

# The Whisper of God Pt 2:

## Listening for divine input – a way of life

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Genesis 6:9–22; Matthew 16:21–28; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

**What's the most exciting thing about God speaking to us?**  
**What's the scariest thing?**

1. God is always speaking...we are called to an interactive life with God; one of great privilege and subsequent responsibility.

John 15 tells us we are the friends of God, not servants who don't know their master's will; we are led by the Spirit of God as the children of God.

God wants partnership, maturity, confidence in knowing who we are in Christ. He wants to share his plans with us.

I don't think God is any where near being able to tell us all He wants to, we just can't handle it.

2. We do hear God. We all have that capacity. We are not deaf.

But we may choose to be deaf by not listening and if we do listen, by not obeying the whisper. We may have said no so often that we have quenched the Spirit and are no longer hearing. Or we may just not be bothering to listen for various reasons.

Who or what leads us and gets our attention...our daily schedules and ambitions and drivenness...others opinions and our fears of standing out?

Why do we not invite God to speak into our routine?

What if we started to listen daily for *God's divine whispers* instead?

Did you wait for God's whispers this week?

Did they come out of the blue? Did you obey?

There are many ways God speaks!

1. ACTION...an invitation to do ...
2. ADMONITION... Nah- not such a good idea
3. REASSURANCE... I'm on your side.

## Genesis 6:9–22

*Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.*

*9 This is the account of Noah.*

*Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.*

*Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. **So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out.***

***This is how you are to build it:** The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish.*

*But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them."*

***Noah did everything just as God commanded him.***

This account is one of the most dramatic representations of a human being hearing from God recorded in all of Scripture. Why? Because Noah lived in the desert. He had never seen a boat before (let alone *built* one), because nobody sailed across a desert. But “build a boat” is precisely the divine whisper he received. Can you imagine how ridiculous this idea must have seemed to Noah’s family and friends—and to Noah himself?

But Noah was a “righteous man,” v 9. He was blameless. He was good and godly and cared more about walking with his heavenly Father than he did pleasing his earth-bound friends. God was asking Noah to take *dramatic* action, and Noah, filled with immense courage, would choose to obey.

**The first type of whisper followers of God often receive is called a *whisper of action*.**

We can choose to obey or ignore or be put off, not follow through and drop the ball down the track. Imagine if Noah had started well but only half finished the ark!

**I share my testimony of a call to ministry...of a call to build as an illustration of hearing big calls, of the complications that arise as you try to discern which way and the different ways that God might speak or not speak...because sometimes he just wants us to get on with it:** In my final year at school I knew that God called me to be a teacher. I had resisted this because of my family’s long line of teachers but in the end I just knew that this was the right course for me to pursue. I had peace of mind about that. But sometime within my first or second year at uni I was also asking God on a deeper level what he wanted me to be. I heard the one word then: **minister**. Clearly and immediately, but in such a way as to also go: *really, did I hear right, that’s just kinda out of my league God*. And so I tucked it away and went on with studying and teaching and then getting married and having 2 children, leading youth groups, worship leading, camps and women’s groups, setting up

a restaurant church...eventually in Invercargill at the age of 34, I decided that I would do a theology degree and if the word was ever to become a reality I better get prepared. Almost immediately I got pregnant again and was extremely sick and deeply depressed. Great start!

But while Annabelle was little I pursued the degree by teleconference one paper at a time, and taught part time to pay for it, eventually travelling weekly to Dunedin to speed up the process.

During this time it became clear to me that if I was ever going to find any credibility in the church I would have to get ordained. I am sure I was a pain to every male minister because I wanted to do things and I wanted to do them my way. Richard will probably tell that is still true! So now I had a choice by the time Annabelle is getting ready for school...back to teaching, counselling or ministry. I had also been doing a Diploma in Counselling from Vision College in Christchurch through this time.

My biggest issue is that I don't believe in myself.

Part of me does, but another part is struggling still with aspects of depression, exhaustion and trying to understand myself. I don't know if I have the courage to back myself to actually becoming a minister. And I tell you I wandered through months of agony asking myself whether it was God I was hearing, whether I could do this, whether I was being an absolute fool.

How to take that leap of faith to build an ark in a desert!!

Some of the women here will resonate with this. You feel as though after having a few kids that your brain has turned to mush, you no longer have any intelligence and who are you trying to fool thinking you could be something out there. And the world has moved on and to get anywhere you actually will need to make a huge effort to retrain, think, and back yourself. If you are in that place of agony of self doubt I know exactly how it feels.

So finally I summoned up the courage to do what I needed to apply. Only to find that the view of some in the church structure was: you are a woman and you have children, your place is at home; you are too quiet and we don't think you have what it takes to be a minister. I needed their vote to make it to the next stage and I barely made it through .

The next stage was acceptance of a sense of call by Presbytery who did consider that this was a possibility and then the assessment weekend run by the national church.

For an introvert this was an horrific process, one which required me to extravert for a whole weekend and be scrutinized by around 20 panel members in all sorts of scenarios. I do not shine in those situations and I didn't shine that weekend.

I was told I could come back however.

I went away and got on with my life.

It was my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday and I was sitting in the Hewitson library on a trip to Dunedin to study, minding my own business and having a little time with God when I had one of those God moments.

It was as close to a vision as I have ever had. I saw myself lying on the floor after having been knocked over by a set of swinging doors, like the ones you have in a restaurant. As I lay there looking at the doors God whispered: if you want to, you can get up and push those doors the other way. Behold I set before you an open door, you can get up and go through it again.

And so I did. I knew that God had spoken.

And thus began my journey to being ordained; moving my family to Dunedin, 2 more years of study and then the agonizing decision of where to go and can I do this thing called student ministry? All from a whisper that took 24 years to fulfill.

### **Is God calling *you* to build something today?**

For Noah, it was an ark—a boat that would save a portion of humanity from God's wrath.

For me it is to build God's church

What might it be for you? Is God trying to whisper in your ear an action-oriented prompting, to build something—a relationship, a career, a family, a mission, an invention? We are called to partner with the Holy Spirit in the world!! Have you prayed for strategy? Have you prayed for God's insight into how to do something?

Is he inviting you to operate by faith, by faith's interests—perhaps for the first time in your life?

Action-oriented whispers clearly can be dramatic, such as was the case in Noah's life. But just as often, they can begin with a seemingly small command, with a simple prompting from heaven, like:

- encourage that person  
Pray that prayer.
- Get the washing in
- Engage in that relationship.
- Read that book.
- SLOW DOWN...driving on the back country roads of southland, not slowly..I get the distinct impression I must slow down. I have a choice. But I do and I come over the rise and there are sheep on the road...

■ ■ ■

**What action might God be asking you to take today? We are all created for good works, to serve...Are you listening?**

**will we manifest the obedient spirit of Noah, who was willing to take whatever action God suggested, even when it cost him his credibility and good reputation in the eyes of those he knew and loved?**

**There is a second way that God often speaks into our day-to-day lives, and it is by way of whispers of *admonition*.**

### Matthew 16:21–23

*From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.*

*Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”*

*Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”*



If ever there was a whisper of admonition in Scripture, it was this one. More like a shout! In response to Peter’s denial that his Lord should die, Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan!” This wasn’t exactly what Peter was expecting to hear from his attempt to be nice and protect Jesus. But Jesus observed in Peter’s reaction a verbal “stumbling block” he just couldn’t tolerate. He had to put an end to **Peter’s ungodly train of thought, right then and there.**

One area I wonder if God wants to admonish us is in the area of our faulty thinking patterns and unreflected conclusions about how things are:

In Jesus’ words, he had rebuked Peter for one simple reason: *He did not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*

He wasn’t thinking from a God perspective but from his own earthly, human perspective. His mind had not grasped an eternal big picture and the way of suffering that God had in mind for Jesus just did not compute in Peter’s worldview of how things should be. Death and resurrection were incomprehensible concepts when applied to the messiah.

Peter's thinking would undergo a radical transformation in a very short space of time as what all this meant became clear. In the meantime he needed to trust Jesus had the bigger picture.

This is one major reason we may not be hearing or listening to or obeying God's whispers at present. We have our own conclusion and strategy about how we are managing our life and we have faulty patterns of thinking about ourselves and God and all sorts of things, that arise from incidents and people's treatment of us and immature conclusions that we have never questioned, yet still drive us.

So the possibility that God might have another plan or strategy for our lives and have information that we don't yet know for why he asks us to do certain things... Walk round the walls of Jericho 7 times and blow trumpets; give your 5 loaves and 2 fish to Jesus, rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and risk the king cutting off your head because you are sad and the ridicule of the naysayers who think this is impossible and the dumbest idea anyone had...go across the road and see if your neighbor is alright, is also just incomprehensible.

Here are four reasons we might miss the whispers of God because we aren't listening, just going la la la la or we can't figure it out because it's not compatible with our data banks and rationality: **what would you say to each of these?**

**1. It's way too hard.** I'm not listening because I'm afraid 'God's going to send me to Africa' or because I think I'm going to have to convert someone on the spot.

He's going to ask of me something impossible, way too big, out of my league, too scary and I am not going there.

**One step at a time. Get more insight. 24 years to become a minister. One day yet I may got to Africa.**

**2. Not backing ourselves.** God won't speak to me because I am just not worthy of that. I'm not the minister and I'm not...I don't know

if that was really God, I just made it up...or some version of this. **I have begun to go with my first impression!** Not try and second guess it, just trust it. Where should I read from Lord? Now what are you saying? Test it.

3. **I'll get it wrong.** The last time I did something I thought God said, I got it wrong and I am never doing that again. Or I made the effort and someone crapped on it. It's too scary to step out again. I need to get some more insight and support.

4. The **'God told me' thing is really abusive and I won't have anything to do with it.**

yes it is. Power dynamics are important. I believe God may be saying is an invitation to listen. Don't give too much power to someone else. Don't write off the word from God because of the messenger.

Don't quench the Spirit. The more you dis the prophets, the men and women who serve God, the more you will soil and stop the Spirit of God from speaking. People will always make mistakes. How we treat that is incredibly important. We don't want to throw the Spirit out with the bathwater of our anger and hurt!. I believe some of us may have done that and we reap a blockage in hearing the voice of the Spirit, individually and corporately.

We need to listen for the Spirit in the ideas of others...when our default setting is to go No, that won't work, we can't do this now, you must be joking, I can't see how that could happen; we may just miss the intention of God.

And listen for the Spirit in your own ideas...trusting the possibilities and the strange ideas that will call something forth from you. What a journey of privilege we are called to.

There is a third way that God often speaks into people's lives, and it is by delivering whispers of *assurance*.

One of the most powerful ways God speaks to his children is by whispering reassuring words. If you think back on your own life, you'll probably notice that some of God's greatest encouragement has also come by way of a real person, clothed in human flesh. You and I can be incredible conduits of God's compassion, his grace, his love ... if only we'll be sensitive to the words he would have us speak to those who need encouragement in our midst.

It's a theme we see echoed all throughout Scripture, that of God reminding his people that despite what they see from their earthly vantage point, he still has things under control.

"I am near," he says.

"I know you."

"I see you."

"I care."

"I'll never leave you, nor forsake you."

"I'll watch over you and provide for your needs."

"I've known you since before time existed, and I'll love you until life is no more."



**Our losses don't change who God is.**

Thomas Hammerlein, better known as Thomas à Kempis, who lived in the late 1300s and early to mid-1400s, spent the majority of his life writing one book, *The Imitation of Christ*. On the subject of conversing with this good and loving God, he wrote this:

*Blessed is the soul who hears the Lord speaking within her, who receives the word of consolation from His lips. Blessed are the ears that catch the accents of divine whispering, and pay no heed to the murmurings of this world.*

*Blessed indeed are the ears that listen, not to the voice which sounds without, but to the truth which teaches within.*

*Blessed are the eyes which are closed to exterior things and are fixed upon those which are interior.*

*Blessed are they who penetrate inwardly, who try daily to prepare themselves more and more to understand mysteries.*

*Blessed are they who long to give their time to God, and who cut themselves off from the hindrances of the world.*

*Consider these things, my soul, and close the door of your senses, so that you can hear what the Lord your God speaks within you. "I am your salvation," says your Beloved. "I am your peace and your life. Remain with Me and you will find peace. Dismiss all passing things and seek the eternal. What are all temporal things but snares? And what help will all creatures be able to give you if you are deserted by the Creator?*

*Leave all these things, therefore, and make yourself pleasing and faithful to your Creator so that you may attain to true happiness.*

*My promise never deceives, nor does it send away empty-handed him who trusts in Me. What I have promised I will give. What I have said I will fulfill, if only a man remain faithful in My love to the end. I am the rewarder of all the good, the strong approver of all who are devoted to Me.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Nelson's Royal Classics (Nashville: Thomas Nelson), pages 55, 58.