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### HEARING FROM GOD

About 4,000 years ago, God started revealing himself to man through a man named Abraham and his descendants. This revelation was recorded in the Bible. God spoke to Abraham, to Moses out of a burning bush, to David, and to the prophets. He spoke definitively through Jesus Christ, who was and is the living Word of God. God did not suddenly become mute when Jesus departed from the earth. Jesus said, "My sheep know my voice," and Peter, Paul and John record words they heard from God in the New Testament. If you are one of Jesus' sheep, then the Lord communicates with you. Yes, God speaks to us through the Bible, but he also speaks to us in other ways.

Last month I asked, "**Have You Ever Had a Message from God Calling You to a Particular Assignment or Ministry?**" And I addressed some of the problems connected to these "messages from God."

For instance, I said that God's messages are rarely crystal clear and that God chooses to speak to us in pictures, analogies, metaphors, mysteries that can come to us in a great variety of ways. They can come through vague impressions that flash into our minds and then are gone. These impressions can come while you are reading the Bible or listening to a sermon, but they can also come while you are watching a movie or a football game or listening to a conversation at work. They can come in a dream or a vision. God is near to us all the time and has a fantastic imagination. The question is, are we tuned in to the Spirit and alert to the vaguest impression

that may be a word from the Lord? These messages can be about anything in our daily lives, or they can be about momentous events that will impact nations.

Again, not every impression people get is a message from God, but God tests His people to see if they are trying their best to be sensitive to Him all the time.

Over the years, a number of women have told me that they married a man whom everyone believed to be a good and godly man, but that he turned out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing. And they said, "I kept feeling uneasy, that something was wrong, but I ignored those impressions and made the worst mistake of my life."

In the early 1900's there was a famous evangelist named E. Stanley Jones. He was known all over the world, sort of like Billy Graham. After a long ministry trip in Europe, he booked passage back to the States on the maiden trip of the Titanic. (Oops!) A few days before departure, he felt that for some reason God did not want him to come home on that ship, so he canceled his ticket and booked passage on a later ship. When his friends asked why he changed his plans, he told them about his impression.

Three weeks later, when Rev. Jones arrived in New York, a number of reporters were waiting for him. They had heard the story via reporters in England, and they were angry and hostile. One asked, "Did God tell you that the Titanic was going to sink?" He said, "No, I just felt that I wasn't supposed to be on that ship. God didn't tell me why." Another reporter said, "What kind of God is it that would tell you not to be on that ship, but He wouldn't tell all those poor people that drowned or lost their families?"

E. Stanley Jones' answer was quoted in many newspapers around the country. He said, "Maybe God spoke that warning to many

people, but I was the only one who was listening.” Are you listening?

The devil tries to control us and make slaves of us through addictions, controlling cults and governments, and through fear. God wants us to grow into freedom, but we never outgrow our need for his wisdom and counsel. When we make a big decision: to get married, to buy a house, to make an investment, to change jobs, it only makes sense to ask God for his wisdom.

But the question we all have is: how can we be absolutely sure that we are following God’s directions and are not being misled?

The answer is.....we can never be one hundred percent sure because we are living by faith and not by sight. John Wimber said that faith is spelled R-I-S-K.

One of the biggest tests in Doris’ and my life happened when we left the Methodist church and started an unaffiliated church. (I am honestly reporting our experience and am not intending to denigrate the Methodist church which has many faithful Christians.)

We were in our 50’s, and we had financial security as we faced retirement. But we had gone through five years of hostility because the Holy Spirit had zapped me big-time. I was preaching that old-time religion: “Repent and receive Christ as your Savior. Turn or burn!” I was no longer comforting the afflicted but afflicting the comfortable. My new confrontational style made me as popular with some folks in that church as a skunk at a picnic.

But our church had risen from the dead - it had more than doubled in attendance and giving, and God was transforming lives. Even so, the High Priest and Sanhedrin, I mean the Bishop and his guys, were offended by my theology and had punished me in many bizarre ways. They didn’t have grounds to dismiss me as a minister, but I was to be exiled to a small church in southeastern Colorado.

Doris and I prayed and felt that God was leading us to leave our nest and start a new fellowship. But then a large group of our church friends met with us one evening and told us they had prayed and felt we should stay

in the Methodist church and try to change it from within. They said that was what they were going to do and they didn’t think we would succeed in starting a new church.

Doris and I were really shaken up. We spent all night talking and praying. I finally said, “Lord, I don’t know whether I’ve been hearing from you, and if I’m not going to be a minister then I don’t know how I could get a job that would sustain us at this point, but I believe you are leading me to leave this place and to trust you.” Doris came to the same conclusion. But we struggled with fear and uncertainty and spent all that night praying and trying to decide what we should do. It was agonizing. We finally decided to do it, come what may. And about 300 people eventually came with us to start a new fellowship.

Were we sure that God was leading us? No, it was entirely by faith. Over the years, I have known five men personally who have tried to start new churches but it did not work out. After great personal and family sacrifice, usually stretching over several years, they had to give up and get some sort of job to support their families. There are no guarantees when we obey what we believe to be God’s leading that things are going to work out the way we hope they will. Remember that Paul had a vision of a man calling him to come to Macedonia (Acts 16). He believed that was a message from God and obeyed that call. Before long, he and his companion Silas were whipped and chained in a dungeon.

For Doris and me, that was “walking by faith and following Jesus.” Please note: I’m not talking about having faith in faith, as if by our own spirituality and force of will we can transform the clay of our existence into a pot that we design. No, no, no! We are not the Potter, we are the clay. We Christians have faith in God, not in ourselves. And not just any god, there are scores of them in our society, but the God of the Bible and specifically the God of the New Testament, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Good night, what a life of purpose and adventure He gives us. But nothing about it is easy. See the following article.

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### **GOD IS LOVE?**

Yes, the Bible declares it so in 1 John 4:8 and 16, in John 3:16, etc., and the Old Testament also declares His love hundreds of times, "*His love endures forever,*" etc.

But based on this world it certainly doesn't appear so at times. To God's chosen people, the Jews, there were times when it was difficult for them to believe that God loved them. Remember Tevye in "Fiddler on the Roof?" He struggled with grinding poverty all his life and sang: "Would it upset some great cosmic plan, if I were a wealthy man?" Then his daughters broke his heart by marrying outside the faith, followed by a terrible pogrom that expelled all the Jews from Russia. That did not feel like love, did it?

Psalms is the Hebrews' book of prayer, praise and instruction and represents a collection spanning over a thousand years of Israel's history. A majority of the Psalms, over 60 per cent, are dark, not at all cheerful or uplifting. For instance, following are a few verses from Psalm 42 and 44:

*"I say to God my Rock, 'Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, 'Where is your God?'....."Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?"*

And let me warn you: if you ever go through a season of depression: Do not read Psalm 88! It was possibly written by a man dying of leprosy, and if you read it just before driving over the Golden Gate Bridge, you will probably jump.

Two important things to remember when you read Psalms: (1) Nearly all the dark Psalms end with an affirmation of faith and trust in God, and interspersed throughout are Psalms of praise, thanksgiving and joy. Read the final five Psalms, 145-150, if you want to have your spirit lifted up to the sky. (2) God is the divine author who inspired the human authors to write these words.

What is God saying to us by including these expressions of doubt and fear in his Book? I believe He is telling us that it is okay to be human and okay to be honest with Him. Our life as Christians may include times of unimaginable loss, suffering and despair. The idea that we should be happy-clappy and joyful in those seasons is totally unrealistic.

Read what Paul said in 2 Corinthians: "*We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.....When we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, conflicts on the outside, fears within.*" This was the Apostle Paul that wrote those words! And God inspired him to record those words for you and me. And our Lord cried out from the cross, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

Life is getting harder, more pressure, more suffering. How can we trust that God is love and everything will be okay in the end? By faith, faith in the cross and in the resurrection.

*"This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."* (1 John 5:4)

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### **A MEMORABLE QUOTATION**

**"Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained.**

**In other words, if it were ever to be possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo jumbo.... the result would not be to make life delectable, but to make it too banal and trivial to be endurable. This, of course, is what the Cross signifies. And it is the Cross, more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ."**

Malcolm Muggeridge

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## **GROUPS**

Groups of animals have unique names. A group of bees is called a swarm. Ants are a colony. Whales are called a pod. Fish are a school. Birds are a flock. Lions are a pride. Crows are a murder. Tigers are an ambush. Flamingoes are called a flamboyant. Owls are known as a parliament. Buzzards are called a committee. (Really.)

I miss many things about being a pastor, but I don't miss sitting in committee meetings with those, uh, nice people.

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## **THE BRILLIANT LOGIC OF EVOLUTION**

(From my Ancient Files)

During the last several hundred years, it was believed by many people that the universe had always existed. This became the credo of most universities. But with the advance of astronomy, it gradually became undeniable that the universe had a beginning.

While the ancient Jews had some inside information about this subject, those who chose to ignore the Bible promulgated various other theories. The generally accepted theory, "The Big Bang," goes something like this:

"In the beginning, there was nothing. Then it exploded, casting immeasurable quantities of stuff out into an ever-expanding universe. This huge explosion caused the formation of stars, planets, and galaxies which follow complex natural laws and accidentally precipitated the formation of the majestic and beautiful universe that we have today.

The way that happened was that over a period of time, matter spontaneously formed itself into increasingly complex forms! Such a strange phenomenon has never been seen by human eyes, but that must have been the way it happened.

One day lightning struck some goo in the ocean and life spontaneously happened! Although no one has ever seen such a thing happen or been able to replicate the process, it must have happened that way as every intellectual and above average person will

acknowledge. Then followed a period of many weeks when amoeba became fish, became frogs, became dinosaurs, became birds, became apes, became men! All of this "just happened" by fortuitous accident.

Since man is alone in the universe, except for many other folks on distant planets whom we are even now trying to reach by cell phone, and since all of us are merely the result of impersonal nature and are nothing but animals, there is no meaning or purpose to existence, there is no God, there is no right or wrong, no good or evil, and nothing beyond this physical life. All children must be rescued from the bigoted rubes who deny these incontrovertible facts and indoctrinated with these liberating truths.

Anyone who won't bow down and acknowledge this brilliant theory is to be cast into a furnace of public scorn and ridicule and dismissed from their teaching jobs."

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## **A CANYON CITY PRISON**

July, 2005

We ministered to a young man, "Jack," who was an electronics engineer before he messed up his life with meth. He had become a Christian in prison and had a great personality. I thought, what a waste. But would he have received salvation if he had not been sent to prison?

Jack's wife had been a witch. He said that after he went through much sickness and spent \$17,000 on doctors for kidney stones, he found his wife's book of incantations and that the section on kidney stones was marked and underlined.

We had him forgive his wife and cast spirits out of him. During the process, he said he had a sharp pain above his heart that would not leave. We asked God to show us the root, and we got a vision of Jack's wife singing a chant over him. We broke that witchcraft curse and all the pain left, and Jack said he felt a new sense of being clean and that darkness and confusion were gone from his mind. Glory to God!