

God Speaking

When I was young, my dad was a contractor and I really looked up to him so I wanted to be like him. So, when I was in high school, I took some architectural drafting classes that I loved. I imagined designing houses and my dad building them. In high school, that was my dream future.

But I remember a time during the summer of my junior and senior year of high school when I was sitting in the back of the sanctuary during the Sunday evening service when my life and plans were completely disrupted. I heard a voice—not an audible voice, but it was a voice that said clearly as can be, “Kory, I want you to go into ministry.” Those were the exact words. I didn’t have to think about it or wonder whether it was my own thoughts, it was just clear. And I knew it was God.

It was startling because I’d never had that happen before. I wasn’t even waiting to hear from God or praying about my future—God just spoke. And I said, “OK...” initially.

It seems strange that after God speaks you could ever forget about it, but over the course of my senior year, I *did* forget about it and went back to pursuing my dream of being an architect. When I graduated, I moved to Sioux Falls with my cousin, enrolled at a vocational school to pursue architecture. At the beginning of orientation, they had a large gathering to welcome all the incoming students and I sat in the room next to my cousin.

About a half-hour into the presentation, that same voice spoke to me again. This time it said, “Kory, I told you to go into ministry and you can’t do that here.”

That was it. Nothing more, nothing less. But I knew I blew it, so I leaned over to my cousin and said, “I gotta go,” went home and called my dad and changed course. As far as I know, that was first time I experienced God speaking to me.

Well, one time I told a girl God told me to break up with her—which I would NOT recommend, but looking back I’m not so sure that was God. In any case, my goal today is to convince you or remind you that God does speak to us. This is a continuation of last week, where we looked at the story of Philip and Ethiopian Eunuch. I mentioned that I had originally approached the passage to talk about evangelism because this is supposed to be a sermon series about evangelism. But I got hung on something that I think many of us get hung up on—the fact that the passage just matter-of-factly mentions that God spoke directly to Philip. So, I thought we ought to pursue that.

I started our conversation about God speaking with two anchors that God uses when he speaks to us—Scripture and the Church. Scripture anchors us because if we believe God is telling us anything contrary to Scripture, we can be sure that it’s not God. God will speak through Scripture and will not tell us anything contrary to Scripture.

Another anchor is the church. Now, by the Church I don’t just mean *me*, or *the organization* of the Church. I mean the *people* of the church. We are not meant to be

solitary Christians—the Bible has no concept of a lone Christian. Anyone who comes to Christ is a part of Christ’s body and needs to function that way.

What this means is that while God does speak to us as individuals, he doesn’t *just* speak to us as individuals. Too often, I’ve heard people who say they hear from God and will insist on it regardless of what anyone else in the church says.

My call to ministry had to be confirmed by the church through the process of ordination. It wasn’t just that I *felt* called. The church had to affirm that calling. That’s a responsibility Christians should take seriously, not just in affirming a call to ministry, but for instance, if you have a friend who can’t carry a tune in a basket say God told him to quit his job and become a professional singer, you need to be able to graciously, but firmly ask, “Are you sure that’s *God* speaking to you?” (Don’t tell them they’re crazy unless you have that kind of relationship with them.)

Could God miraculously make them into a great singer? Sure. But typically God works within our gifts and abilities to accomplish what he wants. Sometimes our emotions or desires can be so strong, we might interpret them as if it’s God speaking. But feeling strongly about something isn’t proof that it’s God. So, if we’re a congregation that wants to regularly practice hearing from God and obeying, we shouldn’t be skeptical that God can and will speak, but we need to have some humility before we proclaim something to be the voice of God.

So, if you believe God is told you something, don't be afraid to go to a trusted friend who will tell you the truth and help you process it. Be humble. Don't just proclaim, "Thus saith the Lord..."

When my mentor believed the Lord gave him a message for me he would always preface it with, "*I could be full of it, but...*" or "*I don't know if this means anything to you, but I sense...*" It puts people on the defensive when you get in their face and tell them what they need to be doing. Hearing from God shouldn't make you weird or pushy.

Those are the anchors—Scripture and other people. But what does it look like for God to speak *directly* to us? And what kinds of things does God say? I don't think we can cover all of it, but I just want to get you started on answering some of those questions today. I'll talk some theory, but mostly, I want you to hear stories from our own people.

In the Bible, God spoke in many ways. Sometimes we don't know how God spoke. We don't really know how he spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden when he told them not to eat the fruit or after they ate the fruit and had a conversation about their sin.

He also spoke to Abraham through a vision, (Gen 15) and through angels that seemed like regular guys. God spoke to Moses through a burning bush, and Balaam through a donkey. He spoke to David through the prophet Nathan.

In the New Testament, angels appeared to Mary and Joseph and the disciples drew lots to determine who would replace Judas (although the Bible doesn't tell us whether

that was right or wrong since the lot fell to Matthias and we never hear from him again). Peter had a vision of animals on sheet and Paul had a vision of heaven. And of course, the book of Hebrews says, talking about Jesus, **“¹In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...”**

The point is...God doesn't just use one method to speak directly to people and there are many kinds of things God says to us. But we need to know that God doesn't speak for our entertainment or even for our personal happiness. *God speaks to us to build up his people and accomplish his mission.* I often hear people say, “I just feel like God is always looking out for me,” but they don't have any intention of conforming their life to his will.

But here's one of our anchors...nowhere in Scripture does God speak so people can have an easy life. Nowhere does it say that God is looking for ways to give people what they want. God speaks to build up his people to accomplish his mission. So, don't ask God to tell you the Powerball numbers. Ask him how you can be a part of what he's doing.

So, today I want to give you some examples of some of the things God says and share some stories of how he speaks directly to us to build up his people and accomplish his mission.

First, sometimes God *convict us*. There are a couple of ways God seems to convict me. The first one shouldn't be a big surprise, but sometimes God fills me with deep *sorrow or regret*. The Holy Spirit speaks through those negative emotions to get us to think about the impact of our sin and invite us to change. I'm also convicted through the words of people. There have been times when someone has said something that cut me to the bone and they didn't even know they were doing it. But the Holy Spirit in that moment illuminated and amplified those words. When God convicts you, do something. Repent. Change. Each time you ignore the Holy Spirit's conviction the less receptive you'll be the next time. //

But sometimes rather than convicting, God gives us ASSURANCE. Here's an example from Naomi Beckering. [Naomi] *I always feel like "God speaking" to you is supposed to mean God is "telling" you to do something big and awesome. I can't think of anything like that, but I do think that God "speaks" to me daily on a much lower level because I tend to have a running dialogue with Him all day. However, those don't really stick in my mind, maybe because those times are just more matter of fact.*

What sticks in my mind are the times where He has simply said "I'm here" when I really needed to hear Him. And for those times, I have lots of stories, but you said pick one so...

I'm a huge morning person. Huge. That's when I do my best -- both at being clear-minded and task oriented, but also when I do my 'best' worrying and fretting. I suspect God speaks to me all the time, but I find the mornings are when I'm "best" at hearing Him. So, one morning, as usual, I was worrying about all the things on my plate and feeling particularly overwhelmed. As I prayed, a picture of a pile of rocks popped into my head, followed by how the process of moving those rocks, even one pebble at a time, eventually moves the pile. I even went so far as to find video clips I could refer to as a visual (cause I'm pretty visually oriented). Found a couple then headed off to work. As I pulled into the driveway and swung around the back of the building to park, there it was -- two piles of rocks -- one big, one small, as if getting moved from one to the other. That pile hadn't been there the day before, but it was there that morning.

In my somewhat typical response to these occurrences, I looked up and said "okay, now you're just showing off". Smiled, felt calmer, very loved and cared for.

How do I know it was God? That's the hard part to answer, it's a feeling -- a deep overwhelming feeling of certainty -- an intuitive sensation maybe. But the consistency with which it happens makes it hard to see it as anything else.

[Kory's Story] When I was pastoring in Iowa, from time to time, God would send us obnoxious charismatics that would always distract us from our normal, practical faith.

One of them was named Mike. Mike was 18 or 19 at the time and really excited about Jesus! One time, he went down to a large charismatic church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. They had a big youth service with an evangelist who talked about the gift of tongues. He said God wants everyone to speak in tongues and invited anyone who wanted to receive that gift to come forward, people would pray for them and he would have the gift of tongues.

Now, that's not our theology. We do believe in tongues, but don't necessarily believe that's a gift that everyone will have. Some do, some don't. In any case, after the service, Mike went forward, they prayed for him and he started praying in tongues.

Well, he came back from that trip and came into my office and said, "*Pastor Kory, you've got to pray in tongues! It's so awesome!*" I said, "That would be alright. I'll think about it." Honestly, part of me was closed to it because I didn't like the idea of being taught by a kid!

That conversation stuck with me and not long afterward I went for a walk late at night—about midnight. And as I walked, I prayed. "God, if you want to make me speak in tongues, I'm willing. So, have at it!" About then, I got to the yard of a large Catholic church and ended up sitting in the grass by the church dumpsters and quieted myself. And it was at that time that I sense the Holy Spirit telling me to pray. So, I started praying and listen and I heard very clearly, "I'm not going to give you the gift of tongues, but I will give you this gift."

At that point, names of people started to float across my mind's vision. I didn't see them, but I saw them clearly in my mind. And as they floated across my vision, I prayed for them and another name would cross, and I would pray for them. After a while of doing, the names just stopped, and I sensed the Holy Spirit say, "That's it. You're done." Of course, I consider that to be the gift of intercession. Now I have experienced that a time or two since that night, but not regularly. And I wonder if some of the reason is that I don't exercise it more often.

God *guides* us. Keith told us a story the other day and I've asked him to come share it. [Keith's story]

When I was a youth pastor, one year, I took 4 of my guys treasure hunting. It's basically an evangelistic focused spiritual discipline. You meet together and pray and ask God to show you who to share your faith to. You gather the hints together from what God has spoken to your group and you do your best to be obedient.

So Jared, Wes, Logan, and Adam and I met in our youth room. We prayed and asked God to show us who He'd like us to speak to and minister to. We spent some time in prayer and Jared said, "I saw myself going into a gas station and yelling, 'Who wants to get some pizza?'" So, I don't know but I think I'm supposed to do that.

Wes saw something like a red bulls eye. Adam saw a polo shirt. And Logan actually drew a picture of a man with short curly hair and glasses, wearing a polo shirt, standing behind a wrap around glass cabinet with items inside of. It didn't take us long to say, "That looks like the technology section at Target." We had one Target in our town.

Jared's prayer time seemed the most suspect and I told our guys that 1) sometimes God does ask us to do weird things. 2) If we went to a gas station and yelled, "Who wants to get some pizza?", we might look silly but we won't be doing anything unbiblical. And finally 3) God would see us trying to be obedient and He'd even see us being willing to look foolish for His sake. So we drove to the gas station that Jared felt like we were supposed to go to. We yelled "Who wants some pizza?" and people stared at us. And we looked at each other. We waited a minute or two and then we left. Obviously that was most a failure.

We went to Target next. We went to the technology section. There was a glass wrap around cabinet with items inside of it. There was a boy with short curly hair and glasses and a red polo shirt. And so we walked up to him, we told him we had been praying, we showed him Logan's picture and we told him that we believed God had sent us there and asked him if he had any idea why that happened or if he wanted us to pray for him. He didn't believe us. He said something about how we must've read what he posted online earlier that day. Apparently He was an atheist, posted something

anti-Christian and thought that we had got together and tried to lie to him and trick him and just thought we made up the whole story. He wouldn't believe us. We wrote a prayer on the back of the photo and we gave it to him. He laughed and said he was going to post it online in order to make fun of us.

I love that God so clearly pursued this young man and wanted this boy to know that He was real and that He loved him. I don't know what became of him. //

Sometimes God has a word or a prayer to encourage someone else.

[Zara's Story] A time I remember God spoke to me was a dream. It was about my pastor I was 12. Pastor Buckley was my pastor for a while in a United Methodist church and I loved hearing him preach he had a great talent of listening and caring for people. Everyone loved him; he was a great mentor and teacher. So we all knew him for many years. Or so I thought I did. Very happy and at peace man. So one night I had an absolutely dreadful dream. I was covered in pitch black darkness I could only see my pastor he was praying and in great pain I felt the urge to lift something off of him I couldn't see. I tried and tried to pry it off of him but it was so incredibly heavy I gave up. At the time I felt incredible pain sadness and darkness for him and frustration and

confusion for myself I couldn't help him out . I wanted to cry for years even now thinking of it the darkness was so thick u could almost cut it. At the time I wanted to talk to him but I was so embarrassed I thought he would think I was inappropriate for dreaming about him and others in the church I wish I could've gone to. I finally spoke about it to an elder a while later. And she told me I must have a sixth sense, pastor Buckley had been suffering with depression for many years. I then realized God was speaking to me. To this day I feel like it was a bad dream that teaches me a lesson of how people suffer in isolation darkness. But also not being afraid about asking them if they need anything.

[Mark Kinde's story]

And sometimes God speaks to *draw* us to him. [Adrienne Kinde]

I remember waking up in the I.C.U. afraid. My entire childhood had been marred by countless bouts of asthma that resulted in hospitalizations. This time was especially severe. I had been there for at least several days, if not weeks. The time had melded together as I battled to breathe. In this moment, when I woke, I noted my parents sitting at my bedside praying fervently; Both were weeping and begging the LORD for my life.

I listened to my parents pray together for some time, when a nurse walked in to give me my medications. The moment she walked into the room, my parents stood. . . I recall my mom saying that she felt- while praying- that she had to ask the nurse what medication she was intending to give me. The nurse told my mom plainly what medication it was. As it happens, the medication she was intending to give me was one I was devastatingly allergic to...My parents asked the nurse to double check my chart. The nurse contended with them for a bit indicating that she knew what she was doing. My parents insisted and eventually checked my chart.

When she returned she apologized profusely, the medication she was going to give me was indeed the one I was allergic to and was at a dose would have killed me almost instantly. It was in that moment that I heard the LORD say, that "[He was] protecting me and was by my side. And that I had no reason to fear. My life was in His hands." After that experience I gave my life to Christ.

Three concluding thoughts about hearing from God:

1. Practice: Quiet your life down so you can hear God speak.
2. Don't ask God to join your mission, listen so you can join his.
3. Where God doesn't seem to speak, use wisdom.