

Stop Making God's Guidance So Complicated

When I was in my 20s, I was praying about whether I should enroll in graduate school. Then one morning in my devotional time I came to Psalm 32:8a, and it seemed to be flashing like a neon sign. It said, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go."

The Holy Spirit was emphasizing that God would teach me and that I didn't need additional schooling. That's not to say graduate school is wrong for everyone else; it was just not God's plan for me at that time. And God illuminated a particular Scripture to clearly show me what path I should take.

The Bible promises that God will guide us. But many Christians find it difficult to hear God's voice. And in some charismatic churches we complicate things when we try to make guidance mystical or weird—as if you have to hear an audible voice from heaven about what color shirt to wear.

Years ago, I learned from author Henry Blackaby that there are four distinct ways we receive divine guidance:

1. You can hear God's voice by reading the Bible. Friends have sometimes complained to me: "I just never hear God speaking." Yet when I ask if they read the Bible regularly, they say they're too busy. Their Bible is collecting dust on a shelf while they beg God for a Technicolor vision from heaven!

God supernaturally inspired 40 authors over a period of 1,600 years to compile His love letter to us. After the Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek, many people were martyred because they translated it in a modern language. God went to a lot of trouble to compile the Bible. Yet today many people say they are too busy to read God's most direct message to Planet

Earth!

When you read Scripture with a prayerful heart, God can cause a verse to jump off the page as a direct message to you. British preacher Charles Spurgeon recognized this years ago when he wrote: "When I have been in trouble, I have read the Bible until a text has seemed to stand out of the Book, and salute me, saying, 'I was written specially for you.'" Expect God to speak directly to you from Scripture.

2. You can hear God's voice through the supernatural inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not an eerie presence that just hangs around. He lives in every born-again Christian, and He comforts us and actively speaks to us. He can do this in many ways: through dreams, visions, warnings, a sense of conviction or—most often—through what we know as the "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12b) of the Spirit.

I have had prophetic dreams and visions over the years, but the most common way the Spirit speaks to me is through a deep sense of inward knowing. I will never forget a time in 1985 when God spoke to me while I was driving my car in Florida. A message came to me, not audibly but in my spirit: "You will move to Washington, D.C." It seemed to come out of the blue, and I knew it did not originate with me. Four years later I was offered a job in the Washington, D.C., area, and I worked there for three years.

The ability to hear the Spirit's voice is developed over years as we grow in Christ. If you really want to hear Him, you should ask God to fill you with His Spirit. As you allow more of the Spirit's presence and power in your life, you will set aside your selfish agendas and sinful habits so God can communicate to you without any hindrance. Meanwhile, a selfish, stubborn attitude is the No. 1 obstacle to hearing God!

3. You can hear God's voice through people. God never intended for us to live in isolation. We are members of His body, the church, and you will hear God better when you are in fellowship with His people. God can speak to you through a pastor's sermon, a friend's wise counsel, a mother's rebuke, a mentor's phone call or a prophetic word given to you by one of God's Spirit-filled servants.

God uses the gift of prophecy, but you should never chase after prophecies. I know Christians who will travel across the country to attend a prophetic conference to get a word from God, yet they have not read the Bible in months or sat still long enough to hear from God on their own. Never treat the holy gift of prophecy like fortune telling. When God needs to speak to you in an unusual way, He has faithful messengers who will deliver it to you at the exact time you need it.

4. You can hear God's voice through circumstances. Not everything that happens to you is God's will. But God is sovereign, and He has power over nature, over government leaders and over all the details of your life. He opens doors that no man can shut. If you have been praying about getting a job at one company, and suddenly you get an offer at a different company, this may be God's sign that He has a better place for you to work.

My oldest daughter wanted to attend a college in Tennessee, and we were praying about her decision. Right after we prayed, I got a call from the president of a college in Georgia. He was inviting me to speak at the school, but in our conversation, I learned that this school was willing to offer my daughter a scholarship. She ended up enrolling in that school, meeting her future husband there and working for that college four years later. God was totally involved in that phone call from Georgia!

Ask God to tune your ears to His voice in a fresh way. Read God's Word with an expectant heart, listen carefully to what

the Lord is saying through His servants, pay attention to what He is saying to you through circumstances and tune your spiritual ears to the inner voice of the Spirit. Guidance is not complicated when you sincerely want to hear Him speak to you.