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*We could hear . . . if we
weren't afraid*

Listening to God can be disturbing and unsettling for it often involves change—change in attitude, in relationships, change in vocation or location. Anything could change if we got lined up with God's best plan for us, if we stopped long enough for the tumult to die down, to get quiet enough to hear God speak. Particularly if we weren't afraid of what He might have to say to us.

How does God speak to us? He speaks to us through our past. He speaks to us in our present situation. And He speaks to us through our own arguments, through our fears and failures, through His love, through other people, books, pain and suffering. He speaks to us by every possible means at every possible time.

"But how can you tell," asked one of my friends, willing to argue a little, "whether it is God speaking or whether you're just listening to your own thoughts?"

I just talk to Him. "Lord, are You saying this to me? If you are, I want to do it. Keep on speaking to me, so I'll know for sure. If You aren't and it comes from some other source, let it be like water poured on the ground—don't let it come back to me at all."

I've also learned to watch my own reactions. When I start to argue with myself, I can be pretty sure that God is speaking and that what I'm doing is trying to protect myself. So, I refer it all back to the One who loves me. Deep in my heart I am surrendered to His whole will. I've already said *Yes, Lord* to all of life. My surrender only needs to be worked out in each instance. He knows this, and I know He knows. So I ask Him, confident He will answer.

I'll admit it is sometimes difficult to know if God is really giving me directions. However, after some experimenting, I realize God has control of my mind, and because He loves me, He will get through to me. Often, looking back it is easier to see how God has led me in the past. So I move out, take the risk of faith and trust Him. Afterward, I can quietly state God did speak to me, lead me, and safely hold me.

One has to be careful, however, about stating, "God told me to do this." That statement smacks of self-confidence and pride. Be quiet, walk softly, move ahead slowly, and do what you believe in your own heart He asks you to do. Afterwards you can tell it all with joy.

There is one infallible test: Is what is coming through to me—love? Is love communicating? Will this make me love God more or less? Will it prove that I love my brother unselfishly, that I am eager for his good? Love protects. Love sets free.

Floyd W. Thatcher, my Zondervan editor, gave me a test which works for him. "Am I being pushed or guided? Time will tell. Time will take care of this.

If it is personal desire, it won't stand the test of time. If it is God speaking, then it doesn't matter if I wait one day, one week or one month." Chapters 3, 4, 5 of my book *You Can Witness Confidence* tell some of my early experiences in self-occupation, compulsion and learning to wait.

Then there is always the test of God's Word. I will never be asked to do something contrary to His will. If what has been suggested to me is God's will, doors will be opened to help make it possible.

The voice of love

When God, who loves you, wants to communicate with you, where does He start? This depends on you. If you haven't yet responded to Him, the first thing He wants is to establish a personal relationship with you. God is interested in everything which concerns you. To get your attention may require a few changes on your part, which He will engineer without consulting you. But He will wait until you are ready, and you will find readiness becoming evident in more ways than one. This too, is His love.

What about you? What if God did speak to you? Would you be afraid to listen? Then you really do have reservations about His love, don't you? You needn't, for one of the proofs of love is the desire to establish communication.

When we think of speaking with someone we love, we usually picture ourselves talking face to face, even though we use the telephone and the letter. One thing is sure, no dialogue is lacking when two people love each other. Dialogue is incomplete only when one person reaches out and the other fails to respond.

"The purpose of dialogue," says Reuel Howe in his book, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (p. 66, Seabury), "is the calling forth of persons in order that they may

be united (or reunited) with one another, know the truth, and love God, man and themselves."

The first time I remember God speaking to me was through the voice of another who invited me to give my heart to Christ. My response helped to bring about this new relationship, and as a result I became a new person, called forth to unfold and to develop as a child of God. I stopped trying to plan my own life, and I put myself into His hands.

As a teen-ager, my prayer was, "Lord, what do You want me to do with my life?"

The next time God's love and voice came to me, it was through a book. I was reading the life story of J Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission. As I read some of his experiences with the Chinese, I was amazed that they were people like myself, not heathen unlike me! My heart became involved, and I loved them.

The only talent I thought I possessed was the ability to talk and tell something so people would believe it. From within the calling Voice seemed to say, "Follow Me. Leave your homeland, parents, brothers and sisters, friends and go to China—where you can share the love of Christ." There was both pain and joy in the struggle to respond to the Voice. There was pain as in my mind I said good-bye and seemed to embark on a big white ship for China. (It did turn out to be a big white ship—the *S. S. Empress of Canada*.) And there was gladness because God had spoken, because He had a plan for me, and He had made some of it known to me.

The voice we fear

Listening to God speak brings ultimate joy and gladness. Why, then, are we afraid to listen? Self-protection for one thing. For another, the possibility

that the voice does not belong to God. Jesus gives us teaching on the voices His sheep listen to, in the 10th chapter of John. There is a healthy kind of fear which makes us aware of danger when the thief is near. There is an unhealthy kind of fear that almost makes us shut God out—like the voices on that jet.

"Did you actually hear voices on that jet?" asked one who heard me tell the experience.

Rather than come right out and say, "Of course not," my answer was, "Do you know you have more than two ears? You have a third ear in your heart. Everyone has, only most of us are afraid to use it."

The devotional material at the close of Chapter 3 quickly provides a clue to the positive truths contained in my experience in that jet plane. Satan designed them to make me question God. Such communications are never love-oriented. And indeed there was no love communicating in those suggestions. By their very nature and content they had the unmistakable aroma of their author: *Doubt God and run your own life.*

People have asked me after teaching sessions why I seldom mention Satan's name. "He's smarter than I am, so I let Jesus Christ take care of him. I don't want any direct dealings with him. Nor do I wish to give him the satisfaction of addressing him, or using his name."

Yet we cannot hide behind the lame excuse that we might be obeying Satan rather than God. If we really want to listen and hear God's voice, we will remember that Jesus said, "My sheep know my voice and they follow Me."

Neither should we ignore this enemy from darkness or be unaware of his general tactics. They are the same as of old—in the Garden of Eden—questioning God's purpose, doubting God's love, throw-

ing up a smoke screen to eliminate the possibility of any guided, creative thinking in alignment with God's will.

Did God really say it? Does God really mean it? These are the kinds of questions the Devil (by whatever name he is called) uses, including such suggestions as: *Why not use your own mind and figure it out? Run your own life, that's why He gave you the ability you have.*

I can usually recognize this voice by the subtle attempt to blend truth and error which begins to show up in selfish plans, failure to consider others, and fear to make any change in the status quo.

Let's face it. We are afraid.

Years ago, while on vacation in California, I remember hearing Dr. E. Stanley Jones for the first time. He made the following statement: "You are never safe until you can stand the worst possible thing that could happen to you." For a long time I was unable to accept this statement, for I could not face the fear within me. Before long the fear I feared came to pass: I loved someone whom I could not have. Then I learned that dread can be taken out of fear and turned into faith when it is shared with Jesus Christ—faith in His love, His plan, His care, His Presence.

Why do we always resist change? Change is the order of the day in our present world. Yet we want things the way we want them, to go on as they once did. Is it because we don't like to admit either to ourselves or others that we were wrong, that we've been stubborn and dogmatic and need to change?

Change is often an affront to us. We cling to the bit of security we've made for ourselves, knowing we can never recapture the past and that the future is beyond our power to control anyway.

To summarize: We must listen to God, who loves us and cares for us. He wants to give us only the very best, but to do so He needs our daily cooperation that we may receive all the gifts which He so much desires for us.



Things to remember:

1. All the ways in which God speaks to us. List them.
2. The tests which can help us to be certain that God is speaking.
3. The reasons for fear. Can you add some more?
4. Results of hearing God speak to us.



Meditation No. 2

Read: Psalm 139

Subject: God Cares

1. Verse by verse, give thanks for each part of God's care for you. Where is He not to be found?
2. Face up to all the things you are afraid of. Face the fear you fear the most. Imagine it coming to pass. Try to live through it in your imagination. What would it mean to you? In words, now commit the whole situation, actual and possible to God who knows all hearts and who loves you.
3. Give thanks that His love will only permit what, in the end, is best for all. Read Romans 8:28.

