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SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

DIRECT COMMUNICATION FROM HEAVEN

The Fourth Level of Hearing from God, and How to Tell His Voice from Your Own

> God still speaks to His people directly, usually as a thought rather than an audible voice. Evaluate the word, set boundaries and stay in the Scripture until you know how the Holy Spirit talks, and over time the little insights add up.

MAIN TEXT
1 Kings 19:11-13

SERIES
We're Rooted in the Bible, Week 6 of 6

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BY
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AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. The fourth level of hearing from God is direct communication, and it usually arrives as a thought, an inner witness, not an audible voice.
2. Like Elijah at the cave, you have to mature enough to discern the word of the Lord among many streams of incoming information.
3. Evaluate the word: its theology, its instruction, its impact on others, and its source, both the external source and your own internal track record.
4. Set boundaries: be mindful of your emotional state, your stage of life and your age, and refuse to act immediately on instruction received while worked up.
5. The Holy Spirit will not contradict the Scripture He inspired, which is why this level is the one most often abused.
6. Be mindful of your training: the more Scripture you take in, the more you learn the Holy Spirit's dialect and can tell His voice from your own.
7. This is a process, not a microwave. Insights come little by little and compound over years.



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READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/direct-communication-from-heaven

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This message closes a six-week series on being rooted in the Bible. The series began with the value of Scripture and then moved, on purpose, into how a believer hears from God. Recap the four levels clearly; this message depends on them:

- **Level one:** the preached word, where God stirs you as you sit under preaching.
- **Level two:** the Holy Spirit bringing Scripture to your remembrance (John 14:26).
- **Level three:** a flow of revelation, a paradigm shift that becomes a framework for your theology (last week).
- **Level four:** direct communication from heaven (this week).

The levels are sequential. Say it again here: no one jumps from "I got saved two weeks ago" to "God told me."

This level is the one most often abused, so the message is practical and pastoral. It gives three safeguards: evaluate the word, set boundaries and be mindful of your training. Keep the humor light and land on encouragement: God wants to speak to you.

Introduction

Why this series? Several years ago God gave a great grace on a Bible reading plan that spread widely and helped well over 100,000 people engage the Scripture regularly. One thing became clear early on: many people read the Bible as the end goal. Reading as worship and as a discipline is good, but **when you serve the living God who actively speaks to His people, it is better to read the Word and expect to hear from heaven.**

Recap the second level. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit "will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26). What has He said? Everything in this book. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1), and "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). If Jesus said it, it is here.

LEVEL ONE IS A SENSING

At level one, much of what we call hearing from God is really a **sensing**. A missionary speaks and you sense you should partner with them. You see kids in the foyer and sense you should serve in children's ministry. A vision offering is coming and you sense you should give.

The problem is that a sensing has no qualifier. Your sense of the Holy Spirit and your feelings run a parallel path, and it can be hard to tell them apart. If someone cuts you off in the Publix parking lot and you "sense" the Holy Spirit telling you to ram their car with your shopping cart, that might just be your feelings.

LEVEL FOUR IS USUALLY A THOUGHT

When God speaks to you directly, it is rare for it to be an audible voice. It is usually what has traditionally been called **an inner witness**. It comes to you as a thought, and it runs a parallel path with your own thoughts. Today's goal: to help you know the difference between what you are thinking and what God is saying.

Elijah and the Low Whisper

Set the scene: Elijah, the great prophet, has been threatened by Jezebel and is hiding in a cave. Now the word of the Lord comes to him.

> **1 KINGS 19:11-13** ESV
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> [11] And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. [12] And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. [13] And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

Four things happen: a wind, an earthquake, a fire and "the sound of a low whisper" (1 Kings 19:12). The text says the Lord was not in the wind, the earthquake or the fire. Yet all of it happened as "the LORD passed by" (1 Kings 19:11). His presence was manifest in all of it, but **only one part of the experience carried the word of the Lord.**

Like Elijah, **we have to mature to the point that we can discern the word of the Lord among a flood of incoming information.** Bills, kids, spouse, house, cars, job and boss are all incoming information. Add a lively, loud Pentecostal church service and there is even more to take in. How do you discern the word of the Lord through all of it?

1. Evaluate the Word

When you sense a word from the Lord, evaluate it in four ways.

- **Its theology.** Is this good theology or bad theology? A diagnostic question: would I know the difference? If you sense God the Father is a three-foot-tall purple man with a high voice, that is bad theology.

- **Its instruction.** Is this godly, good, wise instruction? God will not tell you to do something immoral or unethical.
- **Its impact.** Suppose you sense God telling you to empty your bank account and send it to Convoy of Hope. Wonderful ministry, but that money belongs to your household too. **Illustration:** "I would effectively have stolen Ashleigh's money." Before acting, talk it over with your spouse.
- **Its source, external.** When someone gives you a prophetic word, a word of knowledge or a word of wisdom, look at their track record. Do their words come to pass, or do they say a lot of things in services that never matter? If you know good theology, you can often judge the source from their preaching alone.
- **Its source, internal.** Ask yourself a bold question: Do I make good decisions? When I put my hands on something, does it work out, or is there mess all around me? The people who most need to hear this usually know it least.

2. Set Boundaries

Even when you feel you are hearing from the Lord, set some lines you will not cross. The psalmist said, "The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places" (Psalm 16:6).

This is the level that gets abused most often. Nobody abuses "I got something from the preaching" or "the Holy Spirit brought a verse to mind." But "God told me" gets attached to all kinds of things, flippantly and often to justify something unethical or immoral.

Remember who you are talking about. **Illustration:** in morning prayer I often kneel with my face down in my chair, because I am about to ask a lot of the Lord, and it helps to remember who I am talking to. Saying "God told me" to cover what you wanted to do anyway may be closer to taking the Lord's name in vain (Exodus 20:7) than a careless exclamation.

As preached, this abuse is common in the marketplace too: people claiming "God told me" while living far from Him, and even businesses that coach their salespeople to say "God told me" to close a sale. This is why the levels are sequential. You need to sit under good preaching, get in the Word, and be part of the process that leads to hearing from the Lord.

AN ANCIENT WARNING: MONTANISM

This is an ancient error. In the second century, the Montanists believed in the power of God, the gifts of the Spirit, prophecy and healing, and in many ways they looked like modern Pentecostals and charismatics. All of that is good, and we want to keep it. But they went off track: they treated their new prophecies as carrying authority above the teaching of the apostles. The church rejected them.

The Holy Spirit is not policed by the Scripture, but He will never contradict the Scripture. The series began here: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). We hold to **verbal plenary inspiration:** not only the big ideas, but every word is inspired by the Holy Spirit. God "is not man, that he should lie" (Numbers

23:19). He will not say one thing in His Word and something different to you. What you hear from the Lord will always be in concert with the Bible.

BOUNDARIES TO KEEP

Be mindful of your emotional state. If I am worked up and start to hear from the Lord, I immediately question it. I won't ignore it, but I won't act on it immediately. I take it back to evaluation. We tend to think the more frenzied we get, the more anointing has shown up. But hearing directly from heaven carries great consequences, and it calls for balance.

Be mindful of your stage of life. When money is tight, or you are dealing with a difficult person or situation, be careful, especially with instruction. Receive encouragement and inspiration from the Holy Spirit freely. When it is instruction, draw a boundary and evaluate.

Illustration: the house that wouldn't sell. We had a house in Florida that sat on the market for about eight months while we lived in North Alabama. When you get cagey in a tight spot, one day you "hear" the Lord say to drop the price $300,000, and the next day you "hear" Him say to raise it $300,000 and put God to the test.

Be mindful of your age. When the foundation of the second temple was laid, "many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of this house being laid, though many shouted aloud for joy" (Ezra 3:12).

Illustration: the hymnals and the polo. As a twenty-year-old music minister, I pulled out the hymnals and told complainers to get with what God was doing. Now, nearing forty, I'd love a little Brownsville worship every Sunday. And I knew a pastor who would never preach without a tie, until he started wearing polos. Things come around. When you see something new and get irritated, that may not be the word of the Lord. You may just not like the music. Not everything new is evil.

Get your word from God when things are calm. Call on the Lord in trouble; "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10). Prayer should be the first call, not the last. But do not underestimate how clearly you can hear from God when things are going well. Elijah had four streams of information to discern; if there had been ten or twenty, it would have been harder. Don't enjoy the calm and neglect His presence.

Illustration: nine days with COVID. After about nine days in the hospital with COVID, I posted a video, and people kept asking, "What did the Lord teach you in the hospital?" The honest answer: nothing new. I was not reading and praying in there. But I had a word from God before I went in: the Lord was going to get glory in this. Don't cram in the final hour. Get a word when things go well, and it will serve you when things turn.

3. Be Mindful of Your Training

Because the levels are sequential, you have been in training the whole time: sensing under the preaching, building the Holy Spirit's library through Bible reading, letting Him bring Scripture to remembrance,

receiving a flow of revelation. All of it prepares you to receive directly from the Lord.

When a thought comes and you think, "That's the Lord," how do you know? Remember that the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). He used the hands and pens of men, but it is the Holy Spirit talking.

Illustration: the Alabama dialect. In Texas, people are fascinated by the way I talk. At a church in San Antonio I met a woman from Center Point, Alabama, and we sounded exactly alike. A friend from Birmingham once called a pastor in Texas, who answered, "Jason?" That is a dialect: the same language, said a particular way, with certain pronunciations and turns of phrase.

The Holy Spirit has a dialect, and He sounds like the Scripture. The more Scripture you take in, the more you learn not just what He says but how He talks.

Illustration: the King James ladies. Older women used to prophesy in church with "thee," "thou" and "thus saith the Lord," and I assumed they were putting it on. Years later a young woman prophesied in plain English: "God says." Then it clicked. The older saints read the King James Bible; she read the NIV. The Holy Spirit speaks to you in the dialect of the Bible you read.

So when a thought comes out of the blue while you are in prayer, ask: **Does that sound like me, or does that sound like the Holy Spirit?** Has this thought been rolling around in my head all week, or did it come out of nowhere in the middle of prayer? There is a grace on meeting God in the same place every day. When you receive there, you know who is talking to you there.

Conclusion: A Process, Not a Microwave

God wants to speak to you. If you take away anything from this series:

- **First: read your Bible and pray every day.**
- **Second: this is a process.**

We live in a microwave culture, and Pentecostals often attend microwave churches. We want healing, anointing and revival now. But "Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it" (Proverbs 13:11). Little by little: that is how this journey works.

Illustration: the AI artist. As preached, the number one Christian artist on iTunes that week was not a real person but an AI. (Confirm the current facts before using this.) It is a picture of how easily we trade the authentic for something with the form of what we like, "having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:5). Put in the time, and the real thing comes little by little.

Illustration: the index cards and the margin note. I keep a growing stack of index cards with things the Lord has told me, and I have forgotten most of them. One day the Holy Spirit showed me something in a passage, and I wrote it down. Then I opened the first good wide-margin Bible I ever owned and found the same note, word for word, written years earlier. The Holy Spirit is faithful.

Do the math.

- One insight a month is twelve significant insights a year. Expand them, and that is enough for a book.
- One insight a week is fifty-two a year.
- Two a week is over a thousand insights in a decade, and about two thousand in twenty years.

Imagine sitting down with your grandchildren, or a Bible study you have led for years, and pulling out a stack of two thousand things the Lord has said to you. It adds up, little by little.

This will be a church that gets on the journey, gets rooted in the Bible and seeks God in the secret place. Close with praise.



ABOUT

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