instructions to Jonah:

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." Jonah 3:1-2

When we compare the above verses with the instructions God gave to Jonah in chapter 1 we quickly appreciate God's words to Jonah regarding going to Nineveh have not changed. God has not changed His mind but instead 'brings Jonah back' to the exact same word. This time Jonah does obey resulting in the people of Nineveh turning to God.

As we turn to the account of Abram (Abraham) we discover quite a contrast in the way Abraham reacts to the word of the Lord compared with how Jonah reacted:

Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family And from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. Genesis 12:1

And:

So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him.....Genesis 12:4a

Abraham hears God speak and shows no hesitation in obeying the voice of God. What a contrast to Jonah!

Although Abraham and Jonah responded quite differently as a result of hearing God speak, in both accounts faith and obedience were required. With Jonah it was faith that he would come to no harm as a result of speaking God's word to a sinful people. With Abraham it was faith that God would keep His promise regarding showing him the land He wanted him to go to. (Notice at the point of Abraham leaving Ur God had not yet shown him where he was going to).

Also in both accounts we clearly see obedience was required in order to fulfill what God had said.

Let us encourage one another God does indeed speak, but let us remember there may be times when both faith and obedience are required as a result of hearing what the Lord has said.

Still Small Voice

God speaks to us on a regular basis and uses many different ways to do so. The problem is not about whether God *speaks* to us, the real issue is whether we *hear* when He does speak.

The other difficulty we encounter is *recognising* the Lord's voice. As we saw with Samuel, the Lord's voice is so natural we can so easily mistake it for our own thoughts.

For the purpose of illustration imagine for a moment two people in their home. (For the sake of ease we will call them Robert and Janice). Robert happens to be in the lounge and calls out to Janice who is in the kitchen. Unfortunately, although Robert calls to Janice she doesn't hear him. (Robert speaks.....Janice does not hear!)

In the above illustration there were several reasons why Janice didn't hear Robert when he called. Firstly, she was busy preparing lunch and was not expecting him to call out from the lounge. Because of this she was not *actively listening* for his voice. Secondly, she had the radio on and was listening with interest to the latest news bulletin. The third reason she didn't hear Robert was that she was not near enough to hear his voice.

As a result of all this communication between Robert and Janice did not take place. This wasn't because Robert didn't speak, it was because Janice was unable to hear what he said.

This is so often the case when God speaks to us. It isn't that He doesn't speak, it is simply because we don't hear. Often our attention is taken up with so many things we are not actively listening for God's voice and so don't hear what He has to say.

We see this principle so clearly with the story of Mary and Martha. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus listening to His every word but Martha was occupied with so many things that she was unable to appreciate all that the Lord was saying:

Now it happened as they went that He (Jesus) entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." Luke 10:38-40

How easy it is for us to assume that because we don't hear the Lord's voice He isn't speaking to us. And yet the problem really lies with the fact we are taken up with so many other things we simply do not hear His words.

In the above verses we notice that Martha was ***distracted with much serving***. She was so occupied with all she needed to do that this became a distraction and prevented her from sitting at the feet of Jesus to listen to what He had to say.

When Jesus spoke to Martha we find Him using the following words:

And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” Luke 10:41-42

We realise from the above verses that Martha was not only ***distracted*** but she was also ***worried and troubled about many things***. It was as a result of these things that she was hindered from hearing what Jesus wanted to say. Mary simply sat at the feet of Jesus listening to His every word. Even though Martha was in the presence of Jesus she still didn't hear His words. Why? Because she was ***distracted*** and she was ***worried and troubled*** about many things.

Had Martha recognised these things were hindering her from hearing what the Lord wanted to say, she would no doubt have stopped and put her attention on the Lord.

If Martha had put her attention on the Lord to listen to His words they would surely have brought peace releasing her from her worries and causing her troubles to cease.

The same is so true for you and me. We so easily become distracted with so many things that we lose sight of the Lord being with us wanting to speak. What is our answer? It is the same as it was for Martha. It is realising that we are not hearing God's voice *not* because He is not speaking to us but because other things have got in the way preventing us from hearing Him speak. Once we come aside and choose to 'sit at His feet' it isn't long before we hear the words the Lord wants to say to us.

In Psalm 46 we read the following lovely words:

Be still, and know that I am God; Psalm 46:10a

Another way we could consider the above words is:

- ***In order for us to know God.... we need to be still!***

We can learn so much from the story of Mary and Martha with respect to hearing the Lord speak. We can be like Martha being distracted by so much or we can be like Mary simply coming aside in order to ***be still***, to know the Lord, and to listen for His voice.

Once we accept that God *wants* speak to us, once we accept we can *know* the voice of the Good Shepherd, we need to guard against having wrong expectations of how the Lord's voice will sound when He speaks.

Many, if not all of us, would love to hear the audible voice of God. God does sometimes speak this way but this is definitely not the norm. We may also wrongly assume that when the Lord speaks we will be so confident that we are hearing His voice there will be no room for doubt.

Having wrong expectations of how God will speak can hinder us from hearing His voice. God may speak in an audible voice. He may speak in an extremely dramatic way. There may be times when it is so evident it is the Lord's voice that there is no room for any doubt. However, whilst all of the above may be true, I believe the reality is the Lord's voice sounds so natural we either miss it or simply mistake His voice for our own thoughts. When the Lord speaks I believe there will always be that element of doubt,

“Was that really the Lord speaking to me?”

We can learn a great deal about hearing God speak from the account of Elijah:

Elijah was used mightily by God at Mount Carmel but afterwards ran for his life in fear as a result of hearing the threatening words of Jezebel.

We now find him hiding in a cave in an extremely low place, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. It is in this state of depression that God speaks to him:

And there he (Elijah) went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

So he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.”

1 Kings 19:9-10

We can clearly observe from the above verses that Elijah was extremely low and as a result was not thinking correctly. In his state of depression he says to God,

'I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.'

In the mind of Elijah he was the only prophet left alive. It would have been completely understandable Elijah believing this had he not previously met Obadiah.

Obadiah was a God fearing man who was in charge of the house of King Ahab. Knowing the prophets of God were in danger for their lives he hid one hundred of them in caves. When Obadiah meets Elijah, prior to Elijah confronting the false prophets at Mount Carmel, he informs him what he has done.

Was it not reported to my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid one hundred men of the Lord's prophets, fifty to a cave, and fed them with bread and water?

1 Kings 18:13

Elijah was *not* the only prophet who was alive! He had previously been informed by Obadiah that there were other prophets who had been kept safe and were alive. However, as a result of his depressive state of mind he was no longer thinking correctly and genuinely believed he was the only one left.

Despite Elijah submitting to fear and running for his life, despite him losing trust in God, despite him having sunk to a state of great depression, God still had work for him to do! There was just one problem..... instead of being taken up with God he was preoccupied with himself and his own problems.

Even though Elijah was in an extremely low condition, God still had some important things for him to accomplish and therefore required his full attention..... God knew exactly how to capture his attentiveness:

Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD."

And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was

not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

2 Kings 19:11-12

God certainly caught Elijah's full attention! Having caught Elijah's attention, God now speaks to him regarding the things He still has planned for him to do.

Notice that everything Elijah experienced hearing, everything he experienced seeing and everything he experienced feeling was extremely dramatic!

First the wind tearing into the mountains with such incredible energy and force it broke the rocks in pieces. This was then followed with an earthquake! Finally Elijah's attention is captured with seeing a fire. Although we are not told anything about the fire, I think in the context of a rock splitting wind and an earthquake it is fairly safe to assume this was a large vicious fire full of energy with potentially devastating affects.

Just one of the above events would have been awesome to observe. But there wasn't just one event there were three! One, followed by another, followed by another holding Elijah's full attention.

As dramatic and awesome each one of these events were we read the following amazing words:

..... *but the LORD was not in the wind*

..... *but the LORD was not in the earthquake*

..... *but the LORD was not in the fire*

The wind may have been awesome but God did not speak to Elijah through the wind. The earthquake may have been awesome but God did not speak through the earthquake. And the fire may have been awesome but God did not speak through the fire. How did God speak? He spoke through *a still small voice*.

God may have captured and held Elijah's full attention with events that were incredibly dramatic but He chose to speak through a *still small voice*. It was in the quietness and the stillness that Elijah heard God speak receiving instructions regarding the tasks God still required Elijah to accomplish. (See *1 Kings 19:15-16*)

Let's not be looking for God to speak to us in a dramatic way or waiting to hear the audible voice of God. On the contrary, let us come aside to sit at the feet of Jesus to listen for that quiet *still small voice*.

When we hear the Lord speak we can be assured of the following:

- *The words we hear will always be in line with the word of God.*
- *There will be the inner witness of the Holy Spirit confirming that it is the Lord's voice.*
- *The fruit produced as a result of hearing the Lord speak will always be good fruit such as peace or joy.*
- *God's words will never produce bad fruit such as condemnation, confusion or heaviness.*

God loves to speak to His children. In Part Two we shall discover God uses a variety of ways to speak to us.

Part Two

There are many different ways God speaks to us. The following is not meant to be an exhaustive list but to provide examples of some of the ways God speaks.

The Word Of God

God speaks to His children through the word of God (the bible). Although God speaks in other ways, it is true to say that if we only heard the Lord speak to us through His word it would be more than sufficient. God's word is the only completely reliable and fully trustworthy way of realising what He is saying. It is infallible!

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

God may speak to us through a prophecy, or a dream or a vision (to name just a few ways) but none of these carry the same reliability as God's word. Because of this everything we hear must always be held against God's word by way of testing its accuracy. The bible is the plumbline. It reveals when something is 'off'.

All Scripture is given *by inspiration of God*. The Greek word for *inspiration* is *theopneustos* meaning 'God breathed'. We could therefore say, '*All scripture is God breathed.*' God and His word cannot be separated.

We read in the Gospel of John the following words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1

Also:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

What wonderful scriptures revealing the 'oneness' between God and His word. We can summarise the above points the following way:

- *The word of God is completely reliable and trustworthy, it is infallible.*
- *The word of God is 'God breathed'.*
- *The word of God acts as the plumbline for testing all other ways of hearing the Lord speak.*

Having appreciated the above it is needful to spend a little time considering *how* God speaks to us through His word. In order to do this it is important that we realise the difference between *logos* and *rhema*.

There are two different Greek words in the scripture for 'word'. They are *logos* and *rhema*. Although both have been translated 'word' in our bibles, they have different meanings. In realising the difference between *logos* and *rhema* we begin to see when God uses His word to speak directly to us, it is a *rhema* word we are receiving.

We can think of *logos* as the *written* word of God. When we hold the bible in our hands we are holding the *logos*, the written word. *Logos* enables us to learn about God and to learn about His ways. We understand the gospel message because of *logos*. We understand bible prophecy relating to end times because of *logos*, (to name just a few examples). *Logos* is the Greek word for the *written* (God breathed) word of God.

The Greek word *rhema* which is also translated 'word' in our bibles has a different meaning to *logos*. *Rhema* is when the Holy Spirit takes the written word (*logos*) and quickens it to us bringing it alive inside of us.

For example, we may be going about our daily tasks when suddenly a scripture comes to mind and it feels *alive* and *powerful*. It is exactly what we were needing to hear at that particular time. This is rhema. Or we may be spending time reading an extremely familiar passage in the bible (logos). It could be a passage we have read many times but on this particular occasion it's as if a scripture literally jumps off the page and into our hearts! We become suddenly aware God is speaking to us. He is using logos (the bible) to speak a rhema word.

Sometimes receiving a rhema word is like receiving a 'now' word. It is God speaking His word at a *point in time* for a *specific reason* and it is exactly what we needed to hear at that specific moment.

On other occasions we may be reading the bible, possibly a passage we are extremely familiar with, and we '*see*' something in the word that we have never seen before. At such times we may describe this experience as receiving a *revelation* from God's word. It's as though the words we are reading come *alive* and we suddenly become aware that we feel spiritually *fed* by God's word.

I remember years ago reading the account of Mary Magdalene going to the tomb and finding it empty. On meeting Jesus, who had risen from the dead, she assumed Him to be the gardener. As Jesus revealed Himself to her He said the following wonderful words:

Jesus said to her, (Mary) “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’ ” John 20:17

I had read that verse many times before but on this occasion I realised the incredible truth Jesus was sharing with Mary. Jesus, who apart from the time He became sin on the cross, had always addressed God as 'Father'. As I read this verse I suddenly became aware that what Jesus was saying to Mary, (and therefore to every believer), was the truth that we have been brought into exactly the same relationship that Jesus had with His Father. ***'I am ascending to MY Father and YOUR Father.....'*** (Capitals used for emphasis).

The words came alive within me, there was an excitement and a sense that the Lord had spoken to me. I had seen something I had never seen before.....

“God is my Father and because of the death and resurrection of Jesus I have been brought into the same relationship that Jesus had with His Father as He walked on the earth.”

This was not a 'now' word as described earlier, but what might be described as a revelation in realising or 'seeing' something in God's word which had not previously been realised or seen before. This also is

a rhema word. It is the Holy Spirit taking the word of God (the logos) and causing it to come alive in our hearts. It is God speaking a rhema word to us.

It is worth noting that God is not limited in speaking a rhema word through the bible (logos) and will often speak in other ways as well. However it is important to remember, hearing the Lord speak by any other means than the bible must always be weighed against God's word (logos).

At this point we may be saying,
“I want to hear God speak to me, I want to receive a rhema word from God.”

Of course this is an extremely healthy desire and it is very important that we do experience receiving the rhema word of God. However, it is important to realise that without *knowing* the written word of God, the logos, we are unlikely to receive a rhema word from God.

● *In order to receive a rhema word we need to know the logos word.*

There are many examples in the bible where the Greek word logos or rhema has been translated 'word'. The following are a few examples of this:

In the beginning was the Word...., John 1:1a
'Word' is logos

The sower sows the word. Mark 4:14

'word' is logos

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15

'word' is logos

.... that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word. Ephesians 5:26

'word' is rhema

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17

'word' is rhema

... while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. Luke 3:2

'word' is rhema

The following example once again illustrates the importance of receiving a rhema word:

We are going through a particularly difficult time. We feel weak and vulnerable. It feels as though there is a battle raging in our mind. Satan's taunts and lies are relentlessly following one after another: "You're no good!" - "God will never use you!" - "You will never be free from this problem!" - "Why don't you just give up?" - "You're just a failure!"

Fear and anxiety fill our heart. Discouragement is pulling us down and we wonder how much longer we can cope. Suddenly, in the midst of all this God speaks a word to us. It's a *rhema* word. Immediately our heart becomes filled with peace. Something has changed inside us and the raging battle in our mind has ceased. How did it happen? By hearing God speak. By receiving a rhema word from the Lord.

God truly does speak to us.

Works Of Faith

I believe it is worth taking a short detour at this point. We have appreciated there is a difference between logos and rhema and although both Greek words are translated 'word' in our bibles as we have seen they have different meanings.

A rhema word is a spoken word, it literally means 'utterance'. So when we hear God speak, whether it be directly through His word or not, it is a rhema word.

It was probably nearly 40 years ago that for one reason or another I was doubting God's love for me. As I walked down the road with various thoughts going through my mind concerning the difficulties I was facing I 'heard' the Lord say the following words:

“I could have given the world for you but I created the world and could create it again. I could have given the universe for you, but I created the universe and could create it again. I could have given the angels for you, but I created the angels and could create them again. No, I gave My Son for you Who I didn't create. I gave the greatest gift I could have given for you. There was no greater gift than the gift of My Son that I could have given for you because I love you.”

Although this was not a scripture from the bible (logos) nevertheless it was a rhema word. It was the Lord speaking and it produced faith within me to believe God's love for me.

As previously mentioned, a rhema word could be thought of as a 'now' word. It is God speaking a specific word at a specific time for a specific purpose.

- *Rhema word – God speaking a specific word at a specific time for a specific purpose.*

We have already appreciated the Greek word for 'word' in the following verse is rhema.

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Romans 10:17

On first reading the above verse we realise that faith comes by ***hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*** However, on appreciating that 'word' in the above verse is rhema we could correctly read the verse this way:

***So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the (rhema) word of God.
Romans 10:17***

This scripture now begins to open up to us. We suddenly realise it is the *rhema* word of God which produces or activates faith! In other words, when we receive a rhema word from God not only is the word alive and is a 'now' word but something is produced as a result of hearing the rhema word. That something is faith.

Now here is the important point to grasp. When faith is activated as a result of hearing the rhema word it is for a purpose and that purpose is to produce what we could call 'works of faith'.

Before looking at what James had to say about faith and works let's summarise the above points:

- *Faith is produced as a result of hearing the rhema word of God.*
- *When faith is produced it is for a purpose.*
- *Receiving a rhema word produces faith which in turn results in 'works of faith'.*

In the letter of James we read some very interesting scriptures:

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. James 2:26

James is clearly showing that just as the body is dead if it does not have the spirit, likewise without any works so is faith dead. In other words faith *must* have fruit.

Something must take place as a result of faith being produced. That something is what we could call 'works of faith'.

This is confirmed in an earlier verse in the same chapter:

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James 2:17

This is where we have to be very careful. 'Works' in the above verse is not talking about 'good deeds'! A non believer can often be involved in carrying out 'good deeds'. In fact I think it would be true to say that there have been, (and are,) unbelievers involved in more 'good deeds' than the average believer. No, James is not talking about 'good deeds' he is talking about 'works of faith' which are very different. Good deeds are accomplished without biblical faith, but 'works of faith' cannot be accomplished without biblical faith.

- *Good deeds are accomplished without biblical faith.*
- *Works of faith cannot be accomplished without biblical faith.*

Because of a misunderstanding of the difference between good deeds and works of faith I believe the following verse has at times been misunderstood:

You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. James 2:24

I believe some have misunderstood the above verse and have concluded that salvation is possible by 'good deeds'. In other words, as long as a person is producing good deeds and is living a good life they will be saved. But this is not what James is saying. In context when he uses the word '**works**' he is talking about 'works of faith'.

In the same chapter of James, he uses two examples of Old Testament characters to illustrate faith producing works of faith.

***Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?
James 2:21***

When God asked Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as an offering Abraham was obedient having faith God was able to raise Isaac up again. (*See Hebrews 1:19*).

Abraham not only had the faith God would raise Isaac from the dead, but he demonstrated a 'work of faith' in placing Isaac on the altar ready to offer him to God. (As we read the full account in Genesis chapter 22 God prevents Abraham from going through with the sacrifice and provides a lamb).

The second example James uses is Rahab:

Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? James 2:25

Rahab hides the Israelite spies (***the messengers***). Before helping them to escape, she gets the Israelites to promise to protect her and her family when they return to take Jericho. (See *Joshua chapter 2*).

Rahab showed her faith by believing the word the Israelite spies promised that both herself and her family would be kept safe. That faith then resulted in a work of faith....she helped the Israelite spies escape safely.

We can now hopefully appreciate that faith is for a purpose. As James states in the verse we read earlier, ***faith without works is dead***. We could say it this way:

- *If faith does not result in works of faith, faith is dead.*

As a result of now appreciating the connection between a rhema word, faith and works of faith, we gain a greater understanding of the benefit of receiving a rhema word. When a rhema word is received it produces faith and when faith is produced it results in works of faith.

Biblical Meditation

It is unfortunate that the word '*meditate*' can bring to mind thoughts of some form of Eastern religious practice. Because of this it is sad that we don't often meditate on the word of God. However meditating on God's word is completely scriptural and has huge benefits in allowing God's word to take root in our hearts as well as providing a way for God speak to us.

If we are to engage in meditation it is extremely important to recognise the difference between *wrong* and *harmful* forms of meditation and *biblical meditation*.

All forms of meditation other than biblical meditation involve *emptying* the mind. This is an extremely dangerous practise for any Christian to be involved in!

As the mind is willfully emptied a vacuum is formed allowing all sorts of demonic forces to find entrance. As demonic forces find entrance, Satan is given 'legal right' to gain a foothold in the believers life causing all kinds of problems to arise. Thankfully God has made a way whereby demonic forces can be resisted and expelled and Satan's 'legal right' removed.

(Refer to 2 Corinthians 10 and Ephesians 6)

Biblical meditation is completely the opposite of what has just been described. Biblical meditation involves *filling* our minds with the word of God and just like a cow chewing over the cud, by meditating we 'chew' over the word of God. This is done by speaking out a verse or several verses of scripture repeatedly. Or it can be done by repeatedly thinking over a scripture in our mind. In doing so, contrary to wrong and harmful meditation, our minds become *filled* with God's word.

There are many scriptures confirming the biblical practice of meditation in God's word:

I (David) remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands. Psalm 143:5

In speaking to Joshua, God had the following to say to him:

Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Joshua 1:7-8

And:

Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. Psalm 1:1-2

Also:

Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. Psalm 119:97

The above scriptures assure us that meditation is a biblical practice. It has tremendous value in enabling us to become much more acquainted with God's word as well as providing a wonderful opportunity to hear the Lord speak to us.

By way of personal testimony the following illustrates how God can speak as we meditate on His word:

Several years ago I decided to take the following verse to meditate on:

Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. Psalm 37:5

As I was meditating on this verse, speaking it over to myself I said,
“*Lord what does it actually mean to **commit** my way into you?*”

After asking the question, and as I continued to meditate on the verse, the Lord gave me an impression, it came just like a picture in my mind but I knew the Lord was speaking. This is what I saw:

I was standing on a balcony on the top floor of a very high skyscraper. As I looked across I could see another skyscraper of a similar height. Between the two skyscrapers was a long tightrope. As I looked I saw a person walking carefully along the tightrope using a very long pole to assist with the balancing. He carefully walked along the rope towards me. As he got to where I was standing I realised he was inviting me to get onto his back. Once I was on his back he began walking long the tightrope towards the skyscraper on the opposite side.

As I observed this picture I knew immediately what it meant. The moment I got onto the persons back was the moment I was placing myself fully into his ability to carry me safely across to the other side. There was no turning back. There was no 'plan B'. I had in effect placed my safety into his hands. I had fully and completely *committed* myself to his skill as a tightrope walker fully trusting in his ability to carry me safely to the other side.

I realised that this was what it meant to commit my way to the Lord. It meant not having any 'plan B' to fall back on. It meant having complete confidence that the Lord was able to 'carry me safely to the other side'. It meant once I had committed something to the Lord in prayer, I could totally let it go knowing that He was more than able to sort it out.

Had I not taken the time to meditate on the word of God I would never have experienced the Lord speaking to me in this way. It may have been over fifteen years ago that I received this impression but even as I write it down now it is as clear as it was the day I received it. (We will consider how God speaks to us through impressions or visions shortly).

How truly wonderful and what a privilege it is that the Lord speaks to us. As we have just seen, God speaks as we meditate on His word.

Gifts Of The Spirit

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians chapter 12 and 14 we read about the various gifts of the Holy Spirit. Each one of them given for a specific purpose. In chapter 12 there are nine gifts mentioned which are:

- *Wisdom*
- *Word of Knowledge*
- *Faith*
- *Healing*
- *Working of miracles*
- *Prophecy*
- *Discerning of spirits*
- *Different kinds of tongues*
- *Interpretation of tongues*

The gifts can be placed in four different categories:

- *Communication gifts*
- *Insight gifts*
- *Power gifts*
- *Enablement gifts*

It is not the intention of this study to look in detail at the gifts of the Spirit. However, the ones that are relevant are the gifts which fall under the '*communication gifts*' category. These are:

- *Tongues*
- *Interpretation of tongues*
- *Prophecy (including dreams and visions)*

By means of the above gifts God is able to speak to individual members of His body. He is able to speak to the wider corporate body of believers and He is also able to speak to unbelievers in this way.

Sometimes the Lord will speak directly to us through one of the above gifts. For instance we may find a word of prophecy bubbling up. We begin to speak it out even though there is no one else present. As we listen to the words coming out of our mouth we realise the Lord is speaking to us through this gift. It could be we are praying and we receive an impression. As we hold the impression before the Lord He gives us the interpretation and once again we realise the Lord is speaking to us in this way. (This could also happen with the gift of tongues followed by an interpretation).

However, as the gifts are given for the purpose of building up the body of Christ, it is more often the case that the Lord will use us in the gifts to bring a word for another member of the body. Or He will use another member of the body in order to speak His word to us through one of the gifts. Either way, the Lord is using the gifts of the Spirit to speak.

Many years ago I was going through a particularly difficult time. During this period my wife Christine and I went to stay with some close Christian friends for the weekend. They invited us to their church and we decided to join them.

Part way through the morning service it was time for the young people to go out to their various classes. As they were going out a lady from the congregation who I had not met before, came over to me and very quietly said,
“I believe I have a word from the Lord for you are you happy if I bring it?”

To this I replied *“Yes”* knowing that if I did not get the witness of the Holy Spirit that it was from the Lord I could just dismiss it. On receiving my permission she quietly spoke the word from the Lord over me. (This all took place whilst the children and teachers were leaving the service). The word she brought was so accurate it was just as though she could see into the depths of my heart and knew the exact word I needed at that time. Of course the Lord knew the word I needed to hear from Him and He used another member of the body of Christ to speak to me. You can imagine how encouraged and blessed I was by all of this.

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul makes a point of encouraging us to prophesy:

Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.
1 Corinthians 14:1

Two verses later he reveals why we should desire to prophesy:

But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.

1 Corinthians 14:3

The word of prophecy brings ***edification, exhortation*** and ***comfort***. In considering the three words, *edify, exhort* and *comfort* a little more fully we discover the following:

- *Edify means to build up.*
- *Exhort means to admonish which incorporates the idea of instructing, advising and warning.*
- *Comfort means to strengthen, to invigorate, to cheer or enliven.*

No wonder we are encouraged to desire the gift of prophecy!

Although dreams and visions are not mentioned as one of the nine gifts of the Spirit we can see from scripture God uses both of them to speak. We could probably think of them therefore under the 'umbrella' of prophecy.

One very well known biblical example of God speaking through dreams can be found in the book of Genesis:

Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf." Genesis 37:5-7

This was followed with Joseph receiving a second dream from God:

Then he (Joseph) dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me." Genesis 37:9

Both in the Old and the New Testament we find God speaking through a vision:

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward." Genesis 15:1

And:

Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.” Acts 18:9-10

It is clear from the above scriptures that God speaks to His people through dreams and visions.

Apart from one occasion I have not experienced God speaking to me through dreams. Neither have I experienced God speaking through what some would describe as an 'open vision'. (A perfectly clear picture almost like watching a movie). I have on multiple occasions however experienced God speaking through what I would term an 'impression'. Something very similar to simply imagining a picture in the mind.

When I have received an impression from the Lord there have been two things which have set it apart from mere imagination. Firstly, there is normally an interpretation which comes with the impression at which point I have the assurance (witness of the Spirit) that it is from the Lord. The times I have received an impression without any interpretation given, I simply 'hold' the impression until I receive the meaning or will share it to see if the Lord gives the interpretation to another brother or sister.

The second major difference I have found; something imagined is quickly forgotten but an impression from the Lord is as sharp years later as it was the moment it was received.

There are many examples I could share to illustrate the Lord speaking in this way. Although the following example happened a very long time ago, the impression I 'saw' is as clear today as it was then:

It was an extremely large room with a very high ceiling. In the centre, running almost the whole length of the room, was a very large banqueting table. (The room and the table reminded me of the sort you would have expected to have found in castles in the olden days). As I looked at the table I realised it was absolutely full of food, completely laden with every kind of food imaginable. It was the sort of banquet that would have been presented to a king or a queen. Down both sides of the table as well as at each end, there were places set with the appropriate cutlery in place. Where each place was set there was a chair neatly pushed close to the table just waiting to be pulled out allowing the individual to sit down.

As I took in the sight before me I became aware of a large group of people slowly walking round and round the table completely unaware of the banquet which was set before them. They walked slowly not

speaking a word, heads drooped as if in a state of misery or depression. Their clothes worn and tattered. I knew this banqueting table had been prepared especially for them just 'waiting' for them to take their place and to begin their feast. The people were completely unaware of what had been prepared for them and simply just did not see it.

This may appear like a very full description of something which took minutes to observe and yet the impression took only seconds, if that, to take in.

As I observed the scene I have described I did not hear an audible voice but the quiet still small voice within. This is what I heard the Lord say:

“So many of my children are walking in spiritual poverty!”

What an incredible impression given by the Holy Spirit in order to convey that reality. Sadly how very true the words are. God has given us everything in Christ Jesus. We are complete in Him wanting nothing. The very same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within us. And yet how true it is that many of God's children are walking in spiritual poverty and are not living in the fullness of all that the Lord has provided.

It's worth repeating. How wonderful to know the Lord does speak to us. He may use different ways to speak, but the truth still remains.....the Lord wants us to *hear* and to *know* His voice.

So far we have considered how God uses words to speak to us. He speaks through His word, the bible, He speaks through the quiet still small voice into our heart. He speaks through the gifts of the Spirit. He speaks through dreams and visions where words are used to provide meaning. However God is not limited to the use of words in order to speak to us. As we will now discover, He is able to speak to us in many other ways.

Part Three

Without Words

So far we have considered different ways God speaks to His children where words are used. Of course God is not limited to communicating with us by the use of words, there are many other ways He can use. As we become increasingly sensitive to the Holy Spirit we gain a greater appreciation of this truth.

By no means exhaustive, the following is given to illustrate this.

Holy Spirit

To more fully appreciate how the Lord communicates with us without words being used it is worth reminding ourselves what the bible has to say about the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a Person Who lives within every born again believer. He can be *quenched* and can be *grieved*:

Do not quench the Spirit. 1 Thessalonians 5:19

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30

In the context of the Holy Spirit we could think of the word '*quenched*' as meaning to '*still*' to '*quiet*' or to '*repress*'. In other words the Holy Spirit is wanting to say something to us, He is wanting to use us in some way and therefore wants our attention. Instead of stilling ourselves and listening to His voice we occupy ourselves with other things and in doing so we quench the Holy Spirit.

Also in relation to the Holy Spirit being '*grieved*' we could think of the word '*grieve*' as meaning to '*offend*' to '*displease*' or to '*provoke*'.

As a result of our words, thoughts or actions we can both quench and/or grieve the Spirit. As already stated, the Person of the Holy Spirit lives inside us. As we become sensitive to Him we find that we can know when He has been quenched or when He has been grieved.

We may be asking,
“What has this to do with God communicating with us?”

The fact that we can know when the Spirit is quenched or grieved shows how we can be aware of the Holy Spirit and can therefore be aware of how the Spirit is responding within us. In other words we are *spiritually aware* or we could put it this way, we are *spiritually discerning* what it is taking place.

It should not surprise us that we are able to sense what the Holy Spirit is 'feeling'. The following verse makes clear why this is the case.

In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul has the following words to say:

But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. 1 Corinthians 6:17

Wonderful oneness. Our spirit joined to the Holy Spirit. No wonder we are able to 'sense' or 'feel' things in the Spirit as the Holy Spirit communicates to us through our own spirit. Because of this oneness we are able know the Lord communicating with us through '*discernment of the Spirit*' and '*promptings of the Spirit*' to name but two ways.

Discernment

Although there is a specific gift of the Holy Spirit which is discernment, I believe as we walk closely with the Lord we are all able to discern as the Spirit brings revelation.

It is important to understand that when we we talk about 'discerning' something in the Spirit it simply means that the information we are receiving cannot be received or known by natural means. It cannot be known through our five senses it can only be known as the Holy Spirit provides insight and revelation.

Often when the Holy Spirit communicates this way our natural thinking wants to try and work it out. But things of the Spirit cannot be known naturally they can only be known spiritually as the Holy Spirit reveals:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Corinthians 2:12-14

Because things of the Spirit cannot be known naturally when the Holy Spirit communicates or reveals something to us, there can almost be a feeling of 'conflict' between our natural thinking and what we are sensing spiritually. For this reason it is important that we become increasingly sensitive to the Spirit in order to grow in confidence as He reveals things to us.

The following two examples are ways I have experienced spiritual discernment and share this to help illustrate how the Holy Spirit can alert us to there being something wrong:

A sense of dirt.

You are speaking with someone you have not met before. They are smartly dressed, hair all in place and teeth shining bright. From a natural perspective there is absolutely nothing indicating they are not clean. Everything appears in order and yet... from your inner most being you sense there is something wrong. There is just this inner feeling of dirt and it won't go away. Natural reasoning does not provide any explanation for this inner feeling but nevertheless this sense of dirt is very real.

This is the Holy Spirit making it clear there is something wrong. He is allowing us to sense something in the Spirit which cannot be known any other way. What we are sensing is being spiritually discerned.

With something like this it is highly likely that either the person is involved in some form of habitual sinful practice which could well be sexual, or it is because of the presence of a demonic spirit or spirits.

A sense of heaviness.

A sense of heaviness can of course happen anywhere and anytime but imagine for a moment you are in a Christian meeting. Everything that is

taking place appears completely normal. People are singing their praise to God, prayers are being lifted and the Lord is being glorified. The time comes to hear the word preached and everything that is said is biblical and seems to be fine. And yet there just seems to be a heaviness over the whole meeting.

From a natural perspective the meeting ran smoothly and all was well. Nothing naturally speaking would indicate there was any problem and yet the sense of heaviness throughout the meeting was very real.

Once again the Holy Spirit was revealing something which could not have been perceived naturally. He was revealing there was a problem. The sense of heaviness was being spiritually discerned.

With both of the above examples we can easily see how God is communicating with us not as a result of words but as a result of being sensitive to His Spirit.

Promptings

Promptings from the Holy Spirit could be thought of as a gentle spiritual nudge. We become aware that the Holy Spirit is speaking to us and we 'feel' His promptings to say or to do something. This is a very gentle and wonderful way the Holy Spirit communicates with us.

Several years ago Christine was shopping in a nearby town. She was in a clothes shop looking at the items on display. Suddenly she became aware of a 'not very nice feeling' come over her and knew she needed to pray for a family member. (This sense of 'knowing' a family member needed prayer came from the Holy Spirit). She did not know which family member needed prayer or what the situation was, she was just aware of the promptings of the Holy Spirit revealing to her something was very wrong.

On realising this she quickly found the changing room and went in so she could pray. Not knowing how she should pray or what she should pray about she began quietly speaking in tongues allowing the Holy Spirit to pray through her.

Later that day she discovered our daughter and family had been traveling on a very busy road in Spain. Their car had unexpectedly broken down resulting in there being a very real risk of a serious accident. When Christine later found out from our daughter what had happened she realised the very time the Holy Spirit had prompted her to pray was the same time the car the family were in had broken down. No one was hurt and a potentially serious accident had been avoided!

Praise the Lord for the promptings of His Spirit!

Peace And Desires

Peace

I'm sure many of us during our Christian lives have heard other believers say something like, “*I have lost my peace!*” or “*I just don't feel peace about doing that.*”

On the surface this appears a strange thing to say. But in appreciating what Paul has to say in the book of Philippians and the book of Colossians we understand completely what is meant by the above words:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

And:

And let the peace of God rule (act like an umpire) in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Colossians 3:15

I'm sure many of us can relate to becoming a Christian and experiencing a deep peace which we had not known before. A peace which had absolutely nothing to do with our circumstances but had everything to do with our relationship with the Lord.

This is not a natural peace but it is a peace which comes from God as a result of our relationship and walk with the Lord. As we can see from the above scripture, it is a peace that completely *surpasses all understanding*.

It is not uncommon to hear Christians testify to going through very difficult circumstances which under normal circumstances would prompt fear, anxiety or panic. And yet we often hear how they have experienced God's peace in the midst of the difficulties. This *is not* a peace that the world can give but it is a peace that only the Lord can give. Not only is it a peace which goes beyond our understanding but it is a *keeping* peace. It keeps or 'guards' our *hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*.

This sense of God's peace is extremely relevant in our walk with the Lord and as many of us have no doubt heard preached, can act like an 'umpire' in directing the decisions we make. It is in this

context that we hear believers express they have lost their peace when they have taken a certain course of action, or that they don't have peace as they consider making a certain decision. In other words the Lord is making known the decision is not in line with His will.

We could think of this form of communication being more of guidance as the Holy Spirit leads us in our daily walk. As such it is not so much about us *hearing* God's voice as He speaks to us but more about being sensitive to the Holy Spirit allowing God to communicate to us through His peace.

Not only does God communicate through His peace, but He also communicates through the desires He places in our heart.

Desires

As we consider how God communicates to us through 'desires', it is important to add a note of caution. Although it is a biblical way of God communicating with us, wisdom is obviously needed in order to avoid being led into error.

In Psalm 37 we read the following words:

Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4

We find in the above verse a conditional promise...

The promise..... the Lord will give us the desires of our heart.

*The condition.....*if we delight ourselves in the Lord.

It would be relatively easy to misinterpret this verse by assuming that as long as we delight ourselves in the Lord (the condition), God will fulfill whatever desires we may have.

However, when we take a step back in order to consider this verse a little more fully, we realise the Lord would never give us *whatever* we desire even if we do fulfill the condition. It is possible our desires may not be in line with God's word. Or it could be that our desires are based on satisfying self. So what is this verse all about?

The key to answering that question lies in the phrase, '***desires of your heart!***'. In other words, these are not simply desires which arise from our thoughts or are based on our emotions. These are desires which are found in our inner most being, our heart. They are not desires 'born of self' but are God given desires.

Putting the whole of Psalm 37 verse 4 together we now appreciate that it is *as* we delight ourselves in the Lord, the Lord places within our heart the desires He wants us to have and it is these God given desires which are fulfilled.

It could be we find desires springing up that we have not had before, or it could be we find our desires changing from wanting to take one course of action to wanting to take a completely different course of action.

To help illustrate this let's use the example of the Lords calling on our lives:

As we walk with the Lord delighting ourselves in Him, we become aware of a *growing* desire to become a missionary in a foreign country. We have no idea where this desire has come from. We don't have Christian friends who are missionaries and none of our family have been on the mission field. And yet the desire just won't go away. In fact as time goes on the desire becomes stronger. After praying and seeking the Lord's counsel regarding what we are feeling, we decide to pursue the desire. As we do so doors start to open and things begin to fall in place. In the process of time we find ourselves working as a missionary in a foreign land. Our desire (or rather God given desire) has been fulfilled!

How was it we found ourselves on the mission field in a country we had never been to before and knew little about? It all started with God placing a desire in our heart as we delighted in Him.

I believe this is the true meaning of the above verse. It isn't that God fulfills any desire we may have. It is that He fulfills the desires *He* places in our heart. They may begin like little seeds that have been quietly planted. Or it may be that the Lord gently changes our desires as we love and worship Him. How does this all happen? It happens as we delight ourselves in the Lord.

We have now arrived at realising God is able to communicate with us through the desires in our heart. It is the God given desire which gently alerts us to the realisation..... the Lord is speaking and it's time to listen.

I will finish this chapter by sharing a testimony which I believe perfectly illustrates how the Lord can speak through desires in our heart:

I began my career in teaching and for the first few years absolutely loved it. Despite the long summer holidays I would actually find myself looking forward to getting back to the classroom!

After about five years of working in the same school, (and due to a variety of circumstances,) I moved from North Yorkshire to Kent. From day one in my new school I quickly realised everything was completely different. The education system was very different to the one I had known. The school ran on a much more formal basis compared to what I had previously experienced and because the children were from a very different type of catchment area, it took some time to adjust. Literally overnight I went from loving teaching to being quite unhappy in my work. Despite this I remained in the same school for about eight years before deciding I needed to change my career!

After being in education for nearly thirteen years I completely changed track and went into Financial Services. (I never imagined for one second that I would ever return to teaching, however the Lord had different plans!)

It was during my time of working in the Financial Services industry that we began to host foreign students. They would normally come for a few days at a time and during their stay would often have day trips visiting nearby places. As a result they would often need taking to, and collecting from, the bus pick up point.

On one particular occasion I was sitting in the car waiting for the students to get off the bus. As usual the teachers were directing the students. Whilst observing the teachers and without any warning, I suddenly became aware of a desire springing up in my heart to return to teaching. This was a complete shock and totally unexpected!

On two previous occasions during my twenty two years in Financial Services I had attempted to return to teaching, but as a result of bad experiences had made the decision I would not return to the classroom! On more than one occasion I would be known to say things such as,
“*I will never go back to teaching no matter how much they pay me!*”
(Not a good confession to make!)

There was just one problem! The desire that 'dropped' into my heart as I waited in the car for the students on that particular day did not go away. In fact it became stronger. As a result of this I actually found myself *wanting* to return to teaching!

Having been out of education for such a long time, under normal circumstances it would have been very difficult to return. However these were not *normal* circumstances, this was the Lord at work! (It would take quite a time to share how the Lord opened the way for me to return. Sufficient to say.... the Lord made it possible!)

I did return to education teaching pupils on a 'one to one' basis as well as small group work. I can testify to absolutely loving it just as I had experienced in my first school. Only the Lord could have done that!

How did God speak to me? How did He manage to move me from working in Financial Services to returning to teaching. He did it by 'dropping' a desire in my heart which matched perfectly with His will.

And Finally...

And finally we have reached the end of our journey. Along the way we have discovered God not only speaks to His children, but uses many different ways to do so. Sometimes it's through a quiet still small voice whilst at other times it's as though the word of God jumps off the page and into our heart. It may be a gentle nudge from the Holy Spirit, a sense of unease or a feeling of inner excitement at the sound of His voice. The Lord may speak through a dream, a vision or a prophecy. Why so many different ways? Because the Lord delights to speak with His children.

God is our Father, Jesus is our Saviour and the Holy Spirit is our Comforter. Is it possible that we could ever believe God our Father, Jesus our Saviour or the Holy Spirit our Comforter would not *want* to speak to us? Of course not!

Believing our Father speaks to us is so important as it puts us in a place of expectation. It moves us from a position of being passive to one of actively listening for His voice. Our prayer must surely be: *“Lord..... please help me to listen so I might hear you speak.”*

What better way to finish this study than in reminding ourselves of those wonderful words of Jesus:

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. John 10:14-15

And:

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. John 10:27-28

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Notes