

REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION

# YOU CAN HEAR THE VOICE OF GOD

HOW GOD SPEAKS  
IN LISTENING PRAYER

STEVE SAMPSON



**Chosen**

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

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# Introduction

## *Learning to Know His Voice*

Part of me wanted to title this book *Ten Ways to Hear from God*, because through my years of personal experience, I have recognized at least ten ways that the Holy Spirit speaks to us. My thinking was that in reading these pages, you might reason, *I may not be able to hear God in all ten ways, but maybe I can hear Him in at least one or two*. Listening for God in a couple of ways is certainly better than not expecting to hear from Him at all, but it is still too limiting. I am confident, however, that if you will apply the simple principles I present in these pages, you will hear Him in many ways.

In this new and revised edition, I will be sharing firsthand illustrations of my own experiences over the years. This book is easy to read, and the principles are simple, yet profound. They have proven true repeatedly in my experience for over thirty years. I have been blessed with so much positive feedback from those who have related how these truths have

changed their lives and enabled them to begin hearing the Holy Spirit—daily.

Henry Ford had an amazing vision. He wanted every person to be able to own an automobile. Toward that end, his company manufactured millions of affordable Model T and Model A Fords. My vision is similar—that every Christian be able to hear the voice of the Lord.

If you have an earnest desire to hear from God, this book will be life-changing for you. Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice” (John 10:27). He did not say certain sheep or special sheep. *You* can hear His voice. Yet hearing Him is not just about prayer, but about listening when we pray. Hearing the voice of God should be the most basic, foundational thing we learn as new Christians. Little is written on the subject, however, at least in any practical sense. Learning to hear is a process. Just as a child learns to talk and walk, we all grow in our confidence when it comes to hearing God. The key is not to let religious activity become a substitute for intimacy with God.

This book is not a work to convince the skeptics, but rather to feed and equip the hungry. I am in no way trying to be a theologian, but rather, I am sharing with you the principles the Lord has taught me (combined with experience). This entire book gives practical instruction on how to stir up the Holy Spirit and begin to hear His voice daily. Christians are weary of fleshly hype and hoopla; they desire to hear the Master’s voice. There is a divine desire kindled afresh in the hearts of believers everywhere to know the mind of the Spirit and to expend energy only on that to which He has called them. Hearing God is encountering life. Yes, it is possible to hear from Him—daily.

As a pastor, I noticed firsthand something about those who were growing spiritually. They would always relate how they

had heard the Holy Spirit speak to them through a Scripture, or in some other way, that made them aware that they were communicating with Him. As a result, their spiritual growth was phenomenal, while the growth of others seemed stunted. Hearing God's voice has a huge impact on your growth rate as a Christian.

At first, it seems easy to grow. New converts always seem to have wonderful experiences in the first days of their Christian experience. They may not have a lot of wisdom, but their receptivity and response to the Holy Spirit is precious and priceless. They may not know Genesis from Revelation, but they have an amazing awareness of the Holy Spirit talking to them.

As weeks turn into months, however, new believers generally experience hearing the Lord's voice less and less. Distractions begin to take over. Sincere Christian leaders involve baby Christians in church activities and quickly give them a job title, involving them in special projects and immersing them in all manner of religious busyness. Yet nothing is done to train those spiritual babies to exercise their spirits by listening to the Lord. All the emphasis is placed on looking *outside*, not *inside*. The spiritual growth of new believers stops because communion with the Holy Spirit stops. Instead, they are taught to trust a prominent Christian magazine, the denominational headquarters or a popular and gifted teacher rather than trusting the Holy Spirit within. The simple truth has been forgotten, the most basic New Covenant principle, "None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them" (Hebrews 8:11).

Frankly, I believe Christians do hear God; they just have not been taught to recognize His voice. All manner of things

have clogged our ears. The devil has issued a universal assignment to obstruct our hearing, because he knows that Christians who are in intimate communion with the Holy Spirit are a serious threat to his kingdom. Those who hear God are capable of *knowing* the mind of the Spirit and receiving strategies in prayer—strategies that will expose the enemy’s tactics.

Yet we cannot solely blame the devil, for it is really the lack of proper direction that has robbed us. We have substituted religious gobbledygook for training our young believers’ spirits to be resilient in hearing the Lord. Even the writer of Hebrews laments “you have *become dull of hearing*” (Hebrews 5:11, emphasis added). The implication is that we were born with good spiritual ears, but we have not trained and disciplined ourselves to pay attention to the Holy Spirit, thus we have become dull of hearing.

Although we may grow in our knowledge of the Word, our spiritual man does not necessarily grow. Information about the Bible does not guarantee revelation of the Spirit. Yet you and I can learn to hear His voice in so many ways. There is nothing more exciting than hearing the Holy Spirit, so get ready for the adventure of your life! Yes, you can hear the voice of God.

Steve Sampson

# 1

## Hearing God through the Written Word and the Proceeding Word

Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

Deuteronomy 8:3

Pastor Michael was on a weekend ministry trip in the Carolinas. Traveling with him was his music minister, Jason. They both had been looking forward to a weekend of ministering to an excited and expectant group of people. They began Friday night and ministered all day Saturday; then they agreed to stop for a little refreshment before the Saturday night meeting. As they walked into a famous fast-food establishment, Michael ordered a shake. Jason liked the idea and ordered one, too. Unfortunately, in the thirty-minute drive back to the church, they both began complaining of nausea.

They pulled into the church parking lot just minutes before the meeting began. After several worship songs, Michael was introduced. As he began to preach, his horrible feelings of nausea increased. He prayed under his breath that he would not get violently sick in front of everyone.

Strangely, in the middle of his struggle he sensed the Lord drawing his attention to a young lady on the worship team. Unable to ignore the urging from the Holy Spirit, he heard himself saying to her, “The Lord is telling me that He sees you as pure and innocent, and what you have been through will be as if it never happened.”

Michelle, whom he had never met, began to cry loudly. Her mother, who was on the back row of the church, began to wail. Pastor Michael prayed for a few other people and closed the meeting. He felt so sick by then that he turned down the church pastor’s invitation to get something to eat afterward. He and Jason went to their motel, where they both vomited excessively. They drew the obvious conclusion that they were suffering from food poisoning.

The following morning, they returned to the church. The pastor could not wait to tell Michael about the effect of the word he had spoken the night before on nineteen-year-old Michelle. Her story was tragic. A few months earlier she had met a man on the Internet, and they had agreed to meet in her small North Carolina town. On a date, he had drugged her soft drink and brutally raped her. Her sister found her naked body on the front porch the following morning.

A few days before the ministry weekend, Michelle had finally gotten up the courage to tell her mother about the entire horrendous experience. Her mother was reeling from grief. Then right before the Saturday night meeting, Michelle told her mother that this would be her last church service because

she just could not deal with the guilt and shame of her rape. The only reason she agreed to go to the meeting that summer night was that the music team desperately needed her help, but Michelle had already determined that this would be her last appearance in church.

When I heard the story, I marveled at the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Michelle had reached her end, but God spoke through Pastor Michael to bring her a message of hope and healing. The prophetic word to Michelle—that God saw her as clean and innocent—liberated her from the devastating shame and guilt that made her want to surrender to a life of hopelessness. The change in her life was immediate.

The story made me think of how deviously the powers of darkness had strategized to make Pastor Michael so sick that he would become ineffective. This was not unlike the severe storm that the disciples encountered when crossing the Sea of Galilee, just before Jesus cast the demons out of the man living in the cemetery of the Gadarenes (see Luke 8).

It made me wonder how many desperate people attend church, despairing over a situation and needing to hear God speak to them, but then leave the meeting just as they came—empty and discouraged.

## **The Proceeding Word**

Michael's experience of giving that word to Michelle is a perfect illustration of a powerful truth in Scripture—the need to hear the proceeding Word of God. Scripture tells us,

And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you,

allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; *but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.*

Deuteronomy 8:2–3 (emphasis added)

The truth is that God wants to speak to all His people, and even more important, He wants to speak *through* all His people. Michelle needed to hear more than a sermon. She needed to hear a personal word from the Holy Spirit that would release her from her deplorable encounter. Thankfully, Pastor Michael was available for the Lord to speak through that summer night.

There is no question that God speaks to us through the written Word (the *logos*), which is the established mind of God and the will of God. It is one thing, however, to know what God has said in His Word, but it is also another thing of great significance to know what the Holy Spirit is saying to us daily through the proceeding word.

Think of it this way: The Bible is our road map, while the Holy Spirit is our transportation. Growing up in an evangelical church, I cannot tell you how many times I heard entire sermons on the importance of the written Word of God, and statements such as, “All we need is the Word.” Personally, the only time I heard the Holy Spirit mentioned was at water baptism, when the preacher would say, “In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Some evangelicals claim that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not for our day and time, but ended when the apostles and disciples died. They say that God does not speak today other than through His Word, and they seem to view the Trinity as the Father, the Son and the Holy Bible.

This attitude makes my blood boil. As we read and study the Bible, it tells us that God is willing to speak to us in a

variety of ways and will give us personal instruction and guidance in everything that concerns our lives. The Bible is full of miracles and demonstrations of the active power of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts is a great example of that. It is amazing how many times the disciples had to listen to direction from the Holy Spirit in that book.

The Bible instructs us to be led by the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:14). Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice” (John 10:27). Multiple Scriptures tell us to listen to and obey God. But how can we obey God if we never hear Him? Do we just read the Word, or do we start believing it and acting on what it says?

Most everyone can relate experiences of how they have merely opened the Bible and had a verse of Scripture seemingly jump off the page at them. Those experiences, of which God has graciously given me many, are priceless. The Bible is what some call the “Manufacturer’s Handbook.” As Peter states, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Yet it is one thing to read a book and quite another to know the author. Until the Author, the Holy Spirit, makes the Word come alive, it is only ink on paper. Without the help of the Holy Spirit, we will not experience the flow of life that comes through the written Word.

Again, the best way I find to express this is that the Bible is our road map, but the Holy Spirit is our transportation. I thank God for the Bible; it is our map and our pathway to life. But it is one thing to have a road map, or a GPS system, and another thing to have a car to drive. What good is a GPS without transportation? A GPS will give us directions, but ultimately we have to get in a car and drive.

Romans 8:14 says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Sometimes when I read the Bible, it helps me to read what it *does not* say. Notice it does not say, “as many as are led by their Bibles.” It says “led by the Spirit of God.” It also does not say, “Trust in the LORD with all your brain” in Proverbs 3:5; it says “Trust in the LORD with all your heart.” Every Christian should study, memorize and absorb the words of Scripture, but we must also have a relationship with the Holy Spirit. Again, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. We need the written Word, but we also need the proceeding word, which comes out of our relationship with the Holy Spirit.

The early Christians did not have the luxury of a New Testament to read, but they did hear the Holy Spirit. For example, look at how the Holy Spirit directed Paul, Silas and Timothy:

Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were *forbidden by the Holy Spirit* to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, *but the Spirit did not permit them*. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And *a vision appeared to Paul in the night*. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” *Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

Acts 16:6–10, emphasis added

Forbidden by the Holy Spirit? How did they know the Holy Spirit was forbidding them to preach in Asia? I thought it was always God’s will to preach anywhere.

The Spirit did not permit them? How did they know that the Holy Spirit was not permitting them to go to Bithynia?

A vision appeared to Paul in the night? How did they know that meant they were to preach in Macedonia?

The answer to these questions is that they were hearing the voice of God.

### **You Did Not Believe My Words. . . .**

Zacharias and Elizabeth were wonderful, God-fearing people with a flawless reputation. Luke 1:6 says, “And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” But when the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias, he had trouble believing the angel’s words.

Gabriel told Zacharias, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John” (verse 13).

Zacharias questioned the proclamation, which was a proceeding word from God. He said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years” (verse 18). (We know we are in trouble when we are trying to give God “unknown information.”)

Gabriel was not happy with Zacharias’s response and made it clear that he had been sent from God Himself with the message. Then he said, “But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time” (verse 20).

Notice the angel did not say, “because you did not believe the Bible.” He said, “because you did not believe my words.” We can easily be guilty of the same kind of disbelief. Of

course we would never reject the Bible . . . but we ignore the Holy Spirit when He speaks to us. The Bible is full of places where the Holy Spirit gives commands, and God still gives us commands today through His Spirit. We need to keep in mind John 15:14: “You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.”

### **God Thinks He Is Right**

Keith was the pastor of a small church in a sleepy town in the southern United States. He and his wife had worked hard getting the church off the ground for several years—their biggest struggle being with religious strongholds in the area. By this, I mean people who were self-sufficient and satisfied in their Christian or “religious” experience.

Every week for several years, Pastor Keith and his wife prayed for breakthrough over spiritual blindness and broke the powers of spiritual darkness over their town, knowing that this was where God had called them. One afternoon, Pastor Keith walked into the church and noticed someone had left a message on the church’s voicemail. It was a man named Jerry. Jerry expressed that although he and his wife, Jackie, had driven by the church many times, they had never attended a meeting. On voicemail, he left a prayer request regarding Jackie. She had had a stroke a few days earlier and had totally lost her sight. Jerry related that the neurosurgeon had told him that if Jackie was blind for more than 48 hours, her sight would never return.

As Pastor Keith listened to the message, he had a strong prompting from the Holy Spirit to call Jerry. When he dialed the number, however, Jackie answered. Pastor Keith told her that he had received her husband’s message about her

blindness, and that as he was listening to the voicemail, the Holy Spirit had spoken to him. He was to give her the message that he was hearing in his spirit—the Lord was saying that she would have her eyesight back in two weeks.

Pastor Keith struggled for a way to explain to Jackie what was going on, thinking she might hang up on him. But to his amazement, Jackie’s comments in reply were full of faith.

At one point, Jackie told him, “Oh, then I won’t have to wear my Stevie Wonder glasses.”

Pastor Keith laughed. Before the conversation ended, he invited Jackie and Jerry to attend a church picnic the following weekend. They came, and Jerry gently guided Jackie around as the church people introduced themselves. Jackie was totally blind. But in exactly two weeks, a guest evangelist was scheduled to speak at the church. When he came, he prayed for Jackie and her eyes immediately opened, two weeks nearly to the hour!

Since then, for the last three years Jackie has worked for the church, using the computer daily. That is just one of the many ways she and Jerry have been a blessing to the church. Her eyesight is perfect.

When Pastor Keith heard from the Lord that day, it was life-changing for Jackie. One thing is for sure—whatever the Holy Spirit says is true. He is the Spirit of Truth, and He will never lie. There is nothing more exciting on earth than to recognize that the Holy Spirit is talking to us daily. Pastor Keith’s experience reminded me of the crippled man in the book of Acts:

And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother’s womb, who had never walked. This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with

a loud voice, “Stand up straight on your feet!” And he leaped and walked.

Acts 14:8–10

The Holy Spirit showed Paul that the man had faith to be made well. The knowledge was so strong that Paul boldly commanded the man to stand up, and he did. Paul got results when he spoke to the crippled man. We still see those kinds of powerful results today, for example when God spoke to Michelle through Pastor Michael and to Jackie through Pastor Keith. To God be the glory!

### God’s Words Are Creative

Everything God says is filled with creative power. Just as from the beginning, when God said, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3), the same Holy Spirit speaks things into existence in our lives. It is human nature to question and to second-guess our situation, but when the Holy Spirit talks to us, the results are guaranteed. His words are true and will come to pass.

Most every Christian who enjoys an intimate walk with God will begin the day with prayer and meditation, anticipating being drawn to a specific Scripture that contains a “message” the Holy Spirit is speaking to him or her that day. But it is possible to hear the Holy Spirit in many other ways as well. The bottom line is that we must have the “bread” of the Word of God, but we also must have communication and relationship with the Author.

When Jesus said to Simon, “Your name is rock” (*petras*; see Matthew 16:18), Peter was not acting like a rock. In fact, the name *Simon* means a reed blowing in the wind, unstable and vascillating. But as soon as Jesus changed Simon’s name

to Peter (rock) it was a reality, although Peter did not act like a rock immediately. In fact, in most of His responses to Peter, Jesus rebuked him.

Ultimately, though, Peter acted like a rock. He was a rock when he laid his life on the line on the Day of Pentecost, announcing to the Israelites, “Jesus of Nazareth . . . being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death” (Acts 2:22–23). He was a rock when he confronted Ananias and Sapphira, saying, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?” (Acts 5:3). And he walked in God’s authority when people were healed even by being under his shadow: “They brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them” (Acts 5:15). In fact, more miracles are attributed to Peter’s ministry than to any other disciple or apostle—all because Jesus prophesied to him, taking him from a reed to a rock.

## **What Is God Saying?**

I would like to say to all preachers and Bible teachers, and really to all Christians, that we do not need more information, we need more understanding. We should not be as concerned about what God said yesterday as we should about having a fresh hunger for what He is saying today. Fresh understanding and insight from God is to the Church what new technology is to the business world. We need to hear the heart of God. Look at 1 Peter 4:11:

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God

supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

An oracle is something fresh that is coming from God. It is mandatory that we be listening to the Holy Spirit for the subject and emphasis He wants to bring out. Numerous pastors have told me excitedly, “The Lord has given me a wonderful ‘word’ for the people this weekend.” Some pastors fall into a rut, however. Since they are not hearing the Holy Spirit, they drone on and on with an “old” message. Their message is not evil or false; it is merely lifeless because it is not coming from the heart of God for the present moment. It is out of season.

Following tradition is nothing more than honoring what God did at one time, but is no longer doing. In other words, religion honors what God did, but resists what He is doing. And many Christians practice “safe church” their entire lives, their attitude being, *God, don't make me pregnant with Your plan and purpose.*

Tradition is so deceptive. Many churches are in such a rut that you can set your watch with accuracy by when each step of a meeting or service happens. It becomes the same thing week after week, year after year. The freshness is gone. The Holy Spirit is limited to a back room, if He is allowed in at all. We need to make room for the Holy Spirit to move.

## Spiritual Noise Pollution

One of the most diabolical strategies of our adversary, a strategy that keeps us from hearing the proceeding Word, is noise pollution. The enemy of our souls resists our experiencing this dimension of hearing God daily, so there is

a war going on in the spirit world to keep us from hearing. The competition for listening and available ears is fierce. The devil is competing for our attention.

Just as McDonald's, Burger King and Subway compete for our business, the enemy "competes" with God for our attention. The battle is raging, and with so many technological advances available to us, we have to be more determined than ever to listen. Hundreds of television channels, the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, iPods, MP3s, cell phones, computers, iPads and numerous other items of technological advancement compete for our attention. It seems as though everyone is preoccupied with some type of technology. But the world and all its stimuli have nothing to offer the inner man.

While God waits patiently for each of us to draw nigh to Him and pay the price of taking time to listen, the devil uses distractions, sensation, social media and all manner of ways to lure us, in order to keep our minds and hearts occupied with other things. We are inundated by noise pollution continually, yet to live triumphantly and productively within the Kingdom of God, people must listen to the King.

My passion is that Christians really know and discern the voice of the Holy Spirit. To learn to hear from God is the greatest asset any Christian can possess. Certainly everyone has seen misuses and abuses by those who claim to have heard God. However, no one stops spending money because there is counterfeit money out there. It should be part of normal Christianity to walk in fellowship with God intimately enough to enable us to hear from Him on a daily basis. Jesus did not say that His sheep would listen to CDs, read books or memorize Bible verses, although these things are all good. But He did say, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

Well-intentioned Christians make “Kingdom” decisions that are derived from a human perspective and not God’s. But I love a sign one pastor posted in his office: “For God so loved the world, that He didn’t send a committee.”

## Hearing on the Inside

As I was seeking God about the need for quality of ministry in the Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit spoke these words: “When ministers are not led by the Spirit, they get into works.”

Works become a substitute for living water. Jesus’ words to Martha about that were compassionate but firm: “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But *one thing* is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41–42, emphasis added).

Martha had a need to feel useful and accepted. She had a need to be needed. She was not hearing the Holy Spirit inside her. Christians who are not hearing the proceeding word will always be caught up in performance, trying to satisfy that inward ache through religious accomplishment. There is nothing wrong with hard work and being a servant in the house of God, but it must be done with the right motive. Martha’s motive was her need to be needed, and because she was not hearing and communing with the Holy Spirit, she lacked peace on the inside. She was struggling to find fulfillment through serving.

Something happens on the inside, though, when we begin to tune in and hear from God. Peace comes. Rest comes. No longer present are the nagging doubts about whether we are pleasing God, or the fears that God is disappointed in us. Gone is the feeling that we need to expend endless energy in order to gain God’s approval.

Believers who are being honest with themselves are weary of expending energy on anything that God has not specifically called them to do. It is time we realize that each of us has different callings and that we are not obligated to be a jack-of-all-trades working to meet any possible need in the Kingdom of God. Feeling obligated to try to function in areas we are not called to leaves us feeling guilty and unsatisfied. I have to remind myself that not everything has my name on it. I can only aim for what God has called me to do. What an awesome freedom—to do only what He is calling each of us to do. We are only anointed to do our specific part.

Grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which *every part does its share*, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:15–16, emphasis added

Paul proclaimed in 2 Timothy 4:7 that he had finished his course. I do not desire to follow Paul's course. I want to follow and fulfill the course to which God has called me. That is the course in which I will experience the grace and fulfillment of God. It will bring fulfillment that is too wonderful to put into words.

How do I know the course God has put before me so that I can follow it and accomplish what He has called me to do? By hearing His voice. We have looked at two ways we can do that so far—by hearing Him speak through the written Word, the Bible, and by hearing Him speak through the proceeding Word. Let's go on from here to look at several other specific ways in which God speaks to us.