

Elizabeth Presbyterian Church
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“The Voice of God”

The Bible is full of references of God speaking to man:

Genesis 3 *When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden, so they hid from the Lord God among the trees. Then the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”*

That was God *talking* to Adam and Eve.

Genesis 6 *God observed all this corruption in the world, for everyone on earth was corrupt. So God said to Noah, “I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence. Yes, I will wipe them all out along with the earth!”*

So God *spoke* to Noah.

Genesis 12 *The Lord had said to Abraham, “Leave your native country, your relatives and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”*

And so God *spoke* to Abraham.

Exodus 3 *One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn’t burn up. “This is amazing,” Moses said to himself, “Why doesn’t this bush burn up? I must go see it.” When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, “Moses! Moses!”*

So God *called* to Moses, and thus began the story of the exodus from Egypt.

There are many, many more times when God spoke to individuals in the Old Testament. We read about them and we know they happened. In the New Testament, God spoke to us through Jesus.

Did you ever think that God could speak to you? I think he does every day in every way!

Now let us go from the Bible to a modern-day story from the 1990s.

He was hurting. His emotions were high and his spirits low. He was down and about as low as he could be.

On his breaks from work, he walked the outdoor area in back of his office and prayed out loud for some help from God. It was a wildlife refuge and the birds seemed to bring him closer to his deity.

He had recently learned it was much more effective for him to pray out loud. Most of the time his car was his chapel. On his way to and from work he would spend time in prayer, speaking out loud to his God, carrying on a conversation.

Today he needed some divine help and he indeed prayed for it. He didn't want to sound petty in his prayer request, but he wanted something – anything – to point him in the right direction! That's what he prayed for, the well worn phrase, a sign from God. How many times have we prayed for that?

It made him feel kind of bad to even ask for that, for it made him sound like he wasn't a strong believer, and he was. Nevertheless, he asked for a sign to help him make up his mind and a sign to show him the direction he should act.

After some intense praying he went back to his office building and his second-floor office. When he came in, his secretary handed him a phone message. He looked and was amazed to see that indeed it was the sign he had prayed for – phone call from the person from whom he had been desperate to hear. He returned the call and the conversation went as though he had scripted it.

Things were better and improving each moment. He was so elated, he excused himself and went outside again to gather his thoughts. He spoke and thanked God for the sign he received and for seemingly a way out of his emotional depression, for he had received great news.

And now our story takes an important turn – one that doesn't happen to everyone! A clear voice from somewhere spoke to him and said, "Why do you doubt me?"

That's what he heard as clear as anything. "*Why do you doubt me?*" As if to say, "Why do you need a sign?"

The hair on his arms and the back of his neck stood straight up. Tears filled his eyes as he comprehended that voice and that distinct message. He had no doubts about where the voice came from. It wasn't in his own head. He wasn't thinking those words and didn't expect to hear anything, but he did.

It wasn't a booming, loud voice, yet it was distinct and clear. "Why do you doubt me?" He knew he didn't imagine it, and he knew who had spoken – who else could it be? He knew in his heart and his mind that he had been spoken to by God.

He had to share this with people that mattered to him. Some people weren't sure what to think. They knew he didn't make things up, but still they seemed doubtful. But his pastor – the one who had suggested he pray out loud – had just one simple response. He said "Hallelujah!" He had no doubts at all.

A lot of people would disagree that this man actually heard God speak to him. This sort of thing just doesn't happen. What he heard must have come from inside him. It didn't

matter though. He knew what he heard, and he knew who had spoken to him. When he thought about it, whatever the voice was, it was truly a message from God.

As time went on, he would remember specific dreams that touched him and he wondered about those and the messages that might be in them. Awakening from those dreams he had a sense of calmness that he had never before felt. But nothing was quite like hearing a direct message. There was a supernatural touch to the voice and the dreams.

His faith, always strong, had grown stronger. His mother had made sure he and his siblings went to church as children. She taught him to pray, and it struck him later that as a child he *did* pray out loud at bed time. It was as an adult that he had taken to praying silently. Nothing is quite as pure as a child's praying.

By now, you may have correctly assumed that the man in this story is me.

I heard that voice some years ago and it did change my life. I haven't heard him speak directly to me again since, but I have come to understand that God talks and communicates to us all the time.

The next time you're on a walk, clear your mind and listen to the wind through the leaves in the trees. The sounds change with the seasons. The dry leaves sound differently than the green leaves. Listen to a baby's laughter. Is anything as pure and joyful as that? Listen to the powerful thunder in a spring thunderstorm. How about the sound of running water in a river or creek? The birds chirping or the haunting sound of a coyote at night.

God speaks, and we have to learn to listen – to tune out our busy world and listen – and most importantly, open our hearts. This is so important today, when we have so many distractions. It's basic communication, but it requires our listening as well as speaking.

While that day and the voice of God will always be special in my life, I've come to realize that he speaks to all of us and I'm sure others have similar circumstances.

We've all heard the clichés about prayers and praying: God hears all prayers; prayers can move mountains; Jesus taught us to pray for our daily bread (Matthew 6:12); pray to gain forgiveness, prayer can work miracles. You know what? They're all true.

I believe it's how we pray as much as what we pray about. All prayers are heard, but why shouldn't we be more personal about it? It must be from the heart and it has to be highly personal. But then, what could be more personal than praying to our God?

In modern medicine there are miracles that occur every day and the physicians can't explain them. We have several, what I would call miracles, that have happened to people in our very church. I won't mention their names, but they were in very bad health situations. They certainly know who they are. What was the common thread for both of these people? The power of prayer. We have an awesome prayer chain right here in our church that has touched so many lives.

God communicates to us every day and we just have to learn to listen, but the step to opening up a dialogue with God, is our prayer. This can happen anytime during our day, night, meals, bed time. The operative word here is prayer.

Nicholas Herman had been a footman and soldier and was admitted as a Lay Brother to the Carmelites, a religious order in Paris, in 1666 and was afterwards known as "Brother Lawrence." His writings or letters, in the form of *The Practice of the Presence of God* have been published and read for centuries. Here's a man who was in deep prayer every day.

He writes, "All we have to do is recognize God as being intimately present within us. Then we may speak directly to Him every time we need to ask for help, to know His will in moments of uncertainty, and to do whatever He wants us to do in a way that pleases Him. We should offer our works to Him before we begin, and thank Him afterward for the privilege of having done them for His sake. This continuous *conversation* would also include praising and loving God incessantly for His infinite goodness and perfection."

Do you hear that word, "conversation?" That's what we should have with God, a conversation.

Franklin Graham, Billy Graham's son and a powerful preacher himself, writes this in his book, *All for Jesus*. "When Jesus performed a miracle, the disciples didn't ask, 'How can we do that?' They had been given similar power. They never requested His instruction on the best way to challenge the Pharisees. Only when He prayed did they say 'Lord teach us.' What was it about Jesus prayers that made the disciples ask the question?

"The New Testament records over five of Jesus prayers. The first is what we call the Lord's Prayer. (Matt. 6:9-13) The second is the prayer in Matthew 11 in which He said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.' (v. 25) The third is the most profound and awesome prayer, in John 17, in which he prayed, 'for all those who will believe in me' in the future. (v. 20) He prayed the fourth alone at Gethsemane, where he submitted to the will of His Father. (Luke 22:42) And then he spoke the fifth prayer from the cross, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' (Luke 23:34 KJV)

"No matter what it was that caused the disciples to ask, the Lord answered them, 'When you pray...' He assumed that prayer would be a part of their lives. He did not say, 'If you pray.'"

And that would be the end of my message today, except for this little P.S. to my story.

Another person I know had been praying for guidance and direction through a personal time of anguish. This person's prayer was answered in a distinct voice that said, "It's not what you see, it's what you believe."

Like me, this person had no doubt about whose voice had spoken. I'm sure many of us here have heard from God one way or another. Let us all remember it is a personal conversation with our Lord that prepares us to receive his answers. He does hear every prayer.