

What Hearing God is Not
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 2
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1. Introduction

We may hear people make statements that begin with the phrase “God told me...”.

People’s claim or misuse of the phrase “God told me” may become so frightening or so weird that it might cause me to assume that God could or would not talk to someone like me. Perhaps I’m not spiritually mature enough, or I’m not important enough in the great scheme of things.

Some people might think that hearing God is something that you do in a superstitious or mechanical way – like, just opening up the Bible and finding some phrase there.

If I’m going to be open to the possibility that God will speak to someone like me, it’s important to understand what hearing God *does not* mean.

2. All human troubles come from thinking of God wrongly.

- a. In these sessions, we are emphasizing central concepts. The central concept of *Hearing God, Session 1* was about how God creates community and moves into it and does it on the basis of friendship with Jesus.
- b. The idea of God is the center one. It’s important to understand that all human troubles come from thinking of God _____. To get this right is to get right thinking about us because, if we are in the image of God, in order to understand _____, we have to come to an understanding of _____.
- c. We tend to think of ourselves wrongly because we’re thinking of _____ wrongly, and then we can’t get right what our relationship with God is supposed to be. So, the very idea of hearing God is troublesome.

3. There are many ways to get it wrong.

- a. One problem is the fact that God communicates with us in many different, and often puzzling, ways.
- b. The _____ is one of the primary ways that God speaks to us, and one of the ways that we respond by _____ his face is to turn to the Bible.
 - There are so many ways we can bring ourselves to the Bible and not get anything from it.

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- The Bible is often a _____, and we see what we _____ to it.

We have to read the Bible on the assumption that we _____ already
_____ what it says.

We have to come before it _____, repentantly, assuming that I haven't got it.

- c. When we're talking about God speaking to us, we must always leave it in a position where we are not in control.

The desire to control is one of the primary ways
that we fail to hear God.

We think that there are some ways of hearing from God that are superior to others – for example, that if we are spoken to by a vision, that's better than being spoken to by the Bible, or being spoken to by the Bible is better than being spoken to by a vision or by the Spirit. So, within the fellowship of believers, you have huge battles about the best way. When you dig into the battles, you will nearly always find that they are about _____.

When we come into the conversation with God, we want to _____ our hopes to be in control and then that will deal with the issue of motive.

- d. Motive: Why do you want to hear from God?

- Consider:
 - Do I want to hear from God when I don't have a need?
 - Am I trying to use God's guidance just to keep me safe?
 - Do I want to know the will of God so that I will not have to be responsible for my actions – so I can say "God said it; God did it."?

e. Responsibility – initiative on our part – is the heart of our relationship to God. If we aren't careful and we lose that idea, then we will misconceive the very nature of our Heavenly Father and come to think of him as working with _____. That's a great danger.

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- If we get God's nature right, then we step into the conversation in a way that is creative. Another key to the conversational relationship with God is _____.
- In Matthew 25, Jesus teaches about _____. Matthew 25:14-30 is *The Parable of the Talents*. You'll remember the three people that were given talents. You had the ten-talent man. This man took _____. He did not wait to be told what to do with it. He was told to have charge of it, to use it, but he was not told what to do. The one talent man is the most instructive. His problem was he had the _____ of God. He said, "I knew that you were a hard man that you reaped where you had not sown. You gathered where you hadn't invested anything. And so, I took my talent and hid it."

What's he thinking? He's thinking, "Well, I didn't do anything wrong," but in trying not to do anything wrong, he did the biggest wrong of all. He did not venture what he had, invest it, and count on the kingdom of God.

- We can be on the wrong side of life because we are on the wrong side of God's _____. Insofar as we have a use for God, it's probably simply to _____. That is why so many people only wind up in relationship to God trying to get guidance.

If you had a child who only wanted to talk to you when they wanted to know what you wanted them to do, you would realize there was something wrong in that relationship. So, our problems with hearing God often come from the wrong direction of what we're thinking about.

- If we get God wrong in his attitude towards us and eliminate initiative, then our lives will shrivel and _____ and not expand.

You can try too hard to hear God. You want to come to the point where you realize that in a conversational relationship, you have to leave initiative with the other person, as well as yourself. You learn to listen. You learn to leave space and how not be thinking about yourself all the time.... You learn conversation is an interchange between people, and you can't make the other person do anything....

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- * You don't have to be right all the time for God to work with you.
- * If God blesses something, that doesn't mean it was his preference.
- * You do not force a conversation. You respect and you wait and you listen.
- * God's preferred way of speaking is in a very quiet way that often makes no noise at all.

f. Many people have a problem hearing God because they think God is way off somewhere.

- God's way of being locates him _____.
God is not far off.
- As Paul said on his sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17:28): "He [God] is not far from us...because 'In him we live and move and have our being'."
- _____ and _____ are not a problem for God's word.
 - Our theology is important in enabling us practically to interact with God in a conversational relationship. That takes a lot of work, but the Bible will help us if we read it carefully and learn what God has given us and is teaching us about where heaven is; how He is related to us; and what created reality is made up of.
 - You will feel comfortable with God speaking close at hand and with our communicating with him, but you do have to come to the place where you are aware that, when you speak, God hears you and that, when He speaks, He is near at hand.

Hearing God is not about getting a word or a verse.

It is about developing our character by being with God.

4. What does it not mean to hear from God? Key points from a conversation between Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, and John Ortberg

- John Ortberg begins with a brief overview of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life. He describes Bonhoeffer's decisions, in the first days after Hitler's election, to protest and to deliberately place himself in harm's way – living in obedience to his understanding of hearing God. Bonhoeffer had a lifelong practice of meditation at the beginning of the day. He did not have to begin a new practice when he was imprisoned and in crisis. It was part of his life already.

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- Dallas describes an incorrect approach to hearing from God as being governed by thinking of our own goodness or righteousness. As an example, he describes people who think that “a message a minute” is the way you hear from God and that it is about everything you are doing. God doesn’t do that. **He intends for us to have freedom to develop and grow and choose, within which He may speak.**
- When God speaks, we can be kind of suspicious of whether or not it is God speaking if it turns out that what we hear is in favor of things we might want.
- Hearing from God is not getting a free pass from the anxiety of having to make hard decisions by getting messages every moment about everything.
- So often, desiring to hear from God really means trying to be not responsible for my choices.
- The difference between living in a supernatural realm versus superstition is the attempt to manage or control God or the Divine.
- In superstition there is no natural connection between what you’re trying to manipulate and what you hope comes out of it.
- The way many people pray is superstition. On the positive side, if you understand prayer, listening, and hearing in the framework of the Kingdom of God, there is a natural connection. That’s how kingdoms work – by speaking, asking, responding, and so on.
- What makes a connection natural is that you don’t cook it up. And there is always that element of ethical transformation – that is, I am changed through the experiences. The ethical tone puts my will in the back seat.

5. Bonus Session: *The Stepford Wives*

- a. A lot of churches give the impression that you want nice, sweet people who just do what the Lord wills, as they understand it. Those people need have no initiative of their own. _____ doesn’t show up on the horizon. God could have done that, if He had wanted a world of robots and not of free people who love him, understand, and are _____ in his Kingdom and in his work.
- There would be no _____. There would simply be direction and conformity. That is a picture that robs many people of the kind of initiative and freedom that goes into the kind of relationship about which we’ve been talking.



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- This is where casting God in the character of the Cosmic Boss comes in. It will eventuate in a situation where God is thought of as a great unblinking Cosmic Stare that just sees everything and freezes everything as He has decided it should be.
- b. One of the greatest effects of this is on prayer.
- If you think of God in this way, then you will pray and will conclude your prayer with *...if it be Thy will*, and you're off the hook. It's the way you sign off, and you're not _____ for anything that happens.
 - In thinking about what goes wrong in the human-Divine interaction, when you surrender initiative, you make prayer _____.
 - God has his purposes, and He will accomplish them. Within those purposes are _____ who have a role in what He decides to do.
 - If you don't believe that prayer makes a difference in what God does and does not do within the Sovereign purposes of his will, you won't pray because it's meaningless.
 - That's why one of the hardest things to do in church is to get people to pray.
 - If the church decided to get into prayer in the way that Jesus presents it, the first thing they would do is stop having prayer meetings. They would come together, and they would pray together, but there probably would not be special meetings *because it would become the main business of all the meetings.*

*He said to them, "It is written,
'My house shall be called a house of prayer...'"*

Matthew 21:13

*[T]hese I will bring to my holy mountain and
make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be
accepted on my altar, for my house shall be
called a house of prayer for all peoples.*

Isaiah 56:7

Additional Reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1979).