

HOW GOD TALKS TO YOU
Learning to Hear God's Voice - Part 2 of 4
Job 33:14
Rick Warren

"God does speak -- sometimes one way and sometimes another -- even though people may not understand it." Job 33:14 (NCV)

HOW DOES GOD TALK TO US?

1. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH _____

"The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and make us realize what is wrong in our lives. . . It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point. . ." 2 Tim. 3:16 (LB)

2. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH _____

"When we preached to you, you didn't think of the words as being just our own, but you accepted it as the very Word of God -- which, of course, it was -- and it changed your lives. . ." 1 Thess. 2:13 (LB)

"We do not speak in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, as we explain spiritual truths. . ." 1 Cor. 2:13 (GN)

3. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH _____

"The Holy Spirit. . . will be your teacher and will bring to your mind all I have said to you." John 14:26 (Ph)

"God speaks again and again, in dreams and visions at night when deep sleep falls. . . as people lie on their beds. He opens their ears in times like that, and gives them wisdom and instruction." Job 33:14 (GN)

Warning: Always _____ impressions!

4. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH _____

"Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways." Pr. 20:30 (GN)

"I used to wander off until you punished me; now I closely follow all you say. . . The punishment you gave me was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me to pay attention to your laws." Ps. 119:67, 71-72 (LB)

Why Is It Important To Hear God's Voice?

1. IT ASSURES ME THAT I'M IN GOD'S FAMILY

"Jesus said. . . I know those who are mine and they hear my voice." John 10:14, 16 (Ph)

2. IT PROTECTS ME FROM MISTAKES

"God speaks. . . causing them to change their minds, and keeping them from pride. . . and from falling into some trap." Job 33:17-18 (LB)

3. IT IS THE SECRET OF A PRODUCTIVE LIFE

"The person who shares my life and whose life I share will be fruitful." John 15:5

*"Today, if you hear God's voice speaking to you, do not harden your heart against him."
Heb 3:15*

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Today, we're going to continue in the series on Learning to Hear God's Voice. We're going to look specifically at how God talks to you. When we talk about people listening to God and God talking to people, many people think this is something very mystical, like it's something unusual or extraordinary that God talks to people. But the fact is, He does it all the time. A number of years ago there was a *Time* magazine that came out with a headline that said, "God is dead". The next day the reporters lined up at Billy Graham's home and said, "Is God dead, Dr. Graham?" He said "Are you kidding? I just talked to Him." Any of us can talk to God and God wants to talk to you. The Bible says that God wired you up in order to talk to you, that He created you with the ability to tune into Him, to hear Him, to listen to Him, and to talk back to Him. It's nothing unusual. All of us can do it.

Job 33:14 *"God does speak, sometimes one way and sometimes another, even though people may not understand it."* He's saying the problem is not that God isn't talking. The problem is our perception. Sometimes we're just not tuned in. God wants to communicate with you because you can't have a relationship without communication. God wants to have a relationship with you. He wants to talk to you. He's created you with that capacity to hear His voice.

HOW DOES GOD TALK TO US?

God is not limited to any single way. There are many, many ways. That's why this series is talking about the many different ways that God talks to us. The Bible has some really spectacular ways. I would have been shocked by some of them. God spoke once through a burning bush. God spoke one time through a cloud. He often spoke through angels. One time He spoke through a pillar of fire. Another He even spoke to Balaam through a donkey.

Today we're going to identify the four most common ways that God speaks to us. Honestly, more effective than me explaining it to you is for you to hear a story that illustrates all four of these. But first let me identify the ways.

1. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH THE BIBLE. This is the number one way God speaks.

2 Timothy 3:16 *"The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point."* Notice it says God's way of talking to us first is through His Bible. The Bible is not just a good collection of wonderful thoughts and ideas of men, just a nice inspired collection. Circle *"by inspiration"*. The word literally means in Greek, "God breathed." That means that the Bible is absolutely reliable. There is no other book in the world that is reliable like this book. It can be counted on. It will guide you. It will correct you. It will comfort you. It will help you. But if you don't ever get in it, how can God talk to you? This is why it's so important to have a daily quiet time where you set down for 5, 10, 15, 20 minutes -- it doesn't matter the amount of time -- and you talk to God in prayer and you let God talk to you through

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His word. If you're not doing that on a daily basis, you're missing the number one way God wants to talk to you.

Someone says, "God never talks to me." Are you in the Bible every day? This is how He wants to speak to you. If you're not reading the Bible, your phone is off the hook. He's getting the busy signal and He can't get through to you.

If I told you that tomorrow the President of the United States wanted to meet with you at 4 a.m. in the courthouse in Santa Ana, I don't care what you think of the President, you'd get up and you'd go. When somebody that important wants to meet with you, you go. Even more important, God wants to meet with you tomorrow and you don't even have to go to Santa Ana. You can do it in your own back yard, sitting at your coffee table with a cup of coffee, in a big Lazy-Z-Boy chair with your P.J.s on. He is waiting. The creator of the universe wants to have a conversation with you all the time, on a regular basis, You need to get into God's word because this is the number one way that God speaks to us. If the only time you're in it is every other week or so, you're going to miss a whole lot.

I admit that the Bible can be an intimidating book. In the first place, how many other books do you know that are bound in leather? I've met some non believers that don't even want to touch it! How many other books that you know has a number before each sentence? That's kind of strange. And if you use an old translation you have the thee's and thou's and lots of words you don't understand and some strange names and strange places and foreign words and customs that don't make sense. The Bible can be intimidating. But this book is the manual for life. It's the owner's manual.

A couple months ago I bought a new car. When I did, they gave me in the glove compartment, an owner's manual. That is the designer's original intent for the car. If I read that owners's manual and follow what it says, my car is going to last a whole lot longer. It teaches me how to keep from putting my car under stress.

That's what the Bible does. Why many of you are under stress is because you don't know what's in here and you're not following what it says to do. So you're stressed out. This is the owner's manual for life. When in doubt, consult the manual. God speaks through His word.

How do I get started in this book? Do I start at Genesis and just start reading through it? I wouldn't suggest that. Not if you're just getting started in the Bible. In the first place, you need to get a new translation. There are many of them. The Bible was originally written in Greek and Hebrew. I'd suggest you get the New International Version or The Living Bible. There are a number of good ones. Then you might want to get a study Bible that will give you some guides and aids. My favorite is the Life Application Bible. It helps explain some of those customs and things you don't understand.

Then you need to set a regular time in the word. Then get involved in how to study the Bible. I wrote a book a number of years ago, [Dynamic Bible Study](#). It was twelve ways to study the Bible. The book is now in seven languages. It will give you step by step how to get into the Bible. There are a lot of tools you can get and use to get yourself going.

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I would start in the New Testament. If you've never read the Bible at all, I would start with the book of James. James will give you some practical stuff just to get you going in the Christian life. You need to get into God's word because that's the number one way He speaks to us.

2. GOD SPEAKS TO US THROUGH GIFTED TEACHERS.

Have you ever sat in a church service and felt like God was speaking directly to you, that nobody else in the audience mattered, that God was speaking directly to your heart? He was. At that very moment God was speaking through a gifted teacher to tell you what He wants to say to you. God often uses other people to share His word with us.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 "When we preached to you, you didn't think of the words as being just our own, but you accepted it as the very Word of God -- which, of course, it was -- and it changed your lives."

God speaks through teachers, preachers, pastors. And it changes our lives when we listen to them. Many years ago when I was a teenager I remember one church service I was sitting on the back row of a very small church next to my girlfriend and I was not interested at all in what the preacher was saying. I was very interested in who was sitting next to me. I don't remember a single thing that the pastor said in that service until he got to the end. At the very end of the message he said something like this, "What are you going to do with your life? Are you going to make it count or are you just going to waste it? You'll never be happy until you do with your life what God made you to do. And until you be with your life what God made you to be." Bam! That was right on the forehead to me! It got my attention and it was a turning point in my life. That one simple message. God spoke to me through a gifted teacher. If you had told me 25 years ago that I would be pastoring in a church, much less a big church, I'd said "You're crazy!" I had a promising career as a rock star! I had no intention of ever being a pastor! I often look back and think "What if I had missed that message? that turning point in my life?" That's why I hate to miss church. Even when I go on vacation, if we're going through a town and it's Sunday, I'll try to find some little church of some kind. I always wonder, "What if God had that pastor prepare that message directly for me and what if I miss it?" I don't ever want to miss God talking to me. I want to show up whenever I can.

The Bible says God gives us gifted pastors and teachers to communicate His word. I've had many people tell me "After today's message, I feel like you've been reading my mail." I'm not smart enough to think all this stuff up. I'm not that smart to come in here week after week, Sunday after Sunday, 52 weeks a year for now nearly 17 years and hit it on the head every week. I can't do it! But God is. So I pray. I say, "God, You already know in advance who You're bringing to church next Sunday. You know who's going to be there and You know what their needs are. Would You give me something to say to the people You're planning on bringing. Help me to have something to say on Sunday that's going to help them on Monday morning." And He does. He impresses in my mind certain ideas and truths and as I study God does speak to you.

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Am I saying God speaks through me? I have no doubt about it! I'm amazed by it and I don't deserve it. but I have no doubt about it. An even more amazing factor is if you're a believer, God speaks through you. Many times you don't even know it. How many times, if you could go back over your life, a friend has come to you for counsel or you've said something that was a real turning point thing in a person's life. You didn't think twice about it. It was just an idea that popped into your mind. Where do you think it came from? God was speaking through you. If you are a Christian, God often speaks through you and you don't even know it. It's not some big supernatural thing, it's just the way God wired you. He has an ability to get into your mind without you even thinking about it. He plants ideas. God speaks through gifted teachers.

2 Corinthians 2:13 *"We do not speak in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, as we explain spiritual truths."* When gifted teachers teach, they're actually talking the words of God, what God wants to say to us. The more teaching you hear the more God can talk to you. Obviously, the more teaching you hear the more God will have the opportunity to speak to you. That's why once a week is not enough. You need regular input of gifted teachers in your life more than just once a week.

What if you fast six days a week and then on the seventh day you pig out? You'd have a great case of indigestion. Some of you have spiritual indigestion. The only Bible you ever get is for 30 minutes on Sunday morning, the rest of the week you have no more teaching in your life. That's why you need to get into a small group Bible study. That's why maybe you need to come on Wednesday night to our mid week service where we're going, right now, verse by verse through the book of John and learning about the life of Christ. There are some good radio teachers that you can listen to. And you can listen to tapes. I'm not just a book worm, I'm a tape worm! I have about 6000 Bible teaching tapes and I rotate them in my car. I hardly ever get into my car without putting a tape on. I'm filling my mind, learning the word of God, on a regular basis.

A lot of Christians get into the car, turn on the radio and get all news. The problem with America is we know everything about the last 24 hours, we know nothing about our history and we know nothing about the future. We're in this generation that we think we have to know what's going on up to the minute. I know people who listen to the news 3,4,5 times a day. If you listened to CNN all day yesterday, how much does that matter today? Nothing. Anything that happens that is really significant you're going to hear about it more than simply right then. The problem we have today is we have many people who know everything about what happened in the last 24 hours and they know nothing about their past heritage or they know nothing about the future. You don't have to know everything that is going on in the world. But you do have to know the universal principles that God has laid down that will help you cope with tomorrow.

So you make a choice. Am I going to be at a Bible study or am I going to watch television? Am I going to listen to a tape or am I going to listen to the radio? What's going to last over the long haul? God speaks through gifted teachers.

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3. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH IMPRESSIONS

He puts ideas in our minds. When God puts an idea in your mind we call that inspiration. "I was inspired. I got a creative idea." Where do you think that creative idea came from? It came from the creator! God is the creator. When you are being creative you're being most like God. We're made in God's image. God's the creator, human beings have the ability to be creative. When God puts an idea in your mind we call it an inspiration. When the devil puts an idea in your mind we call that a temptation. So He's trying to speak to you.

John 14:26 *"The Holy Spirit will be your teacher and will bring to your mind [circle this] all that I have said to you."* "Bring to your mind" means He gives us impressions. He gives us ideas. He gives us hunches. He gives us these gut feelings. God often does this. Some of your most brilliant ideas weren't yours. They were God's. God was giving them to you. A brilliant business idea, a brilliant family idea, a brilliant relational idea, a brilliant financial idea. Where do you think you got some of those ideas? God, who loves you, who cares about you, who infinitely interested in all the details of your life. It didn't feel like God because it's so natural. You were made to receive ideas from God. A lot of the things you think up, you're just not that smart either. God gives you those ideas.

There's a lot of confusion about how we receive impressions from God. Next week we're going to spend an entire message on it. We're going to look at how to receive inspiration, how to receive impressions from God. Then I'm going to give you how to test impressions from God. How to evaluate them to figure out whether they're really from God or a bad taco last night and it's indigestion.

There are two extremes you need avoid when thinking about impressions: one is the rationalist, the other is the mystic.

The rationalist denies that God ever speaks to us through the mind. He says God only speaks through the Bible and never gives you any impressions.

The mystic thinks that every impression they get is from God. That's obviously wrong too.

I feel sorry for both of these extremes. The rationalist, who thinks "God never gives me an idea" misses out on God's counsel, God's comfort, God's care, God's concern, God's challenges and guidance in the ways of life. They miss it all. On the other hand, the mystic who thinks that every impression they get is from God tends to make a lot of stupid mistakes and they embarrass themselves. They say, "God told me to do this," and then they go bankrupt. What happened? You missed God. Both extremes are wrong.

You look on TV at some of these people getting all these weird ideas and you tend to be skeptical of this. You hear these people say, "There's somebody out there in the audience supposed to give me a million dollars." Sure, I've had that vision too, many times! Never let a religious nut keep you from experiencing the real thing.

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Any time you find something counterfeit, that is evidence that there is a real thing somewhere. Have you ever seen a counterfeit three dollar bill? No, because there's no such thing as a real three dollar bill. Wherever you find counterfeit that means there must be something genuine somewhere. Wherever you find false teachers that means there are true gifted teachers. Wherever you find false leaders, there are also genuine Christian spiritual leaders. Wherever you find false prophets, that means there are also real prophets. The existence of something phony, fake, counterfeit implies there must be something real. Satan does not counterfeit anything that doesn't exist. He's just trying to throw people off track.

Job 33:14 "God speaks again and again in dreams and in visions at night when the deep sleep falls v 18 as people lie on their beds. He opens their ears in times like that, and gives them wisdom and instruction." Notice it says God sometimes speaks in dreams and in visions. Why? Why would God speak to us when we're asleep? Because we're relaxed, not distracted, our defenses are lowered at that moment. God speaks through dreams and visions.

The best way to do this is to ask God a question right as you're going to sleep. There are many times I'll say, "God, what do You want me to do about this situation with" I'll ask that and then I'll go to sleep. I say, "God, if you want to tell me, fine. If you don't, that's OK." Many times I don't get any answer at all. But sometimes I do. It's up to God. Sometimes I'll say as I'm going to sleep, "God, what's the next step? What's the next step with my family? What's the next step with our church? What's the next step in my relationship with God, tell me what You want to do. I'm open. If you want to talk to me tonight in my sleep, go ahead." I have done this many times with messages. Hundreds of messages I've given to you. I'd been thinking and praying and studying all week and as I go to sleep I say, "God, You know what these people need. Would You put it together in my mind tonight?" I wake up the next morning and the outline's there. It just comes together.

Ask God a question and you give Him the opportunity. Sometimes He'll say something and many times He won't. Most of your dreams are not God speaking. Scientists tell us when we're dreaming our mind is simply reorganizing information. Just reorganizing all the facts and the sights and the sounds that you've got. You read something and watch a movie and talk to somebody and see something in the paper and hear something on the radio and when you go to sleep at night you dream you're the ax killer! That's not God speaking to you. Not everything that you dream is from God. A lot of times it's just things get mixed up and you get put into pictures or stories you've already heard. It's highly unreliable.

And Satan can speak to you, too. Satan can put ideas in your mind. Not every idea that comes in your mind is from God.

Warning: Always test an impression. Never make a decision on an impression alone. You need to test that impression. Next Sunday I'll give you the seven ways to test an impression. It always has to match what the Bible says. If you ever get an impression that is opposite to what God said in the Bible, I guarantee that it's not from God. God never contradicts what He's already said. He's not going to give you an impression contrary to what's in the Bible. I've had guys come to me and say, "I've prayed and I really feel God speaking to me that I'm supposed to leave my kids and go marry this 16 year old bimbo!" Hello? Who are you kidding? or "I know God wants me

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to be happy and He's said don't have sex with people you're not married to, but I really love this person. So I'm going to move in with them even though I'm not married. I know God's told me to do that." Are you kidding? God has said over and over, for your own protection, for your own benefit sex is for marriage only. It's real clear. About 90% of our problems in that area, the emotional scars, the venereal diseases, the broken hearts wouldn't be there if people would just obey what God says to do. When we say, "I know God wants me to be happy, but ..." you better check it out with the Bible. When you ignore the owner's manual -- If I don't put oil in my car every so many thousand miles, guess what? It's going to wear out. And it's going to die real quick. When you don't do what the Bible says you're not hurting God. This is for your benefit.

4. GOD SPEAKS THROUGH PAIN.

Are you acquainted with this way? We don't change when we see the light. We change when we feel the heat. None of us really like to change and so we fear what it might do to us. We fear change and we don't change until the pain becomes greater than the fear of change. Once the pain is greater than the fear, we change. God is so interested in speaking to you and so interested in having a personal relationship with you and loving you and you loving Him and being able to talk about everything, He will even resort to this in order to get your attention.

Proverbs 20:30 *"Sometimes it takes a painful experience to make us change our ways."* Everyone of you know this one by experience. Not all pain is God speaking to you. Not every little hurt, ache, and pain that you have is God. But some of it is. And God often has to use pain in order to slow us down to get our attention. I had a friend who was an All Star Basketball player and he had back trouble and had a bunch of disks that went out. I asked him in the hospital, "Why do you think this happened?" He said, "God had to lay me flat on my back to get me to look up to Him." Has God ever had to do that to you?

At the end of 1980, the first year of this church, I emotionally and physically burned out. I was a confirmed workaholic. I worked about 18 hours a day starting this church. I loved every minute of it. The church office was in my home and I'd get up early, sometimes 4 in the morning, and start working and I'd work till about midnight, sleep for about four hours and get up the next day and do it again. I wasn't taking any time off or any time for myself, very little time for my family. At the end of that year, I burned out. It took me about a year to recover from that. It was the most painful time in my life. But it was during that painful season of my life I learned the lessons that prepared me to handle the stress of a church that runs 12,000. I would have been out of here a long time ago if God hadn't taken me through that valley of pain in those early days. They taught me some lessons that became skills and habits until, a few years ago, I won the award for the least stressed executive in Orange County. Why? (The secret is no socks!) There are some lessons we only learn through pain.

"I used to wander off until you punished me; now I closely follow all you say. The punishment you gave me was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me to pay attention to your laws." Pain gets our attention. It's God's hearing aid. God whispers to us in our pleasures. But He shouts to us in our pain. Pain is God's megaphone. When you're hurting God is saying, "Hey! There's somebody here who wants to help! You can depend on Me. I'll help

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you through that tough time if you'll just let Me." Pain is God's way, often, of getting your attention.

Mike had to learn this the hard way, but pain brought him to Christ. Hear his story:

I'd like to share with you how I'm learning to hear God's voice and how it caused me to accept Christ into my life four months ago. God used the Bible, gifted teachers and impressions to my mind to bring me to Him. But He began by using pain to get my attention. I was born in Los Angeles and, while both my parents claimed to be Christians, we never prayed in our home and we never attended church. My first thoughts of God began when I was about twelve when a couple of my buddies died. One died from a battle with leukemia. Another died from a routine tonsillectomy. I asked my dad questions about what happens to us when we die but I don't remember what his answers were. I do remember going into the bathroom, closing the door, lifting the lid on the clothes hamper and challenging God to close it. During the next few years I drifted towards atheism, evolution, and a liberal lifestyle. By the time I left high school I was very rebellious and unmanageable. I wouldn't admit it then but I was also very lonely, afraid, and unhappy. I hated home and school so much that I joined the army and wound up going straight to Viet Nam. It was a rude awakening for a 17 year old who thought he knew everything. In Viet Nam I was faced again with the issues of life and death, heaven and hell, with the loss of friends and comrades. Alcohol was in abundance and was the prescribed medication. I joined in using it very energetically. Why not? What was alcohol going to do to me that war couldn't? After getting out of the army I jumped into the 60's lifestyle. Everything was free. I became anti everything that had to do with structure, rules, traditions, laws. I was also anti God and anti religion. I felt that religion was just another means of control. A failed first marriage and the loss of contact with three sons were just some of the many victims of my beliefs. For the next several years sex, drugs, rock and roll seemed to be so right and fulfilling. Hope I Die Before I Get Old, Strawberry Fields Forever, and other lyrics of the day seemed to be so insightful and prophetic. Then in 1975 I got married again and everything seemed to get better. A new wife, a new family, a new job, new car, new house. I was on a really great roll. For the next 15 years I felt I had all the right answers.

But in 1990 I started encountering some major setbacks. First I chased my daughter away from home and into a life threatening situation because she wouldn't do what I said. She became just like her dad -- angry and rebellious. Next I lost a career job of twelve years and a substantial income that went with it. I suffered the complete loss of three retail stores that were going to provide for my retirement. Bankruptcy and the loss of our home still didn't get my attention. I again lost contact with my three sons, a scolding letter from one of them told me I was a coward, indifferent, and not responsible. It still didn't shake my confidence. How could I be so blind? I even thought I had lost another son to Christianity. He married a Christian girl and moved away to be with her Christian family.

It's still hard for me to believe that in spite of everything that was happening to me, I still didn't think that things were all that bad. God would have to use a sledge hammer to get my attention. He did. My mom died in January of 1995. We had not spoken for over eight years. I was becoming a very bitter man. Finally, my wife told me one day that she didn't

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like me and was beginning to doubt that we would be together much longer. I was crushed and scared. The pain was now too great to ignore. It was finally starting to sink into my head that if I didn't do something I was going to lose everything and everyone that I cared for. I was finally ready to try someone else's way.

In mid 1995 I started to attend Saddleback at my wife's urging. At first, I didn't sing or pray or participate in the Sunday service at all. I just sat through the services. But as I continued coming I sensed that something was going on inside of me. Now that my pain and emptiness had gotten my attention God began to speak to me through the teaching of Pastor Rick, Pastor Tom and other Saddleback teachers. Around September of 1995 I began attending a small group study at Saddleback called Strong Basis to Believe. I went because the announcement in the bulletin specifically invited non believers. I went to check out this study and bring questions. It was very open and non threatening and I was always impressed by the kindness and the respect that I received. God used the teaching in that group to speak to me and for the first time I started challenging some of my long held beliefs. The new things I was learning seemed to make sense. Many times as I drove home after a meeting I wondered what was happening to me. I was starting to experience some really strange thoughts. There were actually times when I would catch myself thinking like a believer. I now know that these impressions were God's voice speaking to my mind. Around that time I also read a book entitled The Purpose Driven Church by Pastor Rick. Even though I wasn't a believer, his book made sense and really changed my perspective on what a church was supposed to be. It exploded many of my stereotypes and misconceptions. I had always viewed Christians and churches as fraudulent, controlling money grubbers who are constantly casting out guilt trips. Most of my perceptions were based on the religious programming I had seen on TV. But as I read Rick's book and reflected on the actual experiences I was having here at Saddleback I began to realize that maybe those guys on TV didn't represent the real picture of Christianity. I knew one thing for sure. I was falling in love with these people -- you -- this church and this message.

On January 1 of this year I accepted the challenge to start reading the Bible. This brought me into direct contact with God's voice. Less than a month into the Bible I realized that God was speaking to me. As I read and discovered what Jesus had done for me I was really touched. As I listened to God speak through His word I began to feel warmth and comfort like never before. A change was taking place in my heart. I said a prayer in front of my small group on February 18th asking Jesus to lead my life. For the record: There were no trumpets, lightning or fireworks. But I clearly knew that my struggle was over.

My submission to God was both full and complete. There will always be a special place in my heart for the people who waited and prayed patiently for me over all those years. God used them to speak to me. My wife, Jay and my family will always be at the top of that list. I will always be very grateful to others for their caring witness and prayers. I thank all of you for every hug I've ever received since coming to Saddleback. I really wanted the warmth and closeness but was afraid and didn't know how to ask for it. Because I finally let Jesus Christ speak to me, my life has changed so much for the better. Before, I was an angry, hurtful, prideful, conceited, cold and emotionally protected man. But now my deepest desire is to be like Jesus and express His love to others. When people see me, I hope they see Him. I ask

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for the Holy Spirit's direction and guidance in my daily prayers. Every day I thank God for never giving up on me even though I turned my back on Him for so long. If today, you feel a gentle nudge to open up your life to Jesus, realize that God is speaking to you. I pray that you'll listen to Him and He will save you just like He did me.

That's what this church is all about, teaching people to hear God speak. When you hear God speak, really, in your heart, you are changed. Nobody can change that much in four months unless Jesus Christ is in your life. Nobody can change that much, have their life turned around so radically for the good unless you get a power greater than yourself in you to do it and develop a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Why is it so important to really hear God speak? Three reasons:

1. It assures me that I'm in God's family.

The proof that you really know Jesus Christ, that you have a relationship, is that you hear God speak to you. Jesus said, *"I know those who are Mine and they hear My voice."* If you've never heard God speak to you, if you've never sensed His speaking to you in your heart and in your mind, you have every reason to doubt that you're really a true believer, that you're in the family of God and that you're on your way to heaven. You have every reason to doubt it because Jesus said *"Those who are Mine hear My voice."*

Some of you may be brand new believers and when you first get started sometimes it's a little bit difficult to figure out "Is this God talking to me or not?" You're not used to His voice. But if you're really a child of God you're going to know your father's voice. When I call my kids I don't have to say, "This is Rick Warren, your father." I just start talking to them and they know my voice. When any of my three kids call me they don't have to say, "This is Amy, your daughter" or "Josh or Matthew, your son" -- I know their voice. Why? Because I have a relationship. If you don't have that, if you don't ever hear God speaking to you, you need to be saved because you're not going to heaven unless you have a relationship with Christ. It's really clear. It is available to anybody who says, "Jesus, I want a relationship with You. God, I want to know You. I want to communicate with You."

Some of you know about God, but you don't know Him. Some of you know about Jesus, but you don't really know Him. You have a religion not a relationship. You may have gone to Sunday School or catechism as a kid and you're here in church every week but you don't have that relationship.

There's a guy who comes to my house every single day of my life except Sunday. He's called the postman. I know who this guy is. I know what he looks like, I know his name, I say Hi to him. He's even brought gifts to my door. But I don't really know him. I know about him. But I don't really know him. That's the difference.

One of the proofs that you know you're a Christian is that God talks to you on a regular basis and you listen and you hear and you talk back. Many people think God only speaks to super saints.

HOW GOD TALKS TO YOU

Learning To Hear God's Voice - Part 2 of 4

No. Those of you who are parents, do you only talk to your smartest kid? (I hope you're going to say no.) God talks to all His true children -- young believers, old believers, baby believers, grown up believers. It assures me I'm in God's family.

2. It protects me from mistakes.

The Bible says in Job *"God speaks causing them to change their mind and keeping them from pride and from falling into some traps."* If you listen, God will warn you in advance and you'll avoid a whole lot of mistakes in life, if you really start tuning into God. He'll tell you.

A number of years ago I was presented with a business opportunity that seemed really great. It seemed like a terrific opportunity with no risk to it. A lot of Christians I knew were getting into this and recommending it to me. I stayed open and God said to me one day, "Don't." And I didn't. A year later many of those people had lost their shirt financially and the guy who started it was in prison for a scam.

I can't tell you how many times we've been saved from major mistakes here at Saddleback. Why is this church so big? Why are we one of the five largest in America? Because God has protected us from so many mistakes. Because we stay open and we don't move unless He tells us to. When God says "Don't!" we don't do it, even if the whole world and everything else says, "Go ahead and do it!" On the other hand, when God says do it and everything logically says, "Don't do that!" we do it anyway. Because we listen to God in this church. It will save you a lot of mistakes.

There are some of you here that are considering a divorce. God says to you real clearly, "Don't!" Some of you are considering moving in with somebody who's not your husband or your wife and not marrying them. God says, "Don't!" Every time I ignore God's will I get in trouble. Some of you are being challenged to make an unethical decision at work and God is saying, "Don't do it!" Some of you are being challenged to put other priorities ahead of God and your family. God says, "That's foolish! Don't do it." He'll save you from mistakes.

3. It is the secret of a productive life, listening to God on a moment by moment basis.

The more I depend on God's guidance, the more successful I am. Success is knowing God's will and being right in the center of it. If you want to make an impact with your life, if you want to be effective, it's real simple, tune into God and do what He tells you to do.

God is speaking, God wants to speak to you, He'll use many different ways -- these are the four most common but He'll use other ways too. Why does God go to all that trouble to talk to us? Because He loves you. Because you matter to Him. Because you are important. He created you not just to take up space on this earth. You were made to have a relationship with God and if you don't ever establish it you'll die missing your very purpose for living. You will miss the very reason you were created. He wants to have a relationship with you.

HOW GOD TALKS TO YOU

Learning To Hear God's Voice - Part 2 of 4

Some of you have sensed God speaking to you today. You identified maybe with some of the things Mike talked about in his story. What does God have to say to you today? Hebrews 3:15 *"Today, if you hear God's voice speaking to you, do not harden your heart against him."* No matter how long you've ignored God and His voice, He still loves you and He still wants to have a relationship with you.

Prayer:

It's obvious that some of you are in pain today. Some of you are depressed. Some of you are filled with anxiety. It may be over a health issue. It maybe over finances, your marriage, or your desire to get married, or you're in a relationship you're not sure of and you're anxious, fearful, worried. Others of you are fatigued and you're worn out because you're trying to do too much. You just crawled in here this morning -- you're really tired. Many of you are stressed out by innumerable things. Some of you are lonely and that ache in your heart -- that loneliness -- is sometimes almost unbearable. All of these things create pain. God is trying to get your attention. There needs to be some changes in your life and He'll help you make those changes. But you have to have a relationship with Him. Maybe you've let that relationship wane and wan and put on the back burner of your life. Or maybe you've never established one. Would you pray this prayer in your mind? "Jesus Christ, I understand that You want a relationship with me. I want to get to know You and I want to talk with You. Help me to spend some time every day reading Your word. Help me to take advantage of the Bible studies and the classes and the teachers and the tapes that You provide for us. Help me to be open to impressions that You want to give me. Help me to see how that even pain can bring me closer to You. Today, Jesus Christ, I want to open up my life and ask You to be the manager of my life and lead me and guide me and save me." If you prayed that prayer and meant it God heard you. You're beginning a brand new journey called the Christian life. A relationship. The first thing you need to do is tell somebody about it. Tell the closest person to you -- your husband, your wife. "Today I stepped across the line for Jesus Christ."