

Hearing God



James C Davidson

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Also by James C Davidson:

*This Happy Gift of Tongues the Christian and the Spirit Dimension Revelation -
Simply*

Biography

a Bairn's War – 1939-45

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Chapter 1

It was early 1955. I had married in the March of that year, broken my ankle in the April just after the honeymoon, and become a Christian a week or so later in a Billy Graham meeting. A revival fire swept the town of Peterhead that summer. New converts held meetings on street corners and in mission halls, on the beaches and in people's homes, on the front steps of churches, wherever they could gather, wherever people would listen. Evangelical meetings, prayer meetings, Bible studies, praise and testimony meetings - the town was full of them.

It was a good time to be a Christian.

I limped into the public library and glancing along shelves of books on religion, found one about Christians who believed that God spoke to ordinary servants of His nowadays. These Christians prayed with a notebook and pencil beside them so that they could write down whatever God told them. I had to try it.

At first the small inner voice said little of importance, at least as I saw it, but whatever it said, I did:

“Go up that street...”

“Visit John Smith at home.”

“Read this book - not that one.”

And so on. Nothing earth-shaking, but I believed it was from God, and I obeyed. Perhaps God was testing my willingness to do His will while I familiarized myself with the inner voice. Nothing much was happening, until one evening.

About a fortnight or so after we became Christians, my wife, Jean and I, had a visit from Simon, Jean's teenage cousin. We were living in the front room of my parents' council house at the time; homes were hard to come by for new-wed couples in those days. Jean had been busy that afternoon, baking in preparation for the visit of Simon. We were talking about our newly married life and our recent conversions and our new faith, when we heard singing from the street outside.

It was a group from the local Assemblies of God church, about twenty people holding an open-air meeting. Although it was spring, there was a chilly wind off the sea. They looked so cold we decided to invite them in for tea. The thought occurred to me later, but not seriously, that the Lord had made the food spin out for there was enough for everyone.

Afterwards, when our unexpected guests had left, Jean and I walked Simon part of the way home. There was a small steep slope on the way so we left him to continue on his own because my ankle was playing up and the heavy walking plaster was uncomfortable. But before he left us, we had spoken to him about coming a Christian. He said he wanted to be one and would see a minister on Sunday about it.

He left us and went over the rise and out of sight. That was when God spoke to me.

“He doesn't have to wait until Sunday.” It came again and again - “He doesn't have to wait until Sunday.” God was speaking and I had to obey. “I'm going after Simon, Jean. He doesn't have to wait until Sunday”

I shouted after him - fortunately it was a quiet evening. “You don't have to wait till Sunday, Simon. You don't have to wait -”

I struggled up the incline and when I reached the top I saw him about fifty yards down the other side, waiting and looking back.

“You don’t have to wait till Sunday - “

There on the pavement, with people passing us, Simon accepted Jesus Christ his Lord and Saviour. I had obeyed an inner voice, and an apparent consequence of that act of obedience had been a young man surrendering his life to the Lord.

Two other examples of hearing God’s voice and obeying it come to mind from those early days of my Christian faith

Jean and I had been invited to a Scripture Union camp in Glen Lyon, Perth-shire, for the weekend, mid-way through the two-weeks-camp. Our friend, Roy, one of the camp leaders, told us there had been no response from any of the boys to the invitations to accept Jesus as Saviour. There was lots of fun and the boys were enjoying themselves, but nothing spiritual appeared to be happening.

After Sunday lunch - Jean and I were leaving about 2pm
- we knew God wanted us to speak to a group of boys in one of the tents. So we obeyed and told them what Jesus meant to us and asked them if anyone wanted to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. One young lad from Edinburgh said he did, and we counselled him and prayed with him. He committed his life to Jesus.

Roy told us later that from that one decision, the fuel previously laid in those lads’ hearts caught fire, and many of them became Christians in the following week. All it had needed was a spark. When we obeyed God, He struck that spark.

And a second example from our early days of obeying God's voice: It took place on a Sunday evening in November. A cold fog was rolling in from the sea, laying a damp shroud over the town and the harbour with its tied-up fishing boats. The small group holding the open air meeting had met on this same spot in this cobbled street near the harbour for the past few Sundays, though most of the houses were condemned and empty, and only a few families lived there.

The reason for this open air venue was that in an upstairs house nearby, a man in his early thirties was dying of cancer. Each Sunday, after the evening service, the leaders of the meeting went up to see him. But he showed no interest in religion, and less in making his peace with God.

Jean and I were invited to accompany the open air leaders to visit the dying man. It was a small house, gas-lit, and the man lay on a bed-settee in the living room.

My wife and I were silent as the evangelists talked with the sick man and his wife. We were novices so we were there to watch and learn. The visit followed the pattern of the previous weeks, with the man politely indifferent to their words.

As we were about to leave, I looked down on the sick man and felt a great sadness for him. Then I felt God prompt me to speak these words: "Remember, no matter what happens to you, God loves you." I spoke them, and the man responded: tears filled his eyes.

Before we left the house, he had found peace with God. The few words God had given me triggered that man's response. He died two days later.

Sometimes obeying the voice of God has dramatic results, sometimes nothing appears to happen. But always, if one has faith, there is the satisfaction of knowing that God's will has been done even if imperfectly. But those experiences of hearing God and obeying Him happened decades ago. What about nowadays? Does God still speak to us?

It was my last meeting as president of the Montrose chapter of the F.G.B.M.F.I. * before I left the district. Towards the end of the evening, a number of people had come forward for ministry, some for healing, others for spiritual help. The evening's guest speaker was counselling a small group of people, the chapter's other office bearers were also involved, but I was standing back and watching. Then the chapter secretary, Ian Gowans, approached me and said that he was trying to counsel a young American woman, but there was a spiritual block somewhere. He said he felt God wanted to speak to her through me. I did not have this assurance, but I went to where she was sitting in a corner with friends who had been praying with her.

I told her: "I don't have anything to say, but if God wants to speak through me, I'm here and willing to be used."

We bowed our heads in prayer, and silently, I asked God if He wanted me to say anything. Then I heard the inner voice say: "Tell her the trouble is in her voice." Could this be God speaking to me? It made no sense. Perhaps I had made it up, being under pressure to come up with a message from God. If I said what this inner voice was saying, I could be making a fool of myself; and more importantly, bringing ridicule on God.

“Tell her the trouble is in her voice.”

Surely that was not from God. But supposing it was!

'You – whatever is saying those words in my mind – do you confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh?' In a later chapter I explain why I used those words from 1 John 4: 2.

'Do you confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh?'

'Yes,' the voice replied, 'I confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. Tell this woman the trouble is in her voice'

'I'll tell her,' I told myself. 'The trouble is in her voice – she must be a good singer and she's too proud of it. Maybe if I could just introduce the suggestion of pride on her part – that would make it sound more reasonable -'

'Tell her the trouble is in her voice.'

I knew it was not my place to edit God to make Him sound more reasonable. I said aloud: “I don't know if this makes sense to you, but God is telling me to say – ‘Tell her the trouble is in her voice.’ Does that make sense to you?”

“That's it,” she said, “that's it. Oh, thank you, Lord.” Her face was transformed. She was beaming, radiant, even with tears on her cheeks. I felt put in my place. First, I had refused to say the words of God because they did not make sense to me, then I had tried to make them sound more reasonable. But God had just wanted me to say them.

I stood to my feet. “I'll leave you with Ian, now. That's all God wanted me to do.” And I left them.

Later, when the room was quiet and most people had gone, Ian told me what had happened after I left them. Apparently, she had always had difficulty in speaking out prayer or praise – it was bottled up inside her. It had given her a self-image of being tied in a spiritual knot. But that evening, when she realized it was not some secret sin in her life, something she had not been aware of, but the blockage had to do with her voice, her faith received such a boost that she was healed and released.

“She spent a half hour or so just singing and praising God and praying aloud – it was marvellous,” said Ian. “She had a wonderful release.”

Hardly a big event – but it was a victory for one servant of Christ. And it did help the faith of those present. Not only had she gained a new freedom to serve God – but that what was hitherto unknown to anyone there, including the woman herself, had been spoken by someone meeting her for the first time. And this happened because God took a hand in it.

Most of us Christians are ordinary, run-of-the-mill folk. Not spiritual giants. But there are so many of us about ... perhaps you are one, too. So how do we hear God's voice instructing us?

I believe the following factors were important in my life in that F.G.B.M.F.I. meeting: I was ready to be used by God and I was expecting Him to use me. So I was listening for His voice. And when His words came, I obeyed them.

I was reluctant at first, and wanted to edit God's words them to make them more presentable. That would have been a deviation in the path of my spiritual obedience. But I got back on the right way quickly – and I finally said what God wanted me to say. Think on that for a moment before we go on to the next chapter.

* Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International

Chapter 2

It can be a let-down when you obey what you think is God's voice and nothing happens. Like the time I had been advising Dave who wanted to find out about it, about listening to God and obeying the small inner voice. He was very keen and said he would try it. When I saw him a few weeks later, he had lost his earlier enthusiasm.

“What went wrong?” I asked.

“I was having a bath late on the Saturday evening,” Dave explained, “and I was sure it was God's voice telling me to go down to the town's park right away. So I got dressed and went to the park right away. It was about midnight – very dark – and Liz and I (Liz, his wife) walked round the park, not once but twice, and nothing happened. So I haven't trusted that voice since. I made a mistake about hearing God's voice once, but I won't do it again.”

He had believed it was God's voice, but since nothing happened when he obeyed it, he became convinced it was not from God.

“But something did happen,” I said. “You obeyed what you thought was God and even if it wasn't God – even if you were mistaken – God knows you will obey Him even if it doesn't make sense to you.” Dave considered that then he nodded slowly “I take your point – but it doesn't alter the fact I was mistaken about hearing God's voice.”

“Don't be so sure,” I argued. “God could have been testing your obedience – just as He tested Abraham over Isaac. Perhaps He wanted to see if you would obey Him – or more accurately, He wanted you to see if you would obey Him. God knows all about us – our past, present and the future. There's nothing He needs to find out about us – but we need to find out things about ourselves. And sometimes He needs to teach us, and others, through how we behave.”

“Maybe you're right. But it's just that I went expecting something exciting to happen, something wonderful for God – and nothing happened.”

“Perhaps something exciting did happen. You just didn't see it.”

Then I told him a story I had heard many years ago about a Salvation Army officer who felt led to hold an open air meeting in the back court of dilapidated buildings. What made it worse was that it was a dark night, drizzly and drear and most of the windows were boarded up. The Salvationists held the meeting but no one paid any attention. Among the tunes the small band played was the music for “The Old Rugged Cross”. After the meeting, they left without seeing any response.

During the following week, a note was pushed through the officer's letter box. It was written by a man who said he had been in despair the previous Sunday evening and was about to commit suicide when he heard the music of “The Old Rugged Cross” being played below his window. Instead of gassing himself, he went on his knees and prayed. While the band played, he made his peace with God, and he said he was now determined with God's help to make a better go of his life.

“So even if you didn't see any concrete results from walking round that park at midnight, you may have had a great influence on someone. Perhaps saved him

from committing a crime or harming himself." We should not judge if a voice is from God simply by the results we see. Nothing may appear to happen – it may take eternity to reveal it – and yet God be in it. We obey God's voice, not to see things happen, but because God has commanded it.

King Cyrus in the Old Testament was a heathen king and yet God spoke to him and used him to do His will.

“This is what the Lord says to His anointed, to Cyrus - I will go before you and will level mountains – so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, Who summons you by name.” The Bible goes on to say that Cyrus did not acknowledge God as his God, yet God spoke to him and he co-operated with God and set the Jewish exiles free. And why did he obey God? Was it in order to be rewarded? No!

“ - not for price or reward, says the Lord Almighty.” (Isaiah 45: 1-3, 13)

Here was a heathen king who was prepared to obey God, yet not for price or reward, but simply because he knew that God was a real God, a powerful God, the God of Israel. He is an example to us. We should be willing to obey God even if there is no 'kick-back' to us, no “price or reward”. Of course, we would not be looking for material things as a reward, but we do expect to see things happen – spiritual results, to prove that God has been speaking to us.

Because if we are slaves of Christ – and that is what the word we translate as “servants” really means – then we must obey Him, not to see results, but because He commands us. So if God were to tell us to pray on the street corner at nine o'clock every evening for a whole year, we would pray at that street corner every evening at 9 o'clock for a whole year. Not in order to see miracles happen. But because He told us to do it.

There was a time when Jesus was resting at Jacob's well outside the Samaritan town of Sychar, and His disciples came to Him and urged Him to eat.

“But He said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about.'”

When they wondered if someone else had brought Him food, He taught them this important principle which we Christians ought to use in our own lives: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work.” (John 4: 34)

Jesus did His Father's will, not because by doing so He performed miracles of healing or walked on water or fed thousands with a few loaves of bread and fishes, or raised the dead to life – but because doing His Father's will was an end in itself. It was His food and drink.

When He told His disciples that He would suffer at the hands of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and be put to death, Peter tried to dissuade Him! That was a common-sense thing for Peter to do. If you are going to do God's will, if you obey His inner voice and follow the Spiritual directive, surely you will not suffer for it.

But Jesus rejected the common-sense view. His response to Peter was: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumblingblock to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matthew 16: 23)

To have in mind the things of men would be to say: “By all means obey the voice of God, because you will receive a price or reward for your obedience” Unlike King Cyrus who initiated the rebuilding of Jerusalem and set the Jewish exiles free. Cyrus did it because God told him to – and there was no price or reward.

Obedying the inner voice of God does not always result in an exciting outcome, in a great miracle or other wonderful experience to share in our testimony. It can even result in a painful experience for us. Jesus knew that obeying His Father would end in His death; He did not relish the suffering which lay ahead. When He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26: 39)

If Jesus Christ is our example, we have to see doing God's will as important to us as food and drink. And not just obeying the voice of God when we see wonderful outcomes resulting, but obeying when nothing appears to happen, or worse still, when obedience leads to our suffering or apparent failure. Surely, it is better to be a failure obeying God, than to be a success in the world's eyes, while not obeying God.

God deserves to be obeyed because He is God, and we are His slaves. If we are going to follow Jesus' example by doing God's will, we must be sure about what is God's will; we have to know it is God's voice we hear and not some other

voice deceiving us. So it is time we gave some thought to making sure we can recognize the voice of God.

Chapter 3

So how do we recognize the voice of God? For we do not want to obey an inner voice which is not of God.

The most important safeguard for testing if it is God's voice is: does it agree with the Bible? God will never tell us to go against the teaching of His own word. If a voice told us to hate our fellow-men and we obeyed it, then we could not claim to be doing God's will. For the Bible has commanded us to love our fellow-men, even our enemies. And if an inner voice or any other voice - no matter how authentic it might sound - even if it had a whole parade of miracles to authenticate it - if it told us not to love, it would be contradicting God. And God does not contradict Himself.

So whatever the inner voice tells us, it has to agree with the teachings of the Bible. If it does not agree, we ignore it. And that seems to fit in with the whole spirit and tenor of the Bible, too.

Does this mean I consciously parade in my mind all the teachings of the Bible every time I hear the inner voice speaking? No, that is not necessary, not if I make a point of studying my Bible and storing it up in my mind. Because the word of God shapes my thinking when I meditate on it. It gets built into me and influences my attitudes, so that the mind of Christ is reproduced, although imperfectly, in me.

As the Psalmist said: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119: 11)

But yet there is the possibility of an unlimited number of commands which cannot be tested against the Bible. Commands such as: "Don't go to X's this evening, go to Y's instead," or "Leave the 23rd Psalm for next week - speak tonight on First Corinthians chapter 13. Commands to behave in everyday and unspectacular ways, not the stuff from which great miracles are made.

Can we apply the Bible to these instructions? Up to a point we can, because whatever God tells us to do, it will agree with the overall meaning of the word of

God. But when each of the options available are approved by the Bible, then to choose one of them demands a criterion which positively identifies God's voice. I was introduced to one such criterion by a lovely American missionary couple who had worked in Nepal for many years.

"If the voice inside you is telling you to do something and you don't know if it is God's voice, then apply First John 4 verse 2." That was their advice.

And that verse says: "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God."

The immediate context of that verse is that the Apostle John was warning the Church against false teachers who said that Jesus Christ had never had a human body. They said this because they believed that all material creation was sinful, and if Jesus Christ had a material body, then He must have been sinful too. By saying that He never had a body - never come in the flesh, that is - they squared their belief in His divinity with their own ideas about the conflict between flesh and spirit.

But the basic flaw in their thinking, apart from denying the humanity of Jesus, was that it devalued His sacrifice. Since you cannot crucify a ghost, if what they said were true, then Jesus Christ did not really suffer on the cross, and the crucifixion was an empty gesture with neither substance nor significance. That is what follows from denying the humanity of Jesus Christ.

So John says that if any teacher claims Jesus did not come in the flesh, then he is not from God. And how does that help us to test whether our inner voice is from God or from some other source? The context of this verse is that we Christians know Jesus Christ is in us because of the Spirit He gave to live in us. But there are many other spirits which influence the thinking and behaviour of men. False prophets are people misled by spirits which are not from God. Yet the Spirit of God does not mislead us. And He is willing to confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. The spirit of antichrist will not do that. So if the voice whispering in our ear is of Satan, it will not confess Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.

But we could go further. In addition to asking the voice in our thoughts to confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, we may also ask it to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour. A voice from God will have no difficulty

in doing that, whereas Satan will never acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

And yet further. Ask the voice to praise God, to praise Jesus Christ. “You voice, that is speaking in my thoughts just now, telling me what God wants me to do - do you confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh - that He is Lord and Saviour? Will you praise God, right now?” If the inner voice complies with all this, then it is not of Satan.

That still leaves one other source of a counterfeit ‘voice of God’. And that is our own wishful thinking. How can we be sure we are not merely following our own desires and ideas when we obey that inner voice? As a Christian I willingly affirm that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, that He is my Lord and Saviour, and I am happy to praise God. So is it possible for my own voice, speaking in my mind, to be mistaken for the voice of God?

This is where faith and prayer come to the fore. For I can pray: “Almighty God, You know that I want to do your will, not my own will, so I pray that you will guard me from my own wishful thinking. And if I do my own will in the mistaken belief that it is yours, I pray You will make it come to nothing. But Lord, please leave me in no doubt - give me no peace of mind if I am doing my own will instead of yours.”

Satan or one of his angels will be happy to say: “I speak from God” if by doing so he can deceive a Christian. It is important to remember that the Spirit of Jesus Christ lives in every Christian. The Bible teaches:

“- if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”
(Romans 8: 9)

And the Spirit of Christ in us will not easily allow us to usurp the voice of God. He will take away our peace of mind, He will give us a sense of disquiet, a feeling of wrongness about it all, and even if the voice confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, we will know in our inmost being it is not the voice of God, but that of self-deception.

The Spirit of God will assure us we are right or convict us we are wrong, but He will not leave us in doubt. Doubt may have valuable uses in other areas of life, but in the realm of faith, it is definitely out of order. We do not need doubt. And if we ask God to keep us right about this inner voice, once we have tested it to

make sure it is not from Satan, He will help us sort out whether it is of God or self.

So when that inner voice makes itself heard in our thoughts, we should ask it to confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, that He is Lord and Saviour, and ask it to praise God. If it complies with these tests, then we can be sure that this voice is not from Satan.

Then we must test whether or not it is of self. But since we have the Spirit of Christ indwelling us, we can ask Him to keep us right and to give us no peace of mind if we are mistakenly trying to pass off as the instructions of God what is merely our own wishful thinking or imaginings. And because He loves us and is all-powerful, He will take away our peace of mind and sense of rightness about it until we put things right. The end result will be that we have a greater sense of the nearness of God, and will be walking in obedience to the Spirit of God's guidance.

But there are still other ways to check whether the inner voice is from God.

Chapter 4

A dear friend of mine, Bob, who went to be with the Lord a number of years ago, had a wonderful experience when he first became a Christian. He had been an atheist all his adult life although his wife and children were Christians.

One Sunday evening, alone in the house, he glanced idly at a tract - "If the Blood had not been shed" - which a young friend of the family had given him months before. I have told this story elsewhere, but the point I wish to make here is that when Bob picked up that tract, he had no thought of becoming a Christian. In fact, he did not believe that he needed to be a Christian, nor did he know how to become a Christian. He had read the tract a number of times but it never made sense to him. So on that Sunday evening, as he read again - "If the blood had not been shed" - he had no idea that his life was about to be transformed.

It happened suddenly – an immediate impact – one moment, the Gospel was meaningless, a mystery – the next, it was crystal clear. And its meaning had become the most important truth in the world for him. It was his 'Damascus road' experience.

His mind was spiritually illuminated and he knew he was a sinner in the presence of a Holy God. He fell to his knees and confessed his sins and asked to be forgiven.

If you asked Bob how he changed in a moment of time from being an atheist to being a believer – he could not have explained it. But it happened. And it was not merely the end of an intellectual search. It was not the finishing post of a logical journey of discovery. Bob would have used an oldfashioned term to describe it: he had “seen the light...”

In the New Testament, various words are translated as “know”. And in the following verse:

“When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.” (John 10: 4). . . the word “know” is the same word Jesus uses to describe His knowledge in addressing the Churches in Revelation chapter 2 verses 2, 9 and so on.

There is nothing uncertain about this knowledge. Suddenly Bob “knew” he was a sinner and that he needed God's forgiveness.

Christians “know” the voice of Jesus. This is not a logical thing. It has nothing to do with reason. It is an inner certainty which is God-given. And while the passage in John chapter 10 refers in the first instance to those who respond to the voice of Jesus and decide to become His followers, nevertheless the fact remains true, that the followers of Jesus do know His voice.

But they have to be willing to listen to His voice. If someone keeps 'phoning you and you refuse to accept his calls, you will never hear what he has to say. And if you refuse to lift the receiver, all you will get of his calls are the ringing sounds. But no words, no messages. So if someone asks me: how do I know the voice of God? I have to reply – it must agree with the teachings of the Bible and be willing to confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, and that He is Lord and Saviour; and be willing to praise God; and it must be acceptable to the Spirit of Christ within the me and every other Christian..

But further: as a Christian, I will have a God-given recognition of my Lord's voice. “His sheep follow Him because they know His voice.”

Yet He never takes away our freedom of action. We can choose not to listen. We

can reject what is said. We can stop our ears to the words of Christ. In Acts chapter 16, Paul and his companions could have turned a deaf ear to the urgings of the Spirit of Jesus – and they could have persisted in doing the good work of preaching the Gospel in Asia Minor, and obeyed the commission to go into all the world by evangelising in Bithynia. But if they had done these good works, they would have been disobeying God.

They knew the voice of the Shepherd, and they obeyed it, even when it seemed to run contrary to what was their mission – to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to the people of Asia Minor.

But the voice had not asked them to disobey God's will, for Macedonia and Europe were also part of the world they had been sent to. As a Christian, you can expect to hear the voice of your Lord speaking within you. It is expected that you test the voice to ensure that it is of God – because God does not want you to be obeying Satan or his spirits – but once you have tested it, then you have to obey it.

When your habitual response to hearing the inner voice is to test it, and then obey it if it is of God – God is going to speak to you and use you.

Another way to test whether this voice is speaking the will of God is to ask two mature, usually older, Christians to pray about it and give you their advice. You have to be careful to ask the right people, and even then, you do not necessarily take their advice as from God. But sharing it with them ensures that you have level-headed and mature Christians with you in the situation.

My wife and I were on the mission field and the time came for us to make a momentous decision which would affect our future lives, and the lives of our children. We believed we knew what the will of God was, yet we sought the prayers and advice of older Christians who had been longer in God's service. Their advice supported our own belief about what God wanted us to do. And looking back over the years, I believe that getting other witnesses to give their views on what we felt led to do has been a comfort to us when things were difficult.

The problem is that this is only relevant when you have days, perhaps weeks or months, in which to decide and act. But when you have to decide now and act moments later, you cannot use that method of confirming with other Christians

that it is God's voice. When you do not have the time to ask anyone else for their thoughts on the situation, you have to settle it in your own mind: 'Is this the voice of God within me, or not?' And I have already said how you can do that.

Before we go on to the next chapter, may I say this – that if you honestly believe that God has asked you to do a certain action, and it does not conflict with the revealed will of God in the Bible, and you do it – then, even if it was not His will – yet, because you have honestly, and in love for Him, tried to do His will, He can make good come out of it.

As a father, and a grandfather, I know that small children can make mistakes in their desire to please us because they have not correctly heard what we asked of them. The wise parent does not chastise the honest mistake, but points out lovingly the better way. And we are also pleased because our little ones have shown their desire to obey us.

How much more it is with God the Father. And it is better that we serve and obey, even if we make mistakes, than we do nothing in case we find ourselves in the wrong.

The Bible tells of a man who because he was frightened he might make a mistake, hid his talent and refused to use it. God punished that man because he put his own safety first, making it more important than serving God. We dare not let that be our attitude.

Some fifty years ago I heard a speaker on the radio say this short prayer: "Lord, give us the faith to take risks in Thy Name."

That has been a guiding principle and prayer in my life ever since. As I have walked in obedience to what I believed was the voice of God, I am sure I have made mistakes: but I have time and again had the witness – not only of signs following, but the peace of heart within – that I was doing God's will, and He was blessing it.

Chapter 5

In the weeks before I left the small town where I had been ministering for some years, I called on all the folks whose names were in my visitation book. The very last to be seen were the stalwarts, my right-hand men and women. And Mrs Y.

was one of them.

I thought I knew her well after years of working and worshipping together. But I was wrong...

I was taking leave of her and we had reached the doorstep when I happened to mention that God had told me to do something. Her reaction surprised me.

“Oh, surely you don’t believe God speaks to you like that, do you?” she asked. “Yes I do. I’ve believed it ever since I first became a Christian. Don’t you?”

“Oh, no,” she replied. “God doesn’t have to speak to us like that. He’s given us the Bible. We don’t need anything else.”

What I had taken for granted for years, I now realized, was simply not a part of her experience, and probably there were other Christians who shared her views. Not only not a part of their experience, but who sincerely believed that for the individual Christian to expect to personally hear the voice of God was error.

I was having lunch along with a colleague at work and we were talking about God and how He speaks to us, when he said: “I agree with what you’re saying, but what would you say to those who quote Hebrews 1 verses 1 and 2 to prove that God doesn’t speak to us like that today?”

That passage he referred to says: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son -”

Those verses tell us that while God spoke through the prophets to His people, the Israelites, that form of communication has been replaced by what Jesus Christ has said - for He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and therefore we need no other communication than what we have in Him. Some Christians take this to mean that God speaks to His people today only through the words of Jesus, and we have these in the Bible.

In other words, we cannot hear God speaking within us, for He does not speak in any other way than through the Bible.

A number of things have to be said about this. It is true that the complete truth of the Gospel has been revealed in Jesus Christ and nothing may be added or taken

away from it. It is complete and final. But Jesus also speaks to us through His servants, the apostles who lived after His death and resurrection. Aspects of the Gospel have been expanded or made clearer through them and we get this in epistles of the New Testament, such as Romans, Galatians, Ephesians and First John. In fact, all the books of the New Testament have something to tell us from God for they are all part of God's word.

The Spirit of Jesus spoke through the apostles and gave us the New Testament, and this is the record of Jesus speaking to the Church - it is the word of God. But if that is so, then the part of the verse which says - "in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son -" must include the meaning that Jesus speaks to His servants by His Spirit. That is what we get in Acts of the Apostles: "When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to." (Acts 16: 7)

So if a Christian hears the voice of God speaking within him, it is a fulfillment of that verse in Hebrews 1: 1 and 2.

An important point to note that what the Spirit of Jesus had to teach or show them may be for the whole body of the Church: it can be a prophecy for all Christians - but it may also be guidance for just one occasion.

So we cannot quote Hebrews chapter 1 to say that God does not speak to His people today. The Spirit of Jesus can guide us just as He guided Paul and his companions down to Troas and over to Europe.

Another verse which may be used to dispute that God still speaks to individuals is: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith.""

(Romans 1: 17)

Some may argue that there is no need for a private voice to guide us - we should walk by faith in God and in His word, by which they mean the teachings of the Bible. And of course, that is what we Christians must do: live our lives by the teachings of the Bible, trusting by faith that it is the word of God.

But it also takes faith to accept this inner word as being from God, and faith to step out in obedience to it. Every step of the Christian who is walking in the

Spirit, obeying the inner promptings of what he believes is God's voice, is a step in faith. To obey the inner voice is not a departure from faith - on the contrary, it demands as much faith as any other form of obedience to the will of God.

Another passage which may suggest that God speaks to us through circumstances, and not through an inner voice, is found in 2 Corinthians 7: 6: "But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus -"

Let us be clear about this: God is not limited in how He speaks to His people. He can speak to us through other people - sometimes even through people who are not even Christians. Or through Christians we least expect Him to use - perhaps even through children.

On one occasion when I was feeling very downhearted about my circumstances and could see no light at the end of my personal tunnel, I was conducting a teenage Bible study group. At the close of the meeting I asked the young people if they would choose a hymn to finish with. Jenny, a thirteenyear-old girl who was something of a tom-boy, suggested a hymn with this refrain: "Oh, the peace my Saviour gives, Peace I never knew before, And my way has brighter grown, Since I learned to trust Him more."

These words spoke to me and my needs and worked a personal revival in my life. God had spoken through a young girl and a hymn, and He blessed me wonderfully.

I can easily believe that God comforted Paul and his companions by the coming of Titus, for I have known the comfort of God through others also. But that does not rule out that He may speak to us as individuals, even by the small inner voice.

Another passage which may be used to reject God's inner voice is found in Colossians 1: 25: "I have become its servant (that is, the servant of the Church) by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness -"

From this, you may argue that Paul's call was to present the Bible as He knew it in its fullness. He did use the scriptures as he disputed with those who rejected his message, and taught those who accepted it. Yet God also spoke to him and enlarged his understanding of the scriptures so that he was able to give the

Church new insights on the Old Testament.

An example of this is righteousness by faith, as we see how Paul proved that God regarded Abraham as righteous, not because he obeyed rules and commandments, but because he believed God and did what God told him to do.

When we are considering how God spoke to His apostles, we have to see the difference between two uses of the word of God. The first is the word of God for the whole Church, for everyone who will receive it. This includes instructions which God has given by His prophets and are written down in our Bible.

Then there is the word of God which is personal and for a specific occasion. Paul had to present the word of God in its fullness as teachings for all Christians. But on the other hand, he also received word from God which was not for the whole church: an example is the message which he and his companions received that they should not go into Bithynia. (Acts 16: 7) In whatever manner this message was received, there is no doubt that it was a message to them from God for their personal guidance.

The same answer may be given if 1 Thessalonians 2: 13 is used to dispute that God speaks to us personally:

“You received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God ...”

This does not preclude the inner personal message from God which is a one-off message. It simply means that God spoke through Paul as a prophet to the Church.

Perhaps the most significant passage used by those who reject the experience of God speaking to Christians individually since the Church received the Bible, is in 2 Timothy 3 verses 15 to 17:

“.. from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Mrs Y would say this passage proves there is no need for personal revelation

today – the Bible gives us all we need.

But you can believe what this passage says and yet not rule out personal revelation. It does say that the Bible is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, training and correcting the Christian to fully equip him for every good work. But it does not rule out those occasions when he has to make a decision when the Bible does not give the ruling – when it only gives general guidance.

We have to know when the Bible speaks to the whole Church, even to all mankind, and when it speaks to an individual for a one-off circumstance. Such an occasion was when Peter and the other disciples were in the boat on the sea and they saw Jesus walking on the water and they were terrified because they thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus reassured them and Peter said: “Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” He said (Matthew 14: 22-29)

Peter was invited to walk on the water, and he did. But that was one specific occasion. Later, after Calvary, when he saw the resurrected Jesus by the sea-side and recognised Him, Peter “wrapped his outer garment around him and jumped into the water.” (John 21: 7) There was no walking on water that time – he “jumped into the water.”

God speaks through His prophets to the whole Church, but He also speaks to people individually, a message to them alone, a message for a particular circumstance. The Bible is the word of God to all men. But there are times when God says something for a person's own instruction, and that message is not in the Bible. It is on these occasions that He may speak by His voice in our inner man. And as we have already seen, there are ways we may test that voice to prove it is God's voice, and not a counterfeit one.

But let us turn in the next chapter to examples of God speaking to individuals for their own information or guidance. We will look in the Old Testament to begin with, and for every instance we find, we will look at another recorded in the literature of the Church.

Chapter 6

There are many instances in the Old Testament of God speaking to His servants with messages for them to give to the Children of Israel, as the book of Hebrews says: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways...” (Hebrews 1: 1)

But the Old Testament also has instances of people hearing God speaking to them with messages for them personally.

Here we will look at a few of those occasions when God spoke a personal message. Then to show that God still speaks personal messages to people in the days of the Christian Church, there will be examples of Christians or people who eventually became Christians hearing His voice. We can begin with Abraham, or Abram as he was known at the time referred to here.

“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.’” (Genesis 12: 1)

Before Abram could have done that, he must have been very sure that God was speaking to him, for when he went, he took with him his wife, Sarai, his nephew, Lot, and all the people and possessions under his authority. It was a mighty undertaking, a great act of faith in the One Who spoke to him.

Can we look for guidance as clear and as definite as that in the twenty-first century? Apparently we can, if we are to believe Corrie ten Boom in her book: “He sets the Captive free.” She tells of being wakened about midnight in the concentration camp of Ravensbruck. It was her sister, Betsie, who was shaking her awake.

Betsie shared with Corrie what God had been telling her, what He wanted them to do after the war. She went on to tell Corrie: “We must rent a concentration camp after the war, where we can help displaced Germans to get a roof over their heads...”

She described a vision which God gave her, of a house in Holland in which they would receive the Dutch prisoners who would survive the concentration camps. Then she went on to give a message for Corrie, a commission which that saintly lady has faithfully fulfilled.

“You must travel all over the world and tell everybody who will listen what we have learned here - that Jesus is a reality and that He is stronger than all the

powers of darkness.”

There was no doubt in Betsie ten Boom’s mind that God had spoken to her and shown her a vision. She was no immature Christian with a desire to seem important, seeking a personal glory - she was a contemporary saint who was nearing the end of her life, and knew it.

Back in the Old Testament, in the Book of Exodus, we find another servant of God, Moses, finding personal direction for his life.

“Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3: 4-6). Moses was to become a great servant of God and be mightily used by Him. But first, there was the personal encounter, the personal message...

In his book, “Breakout”, the one-time prisoner, Fred Lemon, tells of his first encounter with God. It happened in prison. He tells of how while in prison he developed a great bitterness and hatred toward a prison-officer nicknamed ‘Tojo’, and that it came to a head one night when he was determined to knife and kill the officer the next day.

“That night, 10th August, 1950, the Lord Jesus himself came to my cell.” Fred Lemon goes on to describe how he was alone in the cell, and he had wakened from a fitful sleep: “...all was completely quiet. Three men were standing in my cell. They wore ordinary - though immaculate - civilian suits.” Then the man on the right spoke Fred’s name, and went on to say: “This is Jesus,” indicating the man in the middle.

After this, the middle figure talked to Fred Lemon, covering his whole life up to that day - all his life of crime and in particular, his bad treatment of his wife. That encounter was a turning point in Fred Lemon’s attitude toward authority, and in particular towards the warder, ‘Tojo’. The desire to kill ‘Tojo’ was taken away from Fred, and instead, he was able to pray for him.

In the Old Testament, perhaps Joshua needed encouragement for a boost to his confidence after having taken over from Moses as leader of the Children of

Israel, because we read in the Book of Joshua, chapter 3 verse 7, that God came to give him this personal message: “Today, I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so that they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses.”

God spoke to Joshua ... And Joshua became a brave soldier and leader of the Israelites.

In the story “Death of a Guru”, we read of the difficulties experienced by the young Rabindranath R. Maharaj, in his early days of being a Christian. He found it difficult at school, where even the boys he had thought were Christians were ridiculing him. In the home where he was lodging he encountered great hostility also. But the worst attacks he felt were from demons, surrounded as he was by the frightful-looking idols the Hindu family worshipped.

Until during one night, about 2am, he felt someone shaking him awake. Rabi opened his eyes, and saw someone dressed in white standing beside him.

“I knew it was Jesus,” he says, “although he didn't look quite like any pictures I had seen. He held out his hand toward me and said softly, “Peace! My peace I give to you.”

The vision vanished, but the joy and strength this experience gave the young Christian so filled him that for the remainder of the night he lay rejoicing in the Lord. He had a new courage, and an assurance that Christ would always be with him, leading him, guiding him, caring for him. And he goes on to say: “...that assurance has never left me and never will.”

A personal vision and message of comfort from Jesus Christ. After such an experience, it would not be difficult for this Indian Christian to expect God to speak to him in a small inner voice.

Gideon, the farmer's son, needed a special experience from God, a special message of encouragement if he was to lead the Israelites in their struggle against their oppressors, the Midianites. We read in Judges 6, that the angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak in Ophrah where Gideon was secretly threshing wheat out of sight of marauding Midianites. The Lord told Gideon that He was sending him to save Israel from the tyranny of Mideon. Gideon protested his inadequacies, and the Lord replied: “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Mideonites together.” (Judges 6: 16)

Gideon asked for a sign to prove that it really was God speaking to him, for he did not want to be led astray by self-delusion. So God demonstrated His credentials, and went on to give precise instructions to Gideon about building an altar where he could offer a sacrifice.

Very often, the first time we are aware of God speaking to us personally, it is with a message which has great significance for our subsequent life. In his “Confessions”, St Augustine tells of how he was under great conviction for his sins and could find no relief from his burden of guilt and remorse. “Why not now? Why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness? So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighboring house a voice, as of a boy or girl, I knew not, chanting, and oft repeating, 'Take up and read: take up and read!' Instantly, my countenance altered, I began to think most intently whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So checking my torrent of tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find.”

He obeyed this voice which he believed was from God, he read the Bible, and he received spiritual illumination, his doubts were dispelled, and he was converted. Augustine could find no other reasonable explanation for this voice but that it was from God. He obeyed it, and he, one of the greatest thinkers in the history of the Church, was converted. And the importance for us in this context is that here was another witness, St Augustine, who believed that God spoke personally and individually to those who are open to receive His word.

Back in the Old Testament, there was a time when the prophet, Samuel, regretted that Saul had been made king of Israel. Then God came to Samuel and said, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.” (1 Samuel 16: 1)

This was a private message to Samuel, a message which turned him away from grief over Saul's unfaithfulness, and pointed him in the direction of encouragement and hope for the future. Samuel obeyed, and David became king of Israel.

In the book, “From Witchcraft to Christ”, the one-time witch, Doreen Irvine, tells of how Jesus Christ spoke to her while she was in Bristol. It was an unusual

command He gave her.

“Go to No 50Street, Stepney, and ask for Evelyn.”

Although she was many miles away from that address, and she had no idea who lived there, she obeyed that instruction from the Lord. At No. 50Street, Stepney she found a stout lady and her two daughters, both of whom were prostitutes. In addition to this, the one named Evelyn was a drug addict.

Doreen Irvine shared with them her experience of being a Christian, and the mother decided to become a Christian. The other daughter also became a Christian later while she was in prison. But Doreen never did see Evelyn become a Christian. Yet Doreen Irvine had obeyed the inner voice of the Lord – even although it seemed an irrational thing to do – and a mother and daughter found peace with God.

There was a time in the Old Testament when David and his men were being pursued by King Saul. David had just rescued Keilah and its citizens from the Philistines, and he and his men were staying for a spell in that town. But then news came that King Saul intended to besiege Keilah in order to capture and kill David. David wanted to be sure about what was going to happen, so he asked God two questions: "Would Saul attack Keilah? And would the people of Keilah surrender him up to Saul?"

In some way, probably by means of the ephod which Abiathar had in his charge, God answered both questions with a “Yes!” David expected God to speak to him, and he believed that God had spoken.

“So David and his men – left Keilah and kept moving from place to place.”
(1 Samuel 23: 1-13)

In “Foxe's Book of Martyrs”, we read of Robert Samuel, a preacher of Cobdock, Suffolk, who was imprisoned and awaiting execution. The account continues: “At last, when he was brought forth to be burned – certain heard him declare what strange things had happened unto him during his imprisonment – he fell into a sleep, as it were one half in slumber: one clad all in white seemed to stand before him which ministered comfort unto him in these words: 'Samuel, take a good heart unto thee; for after this day shalt thou never be hungry or thirsty' Which thing came to pass; for from that time till he should suffer he felt neither hunger nor thirst.”

He was martyred by being burnt at the stake on 31st August, 1555.

God encourages and comforts, guides and warns His servants. He has always done this – in the days of the Bible, and the days of the Church. The First Book of Kings tells us that Elijah was in part responsible for bringing a great drought on Israel during the reign of King Ahab. Then God told Elijah to go eastward and to hide in the Kerith Ravine, on the eastward side of the River Jordan.

To go into the wilds during a severe drought when there was little water and perhaps less food about would have been a foolhardy thing to do. But Elijah did it. Why? Because God had told him: “You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there.” (1 Kings 17: 1-6)

Elijah could have been going to certain death in that sun parched land, but he went because he believed in personal revelation from the Lord.

In “The Cross and the Switchblade”, David Wilkerson describes how about eighteen months after he ventured on his first timorous visit to New York, he was standing late one evening outside his little country church. The field of ripe corn behind the church symbolised for him the harvest of youngsters in the city who were hungry for a new beginning. Then he looked at the parsonage and thought of his wife and children safe and happy in it.

“But as I stood and looked at them a quiet inner voice spoke to me as clearly as if a friend had been standing nearby. ‘The church is no longer yours. You are to leave.’”

He goes on to say that when he looked at the parsonage, the inner voice said: “This home is no longer yours. You are to leave.”

And his response has an important lesson for us. “And in the same still, slow and inner voice, I answered, ‘Yes, Lord. I shall go.’”

David Wilkerson could voice his own thoughts and response in the same still voice. But as a servant of God, he had no difficulty in knowing which was God's use of it, and which his own. And as God spoke to David Wilkerson and to His servants, both in the Old Testament and in the Church down the ages, He still speaks today. As He was, so He is.

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Chapter 7

The narrative accounts in the New Testament – the four Gospels and the Book of Acts – have many examples of God speaking to individuals. In this chapter we will look at a few of these instances from the Gospels, and set alongside them, examples of God speaking to individuals in the Church. In this way, it is hoped to provide evidence that God speaks to people nowadays and in Church history, just as He did in the days of the New Testament.

The first occasion we look at of God speaking to a man is from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 1 – in which Joseph learned that his espoused wife Mary was expecting a child. He was going to put her away privately for he did not want to expose her to public disgrace.

"But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1: 20)

This was a personal message to Joseph which both informed him and instructed him about what he should do. He believed, so he obeyed – and in doing so, is an example to us all.

In his book, "Those Controversial Gifts", George Mallone tells of a dream he had just before speaking to a group of Christian women. It was a dream of being muffled in a white jacket. At the third recurrence of the dream, it was accompanied by the Lord giving an interpretation of it: "You are surrounded in my love, and you are surrounded in my grace."

George Mallone goes on to say that he was sure that God was speaking to him and giving him direction for the evening ahead, so he dressed and went to the dinner party, encouraged by this knowledge.

There were more than five hundred women at the meeting. When it came to his

turn to speak – and only a few minutes into his message he became aware that the Lord wanted him to share what had happened that afternoon when he had the dream.

“As I came to the words, 'You are surrounded in my love and in my grace,' the Lord powerfully converted a woman, a Jehovah's Witness, sitting only three rows from me...” She later explained to him that what had made the most impact on her was the “intimate communication that God gave to her through the dream.”

George Mallone had received a message from the Lord. And later, he was told to share that message with the women at the dinner party – and it was that sharing, that obedience to God, which resulted in the conversion of the Jehovah's Witness.

In Luke's Gospel, chapter 1 verse 28, we hear that the angel Gabriel came to Nazareth and spoke to Mary: “Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.”

Here was an instance of God speaking through His angel to a woman who was neither a worker in the temple nor a prophetess, but just a faithful servant of God. Yet a servant who was to be the mother of Jesus Christ. When God speaks to us, we may not know all the implications of what He has said but as we are faithfully obedient, it will unfold.

One of the most influential of social reformers in the

One of the most influential of social reformers in the 1840s), whose endeavours brought about great improvements in the conditions of women and their children in prison, and the homeless living on the streets. Her work led to the introduction of prison reform and also of the provision of education for the children of women in prison, and of the training of nurses. Florence Nightingale was accompanied by some of Mrs Fry's nurses when she went to the Crimea, and such was the impact of this Christian woman on society that she was consulted not only by Members of Parliament, but also by Queen Victoria.

Her reforming zeal was born of her Christian faith and conviction that this was God's work for her to do. And this in turn sprang from teenage experiences such as when her friend Deborah Darby received a message from God to prophesy over her: “You are born to be a light to the blind, speech to the dumb and feet to

the lame,” and another prophesy for her by American Quaker evangelist, William Savery, that she would be led into a high and important calling. God also spoke to her personally through a recurring dream. This teenage girl, who had been a very worldly Quaker, who doubted the reality of God, was assailed by this dream:

“She imagined herself to be in danger of being washed away by the sea, and as the waves approached her, she experienced all the horror of being drowned. But after she came to the deciding point, or as she expressed it, “felt that she had really and truly got faith,” she was lifted up in her dream above the waves . . . The dream no more recurred; the struggle was ended, and thankful calm became her portion.” (“Elizabeth Fry”)

Elizabeth went on to become a powerful agent for social reform that made her one of the most influential Christians of the nineteenth century.

One of the most dramatic instances of God speaking is found in Mark's Gospel, chapter 1 verses 10,11. It took place immediately following the baptism of Jesus - “As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'”

In this way, God expressed His approval of His own Son, and He did it by means of a voice from heaven. We do not get many instances of God manifesting Himself in this way, but He still speaks to His children today, voicing His approval of them.

In the well-known book, “Through Gates of Splendour” the story by the wife of one of the missionaries killed by the Auca Indians – Elizabeth Elliott recounts how her husband, Jim, spoke of joking with God.

“Every now and again,” he said, “I ask for something – a little thing, perhaps, and something answers. Maybe it's only me, but something answers, and makes the request sound so funny that I laugh at myself and feel that He is smiling with me.”

This man who was to die for Christ could not explain the source of the voice which spoke to him, but he linked its humour with God smiling at him. Jim Elliott heard a voice, and it meant a great deal to him. We too may hear a voice. And we should test it, and should it be accepted as from God, then under God's

guidance we may share it with others.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, a bright cloud enveloped Jesus and His disciples, and a voice spoke from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matthew 17: 5)

Once again a voice speaks from heaven, authenticating the divine son-ship of Jesus Christ. Here is no imagined influence gently bending the disciples’ thoughts in a certain direction, but a clear voice which the disciples heard.

Dr John Sung, the great Chinese evangelist, tells of how God came to him during the night of February 10th, 1926. Dr Sung broke down under the burden of sin and cried to the Lord, praying and weeping till midnight.

“Suddenly he heard a voice saying, ‘My son, your sins are forgiven.’ At this his soul was filled with light. Even though it was still night, reaching for his Bible, he began to read the Gospels in a way he had never before.”

The authorities at the Bible Seminary where he was studying, had him packed off to a psychiatric hospital, and in a ward of violent maniacs, he asked the Lord what it all meant. “Then Dr Sung received yet another personal message from the Lord. He was told, ‘You must endure this treatment for 193 days. In this way you will learn to bear the cross and to walk the pathway of obedience to Golgotha.’”

He told no one of the Lord's promise that he was to spend 193 days at the clinic, but after exactly 193 days he was discharged. This was proof that it really had been a message from the Lord, and not his own imagination.

The last example we will take from the Gospels is from John’s Gospel, chapter 20 verses 11-16. Mary had returned to the empty tomb after fetching Peter and another disciple who then returned to their homes. She was weeping and as she looked into the tomb, she saw two angels.

“They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’
‘They have taken my Lord away,’ she said, ‘and I don’t know where they have put him.’”

Jesus then appeared but she thought it was the gardener, and He asked her why she was crying and who she was looking for. When she asked Him to tell her

where He may have put her Lord, He said the one word - 'Mary', and instantly, she recognised Him. When Jesus spoke to Mary, He illuminated her mind: that is how it can be with us too.

Geoffrey T. Bull, in his book: "Coral in the Sand", told how George Hanlon met an old man in Borneo who told him how he became a Christian: "I used to be a medium," said the old man, "and had visions of dragons and spirits in the sky. I even spoke with demons in those days – but one day as I was crossing the ferry there came to me all unexpectedly, the vision of a man. I am sure it was the Lord Jesus. He told me to turn from my evil practices and cleave to the Lord. I immediately obeyed Him. That is how I became a Christian."

God still wishes to speak to men and women, to convict and convert, to encourage, comfort and guide. And the history of the Christian Church bears out this truth.

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Chapter 8

After reading these last two chapters through, I realize I have referred mostly to spectacular forms of communication by God - visions, audible voices, dreams, and so on. When God speaks to us by palpable means these are just different means of His communicating which are more obtrusive than when He speaks by the inner voice. Perhaps these are instances when in His love, God knows there are times our faith needs the extra boost from receiving the more outward manifestations of communication.

Over the past fifty years there have been many occasions when I heard God's small inner voice within me, but in all that time only once have I heard an audible voice, and on just a few occasions seen a vision.

The voice I heard was in The Salvation Army's Clapton Congress hall. My wife and I had just been commissioned as Salvation Army officers; my father, a one-time Salvationist, had wandered away from the Lord over the years, and was in a

spiritual wilderness. Because it was part of our commissioning, he had come to the meeting, and I could see him seated a few rows from the front of the hall.

An appeal was made for those who wished to surrender themselves to the Lord, or to return to God, to come forward and kneel at the Mercy Seat. I was in a tunnel-corridor leading on to the platform, and I could see my father where he was seated. All the sound came from the front, from the platform and the hall. Behind me, the corridor was empty, and at its far end was a thick sound-proof door.

I debated whether or not I should go down beside my father and ask him if he felt he ought to surrender his life back to God. And as I stood there, unsure about what to do, I heard a clear voice behind me. It said only two words: "Go on!"

I quickly turned to see who had spoken. The corridor was empty - the door at the end tightly shut. So I took those words as being from God, and I obeyed their message. My father gladly responded, and he went and kneeled at the front. He not only found peace with God, he was also instantly freed from a lifetime of addiction to tobacco. He had a good relationship with the Lord for the rest of his life until he died more than twenty years later.

And as for visions - let me share one with you.

I had a vision during my usual morning prayer-time on the flat roof of the Salvation Army centre in Tai Hang Tung, Hong Kong. It was like seeing a colour television screen in my mind's eye, although whether it was out there or within me I don't know. But it was a vision of one of my sons who was living as a hippie in the drug culture back in the United Kingdom; he was standing with his hands upraised and praising God. And he was holding his guitar...

At the time I had that vision my son could not have seemed farther from God, but the time came when I saw that vision fulfilled, when he stood beside me and praised God with hands upraised. And he was holding his guitar...

Audible voices and visions, however, have been few and widely separated in time, yet I feel they are in essence no different from the inner voice, which is why I have included them in these chapters. And if we can believe in audible voices and visions and dreams as being from God, it should not be difficult to believe God still speaks to us by a small inner voice. The most important fact is that God still speaks the personal word to His people today, as He did in Bible

times...

Chapter 9

Now we turn to five incidents in the Acts of the Apostles in which God spoke to His followers, and to another five from the life of the Church.

The first is from Acts chapter 8, in which Philip was commanded by an angel of the Lord - "Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he obeyed, and on his way he met a chariot heading south in which was an Ethiopian government official returning to Ethiopia after a visit to Jerusalem. The Ethiopian was reading the Book of Isaiah.

The Spirit told Philip: "Go to the chariot and stay near it." Philip obeyed and struck up a conversation with the man, and it resulted in Philip being invited up into the chariot to explain to the Ethiopian the meaning of Isaiah chapter 53 verses 7 and 8. On the face of it, this would have been an unexpected turn of events – that a man walking a desert road should be invited by a government official of a foreign power to travel with him in order to explain the Scriptures. But God wanted it so and Philip obeyed the Spirit's directions – and the result was that the Ethiopian believed and was baptised by the roadside. (Acts 8: 26 – 38)

A significant point to note in that story is that for a servant of Jesus Christ to be directed and spoken to by the Spirit is treated matter-of-factly.

In his book, "Born Again", Charles W. Colson, who was imprisoned for his part in the Watergate Affair, tells of how when in prison he heard from another prisoner that one of his fellow-inmates wanted to kill him. He could not identify his would-be killer, nor could he imagine why the man wanted to kill him. Then one day, as he was walking in the compound, he saw in front of him two men whom he knew were ex-policemen.

"As I approached their back, the inner voice seemed to say: 'Now, Chuck.'" He had been led by the Spirit of God to the man who wanted to kill him, a one-time Chicago police lieutenant who had been jailed following an investigation which he thought Charles Colson had initiated while serving in the White House on

President Nixon's staff. Colson, although he was a Christian young in experience, had learned to walk by the Spirit's promptings, to listen to God's inner voice... and so identified the man who wanted to kill him.

Acts 9 verses 10-16 tells us of a man named Ananias who lived in the city of Damascus. One day, God spoke to him:

“Ananias!”

“Yes, Lord.”

“Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.”

Ananias responded by saying that this Saul was an enemy of the Church, and that he had come to Damascus to arrest the followers of Jesus. But God replied: “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

It was a brave action of Ananias, to go as a disciple of the Lord to Saul, but he obeyed God's voice and went. And Saul, who had been blinded in his encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road, received his sight again, and was baptised.

The Korean evangelist and pastor and church-leader, Paul Y Cho, tells of his confidence in asking God for a chair, a desk and a bicycle But as the months went by and his prayers seemed not to be answered, he became discouraged. In his prayers he told the Lord: “... if you wait too long I'll be dead and won't need them.”

“Then, I heard a still small voice within me, 'Son, I heard you the first day you prayed six months ago.'

'Well, why didn't you give them to me?' I asked.

'You asked me for a bicycle. Right?'"

Then God went on to instruct Dr Cho that he must be specific in his prayers...

“Which kind did you want? What kind of desk do you want? What kind of chair do you want?” God had to speak to Dr Cho with a personal message in order to teach him a lesson that he must be specific in prayer.

In the town of Caesarea, the Roman centurion, Cornelius, who was also a believer in the God of the Jews... “- distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, 'Cornelius!’” (Acts 10: 1-5)

Cornelius stared at him in fear. “What is it, Lord?” he asked

The angel answered, “Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea.”

Cornelius obeyed the voice of God and sent for Peter. Peter came, and while he was teaching about Jesus to Cornelius and his friends, the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles as He had on the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. God spoke to a Gentile, and when that man obeyed, great blessing came to himself and to those with him.

A contemporary servant of God, Larry Christenson, tells of how after he had been filled with the Spirit, he was praying in his church for more patience, when he felt God begin to answer his prayer. He tells how he had just finished praying and stood up when he saw a woman who really irritated him arrive in the back of the church.

Christenson goes on to say: “The flesh in me almost said out loud, 'O Lord what does she have to come here for? She irritates the life out of me!' And the Lord said, 'Well, son, you asked for patience: here is your chance to try it out’”

God spoke to Larry Christenson, teaching him a lesson which came as a surprise to him, yet which he realised was something he needed to learn. God can speak to us by the inner voice in order to correct or rebuke us and to guide us into a better attitude of mind.

The Apostle Paul was rejected by the Jews in Corinth when he went to them with the Gospel. So he left the synagogue there and concentrated his efforts on the Gentiles.

“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no-one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.’” (Acts 18: 9,10)

This encouraged Paul so that he stayed on in Corinth for eighteen months, and a church was founded. It is a great strength in a frightening or dangerous situation to have the voice of God whispering encouragement within.

St Patrick, in telling of his call to preach the gospel in Ireland, recounts of how he saw in the night visions a man whose name was Victorious coming from Ireland with countless letters, one of which he gave to Patrick, entitled the: 'Voice of the Irish'. St Patrick goes on to say that another night, Christ appeared to him, saying: "He who laid down His life for thee, He it is who speaketh in thee"

This is an example of the Spirit of Jesus authenticating His voice when giving a message to a man, with the purpose of removing any reasonable doubt. And after this vision and personal message from Christ, St Patrick obeyed and went on his mission to Ireland.

The Roman commander had to send his troops to rescue Paul during the uproar when the Pharisees and the Sadducees fell out over the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead; for a while it looked as though Paul would be torn to pieces by the Jews.

"The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, 'Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.'" (Acts 23: 11)

In this way, Paul was encouraged by this personal message from Jesus, that although he appeared to be in danger of losing his life at the hands of the Jews in Jerusalem, yet he need not fear his immediate situation for God intended that he speak in Rome.

When we are doing God's will to the best of our ability, and helped by His Spirit, we can expect God to speak to us, not only guiding or commanding us, but also reassuring and encouraging us.

In "The Life of Antony", we read of the Saint, who was about 35-years old at the time, suffering many attacks by Satan and his demons. But St Antony successfully resisted all the attacks. Then the demons vanished away and the pain left St Antony's body and he was relieved from his sufferings as a vision appeared to him. Antony asked this vision: "Where were you? Why didn't you appear in the beginning, so that you could stop my distresses?"

And a voice came to him: “I was here, Antony, but I waited to watch your struggle. And now, since you persevered and were not defeated, I will be your helper forever, and I will make you famous everywhere.” This encouraged Antony so that he stood and prayed and he says that his body had more strength in it than ever before.

The Christian who says that God does not speak to His servants by means of a personal voice, be it inner voice or audible voice or voice in a vision, has to deny the experience and testimony of many faithful servants in the history of the Church. Only a few have been named here, but it would be easy to add to their number. But these few examples of a vast number of Christians who heard God, should be sufficient to persuade us that we may also hear Him.

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Chapter 10

This chapter examines three passages from New Testament epistles which support the experience of many Christians that God speaks to His people with a personal communication when their situation demands it.

The first is from 2 Corinthians 12, verses 8 and 9:

“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it (a thorn in the flesh) away from me. But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”

The apostle Paul pleaded with God to take away his problem, this 'thorn in the flesh'. He was not looking for a message for the church, nor for any other individual – his prayer was for God to help him personally. And the Lord spoke to him, and that was the help he received.

But the wonderful thing about God's response is that it not only helped the apostle then, but became a principle in his life concerning God's dealings with men, an encouragement to him and to countless servants of God ever since. This is an important side to God's personal revelations to us – that we have to be

ready to share them with others if God wants us to. Sometimes it would be improper or irrelevant to tell others, but there are occasions, and in this passage from 2nd Corinthians, we have one such, when it would be wrong to keep the message strictly to oneself.

I had an experience when writing this chapter which I would share with you. I wrote this chapter in December, and since the spring of that year, I had been bothered with my throat. It seemed to be getting worse and some of the symptoms were disquieting. A Christian in my church was ill with throat cancer at the time. I had seen my family doctor who arranged for me to see a specialist in throat problems. The question haunting me was – 'did I have throat cancer?'

And the small inner voice said again and again - "'You do not have cancer.' The voice confessed that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh, it praised God, it confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord – it fulfilled all the requirements I tested it with.

So most of the time I had no anxiety, but occasionally when the pain became bad or other symptoms became dominant, I was assailed with doubts. But I argued – 'My whole Christian experience has been filled with the assurance and experience of God speaking to me by a small inner voice – can I doubt this now?' If I had throat cancer, then this manuscript would have to be discarded for I could no longer be sure when the inner voice was from God or from myself.

But I held on. This is not a false belief, I insisted. Anyway, I would rather be wrong glorifying God, than doubting Him. Because for me, a God Who – although He is Lord of all the Universe, yet will stoop to speak a word of encouragement to one of His servants – is a God Who is all the bigger, all the more glorified, than a God Who is remote and silent in the face of need.

I was not forthright enough in telling everyone I spoke to that God had already diagnosed my problem. I did tell a few people, including some of my personal family. And it was too late once the specialist had confirmed God's diagnosis, for I could hardly tell people that the Ear, Nose and Throat specialist had said what was what, and by the way, God had said it earlier.

But perhaps in telling you now, I salvage something from it for God's further glory. If you feel God wants you to tell others what He has revealed to you, then

you must obey Him. But be wise and careful whom you tell and what you tell. Ask God to guide you, and do not be in too much of a hurry. Go at God's pace, in His way, to the ones He chooses to hear.

Galatians 4 verse 6 says: “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit Who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”

This verse does not actually say that God speaks to us personally, but it does indicate how He does it, that is, by His Spirit Who is in every one who is a son of God through trusting in Jesus Christ. The context of this verse is that we are sons of God and what this means for us. One of the outcomes of this relationship is that the Holy Spirit is in us. And He is not a sleeping force. He is active and communicates. In this instance, the communication is in addressing God as Father and so giving us the assurance of our relationship with Him.

But this communicating Spirit is the experience of all Christians. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit when He told the disciples: “But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

(John 14: 26)

The Holy Spirit Who lives in us speaks to us. So should we hear an inner voice speaking to us, it could be the Spirit of God within us. It is our responsibility to test the voice to make sure it is from God, and we already know how to do that.

The next verse is already known to us in the context of testing whether or not a voice is from God – 1 John 4 verse 2: “This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God”

Whether or not we take this as referring to people or spirits who teach the truth or falsehood, one thing is obvious: the Spirit of God can be identified, and that by what He says in response to our speaking to Him. In other words, it is possible according to this reading, to have a two-way conversation with the Spirit of God. And a two-way conversation involves His speaking and our listening.

Billy Graham speaks of this two-way conversation when he referred to his long-time friend and man of prayer, the missionary, Frank C. Lauback, who said:

“Prayer at its highest is a two-way conversation – and for me the most important part is listening to God’s replies.”

“Listening to God's replies” - Christians who do this hear God’s voice.

When we take these three verses together, from 2nd Corinthians, Galatians and 1st John, we are forced to conclude that God is not so remote that He does not speak to us except through the words of the Bible, or through a few selected people who are on a higher spiritual plane than we are.

These verses plainly teach us that the ordinary everyday Christian with the Spirit of God living in him and her can expect to hear the voice of God within, teaching and encouraging them for their personal circumstances, and that they can assure themselves it is the Spirit of God by asking Him as in a conversation to confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.

But my experience over the sore throat episode reminded me that it takes faith to believe this, and to act on it. The inner voice and our acceptance of it as the voice of God does not remove the necessity for faith. On the contrary, it multiplies our opportunities for putting faith into action and taking a stand on it.

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Chapter 11

We have looked in the Bible for evidence that God speaks to men individually with a personal message – in the Old Testament and in the Gospels, in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles. And that leaves only one book of the Bible to consider – the Book of Revelation.

The difficulty with Revelation is that the whole book is about God speaking to men. That is what the title means, God revealing His truth to His servants. But it is directed to all His servants, and not so much to the individual. So to find an instance of God addressing individuals we have to look in chapter 3 verse 20, where Jesus says:

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.”

The picture is of a visitor standing at the door of the house and the meaning is of Jesus standing at the door of one's life. The implication is that Jesus speaks to us personally, whether audibly or by an inner voice, seeking admission to our life. This verse stands out from the other verses in Revelation which indicate that God speaks to us, because while they deal mainly with cataclysmic events and concern the End Times, this one is for individual Christians at any time in Church history.

At any time, Jesus Christ wants to enter the life of a man or woman, and at any time, that man or woman may hear the voice of Christ. In other words, Christ speaks in all ages to those who will listen and who are prepared to open their lives to Him.

Although this verse is used here as the main example from the Book of Revelation of God speaking to His followers individually, it goes beyond Revelation in its scope, and stands at the heart of every Christian's relationship with God. In effect, undergirding every Christian experience, in which sinful man responds to God's love in Jesus Christ, is the requirement that man shall hear the voice of God. If God did not communicate with man, man could not respond. And however God communicates, it has to be a way in which His message is received personally. Man in need of God has to know that God has spoken to him.

The 'how to' of receiving God's salvation cannot be acted upon as if it were the detailed instructions in a 'Do It Yourself' handbook, nor is repentance and faith as objectively impersonal as one's response to a 'step by step' plan of a selfassembly kit.

In conversion, there has to be an awareness of our own spiritual condition. And of God, of His love, and of His abhorrence of our sin. This enlightenment may be the very opposite of what we have believed and clung to previously. Christians of bye-gone days spoke of "seeing the light", borrowing from Saul and his Damascus Road experience. They were describing the experience of passing from darkness into the light. In effect, not simply a new perspective of an old view, but of a totally different view, an absolutely new vision.

And such a revolutionary change cannot be achieved simply by reading instructions in a book. Something more fundamental must happen. A spiritual revolution must happen. And that can happen only when God speaks to the

individual. “If anyone hears my voice...”

Some skeptics may dismiss it as either a special message to an individual church, the Church of Laodicea, or of an allegory referring to the Last Days. But the concluding words of Jesus to the Church of Laodicea, and to each of the other six churches addressed, are these: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 3: 22)

So however one may wish to dismiss Revelation 3 verse 20, as referring to a situation not relevant to Christians in general, the final command of each letter aims its meaning to all men of all times who have the spiritual receptivity to hear and understand.

In addition to these words of Jesus Christ which are intended for all of us and which therefore indicate that we can all expect to hear God speak to us, the Book of Revelation also has instances in which the writer John hears God speak. Sometimes this is in the nature of John overhearing something which is not aimed solely at him, as in chapter 12 verse 10: “Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say, 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God’”

Or in chapter 16 verse 1: “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, 'Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth'.”

But sometimes the voice is directed solely to John; God is speaking to him, either directly or through an angel. And examples of these are: chapter 1 verses 10 and 11: 'On the Lord's Day I was in

the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said – 'Write on a scroll...’”

chapter 4 verse 1 : “And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said: 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.'”

There are more examples of this in chapters 10, 14, 17 and 21, right up to the last chapter in the Bible.

In the last chapter of Revelation, John would have worshipped at the feet of an angel, but the angel restrained him: “Do not do it! I am a fellow-servant with you ...” (Revelation 22: 9)

Then he went on to give John the message he had been sent with. In verse 16, we read: “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches.”

Right through into the closing verses of the Bible, we get God communicating with man, by a small inner voice, by an angel, by audible voice or vision or whatever. God by His very nature, wishes to reveal His mind to the creation which He made in His own image.

The whole weight of Scriptural evidence is that God speaks to individuals as He chooses to. This can be a message for the individual to relay to his fellow-men. But it can equally be a message for the individual himself, to instruct or command or encourage him in some way. And to say that God does not speak to men today in an individual way is to reject the practice of God in dealing with men throughout the pages of the Bible, right up to the final chapter of the Book of Revelation. And right throughout the history of the Christian church, right up to the present age.

Chapter 12

During one morning prayer time, the Lord told me to get in touch with the ministers from three churches in the district; it was to do with a Church News column I was writing for a local newspaper. As I was writing down the names of the ministers, the early post arrived, and in the mail was a letter from the first of the three ministers mentioned in God's message to me.

Later that morning, I met the minister I had received the letter from, and I told him what had happened, including saying that God had already told me in prayer to contact him.

When I revealed this, he kept silent, but the look on his face betrayed his surprise. Was it because he did not expect someone who wrote a column for a newspaper to speak about hearing from God? Or perhaps he thought I was some kind of religious nut who claimed to hear voices? Or maybe he was aghast at my impudence for claiming to be on the receiving end of God's messages?

In some circles, Christians who say they hear from God are labelled 'crackpots'. Even being in an exalted position of authority affords no protection from this slur. When a senior police officer revealed that he believed God spoke to him in

prayer, he set off a wave of disquiet which rippled all the way to the centre of national government.

That is how successful Satan has been in denying Christians their birthright, the right of every child to hear his Father, the right of every servant to hear his Lord. Our God – our Lord and Saviour - dare not speak to us. Or rather, we dare not admit we hear Him!

What kind of relationship is that, when it is all one way? We pray, and pray, and pray, but we must not hear! Satan, of course, does not want God's voice to be heard. And Christians fall into this trap, unwittingly, but effectively. And that is when they claim that we cannot hear God's voice personally.

God speaks through the Bible, for it is God's word. And Satan hates and fears the Bible. Yet it is not the threat to him it could be, because some Christians hardly ever read it. Except in church on a Sunday. Or a few hurried verses in the morning or late in the evening.

Of course, God can speak through His word at those times. But we have to be listening. And often, our time with the Bible is when we are newly awakened, or tired after a busy day, and feeling drowsy. So often, it is giving Him the times when we are least alert. But throughout the day, driving a car or working at a counter or desk or kitchen sink or blackboard or the controls of a mighty machine or on our rounds in a hospital or whatever – wherever our work takes us – we are just a whisper away from God. And even less than a whisper if we are willing to listen to Him and to obey Him.

To admit to hearing God's silent inner voice, or His speaking by any other means, does not mean you claim to be a prophet. It just means you are the other half of a two-way conversation. And the message you receive is usually for your personal attention. Hearing God does not make you a spiritual giant just as it does not make my child something special just because he hears my voice. But my child's listening and responding to me acknowledges our relationship.

Another point we should think about in this chapter. Why should it be thought too amazing for us to hear God? Too amazing that He should wish to speak to us? God can do anything. And He loves us. He has always initiated the relationship between Himself and mankind. He set in motion the plan of His

grace for our salvation. He took the lead. It should not be thought strange that He speaks to us now – after all, He can do it, for He is our Father and we are His children.

But then, consider us! What a contrast! For we are by nature, sinful and separated from God. We had turned our backs on Him, gone our own ways. And He had to draw us back to Himself by His own love and grace.

So in the light of those two very different sets of facts – what God is and has done for us, contrasted to what we are and what we have done – which is the more likely? That we should wish to speak to Him, or that He desires to speak to us?

Is it not more reasonable to believe that a loving God would speak to us, His children, than that we, hardened sinners but saved by grace, should speak to Him. Yet every time we pray, we speak to Him. It should be easy then, to believe that He also speaks to us.

David, the Psalmist, must have felt this, when he cried to God: “O God, do not keep silent, be not quiet, O God, be not still.” (Psalm 83: 1)

Two-way communication between God and His servants seems just right, part of a true relationship between the true living God and those who worship and serve Him. The idea of a silent God was unthinkable to the early prophets; in fact, silence in a God is proof that it is a false god. In Jeremiah, we read the words of God to the House of Israel, when He describes the worthlessness of idols of wood, or silver and gold: “Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak.” (Jeremiah 10: 5)

Everything we know of God supports the view that He would speak with us. Even the name of the Son is the “Word”, the medium of communication, and also, Bible scholars tell us, the thought behind the medium. Both the word and its meaning!

In this book we have looked at what the Bible says for and against the view God speaks personally to individual Christians. And that He speaks in various ways, but most commonly, by a small inner voice. We have also read of experiences of Christians over the centuries who believe that they have heard God speak personally to them.

With all that evidence, and the evidence of what we may reasonably expect of a God Who loves us and desires to communicate with us, I conclude by suggesting that we Christians who believe God speaks to us personally are part of a tradition stretching unbroken right back to the beginning of God's relationship with mankind.

In closing, may I say that reading a book about hearing God speak is not enough. The book may inform you, encourage you, even guide you. But receiving guidance will not get you there. You must step out. If you want to hear God speak to you in the everyday, you must speak to Him in the everyday, then listen to Him, awaiting His speaking to you. Expect Him to speak, not only during your times of prayer, those times you have set apart for Him, but whenever He wishes to speak to you.

He may wish to speak to you at times of His choosing, times when you are at home or at work, travelling or at leisure, in good times and in bad, whenever ... wherever. So at all times, be accessible to God.

You know how to determine if this inner voice is of God. And with the Bible in your heart and in your thoughts, you cannot go far wrong.

“I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you...” Psalm 119: 11.

Be courageous, go forward and enjoy your fellowship with God, speaking and listening, in a full communicating relationship: a relationship in which you both speak to Him, and listen for whatever He wishes to say to you.

Chapter 13

And now to finish on a personal note, about listening to God and speaking to Him.

Jean and I returned from the mission field with our two youngest children. We had no home and no furniture, a small amount of clothes that weren't suitable for the north of Scotland climate, and about £200 in the bank, a gift from a loved one. Our oldest son took us into his home, at that time a two bed-roomed house with a walk in cupboard that could hold a single bed, and for the next 15 months we were officially homeless. But we were convinced we were in the centre of

God's will for our lives. Yet still we longed to be back in our home town of Peterhead, some seventy miles to the north, but the housing authority of that town told us that three-bed-roomed houses were as rare as “hen’s teeth” and since we didn't work in the area, we had little chance of getting a council house.

Through the kindness of a Brethren family, when their elderly mother died, we were given some of the old lady's furniture, and a sympathetic businessman stored the furniture in one of his warehouses. I meanwhile, had become a secondary school teacher, and we were beginning to gradually get “on our feet” as far as material possessions were concerned. Then we were allocated a local authority threebed-roomed house in a country village, but still some seventy miles from our home town where our hearts longed to be. We had been away for so many years, and we had a strong desire to be back there.

One Saturday morning, travelling into a nearby town on our weekly shopping trip, Jean was saying how she wished we were back in Peterhead and actually saying which district she would like to live in, somewhere back close to our roots. So I said because at that time I felt it was the right thing to say: “Then why not be precise in telling God all that you want.”

“Yes,” she agreed, “why not.”

“And don't miss anything out,” I added.

So she spelled out precisely her wish list to God: our preferred district, although we knew there were no council houses in that area and we weren't financially able to buy a house, and the kind of house we wanted: three bed-roomed, with an office for me to work and do my writing in, sufficiently separated from neighbours so that we didn't disturb them if we held a meeting singing hymns or a family musical evening, and with a dining room and central heating.

Some time previously, God had shown me in a kind of vision, where we would get a home in Peterhead. I drew roughly what God showed me or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, what He told me. It was a house of fairly recent construction, on a small hill, and an interesting detail was that to park our car it had to go round the left side of the house and park close to the house at the rear. I still have that drawing, kept between the pages in an old Bible.

A few days after Jean gave her detailed list of requirements to God, I noticed an advertisement requiring a warden for a sheltered housing complex in Peterhead

and the successful applicant would be required to live in a three-bedroomed house in the complex. And it was right in the specific district we had prayed about. That was the first we'd heard of sheltered housing in that part of town.

Jean applied for the post and was the successful applicant. We learned later that there had been about twenty applicants. And the three-storied house had an office, central heating, a ground floor dining room, and it was connected to the adjacent buildings in such a way that if we had a musical evening in the middle floor, it was unlikely to disturb our neighbours. And we accessed the car parking area in exactly the way I had seen in my vision.

Another interesting fact is that the house stood on what was described in my young days as "up the hillock" - that is, it was at the top of a small incline rising from the harbour area. And the house was close to our roots: about thirty yards from our back door was the house once lived in by my grandparents, farther down the road was the house where I was born, and from the other side of the house, we could see the roof of the house our family lived in when we returned from Glasgow in 1938.

Jean's birth-place was nearer the centre of the town, whereas our new home was more off-centre. But we had been given a home close to both our roots, just as we had longed for. And God had said our home in Peterhead would be of fairly recent construction: near our home is a granite plaque marking the redevelopment of the site, dated August 1982. We moved into the house the last weekend in November, 1985.

What about God speaking to you through someone else? About two years after moving into our new home, I was told in prayer that God had a new work for me to do. Specifically, it was "a new and peculiar avenue of service". Then a local businessman, a dear Christian brother, visited me one Wednesday afternoon – Wednesday was his shop's early closing day – and after coffee together, we had a time of prayer. Then my companion said he felt he had received a message from God for me. And it was almost word for word the message I had received a few weeks previously: that God had "a new and peculiar avenue of service opening up" for me. A few days later on a Friday evening, two strangers came to our door and after introducing themselves, said they had come to invite me to stand for their political party as a candidate in a forth-coming local government election. I had never ever considered being actively involved in politics, far less standing for election. But I told them that as a Christian, I would have to seek

God's will about it. They acknowledged they knew I was a Christian; they claimed to know “all about me”, and were happy to await for my decision in my own good time. Jean and I spent the weekend praying for guidance on the invitation, and I told these men on the Monday that I would stand as a candidate for their party in the following year's election. And I did, I was elected, and so entered on a new avenue of service, one in which I served for nineteen years until I retired from being a councillor in May, 2002.

I could go on with these personal reminiscences, both of my own experiences and of my wife, Jean's, experiences, in which God has told us to do various acts of service and of the outcomes of these acts of obedience. But they are too many, and the results are not always spectacular but they have had the effect of cementing our faith in hearing and obeying the voice of God. And for us, they are a continual blessing we live with. And we give the glory to God, and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.