

God Speaks through Scripture - an extract from Robby Dawkins' - *Do What Jesus Did*

The primary and eternal way God speaks is through Scripture, called *logos*. Jesus held Scripture in the highest regard, affirming its divine inspiration, infallibility, final authority and sufficiency. *Rhema* is a specific word for a specific situation. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* puts it this way: 'Whereas *logos* can often designate the Christian proclamation as a whole in the NT [New Testament], *rhema* usually relates to individual words and utterances.' The *Expository dictionary of New Testament words* by W. E. Vine states,

The significance of *rhema* (as distinct from *logos*) is exemplified in the injunction to take 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,' Eph. 6:17; here the reference is not to the whole Bible as such, but to the individual Scripture which the Spirit brings to our remembrance for use in time of need, a prerequisite being the regular storing of the mind with Scripture,

Through constantly reading the Word of God, we learn to recognise His voice. Most often He speaks to us directly through this unchanging source. Many times while you're reading the Bible, certain passages will pop off the page as if highlighted. Rather than treating this casually, keep a record as this happens, which is a great way to begin recognising the way God speaks to you. When you sense that a particular passage is something the Lord may be saying to you, write it down. Spend time praying over that Scripture. Write down what you feel the application from the Lord is, and ask God if there's anything else He wants to speak. Even if you're not sure you're hearing from the Lord, write down the first impressions that come to mind. Trust that He wants to speak. If it's from the Lord, it will bear fruit in your life.

A second confirmation comes from other believers. As you sense God highlighting certain passages and speaking them into your life, share what you're sensing with other believers who are close to you, God designed us to experience Him in community; He'll often confirm what He's speaking to you through other believers, especially people with whom you have accountability relationships.

There's a safety in Scripture because we already have the guarantee that 'All scripture is God-breathed and is useful' for building us up (2 Timothy 3:16; see also Isaiah 55:11). As you keep a record of these things over time, you can look back and begin to see patterns emerge of where God has spoken and where He has affirmed or fulfilled His words.

A good way of growing in hearing God's voice for other people is to pray for them and then spend time listening. Read Psalms and ask God to highlight a passage He would speak for someone. Good questions to ask when you read Scripture or pray for a person are, 'Lord, how do You want to encourage this person? How do You see this person? What do You like about this person?' We know from Scripture that God wants to speak to us to build others up, encourage them and comfort them (see 1 Corinthians 14:3). Share what you hear with the person and ask for feedback. The person might readily confirm that this is the same thing he or she has been sensing from the Lord.

As you continue to step out in this area, it may help to keep a record of what happens and the ways you are recognising that God speaks to you, He is pleased when we take time to seek His direction and guidance. He desires that we grow in intimacy with Him, and He says, 'My sheep hear my voice' (John 10:27 NKJV).

A Common Misconception

Many Christians don't believe that they can speak prophetically to others. 'What if I don't have the gift of prophecy?' they ask, a question that results from a common misconception about prophecy, They're thinking of someone who operates in the office of prophet, as mentioned in Ephesians 4:11, and they're confused about the more general ability to prophesy, which 1 Corinthians 14 talks about. In the New Testament and still today, many people operate in the general gift of prophecy that encourages, builds up, comforts and edifies people.

Some Christian circles seem to skip over the gift of prophecy because of its frightening implications—in the Old Testament, delivering a false prophecy meant you were stoned. In the New Testament, the people listening simply judged whether or not they believed a prophecy was from God.

There's also some concern about the way prophecy has wrongly been used to manipulate or spiritually abuse others. At the opposite extreme, other Christian circles have idolised prophecy, placing it on a pedestal almost 'above the law,' which is unscriptural. We are taught to test everything and to judge every word.

I believe the healthiest way to view prophecy given in the general sense is to handle it as we do any other gift - it should be joyfully embraced by the Church, pastored, trained, developed and held to the same standard of accountability. A helpful comparison might be made to the gift of hospitality, which most Christian circles don't find intimidating or overwhelming. In the same way that everyone is admonished to practice hospitality, but some are noted as having the particular gift of hospitality, so it is with other gifts like prophecy. In 1 Corinthians 14:1 (ISV), Paul says we should eagerly desire this gift in particular, implying that asking for it is a prayer request God loves to answer: 'Keep on pursuing love, and keep on desiring spiritual gifts, especially the ability to prophesy.'

In the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophets to reveal new doctrine, 'In the past God spoke to our ancestors many times and in many ways through the prophets' (Hebrews 1:1 GNT). In the New Testament, we see three major purposes laid out for prophecy. It's given first to comfort, strengthen and exhort believers, second as a sign for unbelievers and third to give direction (see 1 Corinthians 14:2-5; 24-25; 1 Timothy 1:18; 4:14).

Other Ways the Father Speaks

Remember that I'm not focusing here on the particular office of prophet, but on the ability of all Christians to recognise and respond to the voice of God as a natural part of being in relationship with Him. We should eagerly seek to grow in this gift. My purpose is to empower and encourage every believer in the many different ways the Father speaks. I also want to equip every believer to prophesy with more confidence and clarity, especially for the purpose of bringing light and hope to a hurting world.

Sometimes when we think of God speaking, we think of dramatic instances like open visions or angelic visitations, but God speaks to us in many ways, and we often overlook some of them. I want to tell you about some of the ways I've recognised God speaking. See if any of these have happened to you. If they haven't yet, remember that they could!

'Popping' Words or Scriptures into Our Minds

I took a prayer team from my church to Los Angeles one year. Along with about two hundred people, we were at a conference I was doing for three Iranian congregations. A tiny woman on our team called out a young guy from the crowd. This was her first time ever doing any type of prayer ministry in that kind of setting, and she said to him, 'I'm just getting the word *Beatles* in my mind.'

Beatles? we wondered. We looked at her; we looked at him. How could that be a prophetic word? But the guy dropped his head, and tears started rolling down his face. It turns out that everybody had been making fun of him at school because he played bass for his church's worship team. They would mock him when he couldn't do things with them because he had worship practice, and they'd say, 'Oh yeah, you gotta go practice with the Beatles!' It meant so much to him that God knew what he was going through, it was as though in a single word he heard the message from God, 'I see the suffering and sacrifice you endure for Me.'

Popping words can be the simple things that come into our heads. When we ask God to speak, we're trusting the first thing that comes to mind. Sometimes it's more significant than we could have imagined.

On the other hand, don't go fishing with a word that's on your mind: 'I see the name Fred-do you have a brother named Fred? No? How about a cousin? A friend? Have you ever met anyone named Fred?' I'm being facetious, but the idea is that if it's from God, He'll make it clear. You don't have to fish for the meaning. If you get a word and the purpose seems unclear, just move on. It may be that as you're praying, or even a few minutes later, the meaning will become obvious.

'Popping' Pictures into Our Minds

Often God's prompting can come as a quick flash of images, maybe of something we weren't expecting to think about. When I train people, I tell them to pray over their minds, ask God to speak and trust the first thing that comes. Often it can be a quick picture, similar to imagining something or the way you get an idea. It's easy for us to discount these pictures, but keep in mind that God is infinitely creative and specific in the ways He reaches people.

Years ago, three sisters came to our church in Aurora. One of them had stomach cancer. She was a more casual Christian, but she'd heard that at the Vineyard church in Aurora you could be healed of cancer, so she came and brought her sisters with her. One of them wasn't a Christ follower and the other was. The sister who was a Christian was highly skeptical about the Holy Spirit's activity and healings, and she was concerned that her ill sister was making a big mistake by coming. But the sister with cancer had begged them to come along, and they wanted to support her and make sure nothing too weird happened.

As we prayed for the sister with cancer, she felt a sensation of electricity in her stomach, and she ended up completely healed. While God was obviously touching her, we asked her unbelieving sister if we could pray for her, too. She said, 'I guess, but I'm not a Christian.'

We started praying for her, and she started leaning farther and farther back. Her eyes were open the whole time, and then she started shaking all over. She kept leaning back almost to the point where it looked as if she'd snap in half. She later said it felt like electricity going all over her body.

Watching her, I got concerned and asked, 'Does that hurt?'

'No, this feels great!' she said.

'Really? Are you sure?' I asked,

'Oh yeah!' she said, 'I feel great!'

Her position looked so awkward that I asked, 'Do you want to sit or lie down?'

'No, no, don't push me down,' she replied.

'I won't push you down,' I said. 'I just want to make sure you're comfortable.'

'Oh, I'm comfortable, I'm fine,' she said. 'There's just one problem - I don't believe in this!'

I told her, 'That obviously doesn't seem to be a problem in this situation.'

At the end of the service, that unbelieving sister wound up giving her life to Christ as a result. The third sister, the Christian one who was completely skeptical about healing, had heard about the Vineyard and all the strange things we did, so she had come to make sure her sisters didn't get too far into something unhealthy. We prayed for her, too, and gave her a number of prophetic words. She acknowledged them as accurate, but nothing was making a difference for her. Her face looked stone-cold.

A woman named Debbie on our prayer team told her, 'I'm getting a picture of a mantel, and on the mantel is a jack-in-the-box. You go and take it off the mantel and just play it over and over again.'

At that point I looked at Debbie, hoping she had something much more profound and spiritual to go from. She said that picture was all she had, so I started praying frantically for some interpretation or Scripture to help justify us to this woman who already thought we were weirdos.

As I was thinking all of this, I suddenly saw tears start rolling down the woman's face. Shocked, I asked her, 'Does that actually make sense to you?'

She shared, 'When I was a little girl, my parents used to fight terribly. They'd throw things - even throw knives at each other. They'd try to hurt each other, and they'd beat each other, It'd get so bad that the only way I could feel any peace was by going next door to my neighbour's house. On the mantel was a jack-in-the-box. I would sit down with it in my lap and play it over and over again just to feel safe.' She looked down, 'I think God is telling me this is a safe place, too. It's safe here.'

Nothing I could have said, no Scripture I could have quoted right then, would have had the same impact on her as that picture. It was an incredible word, and I've told this story for years.

Sometimes the picture God gives doesn't make sense to us. There's a fine balance between asking for clarity or interpretation and resisting the temptation to try to make sense of it ourselves. We approach God with faith that He will speak. When we get a word or picture, we can pray for an interpretation or ask if there's anything else He wants to say, but sometimes what we got is all we get. We must only speak what we think God is showing us - it's not up to us to make sense of it or drive it home. We don't have to try to spiritualise it or create an elaborate prayer around it. That actually can dilute the message for the individual because it was God's direct communication to them just the way it came. We need to just say what we see.