



7 Biblical Ways
to Hear
God's Voice

Brooke Grangard

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Foreword

The underlying truth to the suggestion that God is a communicating God lies in His nature and character. It is literally impossible to read the Bible and not see God talking with His people in some form or another, and they in return, hearing Him.

During the decade I served as a missionary in East Asia, it was imperative that I learned to strip off my own cultural way of interpreting the Bible and let the Bible speak for itself. In many churches, we have shackled ourselves to the false notion that God does not speak to us in a personal way. This is a deceptive tradition taught by people (albeit well-meaning). You will find no proof for this idea in the Word of God.

In the Old Testament, God spoke primarily through His prophets. In fact, He declared that He would do nothing unless He first warned His people through the prophets.¹

¹ Amos 3:7

In the New Testament, God speaks primarily through the Holy Spirit (and of course Jesus, in the Gospels). Jesus said it so clearly in John when He stated, “My sheep hear my voice and follow me.”²

We were made to be in relationship with God. How can two beings have fellowship with one another if they are not able to communicate? Without this key ingredient, relationships either quickly die or become stiff and overly formal, lacking intimacy.

In the following chapters, my prayer is that you will see clearly that God wants you to hear from Him and that you are very capable of doing so.

May we press onto know Him. He is truly a God worth knowing. And more amazingly, He wants to be known!

God Bless,
Brooke

² John 10:27

Chapter One

God's Word (Logos)

The Bible, God's Word, is one of the most powerful and common ways that we as followers of Jesus (or anyone for that matter) can hear from God.

There are two primary Greek words used to describe Scriptures that are translated "word" in the New Testament.ⁱ The first Greek word is *logos*. *Logos* refers to the total inspired Word of God and to Jesus, who is the "Living Word". The second Greek word is *rhema*. I will discuss *rhema* more in the following chapter. For now, let's look at how incredible this *logos* is!

The Bible was written over a 1,500 year span by 40 different writers. Unlike other religious writings, the Bible is an account of real events, places, people, and dialogue.ⁱⁱ

The Bible also passes many tests that any historical document must go through in order to prove its authenticity. I won't go into all of them here. A good book to read on the subject is [*The Case for Christ*](#) by Lee Strobelⁱⁱⁱ.

The Bible points us to God. Through it, we understand what He is like and what He values. We can see how He demonstrates His love for mankind. We can understand His eternal plan and how He desires for us to live our lives.

The Bible is our standard. Without concrete truth, society will seek to determine what the best way for people to live is. This can have catastrophic consequences. Throughout history, we find both individuals and groups of people who thought they knew what was best but whose ideas ended in war and genocide. God gave us a standard that is above and beyond humanity's wisdom.

In the second book of Timothy, we find the verse: *All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.*³ Only God's *logos* Word should be held up as the standard of truth in any culture or for any individual.

³ 2 Timothy 3:16

In Loren Cunningham's [*The Book that Transforms Nations*](#), he gives multiple examples of countries that went from being rife with internal struggle and poverty to peace and prosperity simply by applying the principles of the Bible.

God gave us both spiritual and physical laws. If we follow them, we will find peace and plenty (not necessarily *billions* of dollars and zero problems but peace and plenty).

The Bible also gives us a blueprint for government, education, sciences and the arts, family- in fact, all spheres of society can and should be understood through the lens of God's Word. Landa Cope's book, [*The Old Testament Template*](#), is an excellent read for more insight into this. God's people should be ahead of their times in all walks of life.

Chapter Two

God's Word (*Rhema*)

The *rhema* word of God is God's personal, specific, in-season word to us. God can highlight a verse or portion of Scripture (His *logos* Word) in such a way that we know it is His customized word for us at that particular moment. The Greek word *rhema* literally means "utterance". It is the Holy Spirit giving utterance to the written Word.

Countless times in my life, I have come to my daily time with God and heard personally from Him through the Scriptures. He may answer one of my questions or give assurance to whatever worry is on my heart. And as we just read in the previous chapter from the second book of Timothy, God's Word is able to teach, rebuke, correct, and train. God has used the Bible to bring anything from encouragement to rebuke. (I do prefer the encouragement, but alas, I need the correction as well. And even His correction is so kind!)

Even though I've read through the Bible many times, the Holy Spirit still highlights certain verses or passages in new

ways that I have never seen before. Just recently, I was asking God (and fretting) about our financial situation. I'm sure many of you can relate. As I spent time reading His Word, I came across these words in Isaiah 46:4, words that brought tears of conviction and relief:

Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

As we read His *logos* Word and hear His *rhema* word, it becomes our daily bread. And Jesus himself declares that *He* is the Word⁴ in flesh and the Bread of life⁵. God's Word comes in the form of Scripture, of Jesus himself, and in the *rhema* word of God, quickened to us by the Holy Spirit. He is such a good God! And He so loves to chat with His kids!

This specific way in which God speaks to us is probably the one for which it is most difficult to find a Biblical example. It is due to the fact that our society and generation are among the very few and fortunate ranks to have *personal*

⁴ John 1

⁵ John 6:35

access to the Scriptures. In times before, it was only a group of select males who were able to read and memorize God's Word. And even then, some would only have had one scroll to share between them!

But we do see Paul bringing the written word of God in his letter to the Romans. In many places, he is giving them a historical account of God's plans for His people, but in some places, it could be said that the written Word does in fact become a "word-in-season" for the Romans.

In Romans 4:22, Paul is quoting Genesis 15:6 as he tries to explain to the Romans that they are made righteous by faith and not by works. As the Holy Spirit impressed this truth upon those who heard these words in Rome, it easily could have become their *rhema* word.

My intention is not to get caught up in technicalities or linguistics but to point us to the truth that God does use His general Word to bring personal and specific conviction, direction, and encouragement.

This is why it is so important to spend time in the Word. Not only will the Holy Spirit speak to us as we are actually reading the Bible, but the more we know it, the more He is able to quicken (remind) us of its truth throughout the day.

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

The Word is *living*. We don't read the Bible so that we can check it off our daily chore list. We are investing time in our relationship with Jesus. The Psalms say that God shares His secrets with those who fear Him.⁶ The point is not merely to read it for reading's sake but to find and know the God of those pages.

The Book of Romans also tells us that faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.⁷ God's Word is intended to bring faith when we combine hearing with believing.

⁶ Psalm 25:14

⁷ Romans 10:17

The Bible is full of God's promises to us. We can stand on those promises because of the One who spoke them. He is faithful. He can be tested and proved.

I recall an example from my own life: shortly after we lost our first baby just 3 months into the pregnancy, the Holy Spirit led me to a verse in the fourteenth chapter of John. It is the passage where Jesus tells his disciples not to worry. He is going to prepare a place for them. And in His Father's house there are many rooms.

It was exactly what I needed to hear. No human word could have brought the comfort that God's Word brought to me. I knew my baby was with Jesus, that Jesus had prepared a room for him and was taking care of him. I was also reminded that one day, we would meet again. Only God can comfort us in such a profound way.

Chapter Three

The Holy Spirit

I believe this is the most common way that we as Jesus-followers are meant to hear from God. We are A.D., post-Christ's initial coming. We are living in the age that comes *after* the curtain was torn. Jesus gave His life to restore us to right relationship with the Father. That is the whole point. We are now to come boldly before the throne and talk with our Daddy.

What better way to hear from God than with one of the members of the Godhead- the sweet, wise, beautiful, amazing, humble Holy Spirit. Our Comforter and Friend. Our constant Helper. What and incredible Being He is!

I spent my entire childhood hearing from God through both forms of His Word: *logos* and *rhema*. But it wasn't until I learned that I could hear the voice of the Holy Spirit within my own being that my relationship with God began to grow to new levels of intimacy.

I believe that this type close friendship through intimate communication was the original way that God wanted to relate to mankind. We see him speaking to Adam and Eve in the garden. We see him calling Abraham into a new land. We see him discussing many matters with Moses. And now because of Jesus, we *all* can have access to this kind of intimate relationship with the Father. This is what He has always wanted.

You can hear His heart cry in Scripture: *Oh, that my people would listen to me! Oh that Israel would follow me.*⁸

When Jesus was about to leave earth after his resurrection and go back to heaven, He told his disciples that it would be *better* for them once He was gone. Better than Jesus? YES! *Why?* Because even though Jesus was God, He was still limited to His body being in only one place at any given time. The Holy Spirit is not. The Holy Spirit is with us 100% of the time because He dwells within us. He is always ready to comfort, teach, direct, instruct, help, correct -whatever you need.

⁸ Psalm 81:13

He loves to speak to us in that “still, small voice”. He gives wisdom when we ask for it just like He promised to in James 1:5. He gives discernment when we are unclear about what is really going on in a situation.⁹ And He brings light into areas of darkness like He did for Daniel.¹⁰

Many times in the Bible, we see people being led by the Holy Spirit in this way. In the Old Testament, only a select few were led personally by the Spirit of God. In the New Testament, our supreme model, Jesus, receives the Holy Spirit after being baptized and is then “led by the Holy Spirit into the desert”¹¹. Upon Jesus’ return to heaven, the Holy Spirit comes upon those gathered in the upper room and Joel’s prophecy is fulfilled: The Spirit is poured out upon all.¹² We can see that after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, the playing field is leveled. The curtain is torn in two; all who believe in Jesus can receive the Holy Spirit.

As 1 John 2:27 states:

⁹ Hebrews 5:14

¹⁰ Daniel 2:22

¹¹ Matthew 4:1

¹² Joel 2:28. Acts 2:17

As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him.

It's not that we no longer need teachers to help us understand the Word or the ways of God, but that we no longer have to rely *solely* on people to hear the voice of God.

After 10 years in China, my husband and our two small children and I relocated to Cambodia. We gave away or sold almost everything we had and boarded a flight to Phnom Pehn. We were staying in cheap hotels, hoping and praying that God would open up a place for us to live. Nothing was coming. I was getting desperate.

Around day 14, I put our baby girl down for her nap and took some time to ask the Lord if there was any specific direction He had for us. All that came to mind was a name: Sophia. I could have written it off as some random thought, but I have learned along the way not to ignore that small voice. I googled, "Real estate agent Phnom Pehn Sophia" and a

man's name and listings popped up. Apparently, Sophia is a male's name in Cambodia. Anyway, to make a long story short, we ended up renting a house through...you guessed it, Real Estate Agent Sophia!

Sometimes instead of hearing Him speak into our hearts, it's almost as though we can *sense* what He is saying. As if we know what we are meant to do before we fully understand it with our logical minds.

This happened to my husband and I while we were on furlough in my hometown in Colorado after many years overseas on the mission field. We had been under the impression that we were meant to stay in Colorado for a certain length of time and then move onto the next assignment, but details (of which I won't bore you) were just not falling into place as (we thought) they should have been.

We kept taking our situation back to the Lord in prayer and one day, Rich (my husband) just "knew" that we were meant to continue on in Colorado until our circumstances shifted. I can't describe what changed his mind or why he came to that conclusion. It was as though something was just

illuminated within himself and what he previously could not see, he now did.

When he shared this new idea with me, it didn't take long until I had the same confirmation within my own spirit. A *sense* that yes, this was the right step.

It's hard to find the language for this type of leading because in our modern societies, we so rarely rely on our spirits (which are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit) to direct us. We have been educated in the Greek way of thinking which is to rely almost solely on our minds. Even though this type of leading by the Spirit is *extremely common* in the Bible, we find it hard to get past our own worldview. And many wise and well-meaning Christian teachers only serve to enforce these faulty thought patterns.

It will most likely feel strange at first. That is not because it is wrong but because it is *new*. Most likely you will make mistakes, but if you start out asking the Holy Spirit to guide you like this in small decisions, the consequences of hearing incorrectly shouldn't be too grave.

If you *are* making bigger decisions, I would definitely recommend you ask the Lord for confirmation along the way as well as seek out wise counsel. Remember, we are His sheep and we hear His voice.¹³ He wants to lead us more than we want to be led, so fear not!

(A great resource for principles in learning to hear God's voice in this manner is Joy Dawson's [*Forever Ruined for the Ordinary*](#). My ability to hear God's voice was transformed by applying the wisdom from her teaching.)

¹³ John 10

Chapter Four

Dreams/Visions/Angels

Though we don't meet as many people nowadays (at least in the West) who often hear from God by means of dreams and visions and angels, it is still a very Biblical way to hear from Him. In many parts of the world, it is quite normal. And I believe it will continue to increase in the Western world as well.

There are many times in the Old Testament where people hear from God in one of these ways, but I will draw examples from the New Testament, since the times in which we now live are A.D.!

Jesus Himself was ministered to by angels.¹⁴

Peter and an angel made a jailbreak.¹⁵

Cornelius, the Roman Centurion received a message from an angel.¹⁶

¹⁴ Matthew 4:11

¹⁵ Acts 12

Peter had a vision that helped to convince him that all food is now kosher.¹⁷

John wrote the entire book of Revelation through a vision.¹⁸

Paul went to Macedonia after receiving direction in a dream.¹⁹

One of the earliest times that I remember hearing from God as a child was in a dream. I was about 10 years old, and some of my classmates and I had gotten into an argument at school. I came home and was very distressed about the break in relationship. I couldn't stop worrying about it and was very nervous to return to school to see them. I remember waking from my sleep the next morning with a dream: my classmates and I were all sitting in a big circle and were happy. It was a very simple dream, but I felt that it was encouragement from God that everything would be

¹⁶ Acts 10

¹⁷ Acts 10

¹⁸ Revelation

¹⁹ Acts 16

okay. And everything turned out just as He showed me in my dream.

It's possible that the dream was just my subconscious trying to relieve itself of the stress, and I am not saying that every dream you have is from God, but there is a certain *weight* to those dreams that are. And God is able to confirm the dream to you as well. I wouldn't recommend that you make any major life changes based *only* on dreams you think are from God *unless* they are confirmed to you in other ways and you have sought counsel. Many of the ways mentioned in this book are ways God can confirm His voice and direction for our lives.

I have heard it said that God speaks to us in the way that we need to hear. If we are tuned into Him, He generally speaks to us within our spirits. I personally believe He prefers that way because it is the most intimate one. But sometimes we need to hear Him in a different way, especially in very big decisions or very stressful situations.

Visions differ from dreams. A vision is generally a picture that we see while we are awake. A dream occurs while we are asleep.

Some people commonly hear from the Lord in visions, but He rarely speaks to me in this manner. I can remember only one significant vision that I have had. In 2003, I felt that God was calling me to move to China as a missionary. I had just finished a degree in Spanish Bilingual Education! Nothing to do with China! It was a huge decision, and I really needed to know that I was hearing from God.

One day, as I was sitting in a class, I saw in my mind's eye, but with my eyes *open*, a picture of a large red flag with a yellow symbol in the top left corner. I'm sorry to say that I didn't even know *for sure* if this was China's flag or not. Obviously, geography was not my strong point. Once I discovered that yes, China's flag was red with the yellow stars in the top left corner, I strongly felt that this was God's confirmation to me. I was meant to go to China as a missionary.

Chapter Five

Creation

Creation reveals God. In Psalm 19:1-3, we read, *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the works of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.”* This is a common and often a very overlooked way that God speaks to us.

It is so easy to walk outside and miss all that God is saying to us. But everything that God has created is expressing some facet about God. Just as every word you write, every picture you take, and everything that you create expresses something about you (even the projects you don’t really care about!), how much more does God’s creation do the same for Him?

In fact, the voice of creation is so powerful at confirming to us God’s eternal power and divine nature that Paul says we are without excuse if we fail to heed its call.²⁰

²⁰ Romans 1:20

The book of Job says it like this:

Ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you.

Which of these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.²¹

Albert Einstein said, “I believe in God- who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of the universe.”^{iv} And Sir Isaac Newton quoted, “In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God’s presence.”^v

By watching the transformative growth of an acorn into a large oak tree, we can understand that we should not despise a small beginning. We must all start small and grow into what we are meant to be.

By watching the sun rise and set daily, we can see God’s faithfulness. He will do what He has promised.

²¹ Job 12:7-10

By watching the four seasons come and go each year, we can understand that there is a time for every activity under heaven. God gives space and boundaries to all.

Just recently God was speaking to me through the little birds that visit the bushes outside of our home. There is a bold, flashy cardinal and a simple, shy sparrow. They are so different, but both are lovely. Through their presence, God was reminding me that every creature gives God glory simply by being themselves. I was reminded that I don't have to fit into someone else's mold of what it takes to be a good _____ (mother/wife/daughter/woman/teacher/missionary, etc). All I have to be is who He made me to be.

And God can actually use his creation to speak to us *literally!* You can read the details in Numbers 22. A foolhardy man named Balaam was so insensitive to God's leading that his own donkey had to convince him of the right path to take!

Chapter 6

Other People

God can and does use other people to speak to us as well. We see this happen over and over in the Bible. In the Old Testament, God used His prophets to speak to His people. The book of Amos says that God would not do anything without first revealing it his prophets.²² He always wanted His people to know where they stood with Him. If He ever had to bring correction to them, it was always done after CLEAR warning. It wasn't because they didn't *know* that they often found themselves in trouble. It was because they didn't *want* to know.

And in the New Testament, we also see many examples of God speaking through one person to another person or to a group of people. This is what Paul is referring to when he writes about prophesy and words of knowledge.²³

In Acts 5, Peter receives a word of knowledge about what Ananias and Sapphira are really up to.

²² Amos 3:7

²³ 1 Corinthians 14

And in Acts 21, Agabus tells Paul that if he goes to Rome, there will be chains waiting there for him.

Before I became a missionary, I remember a woman praying for me at a Christian conference that I attended. She told me that she felt she should pray over my feet! She said that they would go into many nations. And that has been true. God has taken my feet (and the rest of me) into many nations. The Holy Spirit revealed that to her so that she could pray for and encourage me.

A couple of years into my time in China, I was asked to become part of a leadership team to pioneer a new work in a new city- one with little witness. I felt very inadequate for the job and was struggling to hear from God about the decision I was to make. Around that time, a friend in Australia emailed me and said that she had been praying for me. While she was praying, she saw a picture of a very large, strong man standing in front of a window, but when he saw his own reflection in the mirror, it was of a very small, skinny man. She went on to explain that this picture meant

that I was not seeing myself in reality, in the truth of how God saw me.

My friend's words convicted me. I repented for thinking that I knew better than God and for not agreeing with Him about who I was. I was then free to hear from God about what my next step should be. Turns out that it *was* to help pioneer the new work!

Sometimes our pride can get in the way of hearing God through other people. We are afraid of being exposed. And it's true, not every messenger is as gracious as my friend was. Most of the time when God speaks to me through other people, it is very encouraging and uplifting. It is rare when He brings correction, but I still want to hear it, even if He does! I care more about hearing from Him than I do about what others might think about me.

Shawn Bolz writes an inspiring book on the subject titled [*Translating God*](#). This guy's capacity to hear from God in specific details for others is really mind-blowing. And my husband was recently at a conference where Shawn spoke

and had the chance to meet him in person. He is very friendly and “normal” as well!

God can also use people to speak to us in more indirect ways. If you’ve ever heard your pastor speak on a Sunday morning and felt the prompting of the Holy Spirit, you know what I’m talking about. He can use a seemingly “random” story from a friend, a well-timed phone call, a much needed blog post from someone who seems to have read your mail. God can and does use all of these ways to speak to us.

Chapter Seven

Circumstances

We see the way that God uses circumstances to speak to people very clearly illustrated in the story of Elisha at the brook.²⁴ There was famine in Israel. God had led Elisha to a brook. Every day, God would send ravens to feed Elisha bread, and he would drink from the brook. After some time passed, the brook dried up. It was God's way of moving Elisha on. Then God gave him directions for what his next step was to be.

In a similar fashion, God tries to use Jonah's circumstances at the end of the book of Jonah to soften his heart. God causes a vine to grow and offer Jonah shade. Then God causes a worm to come and eat the vine. Jonah wasn't too happy about God's teaching methods, but it was effective!

It can be hard at times to let go of a person, place, or thing *especially* if it was God who first provided it for us in the first place! But if we try to hold on to what God is moving us on

²⁴ 1 Kings 17

from, we can end up camped out by a dry riverbed, complaining to God because He isn't providing!

When seasons begin to shift in our lives, we need to ask God if the change is coming from Him or not. Not all obstacles are from God. Some can be from other people and their choices. Some can be from the enemy of our souls and should be dealt with accordingly. But if the obstacles are from God, we need to recognize them for what they are and agree with what God is doing. If we dig in our heels, we will find ourselves kicking against the goads.

My husband and I found this happening to us while we were living in Cambodia. We knew that God had called us to step out of China even though we had been living there for 10 years and had invested much. We felt the next step was to be to move to Cambodia, but once we were there, life did not happen as we had planned.

It was as if *every* door we tried to walk through was locked and dead-bolted. We reached out to many ministries and NGOs and churches, looking for a place to connect and get involved, but nothing seemed to materialize. Finally, *one*

church made room for Rich (my husband) to minister with them. And within a month, the pastor called and said that the church had split and they would no longer be meeting!?!

We didn't know what was going on. We went back to God and began to (slowly) realize that *HE* was behind the closed doors. In hindsight, we can see that He had called us to step out of China and into Cambodia so that He could lead us to be based out of the U.S. for the next season of our lives. We would have been unable to hear that if we had still been living in China. Living in that part of the world was all that we knew and were able to even consider at the time.

God had to take us out of ourselves, out of our “normal” to bring us to a place where we could hear the *bigger picture* of what He was saying. He used our circumstances to speak to us.

God also used Mary and Joseph's circumstances to speak to them. It just so *happened* that a census was called for at the very same time that Mary was about to have baby Jesus. They could have resisted what the Roman government was demanding that they do. They could have decided to rage

against the machine and go hide in the hills. But they agreed with life's demands and traveled to Bethlehem, unknowingly fulfilling a prophecy about where the Savior would be born.

God is always at work. He is working out your life for your good. Even if He's not directly *causing* everything that happens to us, we can be sure that He is working it out for our good.²⁵ He can even use the government to accomplish His will!

²⁵ Romans 8:28

Conclusion

God can speak to us in a variety of ways. He is a very wise and effective communicator.

I have heard it said that we must “tune in” our radio to God’s frequency if we are to catch what He is saying. Sometimes the only reason that we cannot hear from Him is because we are too busy to stop and listen (or because we don’t actually *want* to hear His answer).

He will never force Himself upon us, but He does wait for the hungry heart to seek Him out, the one that longs to hear Him speak and believes that He will do as He promised. That person will not be denied his request.

For a list of recommended reading on this subject, please visit us at <http://thevinepress.org/recommended-reading>.

ⁱ <http://ati.iblp.org/ati/family/articles/concepts/rhema/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.everystudent.com/features/bible.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Disclosure on Amazon Affiliate Program: I didn’t write this book with the intention to earn money from recommending*

various books, but I found myself naturally doing so along the way. So I decided that if I am doing so anyway, why not earn a percentage of what Amazon makes and help support our mission work? Thank-you to all who click and purchase through our links.

^{iv} <http://quotesgram.com/einstin-quotes-god-and-science/>

^v <http://godevidence.com/2010/08/quotes-about-god/>