A person is silhouetted against a bright sunset over a body of water. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a shimmering reflection on the water. The sky is a mix of warm yellow and orange tones. The word "GOD" is written in large, white, serif capital letters across the upper half of the image, with the sun positioned behind the letter "O".

DISCERNING
THE VOICE OF
GOD

How to Recognize When God Speaks

PRISCILLA SHIRER

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GOD

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Priscilla Shirer is a Bible teacher whose ministry is focused on the expository teaching of the Word of God to women. Her desire is to see women not only know the uncompromising truths of Scripture intellectually but experience them practically by the power of the Holy Spirit. Priscilla is a graduate of the Dallas Theological Seminary with a Master's degree in Biblical Studies. For over a decade she has been a conference speaker for major corporations, organizations, and Christian audiences across the United States and the world.

Priscilla is now in full-time ministry to women. She is the author of *A Jewel in His Crown*, *A Jewel in His Crown Journal*, *And We Are Changed: Transforming Encounters with God*, and *He Speaks to Me: Preparing to Hear from God*.

Priscilla is the daughter of pastor, speaker, and well-known author Dr. Tony Evans. She is married to her best friend, Jerry. The couple resides in Dallas with their two young sons, Jackson and Jerry Jr.

Jerry and Priscilla have founded Going Beyond Ministries where they are committed to seeing believers receive the most out of their relationship with the Lord.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Welcome to *Discerning the Voice of God!* The material in this book is divided into five days of individual study and one small-group session each week when you will process with others what you have studied. The small-group sessions provide an excellent opportunity to share what the Lord is teaching you as well as learn from what the Lord is teaching other women in your group.

Each day of individual study will take about 30 minutes. The learning activities provide a time of application and reflection. These things may also be topics of discussion in your small group. I strongly encourage you to complete all the learning activities to get the most from your study. Throughout the study you will also see flower icons followed by fill-in-the-blank statements. These are the key principles for each day. Pay special attention to these—they are designed to reinforce the message of the material you are studying.

As a part of my preparation for this Bible study, I had the opportunity to ask many godly people to complete this thought: "I know the Lord is speaking to me when ..." You will find their comments at the beginning of many of your daily lessons.

You may want to keep a notebook or journal close by to jot down thoughts the Holy Spirit reveals to you as you study. There are some activities throughout the study that will instruct you to answer on a separate sheet of paper. You may want to put those in your journal as well.

As you commit to this study, ask the Holy Spirit for guidance as you seek to better prepare yourself to recognize God's voice.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome! I am a believer in Jesus Christ. He was sent to earth to die because the Father so passionately loved me that He couldn't bear to live without me. I have spent most of my Christian life leaning on this belief without really experiencing it.

I was taught that a relationship with God was a personal one in which God speaks to His children. I sat in many prayer meetings where passionate believers shared stirring encounters with God's voice while my own soul was filled with overwhelming confusion. How did these saints know God was speaking?

I made a decision to believe God speaks but not disappoint myself by believing He would speak to me. I hid my growing dissatisfaction with my Bible study and a powerless prayer time. I thought this was the way it would always be, until the day God spoke personally and intimately to me. An encounter with His presence made me different: I was filled with a hunger for the presence of God and fully convinced that the goal of my ministry should be to whet the appetites of others for the same. In your hands you hold a piece of my passion.

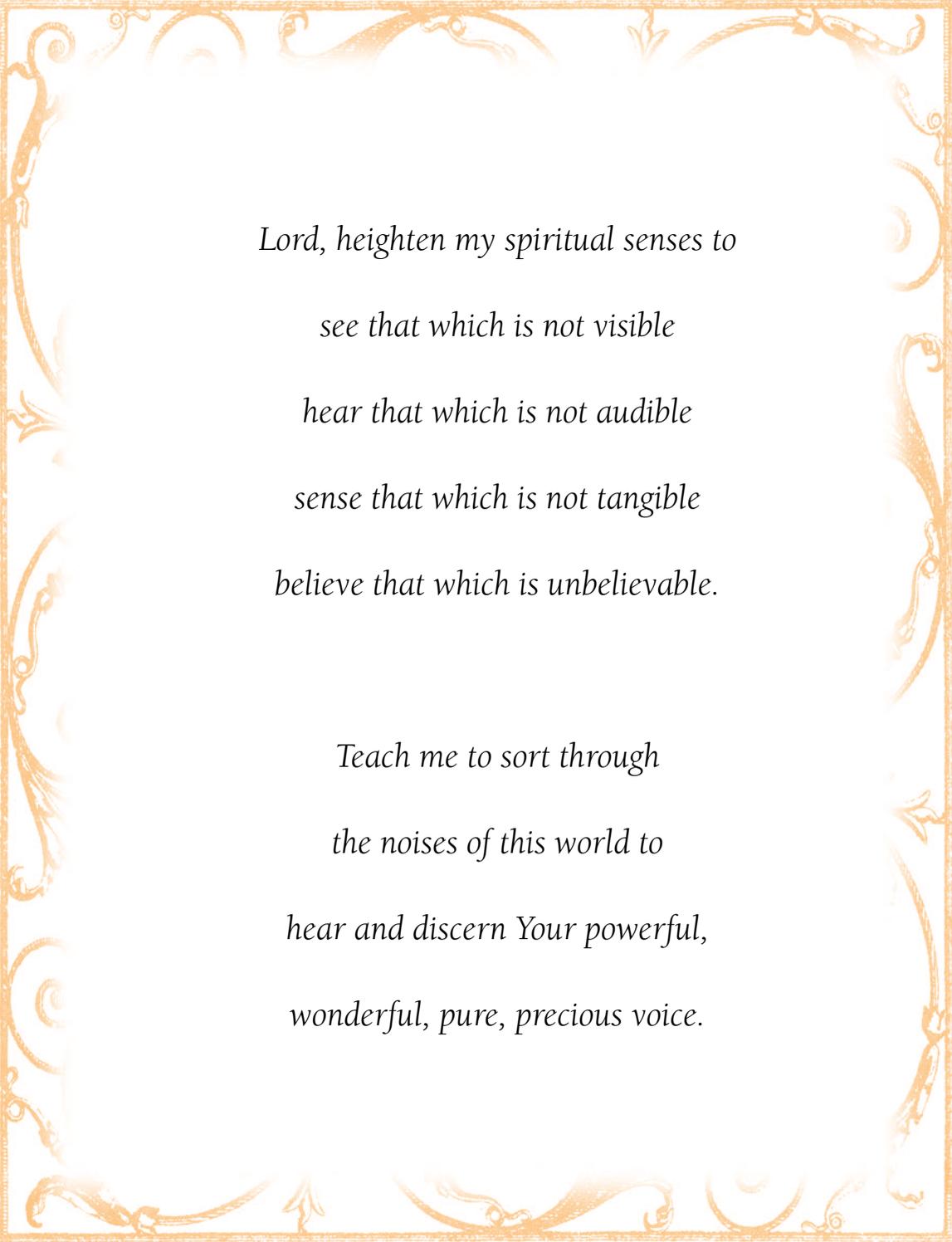
Discerning the voice of God is a divine mystery because it is a supernatural work the Holy Spirit does in us. This study cannot give you a formula by which you can discern His voice with 100 percent accuracy. As you practice discerning, know God graciously allows our errors to be the best teacher in hearing correctly in the future.

These next pages will guide you through six weeks of study. The first week will challenge your level of anticipation to hear from God. The second and third weeks will look in-depth at the Holy Spirit as God's primary method of leading His children. The fourth and fifth weeks will cover the nature of God's voice which reveals His character and His purposes. And finally, week six will examine Abraham's illustration of what our response should be when God speaks. I am praying you will be challenged and emerge from this study better equipped to hear the magnificent voice of our great God.

Open your heart completely to what the Spirit wants to teach you and the way He wants to teach it. Ask the Lord to break through the barriers. He is God and can do whatever He wants to get His word to you. As I prepared for this project, God began to infiltrate my cozy Christianity with His unconventional methods and I have emerged better for it. The more ways we can hear God speak, the more we will hear!

Blessings,

Priscilla



*Lord, heighten my spiritual senses to
see that which is not visible
hear that which is not audible
sense that which is not tangible
believe that which is unbelievable.*

*Teach me to sort through
the noises of this world to
hear and discern Your powerful,
wonderful, pure, precious voice.*

ANTICIPATING THE VOICE OF GOD

My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me. John 10:27, HCSB



1. Jesus was clear to point out a _____, naming us His _____:

“My sheep ...”

Romans 8:16—*The Spirit Himself testifies together with our spirit that we are*

_____.

2. Jesus points out not only a _____ but a _____ of being His sheep:

“... hear My voice.”

John 8:47—*The one who is from God _____ God’s words.*

3. Jesus points out a _____, a _____ and also

a _____ for being His sheep:

“I know My sheep.”

_____ is the foundation for getting to know God.

4. Jesus points out a _____, a _____,

a _____, and also a _____ from His sheep:

“They follow Me.”

John 10:11—*I am the _____ shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*

Hebrews 13:20-21—*Now may the God of peace ... the _____ Shepherd of the sheep—
with the blood of the everlasting covenant, equip you with all that is good to do His will.*

WEEK 1

Anticipating the Voice of God

Day 1 EXPECT TO HEAR IT

HE SPEAKS

*I will stand on
my guard post
And station
myself on the
rampart;*

*And I will keep
watch to see
what He will
speak to me.
Habakkuk 2:1*

*Call to Me, and
I will answer you,
and I will tell you
great and mighty
things, which
you do not know.
Jeremiah 33:3*

GOD WILL SPEAK TO THE HEARTS *of those who prepare themselves to hear; and conversely, those who do not so prepare themselves will hear nothing even though the Word of God is falling upon their outer ears every Sunday.*¹ —A.W. Tozer

I spent much of my Christian life not hearing God. I had read about how He spoke to people in the Bible, and even about modern-day believers who had an intimacy with Him that allowed them to hear His voice. But I rarely, if ever, experienced that type of connection with God. My relationship with Him was more one-sided. In prayer, I talked and He listened. I approached my Bible reading as an opportunity to learn about God, while never anticipating and expecting that the God of the universe would really speak to me about the personal details of my life.

Then my Bible study took me to Habakkuk, and I read about a man who desperately needed to hear from God and was amazingly confident that He would indeed answer. God shattered the season of divine silence in my life by convicting me about my lack of expectancy and anticipation to hear from Him. This is where clear communication with God begins: with a believer approaching her relationship to God and His Word with anticipation, expecting Him to speak.



Clear communication with God begins when I _____ God

and His Word with _____, expecting Him to speak.

If you have experienced a time when your prayers seemed unheard, how did you feel toward God?

Did this instance cause you to doubt that God desires to speak to you? yes no If so, why?

Deuteronomy 5:31

As for you, stand here by Me, that I may speak to you.

Micah 7:7, NLT

My God will certainly hear me.

Throughout Scripture God paints a picture of His relationship with His beloved as one in which He responds and speaks. Believers in the Bible didn't call to God and then walk away despondent because they assumed God wouldn't respond. They looked expectantly and eagerly for the response God would offer.

Many of us don't really believe God will speak to us and give us specific directions concerning the details of our lives. We claim to believe that God speaks, but we are secretly discouraged because we don't see evidence of His voice in our lives. We need to approach the Father with an expectancy that He will speak.



Approach the Father with an expectancy that He will speak.



THE STORY OF HABAKKUK

Habakkuk desperately needed to hear from God. He saw the continued iniquity and destruction of Judah and called out to God for help. Initially, it appeared that God wasn't answering or hearing, yet Habakkuk never considered that he wouldn't receive divine instruction.

On the inside of the front or back cover of this book, make a list of personal circumstances troubling you. As you work through this Bible study, focus on these circumstances and how God is speaking to you concerning them.

In Habakkuk 1:2-3, the discouraged prophet asked two questions of God: "How long?" (v. 2) and "Why?" (v. 3). These questions probably strike a chord with you as well. When the circumstances of life seem to be closing in on us and we see no end in sight, we want to know how long we will have to continue calling out to God with seemingly no response. We also want to know why He would continue to allow the circumstances we face.

Think of a request you have been bringing to the Lord for a long time. Do you still expect God to respond and speak to you, or are you losing hope? Write your thoughts below.

Habakkuk 1:5
Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days— You would not believe if you were told.

We don't know how long Habakkuk had been calling out to God, but when it appeared that He was not answering, Habakkuk pointed an accusatory finger at God. Open your Bible and read his prayer in Habakkuk 1:2-4. Habakkuk became increasingly discouraged and started to lose confidence that the Lord would answer him. God finally spoke up and answered the prophet in verse 5.

Read this verse in the margin and underline the actions God commanded Habakkuk to take.

With these words, God gave Habakkuk spiritual vision. The prophet received encouragement to look around and observe. While Habakkuk waited on God to answer, God was already answering! God wanted to restore Habakkuk's confidence by showing him that He was not idle and uninterested in the demise of Judah. Even though the prophet wasn't seeing God respond in the way and timing he expected, God was speaking and moving. He always is—even in His silence.

Throughout the next week ask the Lord for spiritual vision concerning each of the personal circumstances you listed earlier. Take deliberate time to see God's handiwork in each situation.

Proverbs 3:5-6
Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.

CONFIDENCE RESTORED

With his eyes newly opened, Habakkuk was able to rebuild his confidence in God's ability and sovereignty. Instead of making his request by shaking an accusing finger at God, Habakkuk chose words that revealed his expectation and anticipation.

Read Habakkuk 1:12-13. On a separate sheet of paper, make a list of the attributes of God mentioned in these verses. Use these words to write a short prayer expressing your confidence in God's control of your circumstances and desire to speak to you regarding them. Put this page in a place where you can see it often.

Habakkuk's second prayer is completely different from his first. After seeing his circumstances through new eyes, his level of anticipation increased.

Which prayer of Habakkuk's reflects your current feelings about hearing God's voice? Mark where you are on the continuum.



first prayer (vv. 2-3)
doubtful and accusatory

second prayer (vv. 12-13)
expectant and confident



If we come to Him doubting His ability to speak, we will have a difficult time listening. So we must come expectantly.²

—Charles Stanley

Not until Habakkuk's approach to God changed from doubtful to confident and expectant did he begin to receive directions from God as to what he should do. Initially, God spoke to prove that He was indeed up to something and to build Habakkuk's confidence, but the second time He spoke to give instructions and guidance. Could your level of expectancy be a factor in how clearly and frequently you hear God's voice?



What has the Holy Spirit taught you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do as a result of today's study?

Write a prayer responding to God's commands to you.

Psalm 5:3

*In the morning,
O LORD, You will
hear my voice;
In the morning
I will order my
prayer to You and
eagerly watch.*

1. A. W. Tozer, *The Root of Righteousness: Tapping the Bedrock of True Spirituality* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1986), 21.

2. Charles Stanley, *How to Know God's Will* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1989), 12.

Day 2 WAIT PATIENTLY FOR IT



HE SPEAKS

The vision is yet
for the appointed
time ...

Though it tarries,
wait for it;
For it will certainly
come, it will
not delay.

Habakkuk 2:3

IF YOU WANT TO HEAR GOD’S voice clearly and you are uncertain, then remain in His presence until He changes this uncertainty. Often much can happen during this waiting for the Lord. Sometimes He changes pride into humility; doubt into faith and peace; sometimes lust into purity. The Lord can and will do it.¹

—Corrie Ten Boom

One thing I learned from my friend and mentor Anne Graham Lotz is God does speak to His children. She once said to me, “I never make a major decision, especially one that will affect another person, before I receive direction from God.” For every major ministry decision she has made, she can pinpoint a specific Scripture verse as the one God used to personally direct that decision. Anne so anticipates and expects an answer from God that she is resolved to wait on Him for guidance before coming to a final decision on a matter.

Psalm 27:14

Wait for the LORD;
Be strong, and
let your heart
take courage;
Yes, wait for
the LORD.

Recall a time when you acted *before* hearing from God.
What happened? Share your experience with your small group.

The process of waiting for a message from God can be just as important as the message itself. In waiting, my faith and intimacy with the Lord grow. Often something I learn while waiting prepares me for the message so that I am not as surprised by it as I might have been otherwise; thus, I am more willing to obey.



The process of _____ for a message from God

is just as important as the _____ itself.

If we approach our relationship to God and His Word expecting Him to speak, we will be more patient because we know He will come through in His time. Just like the rest of us, Habakkuk had to wait for God’s Word and its fulfillment.

✧ WAITING ON HIS WORD ✧

We are always willing to wait on things that are important to us. We will stay by our phones awaiting a call regarding a career opportunity or a report from the doctor's office. We will wait in line for much-needed groceries. We will wait out the long months before the arrival of a baby. The value we place on an object or person dictates the amount of time we are willing to wait on them. The importance of hearing God's voice was paramount to Habakkuk.

Look up Habakkuk 2:1 and write it in your own words in the margin.

The Hebrew word for *stand* is *amad*. It means "to endure, remain and to be standing both in body and attitude." The Hebrew word for *station* is *yatsab*. It means "to take one's stand." Habakkuk's usage of these two words shows how seriously he expected God to answer and how determined he was to wait on that answer. He didn't seek to fill his void with any alternatives. He just waited on God—posture militant, stance strong, and resolve sure. He was on the lookout for an answer.

Which of the following adjectives describe your stance when waiting on God's Word to you? Check all that apply.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> wavering | <input type="checkbox"/> confident | <input type="checkbox"/> critical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> doubtful | <input type="checkbox"/> nonchalant | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |

In Habakkuk's day a watchman would minimize all distractions to concentrate fully on the task of protecting the city from approaching enemies. The guard would not allow anyone to coerce him from his post. Likewise, the prophet wasn't going to make a move until he received divine direction. If we value God's Word as Habakkuk did, we should be willing to wait patiently and not move until we have received it.

Habakkuk described where he would wait: "on the watchtower." The watchtower was positioned well above the ground to provide a broad view for miles around. It gave the guard in the tower a different view of his circumstances by placing him high above ground level. Habakkuk purposed to remove himself from the depression and anxiety of his ground-level circumstances and get above them. He took his eyes off his circumstances and watched only for God.

Look back at the list you made inside the front or back cover of this book. Place a plus sign beside the ones in which you are patiently waiting to hear from God and a minus sign beside the ones in which you have taken action before hearing from Him.



If you told God on your knees that you had reached an impasse and ... were handing it over to him, then leave it with him. Do not go to the first Christian you meet and say, "You know, I have an awful problem; I don't know what to do." Don't discuss it. Leave it with God, and go on the watch-tower.²
—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones



WAITING ON FULFILLMENT OF HIS WORD

We often want to immediately run ahead the moment we hear God’s leading and direction. Instead of walking in daily obedience, we desire to see the end result of God’s plan instantly.

Habakkuk 2:3

The vision is yet for the appointed time; It hastens toward the goal, and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay.

When God began to give Habakkuk the guidance he had been seeking, He buffered it with the words recorded in Habakkuk 2:3 (in margin). Habakkuk’s need for patience was so great, the Lord prefaced His message with a reminder for Habakkuk to not try to carry out God’s plan before its due season.

God encouraged Habakkuk to be patient by assuring him of four specific promises regarding the vision He was about to reveal. Underline them in the margin (Hab. 2:3).

In the Book of Genesis, Abraham and Sarah faced a situation where they were forced to wait on God. What was the Lord’s promise to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18:9-18?

According to Genesis 21:1-2 when did God accomplish what He had spoken to Abraham and Sarah?

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow about His promise.

How had Sarah and Abraham impatiently tried to fulfill God’s promise of offspring (Gen. 16:1-4)?

Don’t flounder when time passes as you wait to see God’s promises fulfilled. Stand firm and walk in daily obedience to God.

Great relief awaits those asking God to provide a mate, financial assistance, a ministry opportunity, career advancement, or simply His direction. We can be free from the burden of trying to make things happen when we know He promises to fulfill His own Word. God told Habakkuk what he would need to walk in patience before the Lord.

On what must the righteous depend? (Hab. 2:4) _____

While the righteous man trusts God will fulfill His Word, the proud man (self-reliant) depends on himself to bring things to pass. When we seek God in faith, He promises us great reward (see Heb. 11:6).

What has the Holy Spirit taught you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do as a result of today's study?

Write a prayer responding to God's commands to you.

1. Corrie Ten Boom, *Not I, but Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 24.
2. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Faith Tried and Triumphant* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 28.

Day 3 PLAN TO OBEY IT



HIS LEADING IS ONLY FOR *those who are already committed to do as He may choose. To such it may be said: "God is able to speak loud enough to make a willing soul hear."*¹
—Lewis Sperry Chafer

HE SPEAKS
If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine.
Exodus 19:5

Several weeks ago, I asked my husband which pair of shoes looked best with my outfit. I knew which pair I was going to wear regardless of his response. When I chose my option instead of his, he was understandably irritated. These days when I ask for his opinion he is hesitant to give a response. Instead he just says, "Why are you asking me? You're going to do what you want to do anyway!"

I wonder how often we ask God for His opinion while knowing full well we plan to stick with our own plan. Yes, we will follow Him, but only when and if His

prescription will be comfortable to follow and will closely match our own desires. If we want to keep the lines of communication open and flourishing, we must prepare to abandon our plans when they don't coincide with His. Obedience is the key to hearing His still, small voice.



_____ is the key to hearing His still, small voice.

Luke 8:18, NLT

Be sure to pay attention to what you hear. To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But to those who are not listening, even what they think they have will be taken away from them.

Do you normally consider what your response will be to God before you seek His direction? yes no

OBEDIENCE NO MATTER WHAT

Habakkuk wasn't just passionate about hearing God's direction. He also was serious about fully accepting God's commands no matter what they were. He thought ahead and planned to respond in obedience.

"I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved" (Hab. 2:1).

Strong's defines the word *reprove* in Habakkuk 2:1 as "rebuke, correction, reproof, refutation, chastened."³

What does Habakkuk's use of the word imply about the type of response he expected from God?



If we settle ahead of time that we will obey whatever God tells us, we will go into our time with him ready to hear his voice.²

—Henry and Richard Blackaby

Habakkuk seemed to think that whatever God said, at least part of it would be a rebuke to him; but he was willing to accept even God's harsh words.

How do you usually respond to God's Word even when it may be something you do not want to hear? Rank your responses 1 (the response you most frequently use) through 4 (the response you least frequently use).

- ___ ignore—act like I never heard it
- ___ consider—weigh my options
- ___ obey—follow His directions regardless of how I feel
- ___ keep praying—hope God will change His response



Read the passages listed below and match them to God's response to people who do not obey His Word.

Jeremiah 6:16-19

Amos 8:9-11

Zechariah 7:12-13

sent a famine of His Word

refused to listen

brought disaster to the people

Deuteronomy

5:29-31

Oh that they had such a heart in them [like Moses], that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments . . . Go, say to them, "Return to your tents." But as for you [Moses] stand here by Me, that I may speak to you.

To know God's Word and not obey it is sin against Him. Sin reaps consequences. One consequence is that we will hear His voice far less frequently. As we blatantly ignore and disobey God, we build a callous around our spiritual ears so that we don't hear the voice of God. He knows if we are pure in our desire to do what He says. Matthew 5:8 extends a promise to the pure in heart: "They shall see God."

Moses was a man who knew God intimately. God separated His relationship with Moses from any other man of the day when He said He spoke to him "face to face" as a man speaks to his friend (see Num. 12). But Moses was far from perfect. He was a murderer (see Ex. 2:12) and had once tried to shirk God's responsibility for him (see Ex. 4:13). But God still used him and spoke to him. He gives the reason why in Deuteronomy 5:29-31 (in margin).

True blessing isn't just found in hearing God's voice but in heeding it. When we obey, no matter how unusual His instructions may be, we create a solid foundation on which God can display His supernatural activity in our lives.

Recently, my youngest son, Jerry, was ill. I kept waking up as he wheezed and coughed. At 4:00 a.m. I was awakened not by coughing but by the Spirit of God. He encouraged me to go to the nursery, lay a hand on my son, and pray for his healing. I debated for at least 10 minutes. I had just gotten back in bed and didn't feel like going all the way back up those stairs. Could it be the supernatural intervention God had planned with my son's health hinged on whether or not I would obediently follow His simple instructions? I got up and went to Jerry's room. I laid my hands on him and prayed for God's healing. I poured Scriptures over him. Afterward I went back downstairs. He slept soundly the rest of the night.

The next morning my husband asked if I had given Jerry medicine in the middle of the night. I told him I hadn't. He said, "After you went up there, the coughing stopped. I thought you must have given him something." I said, "Yes, I gave him something all right! God's healing!"

Many times God has asked me to do something I thought was too crazy to consider. Yet in ignoring His leading, have I often missed out on the supernatural and glorious results He had planned if I had just obeyed His instructions?

I wonder what supernatural rewards and divine interventions are awaiting us if we plan beforehand to fully obey when God speaks?

Psalm 19:11

In keeping the [word of the Lord] there is great reward.

Isaiah 48:18,

HCSB

If only you had paid attention to My commands. Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.

What has the Holy Spirit taught you as you studied today?

Matthew 7:24, NIV

Everyone who
hears these words
of mine and puts
them into practice is
like a wise man.

What is God asking you to do as a result of today's study?

Write a prayer responding to God's commands to you.

1. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing, 1918), 114.
2. Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Hearing God's Voice* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 245.
3. James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, n.d.), 123.

Day 4

LISTEN FOR IT



HE SPEAKS

As you enter the house of God, keep your ears open and your mouth shut! ... he is in heaven, and you are only here on earth. So let your words be few.
Ecclesiastes 5:1-2, NLT

THINGS DON'T CHANGE *when I talk to God; things change when God talks to me.*¹ —Bob Sorge

Listening for the voice of God seems to be a misplaced phenomenon. Lost in the midst of busyness and growing religious activity is the art of being still—consciously and deliberately tuning our ears to hear God.

Could it be we don't hear God because we have trained ourselves not to hear Him? Our busy lifestyles have squelched out the clear, powerful voice of God so we no longer even recognize it. We must carve out time to purposefully listen for God's voice through prayer, meditation on His Word, and worship. If we listen we'll hear the voice that speaks eternally.



I must carve out time to purposefully listen for God's voice through

_____, _____ **on His Word**

and _____.

According to our main Scripture today, we should “let [our] words be few” (Eccl. 5:2). This implies that our time listening should outweigh our time talking. I’m not saying we shouldn’t voice our needs, requests, and desires to God, but we shouldn’t allow these things to keep us from hearing what He wants to say.

Scripture repeats the pattern of God calling His people away from action to stillness. Underline the words that indicate this in the Scriptures in the margin.

Circle the phrases in Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 and Habakkuk 2:20 that reveal the *reason* for silence, and put a box around the phrases in Psalm 46:10 and Isaiah 30:15 that explain the *result* of silence.

Ecclesiastes

5:1-2, NLT

As you enter the house of God, keep your ears open and your mouth shut!

... he is in heaven, and you are only here on earth. So let your words be few.

Habakkuk 2:20

The LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him.

Psalm 46:10, NIV

Be still, and know that I am God.

Isaiah 30:15

The Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said, “In repentance and rest you will be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength.”

TWO TYPES OF LISTENING

There are two types of listening—*passive listening* and *aggressive listening*. We engage in passive listening most frequently. We hear with our physical ears, but we don’t digest the truth of what is being said. God wants aggressive listeners who look intently at His Word and listen deliberately to what He has to say.

Although it’s easiest to concentrate on listening to God during times of prayer, meditation, and worship, we can aggressively listen at other times. I practice listening while I am doing all sorts of mundane tasks. I purposefully focus on God, invite the Holy Spirit to speak, and concentrate my attention on Him.

Make a list of everyday tasks you will accomplish today. How can you turn them into opportunities to aggressively listen for God to speak?

Task	How I can aggressively listen
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

James 1:25
The one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this [woman] shall be blessed in what [she] does.

For most of my Christian life, I left my prayer time feeling like I just had a one-way conversation and received absolutely no response. I desperately longed to have a regular encounter with God. I believed God wanted more out of my prayer life with Him and so did I. That’s when I began to take seriously the art of listening, making prayer more about God and less about me.

Stephen Verney suggests that there are three stages of listening prayer or contemplation: “First, ‘it is me and him.’ I come to prayer conscious of myself, my need, my desires. I pour these out to God. Second, prayer becomes ‘him and me.’ Gradually, I become more conscious of the presence of God than of myself. ‘Then it is only him.’ God’s presence arrests me, captivates me, warms me, works on me.”²

Listening to God involves your participation. You must engage your body, mind, and spirit. In her book *The Joy of Listening to God*, Joyce Huggett describes this experience: “I closed my eyes to shut out visual stimuli ... I closed my ears ... by dealing authoritatively with the distractions which threatened my ability to tune in to God. ... I closed a series of shutters on the surface level of my life, thus holding at bay hindrances to hearing the still, small voice of God.”³

List on a separate sheet of paper the “visual stimuli” that normally distract you from tuning in to God. Go back and list conscious efforts you can make to remove those distractions.

I am leery of giving you a formula to follow when spending time listening to God. For each person this experience will be different. The Lord wants to deal with you as an individual. Just as intimacy between a man and a woman doesn’t need to be prescribed down to the last detail, neither does your intimate time with the Lord. God clearly speaks to His children, however, when they pray, meditate on His Word, and worship Him.

PRAYER

In 1 Corinthians 14:15, the Apostle Paul said he prayed with his mind and also with his spirit. Mental prayer is what we participate in most often, but we shouldn’t limit our prayer lives to it. In praying with my mind, I work through my prayer list. I ask for forgiveness of sins, offer Him thanks for specific things, bring Him needs for which I desire His intervention, and intercede on behalf of others. Instead of ending my prayer time when my list is complete, I wait and quiet my mind so I can move to a Spirit-led time of prayer. I believe this is, at least in part, what Paul referred to in his letter.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:10-12 in your Bible. According to this passage, why do we need to connect with the Spirit during prayer? Write your answer in the margin.

Spirit-led prayer gives the Holy Spirit an opportunity to direct our prayer time. He alone knows the thoughts of God and can express them as He leads us in prayer. When I embark on this journey in my prayer time, I turn my thoughts inward and allow the Holy Spirit to direct my time in prayer. He brings to mind people or situations about which I might not normally think. He causes me to recall sins I didn't realize or had forgotten I committed. He brings a specific verse to my mind. I am often directed to worship God for a specific characteristic or attribute. The more I practice this type of prayer, the more I develop the ability to do it anywhere, no matter the chaos swirling around me.

Joshua 1:8,

THE MESSAGE

Don't for a minute let this Book of The Revelation be out of mind. Ponder and meditate on it day and night.

MEDITATION

Over and over the Scripture points believers to meditation. Some of the most precious times I have with God come not during a corporate worship experience but during a time of personal meditation. During this time in my "secret place" with God I normally just sit still in God's presence, sometimes in silence, with a specific Bible verse on my mind.

Meditation is a discipline because it requires you to control your desire to fill the silence with activity. You just sit, think, and ponder; you may concentrate on Scripture, the goodness of God to you, or the goodness of God Himself.

My Bible and journal are my only companions during this time. I write down the thoughts the Holy Spirit brings to my mind and record the messages I sense the Lord leading me to hear from Him.

Psalm 77:12

*I will meditate
on all Your work
And muse on
Your deeds.*

Psalm 119:15

*I will meditate
on Your precepts
And regard
Your ways.*

Stop now for a short time of meditation. Turn to Isaiah 50:4-5 and read it slowly and personally. Put your name into the verse as you read it, and record in your journal or on a separate sheet of paper any thoughts the Lord brings to mind as you meditate.

WORSHIP

Meditation often leads to spontaneous worship. Many times I will use praise and worship music as the backdrop for my time with God. As the worship music speaks of His attributes, I ponder the lyrics and allow them to lead me into personal worship. During this time, God leads me and shows me how He wants to be worshiped and how I should spend my time with Him. As the music envelops me, I am both overwhelmed and encouraged by an awareness of His presence.

As I sit, I begin to hear God—not always with specific instructions, but with a sense of His presence guiding, leading, and pursuing me wholeheartedly. I sense that He is with me and near me and the words of the passage on which I am meditating come alive.

By listening to God through prayer, meditation on His Word, and worship, the Holy Spirit will begin to speak to you, revealing God's personal and timely word for your life.

What has the Holy Spirit taught you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do as a result of today's study?

Write a prayer responding to God's commands to you.

1. Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place: Keys to Igniting Your Personal Time with God* (Lee's Summit, MO: Oasis House, 2005), 11.
2. Joyce Huggett, *The Joy of Listening to God: Hearing the Many Ways God Speaks to Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 65.
3. *Ibid.*, 53.

Day 5 HAVE FAITH IN IT



I KNOW THE LORD IS SPEAKING TO ME *when the voice I hear is always challenging, always convicting, and never allows me to be comfortable where I am. Not having a father, what an honor it is to have One who loves me so much that His greatest desire is to see me grow. —Kirk Franklin*

HE SPEAKS
The word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

Hebrews 4:2

Over this past week we have looked at the importance of expecting God to speak in a clear and personal way. That belief is paramount to experiencing communication with God. Today we will look at a final key component in preparing ourselves to discern God's voice: faith in the power of the Word.

In 2004, I was facing a very specific issue of healing. As I searched for a solution from doctors, the Holy Spirit convicted me that I had sought an answer from everyone except the Lord. I had not asked Him to heal me. I had asked for advice and medication from doctors, sought guidance from Web sites and books, but still had not verbalized my request to the Lord.

As I searched my heart, I realized the reason I hadn't prayed about it was that I didn't truly expect the Lord to answer me. I read and believed the miracles of the New Testament and had even seen and heard of Him healing modern-day believers, but in the deep recesses of my heart I didn't believe He would do it for me.

Hebrews 10:22
Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Carefully examine the paragraph above. Exactly what did my lack of faith prevent?

- God from healing me
- me from taking my problem to God
- God from doing what I told Him to do

Faith as small as a mustard seed is enough to come to God for His power (see Matt. 17:20). My lack of faith in God's desire to speak to my current situation didn't keep God from acting. It kept me from asking. Therefore, I didn't hear God's voice and receive His direction. Faith in God's Word is the final component necessary to hear from God and clearly discern His voice.



_____ in God's Word is necessary to hear from God and clearly discern His voice.

Are you facing a specific situation about which you have not sought the Lord's guidance? yes no
If so, why have you not sought Him?

I meet so many believers who love the Lord and live holy lives, yet seem to be missing something in their Christian experience. I, too, have lived through years of mediocre Christianity where I haven't experienced His power, felt His presence, or heard His voice. As I searched Scripture and the Holy Spirit searched me, it became clear that I wasn't exercising an active faith that really believed God would do for me those things He did for believers in Bible times. If we want to hear God speak, we have to exercise active faith, believing He will work in our lives.

Draw a line from the Scripture to God's corresponding activity.

Genesis 1:3	to accomplish
Isaiah 55:11	to calm
Mark 4:39	to resurrect
Luke 8:53-54	to create
Luke 13:12	to heal

Which of these works of God do you need to see most evidenced in your life right now? In what way?

Faith is the channel of living trust that allows us to experience God in our every-day lives. He is looking for someone who believes He is who He says He is and He can do what He says He can do! Go to God expecting to hear His voice, and don't hesitate to move forward in obedience. When you obey, you move from your agenda to His, and God's plan is always greater.

HIS WORD IS ENOUGH

John 4:46-54 tells the story of a royal official of Capernaum whose son was sick to the point of death. He had so much faith in the power of God's Word that he walked about 20 miles from Capernaum to Cana just to see Jesus. When he met with Jesus there, he requested that Jesus come to heal his son. Jesus responded by saying, "Go, your son lives." The official "believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off" (v. 50).

How did the official's action demonstrate His faith in Jesus' word?

The official had no evidence that Jesus' words had made any change in the life of his son since he was 20 miles away. His faith alone gave him the assurance to take the journey home. Can you imagine how agonizing that trip would have been for someone who didn't trust what Jesus said? This man believed the word of Jesus enough to confidently walk back home. When his servants came running to meet him, they told him his son had been healed; and when they compared the time of Jesus' words with the time the son's health returned, the two were the same.

If the official had not believed Jesus' word, instead of walking confidently toward home, how might his response have differed?

God's Word is enough! Having faith like the royal official will enable us to walk in confidence even when all we have to hold to is His Word. If God has spoken to you clearly about something, start moving toward it so you don't miss the glorious moment when your faith will become sight.

What has the Holy Spirit taught you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do as a result of today's study?

Write a prayer responding to God's commands to you.

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

Write the key principles from this week's study:

Day 1: _____

Day 2: _____

Day 3: _____

Day 4: _____

Day 5: _____

Look back at your notes from the end of each day of study. List three things the Holy Spirit has encouraged you to do as a result of this week's study.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What immediate steps will you take to respond in obedience?

IS THAT YOU, GOD?

*T*he Father so passionately loves you that He sent Jesus to die in your place. He desires a personal relationship in which He speaks directly to you. Have you spent most of your Christian life leaning on these beliefs without really experiencing them? Have you been in the presence of passionate believers who shared stirring encounters with God's voice while your own soul overflowed with confusion? How did these saints know God was speaking?

No blessing surpasses a relationship with God in which you know when He is specifically calling to you. The more intimate your relationship with Him, the clearer God's voice becomes.

Discerning the Voice of God provides participants with practical help in knowing what you hear is from God. Through this study you will become more familiar with God's Holy Spirit, His character, language, and tone of voice.

ALSO AVAILABLE

DISCERNING THE VOICE OF GOD LEADER KIT— includes one member book and two DVDs that contain seven teaching sessions with Priscilla, promotional segments, and bonus material for the small-group sessions. ITEM 001315095

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