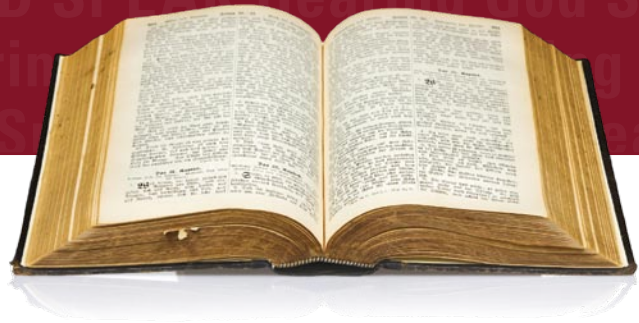


HEARING GOD SPEAK

How applying these five principles helps us listen to and do what he wants

BY REV. DAVID R. CHOTKA



Usually God doesn't speak in our mother tongue

No one taught me how to do it. No one taught me that God actually communicated clear direction to his people, or that it was possible to hear and then do exactly what God wanted done.

And yet there were multiple accounts in the Bible of ordinary people not only hearing God, but hearing God clearly! Paul and Barnabus were sent after the Spirit spoke at a prayer meeting (see Acts 13:1-3). 'No name' Elijah was sent to confront a king (see 1 Kings 17:1), hide and be fed by ravens (see 1 Kings 17:2-3) and find provision in a foreign land, because God 'commanded' a widow to feed him (see 1 Kings 17:9). Ordinary Ananias

was told to find 'church-wrecker Saul' and pray for him (at risk of his life) at the same time as Saul was told that Ananias would pray for him to receive his sight (see Acts 9:10-19).

Apart from reading the Bible to get general direction, no one told me how to hear the Lord when the direction wasn't clear! Sometimes two good choices required a decision, and I didn't know which was best!

I had to get a job. My town had 22 percent unemployment and work was scarce. My parents ran a restaurant—but people were cutting out restaurant meals because there was no extra money. So when a man offered me a job driving a delivery van, it made sense to check this out.

He gave directions to the factory; I went with a sense of uneasiness.

My mind said, "If you are not working, your job is to find a job." My heart however, wasn't listening to my head—it was getting more unsettled. A lead-like feeling came into my spirit as I parked the car; it grew more disturbed with every step toward the door on the loading dock. I knocked loudly, and no one answered. Sensing relief, I returned to my parent's restaurant.

The factory owner came back and asked why I hadn't gone to the interview. When he heard about the door he laughed and apologized; the office had a vine-covered door tucked away in the back, so I



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returned to try for the job again.

Once again my spirit became 'heavy', with an increasing sense of trouble inside—yet I could see no reason to turn down honest work. As I walked into the office, the secretary greeted me cheerfully and said, "Oh hello! You must be the man coming for the delivery job. I was told you would be coming. The job is yours; in fact you can start right away. Do you want it?"

Every part of my inside was battling with my mind, screaming not to take the job. Yet the work was needed. The pay was low, but there were no jobs to be had. So I said "Yes", signed the contract, left the building—and felt like throwing up.

The next morning a call came from a different employer offering a 15 week job at \$3.00/hour more than the job I took, but it was too late. What I didn't know was that 15 weeks later, God would send me to seminary; the extra money would be needed to pay for the year. I did go to

school, but struggled to pay the bills.

The Holy Spirit was attempting to communicate, to 'speak.' Usually God doesn't speak in our mother tongue. Rather God speaks by the presence and the absence of his peace. This is what it means when Paul indicates we should "let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts."

We need to know the Bible's principles. We also need to cultivate 'listening to the peace.' In fact, five tests can help us ensure that 'the will' is clear and that we are listening to and doing what God wants. These classic spiritual disciplines, found in the devotional literature, can be located in a single Pauline text:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever

you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father (Colossians 3:15-17 NASB).

The five principles are:

- The Word of God
- The Witness of the Holy Spirit
- The Workers in God's Kingdom
- The Worship of God
- The Will of the Believer

1. The Word of God

Colossians indicates that the Word should dwell in us richly. What better way to discover what God wants than to saturate our souls with his specific teaching! If the Word within us is rich, so also will be the guidance that God sends. There are biblical principles that we should know. Read the Gospels until their teaching is second nature. Study the Epistles. Immerse yourself in the prophets. Commit Scriptures to memory. There will be no *specific* guidance if we are disobeying the *general principles* of godliness that are ours for the learning. If this step is not taken, then guidance is more difficult. Obey what you know. Then God can give specific steps to take.

2. The Witness of the Holy Spirit

Here God takes the general Word we know, moves upon it by his Spirit and makes it specific. The peace is to 'rule' in our hearts. 'Rule' here is used in ancient Greek for 'umpire' or 'referee.' The peace of Christ then is to mediate or referee between two (or more) directions to help us determine whether we are 'in' or 'out' of the game. The peace 'calls the decision.' There should be a general sense of peace in a Christian's life which comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit. Should this 'peace/presence' become diminished, jarred, or out of kilter, 'peace', the referee, is saying "Wait. Test this one out." If the 'peace/presence' is

consistently absent, God is saying "No." If the 'peace/presence' grows deeper as one considers a direction, this is a signal that God *could* be leading in this direction. It is best to keep this tentative; since this is subjective, there needs to be a further testing of this sense of leading.

3. The Workers in God's Kingdom

Find people saturated in the Word of God. Ensure they are open to the leading of the Spirit, and sensitive to God's flow of peace. Place the situations before them and pray together. Let these be people with no vested interest (i.e. if you are thinking about a new job, don't pray with the boss!). Let them ask probing questions until they and you together come to a place in which the peace of Christ in their souls and yours is 'ruling', and indicating this decision is 'in the game' and 'fair play.' This is what it means to be 'called in one body.' The general principles of the

Word must be in harmony with this decision. The sense of leading in the soul of the seeker must be peaceful and clear. There should be a consensus in unbiased third parties (Workers) that both Word (the clear teaching of the Bible) and Spirit (God giving peace within) together are pointing in this direction. With these three (Word, Witness and Workers) in place, the last steps can be taken.

4. The Worship of God

At this point, decide. Choose a direction. The outflow should be "Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"—praise, worship, and a release of intimacy with God in all concerned. Even a heavy decision should lead to a sense of rightness that facilitates being able to worship God in openness and joy.

5. The Will of the Believer

Once the decision is taken, believers set their will to live with the

consequences of the decision. There will be ups and downs with each choice. Regardless of how one feels, there is a specific calling on each believer who has sounded out the mind of the Lord. *Thankfulness* will be the calling in the times when the decision is tough. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father."

Had I known about these five steps, discerning what God wanted around that job would have been much easier. While the process is not infallible—because everyone falls short of the mark—balancing these five tests together makes the possibility of hearing and obeying God all the more likely.

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"God's message was preached in ever-widening circles." (See Acts 6:7)

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