

# “GOD WANTS TO TALK TO YOU” - Part 1

## Can You Hear Me Now?

Luke 8:4-15 July 11, 2010

Probably one of the most dangerous phrases in the English language is “God told me to do it.” It could also be one of the most misunderstood, misused, and most abused phrases. And it can be a most manipulating phrase. When somebody says, “God told me”, how do you argue with that? How do you argue with God? “God told me to do it.” But then again, a lot of really stupid decisions have been blamed on God, and I don’t think that God is that stupid. But when someone says that “God told them”, do you believe them? Sometimes I have trouble believing them and yet I’m a guy who has had, or if you wish, claims to have had conversations with God. Sometimes I want to ask, “How do you know it was God? And what medications were you on at the time?”

But I do know that God speaks to people. Sure, there may be some counterfeit voices out there, but there is also a very real voice of God. And God wants to speak to all sorts of people. He wants to speak to you and me. But how can we know that we are hearing from the one true God? How do we know when it's the devil talking? Or that late night pizza? How do we hear from God? So I am beginning this series, inspired by Verizon and by Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, “Can You Hear Me Now?” Actually I always hated those commercials, but this is a chance to bring something good out of them. So we're going to look at some ways to test the messages we hear. How do we know when a message is really from God, and when it’s not?

Let’s start with the basics. We can go out and buy the finest radio around, but if we don't turn it on and tune it in, we’re not going to hear anything. Does that mean that there is nothing out there to hear? No! It just means that we’re not turned on or tuned in. If we don't tune in, it doesn’t matter how good the equipment is. We will hear nothing. We’ve got to be tuned in. In the same way, God has already given us the capacity to hear Him. We were made in His image. And because of that, we have all the equipment we need to hear from God. But we’ve go to tune in.

Back in 1977 when I was just an infant, there was a movie called “Smokey and the Bandit.” It starred Burt Reynolds, Jackie Gleason, Sally Fields, and others. But one really big star in the movie was a CB radio. That was how we talked from car to car before cell phones. And the CB’s had a language all their own. “That’s a big 10-4 good buddy. Put the hammer down, the pedal to the metal, and I’ll catch you the flip side. Look out for the County Mounty in the plain brown wrapper hiding in the bushes.” But often a radio call would begin with the words, “You got your ears on?” That meant, “Are you tuned in?” Now in the 70's we thought that was a new line. How foolish! 2000 years earlier, Jesus said the same thing. In Luke 8:8 Jesus says “*He who has ears to hear let him hear.*” That could be translated, “Do you have your ears on? You have all you need to be able to hear me. Are you tuned in to what I am saying?” We need to tune in to Jesus.

Jesus told a story about tuning in. We usually call it the Parable of the Sower. One place it can be found is in Luke 8. “*A farmer went out to sow seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the footpath and it was trampled on and the birds of the air ate it. Some fell on rocky soil where the plants quickly grew but withered because they had no water. Some seed fell among weeds, and the weeds choked the life out of the crop. And still other seed fell on good soil and it came up and yielded a crop a hundred times more than was sown.’ When He had said this He looked at the crowd and said, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’”*

Now when a farmer starts planting, they don’t have just a handful of seed. They toss out bunches. It’s called broadcasting. And in the days of Jesus, the practice was to first sow the seed, and then plow that seed into the ground. So seed would be scattered all over the place. And it would land on a variety of soils. Different soils will give different results. Now Jesus tells us in this parable, that God is the farmer. And that seed is His Word, His message for us. The soil represents four different attitudes that people have when God’s Word lands on

them. This week and next we are going to look at those soils, because to hear from God, we have to be prepared to hear. But that brings up a question, why do we want to hear from God? Three reasons.

### **1. It Proves That I'm in God's Family.**

It is confirmation that we have a relationship with Jesus, and that He wants to talk to us. I don't know if you know this but Donald Trump, Bill Gates and I are really good friends. I write them all the time. It's just that they don't write back. Now if I write them and they ignore me, are we friends? No! Of course not. In the same light, if God is my friend, shouldn't I expect to hear from Him? That's what it means to have a relationship. We cannot have a relationship without communication. If we never hear from God, we have reason to question whether we have a relationship with God. Or could it be that God wants to communicate with us but we are just not listening. Jesus said in John 10:27 *“My sheep recognize My voice and they follow Me.”*

Some people think that God only speaks to the best of His children - Moses, Paul, the prophets. And they think that they're too insignificant for God to speak to them. But a good parent, and God is the best Parent, doesn't speak to only some of their kids. They speak to all of them. And I also know that I am more likely to talk to my kids when they are having some kind of struggle. In the same way, God has more to say to us when we are struggling as opposed to when everything is just peachy keen. God wants to talk to us just like I want to talk to my kids. And when I call my kids, I don't say, “Hello, I am the Reverend Chuck Sprenkle from St. Paul Church, and I am also your father.” No. I say “Hi” and they know who I am. It wasn't always that way. As babies I think that all voices sound like the teacher in Charlie Brown cartoons, “Wah, wah, wah, wah.” Recognizing my voice was a learned ability. Recognizing the voice of God is a learned ability, too. It comes with spiritual growth, and spiritual growth is a life long project. We're going to be learning to recognize God's voice the rest of our lives. And it does get easier. The better we get to know Christ, the better we begin to recognize God's voice from amid all the others. And hearing from God proves that I'm in God's family. That's one reason why I want to hear from God.

### **2. It Protects Me from Mistakes.**

If we listen, God will warn us when we're headed into trouble. That's the promise in Proverbs 6: *“Listen for God's voice in everything you do and everywhere you go. He's the one who will keep you on track.”* That's so true. Once when living in Halifax I had to get to an appointment in Harrisburg. That's easy if you take 322. But with some regularity there would be accidents and traffic tie-ups on 322. You can go another way, but it takes about half a day rather than half an hour. Traffic headed toward Harrisburg on 322 was stopped dead. Backed up for miles. Experience told me that it could take hours to get to Harrisburg. But I heard the Lord say to me, “It'll be alright. Get on 322.” I said, “God, you're wrong on this one.” And I headed to Duncannon on the other side of the river. That was good for about a half a mile. But then I discovered that half the free world decided to go through Duncannon, too. It seemed to take forever. But a half an hour or so later, I finally got on Route 15 and started heading toward Harrisburg, bumper to bumper, moving at about 10 miles an hour. Just beyond Duncannon, there's a hill where you can look across the river. And I looked and saw all the traffic flowing at about 65 miles an hour. And the Lord laughed and laughed. Had I listened to God, I would have been on time. I was not. If we hear and listen to the Lord, He will protect us from mistakes.

### **3. It Produces Personal Success.**

Psalm 32:8 *“I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.”* I'm not talking about the world's definition of success, which is about selfishness. And I am not preaching a prosperity gospel. God's definition of success is about significance. True significance in life. And God wants us to be people of significance. He has a plan for each and every one of us. The more we listen to Him, the more we can be in sync and on track with that plan. The result is that the more we listen to God, the more effective we'll be.

So these are some benefits to hearing from God. But how do we prepare to hear God's voice. There are four things, but we will only deal with the first one today.

### **1. Cultivate an Open Mind.**

Be receptive. Be willing. Be open. Be eager. Be ready. The number one barrier to hearing God speak is resistance. We don't believe that God will speak to us. Many are even closed to the possibility that God might speak to them. If we don't think God can or will speak to us, He won't. It is amazing how many people think that they're open-minded but they're not. Especially when it comes to God. The mind is closed on the subject. They don't even believe in the possibility of God, much less God speaking. They've been brainwashed by society and the mind is closed.

This is the hard soil Jesus talked about. On a farm, there are rows between the plants. They have to be there so you can walk down the row and harvest the veggies. Over time, that path can get hard. Now if a seed lands on that path, it has virtually no chance to grow. It can't take root. And so it becomes a snack for the first bird that shows up. Jesus explains that in verse 12. *“Those along the footpath are the ones who hear. And then the devil comes along and takes away the word from their heart so that they cannot believe and be saved.”*

Now think about those paths between the rows. They are hard and narrow. Do you know any minds, any hearts, any people like that? A closed mind, a hard heart, and a narrow view of life. They're closed to even the possibility of God in their life. I've spoken to local atheists like Stephen Frey and Steve Neubaum who think that they are so smart, so enlightened, and so open minded. Yet they cannot even consider the possibility that there is a God, much less that there is a God who loves them and want to speak with them. They have challenged me to prove to them God exists. But I don't even try because there is nothing that I could say that they would accept. People like that don't even give God a chance. “Our minds are made up. Our hearts are hardened. We're unwilling to listen.”

What causes closed minds? Let me lift up a couple of possibilities. **First is Pride.** When we are filled with pride we don't need anybody else, not even God. So why pray. We can handle this. Pride causes me to close my mind to God.

**Then there's Fear.** A lot of people are afraid of what God might say to them. They're afraid that God will tell them the truth about what is going on in their life, and they don't want to hear it, especially when they know that they are doing things that are wrong. And so they run from God, scared to death. Or what if God asked us to do something we don't want to do? Something that's too hard? Something I don't like? So out of fear, the mind and the heart are shut down. What if I open my mind to God and He turns me into a religious fanatic? All of a sudden I have to wear polyester and big hair and say “Praise the Lord!” and “Out, foul spirit of nicotine!” What if, all of a sudden, He makes me goofy or something? I don't want to be goofy. What if God takes away all my fun? Or my freedom? Fear can lead to a closed mind.

**A third one is Bitterness.** Bitterness and resentment will close our hearts and minds to God. Now the reality is that as we go through life we are going to get hurt. Sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally. But pain is going to come. The difference comes in what we do with that pain. If we hold on to it, focus on it, we will start looking around for someone to blame, and somewhere along the line we pin that blame on God. And if we blame God, if we are mad at God, we are not going to be open to hearing from God. The mind is closed and the heart is hardened. Not even God's love will be able to get through to us.

Some of you have been hurt very badly. You've been betrayed, misled, abused physically, emotionally, verbally.

Some have been rejected, hurt by a former girlfriend, boyfriend or spouse. Or maybe a Christian acted in ways that were not very Christ-like. Those things pile up in life. And there are a couple of things to say. First, I'm sorry you hurt. And God is too. For when God sees His children struggling, He grieves because that's not what wants for us. He hates to see His children get hurt. But it's a free world where people make choices that are wrong and foolish and people get hurt. But don't turn from God. Turn to God. I don't know why but sometimes when we get hurt we turn away from the One who can help us. We withdraw into a shell. We harden our hearts and close our minds. Bitterness makes our heart grow cold. So first, turn to God.

The second thing to remember is, never let somebody else's sin keep you from God. That's foolish. Don't let someone from the past continue to hurt you in the present. And they can't hurt us any more unless we choose to hold on to the pain. They've probably already forgotten it but we're holding on to it. Let it go that you might be able to move on and grow in life.

The tragedy of a closed mind and a hard heart is that it's barren. Nothing can grow there. Nothing can live there. The seed of God's gospel has no chance of taking root in a closed mind or a hardened heart, because those with a hard heart and closed mind are not really living. They are just existing. They cannot live because that living seed cannot take root. And Jesus tells us that that sort of life is for the birds, not for the children.

There's good advice found in James 1: *“Get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives. Humbly accept the message God has planted in your hearts for it is strong enough to save your soul.”* Humbly accept. Be open to the possibility that God wants to talk to you. Even if it takes a while, open your heart, your mind, that you might hear what the Spirit is saying. That's the first step to hearing from God. We have more to follow next week. But for now, cultivate an open mind and a tender heart that you might be ready to hear from God. And in your life, may it be so. Amen.