

Did God Really Speak To You?

It delights my soul when I encounter women who are hungry to grow in their relationship with the Lord. In fact, the most rewarding part of my position as Director of Women's Mentoring at STS is to see a woman's life impacted by her knowledge of God. I have the joy of witnessing countless women engage in a rich study of God's word; they read, they think, they study, they ask, they ponder, they deliberate; and by God's grace, they grow toward a greater knowledge of their Creator and Savior. You might say that these women are eager to *hear from God*.

But does God actually *speak*? There seems to be much confusion over how, when and with whom God communicates. Sadly, much of this confusion begins when popular female speakers, teachers, authors and bloggers claim that "God spoke to me"; an assertion that can be dangerously misrepresented and misinterpreted. While I suspect that such teachers are eager (as I am!) to see other women grow in relationship with the Lord, their message is often carelessly delivered.

Specifically, I see several underlying issues related to the claim that "God Speaks to Me" that can cause confusion or even harm.

1) **When someone claims "God speaks to me", others may conclude that he/she has heard God's voice audibly**

Let us understand that God is in the business of revealing himself to the human race that bears his image. From the beginning of time, the LORD has desired to reveal himself to mankind; he is not a hidden or mysterious God of whom we cannot know. In fact, he desires us to have increasing knowledge of him (Eph 1:7; 3:19, 4:13; Col 1:10, 2:2). We need to recognize, however, that God has chosen to reveal himself in different ways throughout redemptive history. The Bible tells us that he communicated with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua and others. Under the old covenant, he communicated through prophets, who acted as designated representative (his spokesman, if you will). These spokesman were authenticated by miracles so that others would know that they were speaking on behalf of the One True God (2 Cor 12:12).

We know that God has spoken to us through His Son (Heb 1:1-4) and has revealed himself through the person of Jesus Christ. "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14).

After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God "superintended" apostles to record the prophetic word (2 Pet 1:19-21) which resulted in our inspired Scripture of the New Testament (2 Tim 3:16). In the last apostolic writing (Revelation), God instructed the author John to effectively "close the canon", warning that no one should add to the words of the prophecy. (Rev 22:18,19).

Further, the Holy Spirit provides for a personal relationship with our Savior. It is through the remarkable indwelling of God Himself that a believer is able to “commune” with the Creator to whom he/she has been reconciled. Let us not underestimate the intimate nature of the Holy Spirit! We must celebrate that the veil has been torn in two, and with the inauguration of the new covenant comes direct access to God. It is through the Holy Spirit that our hearts and minds are illuminated to the truth God desires to convey to us as individuals.

[NOTE: God also reveals himself through His creation (Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:20); such revelation is available for all to see. This is often considered “general revelation” as opposed to “special revelation”, or revelation unto salvation.]

So yes, God has spoken -- through prophets, apostles and Christ himself -- and his words are recorded in the inspired text of the Bible, which is completed (and has been for some time!). God still reveals himself today, but he does so *through His word* as illuminated *by his Spirit*.

Therefore, the claim that God speaks audibly to humans today should raise a red flag. It is somewhat of a mystical claim which I’m sure captures the allure of many; however Scripture does not support this. I would be very skeptical of anyone claiming to have heard an audible voice from the Lord today.

2) When someone claims “God speaks to me”, others may conclude that God gives new information.

As mentioned, all that God has intended to say is written down, and included in his word. The canon is closed.

While the Holy Spirit gives us access to God’s truth, there is no “new” truth to be imparted. The Holy Spirit *illuminates* and *confirms* the truth that God has already revealed in his word. There is no longer need for a “spokesman” to deliver *new* truth.

I would be very skeptical of anyone who says they have a “new word” from God that is not accessible to any believer through the Bible. The danger here is that women may get the false impression that a speaker will deliver a message that they cannot glean for themselves in Scripture. They become reliant on that person, and not on the Holy Spirit.

You may ask, why do we need preachers and teachers if we have the Holy Spirit? The answer is that preachers and teachers are to convey or clarify the truths of Scripture; not come up with new ideas. When a preacher or teacher delivers a message based on God’s word, the Holy Spirit has something to work with, if you will.

Instead of claiming that God “speaks” through the Holy Spirit, we should be careful with our phraseology and say that the Holy Spirit illuminates God’s already spoken word. Each believer has access to the Holy Spirit who will guide them in all truth, (John 16:13). It is each believer’s privilege and responsibility to act like those in Berea who “received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.” (Acts 17:11).

3) When someone claims “God speaks to me”, others may conclude that God communicates only to certain qualified individuals.

Some speakers claim that God has entrusted them with a specific message that needs to be communicated to a specific group or individual *through them*. Not only is this concept unsupported by Scripture, I believe there is great danger in purporting such a claim.

As noted above, God has revealed *his* truth; and *his* truth is conveyed to *his* children through the illumination of *his* word by *his* Holy Spirit. By implying that God relies upon intermediary messengers, these speakers can do real harm. In my opinion, they (inadvertently?) encourage others to be reliant upon *someone other than God* for their communication from him. The danger is that women who rely on a member of fallen humanity for revelation of God are in essence surrendering their direct access to him! I personally consider this an affront and insult to the shed blood of Christ. Jesus died so that believers could have a personal, intimate relationship with God that does not depend on the works of another fallen human. Is the implication of such a claim that someone may have access to God that another individual does not? Do these speakers consider themselves necessary intermediaries for someone else’s growth? Surely, if God desires to communicate with one of his children, he could do so through his own indwelling Spirit instead of a fallen individual.

At best, these speakers allow others to become lazy in their pursuit of knowledge of God, encouraging them to simply “get a message from So-and-So” instead of engaging with God’s word on their own and being sensitive to the Holy Spirit. At worst, they lead women away from reliance upon their Savior.

Now, do preachers and teachers (and even mentors, counselors or disciplers) study God’s word in order to deliver truth? Yes! However, for a minister of God’s word to claim that they are the *only* channel through which a specific word can be delivered is quite frankly, insulting. To state that “God told me to tell you” reflects a significant level of arrogance. True ministers of the word would instead claim “here is truth that I have gleaned from God’s word. I pray that His Spirit will guide you in understanding.”

The overall warning to women remains the same as it was in the Garden of Eden. That is...when you enjoy intimate, personal access to your Creator, listen to *his* words, and *his* alone. His words are easily accessible to you through the Bible once you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and are indwelt with his Holy Spirit. God’s word is not hidden, and it is readily available. (For glory’s sake, get a Bible app on your smartphone!)

But there is more you can do. You can pray.

- *Pray for other women.* I believe many Christian women are genuinely drawn to popular speakers because they desire to hear a word from God. They want someone to tell them

what the Bible teaches, so they can have transformed lives. Praise God that he has raised up women who are eager to study his word! Pray that God will bring his truth to bear on their minds and hearts regardless of what is being taught. (He can do this!) Pray that they will have the courage and discernment to ask good questions and weigh any teaching they receive against Scripture. Pray that God would grow them from simply feeding on milk to a maturity that desires solid food (Heb 5:12-14) and they not be led astray by the philosophy of this world (Col 2:8).

- *Pray for leaders.* Pray for those who have been called to lead and teach women through a study of God's Word. These people are ministers who have dedicated hours of prayer and study in order to guide others in a knowledge of God. Yet they are fallen people; they are not perfect. Although it may be their desire to glorify God in their ministry, they are susceptible to being led astray by their own desires. Pray that they are protected from the schemes of the enemy, and guarded against false doctrine and selfish ambition. Pray for anyone you encounter who is seemingly mishandling the word of God. Obviously, there are very influential speakers making an impact on undiscerning followers. Pray that God correct these teachers through whatever means he seems fit. We are all in need of correction at some point in ministry. Pray that the Lord bring these teachers to understand the error of their ways, and that he grow in them a humble spirit and teachable heart. Rest in the knowledge that God is jealous for his children, and for his word to be proclaimed with truth.
- *Pray for yourself!* Pray that God keep your own mind discerning and your own heart teachable. Pray that God will prompt you to search answers from Scripture when something you are being taught seems inconsistent with other biblical teaching.

But most of all, read and study your Bible zealously! To counter false teaching, we must be armed with true teaching. Dive into the biblical text with determination and "be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

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