

Living the Questions: How Does God Communicate?

Deuteronomy 6:4–12 • 1 Corinthians 2:9–16

The Christian Rock singer, Krystal Meyers, writes a lyric perhaps you have prayed.

Dear God
It's me again down here
Don't wanna sound insincere
I'm lost
Sometimes you're so unclear
What can I do?

I'm feeling so far from you
Frustrated
Irritated
Disconnected from it all
The weight of the world
Has pushed me to the wall

If you have ever prayed a prayer like that, then you know the frustration of hoping and longing for more—and you will be glad to know that you are not alone. The Good News is that God wants you to experience that “more.” Listen to what Paul has to say in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth.

1Cor. 2:9 But as Scripture says:

“No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
and no mind has imagined
the things that God has prepared
for those who love him.”

1Cor. 2:10 God has revealed those things to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches everything, especially the deep things of God. ¹¹ After all, who knows everything about a person except that person's own spirit? In the same way, no one has known everything about God except God's Spirit. ¹² Now, we didn't receive the spirit that belongs to the world. Instead, we received the Spirit who comes from God so that we could know the things which God has freely given us. ¹³ We don't speak about these things using teachings that are based on intellectual arguments like people do. Instead, we use the Spirit's teachings. We explain spiritual things to those who have the Spirit.^b

1Cor. 2:14 A person who isn't spiritual doesn't accept the teachings of God's Spirit. He thinks they're nonsense. He can't understand them because a person must be spiritual to evaluate them. ¹⁵ Spiritual people evaluate everything but are subject to no one's evaluation.

1Cor. 2:16 “Who has known the mind of the Lord so that he can teach him?”
However, we have the mind of Christ.

So let's think about communicating with God together for a moment. When you think about communicating with God, what are some questions people have? Just shout them out...

[Take questions from the congregation.]

Good! Those are really great questions. Today, we are going to work on this question, "How does God communicate?" But we will get to more of these as our series goes on. In most of our experiences, we do not literally hear God's voice with our ears—though if history is a guide, that does happen—but still God seems to want to communicate. What are the keys to hearing God's voice, and then how does God communicate?

1. Let Go of Being in Control

The first and most important thing when we are learning to listen to God is to let go of being in control. We like to be in control, don't we? Especially if we are competent, intelligent people, we mold and shape our environment all the time. So why not God? One of my first independent prayers went like this: "Oh Lord! I really want that purple bike with the sparkly seat! If you'll get me that bike, I will never ask for another thing in my whole life." The problem with this kind of prayer is that it tries to turn God into a cosmic Santa Claus, the Giver of things, not a Person to know. Another common misconception is that if we pray harder, or use fancier words, or say exactly the right words, that God is more likely to hear us and do what we want. This is "magic-thinking," trying to convince ourselves that we can control God and the universe. If we want to communicate with God, we have to be honest: we are not fully in control of ourselves, let alone the Universe, and we have to let God be Who God is—bigger and better and different from what we want.

2. Finding Our Center

Since most of the time, God doesn't part the clouds and speak out of a bright light, the most common way for God to speak is to our hearts and minds. The second step to communicating with God is to find our center. Inside each of us there is a still place where we just are—that's your center. For those who have encountered the living God, this is the quiet place inside where we know we are truly, deeply loved by God. It's the place where you know most clearly who you are. Anyone else want to take a run at describing what that is like?

[Take ideas from the congregation.]

When you let all the little details that are currently driving you crazy slip away, when you let all the worries that are pressing on you fall silent, when you let all the anger or pain or frustration or sadness fade away, what is left is probably your center. If you have ever taken a walk to clear your head, or taken a deep breath before taking the next step, you have been trying to find your center. Learning to find our center is one of the keys to learning to listen to God. If that's something you're interested in exploring further, I would be happy to offer you some one-on-one coaching.

3. Learning to Recognize God's voice.

So now to the biggest question so far: how do you know when it's *God* communicating? Clearly this is a big enough topic for several sermons, but let us begin now. Part of how we

know it's God's voice because what we hear is what God would say. In one of the other churches I served, a woman once tried to convince me that Cynthia had lied to her. While I heard the woman out—mostly out of courtesy—I knew Cynthia had never said those things. Why? Because my wife is always, always honest. I know my wife, and so I knew this woman was not right. For sure the best way to know whether God is speaking to us by His Spirit, is to be familiar with who God is, what matters to God, and how God works. So when we want to know if it's God speaking, we check three things:

- Is it completely loving? Since God is love, it will have our own and other people's best interests at heart. God can communicate through our circumstances what the loving path forward is for us.
- Does it fit with what the *whole* Bible says about God? God can communicate through God's Word, but it has to fit with it all.
- Does it fit with what the Church has said about who God is and how God works? God can communicate through God's people.

If all three of these points line up, then we are on the right road. Chances are pretty good that what we are hearing in our hearts is of God. For some of us what I have said today is eye-opening—we have been doing things like this and just weren't aware that there were words for it, or that what we were doing is praying. For some of us, this is all new. Yay!

A lot of us feel like life is a pop-quiz, but we never know what's going to be on it. I have Good News: this is where the Holy Spirit comes in. Paul writes, "We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." That's the Good News—that God *wants* us to understand, that God works in us to open our eyes and ears so that we will know what God wants. How do we know this is so? Because God didn't just tell us—God *showed* us. In Jesus, we see the fullness of God—walking, talking, laughing, teaching. The love of God promised to us for ages, was demonstrated in Jesus' willingness to die on the cross for us. When life pushes us to the wall, and the weight of the world seems ready to crush us, the best prayer we can learn to pray is, "God, what is it that *You* want?" In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus went to that quiet space where He was most Himself, opened up to God, and surrendered all He was...to become all God wanted Him to become. God hopes and prays that we, too, will find a space we can be our best, loved selves, open up to God, and surrender all we are, so that God can share His "more" that changes us...and the world.