

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Larry Omasta's Message of January 25, 2009
"Has God Spoken to You Lately?"**

[God desires to have a close and personal relationship with us. But this relationship involves more than us talking to God through prayer. It also involves being in tune with God so we can hear him speak to us through his thoughts that enter our consciousness.]

[Topics: Relationships; Communication, God Speaking to Us, God's Will; Spiritual Truths]

Excerpt: Today we're going to take a look at how we communicate with one another and with God. Now, good communication isn't as easy to accomplish as we first might think, because it involves three key elements, not just one. Most of us think that to be a good communicator, you must be good at "talking." Now talking is one of those elements, but there are two others even more important. The second one is "listening" and the last one is "understanding."

Understanding what we have just told each other is so important for us to be able to truly communicate with one another. Let me give you an example. A traveling salesman stopped at a local restaurant for breakfast and lots of coffee. When the server delivered the coffee, the friendly salesman attempted to make a little conversation.

"Looks like rain," he said. "I don't make the coffee," the server responded defensively, "I just serve it." [Now they were talking but there was little understanding.]

Now good communication with understanding always involves a two-way conversation. For example, when I talk to my wife Judith, I may have more to say than she does at certain times. At other times, her thoughts and feelings will dominate our conversation. And when we get into a lively conversation, both of us are talking and sharing ideas about 50-50. I think most of us would agree that this is fairly typical of what happens when we communicate effectively with one another. There's talking and listening and understanding.

And it's the same with us in our relationship with God. When we want to have a meaningful discussion with God, we simply can't do all the talking to him even though prayer is good. We need to have a two-way conversation with Him. But talking with God is a little different than talking to a spouse, a friend or a family member. In talking with God, we need to take some time and be silent and listen to what God has to say to us. We must be in tune with God so we can hear him speak to us in various ways, as we shall see in a few moments.

Now, I realize that this whole concept about hearing God speak to us may seem, at first, very strange or even unnerving. But, that's our human nature at work. Comedienne Lily Tomlin, put it very succinctly when she asked, "Why is it when we speak to God, we are said to be praying? But when God speaks to us, we are said to be schizophrenic?"

However, Scripture shows us that God desires to have a two-way conversation with us. That was God's plan from the beginning. God spoke to Adam & Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah,

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the list goes on. There are many Scriptures in the OT, where God pleads with Israel to listen to him and heed his message. For example, God says in **Psalm 81:8, "Hear, O my people, and I will warn you – if you would but listen to me, O Israel!** But unfortunately, they didn't.

And today is no different. God says to us, "Please listen to me. Please hear my voice and consider my thoughts." And so in response, we should be asking God, "Lord have you been trying to tell me something that I need to hear?" Are you exhorting me to listen to you?"

Jesus said something very profound to us as NT Christians in a parable recorded in **John 10:3-4. The sheep listen to his (the Good Shepherd's) voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4) When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.**

As Christians – followers of Jesus –we're told that Jesus will speak to us and that we will listen to him because we will know or recognize his voice. That's God's promise to us. The reason God does this is because He has a desire to have an intimate relationship with each of us. And He can't have that relationship unless there's a two-way conversation going on.

And did you also catch that our Great Shepherd calls us by name? Each one of us is intimately known by God. The apostle Paul writes about this intimate relationship in **1 Cor. 1:4-5,9. I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5) For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge, 9) God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.**

The Greek word translated "fellowship" is *koinonia*, which also means sharing, partnership and communion. Now Webster's International Dictionary defines "communion" as, "An intimate relationship with deep understanding: an act of sharing one's thoughts and emotions with another."

Koinonia describes God's desire to have a close and personal relationship with us. But before we get into the dynamics of our relationship with God, let's talk about our relationship with other people.

So how do we get to know others on a personal level? The first thing we do is spend time with them. Before we got married, we spent a lot of time with our future spouse, isn't that right? And speaking from a male perspective, if we didn't, our future wives wouldn't have married us. And likewise, if you are teen or a single person – how do you develop a close friendship with someone? You spend time with them.

And secondly, I think we all realize that we'll never get to know the other person if, all we do, is talk non-stop about ourselves, our accomplishments and our problems and NEVER listen to what the other person has to say about their thoughts and feelings, their goals and desires. Communication isn't just a monologue.

And it's the same with us in our relationship with God. Now some of you are thinking, "Well I've never heard God speak to me." And that may be true. But, because we can't hear God speak to us, we assume a couple of things, which are incorrect: 1) He's not trying to communicate with me. 2) He's far off in some remote part of the heaven and isn't interested

in me. 3) He's so busy dealing with "the righteous" that he doesn't know much about me, if anything at all. But these assumptions are totally false.

Now there are a couple of REAL reasons why we can't hear God speak to us: 1) We're too busy most of the time to listen. 2) We're not familiar with his voice. 3) We're too fixated on our own thoughts and desires to hear his voice trying to cut through the clutter. In other words, too often we are tone deaf to God. 4) When we do hear God, we don't realize that it's He who is speaking to us. And therefore, we listen half-heartedly or ignore Him. I'm guilty of that many times.

In talking with Fred Steven's about this message a few weeks ago, he made an interesting comment to me. He said how often do we talk in a calm manner to our children especially our teenagers about their conduct or behavior. And many times we don't seem to get through to them. And then he said, "So we ask them. 'Do we have to shout to get your attention?'" Sometimes I wonder if that thought hasn't crossed God's mind. Does he have to shout to get our attention?

In the Biblical text, God spoke directly to humanity. In our Thursday morning Bible study we've been going through the book of Genesis. And we've been amazed at how many times God has communicated with his creation. For example, God walked and talked with Adam and Eve – even after they had sinned and showed no remorse. He didn't abandon them.

God continued to interact with humanity. God talked with Cain and Abel. In fact, God warned Cain not to let his evil thoughts take hold of him and cause him to sin. We know that God spoke with Noah. Later, he visited Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in some type of visible form and spoke directly to them.

Remember the story of how Abraham reasoned with God? And at the end of the discussion God said he wouldn't destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if there were 10 righteous people living there. Wow, that was a good example of a two-way conversation between God and humanity.

God also spoke to Moses in a loud voice from a burning bush and from the clouds on Mt. Sinai. God also spoke to his servants by dreams. He revealed to Daniel the fate of the world's ruling empires in a series of dreams.

We know that God spoke to the nation of Israel and Judah through the prophets, who heard his words in dreams and visions. We know that God spoke to the prophet Elijah, on Mount Horeb, when he was fleeing for his life. Let's read about it in **1 Kings 19:11-13** and see in what manner God spoke to Elijah as he was deep inside a cave.

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12) After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper (a still small still voice - NKJV). 13) When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" We could say that this is how God speaks to us most of the time – in a "gentle whisper."

And we were reminded by Pastor Glen's sermons during the month of December, that God spoke to Mary and then Joseph through the archangel Gabriel. And then God spoke to the shepherds about the birth of Jesus through his angels. We also know that the resurrected Jesus spoke to directly to Saul on the road to Damascus and changed his life forever. And later in Paul's life we read that the Holy Spirit spoke aloud to Paul forbidding him to go to Asia Minor in Acts 16.

Now we might say, that's all well and good, but how does God speak to us today? **The first way** is through his written Word, especially the NT. As we study the verses and ponder how we can apply them in our daily lives, we will find that God will bring these various Scriptures to mind as we face the many situations in our life wondering what to do. As we drink deeply God's Word, we find He will direct us, challenge us, warn us, as well as comfort and assure us.

A second way God speaks to us today is through other people. How many times have you been struggling with something in your life, not knowing what to do and someone will come up to you and give you the answer you've been searching for or confirm one of your plan of action? And then everything just clicks into place for you. I know that's happened to me many times. And in 9 times out of 10, we hadn't even told the person that we've been struggling with that particular problem.

The third way and perhaps the most important way and the most consistent way God speaks to us – is through his thoughts that enter our consciousness. God lives and abides in us because of the coming of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus said that he will live in us through the Holy Spirit. So it's natural that we are prompted and guided in our minds by God.

Paul writes this interesting comment to the members at Corinth. **1 Cor. 2:10-13, The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11) For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12) We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13) This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.**

Paul is saying that when we are in tune with the Holy Spirit, which every Christian has received, we will hear God's thoughts – we will hear God's spiritual words speak to us. Paul used himself and others as examples of this to the Corinthians.

Paul explained this another way when he wrote in **Romans 8:5, ...those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.** When we are being guided by the Holy Spirit, we will do and say what pleases God.

So, how do we learn to recognize and listen to the voice of God? Let me give you some personal examples that will hopefully you will be able to relate to. Probably the first time in my life that I was aware of God speaking to me was about 6 weeks after I started studying my Bible and the old Bible Correspondence Course that our denomination sent out. God didn't speak to me in an audible voice, but rather in terms of strong thoughts.

God was telling me that that I needed to change my life style and follow him, that I was indeed a sinner and needed a Savior to take away my sins against him. Now, the thought

that I was “a sinner” or was in total rebellion against God had never crossed my mind before. I’m sure this sounds very familiar to many of you, because you had similar experiences when God was first calling you.

So, God also impressed upon me that I needed to let Jesus Christ rule my life instead of me ruling it. Now I really wrestled with that last thought. I wasn’t so sure that I wanted to give up being in charge of my own life. That was a struggle for me. I wrestled with those thoughts for about 2 weeks before I swallowed my pride to the point that I realized that my life wasn’t so hot with me in charge. (Teens today would use the word “cool” instead of “hot”).

Later after studying **John 16**, I understood that it was the Holy Spirit who was convicting me. Jesus said, **When he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment (16:8)**. And so I listened to those thoughts from the Holy Spirit and was baptized when I was 23.

Normally we don’t hear an audible voice from God but we clearly hear God’s thoughts that come into our minds. Sometimes the thoughts come with such force and strength that it seems like we’ve actually heard a voice.

Now, there’s always the question, we should have – “How do I know it’s God speaking to me?” How do I know it wasn’t just a random thought from our subconscious surfacing? Or how do I know that the thought didn’t come from the Devil whispering in our ear? Did that thought actually come from God? We need to know.

Well, the answer is quite simple, yet profound. **We know it’s God speaking to us** because He will never give any of us a thought or ask us to engage in any activity that would contradict his written Word or violate any principle of Scripture. And that’s why studying the Scriptures should be so important to us.

Jesus told his disciples that the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, **will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:26)**. Now we know that Jesus didn’t talk directly to us. We’re approximately 2000 years removed from the time of Christ. But Jesus has spoken to us indirectly through his words preserved in the four gospels. And so, if we haven’t studied Jesus words in the Gospels, it’s hard for the Holy Spirit to bring to our minds the words of Jesus, isn’t it?

As I said, we know for a fact that God can’t contradict his written Word. So, for example God would never tell us to harm anyone, or ridicule or spread gossip about others. It’s contrary to Scripture. God would never tell us to destroy or bomb, or set fire to a building or a home. God would never tell us to injure or kill someone.

Now some may point to OT Scriptures where God commanded Israel to kill and destroy various tribes of Canaanites when they entered the Promised Land under Joshua. But we must realize that this was not a universal command given by God for all time as to how to treat one’s enemies.

The land of Canaan was conquered over 3000 years ago. The NC has replaced the OC almost 2000 years ago. Jesus taught us a different set of values we are to live by under the NC. In **Luke 6: 27-28**, Jesus said, **"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28) bless those who curse you, pray for those who**

mistreat (persecute) you. The Greek word translated “mistreat” can also mean revile, slander or treat abusively. Matthew’s version uses the stronger word – “persecute.”

Paul also elaborates on Jesus’ teaching for us under the NC. He wrote in **Romans 12:17,21, Do not repay anyone evil for evil. 21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** That is how the Holy Spirit will prompt us.

2) Now, we also know that it’s God speaking to us because he will never tell us to do anything that gratifies our illicit fleshly desires. Rather God encourages us to do the right thing in our own lives and to take actions that would benefit others.

3) We know it’s God speaking to us because he often times calls on us to take acts of courage, to step out of our comfort zone. In areas where we would naturally be timid, God calls for us to bold – such as helping someone, or giving words of encouragement or even sharing with others what God has done for us in our life.

4) We know it’s God speaking to us because our mind is flooded with thoughts of loving others, bearing burdens, resisting temptations that are harmful to us. But when our human nature or Satan talks to us, we have thoughts of selfishness, of greed, or how to take advantage of someone. And when our human nature talks to us, we have thoughts about protecting #1 or pleasing #1 above all others.

We know it’s God speaking to us because he works for the good of all concerned not just us. In fact, he may ask us to make a sacrifice for others, to offer the place of honor to others, to consider or esteem others better than ourselves (**Phil. 2:3**).

Now, let’s ask a few more questions. What can we do to hear God or to hear God more clearly? First of all – if we’re going to listen to God, we must come to Him expectantly. We must anticipate His speaking to us. In short, we must believe or have faith that God wants to talk to us, because He does!

2) If we’re going to listen to God, we must be quiet. How can God speak to us if we don’t take time to listen? Being quiet is essential to listening. If we are too busy to listen, we won’t hear God. It takes time and quietness to hear God speaking to us. God tells us in **Psalms 46:10, Be still and know that I am God.**

Today, it’s much more difficult to go to a secluded spot in our mega-cities like they did in Biblical days. But, we can find quiet times sitting in our living sofa late at night or at the kitchen table early in the morning. The place isn’t important. The decibel level is. The voice or thoughts of God are so easily buried under an avalanche of clamor and competing sounds.

Society today, which I believe is inspired by the Devil, is totally against us having any time for quietness and reflection. Think about it. With the advent of portable video games, i-pods and cell phones, internet video and audio downloads, U-tube videos, TV, game stations, there doesn’t seem to be a waking moment when anyone under 40 especially our teens have a quiet moment to reflect and a even a moment of silence to hear God speak to them.

In Richard Foster’s book, *Celebration of Discipline*, he writes: “In contemporary society our Adversary majors in three things: noise, hurry and crowds. If he can keep us engaged in ‘muchness’ and ‘manyness’ he will rest satisfied.” Psychiatrist Carl Jung once remarked,

“Hurry is not of the Devil, it is the Devil.” All of us need to slow down, find a quiet place, so we can be in-tune with God.

3) If we’re going to listen to God, we need to be sensitive to what God is saying. Psychologists tell us that there are two kinds of listeners – a passive listener and an aggressive (involved) listener. Now a passive listener is one who tunes out what is being said by the other person. At best they listen half –heartedly but couldn’t give you any specifics about what the other person has been saying.

Now an involved listener intently listens to what is being said. That person is sensitive and responds to what they are hearing. When we are an involved and obedient listener to what God is telling us through the Holy Spirit, our lives become transformed.

4) If we’re going to listen to God, we must be willing to hear God correct us as well as comfort us. If we come to God looking only for comfort and blessings – in other words smooth things, then we will NOT always hear what God has to say to us.

Another example of not hearing God’s speak to us is in our prayer life. Too often when we pray about a problem we’re facing, we tell God our solution and then ask him to make it happen. I think we understand what’s wrong with this type of prayer. Right? We’re telling God, the Creator of the universe how to fix things, instead of asking for his will to be done?

And so when God gives us his answer to our problem, we often don’t hear it because it’s not the solution we’re looking for. And then we become distraught and frustrated because we think God hasn’t answered our prayer – when he has. But, you see, we weren’t in tune with God so we missed what he said to us.

5) If we’re listening to God, then we also need to understand that He is patient with us. He knows we struggle with certain things and that we’re prone to give in to certain weaknesses or sins. And so even when we hear God prompt us to do certain things or he tells us not do other things in our life, he knows that many times we don’t have the strength to listen to him and do what he says we need to do. And when we don’t respond to what God is prompting us to do, he will repeat it again at a later time. That’s when we need to cry out to God to give us the strength and the conviction to accomplish what he has urged us to do.

Now, what can we do to better be in tune with God? God can definitely talk to us if we set aside some time to meditate and just think about him and his goodness. It’s a wonderful habit to develop. But that might give you the wrong impression that only doing meditation could God speak to you. In my experience the more we are in tune to God, the more we will hear him speak to us. It can happen any time of the day, in any place. And most of the time it’s when we least expect it.

So, what are the benefits of being in tune with God? First of all, we begin to see things from a different perspective. And that includes our problems and trials. It includes our relationship with others, including those we consider pain in our lives.

Secondly, being in tune with God, we, have the enduring power to engage adversaries, confront tragedy, and surmount any problem that lies in our path. 3) Being in tune with God, we can no longer think of Him as distant or detached from us. Through the Holy Spirit, God lives intimately with each of us. He’s imbedded in the deepest recesses of our lives.

4) And being in tune with God, we know that he desires an intimate relationship with each and every one of us so that he can pour his love and his life into us. Through that relationship God will continue to encourage us, change us from being self-centered, and transform us more and more into the likeness of his Son.

I'd like to conclude today's message using an analogy. Probably most of us remember seeing one of the older Verizon Telephone Network commercial on television where their tech guy who has dark hair and dark rimmed eye- glasses, walks around talking into a cell phone and says "Can you hear me now?" "Can you hear me now?"

The analogy I want to leave with you is this: picture God asking all of us, "Can you hear me now?" He's asking each and every one of us, "Can you hear my love for you? Can you hear my wisdom for you? Can you hear my discipline for you? Can you hear all the good things I have in store for you? Can you hear my strength I give you to say no to temptations? Can you hear the courage I give you to go through a trial? Can you hear my compassion that I want you to have for others? Can you hear my desire for you to share my love and my life with others who don't know me yet? These are the things that God is talking to us about.

May we all respond, "Yes, Lord I can hear you. Please give me your strength to carry our you will for me."

Key Scripture: John 10: 3-4, "The sheep listen to his (the Good Shepherd's) voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4) When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."

General Group Question: How does God communicate with us?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. What are the three elements of effective communication? What is the end result of effective communication?
2. What does it mean to you that God has called us, "**into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ**"?
3. What are some of the REAL reasons why we can't hear God speak to us?
4. How can we tell if it's God who is really speaking to us with his thoughts?
5. Why is it important for us to know what Jesus taught as recorded in the four Gospels?
6. What is the importance of finding quiet time to be in tune with God?
7. Why is being an involved listener so beneficial for us as we relate to others and especially to God?
8. How can you personally do to be more in tune with God?