

**Question: How many different ways can you name by which God speak to us?**

There is a quote in marketing, *"tell them, tell them and tell them again"*. It's a misquote of Aristotle. When you want to get a message across you have to do it over and over ... and even then people don't get it. I remember when Ward and Julia, a wonderful couple of elders we had here years ago were leaving and moving out of the area to retire, we were having a special morning tea farewell. For about four weeks we put in in the notices, emails, announced it and had it up on the screen. A week after the event a person said to me, *"I'm sad I missed the event I didn't know about it."* They had been at all four services and got emails. In a similar way God works hard to get things through to us, but how receptive are we?

One of the key things that God does is speak to us. From the Garden of Eden right through to today God, with an arguable gap of four hundred years before the angel appeared to Elizabeth, God has always spoken to those who love and serve Him and also some who don't want to. Even when there was a lack of prophetic voice in that time before Jesus' birth, God may well have continued speaking to faithful individuals. But how does God do this, how does an invisible, all-powerful, omni-present God speak to us? Well, it shouldn't be a surprise to you to find that through history God has spoken to people in a whole host of ways. Let's look at some of them:

1. It all began in Genesis with God **WALKING and TALKING** in the Garden with Adam and Eve and speaking with them personally. How amazing that must have been. We can only guess it must have been very much akin to having Jesus walk with the disciples and what, one day, we will experience with Jesus in eternity.
2. Early on in the Biblical account we see God speaks through **KEY EVENTS**. In the Old Testament before the Law was given, key events spoke of God's displeasure at what was going on. The punishment of Cain, the dispersion of the people after the Tower of Babel and the deaths of people in the desert, after leaving Egypt, spoke of God's displeasure with their faithlessness and disobedience.
3. **ANGELS** God has, throughout the Scriptures and human existence, spoken through angels. The Hebrew and Greek term for angels refers to *messengers* of God. Sometimes, as in the Burning Bush episode and the Lord appearing to Abraham before Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, the exact nature of these messengers is somewhat unclear. At others times, such as in Daniel 10, when a spiritual "prince of Persia", a demon, withheld God's angel for twenty-one days from bringing a message to Daniel, we see a much more complex interaction of the spiritual world of angels with humanity and its events. In the encounters of angels with Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds in the nativity narrative, we see a much gentler side to their communications.
4. God also speaks through **DREAMS**. Dreams, clinically, are the way our brains integrate all that we have experienced, long and short term, with what we have recently learned, are learning and have experienced in life. However, God clearly uses them to speak straight into our consciousness in a very clear and direct manner at times. Take, for example, the interpretations Daniel was given of the

Kings dreams that no one else could interpret – especially as the King told no one what the dreams were. Not a problem because God told Daniel, in his own dream, what the dreams had been and what the interpretation of them was. Similarly, in the New Testament, Joseph was clearly told, in a dream (Matt 2:13) to get out of town before Herod killed the baby Jesus. Very clear, explicit and to be acted on immediately.

5. Sometimes **GOD SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO PEOPLE** though not while walking with them as in the Garden of Eden. In the Old Testament we have Moses, with whom God spoke face to face, as if to a friend, in Exodus 33:11. Whereas in 1 Kings 19:11-12 Ezekiel learned that the still, small voice of God was the one to listen for rather than the violence of a wind, fire or earthquake. A good lesson that one for us today: God speaks a quiet re-assurance when the world seems to be falling apart and everything and everyone seems to be against us and we just want to run away as Ezekiel had. That quiet voice of God's reassurance is more powerful than any storm or situation and warms us from within when we hear it. In the New Testament our dear friend Peter famously gets personally scolded by God on the Mount of Temptation (Matthew 17:5). Now that's a voice we probably don't want to hear! For the apostle Paul, the changing point in his life was when the resurrected Jesus spoke to him on the Damascus Rd. He couldn't see Jesus, but Jesus clearly spoke to the then Saul and redirected his life to become the missionary Paul, everything changed.
6. God can also speak through the **DRAMATICALLY UNUSUAL!** The Scriptures record a number of these.
  - a. In Daniel 5:5-9 a man's hand began *writing on the wall* of Belshazzar's palace. Because of the disobedience of the people and the desecration of the Temple they had brought about they were about to be destroyed, and quickly. If you know the expression "the writings on the wall", now you know where it came from ... and it rarely refers to good news!
  - b. In Numbers 22:21-25 God spoke through the *mouth of a donkey* because Balaam, who was supposed to be His servant had ceased to listen even though God had tried multiple different ways. I wonder how many ways God has to speak to us to get a message across. Hint here: if an animal starts speaking to you, you many actually have a bigger problem!
  - c. Throughout a good part of the Exodus narrative God lead the people around in the desert *by fire and by cloud*. No one doubted the presence of God in this time because God's presence was physically present in cloud or fire was there with them.
  - d. Of course, one of the most famous encounters was with God *speaking to Moses from the Burning Bush*. Not your everyday occurrence and it certainly captured Moses' attention!
7. One of the main ways God speaks to us is through **His Word, the Scriptures**. The psalmist writes it so well in Psalm 119:105, "**Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.**". As we have noted previously, and you know the words of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 so well, "<sup>16</sup> **All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**" God

continues to speak through His Word written, the Scriptures, and through the Word made Flesh, Jesus, until this day and will do until the end of time.

8. Since Pentecost particularly, **God also speaks to many people by His Spirit.** The Holy Spirit quickens our consciences to the things of God, internally convicting us of sin so that we will do something about it, not to make us feel bad. Ever thought that when you feel bad about something you've said or done that it might not just be your conscience? It might very well be the Holy Spirit prodding you to do something to make things right – with God and anyone else impacted by your action. Romans 8:26-27 even tells us that the Spirit helps us to communicate when we are completely without words so our Spirit can talk with God's Spirit. Furthermore, if we are in tune with God, the Spirit can lead, direct or even redirect us as happened with the apostle Paul in Acts 16. When Paul and Luke wanted to go to Bithynia they were prevented by the Spirit. Paul received a vision of a Macedonian man calling for help so their path was redirected.
9. And one we should never overlook – **GOD SPEAKS THROUGH PEOPLE AND CIRCUMSTANCES AROUND US.** There is no limitation to how God can do this, the people before us don't even have to be Christian, sometimes it's just common sense we need. But how wonderful it is when good Christian brothers and sisters speak truth into our lives, encouraging us, challenging us, celebrating with us, working alongside us, learning with us, worshipping with us, growing with us. God speaks through this so powerfully!
10. God also speaks through the **LAW OF CONSEQUENCE.** What we do brings about the results God has outlined – for reward or otherwise. Like a good parent who follows through on the consequences they have told a child before an action, so too God follows through on His Word and this too speaks loudly – especially when you don't listen right!

No doubt there are more ways that God speaks to us that you can think of or have experienced. God's plan is made clear in Hebrews 1 as the author writes, **"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways..."**. All of the various ways God had communicated to the people in the past were a precursor to a greater revelation. **"[I]n these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe."** Those of you who were here last week will recognise the significance. Today, we live in the world where **"Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."**(Ephesians 4:11-13) We are not only to be obedient and responsive to the Word of God we are to be confident in our understanding of God's Word, of how we are to live and of what God wants of us. So much so that **"we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the**

**whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**

In all these ways God speaks to us. God wants us to listen and to talk with Him. Let pray we are listening. We certainly can't fault the number of ways God has tried to communicate!

Amen

NEXT WEEK: White Sunday!