

by Berni Dymet

HOW CAN I

HEAR

GOD SPEAK TO ME?





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*Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking;
if you hear my voice and open the door,
I will come in to you and eat with you,
and you with me.*

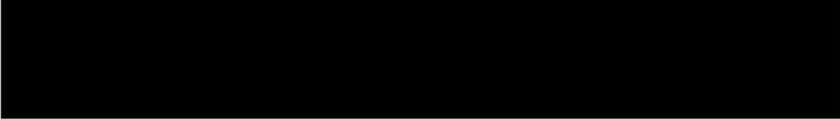
Jesus
(Revelation 3:20)



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CHAPTER ONE

is God still
speaking today?





CHAPTER ONE

is God still speaking today?

What a Divisive Question

So let me ask you: what do you think? Is God still speaking today? Is He still communicating with His people, His children, His flock ... and with that one lost sheep?

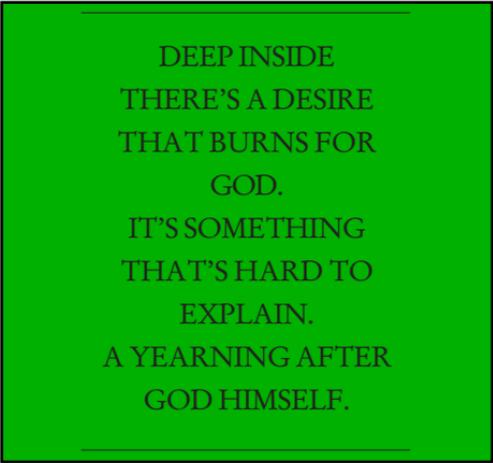
Now that – that is a question that pretty much divides the church down the middle.

Is God still speaking today – and if so, how?

The controversy which that little question creates, the division it creates amongst God's people, is huge. Here's how it unfolds.

There are some amongst the family of God who will tell us that the only way that God speaks today – absolutely the only way – is through His Word, the Bible. Read the Bible. That’s God’s Word. That’s how He speaks. Full stop. End of story. No arguments please!

Then at the opposite end of the spectrum, we find Christians who claim to have seen signs and wonders, to have had so-called ‘words of knowledge’ and ‘prophecies’ over their lives. I even know one man whose pastor constantly claims before his church, to have visions of Jesus.



DEEP INSIDE
THERE'S A DESIRE
THAT BURNS FOR
GOD.
IT'S SOMETHING
THAT'S HARD TO
EXPLAIN.
A YEARNING AFTER
GOD HIMSELF.

Well, what do we do with that? How do we understand that?

Because in the middle of all this, there’s little old you and me!

If you're anything like me, deep inside there's a desire that burns for God. It's something that's hard to explain. A yearning after God Himself. A hunger that can't be satisfied by a shallow, dry, academic, cerebral answer to the question, "Does God still speak today?" And a thirst after Christ that won't be satisfied by froth-and-bubble claims of sensationalism either.

Do you see what an important subject this is? If God is indeed God, if He truly loves us, if the yearning in our breast for Him is real, then surely ... surely He wants to speak to us. And somehow, the two extremes on the spectrum that no doubt we've all experienced ... somehow they just don't ring true.

That's why I've written this short book. As a simple man who hungers after God – I want to know the truth. If God loves me, is He still speaking with me today? If He's so concerned as to number even the hairs on my head, if He's interested in the detail of my life, if He truly cares – then surely ... surely He wants to communicate His love to me.

I just want to know the truth. And then, once I know it, I want to live it. I want to live the truth with my life. That's all. Simple really!

That's my journey. So ... will you join me?

The Fire Within

It's funny how our first experiences of something shape our lives. A decade and a half ago, when I first gave my life to Jesus, I had the good fortune to board for several months with an elderly woman of God – Norma. Norma's hair was greying, her body was weaker with age – but her spirit within her, her desire for God, her passion to see His kingdom come, was nothing short of a raging fire that burned within.

I had many a late night discussion about God in those early weeks and months of my faith with Norma over our favourite cup of tea – 'Russian Caravan' it was called. And sure, the conversation often meandered. That was just Norma's way. Nothing was ever a straight line from A to B with her. It was more like a pleasant walk through a cool, fragrant forest, with more than enough time – as

the whim took her – to circle back and revisit something that had delighted her heart a second time, even a third or fourth time.

And yet the fire in her heart was real. It was reflected in the sparkle in her eyes when she spoke of her Saviour; a sparkle that was nothing short of extraordinary.

Now Norma spent much time in prayer. She spent much time reading God's Word. That was something that I observed. Since her husband had passed away 18 years earlier, time was something she seemed to have plenty of. But there was something more. Something much more.

Norma *knew* God. That's the conclusion that I came to. She actually *knew* Him! Not as a Concept or an Idea. Not as Someone she'd heard about, or even read about. No – this was different. She *knew* God firsthand. She knew Him in her personal experience.



SHE KNEW GOD
FIRSTHAND.
SHE KNEW
HIM IN HER
PERSONAL
EXPERIENCE.

He was her Lord, her Saviour *and* her constant Companion. He was her Comforter. He was ever-present in her life. What other explanation could there be for the fire in her heart? How else could I account for the sparkle in the eyes of this ageing saint?

And it is that first, close experience through Norma, of what it is to be a 'Christian', what being a 'Christian' can indeed be, that shaped my walk

THIS IS WHY I WANT TO
HEAR MY GOD SPEAK:
BECAUSE ANY
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MEANS SOMETHING,
THAT HAS VALUE TO IT,
IS BASED ON
COMMUNICATION.

with God. It was seeing what she had, the relationship that she had with her Jesus, that began in me an indescribable hunger after God Himself.

That's why I ache to know Him, to experience Him and to hear Him speak into my life.

And as if sensing this, Norma gave me the very first 'Christian' book that I ever read, other than

God's Word. It was *The Pursuit of God* by A.W. Tozer. A book through which the Spirit of God fanned the spark within me into a fire that has raged ever since – a mighty desire after God Himself.

And so it is that I want to live my life out completely for Jesus: everything that I am, everything that I have, all my hopes, all my dreams, to serve Him with the absolute complete lot.

Not because I'm some great guy – believe you me, I am not! But rather because I've tasted the piercing sweetness of the many splendored love of Christ (as A. W. Tozer put it). I've tasted His goodness and His joy and His peace, and you know what? I want more.

Why I Want to Hear God Speak

And so this... this is why I want to hear my God speak: because any relationship that means something, that has value to it, is based on communication. And not just *one* way communication. It has to be *two* way communication, doesn't it?

A marriage is headed for divorce when there's a stony silence between husband and wife. If all they do is to communicate on a transactional basis about the mundane things of life and they no longer communicate heart to heart, then friend, unless they do something about that, their marriage is headed towards divorce.

That's because a rich relationship is founded on intimate communication. And if it's true in a marriage then it's also true in our relationship with God.

So (as Norma might have done) let me circle back to this question: *Is God still speaking today?*

Experience or Truth?

These days, we live in a world that values experience on a far higher plane than it does truth.

WHILST WE MAY
EXPERIENCE GOD
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THROUGH SIGNS,
THROUGH DREAMS
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EXPERIENCE IS NOT
ALWAYS THE MOST
RELIABLE ARBITER IN
DETERMINING
WHETHER IT IS IN FACT
GOD SPEAKING

Who cares what's true – is there even such a thing as truth? Just give me something that works.

Now in *my experience* God speaks to me and to others in many different ways. But my experience is so small, and God is so ... infinite. Is my experience the final arbiter on how God speaks? Is it?

We all have emotions: sometimes they go up, and other times they go down. Sometimes we're at the top of our game and at other times, well frankly (come on, let's be honest!) we're off with the pixies.

So whilst we may experience God speaking to us through prophecies, through signs, through dreams and in all sorts of different ways, experience is not always the most reliable arbiter in determining whether it is in fact God speaking ... or whether we're just having one of those days when we're off with the pixies!

No – I believe with all my heart, the truth, *the* Truth – God's chosen way of revealing Himself to us, of providing us with a rock solid basis for understanding Him and understanding our

experience of Him – is *His* Word, this thing we call ‘the Bible’.

Inspired by Him, written through human beings for sure – each of the 66 books of the Bible was written at different times in history and under different circumstances and for different purposes. But together those 66 books are the inspired Word of God.

The Bible is God speaking with the generations that have gone before us, with today’s generations, and with the generations that will come after us.

IF WE ACCEPT THAT
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WAYS OTHER THAN
THROUGH THE BIBLE
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GOD SPEAKING

And this wondrous God is true. He never contradicts Himself. He never says one thing over here and does something else over there. He is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). So if

anyone – whether it’s me or you or anyone else –

claims to have heard from God in a certain way, then what I want to know is:

- a. ***Does the Bible tell us that God in fact does communicate with His people in this way?***
Because if it doesn't, then friend, at the very least, I am going to be very, very suspicious of any claim from someone who tells me that they've heard from God, and

- b. If a person claims to have heard from God, ***is what God is supposed to have said to them consistent with the Word of God;*** and by that I mean the whole counsel of God (not a verse or two in isolation)? Because if God says one thing in His Word and some so-called prophet for instance, comes up with some so-called revelation that contradicts God's Word, then forget it. In that case, I know absolutely for sure – that this ain't God talking!

Amen?!

It makes sense. When we step into this realm of God speaking with us about specific things

happening in our lives and in the lives of the people around us, then we're stepping into territory which is rich and fertile on the one hand (if it is indeed God speaking) but on the other, is open to error, misrepresentation and manipulation (if it is not).

In other words, if we accept that God speaks to us in ways other than through the Bible alone, then there is a need to discern whether, on each occasion, it is indeed God speaking, or whether the hearer is simply operating in the flesh, at worst, or has their wires crossed, at best.

So – what do we do with this? Do we completely dismiss the notion that God speaks by any way or means other than through His Word? This certainly seems to be the safer option. But then, if God does indeed speak in other ways into our lives, aren't we then limiting God at best, or ignoring Him at worst?

Or do we simply accept that God does speak in different ways to different people and accept it each time we think that we've heard Him speak with us? But then – if it wasn't God speaking in the first

place, that's a dangerous thing ... isn't it?

It's the Truth that Sets us Free

Well, fortunately for you and me, God's already thought of that. And He gives us clear and unequivocal guidance through His Word as to how to handle this sometimes confusing and often divisive issue.

JUST BECAUSE
THERE'S A RISK
THAT A PROPHECY
MAY BE FALSE, THAT'S
NO REASON TO DISMISS
THE WORK OF
THE SPIRIT

This is what He has to say:

Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise the words of prophets but test everything. Hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.
(1Thessalonians 5:19-22)

In other words, don't ignore what the Holy Spirit is doing! And frankly God sometimes does things in ways that make absolutely no sense to you and me. Just because it's different; just because it doesn't fit with a rational Western mindset or whatever mindset someone dumped on us from birth – that's

not a valid reason for quenching what the Spirit of God is doing.

It's not a valid reason for despising the words of prophets (who by the way, God tells us in His Word He has appointed in His New Testament Church – Romans 6:12, Ephesians 4:11). In other words, God's saying to us – “don't throw the baby out with the bathwater here”.

But at the same time He's telling us to be discerning; to sift what we see and hear, to test people and prophets and experiences that claim to be God-sent. False prophets are nothing new – they've been around for millennia:

Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen oracles for you that are false and misleading.
(Lamentations 2:14)

The flip side of this coin is that just because there's a risk that an experience may not truly be from God; just because there's a risk that a

prophecy may be false, that's no reason to dismiss the work of the Spirit either.

No. God's truth is simple, common sense truth. What He's saying in effect is that whenever there is a work of the Spirit *we are called to be discerning*. We are called to hold onto what is good (for if we don't do that, then we're quenching the work of the Spirit and despising the words of the prophets whom God has sent us) and throw out that which is not from God and which is therefore, by definition, evil.

Back to the Main Question Then

So is God still speaking with His people today? Absolutely! And I say that not based on my experience (although on this occasion my experience happens to be consistent with God's truth). I say it based on God's truth – His Word, the Bible.

I say it based on the Word of Jesus Himself, the Son of God:

“Very truly I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own he goes ahead of them and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of stranger.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying. (John 10:1-6)

If you love me you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees or knows him. You know him because he abides with you and he will be in you. (John 14:15-17)

When this Advocate, (this Spirit) comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of

truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. (John 15:26)

He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:14)

Over and over again, God's Word tells us that God speaks with us (*the sheep hear his voice*), that we're called to be discerning and recognise the voice of God (*the sheep follow him because they know his voice*) and that the Holy Spirit has been given to us so that we can hear the voice of God (*because he will take what is mine and declare it to you*).

Is God still in the business of speaking to His people through His Spirit today? Are we meant to hear the voice of Jesus Christ? Are we meant to discern His voice? Absolutely! That's exactly what Jesus promised would happen. Over and over and over again. It's promised in the Bible.

As we read back there in 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22, the Holy Spirit is very much at work amongst the people of God – you and me – speaking and declaring the things of God to us. And whilst we

shouldn't quench Him, when people claim to be speaking on God's behalf, then we had better test what is being said and done in the name of our God, to make sure that it is indeed from Him.

And the way we test things, the way we weigh

OVER AND OVER AGAIN,
GOD'S WORD TELLS US
THAT GOD SPEAKS
WITH US

and assess and discern, is by shining the light of God's truth on each situation.

And that light ... that truth comes to us 100% perfectly, 100% reliably from one place.

God's Word ... the Bible.



CHAPTER TWO

the word of God





CHAPTER TWO

the word of God

The Bible? Oh Please!

My hunch – just a hunch mind you – is that there are a few people who've arrived at this point in the book, wishing, hoping that we could avoid this subject of T–H–E B–I–B–L–E!!

Can't you just let me *hear* God speak?! Can't I just *experience* God's love? Can't we just give this whole thing – the Bible – a wide berth? I just want to *know* God, not read a textbook about Him!

And if perhaps you can sense a bit of that attitude rising up in your heart, then truly, I

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understand. For much of my life I hated reading. And “hated” is not too strong a word. I don’t think I read a book cover to cover until I was well into my twenties. Libraries

always made my skin crawl – I’m just not so much into the detail, I’d rather just have the experience.

And in this day and age, lots of people are like that. There are of course exceptions – but most of us are going for experience over research most of the time.

So my view of the Bible was all bad. Boring, irrelevant, untrue (words coined by Nicky Gumble) would be the best word association response that I could have come up with back then, when someone said ‘the Bible’ to me.

Experience, Experience, Experience

As we saw back in the first chapter, some people deny that God is still speaking today. They say that

the only place you can hear from God is in the Bible. Others are kind of ‘out there’, maybe swinging off chandeliers (figuratively speaking!) maybe seeing apparitions of Jesus all over the place. They hear God speaking in every experience.

And then there’s the ordinary folk like you and me who are hungry to hear God’s voice. To hear Him speak. To know His heart. To receive His guidance and His strength and His peace. To know God, not just in our heads and not even just in our hearts, but in our actual experience.

These days – experience is where it’s all at!

I remember when I first gave my life to Jesus it was the 15th October 1995. In the weeks and months following that time I had such an incredibly strong sense of God’s presence. He wrapped His arms around me during a particularly difficult, painful time in my life and I was full of the joy of the Lord even though I was travelling through a lot of pain.

A good friend of mine, Phil, the pastor of the first church I attended, sat down with me over a cup of coffee and said: “You know Berni, you know it won’t always be like this”. There was something inside me that made me angry. I said to myself and I said this to God, “If I can’t have this intimate relationship with my God each and every day, if I can’t *experience* His joy and His peace each day, then you know something? I don’t think I want Him”.

Fairly radical stuff. And in one sense Phil was quite right. Life does have its ups and downs. Sometimes circumstances are against us – sometimes everything’s rosy. Sometimes our emotions are up – sometimes they’re down. We’re all different people in different places and so the details of all that are different in our individual lives. But the patterns are the same. There are ups and there are downs, and that my friend is just the way it’s going to be.

Great Advice

In those early days of becoming a Christian, Phil told me that I should read my Bible every day. Can

I tell you what a huge turnoff that was?! It appeared to me to be such a great burden, having to open this dreary volume ... every day!

IN THOSE EARLY DAYS
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READ MY BIBLE EVERY
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TURNOFF THAT WAS?!

I remember when I was young, my mother – being a piano teacher – made me learn the piano. Now I need you to remember here that

Berni's into getting out there and experiencing all that life has to offer, not reliving minutia and detail over and over and over again. This piano learning thing required me to sit still on a chair for half an hour each day and painstakingly practice scales and arpeggios. It was absolutely excruciating for me. Surely there had to be something in the Geneva Convention that prohibited this sort of inhumane treatment!

Every morning when I woke up in my bed, the prospect of this half hour's water torture hung over me like a thick black cloud. It was depressing and it

wasn't until I'd done the obligatory half hour's piano practice, that I was released from the depression – the burden lifted off me for the rest of the day.

Until the next morning when I woke up – and that dark cloud was back again. Ground Hog Day!

So when Phil dropped this “read your Bible every day” thing on me – that's exactly how it felt. That dark piano-practice cloud of my childhood returned.

Read my Bible every day?!! NO! NO! You have to be kidding me!

It's a huge book – 775,000 odd words in 31,173 verses, in 1189 chapters in 66 books – and all of it written in times and places and cultures that are, by and large, unfamiliar to you and to me.

Who or what for instance was Ephraim? And why was everyone sacrificing bulls and goats and doves? Why did they do that? And did the walls of Jericho really come tumbling down when they marched around and blew those trumpets? And ...

You get the drift don't you?

But Phil, my pastor, was a kind of persuasive guy. Not in an arm twisting

kind of way either. He's a real salt of the earth kind of man: honest, decent. He stood by me when things were tough. He encouraged me and admonished me when I was young in my faith. By who he was and what he did, he earned the right to influence me.

And as I listened to him preaching each Sunday he just really made sense to me. Not esoteric, dry, boring theological messages, but God-in-my-life, rubber-hits-the-road kind of preaching.

So I did. I took the plunge. I established back then this pattern of getting up early in the morning while everyone else was still asleep (something I'd been doing since I was a small child anyway) and doing something different with that time – spending that time in prayer and in reading the Bible.

SO TAKING THIS STEP
AND STARTING TO READ
THE BIBLE WAS A BIG
DEAL FOR ME.
IT CHANGED ME!

I share this with you so that you'll understand how 'reading the Bible' was completely not who I was. People sometimes look at me these days and think to themselves, "Well, the guy after all is a preacher. He teaches the Bible on the radio and TV and writes books about it. Of course you'd expect *him* to read the Bible, but not me. It's just not me."

If that's you – then I'm one of you, not one of them. So taking this step and starting to read the Bible was a big deal for me.

But you know something? I was surprised. A lot of it made sense. A lot of it was confronting. It was like shining a really bright light on my immaturities and things that I was doing that weren't pleasing to God. And day after day, month after month, year after year, here's what happened.

It changed me!

God Speaks

I open the Bible these days and it's God speaking to me. There aren't always fireworks and flashes of thunder and great revelations each and

every day. It's not like that. Little by little though, day by day, God's Word has become a part of who I am.

I'm not good at memorising verses. Some people are. I'm not (remember, I'm not a detail person). But now, when someone asks me to get up and speak about something or we're having a discussion amongst friends about this issue or whatever it is, it's utterly amazing the recall that God has given me to reach into His Word and uncover the truth.

I can remember things that God says in His Word, not word for word always, but pretty close, and where to find them, and that makes all the difference. When someone's really bugging me and I want to tear them apart, all of a sudden a small voice whispers "*turn the other cheek*"; a small voice whispers "*wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy*".

All of a sudden God's Word starts to guide my responses and my behaviour and shape my world for the better.

God's Word is giving me what I need to live my life. The Holy Spirit speaks His words right into my life exactly when I need them.

It Sounds Mundane, but ...

It sounds really mundane reading the Bible every day and in some respects it is. I tend to read an Old Testament book followed by a New Testament book – one of the letters from Romans to Revelation followed by one of the four Gospels or Acts. That's how I cycle through the Bible. I've pretty much read it all now, several times.

I CANNOT BEGIN TO
TELL YOU HOW MANY
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BY READING THE NEXT
CHAPTER.

The reason I cycle that way is that the different books feed me differently. Some of those Old Testament narrative stories – Judges, Kings, Chronicles – they feed me with the power and the majesty and the faithfulness and the awesome holiness of God. And then the letters in the New Testament, they teach

me about real life and understanding my life in the light of what Jesus has done. And then the Gospels and the book of Acts – they take me back to the heart of my faith in Jesus. And then some of the Wisdom books in the Old Testament – Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations – I sprinkle them throughout and it's like adding flavour to everything else.

As I said, it sounds mundane to pick up the Bible, to read the next chapter or even a few verses in the book of Luke which is what I was reading as I was writing this book. It doesn't appear that a schedule like that could ever relate to my life. This book followed by that book. This chapter followed by the next chapter.

But I cannot begin to tell you how many times I've found exactly what I needed for today – for the things I'm going through, for the things that unbeknown to me, are going to confront me today – by reading the next chapter. It's amazing how many times God has given me exactly what I needed for that day from those very next verses in the next chapter that I was due to read in my boring, mundane schedule.

Music for My Soul

In case you were wondering how the piano practice story ended in my life – here it is. Within just a few years, I caught the bug. It came to the point where I had some seven and a half thousand different scales and arpeggios to practice for my piano exams (I was sixteen, seventeen years old by this time). So I wrote each one down on a piece of paper, put them in an empty, blue plastic ice cream container on one side of the piano, pulled out the next one, practiced it until I managed to get it right, and then dropped the paper into the empty ice cream container on the other side of the piano.

This way, I was able to get through all seven and a half thousand of them every two days!

Today, (I'm in my 50's now) I can make a piano sing. And I do – often when I'm writing a radio program or a book in my study, I'll take a break and go to my piano. It's music to my soul. Other people often comment – “I wish I could play the piano like that, I gave up when I was young.”

Playing the piano, making music, is one of the great treasures in my life today.

And it's the same – only much, much better – with my Bible; God's Word.

READING GOD'S WORD IS
LIKE BEING RESTORED
BACK INTO HIS
ORIGINAL IMAGE.

Reading the Bible sounds like a chore. It sounds mundane but after years of doing it, here's what I want to share with you. It is like music for my soul.

From time to time I've received a prophecy from someone or a word of knowledge (we'll look at them in later chapters) and those times have been powerful markers, turning points often on my journey.

But the strength and the maturity and the growth and the transformation, the things that have made my life better – I can't begin to tell you – they have come from this wondrous habit that Pastor Phil taught me all those years ago, of reading my Bible every day.

The ability to discern whether someone is speaking from God or not, the wisdom to know how to handle tough situations, the maturity some days to lay my life down – boy that’s hard – all those things have happened as the Word of God has become part of who I am.

Genesis 1:26 says that we’ve been made in the image of God. The problem is that our rebellion and our sin have marred that image. Reading God’s Word most days, listening to what He has to say, is like being restored back into His original image. A repair job here, a clean-up job there, a new bit here and all of a sudden we’re a new person – *old things pass away and everything becomes new* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

It’s knowing the truth that sets us free and the Bible is God’s way of sharing His truth with us. If there is one thing, just one thing that I can point to that was the smartest thing I ever did after I gave my life to Jesus, then it’s opening up that Bible, a daily habit, and letting God speak His Word into my heart through His Spirit.

The tragedy is that so many people ... the people who don't do that, are the very ones whose lives are all over the place because there's no foundation, there's no anchor in God's truth. There's no opportunity to hear God 's truth - His music - spoken into their souls.

If you hunger to hear God speak into your life, can I offer you just this one thing? Go grab the Bible that's gathering dust up on the shelf somewhere and read it ... *every day*.

My prayer is that God's Word will be music to your soul. My prayer is that you too will hear God speak. I have absolutely no doubt that you won't have to wait very long!



CHAPTER THREE

the time of prayer



CHAPTER THREE

the time of prayer

I'm Not Much of a Pray-er Either Frankly!

As I shared with you in the last chapter, the simple habit of reading God's Word, even if it's just a few verses every day, has utterly changed by life. And

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it's my passion, not only that I should have a close intimate relationship with Jesus, but to share God's

Word; God's truth, with you in a way that leads you into a more dynamic relationship with Him too. A

AS MUCH AS I WASN'T A
NATURAL FOR READING
THE BIBLE, NEITHER AM I
MUCH OF A PRAY-ER
EITHER.

relationship that transforms you and changes you. A relationship that makes you rich beyond measure in God's grace.

The very first book I ever wrote was called *'How to Get Close to God'*. But it's the second book that followed on from that which really amazes me. That book was called *'Unlocking the Power of Prayer'*. And for me to write a book like that – second cab off the rank – was completely and utterly bizarre.

Why? Because as much as I wasn't a natural for reading the Bible, neither am I much of a pray-er either. In fact, I was anything but! Because my natural tendency is to race out the door and experience life. The idea of sitting there and praying seemed about as palatable to me as ... practicing the piano!

I love this – you know what they say. No man is a total loss. He can always be used as a bad example! That's me!

I love God's sense of humour – He is such an awesome God. He picks a guy who doesn't want to read the Bible and who doesn't want to pray – and then, rewards me so richly through those two things that I end up writing books about them. I think I can hear Him chuckling to Himself as I'm sitting here in the coffee shop pecking away at the keyboard.

The majesty of God's wondrous grace, eh?!

No Time to Pray

There's an amazing contradiction that so many people are living out in their lives – people who believe in Jesus. Here's how it goes.

On the one hand these people really would love to hear God's voice. They'd really like to know that He's there with them and that He has some practical words of wisdom for them and some guidance on decisions they need to take today and tomorrow and the next day. That's on the one hand.

But on the other, it's often these very same people who are just too busy to sit down for twenty minutes or half-an-hour most days and spend some time in prayer with Jesus.

Too busy! Too busy! Too busy! Well, fair enough. I know all about that. I'm one of those 'Type A' action-oriented people too. We're more focussed on doing things and getting outcomes than on spending time in relationships. So anyone who says to me, "I'm just too busy to pray" truly, I really relate to that. I really do understand.

But the problem that comes out of not spending time with God, is that we head off into our day and we confront all these issues and tensions and decisions and all the stuff of life, and we are so immersed in it all ... and then, right in the middle of that we think, "Where's God? Why isn't He talking to me and guiding me and comforting me?"

Well, I'll tell you.

God was waiting for us this morning. He was waiting for you and me to get still before Him and

spend some time with Him, reading His Word the Bible, listening to what He has to say and then chatting with Him in prayer.

Gladness Amidst the Uproar

I invite you to come and have a look at this Psalm with me – Psalm 46:1–11. It's one of my absolute favourites:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,

though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

though its waters roar and foam,

though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;

God will help it when the morning dawns.

The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;

he utters his voice, the earth melts.

The LORD of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

Come, behold the works of the LORD;

see what desolations he has brought on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;

he burns the shields with fire.

'Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations,

I am exalted in the earth.'

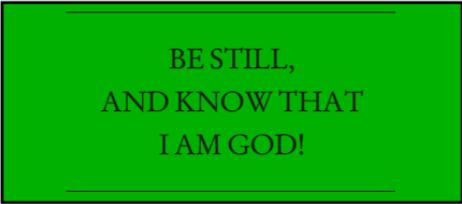
The LORD of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

It's a powerful truth. God is our refuge and our strength in the middle of the mess we sometimes find ourselves in. You and I, we don't have to be afraid of the mountains shaking and falling into the sea and roaring waters and calamity and upheaval and uproar – the sort of things we go through in the rough and tumble of everyday life.

We don't have to be afraid. Why?

Because there is a river whose streams flow right through the heart of our lives to make us glad. The nations may well be in an uproar, the mountains may well be trembling and crashing into the ocean, but God is the God above all and when He speaks the earth melts before Him.



BE STILL,
AND KNOW THAT
I AM GOD!

From Theory to Practice

Well that's a great theory, but you and I can find ourselves in the middle of a calamitous uproar, with tensions perhaps running high at work, hard pressed on every side in life, running through life at a million miles an hour. That's so often the reality. So how are we meant to experience these streams of joy from the river of God? Come on!

How are we meant to hear Him and know Him and not be afraid because He's there with us in the middle of the uproar, when all this stuff is flying through the air?

Well, the answer comes to us in verse 10 of the Psalm:

Be still and know that I am God.

I don't care who the relationship is with, if we

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don't make time away from the hustle and bustle, just to connect – just to spend time together to talk, whether it's husband and wife or work colleagues or friends – if we don't do that; if we don't get still and focus

one-on-one on each other, then the hustle and bustle is going to distract us from the reality of the relationship with that other person.

Isn't that right?

What happens is that we forget in our experience, how wonderful the love of our wife or

our husband is. We forget the joy of a friendship because our dominant reality, the thing that we become completely focused on, is the busyness and the battle of life right at the moment.

And friend, if you and I want to *know* this God, if we want to hear Him speak, if we want to experience His streams of joy, if we want to have rest and peace, there is only one way! Just one!

Be still and know that I am God.

It's as simple as that. And that's what prayer is – getting still before God.

The Bible and Prayer – A Powerful Combination

In Chapter 2 we looked at the habit of spending time every day reading the Bible. Well, the flip side of that coin is praying. Here's how it so often works for me. I pray a bit, I ask God to speak to me, and then I open the Bible and read the next bit that I was going to read – the next chapter in Luke's Gospel or whatever it is for that day. And in reading that, the Spirit of God actually speaks with me.

I get this sense that God's up to something here. But I need to chew it over. So I put the Book down and I pray about it. I ask, "God what are you saying to me today?" And I think about it. I get still and I listen. I just wait expectantly on God. And that's the place where God so often speaks with words of reassurance, with words of correction, with words of guidance, with some specific direction or action or priority for today.

This happened again this morning in fact.

I had a difficult situation and some difficult decisions to take today and after spending some time in God's Word and thinking and praying and listening, well, the answer was as plain as the nose on my face.

So often I'm confronted with a 'To-Do List' longer than my arm. I can't possibly get it all done in one day. And so I go to God and say, "God what's your priority? What do you want me to get done today? What has to be done today so that your kingdom will come and so that your will, will be done?"

And that's where the important things drop out into my lap. So I go and do those things and it's a gift from God.

Friend, if we want to hear God speak right into the realities of our lives, then we need to get still before Him.

There's no other way. And little by

little He'll start to speak. And day by day, we'll learn better how to recognise His voice.

FRIEND, IF WE WANT TO
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THEN WE NEED TO GET
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THERE'S NO OTHER
WAY.

That's the way it's meant to be.

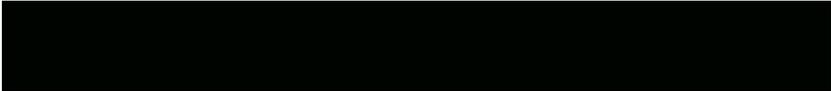
Be still and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)



CHAPTER FOUR

the providence of
preaching





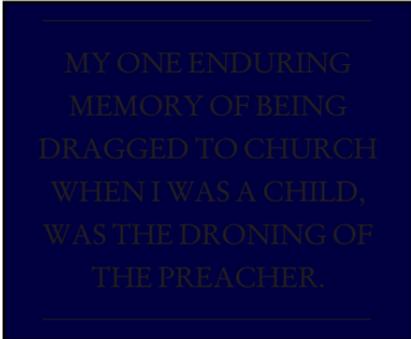
CHAPTER FOUR

the providence of preaching

The Drone of a Preacher

My one enduring memory of being dragged to church when I was a child, was the droning of the preacher.

I can honestly say he never said one thing, not a single thing back in my childhood, that impacted my life for good.



MY ONE ENDURING
MEMORY OF BEING
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WHEN I WAS A CHILD,
WAS THE DRONING OF
THE PREACHER.

Well, perhaps there was one thing. I was so bored this one particular Sunday morning sitting on these hard wooden pews in a large church as a young lad, that I took matters into my own hands and used the time more or less fruitfully to learn to wiggle my ears. (My father could wiggle his ears, so even at age eight or nine, I guessed that genetic probability was stacked in my favour. Eureka! I was right!) But that was it.

An incredible waste of time when you think about it and really sad. Because there's something really powerful about hearing the Word of God preached and receiving God's wisdom and God's correction and God's encouragement and God's grace and God's love in that way.

We've looked so far at hearing God speak through His Word and during times when we get still before Him and pray. Well, we're now going to look at hearing God speak in another way – through His providence of preaching.

The Problem with Preaching

Now the idea of preaching – some guy getting up and speaking about God's Word, teaching what's

in the Bible – to many people, it seems like a pretty old-fashioned concept. Pretty dull.

I mean compared to the plethora of outrageous, hi-tech entertainment choices; the kaleidoscopic smorgasbord of whiz bang entertainment options laid out before us – right there at our fingertips, there for the taking – preaching doesn't really cut it, does it?

And the other problem with it is, let's be honest, there's quite a lot of bad preaching going around as well. I've sat and listened to people talk about the message they receive from their pastor on a Sunday morning at their church, and I have to tell you in many, many cases the news is not good.

The sad truth is that there's a lot of dead preaching out there; people droning on with irrelevant boring messages. Not everywhere of course, not every pastor, not every church, but a lot. And if someone's getting offended, I'm sorry, I'm just stating the blindingly, glimpsingly obvious.

A.W. Tozer in his classic book, *The Pursuit of God* puts it this way:

It is a solemn thing, and no small scandal in the Kingdom, to see God's children starving while actually seated at the Father's table. Sound Bible exposition is an imperative must in the Church of the living God. Without it no church can be a New Testament church

IT IS A SOLEMN THING,
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in any strict meaning of that term. But exposition may be carried on in such a way as to leave the hearers devoid of any true spiritual nourishment whatever. For it is not mere words that

nourish the soul, but God Himself, and unless and until the hearers find God in personal experience, they are not the better for having heard the truth.

It's sad but it's true. And it's nothing new. This is how Luke records the reaction of people listening to Jesus preaching:

He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbath. They

were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority. (Luke 4:31)

And Matthew records:

Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. (Matthew 7:28,29)

In other words, what Jesus was teaching and talking about was not the sort of preaching that they'd been hearing down at their local synagogue or down at the temple on the Sabbath from the scribes, the synagogue leaders, the priests and the rest of the religious establishment.

In fact, quite to the contrary. Look again at what Jesus had to say about the teaching of the scribes and the Pharisees:

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the

shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.

(Matthew 23:2-4)

Good Preaching and Bad Preaching

So I guess what I'm saying, is that there's good preaching and there's bad preaching. There always has been and doubtless there always will be. It's in the Bible and you see it around today. Let's just call a spade a spade here – there's preaching that brings life and sadly, there's preaching that brings death.

And people who sit under dead teaching, well, their faith and their passion for Jesus is will begin to erode. Little by little their faith will die and they will find themselves in what feels to be a godless wilderness. Where is God? Why can't I hear Him speak anymore? Was He ever really there in the first place?

Does that mean good preaching is all hype and motivation, about success and earning a lot of money. No! That's not what makes good preaching either.

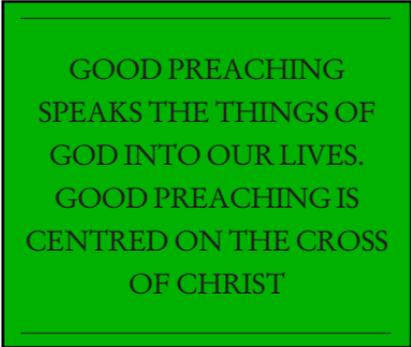
For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears,

they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.
(2 Timothy 4:3,4)

So, if we're looking for preachers who will tickle our ears, tell us how God wants to make us rich, pander to our 21st Century conspicuous consumption cultish lifestyle, we don't have to look very far. The telltale sign of this sort of preaching is that it talks always about God's blessings, and not about the sacrifices of being a disciple of the Son of God, who was brutally nailed to a cross for you and for me.

No – there's plenty of that sort of preaching out there. A contemporary preaching style with a good dose of hype mixed in with things we want to hear, does not necessarily make for Christ-centred preaching and teaching either.

Good preaching speaks the things of God into our lives.



GOOD PREACHING
SPEAKS THE THINGS OF
GOD INTO OUR LIVES.
GOOD PREACHING IS
CENTRED ON THE CROSS
OF CHRIST

Good preaching is centred on the Cross of Christ, the coming of the kingdom of God. Good preaching glorifies God and brings us into glad submission to His will.

There's an authority, a gravitas, a weight, a power that reaches into our hearts through Christ-centred preaching. It is utterly life-changing. Beyond any shadow of any doubt, when we have sat under Spirit-anointed preaching, we know that we have heard God speak. That's the sort of life-giving preaching that is the providence of God.

The people who listened to Jesus were amazed because He spoke with authority. They could just pick it. They knew that this was the truth that they were hearing. Do you remember what Jesus said to His disciples when He was telling them how He was the good shepherd?

The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has

brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers. (John 10:2-5)

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. (John 10:14)

You just know that you know that you know that you've heard the voice of God.

My friend, seek out the sort of preaching and teaching that you know comes from God: the sort with authority, the sort through which the power and the grace and the truth and the love of Christ just rings out – clear, pure, and unmistakable. It's this sort of teaching that God uses to change lives. It's astounding and amazing because you can feel God reaching out through the speaker into the realities of your own life. And that's the Holy Spirit doing that, not the preacher – the Holy Spirit.

With all that I am, I encourage you to listen to those sorts of teachers rather than sitting under dead

SCRIBES AND PHARISEES,
MY FRIEND,
ARE ALIVE AND
WELL IN GOD'S CHURCH
TODAY.

teaching that saps the faith and the life out of you like a chronic disease.

Scribes and Pharisees, my friend, are alive and well in God's church today. How sad it is to sit there and just learn to wiggle your ears as I did as a lad and miss out on the bread of Life. Tozer was right. This is no small scandal in the kingdom of God!

God's Timing

There was a time just before my wife, Jacqui and I were married. We were engaged and it seemed as if just everything was going against us. I mean, we were really, really, really low. We had a great church, a great pastor and a great teacher but we were just low because of the opposition we were facing on so many fronts in our lives. So we decided to go down the hill one Sunday evening and visit a different church. Just on a whim. Just for something a bit different.

The preacher wasn't the regular pastor whom we knew, but a visiting guy from some surfing ministry.

He preached on Matthew 14:22-33. This is quite a long time ago but I still remember it as though it was yesterday. This passage relates the story of the disciples in the Sea of Tiberius, caught in a violent storm and Jesus comes to them, walking on the water. Peter says, “*Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water*”. So Jesus calls Peter out of the boat and right there, in the middle of the storm, Peter steps out of the boat.

As we listened to his message together, we looked at one another because we realised that God had put this message and this preacher there to strengthen and encourage us. It was God’s call for us to step out of the boat in the middle of the storm (where our natural instinct had been to cower in fear inside the boat with the rest of the disciples, waiting for the storm to pass).

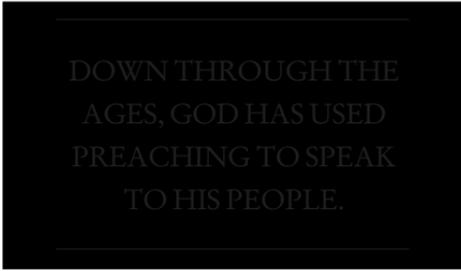
Over the coming weeks we did exactly that – we stepped out of the boat and we saw so many breakthroughs. We persevered through the challenges we faced with a new courage and it all worked out. And to this day I remember that message even though it was years ago. To this day

when I find myself in a difficult place, when my faith is being tested and when I need courage, I go back to that passage.

God still uses that message in my life today.

Preaching as Providence

Down through the ages, God has used preaching to speak to His people. You find it in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, over and over again. It is one of the ways that He has chosen



DOWN THROUGH THE
AGES, GOD HAS USED
PREACHING TO SPEAK
TO HIS PEOPLE.

to speak to us –
preaching that opens
up His Word.
Preaching that
speaks the things of
God to us.

And when the preacher is truly speaking the things of God to us, then the Holy Spirit speaks them directly into our hearts, which is what happened to Jacqui and me that Sunday night all those years ago, then in the same way as the multitudes listening to Jesus sensed it, we too know that it's God who is speaking to us.

Preaching is truly God's providence. His protection, His care, His spiritual power to change our lives. And whilst the hi-tech entertainment options of this world claim to offer so much, there is nothing ... nothing as powerful or as life-changing or as blessed as hearing the Word of God spoken into our lives and receiving it into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God who was given to us for this very purpose – to declare and impart the things of Jesus to us.

Friend, God is still speaking today. Inspired, anointed, Christ-centred, Spirit-filled preaching and teaching is one of the ways we hear from God. It's mighty, it's powerful and God can target needs and issues in our lives with pinpoint accuracy.

Let me encourage you to find and receive that sort of teaching and preaching in your life. Not the stuff that necessarily entertains you or tickles your ears and tells you what you want to hear, but the sort that tells God's truth with power and authority.

It is God's providence for you and for me. It is life-changing. Hallelujah!



CHAPTER FIVE

reading the signs





CHAPTER FIVE

reading the signs

A Change in the Weather

On Valentine's day back in February 2007, a Polish-born German woman, Ewa Wisnierska, was competing in an international paragliding competition in New South Wales, Australia. It was a race to see who could fly the furthest distance on the day.

Now I'm someone who likes good old *terra firma*. The more *firma*, the less *terra*! So the idea of paragliding – letting the wind and the thermals

carry you way up in the air, whilst your dangling off this flimsy set of plastic and aluminium wings – frankly has me breaking out in a cold sweat.

Nevertheless, some people love the thrill, so on this day, some of the top paragliders in the world had gathered for this competition.

The winds were from the south and so Ewa and most of the other competitors therefore headed north with the prevailing winds. Now there was a thunderstorm brewing towards the north, but if they could only get through before the storm formed, they'd be well on their way to a successful day's racing.

Ewa could see that the band of clouds hadn't formed fully ahead of her yet, so she headed straight for them, following others ahead of her,

—
AS EXPERIENCED
AS EWA WISNIERSKA
WAS, SHE HAD MISREAD
THE SIGNS!
—

hoping to make it through before the storm formed. There she was, dangling from her paraglider, trying to skirt around

a small cloud when all of a sudden, the clouds merged into a single mass and the storm formed right around her.

In that instant, she found herself smack bang in the middle of a powerful thunderstorm. Rain, hail, lightening, frightening winds ... and she's dangling from her paraglider!

As experienced as Ewa Wisnierska was, she had misread the signs!

Now the problem with clouds for a paraglider, is that clouds mean lift.

The storm rocketed her upwards at 20 metres a second (that's 1,200 meters or 1.2 kilometres per minute – a frightening speed) Up and up. There was nothing she could do to slow herself down, the updraft was just too powerful.

3,000 metres, 4,000 metres, 5,000 metres, 6,000 metres.

Now at 7,000 metres the atmosphere is so thin, that we run out of oxygen. No one survives above

that altitude without breathing apparatus and oxygen (which she wasn't carrying on board).

7,000 metres, 8,000 metres, 9,000 metres – her onboard altimeter recorded that she had ascended to an altitude of 9,946 meters! Almost 10 kilometres above the earth's surface. There was no way to survive up at this altitude.

Frozen and unconscious, in the minus 55 degree Celsius, oxygen-depleted stratosphere, Ewa Wisnierska dangled from her paraglider. She glided there in a slow turn until suddenly the weight of the ice on her paraglider caused her to plummet several thousand metres. Then, miraculously the paraglider snapped open again with a jolt, waking her up. This was the most extraordinary experience, really a miracle. No one has ever survived anything like that.

Can you imagine how she felt when she came to?

She'd been sucked up into that thunderstorm. She was covered in ice, barely able to move, aware

that she was in a precarious life and death situation and still in the storm that could snuff out her life (as had happened to another competitor from China who had been only a few hundred metres away from her).

Even in this barely conscious state, knowing the mistakes that had put her there in the first place, knowing that she only had one chance of survival now that the storm was weakening and she was more on the edge than the middle, Ewa did the one thing she knew how to do.

She put herself into a downward spiral. With everything she could muster she created that downward spiral and she survived to tell this most extraordinary tale. In fact a week later, she was back in the air again with the very same paraglider.



NEXT TIME I WILL READ
THE SIGNS FOR MYSELF
AND MAKE MY OWN
DECISIONS

I watched her being interviewed recently on television. She said something along these lines:

It was a race we were all trying to win. We saw the storm coming but everyone headed towards it. I followed them. The thing I've learned since then was that next time I will read the signs for myself and make my own decisions about going or pulling out.

THE WORD 'SIGN' OR
'SIGNS' APPEARS OVER
160 TIMES
THROUGHOUT THE
BIBLE.

Now that is a piece of wisdom that really struck me between the eyes:

... I will read the signs for myself ...

God Speaks Through Signs

We've seen that God speaks to us through His Word the Bible. And we can rely on that because that's our bedrock; our foundation. God never contradicts Himself whatever else we may hear or see or feel. What He says in His Word is the truth and anything that contradicts that isn't the truth. It's as simple as that.

We've seen that God speaks to us as we spend time in prayer and in thought, quietly with Him.

And we've seen that He speaks to us through anointed, inspired preaching and teaching.

What we are looking at in this chapter is signs. And it turns out that God speaks to us through signs as well. And one of the things that we're taught in His Word is to read the signs:

Jesus also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?" (Luke 12:54-56)

Now, let's get the context right. Jesus was talking about the fact that they had the Son of God right there in front of them; right under their noses and they just didn't get it. He was the sign and they just couldn't read it. They could interpret the signs that pointed to a change in the weather, but they

couldn't interpret what God was doing in their experience.

The word 'sign' or 'signs' appears over 160 times throughout the Bible. Often times, the word is used about miraculous signs – miracles, wonders – such as those performed by God through Moses.

Then the LORD said, "If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground." (Exodus 4:8,9)

But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it. (Exodus. 4:17)

Other times, signs weren't that at all. Sometimes they were a symbolic act or some physical action or circumstance:

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt,

you will worship God on this mountain.”
(Exodus 3:12)

Then take an iron pan, place it as an iron wall between you and the city and turn your face toward it. It will be under siege, and you shall besiege it. This will be a sign to the house of Israel. (Ezekiel 4:3)

There's nothing particularly supernatural or miraculous in those two. There are many more signs like that in the Bible.

What is a Sign?

Now let's ask ourselves – what is a sign? What is its purpose? Well, a sign is something that imparts information – it's like a summary of what's going on that stands out from the background noise because it's important.

A SIGN IS SOMETHING
THAT STANDS OUT
FROM THE SITUATION
OR CIRCUMSTANCE,
AND TELLS US
SOMETHING
IMPORTANT THAT WE
NEED TO KNOW

Buildings have signs on the front of them to tell us who or what is inside. We have street signs that give us directions, or tell us what street we're on, or tell us what speed we can travel safely, or warn us of road works and hazards.

So, a sign is something that stands out from the situation or circumstance, and tells us something important that we need to know; where to go, what to do, what not to do. That's what a sign does. It conveys information and instructions that benefit us.

And in the Bible, signs – be they miraculous or mundane – tell us about God, what He's doing, what He's up to, and often times, how we should respond. They are there for our benefit. That's what signs are in the Bible.

The miracles Jesus performed are referred to as 'signs' by John in his Gospel. Jesus was and is the Word of God – God speaking to us about who He is and what He's up to in the world. His miracles – His signs – attested as to who He was, and what He had come to do. That's why John calls them 'signs'.

Signs in our Lives

Now so often there are signs in our lives, but either we miss them altogether or we misinterpret them. I wonder how often people look at all that's going on in their lives – the storm clouds rolling in – and ask themselves, “I wonder what God's up to here? What's He saying to me through everything that's going on?”

Imagine rocketing along a country road in the fog. You see a sign ‘Bridge Closed Ahead.’ What do you do? Well, you slow down to a crawl, because clearly, there's a hazard up ahead.

Imagine ... just imagine the consequences of ignoring the sign, or missing it altogether!! And yet so often, that's exactly what we do in life!

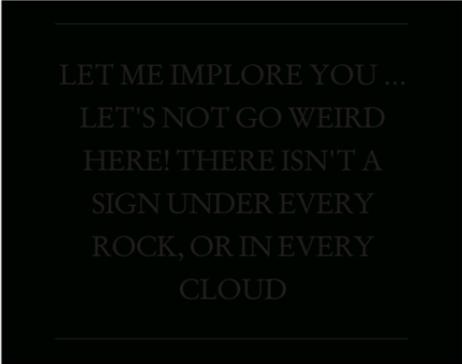
Have you ever been travelling through a situation, something difficult and complex and you don't quite know the whole picture or how it's going to turn out or indeed what God's up to? And all of a sudden there's a flash of lightening over there and the thunderclap that follows. But over in a different direction is a ray of sunshine, of hope.

Or someone says something and you think to yourself, “I wonder if ... I wonder if God is trying to tell me something?”

You see most of us, we can look up at the sky and see that the weather’s changing, and so we grab an umbrella as we’re heading out the door. And yet we’re the very same people with a huge propensity to ignore what God is saying to us about what He’s up to, through the things that are happening around us; through the signs that He puts there for our benefit.

Let’s Not Go Weird Here!

The issue I guess, is how to read God’s signs in our lives. I mean, the last thing we want to become



LET ME IMPLORE YOU ...
LET'S NOT GO WEIRD
HERE! THERE ISN'T A
SIGN UNDER EVERY
ROCK, OR IN EVERY
CLOUD

is, well ... weird. In August 2010 the Mercury Newspaper in Tasmania Australia came up with this report (and I quote from their website):

HOLY guacamole! *A South Hobart man has discovered the image of Jesus on a store-bought tortilla. Carpenter Lloyd Osborne told the Mercury the flatbread rose from the dead earlier this week.*

'It came out of a packet on Tuesday night,' he said. 'My wife had the packet open for a few days and had actually thrown it out. I resurrected it from the bin. It was still in the packet, and I opened it up and took one out and that was on it to my amusement.' On seeing the unusual markings, his first thought was that the face he could see was almost unmistakable. 'Could it be Jesus? Whether it's a message from one carpenter to another I don't know. I am renovating the house, so maybe I should put in a shrine for pilgrims to come and visit.' Mr Osborne said he had no immediate plans to eat or sell his unusual tortilla, which was bought at a Sandy Bay supermarket.

Extreme I know. But at the same time, let me implore you ... let's not go weird here! That's not what I'm talking about. There isn't a sign under

every rock, or in every cloud, or in everything that anybody says ... or, for that matter, on every store-bought tortilla! OK?!

So How Can We Read God's Signs in Our Lives

Well, here is what I do.

When sometimes circumstances feel a little bit fuzzy and the way forward isn't quite clear, I take time to get quietly before God. I pray for a bit of wisdom and insight. And then I just look at the different things that are going on and I think about them prayerfully.

'God, that event – what does that mean? What should I do with that? Is there anything You are saying to me through that? Or this person, what he said or she said? Do You mean me to take notice of that?'

Once we were having problems selling our house when we'd already bought another one. Not something we'd done out of hubris. We had felt God leading us to downsize and downscale and we really felt this was God's will and so we stepped out

in faith. So we bought the new house before we sold the old house.

And way before things became difficult, a wise, experienced real estate agent quipped to me, “I always tell people, don’t panic, it’ll sell eventually”. I thought nothing of it at the time, but when things became tight and difficult and settlement on the new place was coming and the old place wasn’t selling, time and time again God brought this

IT'S ABOUT LOOKING AT
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passing comment back to my remembrance time and time again. He spoke to me through it and gave me peace to know I was on the right path here, even though things were looking dire.

It might be something you see in a movie or on television or in some situation that leaps out at you – or a thunderbolt or a ray of sunshine. Sometimes God will give us insight through those things.

Signs! And He expects us to read the signs. He says so over and over again in His Word.

Is that like reading tea leaves?

No, no! It's about looking at all the things going on around us through God's eyes, getting still with God and listening to what He's trying to say to us. So often God is speaking through our circumstances, through what's going on around us and we're not even listening. Sometimes He's erected a 'Bridge Closed Ahead' sign, and we cruise past it without even looking, and wonder why we fall off the edge!

I really encourage you to get still before God, think about the different things going on in your life and ask Him what He's trying to say to you. Ask Him for His wisdom and His insight and His guidance. Ask Him to point out His signs and markers to you. He never holds back.

It's a process of learning ... learning to discern what God is saying and when it's Him talking

versus when it's our flesh. One thing I always come back to is this failsafe: God never contradicts Himself. That's why we can be absolutely certain that anything that contradicts God's Word hasn't come from Him.



CHAPTER SIX

the power of
the prophetic





CHAPTER SIX

the power of the prophetic

Prophets Back then ... and Now

Way back in the Old Testament, God spoke to His people through Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and all those Old Testament Prophets – men whom God had called to speak His message directly to His people.

Then in the New Testament, He speaks to us first and foremost through His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, and through the Apostles and the other writers of the New Testament books. And

He's still using those to speak to us today by His Spirit, through the Word of God. Hallelujah!

But what's also interesting, is that the New Testament in particular, tells us how His Spirit speaks to us today. Sometimes it's easy to ignore that. It's easy to get all dull and boring about the way God communicates with us. But God is a stunningly creative communicator. There's nothing ... absolutely nothing dull and boring about how God communicates with you and me.

And one of the ways He does that, is through the power of the prophetic.

Now I'm not saying that because I come from a particular denominational or theological tradition. I do not. When it comes to denominations – I am very much a post-denominational. In other words, in my heart, I care much more about what my local church is doing – whether we're honouring, worshipping and serving God, whether we're making a difference in people's lives with the love and Word of God – than I do about what any denomination may be up to.

And when it comes to theology, I'm a simple kind of guy. I just want to know what God is saying to us through His Word the Bible, and apply it to life. That's it!

I'M A SIMPLE
KIND OF GUY.
I JUST WANT TO KNOW
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US THROUGH HIS WORD
THE BIBLE,
AND APPLY IT TO LIFE.

And one of the things His Word says, on this side of the Cross, in the New Testament, is that God has appointed prophets – people who are to speak to His people on His behalf – in His church. Simple as that.

Now I acknowledge that there are some amongst God's people who simply believe that there are no more prophets today. That prophecy is something that belongs to the past and not the present. But as I read the Word of God, plainly, in a simple, straightforward way, I cannot come to that conclusion.

I believe that God has given some people a supernatural gift of prophecy – the gift to speak His

DO NOT QUENCH THE
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EVERYTHING.

specific will into the lives of God's people. And, as we saw earlier in Chapter 1, the last thing we should do, is to despise their words:

Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise the words of prophets but test everything. Hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.
(1Thessalonians 5:19-22)

So What Is a Prophet?

Well, quite simply a prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of God; someone who speaks the will of God into the lives of God's people.

Let's take a look at what God's Word has to say on this – because like everything else, it is God's Word that provides us with the authority to understand what God is doing. If God says He has appointed prophets in the church, then He's appointed prophets in His church.

And if God's Word says that He hasn't appointed prophets in His church, then – guess what! He hasn't appointed prophets in His church. So – what I want to know is not what any particular denomination or theological dogma says on this subject.

What I want to know is what God's Word says.

So this is the Apostle Paul writing to the fledgling New Testament church in Corinth, after Jesus has died and risen again and ascended into heaven:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to

another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:4-12)

So here Paul's talking about supernatural gifts that are given to people in the family of God. And not just to the special super-Christian leader people. Have a look again at verse 7:

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

A PROPHET IS SOMEONE
WHO SPEAKS ON
BEHALF OF GOD;
SOMEONE WHO SPEAKS
THE WILL OF GOD INTO
THE LIVES OF GOD'S
PEOPLE.

To each person, to each believer is given one or more of these supernatural gifts. Some people are

given a measure of supernatural wisdom that goes way beyond human wisdom. Others, are able to know things supernaturally, that they simply have no way of knowing in the natural dimension. They are able to give people ‘words of knowledge’ that have a powerful, supernatural impact on their lives. And so, this passage in 1 Corinthians 12, goes on to list the supernatural gifts that God’s Spirit – by His sovereign will – bestows on *each* believer.

The power of these gifts lies in the fact that they can achieve so much more than we can achieve in the natural – because they are *supernatural*.

Have these Supernatural Gifts Passed Away

Now I’ve heard some Christians say, ‘No, No! That was for back then, not for now.’ In other words, they don’t believe that these supernatural gifts are in operation today.

This passage, 1 Corinthians 12, rolls straight on into 1 Corinthians 13, that famous passage about love that kind of says – you know you can have all the gifts under the sun, but unless you use them in love those gifts are useless.

And it's these very same people who love to

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quote 1 Corinthians 13 (the chapter about love) that somehow want to deny that these supernatural gifts promised to *each* believer in 1 Corinthians 12, exist today.

Perhaps this is because – particularly in the west with our rational Western mindset – we're uncomfortable with the idea that there might be supernatural gifts in operation; gifts that we can't explain rationally. And so sometimes we want to deny that this bit of the New Testament actually applies to us, whilst at the same time, accepting the other bits that make rational sense to us.

I don't know what it is, but I find nothing ... nothing in the New Testament that tells me that these supernatural gifts were meant only for those

back in the 1st Century and not for us here and now in the 21st Century. Nothing.

And what are the gifts?

Words of wisdom, words of knowledge, extraordinary faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of the Spirit, speaking in different kinds of tongues, interpreting different tongues.

One of the arguments against words of wisdom and words of knowledge and prophecy is that these so-called modern day prophets set themselves up above the Word of God. They can say things that don't agree with the Scripture, God's Word.

So what do we do with that?

Well, I have to tell you, like anything else good that God gives us, you can take it and you can abuse it. Absolutely. I've seen it happen in this area, where people go for emotionalism and they go for manipulation, where they claim to be speaking on behalf of God but in fact they aren't. They are just operating out of their own flesh and their own desires.

Is that a reason to believe that God doesn't use prophecy and other supernatural, spiritual gifts today?

Just because something good from God can be abused doesn't mean that it's not a good thing from God. I mean, back in the Old Testament (as we've seen back in Chapter 1) there were false prophets. Just because some men and women abuse a gift from God, doesn't mean that the gift doesn't exist.

God's 'Belt and Braces' Approach to Prophecy

Obviously God knew the controversy that these

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spiritual gifts would create. Back then when Paul was writing to the Corinthians – these spiritual gifts, supernatural gifts, were new. They were unexpected. God was doing something that

hadn't been seen before – people speaking in different tongues, people interpreting those tongues, ordinary people like you and me prophesying, astounding words of knowledge, healings ...

This was outrageous back then ... just as it is outrageous for some people here and now. And so the Holy Spirit made sure that His Word had the controversy covered. As if what He led the Apostle Paul to write about these supernatural gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 were not enough (and for some clearly it was not) He had Paul adopt a 'belt and braces' approach in 1 Corinthians Chapter 14.

He had Paul write these words to put God's view on these supernatural, spiritual gifts – especially the gift of prophecy – beyond any shadow of doubt:

Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy. For those who speak in a tongue do not speak to other people but to God; for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit. On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to

other people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.

Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves, but those who prophesy build up the church. Now I would like all of you to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. One who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. (1 Corinthians 14:1–5, bold emphasis mine)

In other words God's Word itself urges us to strive for – literally to burn with zeal, to earnestly seek out – these supernatural, spiritual gifts – ***especially prophecy***. (Remember this is God talking here, not me!) And Paul goes on to urge us not only to speak in tongues, but even more, to prophesy. Why? Because it is God's gift for building up the church!

My Friend Dennis

There have been several times in my life when someone has given a specific prophecy just for me,

and as it turns out each of those, barring one, has had a huge impact on my life. Now that one, the exception as it were, was a so-called prophecy that simply didn't ring

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true to me as having come from God – something that was confirmed by others who were there at the time. So that one I set aside – that's what discernment is all about.

But, other than that one exception, I look back now on those prophecies that God brought to me through different people over the years, and each one of them, as it turned out, was a major turning point in my life's journey. Each one of them was a sign-post from God that had a powerful impact.

In my life, prophecies and words of knowledge aren't things that have happened thick and fast every day of the week let me say. In a decade and a half of walking with Jesus, I guess I can point to

about six or seven prophecies that have had a powerful impact on me.

And you know, they didn't come so much from proud people coming to me with a "Thus-sayeth-the-Lord" proclamation either. No, it wasn't like that.

One of the most powerful was given to me through a man called Dennis Adams. He worked at the time for a large, global Christian radio network called HCJB. He and I were attending the conference of what was back then known as the 'Christian Broadcasters Association' – the association of Christian media ministries in Australia.

I was still working in my IT consulting job at the time, but I had also taken up my new position in the ministry of Christianityworks – the two in tandem were tiring to say the least. At the time, the ministry was in quite a bit of trouble. My predecessors had taken all our radio programs off air – and this for a ministry whose 'core business' was producing Christian radio programs. Hmm!

As a result, there was almost no financial support and the ministry was almost dead. It was pretty much “last one out, turn out the lights” and frankly, I didn’t know what to do. All I knew – and it was something that I knew beyond any doubt – was that God had called me to the ministry of Christianityworks at this moment.

I had no real experience in media. I didn’t know any of the radio stations who could take our programs if we started producing them again. There was almost no money left. The situation, from my limited human perspective, appeared completely hopeless.

I knew in my heart of hearts that God wanted me to attend that Christian media conference, but it was on a weekend. I’d been

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working long and hard in the months leading up to that time and I was exhausted. So I said to God, 'I just can't go.' So I didn't, until one of the speakers cancelled at the conference, and I was asked to go along and speak in his place.

So – God had to drag me kicking and screaming to the conference! (Not very spiritual or edifying I'm afraid – but then fortunately this is a story about the power of God, not how clever or obedient I was!)

When I met Dennis for the first time over a cup of coffee in the morning tea break, he looked at my name tag – we didn't know each other, but he'd heard some of the short radio messages that I'd put together in the past – and almost immediately tears welled up in his eyes. And with a passion and conviction and gravitas that I will never forget, he said to me, 'You have to start doing those radio programs again, you just have to!'

Dennis is the most humble, unassumingly gentle man you will ever meet. But I tell you, his words pierced my heart that day. I knew without a shadow

of a doubt, that God was speaking to me through Him.

And because of that, we spent the last few thousand dollars that the ministry had on producing the first series of new radio programs. At the time we had no idea how we were going to get them onto any radio station anywhere – I just didn't have the contacts or the credibility.

That was almost 6 years ago, and at the time of writing this book those same radio programs are heard by literally millions of people each week through over a thousand radio stations in 165 countries around the world. (I told you this was a story about the power of God!)

I know with all that I am that those words that Dennis Adams spoke to me that day were from God – that they were a prophecy – and that without them I wouldn't be here with you today in the pages of this book and with countless others listening to their radios around the globe every day.

Do Not Despise the Words of Prophets!

Should we discern prophecies? Absolutely! Should we think them through and pray them through? Absolutely! Should we reject any that don't ring true? Absolutely!

But, my friend, God's Word says that He has appointed prophets in His Church and that He has done so to build us up! His Word says that He is still speaking to us today through those prophets

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whom He has appointed by His sovereign will, as His gift to us.

Why, oh why would we want to deny that? Why would we not want

to hear when God has something specific to say to you and to me, from His heart into our lives through people (prophets) whom He created and gifted for that very purpose?

*Do not quench the Spirit, **do not despise the words of prophets** but test everything. Hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.*
(1Thessalonians 5:19-22, bold emphasis mine)



CHAPTER SEVEN

out of the blue



CHAPTER SEVEN

out of the blue

Does God Really Speak ‘Out of the Blue’?

Let me ask you – have you kind of heard a voice out of the blue and wondered, ‘Where did that come from? I wonder ...

I wonder whether that was God prompting me to do something. I wonder ...’

AS I READ MY BIBLE
ONE OF THE THINGS
THAT I’VE NOTICED IS
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SPEAKS TO PEOPLE LIKE
... LIKE A VOICE OUT OF
THE BLUE.

As I read my Bible one of the things that I’ve noticed is that God sometimes speaks to people like

... like a voice out of the blue. And let me make this quite clear – as hopefully I have been doing in each chapter so far. We’re looking at different ways that God speaks with people. And we’re not doing that solely through the lens of my experience, or anyone else’s either for that matter.

The question that people constantly ask me is ‘How can I hear God speak to me?’

And so this book is a humble attempt to go to the one place where I know that I will never be misled. The one place that I know contains the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And that place is God’s Word, the Bible.

Jesus promised us that we *will know the truth, and the truth will make us free.* (John 8:32)

And so what we’re about in this book is discovering the truth so that we can be free to experience God and hear Him speak to us, the way He always intended. The only types of communication from God that have made it into the pages of this book are those that so far, I have discovered in His Word.

And one of those ways, is as a voice out of the blue. So – let's take a look.

James Forgets His Diary

I had coffee with a dear friend of mine, James, just the other day. He was telling me how the day before he had been racing out for a meeting and he'd had this distinct impression that he should go back to his study and grab his diary. So, he did what every God-fearing, Bible-believing Australian male would instinctively do.

He ignored it!

On the way to his meeting, something happened and he needed to contact the person whom he was planning to meet, so that he could adjust the arrangements. The problem was he didn't have the man's phone number on him.

Yes, you guessed it, the phone number he so desperately needed was in the diary sitting back on the desk in his study. My hunch is that this is a lesson that James will not quickly forget. Looking back on it, he realised that God had been doing

him a favour, giving him a little nudge, a little ‘heads up’ to prepare him for something that was about to befall him.

It was very much, a voice out of the blue. And I think most of us would be able to point back to a time when we heard that voice, and did precisely what James did – we ignored it!

Big Things and Little Things

Now sometimes God has big things to say to us and other times He has little things to share with us. And in my experience, if we love Him; if we’re in the business of drawing close to Him, sometimes in the thick of things while we’re on the run, He speaks to us out of the blue.

Some people are intensely uncomfortable with that. As we’ve seen, there’s a school of thought that says that God only ever communicates to us through His Word the Bible. Well, I agree, the Bible is the primary way that God communicates with us. And if anyone claims any other communication – a prophecy, a word of knowledge, something from God out of the blue – if anyone

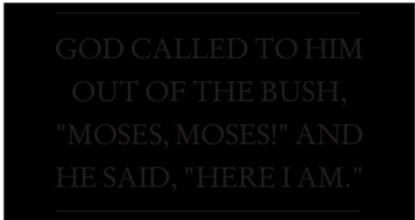
claims to have heard from God like that but what they claim to have heard is not consistent with what the Bible says, well my friend then we definitely know that *it ain't coming from God*. God never contradicts Himself. Let me repeat that: God never contradicts Himself. So I agree on that front.

So as I've said earlier, I'm going with what's in the Bible. And, in the Bible, God speaks to people out of the blue. He just does!

And the number of times He speaks to people throughout the Bible and they answer Him, "Here I am Lord", well there are in fact lots of those. Let's have a look at just one instance.

A Burnt Out Old Wreck

Moses is a burnt out old wreck of a man. He's 80 years old. He had murdered an Egyptian as a young man, so even though he grew up in Pharaoh's house, he was forced to flee out to the back of the desert to tend sheep for 40 or 50 years.



GOD CALLED TO HIM
OUT OF THE BUSH,
"MOSES, MOSES!" AND
HE SAID, "HERE I AM."

But suddenly, when God's ready to speak to him, God speaks out of the blue or at least, out of a bush right there – out in the back of the desert where he was tending the sheep!

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.'

When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

"The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:1-10)

Was this an audible voice, or was it a voice Moses heard in His heart?

We're not told in the Bible. We could assume that because the flame in the burning bush appears to have been visible to Moses, and because the Bible says that God called to Moses 'out of the burning bush' that perhaps the voice was indeed

audible. But the facts are that we're not told specifically, so we don't actually know. But here's the thing – I don't think it really matters. Point is God spoke to Moses ... out of the blue.

Remember, God didn't have a Bible to speak through back then. It wasn't written yet. Moses as it turned out, was going to write a good chunk of the early books of what we now call the Old Testament, but he wasn't at that point just yet. He was still a burnt out old wreck of a man, way out in the back of beyond, tending a flock of miserable sheep.

And so God spoke to Moses out of the blue as it were, out of the burning bush and called him to a mighty work – going to Pharaoh and leading God's people out of Egypt and through the wilderness for 40 years.

When you think about it that way, it was a pretty big call for an 80 year old, who thought he heard something out of a burning bush!

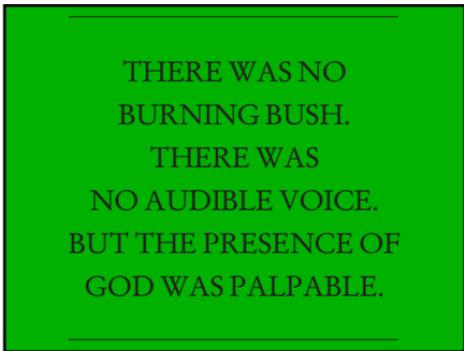
And Moses Wasn't the Only One

If you have access to an electronic version of the

Bible, I suggest you do a search on the words, ‘Here I am’ throughout the Bible. They come up over and over again. God speaks to His people out of the blue and they answer Him, “Here I am Lord”.

Has it ever happened to me? Well I’ve never been called to lead Israel out of Egypt, to be quite honest with you. Nor have I heard a voice out of a burning bush. But at the same time, God has spoken to me out of the blue, about things that were big in my life and about things that were small as well.

I remember not long after I became a Christian I was alone in my house. It was a Saturday afternoon and I was ironing downstairs. As I finished each shirt, I’d take it upstairs and hang it up in the wardrobe. As I was heading back downstairs after hanging one particular shirt, I was overwhelmed by the Presence of God on the top landing.



THERE WAS NO
BURNING BUSH.
THERE WAS
NO AUDIBLE VOICE.
BUT THE PRESENCE OF
GOD WAS PALPABLE.

There was no burning bush. There was no audible voice. But the Presence of God was palpable. So I sat down at the top of the stairs and what I experienced in the next fifteen or twenty minutes was God calling me to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.

I remember thinking to my self, ‘Hang on, I’ve been a Christian for like five minutes and you’re

GOD DIDN'T GIVE ME
THE FULL PICTURE
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ABLE TO SEE THE
SIGNPOSTS AND READ
THE SIGNS AND FOLLOW
AFTER HIM ALONG THE
PATH THAT HE HAD
CHOSEN.

calling *me* to do *this?*

Then He showed me how over the previous twenty years as I’d been invited all over the world to speak at conferences and events in the IT industry – which is what I did back then, I was an IT consultant – He showed me how He’d been preparing

me and getting me ready for this call, even before I'd given my life over to Him.

Now these weren't my thoughts or ideas. This wasn't a vivid imagination at work. I was ironing, and like any good male, I'm generally only capable of doing one thing at a time, so I was focussed on my ironing.

No, it was definitely a 'someone outside of me speaking into me and showing me this stuff' kind of experience. To this day, I have never heard the audible voice of God, but then and there I knew that this was definitely God speaking.

That was my call into ministry. From that moment onwards, I set my face to follow hard after that calling.

Had He not done that in the way that He chose to do it that day, I would not have started to walk down the path that He opened up for me. Had He not done that, I wouldn't have had the drive or the conviction or the focus to pursue His calling which, by the way, has not always been easy.

God didn't give me the full picture that day. What He did was call me and open my eyes, so as opportunities opened up – as the signs appeared – I was able to see the signposts and read the signs and follow after Him along the path that He had chosen.

Jesus said:

I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.
(John 10:16)

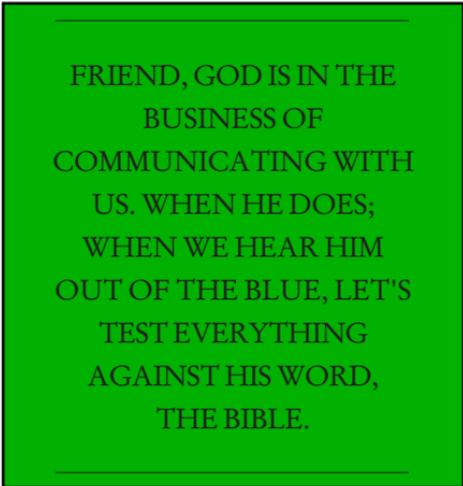
My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27)

This is exactly how it was for me that day. I just knew it was God who spoke to me and God who called me to do what I'm doing, on that day in the stairwell in the middle of ironing shirts –which as I reflect on it now, is not a lot different to Moses tending his sheep. Boring. Ordinary. Mundane.

I didn't know it was going to happen. I had absolutely no idea at that point how it would unfold; that I would be involved in the medium of

radio and writing books. Absolutely no idea – it never entered my mind. The details didn't come until years later, in fact another eight years after that time.

Sometimes I've thought I heard God's voice and I don't think I've got it quite right. So I always test things. I think, I pray, I see if they make sense and little by little what I've discovered is that I'm getting better and better at discerning God's voice; recognising that it's Him that I'm hearing, not my own thoughts or imagination. What I've discovered is that His voice is, as Jesus promised, distinctive and recognisable.



FRIEND, GOD IS IN THE
BUSINESS OF
COMMUNICATING WITH
US. WHEN HE DOES;
WHEN WE HEAR HIM
OUT OF THE BLUE, LET'S
TEST EVERYTHING
AGAINST HIS WORD,
THE BIBLE.

In my day to day life God sometimes nudges me this way and sometimes that way. In the middle of pressure and conflict the Holy Spirit speaks

strongly and directly, often with a Scripture that leads me to behave in a godly way, rather than follow my natural human inclinations.

And you know, that's exactly what Jesus promised would happen. In John 14, Jesus promises to send us His Spirit to dwell in us and He goes on to say:

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. (John 15:26)

He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:14)

Friend, God is in the business of communicating with us. When He does; when we hear Him out of the blue, let's test everything against His Word, the Bible. If it's not consistent with His Word then it's absolutely certain that this thing we thought was from God definitely isn't from Him.

But He does communicate with us in all sorts of different ways and sometimes it comes completely out of the blue, so let's be ready for it.



CHAPTER EIGHT

the counsel of others



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the counsel of others

Different Points of View

The other night I was asked to spend some time facilitating a discussion amongst the elders of the church council of a particular church not far from me. It seems that there was some conflict and disagreement amongst some of the members of the

MAKE MY JOY
COMPLETE; BE OF THE
SAME MIND, HAVING
THE SAME LOVE, BEING
IN FULL ACCORD AND
OF ONE MIND.

church council. And that's not good. Leaders of God's people should not be in conflict. They should act in unity.

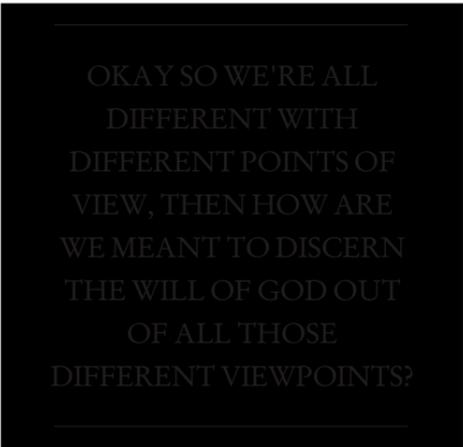
The Apostle Paul writing to his friends at the church in Philippi, said this:

Make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (Philippians 2:2)

We were chatting that night about the fact that God has made each one of us quite differently:

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Romans 12:4–8)

And obviously a leader is going to have a totally different view of the world compared to say, an encourager (exhorter) or a carer (the compassionate). That's because leaders are wired one way, encouragers are wired in a completely different way and the carer is wired in yet another way again on the inside. That's the way it is. Because we're different, we naturally see things differently and often that ends up being the source of conflict.



OKAY SO WE'RE ALL
DIFFERENT WITH
DIFFERENT POINTS OF
VIEW, THEN HOW ARE
WE MEANT TO DISCERN
THE WILL OF GOD OUT
OF ALL THOSE
DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS?

That's what was going on amongst this group of leaders.

Now, in this meeting one of the elders of the church, an older man with quite some wisdom, asked the 64 million dollar question.

He said, “Okay so we’re all different with different points of view, then how are we meant to discern the will of God out of all those different viewpoints?” And that my friend is a very, very good question.

When our Strength is our Weakness

One of the things that I’m prone to do, is to race out and just do things without listening to the advice of other people. It’s because my personality type is that of the leader. I’m an action person. I work on the theory that if I make ten decisions today and get seven of them right then I’m much better off than if I’d made only three decisions and managed to get them all right.

My good friend, Keith Henry, with whom I co-

GOD WILL OFTEN SPEAK
TO US THROUGH THE
GIFTS AND THE ABILITIES
AND THE PERSPECTIVES
OF OTHER PEOPLE.

authored the book *‘My Personality GPS’*, makes this point about leaders. One of their natural weaknesses is that they often fail

because they don't listen to advice. So here is something that I have to had to learn in order to grow in godly maturity.

I have to tell you those detail people – you know the sort – they're the ones that in particular, have the tendency to drive me nuts, because they analyse everything. And the reason that I find these detail people naturally irritating is because they slow me down. I want to get on with things and they want to analyse things first.

But do you know what I've learnt? It's this: that without those detail people I am prone to failure because God is in the detail. The detail actually matters. And oftentimes, unless we get the detail right, my best plans are going to come unstuck, no matter how hard I work at them.

So part of my growing up, my process of maturing as a Christian, has been to learn to value and to listen to the detail people. They are really, really, really important to me.

And what I've also come to realise is that God will often speak to us through the gifts and the abilities and the perspectives of other people. Even, let me say, people who in would normally drive me nuts. I love that! God has such a great sense of humour in dealing with our immaturity.

God Deliberately Speaks through Other People

Okay, so what does God's Word have to say on this issue? Well there are some fantastic bits of wisdom on this very thing in the book of Proverbs:

Without counsel, plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed. (Proverbs 15:22)

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion. (Proverbs 18:2)

Plans are established by taking advice; wage war by following wise guidance. (Proverbs 20:18)

Isn't that great stuff?

What God is saying to us here is that if we just rush off in a fit of pride because we think we know what's right, well there's every chance that our plans will go off the rails. But if we humble ourselves instead of being more interested in our own opinions and listen to the good advice of others, that's how our plans are going to succeed.

WHAT GOD IS SAYING TO US HERE IS THAT IF WE JUST RUSH OFF IN A FIT OF PRIDE BECAUSE WE THINK WE KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT, WELL THERE'S EVERY CHANCE THAT OUR PLANS WILL GO OFF THE RAILS.

I have to tell you, this is something that I have had to learn and I've learnt it the hard way. And the more I've learnt it, the better my life has become.

We were recently planning something really new in the ministry of Christianityworks; quite different, quite big and quite new. We, the board and the management, really felt God leading us in this particular direction to start this new initiative in the ministry.

So having learnt this lesson the hard way, I worked with our team to put the ideas and the plans together. So many good ideas came out of different people because God made each one of them differently.

And when our plans were together in rough form, I then took them to some business people who were experienced both in ministry and business. People who'd 'been around'. People who I knew were sharp. And I said to them, "Look, what I really want is your frank, direct and honest feedback and advice. If you think we're off with the pixies, please tell me now."

And these people gave me their frank advice. It wasn't all what I wanted to hear quite frankly. The counsel of others often isn't. We want to be told how wonderful we are and how clever we are and how successful we're going to be – right?!

But the godly advice from these different people really helped to sharpen our thinking. It helped to find the holes in the plans and to start working out how to deal with those weaknesses. And through

this process of consultation and collaboration with godly men and women, here's what I believe has happened.

I believe that we have discerned the will of God. God has spoken through His people – each one different, each one created to see a certain thing – and by submitting the plans to consultation and review and – horrible word here – criticism (!!) we have a much better basis for moving forward.

We have the bases covered in a way that we wouldn't have if I'd done it on my own or with just one or two people. With all that I am, I believe we've heard God speak through this process. And with all that I am, that's exactly what I think God meant for us to do.

Without counsel plans go wrong but with many advisors plans succeed. (Proverbs 15:22)

The Key to Counsel

It's awesome stuff. It's so easy to fall into conflict when teams of people are working together, or at least trying to, and yet they are all seeing

things differently. And the key to seeking God's will in a team environment is through mutual submission.

That requires wisdom. And it requires a genuine humility, to lay down our pride in our own ideas and to listen to the experience and wisdom of others

IT'S WHEN WE ALL YIELD;
WHEN WE ARE ALL IN
MUTUAL SUBMISSION TO
ONE ANOTHER, THAT
WE HEAR GOD'S VOICE.

whom God has deliberately made to be different to us. Have a listen to what God says about wisdom – His wisdom – the sort of

wisdom that comes from above:

Wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, good fruits without trace of partiality or hypocrisy. (James 3:17)

The bit that really strikes a key with me there is that wisdom from God is willing to yield, willing to get off its high horse and to listen to the skills and views and gifts and abilities and perspectives of

others; those godly men and women whom God has put around us. It's when we all yield; when we are all in mutual submission to one another, that we hear God's voice. There's a reason for that. It's because:

God opposes the proud but He gives grace to the humble. (James 4:6)

So often we want to hear God speak, we want to discern the will of God. "God, what are you doing? God, what's next? God, this is a tight spot, how do I deal with this?" And yet we ignore the good advice of the godly people that God has given to us. Hello!!

Why do we do that? Because – let me say this lovingly but directly – we're proud and immature, and foolish. Just as God's Word says:

...like a fool we take no pleasure in understanding but only in expressing our own personal opinions. (Proverbs 18:2)

Wake up! God speaks to His people, through His people. We can discern the will of God as we submit ourselves lovingly to one another and seek

after God's will rather than our own personal agendas.

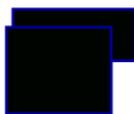
Sometimes God speaks supernaturally, other times He speaks through the ordinary and the every day. Both are equally valid.

And one of the great delights of my heart, something that I've truly come to love, is to hear God speak through the lives and the mouths and the counsel and the giftings and the experience of other people, because by His grace He is teaching me to get off my high horse, shut up and listen. (N.B – This is still a work in progress, so watch this space!)



CHAPTER NINE

dreams and visions





CHAPTER NINE

dreams and visions

What ... again?

Okay – we’ve been looking at the different ways in which God speaks with us. The principal way, the absolute authority on God’s truth is the Word of God. The Bible. His chosen way of communicating the truth – the most important of which is the truth of His Son, Jesus Christ, who is also called ‘the Word of God’.

The Bible is God speaking. Jesus is God speaking. But as we’ve seen, God uses many other ways to communicate with us as well. And that’s

not because I say so, but because God Himself, in His Word says so.

Yes, we have to discern those different ways. Yes, it can be a learning process to hear and recognise the voice of God. And yes, it is up to each one of us to make sure that any person or any experience that purports to be God speaking is in fact, God speaking.

And the most reliable test of that, is whether what the person is saying or what we think the experience is telling us, is in fact consistent with God's truth, His Word, the Bible.

You've heard me say the same thing over and over again in the pages of this short book. And you

PERHAPS
YOUR THINKING,
"DREAMS AND VISIONS?
WHERE IS THIS JOKER
GOING WITH THIS?
IS HE FOR REAL?"

might be thinking, "Why is Berni belabouring this point?"

Well, there's a specific reason; because in this

chapter we're looking at dreams and visions. Are they real? Does God still speak through them or use them today? Or are they phoney?

I think these are reasonable questions to ask when we're enquiring as to how it is that God speaks with each one of us.

Expect the Unexpected

Now perhaps your thinking, "Dreams and visions? Where is this joker going with this? Is he for real?" My response to you is simply this: my heart, my passion is to dive into God's Word, the Bible, to read it, to understand it, and to live it. I'm a simple kind of guy and that's how I approach life.

And one of the things that happens when we do that, is that we discover that God often does things in ways that you or I, with our rational Western mindset (or whatever other mindset we may have grown up with) perhaps wouldn't have chosen, were we God. Well fortunately for you, I'm not God (and I'm quietly thinking to myself, fortunately for me, you're not God either – as nice a person as I am sure that you are!) That's the upside.

But perhaps the downside is that when we accept God's Word as His truth, His way of doing things, then we have to go with some of the things that God is doing God's way, even if we don't quite approve of them in the first instance; even if they don't quite make sense to us:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8,9)

In short, I've discovered that when I read God's Word, I need to expect the unexpected.

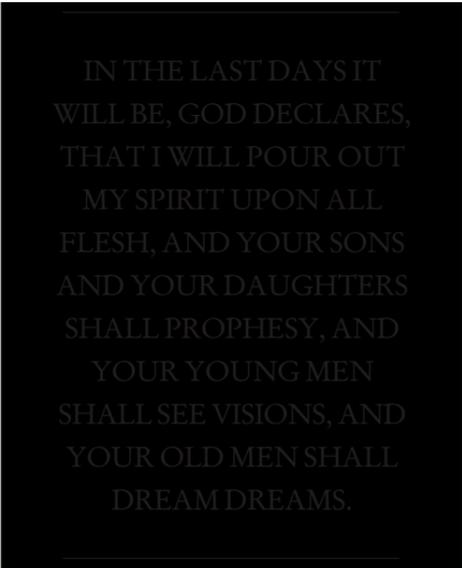
Are Dreams and Visions Really for Today?

Well, what does God's Word say about dreams and visions in this day and age? Remember we don't live in Old Testament times. We don't live during the time before Christ's crucifixion. Nor do we live between His death, resurrection and ascension.

We live in post-Pentecost times. God has, as He promised, poured His Spirit out on all who believe.

We are His people, waiting for Jesus to return. So the question is not just “What does the Bible say about dreams and visions?”, but “What does the Bible say about dreams and visions *in the age in which we live?*”

Let me share with you a passage from the Book of Acts. God’s Spirit has just been poured out on the Christians – they’re all talking in different languages and they’re behaving as though they are drunk. Literally!



IN THE LAST DAYS IT
WILL BE, GOD DECLARES,
THAT I WILL POUR OUT
MY SPIRIT UPON ALL
FLESH, AND YOUR SONS
AND YOUR DAUGHTERS
SHALL PROPHECY, AND
YOUR YOUNG MEN
SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND
YOUR OLD MEN SHALL
DREAM DREAMS.

Not surprisingly, the other Jews in Jerusalem at the time are somewhat critical at this apparently appalling and unrestrained behaviour. They are accusing these Christians of being drunk, so Peter the Apostle stands up to explain:

All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Acts 2:12-21)

Do you see? What's going on here is that the unexpected is happening. They were falling over as though they were drunk. Not a good look! They were speaking in different tongues – something that defied

PROPHECIES,
DREAMS AND VISIONS.
GOD, THROUGH THE
PROPHET AND THE
APOSTLE, IS TELLING US
THAT THESE ARE EACH
WAYS IN WHICH HE IS
GOING TO SPEAK WITH
US IN THIS AGE.

explanation. And so to explain this odd phenomenon and to silence the sceptics, Peter the Apostle gets up and says, "You think this is amazing? This is nothing. Wait till you see what's coming next."

And then He goes on to quote the Old Testament prophet Joel:

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams ... (Acts 2:17)

Remember this is Jerusalem in the first century. Everyone listening knows the Scripture he's quoting. And in this passage from Joel, God promises that the Holy Spirit will cause people to have prophecies and dreams and visions. Way back there in Joel's time, God was pointing forward to this age in which we now live – the post-Pentecost, pre-Second Coming age that began on that day that we read of in Acts, Chapter 2.

Prophecies, dreams and visions. God, through the Prophet and the Apostle, is telling us that these are each ways in which He is going to speak with us *in this age*.

It's in the Bible and Peter's saying to those assembled (who, by the way, were many of those who had bayed for the blood of Jesus in front of Pontius Pilot only five weeks earlier): "This is

precisely what God promised us through Joel, so don't shoot me – I'm only the messenger.”

And if I could personally echo that same sentiment here and now, should it be that you feel uncomfortable with this idea of God speaking to us through prophecies and dreams and visions: my friend, it's in the Bible. Please, don't shoot the messenger.

In My Experience ...

Do you know that many, many Muslims who ultimately put their faith in Jesus Christ report that they saw Jesus coming to them in a dream? In fact, this is a really, really common occurrence.

Has God ever spoken to me that way? No, He hasn't. I hear God in different ways and that's fine. We're all different. God knows that and He speaks to us in ways that best communicate His will, given who He has made each one of us to be.

But have I been impacted by this? Absolutely!

Let me share with you the story of when my wife visited our church for the very first time; before she was my wife, before I even knew her. She came on the Sunday morning, a service where I was preaching. And then she came back again on that same Sunday evening.

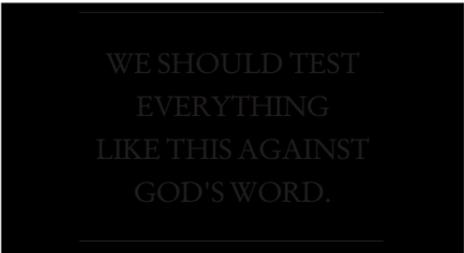
Now our pastor, Phil, was preaching that night. He's a great guy, practical and very down to earth as I mentioned earlier. We sang and we prayed and the time came for Phil to stand up and preach the message. So, he gets up and is about to preach and then he looks over at Jacqui. He didn't know her name, none of us knew who she was. And he said to her, "God's given me a vision for your life". And he went ahead and described this picture, this vision, in a huge amount of detail.

Pretty gutsy thing to do, I thought!

Well, Jacqui is pretty quiet and shy, so she didn't react at all. But months later we discovered that this was an incredibly difficult time in her life. And on this difficult leg in her journey, it felt to her as though God had deserted her. What she was really

wanting in her heart of hearts was for God to speak to her, to show her that He was still there and that He hadn't forgotten her.

Of course none of us knew any of that at the time. And this vision that Pastor Phil described to her that night turned out to be a huge, huge turning point in her life's journey. In fact, had Phil not communicated that to her as boldly as he did that night, she probably wouldn't be my wife today.



WE SHOULD TEST
EVERYTHING
LIKE THIS AGAINST
GOD'S WORD.

In many parts of the world, people have no problem at all with this idea that God speaks through dreams and visions and prophecies. But somehow we Westerners with our rational, materialistic mindset, can struggle with this idea.

Test All Things

Let me come back to where I started. We should test everything like this against God's Word. Sometimes people will come to us with 'stuff' that

isn't from God, and sometimes we may have a dream or a vision that isn't from God either. But sometimes ... sometimes these things are very much from Him. And if God tells us in His Word, the Bible, that all along it's been His plan to speak to us in this way through dreams and visions, well, I don't know about you, but I think we should listen.

Just because I may not be comfortable with what God is doing and how He's doing it, doesn't mean that He's not up to something completely wonderful.

Yes, this whole dreams and visions thing is open to abuse. Paul talks about this. About people who ...

...dwell on visions being puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking. (Colossians 2:18)

Of course it's open to abuse. That's why we test everything against God's Word. That's why we're discerning. Let me ask you – if someone you didn't know accosted you on the street and asked you to invest your life savings with them, because they have the best deal on the planet, with “guaranteed

returns of 100% per annum” ... would you sign over your savings to them?

Hmm. I hope not. I hope that you would be discerning and wise.

And that’s why, when people say they see things through dreams and visions, I feel the need to be wise and discerning. The same would be true if God gave me a dream or a vision. I would bring it back to Him and pray and let His Spirit speak to me about it.

But as I come to God’s Word, what I discover here in the Book of Acts, Chapter 2 is that it was always God’s plan that as He poured His Spirit out on all His people, He would speak to us through the dreams and visions that He gave to some.

Friend, God does things in ways that you or I perhaps wouldn’t have done were we in His great and mighty shoes. And yet, I hunger to hear Him speak. I delight in hearing Him speak.

When, how ... that’s His choice. Our job is simply to listen.



CHAPTER TEN

all the ducks in a row



CHAPTER TEN

all the ducks in a row

A Quick Re-Cap

Well, throughout the previous chapters of this book, we've looked together at eight different ways that God speaks to His people today:

1. **The Bible** – God's Word. *The* authority for God revealing Himself and His will to us.
2. **Prayer** – He speaks to us during our times of prayer and devotion, when we can hear that 'still, small voice' of His Spirit.

3. **Preaching** – God speaks to us through anointed preaching and teaching, when someone opens the Word of God for us.
4. **Signs and Wonders** – Yes, God still uses signs and wonders from time to time to get His message across.
5. **Prophets** – The New Testament makes it clear that God appoints certain people in the body of Christ to be His prophets, to speak His will supernaturally into our lives.
6. **Out of the Blue** – Sometimes God just pipes up out of the blue, right in the middle of the cut and thrust of life.
7. **Through the Counsel of Others** – God so often speaks to us through other godly men and women whom He puts around us with different gifts and abilities to our own.
8. **Dreams and Visions** – Again, the New Testament is clear. God's plan in these last days is to speak to His people through the dreams and the visions that He gives to some.

And if we add all of that up, what we discover is that God is still speaking to us – rather a lot in fact. Principally, primarily through the authority of His Word, the Bible, the living Word of God. That’s why I put it right up there at number one. If numbers two through to eight purport to be God speaking, then they had better be consistent with number one – the Word of God.

If they aren’t, then quite simply, they’re not from God.

If someone claims to have had a dream or a vision or a prophecy but it contradicts the Word of God, make no mistake, that dream or vision or prophecy simply cannot be from God. God is not in the business of contradicting Himself. God is not in the business of changing His mind.



IF WE ADD
ALL OF THAT UP,
WHAT WE DISCOVER IS
THAT GOD IS STILL
SPEAKING TO US -
RATHER A LOT
IN FACT.

It Stands to Reason

But He is interested in our lives – in the nitty gritty, day to day reality of our lives – and like any loving father, He knows that sometimes we need His specific guidance because He loves us. It stands to reason therefore, that He's going to speak specifically into our lives, as any other father would.

When I was a child, my father didn't speak vague generalities into my life. He spoke specifically into my life because He loved me.

I heard a pastor, a man whom I respect a great deal, stand up and preach a sermon not too long ago in which basically He said, that God only speaks these days through His Word, the Bible and through no other means. He said very clearly that there are no more signs and wonders, dreams and visions, prophets ... and so on.

Well, the first thing is that that's simply not what the Bible says.

Each of the other ways that God speaks to us that we've looked at in the course of this short book

– numbers 2 through 8 summarised above – have come straight out of God’s Word. I haven’t made them up. They’re in the Bible.

So afterwards I went and asked this pastor a couple of questions.

The first one was, “Why did you become an ordained minister in this church and this denomination?” His

answer was, “Because I felt called”. And that is exactly the right answer. In fact, “it’s God’s calling” that is the only right answer for the pastor of a church.



IT STANDS TO REASON
THAT IF WE FEEL LED BY
GOD TO DO THIS OR TO
DO THAT, THEN
SOMEHOW WE MUST
HAVE HEARD HIM SPEAK
THAT INTO OUR LIVES.

So my second question to him was, “So how did you discern that calling? How did you come to the conclusion that God was calling you specifically to this type ministry in this place?”

And then he proceeded to tell me about this and that, some of the things that we've talked about in Chapters 2-9: prophets (people who'd encouraged him to take this path, and he had felt that this was God's leading), during times of prayer, out of the blue, through the counsel of others, the different ways that God speaks.

Although strangely somehow, he didn't want to acknowledge the reality that God had spoken to him in many different ways, in addition to what he'd read in his Bible, in order to call him into this specific ministry.

It stands to reason that if we feel led by God to do this or to do that, then somehow we must have heard Him speak that into our lives.

And that's what this short book is all about.

HOW DO YOU DISCERN
GOD'S WILL AMONGST
ALL THE NOISE AND
DISTRACTIONS OF LIFE?

Going into God's Word and learning from Him how it is that He chooses to communicate with us.

What if I Get it Wrong?

But learning to discern His calling; learning to put the pieces together, sometimes it's not easy. Along the way I've made mistakes, or at least it appears to me that I've made mistakes. I thought God was calling me to this or to that, so I headed down that path and it didn't quite work out the way that I thought it should have worked out.

And when it comes to the big decisions of life, that's a pretty scary prospect. What if we think we're hearing from God say in choosing a wife or a husband, or in choosing a particular career or a ministry, or in heading overseas to some distant foreign land to become a missionary – and in fact we haven't heard from Him at all?

You get the point. That's a pretty scary prospect don't you think?

I mean, I do believe that sometimes, oftentimes God's leading takes us right into a wilderness experience as He did with His Son (Mark 1:12). So there we are expecting instant success, while God has a plan to teach us and refine us in the

wilderness for a while. And that's okay. I'm not bothered by that, as surprised as we sometimes are by it, it doesn't bother me. Because even the wilderness, when it's God's sovereign choice for our lives, is a good thing.

But the most important thing for me in hearing God speak, is that if I'm going to head off in this direction or in that direction, then I want the direction that I head off in to be the one that God has chosen and ordained and prepared for me, no matter what that direction holds. That's all. Whatever way it is, I just want to make sure I'm heading God's way.

How do you discern God's will amongst all the noise and distractions of life? A prophecy, a dream, a passage in the Bible that leaps out at you, are they from God? Are they leading us in a particular direction, or are we just imagining it?

That's the bottom line, isn't it?

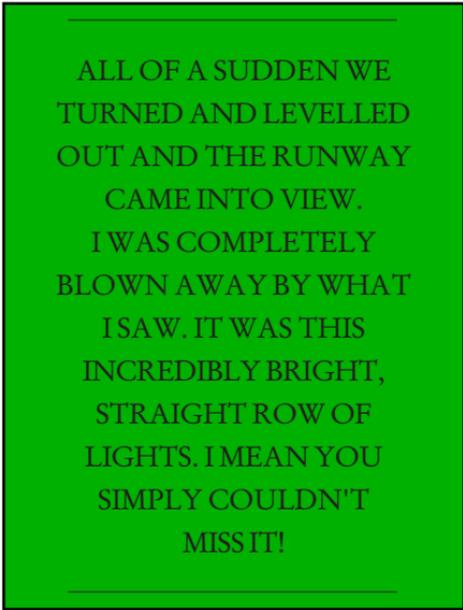
A Straight Line

Before the days of global terrorism, as a frequent

flyer I was often invited up into the cockpit of commercial jets to sit in the jump seat during a take off or a landing. They were the good old days!

One time, we were returning during the night to Sydney on a flight from Wellington, New Zealand. I was in the cockpit of a Boeing 767 which actually gives you a fantastic view out of the front wind screen – better than just about any other commercial plane at the time. And flying into Sydney, well it's a pretty big city. There were so many lights down below and I was sitting in the jump seat wondering how the pilot was going to pick out the runway amidst this mass of lights.

All of a sudden we turned and levelled out and the runway came into view. I was



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completely blown away by what I saw. It was this incredibly bright, straight row of lights. I mean you simply couldn't miss it! All those lights in a row were clear and unmistakable and they showed the pilot in which direction to fly and how to land once they went off their instruments into visual mode.

And I learned the same thing when I was training to be an officer in the Australian Army. One of the things that they taught us was that out in the bush (or the forest) patterns are random (a bit like the lights of Sydney below the 767). And when a soldier camouflages himself he has to replicate the colours and the randomness on his face and clothing in order to blend in.

The moment there's a block of one colour, or the moment there's something out there that's in a straight line, it will leap out from the random background and be visible to the enemy. And as we practiced this, it was amazing how absolutely true it was. I mean it makes sense when you read about it – but it absolutely smacks you in the face when you see it.

Looking for Ducks in a Row

And for me it's the same in discerning God's will. He speaks to us in different ways at different times – through His Word, by a prophecy, a sign, a prompting while we're praying. And learning to hear the voice of God; to discern when God is speaking; to understand what He's saying to us is a process, as it is in any relationship. I mean learning to communicate between husband and wife is a life long process isn't it?

So when I'm feeling the Lord my God leading me down a particular path, inevitably what happens is that as I sit back and look at things and think about things, a few of those start to line up – just like those lights on the runway.

A Scripture verse that He sets on my heart and just won't go away; a word, a prophecy from someone who has no idea what I'm thinking or dreaming; some other event; that door over there that closed unexpectedly (even painfully) but over here this other door opened to my surprise ...

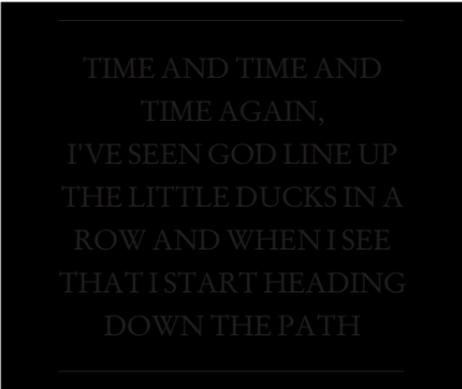
And all of a sudden, it's just like those lights lining up on the runway. They end up in a bit of a straight line, like little ducks all in a row, pointing in a certain direction. Now to be sure, sometimes we can't see them all until we start heading down the path. In fact mostly in my experience, that's been the case.

SO WHEN I'M FEELING
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RUNWAY.

First we have to step out in faith – often letting go of the past first – before God reveals what comes next. That's why it's called *stepping out in faith*. And as we walk down the path, these little markers appear – as God confirms that we're on the right track and encourages us to keep going ... building our faith in Him each and every step of the way.

Now again, this isn't something that I dreamed up. When I was a young Christian attending Bible college, one of our lecturers Malcolm White shared this story with us. He was – and still is – a wise saint with many more years of experience than me, in following hard after God.

I have never forgotten his “little ducks in a row” story, which he shared with us in response to a question from one of my fellow students – a question that went something like this:



TIME AND TIME AND
TIME AGAIN,
I'VE SEEN GOD LINE UP
THE LITTLE DUCKS IN A
ROW AND WHEN I SEE
THAT I START HEADING
DOWN THE PATH

How can I hear God speak to me? How do I know when He's leading me in a particular direction?

Does that sound vaguely familiar?

A Faithful God

Time and time and time again, I've seen God line up the little ducks in a row and when I see that I start heading down the path prayerfully, eyes open, asking God to open doors if it's His will and close doors if it's not.

Sometimes there's opposition and that's where the faith came in. Sometimes it's seemed as though I've headed down a path only to run into a dead end. Was it God's will to put me there, or did I perhaps head off in my own direction for a while straying off the path that God had prepared? Sometimes it was one, sometimes it was the other and sometimes ... well, I'm still not quite sure to tell you the truth.

But above all I always remember this, *my God is faithful.*

He knows my heart. He won't lead me down a path that He doesn't want me to follow. When I make mistakes, He forgives me and leads me through – even compensating many a time for my error. It's just how He is.

And whilst I've groaned at the occasional dead end along the way, as I look back over the last decade and half of walking with Jesus, I can see how He's guided me to where He wants me to be.

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

My friend, I pray that this book has been a blessing to you. Given that you have read this far, I know that you must be someone who hungers to hear the voice of God – to hear God speak to you.

And my prayer for you is that as we've opened the Word of God, you have discovered how it is

LISTEN!
I AM STANDING AT THE
DOOR, KNOCKING;
IF YOU HEAR MY VOICE
AND OPEN THE DOOR,
I WILL COME IN TO YOU
AND EAT WITH YOU,
AND YOU WITH ME.

that God speaks – not just in your mind with some newfound knowledge, not just in your heart with a newfound desire (as important as those are) but in your experience; in your



life – in your Bible reading and prayer time and amidst the cut and thrust of day to day life.

I wanted to finish off this short book on an important note. On something that Jesus had to say to His church about hearing His voice – that Scripture that appears right up at the front of this book:

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

(Revelation 3:20)

It is a beautiful picture this picture of Jesus knocking at the door – remember this is written to God's church in Laodicea – to believers, to people like you and me. What God humbles Himself to come and knock at our door, to speak to us so that we can hear, to come in and fellowship with us? What God, but the One who sent His Son to die on a cross for you and me?!

And yet as beautiful as this picture is, it is a solemn one.



For it is a picture of God speaking directly to His people who have strayed away from Him. Let's read the whole passage together so that we can put this one beautiful verse into context – because it is the context of what Jesus is saying to the church in Laodicea, that I believe He wants you and me to hear:

And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation: "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. I reprove

and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent.

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” (Revelation 3:14–22)

Here the Lord was speaking to a people who had become comfortable in their faith and in their wealth. A people who hadn't rejected God per se, but who had grown lukewarm in their relationship with Him, not realising their spiritual poverty. Not

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LET ME CALL
THIS WHAT IT IS - SIN.

realising that they were in fact, *wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.*

And His call to them, as I believe it is to you and me today, is to trade in their (our) worldliness, their (our) comfort which has made them (us) lukewarm towards God, trade it in and buy instead a heavenly wealth that will make them (us) rich beyond all measure.

How do we do that? *Be earnest, therefore, and repent.*

And it is in this context that He comes to us and says:

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.

(Revelation 3:20)

The voice of God calls us to Him. The voice of God calls us to a turning point – to turn away from our worldly desires and comforts and compromises and ... let me call this what it is – sin. Back to Him.

It is for this reason that He stands and knocks at my door today, as He does at yours.

And my prayer ... my prayer is that we each one of us would open our door and invite Him in afresh and anew today, to fellowship with Him.

MANY HAVE ACCEPTED
JESUS AS THEIR SAVIOUR.
FAR FEWER HAVE
ACCEPTED HIM AS THEIR
LORD, ABOVE ALL
OTHER THINGS IN THEIR
LIVES.

For that is the purpose of hearing His voice.

Yes, His voice is wondrous. Yes, knowing Him and hearing Him is a greater gift than any that we might receive, other than salvation itself. But immersed as we are in a society that has a consumer mentality, the easiest error of all for us to fall into is to imagine somehow that God is here to serve us. To make us feel good. To help us get our own way – so that we can continue on in our lukewarm, comfortable Christianity.



Nothing ... nothing can be further from the truth.

Many have accepted Jesus as their Saviour. Far fewer have accepted Him as their Lord, above all other things in their lives. May you and I this day hear His voice calling us into a deep place of earnest repentance. May you and I from this day forward, walk in the counsel of the Holy Spirit, in holiness, in obedience – to do His will, whatever that may cost us.

For it cost Him His life.

Dear God, we come to You today to thank You for your Son. To thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit to be our Comforter and Counsellor. And for teaching us through Your Word how it is that we can hear You speak to us. Thank You for coming to knock at our door. Forgive us as we have grown comfortable and lukewarm in our faith. We have heard You knocking and today we open the door and invite You in. We turn away from our sin and ask for Your forgiveness. And



we pray that as we walk with You in close fellowship day by day, we will indeed hear Your voice. Speak to us – yes to guide us and comfort us. But speak to us too Lord, that we may grow in love and obedience – that with every breath that we take, our lives would bear fruit that brings You much glory. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

May you be truly blessed as you draw ever nearer to your Lord and Saviour Jesus the Christ, as you hear Him speak to you and as you lay down your life in obedience to Him, for His glory.

Your friend in Jesus,

Berni Dymet

About the Author

Berni Dymet is a passionate Christian communicator with a heart for sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ right into the middle of the issues of life.



As a man who's own life has been radically and completely turned around by God, he believes that God's Word has the power to transform each one of us when the Spirit of God brings it to life deep in our hearts.

Millions of people around the globe tune into Berni's radio programs each week through over 1,000 radio stations in over 120 countries around the world.

People like this man from Rwanda:

I cannot imagine how many people I killed in name of avenging for my family that was murdered in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, which led me to 15 years behind the bars. When I came out of prison ... I continued



to hate and always wanting to avenge for my family, until recently when I started to listen to your “A Different Perspective” teaching on Radio Salus ... I can now tell you that I have changed, I’m a new man, although God still have to do a lot of work in my life ...Christianityworks program have been God’s tool for this transformations in my life. Christianityworks program team, you are doing an amazing work! Thank you!

But Berni’s passion, his enthusiasm and his insights into the day to day realities of life are simply tools in God’s hands. The real “change agent” is God Himself.

And to Him - and Him alone - be all the glory!

DO YOU YEARN TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE? THEN THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU!

Question – is God still speaking to us today? And if so – how can we hear Him speak? How can we know His will for our lives?

These are questions that many, many people are asking. So many people hunger after God. They hunger not just to hear *about* Him; not just to read *about* Him ... but to *know* Him for themselves.

So if you want to experience Him and hear His voice for yourself, then this book is definitely for you.

Join Berni Dymet as he takes us into God's Word to discover what God has to say about how He speaks to us and how we can hear His voice for ourselves.

How Can I Hear God Speak to Me? is a book based on God's Word – rich, full of Biblical insight – and yet easy to read.

Once you start, you just won't be able to put it down.

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