

**RECEIVING GUIDANCE FROM GOD**  
**Learning to Hear God's Voice - Part 4 of 4**  
**Habakkuk 2:1-2**  
**Rick Warren**

*"I will climb my watchtower and wait to see what the Lord will tell me to say and what answer He will give to my complaint. The Lord gave me this answer: 'Write down clearly on tablets what I reveal to you, so that it can be read at a glance.'" Habakkuk 2:1-2 (TEV)*

## **I. HOW TO REQUEST GUIDANCE**

### **1. Believe God \_\_\_\_\_**

*"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat. . . or drink. . . or wear?' . . . your heavenly Father knows that you need them." Mat. 6:31-32 (NIV)*

### **2. Ask God \_\_\_\_\_**

*"If you want to know what God wants you to do, ask Him, and He will gladly tell you." James 1:5 (TLB)*

### **3. Expect God \_\_\_\_\_!**

*"... God is always ready to give bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask Him; He will not resent it. But when you ask Him, be sure that you really expect Him to tell you..." James 1:5b-6 (TLB)*

## **II. HOW TO RECEIVE GUIDANCE FROM GOD**

(Habakkuk 2:1-2)

### **1. \_\_\_\_\_: Get alone in a quiet place**

*"I will climb my watchtower..." Habakkuk 2:1 (TEV)*

*"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." Luke 5:16 (NIV)*

2. \_\_\_\_\_: **Calm your thoughts and emotions**

*" . . . and wait to see what the Lord will tell me. . . "* Hab. 2:1 (TEV)

*"Be still, and know that I am God"* Ps. 46:10 (NIV)

*"LORD . . . Every morning, I tell you what I need, and I wait for your answer."* Ps. 5:3 (NCV)

3. \_\_\_\_\_: **Let God give you a mental picture**

*"I will look to see what He will say to me."* Hab 2:1 (NIV)

4. \_\_\_\_\_: **Record the ideas you receive**

*"The Lord gave me this answer, `Write down clearly. . . what I reveal to you.'" Hab. 2:2 (TEV)*

5. \_\_\_\_\_: **Thank God for speaking to you.**

*"O Lord, now I have heard your report, and I worship you in awe. . . "* Hab 3:2 (TLB)

**RECEIVING GUIDANCE FROM GOD**  
**Learning to Hear God's Voice - Part 4 of 4**  
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There are literally hundreds of stories of God speaking directly to people. Pastor Tom read one a little earlier about God speaking to a young boy named Samuel. When I read that I wonder why we don't hear more about that today of God speaking to people. Does God have a cold or laryngitis? What's the problem?

The fact is God does speak to people today. We've been looking in this series about Learning to Hear God's Voice. Today I want us to look at the topic of How to Receive Guidance from God. We said last week that God speaks primarily in four ways: He speaks through the Bible, He speaks through gifted teachers, He speaks through impressions of the Holy Spirit, and He speaks through pain. I'd like to focus this morning on the third way -- impressions of the Holy Spirit. It's a way that has a lot of confusion and misunderstanding with people. How does He do it?

I'm going to give you five ways to tune into God to hear God speak to you when you need guidance. You're saying, "Lord, should I marry this person?", "Should I change jobs?", "How do I deal with my children in this circumstance?", "Should I make this investment or not?" God wants to deal with you on those issues. But you've got to be tuned into Him.

We're going to look at Habakkuk and the five things he did to tune into God.

## **I. HOW TO REQUEST GUIDANCE**

But first three prerequisites on how to make a request of God. When you need to ask God for advice there are three prerequisites:

### **1. I must realize that God cares about the details of my life.**

Matthew 6:31-32 says *"Don't worry about what you eat or drink or wear. Your heavenly father knows you need these things."* That's an amazing verse to me because it says God's concerned about what I wear. God is concerned about what I drink and what I eat. Every little detail in my life. God is more interested in the details of your life than you are because He made you. Until you understand that you won't come asking Him questions about the details of your life because you'll say, "I don't want to bother God." He's interested because He's your heavenly Father and He made you. He's far more interested in it than you think He is.

### **2. You need to ask a specific question.**

When you're looking for guidance from God ask a specific question. The more specifically you ask, the more God is able to answer it. Instead of saying, "God, do You want to say anything?" say "God, what do You think about ....?" What's the next step? What should I do here? How should I do it? Over twenty times in the New Testament, God says "Ask." He says, "Ask..."

## RECEIVING GUIDANCE FROM GOD

### Learning To Hear God's Voice - Part 4 of 4

Seek... Knock" The Scripture says *"If you want to know what God wants you to do ask Him and He'll gladly tell you."* James says you have not because you don't ask. God wants you to ask for advise. He's waiting and willing. He wants you to ask for advise about your relationships, about your career, about your health, about your finances. He's eager and wanting to talk to you. So you ask and believe He's interested in the details.

### 3. Believe He wants to answer.

James 1:5-6 (Living Bible) *"God is always ready to give a bountiful supply of wisdom to all who ask Him. He won't resent it. But when you ask Him, be sure you really expect Him to tell you."* Circle "expect". God is more willing to talk to you than you are willing to talk to Him. Remember He tried four times to get Samuel's attention. When you expect answers to your prayers then you really pray. And when you really pray then you really get answers.

When you come to God, you make a specific request and you ask Him about how He wants to handle the situation and you expect an answer. In the book of Habakkuk, chapter 1, he asks God six specific questions. Then in chapter 2, he waits and listens to God answer and he writes down what he hears. *"I will climb my watchtower and wait to see what the Lord will tell me. The Lord gave me this answer. `Right it down what I reveal to you.'"*

Out of this book we see five steps to receiving an impression from the holy spirit.

1. Withdraw
2. Wait
3. Watch
4. Write
5. Worship -- which is expressing my love to God

### 1. WITHDRAW

The very first thing if you're going to hear God speak to you is you need to withdraw. That means get alone in a quiet place. Habakkuk says, *"I will climb my watchtower."* That's a Hebrew expression that means, I'm going to get alone, get off by myself, eliminate external distractions so I can hear God speak. Find a quiet place alone.

In today's world that can be difficult at times, especially those of you who are mothers of preschoolers. I recently read this about Susanna Wesley who was the mother of 18 children. Two of her sons, Charles and John, shaped England in their day. Charles Wesley wrote several hundred songs and hymns which churches still sing today. John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist denomination. Both men had a profound affect. With 18 kids, how did Susanna Wesley ever find a quiet place to pray? This was her solution. Every afternoon she would sit in her living room and throw her apron up over her head. The children knew that when mother was in her rocking chair with her apron up over her head she was not to be disturbed. Where there's a will there's a way!

## **RECEIVING GUIDANCE FROM GOD**

### **Learning To Hear God's Voice - Part 4 of 4**

Find a place where you can be quiet and get alone with God and listen. One of the reasons why you don't hear God speak to you more is because you are surrounded by noise. The radio is always on, the TV is always on, the fax machine is always on, you've got your beeper on, you walk with a Walkman -- you're surrounded by noise. So you can't hear the still small voice of God.

The first step is you need to withdraw and get off by yourself. Get alone in a quiet place. Luke 5:16 says "*Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*" Circle "often". Jesus led a very active life, yet in spite of that it says He often withdrew. He made it a habit. If He needed to do it, certainly we do too. We need to get away from the distractions, take the phone off the hook, otherwise you will be called while you're praying. Get alone, removing every external distraction possible.

If that's all that was needed for you to hear God it'd be real easy. Just get off by yourself and you'd hear God every time. But AFTER you get in a quiet spot then you need to quiet yourself, your own mind and your own emotions. That leads us to the second step.

## **2. WAIT**

Waiting means to calm your thoughts and emotions. You need to quiet yourself down. The second thing Habakkuk says is "*I will station myself.*" The Good News says, "*I will wait.*" What does it mean to station yourself? It means don't move, stay put, don't run around, be still. When I station myself it means I'm going to stay there for awhile until something happens.

Habakkuk says, I'm going to station myself so I can hear God. God speaks to the person who takes the time to listen. The one reason why many of us don't hear God is we're just too busy. "God, I've got 30 seconds for you. Go!" Hurry is the death of prayer. If you're going to hear God speak, not only do you need to get in a quiet spot but then you must mentally and emotionally calm yourself down too.

Let me describe to you the reason why most prayer is unfulfilling for people. Here's the typical prayer experience. You're going to pray today and so get off by yourself. Maybe you happen to find a quiet place. But the moment you set down to pray, your mind starts reminding you of everything you haven't done yet. I find because I think at high RPM's about 90% of the time, when I sit down to talk to God, my mind is racing. It just flits from one subject to the next. I find it very difficult to focus unless I wait and I calm myself, by choice, mentally and emotionally. What happens is, You set down and you start thinking of all the unfinished tasks you have, all the responsibilities you've got, all the things you'd better not forget. If you're ever wondering what you have to do today, just set down and start to pray and you'll think of it all real quick. Because the devil makes sure all of those things crowd into your mind instantly.

When your mind starts moving from subject to subject you can't hear God. What do you do? I've discovered if I try to ignore it, it doesn't go away. If I say, I'll think of those things later, and I push them down, they just scream louder. So, I've come up with a real practical solution. When I start to pray I take a pad with me, like a post-a-note pad and something comes up when I pray,

## RECEIVING GUIDANCE FROM GOD

### Learning To Hear God's Voice - Part 4 of 4

"Don't forget this..." I just stop and write it down and go back, pray some more and something else comes up, I stop and I write it down. I may end up with 15-20 things but at least I don't have to worry about forgetting it.

Most people never get past that mental chaos stage. If by chance you do, then you come up with the second enemy before you hear God, and that is negative emotions. The next voice you usually hear is your conscious. Satan loves to play on your conscious. He is the accuser of Christians. You start thinking of all the things that you're not doing, that you're guilty of, your sins, your faults, your weaknesses. Satan is screaming, "Guilty!" That doesn't make prayer any fun! If every time you sit down with a person to talk to them, they start criticizing you, pretty soon you'd start saying, I don't like to talk to that person. If every time you sit down to pray all of a sudden you'd just start feeling how bad you are and the things that are wrong in your life, then it's no wonder you're not going to want to pray.

That is not the voice of God. That's the voice of the devil and your own conscious which is always putting you down. The Bible says that for a believer *"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ."* Satan is the accuser. God is a loving Father who wants to talk to you, not sit around and condemn you. To get past this you have got to decide, Am I going to focus on what's wrong with me or am I going to focus on God's love? He wants to encourage you. He wants to lift you up. He wants to love you.

How do you do that? How do you calm your thoughts and emotions? Let me give you a Biblical technique for tuning into God. This isn't something I got out of a meditation or self help book. This is right out of the book of Psalms. David said I do two things mentally and emotionally so I can hear God.

1. Relax your body. Ps. 46:10 *"Be still and know that I am God."* Circle "be still". The first thing you've got to do if you're going to relax your mind is you've got to relax your body. You need to let go, be still, get comfortable. The Bible says David sat before the Lord when he prayed. Get yourself in a comfortable position. Let go of muscle tension. Your body affects your attitudes. If you don't feel good physically it affects your emotions and your moods. Your body does influence your attitudes. They're tied together. As your body relaxes so does your mind. Just relax your body. Be still, the Bible says. Once I've got my body still then...

2. Wait in silence. Ps. 62:5 *"For God alone my soul waits in silence."* Waiting means it takes time. It's difficult to calm down in a hurry. Forcing yourself to calm down quickly does not work. Trying to force yourself to calm down is about as affective as forcing yourself to go to sleep. It doesn't work. You can't force yourself to go to sleep. You just have to wait until you go to sleep. Sometimes that takes a while for your body and your mind to get the RPM's down. It just takes time! God speaks to people who take the time to listen. If you're in a hurry, you're not going to hear God speak. You must withdraw and then you wait in silence, which calms your thoughts and your emotions.

2 Kings 3:15 says that Elijah asked for soft music to be played while he tuned into God to find the answer to a question he had. He said "bring in the harpist" and he had a harpist play while he tuned into God. I've found in my own life sometimes the quickest way to calm down is to put on

## RECEIVING GUIDANCE FROM GOD

### Learning To Hear God's Voice - Part 4 of 4

a praise tape, some slow Christian music. I just start listening to it and it shifts my body, my mind, my emotions into a lower gear so I can learn to hear God. Once your body is still and once your mind is quiet then you become sensitive to hearing God speak. Inner calm opens the intercom to God and you can hear Him.

Some of you are saying, this sounds like TM -- transcendental meditation. It's the exact opposite of transcendental meditation. TM and humanist meditation says you want to make your mind go blank. That's the goal of it. The goal of prayer is not to make your mind go blank. The goal of prayer is to hear -- tune in -- to the voice of God so you can talk to Him and He can talk to you. Withdraw and then wait.

### 3. WATCH

Let God give you a mental picture. The third thing Habakkuk says is "*I will look to see what He says to me.*" Circle "look". He says, I will look at what God says. It seems to me to make more sense to say I will listen to what God says. You listen to what people say, you don't look at what people say. Why did he say this?

An important key to hearing God is to understand that God's voice is often visual. God often wants to speak through a mental picture. There are hundreds of examples of this in scripture where people were praying and God gave those people a mental picture or vision. It's all through scripture. It's the primary way God contacts people -- through impressions in your mind. He gives you a mental picture or image or vision inside your head.

Examples: Abraham, Jacob, Job, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah... New Testament: Peter, John, Paul.

This is the number one way God speaks to people, by giving them a mental picture. I think that's the reason why Jesus says several times, "*Watch and pray.*" There is a visual element to prayer. Some of you have no idea what I'm talking about. But if you'll grasp it, it will open up a whole new area of your life in relationship to Christ.

Some of you are saying, "I thought visualizing was New Age." The counterfeit type is. Satan has never had an original thought in his life. He can't create because he's not the creator. Only God is the creator. Satan can only copy, pervert and counterfeit what God already does. So whatever God does, Satan tries to counterfeit it. For instance, God gives gifted, godly teachers and preachers so satan comes up with false teachers and preachers. God creates real miracles. Satan comes along and he does phony miracles, fake, counterfeit. The Bible says just because you see a miracle doesn't mean it's from God. There are counterfeit miracles. God creates genuine fellowship. That's what he made the church for so that there is support, love and people helping each other, genuine koinina, genuine fellowship. Satan comes along and tries to create false fellowship such as beer commercials -- "It doesn't get any better than this!" If you think it doesn't get any better than that you've got a lot to learn. That's false fellowship. Beer commercials don't sell beer, they sell fellowship. They show people having a good time. People think if they drink that then they'll have a good time! Everything that God does, satan tries to counterfeit.

## RECEIVING GUIDANCE FROM GOD

### Learning To Hear God's Voice - Part 4 of 4

God, in the book of Psalms, teaches us how to tune into Him through Biblical meditation and Biblical visualizing. What does Satan do? He comes along and creates counterfeits of it. New age channelers are simply trying to counterfeit communion with God.

A counterfeit of anything is simply proof that the real exists. Have you ever seen a counterfeit three dollar bill? No, nobody's dumb enough to counterfeit one because there isn't a real three dollar bill. What about a counterfeit plastic bag? No, because a plastic bag has no value. Counterfeit is proof that something exists and that it has value. It bothers me that Satan has robbed many believers from the joy of intimately knowing God in a personal way by getting them to believe that all meditation or visualizing is new age. That's just not true! God thought it up first. Anything that God creates can be perverted or misused. Sex is a good example. God meant sex to be a wonderful expression within the bounds of a committed marriage. Satan comes along and perverts it, misuses it, counterfeits it. But that doesn't mean that the real thing doesn't exist, it does.

I'm simply saying this: God gave you the ability to imagine. Don't let the devil take it away from you.

You withdraw, and then you wait, and then you watch. And you watch for the real thing. What does that mean?

Ephesians 1:18 *"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know the hope to which He has called you."* He says, "I pray that the eyes of your heart will be opened". I thought the eyes were in my head? He's not talking about physical eyes. He's talking about spiritual eyes. Spiritual senses. When you were born physically you got a set of physical senses. Hear, taste, touch, smell, feel. When you were born spiritually you got reborn and got a set of spiritual senses: spiritual eyes, spiritual ears. Have you ever been reading the Bible... you've read a verse a dozen times but all of a sudden it pops out at you? God just opened your spiritual eyes. The Scripture says in John 3 *"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven."* There is an unseen part of reality that we don't see that you can only see with your spiritual eyes. But it's just as real. None of you see God here but He's more real than this building which you do see. The building will eventually decay but God's not going to. God is saying, I want you to learn to see from My perspective, from My viewpoint.

Many of you are naturally visual thinkers. There are two kinds of thinkers: visual thinkers and digital thinkers. I don't happen to be a visual thinker; I'm a digital thinker. I don't think in bright beautiful pictures. A lot of you do, though. And that's very normal. God made you that way. Studies have shown that between 50-75% of the population see in pictures. Those of you who do it know what I'm talking about. When you read the Bible you don't just read the story, you see the story in your mind. You can see it happening. You think it that way. That means it's going to be easier for you to let God give you a picture than it is for the rest of us.

But what about the rest of us who don't think that way? The Bible says in Hebrews 5:14 *"Our spiritual senses must be exercised"*. You can develop the ability to see with your spiritual eyes if you'll practice and let God work on it in your life. You can train yourself. When you quiet

## RECEIVING GUIDANCE FROM GOD

### Learning To Hear God's Voice - Part 4 of 4

yourself down and get calm and all the distractions are out of the way, then you can simply say, "Jesus, is there anything You want to show me? Do You want to give me an idea, an impression?"

#### 4. WRITE

Record the ideas that you receive. Notice what Habakkuk did. *"The Lord gave me this answer, 'Write down clearly what I reveal to you.'"* Get the progression: chapter 1, Habakkuk gives six questions to God. chapter 2, he waits, he quiets himself, and he watches and the Lord says, "Here's what I want you to do, Write down clearly what I reveal to you." In Chapter one he writes down his prayer to God, what his questions are to God. In Chapter two, he writes down God's answers back to him.

What does that have to do with me? Many of you, your prayer life has got in a rut -- it's boring. You don't like to pray because you end up saying the same thing over and over. You're stuck in a rut and a routine.

Solution to break out of the rut: Write out your prayers as you think them. Buy a spiral binder, a three ring notebook, it doesn't matter what it is and as you're praying, write out your prayers while you're praying it. This is called the spiritual habit of journaling. Almost every great Christian in history has journalized. They wrote down their prayers, what they wanted to say to God and then they'd wait and then what they felt impressed of God they'd write that down, what God said back to them. There are many benefits to doing this.

You ask, Is it ok to write while you're praying? Of course. How do you think we got the Bible. How we got the Bible is godly men and women were praying and talking to God and when God talked back to them, they wrote it down. If you want an example of journalizing, there's a whole book on it. It's called Psalms. In Psalms, almost every one, David starts with a question. God, how come my enemies are prospering when I'm trying to live for You, and I'm not making it? And then he waits and watches and he writes down God's answer. We call those the Psalms.

There are many benefits to developing this habit of journalizing. In the first place it keeps you focused. It gives your body something to do while you're praying. It keeps you focused. Your mind won't wander when you're writing down what you're trying to think about.

Another benefit is it allows you to remember what you've said to God and what God has said back to you. You don't have to learn a lesson over and over. Because you wrote it down and you go back and review it.

A third benefit, and we're going to talk about this next week, is that later it allows you to test the impression. The Bible says real clearly that not every idea you get is from God. Some of them are from the devil, some of them are from God, some of them are self inspired. How do you know the difference? Next week I'm going to share with you the six ways to test an impression. but you don't want to go testing and analyzing your prayers while you're praying. That ruins the whole spirit of the thing. So you just pray and receive what God wants to say to you, you write it down, and later you can go back and test it and look at it.

## RECEIVING GUIDANCE FROM GOD

### Learning To Hear God's Voice - Part 4 of 4

#### 5. WORSHIP

You thank God for speaking to you. Habakkuk 3:2 *"Oh, Lord, now I've heard your report and I worship you in awe."* He says, now that You've spoken to me, I love You and I want to express my love to You. When you have received God's loving response, you've asked a question and you've heard an answer in your mind and you write it down, it's going to make you want to love the Lord more and draw you closer. This turns prayer from a monologue into a dialogue, a conversation.

I was bored to death with prayer until I learned how to do this. It was like talking to a brick wall. I never expected an answer. I never expected to hear from God. It was just me talking. It didn't matter if anyone was there or not. I don't like to just talk to myself. But once I realized that God does want to have a conversation with me -- we talk about Jesus wanting to have a relationships, you can't have a relationship without people talking. If you do all the talking, you don't have a relationship. But you've got to take these steps and make time.

Sometimes I've asked God a question and I've waited and sensed that God was saying, "I don't want to tell you right now." That's OK. He knows what's best. It's like sometimes when I talk to my wife Kay. "Is there anything you want to say to me?" She says, "No, everything's OK." Sometimes I go to God and say, "God is there anything You want to say to me?" He says, "No, everything's OK." I don't have to have something every time. But I'll say this: If you'll practice these and begin to develop them in your life, more times than not, God will talk to you. Because He's interested in your life. This is the difference in knowing about God and knowing God.

There are really three kinds of relationships you can have. You can believe in God. That's the lowest form of relationship. Or you can be acquainted with God. That's a little bit deeper relationship. Or you can be the friend of God. Jesus wants that kind of relationship to you. He says, I want to call you My friends, where we commune and discuss and dialogue and converse and know each other. God wants you to be His friend.

If you will begin to practice these Biblical steps it will open up a whole new dimension of your Christian life. It will become a great adventure to you. A great joy. I say that from personal experience.

This is not the only way God talks to you, obviously. But this is a key way that God can get your attention and you can hear Him talk to you.

Next week we're going to talk about How Do You Test God's Voice. 1 John 4:1 says "Don't always believe everything you hear just because someone says it's a message from God. Test it first to see if it really is." Next week we'll talk about those ways to test God's word, to test if an impression is from Him.