

Can You Hear What the Spirit Is Saying?

by Chip Brogden

God desires to confound us to teach us to listen to Him in many ways, not just one.

Scripture: Psalm 19:1, Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 3:5, Isaiah 30:21, John 10:27, Romans 8:14, 1 Corinthians 13:11, Hebrews 11:1, James 1:5

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Hearing God"

Description

Chip Brogden preaches about God's desire to confound us in order to teach us to walk by the Spirit, leading us away from relying solely on feelings and experiences to a deeper reliance on faith and maturity in hearing God's voice. As we grow, God weans us from seeking constant spiritual highs and teaches us to discern His guidance in more subtle ways, including through the Bible, creation, and ordinary people and circumstances. The Lord's methods of communication evolve as we mature, moving from extraordinary means to a more intuitive, Spirit-led guidance that requires humility, patience, and a deeper understanding of His ways.

Transcript

"And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left (Isaiah 30:21)."

God desires to confound us that we may learn to listen to Him. Before we are confounded by the Lord we are dogmatic and sure of what we believe, but now we are not so sure. Before we could hear the Lord and follow His direction, but now we hear little or nothing at all. Before we were sure of our direction and calling, but now we wonder if perhaps we were mistaken. What is happening? The Lord is confounding us. He is teaching us what it means to walk by the Spirit.

What has happened up until now is we have been led by our feelings. Indeed, God uses our feelings to lead us when we are children. But now He desires our faith to grow, and to accomplish this end He will lead us into unfamiliar territory and teach us to listen to Him. Whatever plans or formulas or programs we used to ascertain God's will in days past will be fruitless during this time. We expect the Lord to do such and such, but He does not do so. We expect to feel a certain way, but we no longer have those feelings. We expect to have a certain encounter with God as in days gone by, but God seems to hide His face from us.

Is the Lord indeed hiding Himself? Is He abandoning us to our own way and refusing to speak to us anymore? No indeed, but He wishes us to rely wholly upon Him and not upon our senses and feelings, even if in times past He used our feelings.

With respect to God's Voice and guidance, as a child we learn to listen and God does lead us along as little sheep. He has to tell us every little thing: go here, say this, don't say that, take this course, be still, etc. He will give us such a sense of His Presence as to make us feel as though we are walking on air. His direction is clear and unmistakable. Children cannot be led otherwise.

After awhile, if we are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, we will begin to mature. Now God begins to wean us from the life of feeling and delicious spiritual experiences. Such times occur with less frequency as we grow older. When we ask for guidance it does not come so easily. Now we have to wait, and we are not used to waiting. We begin to wonder where we have gone wrong, and why we don't enjoy the keen sense of His Presence as we did before. Perhaps we will pray more, or become busier in our spiritual disciplines, in an attempt to recapture some of those feelings we used to enjoy, and sometimes we are rewarded with the coveted feeling. Most of the time we are not. No amount of prayer, fasting, or spiritual activity will bring the feelings back. We do not hear the crystal clear Voice of God as we did before.

How easily in days gone by we would declare, "The Lord spoke to me" thus and so; but today we do not so easily make the bold confession. Instead, we wonder why we cannot hear from God. We search our heart to see if there is some unconfessed sin, but our heart does not condemn us. We are at a loss to explain what is happening.

A Christian faced with this situation should realize that children are led by God in a childish way, but as a mature believer the Lord will lead them in a mature way. Over time we are expected to know God's WAYS as well as His WILL. When we know the ways of the Lord we will speak and move in harmony with His Spirit without having to consciously stop and ask for guidance, wait for a warm feeling or tingling sensation, and then proceed.

When we first become aware of spiritual things we are so excited at being able to have a dialogue with God that we tend to expect everything to be audible or unmistakable from that point forward. If we first met God in the fire from heaven, or in the mighty rushing wind, we expect everything to be fire and wind from henceforth. This is simply not the case. When the Lord appears to us in dazzling white, we, like the disciples, attempt to build Him a tabernacle and remain there, but Jesus does not always appear to us with shining face, bathed in light.

It reminds me of the cobbler who was praying one morning when the Lord spoke to him and said, "I will come to your shop today". The cobbler was disappointed when no one appeared but an old man, a tramp, and a child. At the end of the day the cobbler cried, "Lord, why didn't you visit my shop today, as you promised?" Then the Lord showed him how He had indeed come not once, but three times. It was just not as the cobbler expected.

As a general rule, the Lord will use extraordinary, even miraculous means to lead us when we are children, but when we are older in Him and have some experience with His ways then He expects us to rely more upon the Spirit and less upon some sensation or powerful experience. That does not preclude the Lord from moving upon us in a tangible way from time to time, only that is not His usual method for leading the mature ones. The older one becomes in the Lord the more intuitive one becomes. Everything

is not cut and dry. With a clear word from God or supernatural sensation we advance with boldness, but when it is a still small voice or conscience or an impression or no guidance whatsoever, we will be less impulsive and more deliberate with each step. We will wait upon the Lord longer. We will be less confident in ourselves, and more dependent on the Lord. This dependency breeds humility.

We eventually learn that we cannot reduce God to a formula, and we can never be certain where or how He may be speaking to us in a particular situation. We learn to look for faint traces of Spirit in common, ordinary vessels and in our daily lives, instead of the mighty rushing wind at the believer's meetings.

One way the God-Man reveals Himself to us, of all ways, is not in a glorious vision or supernatural event, but in the pages of this thing we call the Bible. Imagine that. How odd. A book. Why not just appear to the one who seeks Him and speak face to face. No! Why? It would kill us. It would absolutely blow us away to be confronted with the Real Jesus, because the Jesus we have come to believe in is a fairy tale, a jolly elf, a fantasy character. The Bible prepares us for Him, does it not? Using types, shadows, stories, just to whet your appetite and get you accustomed to Him and His dealings so you are not totally shocked when you do meet Him.

How flippantly we just pick up the Word and skim through our favorite verses and say "ho hum". We haven't met the Lord. We haven't touched the God of the Word. How can we do that? Because the Bible is, outwardly speaking, so ordinary. Nothing high-tech about it. It seems so innocuous, so innocent. But it is the primary introduction we have to meeting the Man, the God-Man. Absolutely brilliant, this plan of God.

We know that God speaks to us through the Bible. As spiritual babes we may take the dogmatic position of saying that is the ONLY way God speaks to us today. As a result, our field of vision is limited to the written text and we miss the millions of other ways God desires to get through to us. Obviously the written Word is critical, for it gives us an objective criterion against which our subjective spiritual experiences may be measured. Without the objectivity of God's written Word we would all be tossed to and fro by every spiritual experience, false prophet, and false teaching.

Even so, let us not limit God by saying He will only speak to us through the Bible. What is the Bible, but a record of God's speaking to men and women across a span of many generations through a variety of means? We have audible voices, angels, visions, dreams, prophetic words, signs and wonders, judgments and natural disasters all represented in the Bible as ways in which God sought to communicate with men. These communications were written down in order to provide us with a permanent record. Finally, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to communicate with us face to face, and the record of these encounters were documented and placed in the Bible as well. Then, the letters of the apostles to the churches were copied and made a part of the sacred text.

There is yet another record and testimony of Jesus Christ that was present before the Bible even came into existence, and it still exists today. I am talking about the testimony of Creation itself. The Bible tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork. It says that through Jesus Christ, God formed the worlds, and that the whole creation is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God (the Church). The fingerprints of God are everywhere in the starry black depths of outer space, in the polar ice caps of virgin white snow, in the watery depths of the Pacific, in the breathtaking heights of the Alps. His design can be seen under the microscope and through the telescope, from the intricacy of the spider web to the rings around Saturn.

Additionally, God speaks to us through other people. I don't necessarily mean preachers, teachers, and writers, but ordinary people, common people. Relatives, as well as strangers. Children in particular. God speaks to me through my own children, and through my wife. He speaks to me through my critics, and through my friends, through people I like, and through people I don't like. Sometimes it is hard to hear Him speaking through ordinary people, but His echo is unmistakable if we learn how to listen.

God constantly speaks to us through our environment, our difficult circumstances. Whenever we encounter a difficulty, when things do not go as expected, instead of rebuking the devil, let us stop and ask, "What might the Lord be speaking to me in this situation?" Perhaps you are facing a contrary wind because you are sailing the wrong direction. We must learn to discern between the assault of the enemy and the hand of the Lord.

Jesus would constantly say, "He that has an ear, let him hear." The Lord does indeed speak to us in many ways that are often overlooked. Let us ask the Lord for a hearing ear and a receptive heart. Amen.

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