

How to Hear God's Voice Through the Clutter

She had done it again! Instead of coming straight home from school like she was supposed to, Rachel had gone to her friend's house. Without permission. Without our knowledge. Without doing her chores.

With a ministering household that included remnants of three struggling families plus our own toddler and newborn, my wife, Patti, simply couldn't handle all the work on her own. Everyone had to pull his or her own weight. Everyone had age-appropriate tasks they were expected to complete. At 14, Rachel and her younger brother were staying with us while her parents tried to overcome patterns of communication and behavior that had resulted in the children running away to escape the dysfunction. I felt sorry for Rachel, but honestly, my wife was my greatest concern.

Now Rachel had ditched her chores to spend time with her friends. It wasn't the first time, but if I had anything to say about it, it would be the last. I intended to lay down the law when she got home and make it clear that if she was going to live under my roof, she would obey my rules. But she wasn't home yet—which was a good thing.

Before I share what happened next, let me explain what was going on in my life at that time.

Though I decided to follow Jesus when I was 15 years old, for much of my adult life I'd struggled to hear God's voice. In John 10:27, Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice," yet amid the bustling activity of everyday life, I often found it difficult to recognize the voice of my Shepherd.

I hungered for deeper spiritual intimacy with God but couldn't find it. In fact, I wanted to hear Him so badly I embarked on

a 10-year search to hear Him clearly. Then on the eleventh year of my Christian life I had the spontaneous thought that “I should take a year of my life and focus on learning to hear God’s voice.” I decided to act on that thought and devote a year to focused effort, learning to hear His voice.

It was during that year when this encounter with Rachel happened. Because I had been learning to hear God’s voice more, the thought crossed my mind that maybe I should try to see if I could hear anything from the Lord about the situation. Maybe He could give me a way to get her to do what she was supposed to (i.e., what I wanted her to do).

I went to my office and reviewed what the Lord had been teaching me from Hab. 2:1-2: “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. Then the Lord answered me and said, ‘Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run’” (NASB).

We all encounter obstacles every day that hinder us from hearing God. The pace of modern-day living has increased this exponentially. Even those who desire to serve God and obey Him in everything can “become weary in doing good” and lose touch with what He is saying (Gal. 6:9, NIV). For some, His voice grows more faint with each season. For others, we have to admit that we’ve never recognized His voice in the first place.

Yet for both extremes there is an answer, and it’s found in this passage. For those wanting to hear God through the clutter of everyday life, Habakkuk reveals four keys that can unblock the airwaves and keep you attuned to what He’s saying.

Key #1: Go to a quiet place and still your thoughts and emotions.

Habakkuk said, “I will stand on my guard post” (2:1, NASB).

When soldiers stand at a guard post, they're not engaged in busywork, nor are they cluttering their senses with blaring music or the latest movie. A good soldier will silence the distractions so that he can quickly catch any signal, good or bad.

So it is with those who desire to hear God's voice. Psalm 46:10 encourages us to be still, let go, cease striving and know that He is God. In Psalm 37:7 we are called to "be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him" (NIV). There is a deep inner knowing in our spirits that each of us can experience when we quiet our flesh and our minds. When we cease our labors and enter the rest of God, He is free to flow (Heb. 4:10). If we are not still, we will sense only our own thoughts.

In my situation with Rachel, I didn't have a guard post, but I did have an office, so I went there to quiet my temper and my mind. Loving God through a quiet worship song is one very effective way to become still. In 2 Kings 3 (NASB), Elisha needed a word from the Lord so he said, "Bring me a minstrel," and as the minstrel played, the Lord spoke. I have found that playing or listening to a worship song is the quickest way for me to come to stillness. I need to choose my song carefully; boisterous songs of praise do not bring me to stillness, but rather gentle songs that express my love and worship. And it isn't enough just to sing the song into the cosmos. I come into the Lord's presence most quickly and easily when I use my godly imagination to see the truth that He is right here with me—which means I am singing my songs to Him, personally.

"I will keep watch to see," Habakkuk said (2:1). To receive the pure word of God, it is crucial that my heart be properly focused as I become still, because my focus is the source of the intuitive flow. If I fix my eyes upon Jesus (Heb. 12:2), the intuitive flow comes from Jesus. But if I fix my gaze upon some desire of my heart, the intuitive flow comes out of that desire. To have a pure flow I must become still and carefully

fix my eyes upon Jesus. Quietly worshiping the King and receiving out of the stillness that follows quite easily accomplishes this.

Key #2: As you pray, fix the eyes of your heart upon Jesus, seeing in the Spirit the dreams and visions of Almighty God.

Habakkuk was actually looking for vision as he prayed—that's why he specifically mentioned he would "*keep watch to see what [God] will speak to me*" (Hab. 2:1). It may seem odd for vision to be part of hearing the Lord, yet this is a spiritual key that so many believers miss. The prophet opened the eyes of his heart and looked into the spirit world to see what God wanted to show him.

God has always spoken through dreams and visions, and He specifically said that they would come to those upon whom the Holy Spirit is poured out (Acts 2:1-4, 17).

Because I'm a logical, rational person, observable facts that could be verified by my physical senses were the foundations of my life, including my spiritual life. I had never thought of opening the eyes of my heart and looking for vision. However, I have come to believe that this is exactly what God wants me to do. He gave me eyes in my heart to see in the spirit the vision and movement of Almighty God. There is an active spirit world all around us, full of angels, demons, the Holy Spirit, the omnipresent Father and His omnipresent Son, Jesus. The only reasons for me not to see this reality are unbelief or lack of knowledge.

In his sermon recorded in Acts 2:25, Peter referred to King David's statement: "I saw the Lord always in my presence; for He is at my right hand, so that I will not be shaken." The original psalm makes it clear that this was a decision of David's, not a constant supernatural visitation: "I have set [literally, *I have placed*] the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken" (Ps.

16:8). Because David knew that the Lord was always with him, he determined in his spirit to see that truth with the eyes of his heart as he went through life, knowing that this would keep his faith strong.

In order to see, we must look. Daniel saw a vision in his mind and said, "I was looking ... I kept looking ... I kept looking" (Dan. 7:2, 9, 13). As I pray, I look for Jesus, and I watch as He speaks to me, doing and saying the things that are on His heart. Many Christians will find that if they will only look, they will see. Jesus is Immanuel—"God with us" (Matt. 1:23). It's as simple as that. You can see Christ present with you because Christ *is* present with you. In fact, the vision may come so easily that you will be tempted to reject it, thinking that it is just you. But if you persist in recording these visions, your doubt will soon be overcome by faith as you recognize that the content of them could only be birthed in Almighty God.

Jesus demonstrated the ability of living in constant contact with God. He did nothing on His own initiative, but only what He saw the Father doing and what He heard the Father saying (John 5:19-20, 30). What an incredible way to live!

Is it possible for us to live out of divine initiative as Jesus did? Yes! We must simply fix our eyes upon Jesus. The veil has been torn, giving access into the immediate presence of God, and He calls us to draw near (Luke 23:45; Heb. 10:19-22). As Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:18, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened."

Key #3: Recognize that God's voice in your heart often sounds like a flow of spontaneous thoughts.

In my situation with Rachel, when I quieted my heart enough that I was able to picture Jesus without the distractions of my own ideas and plans, I was able to "keep watch to see what He [would] speak to me" (Hab. 2:1). I wrote down my question:

“Lord, what should I do about Rachel?”

Immediately the thought came to me: *She is insecure.*

Well, that certainly wasn't my thought! Her behavior looked like rebellion to me, not insecurity. But like Habakkuk, I was coming to know the sound of God speaking to me (Hab. 2:2). Elijah described it as a still, small voice or a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:12). I had previously listened for an inner audible voice, and God certainly does speak that way at times. However, I have found that usually God's voice comes as spontaneous thoughts, visions, feelings or impressions.

For example, haven't you been driving down the road and had a thought come to you to pray for a certain person? Didn't you believe it was God telling you to pray? What did God's voice sound like? Was it an audible voice, or was it a spontaneous thought that lit upon your mind?

Experience indicates that we perceive spirit-level communication as spontaneous thoughts, impressions and visions, and Scripture confirms this in many ways. For example, one definition of *paga*, a Hebrew word for intercession, is “a chance encounter or an accidental intersecting.” When God lays people on our hearts, He does it through *paga*, a chance-encounter thought “accidentally” intersecting our minds.

So the third key to hearing God's voice is recognizing that God's voice in your heart often sounds like a flow of spontaneous thoughts. Therefore, when I want to hear from God, I tune to chance-encounter or spontaneous thoughts.

Key #4: Write out your prayers and God's answers.

Finally, God told Habakkuk to record the vision (Hab. 2:2). This was not an isolated command. The Scriptures record many examples of individual's prayers and God's replies, such as the Psalms, many of the prophets and Revelation.

I have found that obeying this final principle amplifies my confidence in my ability to hear God's voice so that I can finally make living from His initiatives a way of life. This fourth key of "two-way journaling"—writing out your prayers and God's answers—brings great freedom in hearing God's voice.

I have found two-way journaling to be a fabulous catalyst for clearly discerning God's inner, spontaneous flow, because as I journal I am able to write in faith for long periods of time, simply believing it is God. I know that what I believe I have received from God must be tested. However, testing involves doubt, and doubt blocks divine communication, so I do not want to test while I am trying to receive (see James 1:5-8).

Again, that's not to say everything we think we receive is absolute truth. Testing is good and necessary. But by journaling, I can receive in faith, knowing that when the flow has ended I can then test and examine it carefully. Don't become so concerned with the testing that your lack of faith hinders your ability to receive what the Lord wants to say to you.

So as I continued pressing in to hear from God regarding Rachel, I wrote down what I believed He had said: *She is insecure.*

But the Lord wasn't done. I continued to write the spontaneous thoughts that came to me: *Love her unconditionally. She is flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone.*

My mind immediately objected: She is not flesh of my flesh. She is not related to me at all—she is a foster child, just living in my home temporarily. It was definitely time to test this "word from the Lord"!

There are three possible sources of thoughts in our minds: ourselves, Satan and the Holy Spirit. It was obvious that the words in my journal did not come from my own mind; I certainly didn't see Rachel as insecure or flesh of my flesh. And I

sincerely doubted that Satan would encourage me to love anyone unconditionally!

So it was starting to look like I might have actually received counsel from the Lord. It was consistent with the names and character of God as revealed in Scripture, and was also completely contrary to the names and character of the enemy. That meant that I was hearing from the Lord, and He wanted me to see the situation in a different light. Rachel was my daughter—part of my family, not by blood but by the hand of God Himself. The chaos of her birth home had created deep insecurity about her worthiness to be loved by anyone, including me and including God. Only the unconditional love of the Lord expressed through an imperfect human would reach her heart.

Confirmation: The Final Test

But there was still one more test I needed to perform before I would have absolute confidence that this was truly God's word to me: I needed confirmation from someone else whose spiritual discernment I trusted. So I went to my wife and shared what I had received. I knew if I could get her validation, especially since she was the one most wronged in the situation, then I could say, at least to myself, "Thus sayeth the Lord."

Patti immediately and without question confirmed that the Lord had spoken to me. I ditched my entire planned lecture and returned to my office, anxious to hear more. As the Lord planted a new, supernatural love for Rachel within me, He showed me what to say and how to say it to not only address the current issue of household responsibility, but also the deeper issues of love and acceptance and worthiness.

Rachel and her brother remained as part of our family for another two years, giving us many opportunities to demonstrate and teach about the Father's love and to plant spiritual seeds in thirsty soil. We weren't perfect and we didn't solve all of

her issues, but because I had learned to listen to the Lord, we were able to avoid creating more brokenness and separation.

The four simple keys that the Lord showed me from Habakkuk have been used by people of all ages, from 4 to 104, from every continent, culture and denomination, to break through into intimate two-way conversations with their loving Father and dearest Friend. I've also discovered that omitting any one of the keys will prevent you from receiving all He wants to say to you. The order of the keys is not important, only that you *use them all*.

Embracing all four, by faith, can change your life. Simply quiet yourself down, tune to spontaneity, look for vision and journal. He is waiting to meet you there.

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Watch Mark Virkler explain the four keys to hearing God's voice—and the story behind his discovering them—at