

**BITESIZE BELIEFS**

# **HEARING GOD**

## **ARE WE REALLY LISTENING?**

**STEPHEN G. DERGES**

**[www.bitesizebeliefs.com](http://www.bitesizebeliefs.com)**

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## Dedication

The whole 'BITESIZE BELIEFS' series is dedicated to my wonderful wife Rosalyn – thank you for believing in me, trusting in me and loving me. I know that I'm a better man with you than I would have been without you.

## Acknowledgements

Many people have had a profound influence on my life and it's not possible to list everyone here. So, apologies if you are not specifically singled out – your reward will be in heaven!

Countless leaders, speakers, authors – many of whom I've not met personally – have inspired me and helped me develop and I'm profoundly grateful for the books, video and audio recordings and other materials they have shared.

I'm especially indebted to Carl Brettle, CEO of Neighbourhood Prayer Network (NPN), and his wife Rebekah who had the vision for NPN and launched the ministry in 2013 at Wembley Stadium.

Carl was the catalyst for me to re-edit the original editions of 'BITESIZE BELIEFS' and make this publication a reality – I appreciate your advice and faith in me. Do check out NPN's vision and ministry at:

[www.neighbourhoodprayer.net](http://www.neighbourhoodprayer.net)

# Introduction

Thanks for picking up this book – my prayer is that it will help you to a greater understanding of God's ways and into a deeper relationship with Him.

## WHY THE BOOK?

This is one of a '*pamphlet type*' books that I've written over the years to help people grow spiritually and, as you can see, it's not very long. That's not because I've not got much to say, but in this age of '*sound-bites*' and '*instant makeovers*', I felt short, easy-to-read books would be more accessible. I've too many books on my shelves that I've started but not finished, so I've kept '**BITESIZE BELIEFS**' condensed because I want them to be read.

Although I didn't attend Bible College or study for a theological degree, over many years I've been involved in various leadership roles in church, charitable, community and business settings. As Pastor of a Baptist Church and recently Chair of Trustees and Leadership Team of an independent evangelical church, I've learned a multitude of lessons – some painful ones – but I've also known God's gracious favour too.

Whilst much of the focus is on spiritual leadership, I fervently believe the principles and concepts are transferable to life in general. Before we can lead anyone else, it's crucial we lead ourselves.

For those in spiritual leadership, we're required to be faithful in lesser assignments before greater responsibilities come our way. Even if we never become leaders of more than tens or fifties, when we're in the place where God wants us to be, we'll know His blessing.

So, find a comfortable chair, sit back, get a cup of tea (or whatever takes your fancy) and you'll be through this book before you know it. But hopefully the thoughts and challenges it provokes will last a lifetime!

Stephen G. Berges

# HEARING GOD

The time was 3 am – yes, that’s morning and it does exist! I’m absolutely tired out yet wide awake. Sleep eludes me just like my golf tee shots often miss fairways. I’m sure it’s a conspiracy that trees, water, and bunkers are located where I hit my ball.

The previous few days had been hectic. Canadian pastor Dale Plante was staying with us. Early mornings; late nights; celebration meetings; personal ministry – it all takes its toll. I once described Dale as *‘Tigger on fast forward’* (it was a compliment, honestly) but keeping up with his pace was a full-time job. Where he gets the energy from is a mystery. Plus, a late-night pastoral meeting and a conversation with someone having difficulty with our worship style, meant I was whacked but there was little chance I’d sleep. Not even the gentle rise and fall of Rosalyn’s rhythmic breathing could lull me into a restful slumber.

Why does God often speak to me in the middle of the night? Yes, the Bible says He never slumbers or sleeps<sup>1</sup> so maybe as we’re made in His image<sup>2</sup>, that’s the reason. But we’re told He gives sleep to those He loves<sup>3</sup> and I thought I qualified.

I’ve found that the Holy Spirit regularly speaks to me in the night and now I was reminded of a prophecy I received at a Worship Leaders’ Conference in Southport in 1999. Being picked out of a crowd of over 500 by someone who didn’t know me was awesome! Part of the prophecy was, *“Go ahead and write*

*down some things God is showing you. It’ll become clearer and God will release what’s been blocked up.”*

Pretty specific, but prophecy needs to be confirmed, so on returning home I’d asked my fellow Church Elders to pray into and ratify it – which they did! I was an Elder and Worship Leader and responsible for developing the church strategy plan, co-ordinating our leadership team planning activities. I’d also initiated a monthly church magazine and was involved in launching *‘Lifting Jesus Higher’* which aimed to build deeper relationships between local church leaders.

I also wrote *‘Focus on Faith’* articles for the local weekly newspaper and initiated *‘Prayer for the Week’*, written by local church leaders in the same publication.

I heard myself saying, *“Father, I thought You were leading me in all this; I’m doing what You said; what’s the issue here?”*

Yet despite every attempt to ignore these thoughts, I still couldn’t sleep and now it was 5 am! I’d better get up and do something about it and tiptoe down the stairs – quietly to not wake the family (or the dog – sadly now no longer with us). Why do these stairs creak much louder in the middle of the night? So, this is where you come in – hopefully not literally; you wouldn’t want to see me in my dressing gown sat bleary eyed in front of a computer screen in my darkened office.

How do we hear God? How do we know it is God? Should I even expect God to speak to me? And a hundred other questions run through my mind.

Let’s start at the beginning...

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 121:3-4

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:27

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 127:2

## WHY WOULD GOD WANT TO SPEAK TO US?

The answer is simple yet profound – because He loves us and because He has great plans for our lives, so we need to hear what He has to say to us.

This isn't new news to a Christian, but have we really grasped the immensity of it? The God of Creation who holds everything together, Who is exalted in the highest heaven loves us and wants a relationship with us.



Let me introduce here a '**SELAH MOMENT**'. The exact meaning of 'Selah' in the Psalms is a mystery – it's possibly a musical break, where we're encouraged to take a breather. I love the Amplified Bible's rendering of 'Selah' – *"pause and calmly realise what that means!"* Let's stop for a moment, slow down, and meditate on the enormity of the thought that the God of heaven loves us, and take the opportunity to thank Him.

I'm quite logical – one of those left-brain types – probably due to my Surveyor and Banker training, as well as being a character trait. Give me the facts and the desired outcome; let me analyse the situation and I'll come up with a strategy involving several potential solutions. So it seems totally logical to me if someone

wants to develop a relationship with another person, they'd want to speak to them. In fact, it would be illogical if they didn't. And it's plausible they'd use different communication methods rather than a single means of interaction.

We're bombarded with a plethora of media devices – TV; radio; newspapers; magazines; telephone; internet; social media; email; text messages – and influenced through advertising, news programmes, documentaries, reality shows and *'the soaps'*. Why wouldn't our Heavenly Father use different methods to communicate with us?

Yet many Christians appear to believe God has shut Himself off from us having said all He ever wants to say in the Bible – He's given us the Book to read so nothing else is necessary. He's out of radio contact now; the dial-up won't connect (some folks reading this won't remember dial-up but those of us of a certain age remember the frustrations before high-speed Broadband and the high pitched whine indicating we couldn't connect.)

Please don't get me wrong; I'm not saying the Bible isn't important. It is the inspired Word of God and *"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."*<sup>4</sup>

I love the Bible and get so much inspiration from it, but it's not the only way God communicates. We have such an infinitely creative God that He's not going to limit Himself to just one communication method. He's not gone 'off-line' now that the Bible is printed.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17



# THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus outlined part of the role of the Holy Spirit in John's Gospel chapters 14-17 during His inspirational final talk to the disciples before His death, saying,

*"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is Mine and make it known to you."*<sup>5</sup>

Let's have a look at this in more detail:

➤ **The Holy Spirit speaks:** speaks what and to whom?

He speaks *"what He hears"* and what He hears must come from the Father and Son because the Holy Spirit is a member of the Trinity and He's in intimate relationship with both the other members of the Godhead.

Jesus says everything belonging to Him will be made known to us by the Holy Spirit – imagine that. The Holy Spirit will make us aware of Jesus' desires and purposes.

➤ **The Holy Spirit guides:** who? Us of course – this isn't rocket science – but it is such an amazing privilege.

He guides us *"into the truth"* – not just any old truth – *all* truth – and *"The truth will set you free"*.<sup>6</sup> The Bible makes it clear God doesn't lie<sup>7</sup> otherwise He wouldn't be holy and righteous.

➤ **The Holy Spirit makes things known:** what things? Those of the Father and Jesus. Notice the future focus element as the Holy Spirit reveals the future – *"what is yet to come"* – and illuminates what Jesus said whilst on earth so we become aware of what's on God's agenda.



Jesus calls the Holy Spirit – the Counsellor – so let's briefly unpack this.

The simple definitions of a counsellor include 'adviser', 'lawyer' or 'diplomat' – someone qualified to give advice and acting on another's behalf. And not just advise but also discuss, exchanging views and opinions to illicit guidance – it's a **two-way process**.

My wife Rosalyn, is a qualified counsellor, helping people discover the issues behind their patterns of behaviour and attitudes by using probing questions so clients can find appropriate solutions. It's **participative** rather than **prescriptive**.

The Holy Spirit *'speaks'* into our situations, revealing God's ways and exposing our

<sup>5</sup> John 16:13-15

<sup>6</sup> John 8:32

<sup>7</sup> Titus 1:2

intentions and attitudes. He counsels, advises, challenges, encourages, but we have the choice – freewill – to choose, or not, to obey.

The Holy Spirit also ‘*convicts*’<sup>8</sup> – warning us that, unless checked, we’ll be led away from God’s best for us. And as a counsellor, He also ‘*testifies*’ on Jesus’ behalf<sup>9</sup> giving us an eye-witness’ first-hand authentication of who Jesus is and what He has done for us.

It’s a huge subject and I have to challenge and remind myself regularly that the Spirit of God can advise, convict, empower and let me know the present and future purposes of the Trinity. Awesome!

Time for ‘**SELAH MOMENT #2**’ and some questions.

### ➤ How willing am I to listen to the Holy Spirit?

It’s vital we make the time to sit down and ask Him to lead us into the truth, remembering He’s available anytime, anywhere.

### ➤ Is He really my personal Counsellor and Guide?

The Holy Spirit is a person, not some kind of ethereal, mystical power who’s available only to the super-spiritual or on special occasions who deals with us on personal basis.

### ➤ Have I asked the Holy Spirit to work in power in my life?

In Luke 11:13 Jesus tells us that the Father will give good gifts to His children – the gift of the Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 says, “**Now it is God who makes**

***both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.***”

The “*what is to come*” phrase includes our eternal inheritance and standing in Christ – but right now notice we receive the Holy Spirit as a deposit. A deposit is a down-payment paid ‘up front’ that it isn’t the full amount. It anticipates a future, more complete benefit – there’s more to come.

In living Holy Spirit empowered lives we’ll demonstrate both the “**Fruit of the Spirit**”<sup>10</sup> and the Gifts the Holy Spirit generously gives. Other ‘**BITESIZE BELIEFS**’ books focus on these aspects, but why not turn to Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 1 Corinthians 14 and Ephesians 4:11-12 for an inkling of the ‘more to come’?



And there’s even more – this isn’t a one-off event. The second half of Ephesians 5:18 in the Amplified Version implores, “**...be filled with the [Holy] Spirit and constantly guided by Him**”. Constantly encompasses continuously, repeatedly, habitually, perpetually – getting the message?

If this ‘**SELAH MOMENT**’ has raised other questions, why not chat it over with a trusted Christian friend or church leader?

<sup>8</sup> John 16:7

<sup>9</sup> John 15:26

<sup>10</sup> Galatians 5:22-23



## ARE WE LISTENING?

Larry King – the American chat-show host – once said, *'I remind myself every morning: Nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So if I'm going to learn, I must do it by listening.'* This wise advice is echoed by an allegedly Irish proverb which says, *"God gave us two ears and one mouth and we need to use them in that same proportion".*

Let's face it, most of us more concerned about what we're saying rather than listening especially when it comes to prayer – that's why we have *'prayer lists'* or we blurt out our *'wish list'* prayers and then rush off expecting automatic answers because we'd prayed.

Several passages of Scripture indicate all we need to do is to *'proclaim it and*

*claim it'* but truthfully, we know that even our infinitesimal amount of faith rarely moves mountains.

Psalm 37:4 may say you will receive *"the desires of your heart"* when you *"delight in the Lord"*, but this isn't a blank cheque to cash in whenever we want.

Jesus taught His disciples not to pray for their own benefit but to ask for heavenly purposes to prevail – *"Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"*<sup>11</sup>. That indicates to me that God's purposes are different to ours and we need to get on His agenda.

Another **'BITESIZE BELIEFS'** book – **'PURPOSEFUL PRAYER'** – may help us understand God's will enabling us to *'pray it in'* with confidence and assurance.

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 6:10

# GREAT THINGS HAPPEN WHEN WE REALLY LISTEN

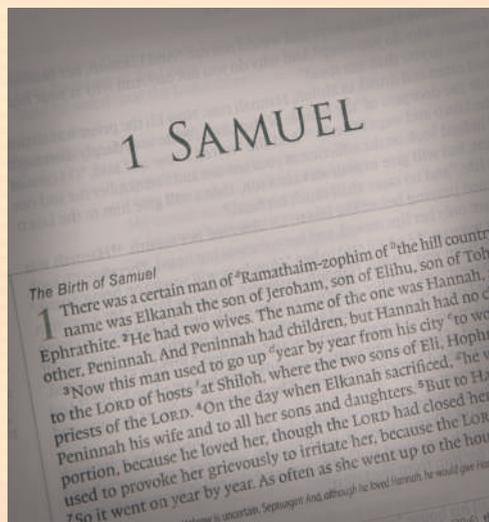
The story of the young Samuel being trained under the tutelage of the priest Eli (1 Samuel chapters 1-3) is fascinating. Here's my potted version.

In chapter 1, a lady called Hannah who is desperate for a child, goes on an annual pilgrimage to the Tabernacle – the house of God – located in Shiloh with her husband, Elkanah plus Elhanah's other wife, Peninnah – it appears polygamy was permitted in that culture. Peninnah had children of her own and continually taunts Hannah over her childlessness.

Entering the Tabernacle, Hannah pours out her heart in silent prayer making a bargain with God along the lines of, *"If You give me a son, I'll give him back to You"*. Eli, watching her lips move but hearing nothing audible, mistakenly thinks she's drunk and gives her a right royal telling off. But realising she's genuine, he blesses her, praying God would grant her request. A few months later Samuel is the result and Hannah, making good her promise to God, sends Samuel, as a very young lad, to live at the Tabernacle.

Eli was an old man and his sons were a law unto themselves. Not only were they violently ripping off people coming to present sacrifices, they were also sleeping around with the female servants. Although Eli tackles them about it they obviously have no respect for their father and just carry on carrying on. Later we read they come to a very sticky end.

It seems incongruous a parent would put their first born, only, child into that toxic situation as unlike today, there was no Social Services Child Protection Safeguarding protocols. Yet God turned round a potentially disastrous situation,



as Samuel later becomes probably Israel's greatest prophet-leader.

In Chapter 3, there's a life-defining incident for young Samuel. Drifting off to sleep, he hears an audible voice. Thinking it's Eli, he runs to find out what he wants. Eli says it's nothing to do with him, telling Samuel to go back to bed. I'm sure we can imagine the tone of voice Eli used!

It happens again – with the same result, except probably Eli's response was somewhat harsher – yet when it happens on a third occasion, Eli finally gets the message. *"This is God wanting to speak to you,"* says Eli and counsels, ***"Go and lie down, and if He calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"***<sup>12</sup>

What is Eli thinking? Here's God's earthly representative and mediator for the

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Samuel 3:10

<sup>13</sup> 1 John 4:4

<sup>14</sup> Romans 8:37

people, saying *"If he calls you?"* God has just spoken three times – of course He's going to speak again if no-one's listening. How many times does it take to get our attention?

What can we learn?

➤ **God continues to speak when we don't hear the first time**

He doesn't give up on us and keeps calling even if our line is engaged or off the hook because He loves us so much. I've learned the hard way how persistent the Holy Spirit is when it comes to effecting change in my life.

➤ **God can use imperfect situations to further His purposes**

Being surrounded by immorality, blackmail, and robbery, with GBH and menaces, isn't usually the best training establishment for prospective church leaders. But even in this environment God still wanted to impart His word.

I admit I can become frustrated with people who say that they're not in the so-called 'right place' or it isn't an appropriate time because there are situations that need to be sorted out before blessing results.

**Number 1:** if we're not in the right place why not and what are we doing about it?

**Number 2:** if there are issues that need

to be sorted, why haven't we tackled them?

We shouldn't be limited by the world around us because **"the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world"**<sup>13</sup>. We're meant to be overcomers, actually, *"more than conquerors through him who loved us"*<sup>14</sup>.

➤ **God isn't too concerned about our age**

Samuel was probably in his teens yet received an important, devastating, message for his mentor and teacher Eli who was far older and infinitely more senior in rank.

But God uses older and middle-aged people too...

- Caleb was 85 when he claimed his inheritance in Canaan
- Daniel was possibly in his 70's when he was thrown into the lions' den.
- Most of the disciples were probably middle-aged when they were called and commissioned by Jesus
- Paul appointed Titus to chose elders in churches across Crete and Timothy, probably early 20's, to lead churches.

Whatever age we are, let's be like Caleb of whom it is written in Numbers 14:24 *"has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly"*.

## DOES GOD SPEAK TODAY?

Although Samuel's story is in the Old Testament, God still speaks today and in different ways. *"For God does speak – now one way, now another"* says Job 33:14. Psalm 19:1-4 says the heavens pour out speech and in Romans 1:20 we read no-one has an excuse not to believe in God because creation does the talking for Him.

I, and others I know, have experienced God *'speaking'* in various tangible ways, including dreams and visions. On the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel,

*"In the last days, God says, 'I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream*

*dreams. Even on My servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”<sup>15</sup>*

I’m not sure whether I’m an old man dreaming or a young man having visions. Hopefully it was the latter as I was awake when I was prompted to start these books. It seems pretty



conclusive the promise is we will be enabled to dream dreams, see visions and prophesy.

And no-one is excluded...

- Men and women are involved
- Status is unimportant – we’re all servants
- Old and young are included
- There’s no nationality and ethnicity barrier – Peter was talking to people from a dozen different parts of the world.

God isn’t exclusive – He *“wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth”<sup>16</sup>* and once we do, He continues to speak to us and through us.

Although I’m not focusing on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit here, to dispel any illusions, it’s Biblical to believe the Holy Spirit wants to speak to us using different communication methods.

Over 50% Gifts of the Spirit outlined in 1 Corinthians 12 involve speech...

▶ **Message of wisdom**

*(older versions of the Bible use ‘word’)*

▶ **Message of knowledge**

▶ **Prophecy**

▶ **Speaking in different languages**

▶ **Interpretation of those languages**

It could be stretched to include **gifts of healing** – in James 5:16 we confess our sins to one another to be healed so that involves speech.

All five-fold ministries in Ephesians 4:11 depend on communication. Apostles, Evangelists and Prophets speak the Word of God and effective Pastors and Teachers share God’s Word orally.

And we have God-given intelligence and creative minds for a purpose. We can think through situations and feel emotions prompting us to action. Spontaneous thoughts, associations and ideas are all used by God to communicate His plans and purposes.

We can speak to God at any time – there’s no need for an appointment, no special ritual or ceremony to perform and we don’t have to go through someone else to *“approach the throne of grace with confidence”<sup>17</sup>* to receive God’s help when needed.

It’s an amazing privilege to hear God speaking to us but the critical question is, are we willing to listen? Listening is always the first stage to hearing but sometimes there are obstacles.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 2:17-18 referring to Joel 2:28 ff

<sup>16</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4

<sup>17</sup> Hebrews 4:16





A person wearing white, flowing robes is shown from the side, with their arms raised in a gesture of praise or prayer. The background is a dark, starry space with a gradient of purple and blue light, suggesting a celestial or divine atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

I will pour out  
**MY SPIRIT** on  
*all people.*  
*Your sons and*  
*daughters*  
**will PROPHECY,**  
*your old men*  
**will DREAM**  
**DREAMS,** *your*  
*young men* **will**  
**SEE VISIONS.**

**JOEL 2:28**



# WHAT STOPS US LISTENING?

Sometimes there are potential 'reception blockers' – here are three I've encountered:

## ➤ Business

Diaries, schedules, and appointments are useful tools but can get in the way of relationships – with God and other people.

Life is demanding – careers to forge; bills to pay; goals to achieve – but if busyness rules our lives, God is forced into a timeslot in an electronic organiser. Perhaps that's why people don't always recognise Christ in us during the week – we've planned Him out of daily activities. He's got His time and place – called Sundays – but not right now or here during the rest of the week.

I often need to remind myself to make time to seek Him rather than stop and shout 'help!' when crises arise. Is it time for us to be proactive rather than reactive, intentional and to prioritise our spiritual life, especially prayer?

One of my 'personal development areas' is to be more selective in what I take on. When I get alone with God, I have time to focus.

## ➤ Noisiness

Jesus told us when we pray we should find a quiet place<sup>18</sup> and modelled this in His prayer life as these 4 examples from each of the Gospels demonstrate:

- Early in the morning He prepared for His preaching ministry in a solitary place – Mark 1:35
- Before choosing the 12 Disciples he went up a mountain to pray alone –

Luke 6:12

- Prior to walking on water to rescue the Disciples from the lake storm, He'd been up all night praying – John 6:15
- In the Garden of Gethsemane before His betrayal, He prayed alone – Matthew 26:39

Maybe that's why the Holy Spirit speaks to me in the early hours when I'm not so distracted!



## ➤ Laziness

Half an hour in bed is usually more enticing than getting up to pray but like everything else in life, we achieve what we commit to.

Many of us dislike the word 'discipline' but we're called to be disciples and discipline is an integral ingredient in our spiritual growth and development.

Proverbs 10:27 in The Living Bible says, **"Reverence for the Lord adds hours to each day."** Whilst we can't literally 'manage time', we can use it more effectively and efficiently when we get our priorities right. We achieve much more when we discipline ourselves by putting God first.

Let's take another 'SELAH MOMENT' to reflect on any 'reception blockers' preventing us hearing God's voice more clearly.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 6:6

## RECOGNISING THE UNEXPECTED

Most of Jesus' miracles were unplanned interruptions to His schedule. Rick Warren, former Pastor of Saddleback Church says, *"Instead of following in the steps of Jesus we should follow in the steps of Jesus."*

Having a regular, preferably daily, quiet time of intimate communication with God is vital but we should also recognise sometimes the Holy Spirit puts unexpected opportunities in front of us.

Another 'BITESIZE BELIEFS' book - 'IDENTITY CRISIS' - recounts how at the hairdressers, a conversation I hadn't

anticipated led to an opportunity to pray for someone's healing. Let's be open to Holy Spirit '*promptings*' - wherever and whenever. Maybe it's speaking an encouraging, or challenging word, doing something we hadn't planned or committing to something seemingly '*out of the blue*'. We may meet someone unexpectedly and '*hear*' a quiet voice inside telling us to share something with them or take a certain course of action. Many of these '*interruptions*' may lead to opportunities '*down the line*' we hadn't anticipated.



There the angel  
of the Lord  
appeared to him  
in flames of fire  
from within a  
bush. Moses saw  
that though the  
bush was on fire  
it did not burn up.

EXODUS 3:2



## UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WILL?

A major question many struggle with is what they perceive to be the will of God for their lives, often involving the specific locations in which they should live, jobs and especially relationships, particularly prospective marriage partners.

I believe God is concerned with the details and specifics of our lives but I'm convinced He's more interested in our willingness to obey Him. Romans 12:1-2 are key verses: if we want to know God's *"good, pleasing and perfect will"* we are to become *"living sacrifices"* – God's definition of true worship – not conforming to the world's standards and value systems but allowing our minds to be transformed and renewed.

The Message Version provides a great paraphrase: *"Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention*

*on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it."*

The Scouts' motto *'be prepared'* succinctly encourages us to embrace any eventuality the Holy Spirit wants to bring our way. Impromptu promptings may be inconvenient – preventing us doing what we'd planned – but often produce extraordinary outcomes.

This book is a prime example. I didn't intend to write it, or a whole series, until I was awoken in the middle of the night. Inconvenient? Certainly, and I'll probably never know the full outcome, but God will use it all for His purposes.

If we had a burning bush to attract our attention like Moses<sup>19</sup> or Gideon's *double fleece and dew experience*<sup>20</sup> we'd be more confident about God's plans for us. But it's rare to have fanfares from heaven or have angelic choirs before we hear what God has planned. More often we have 'still small voice' experiences where He speaks in a "gentle whisper" as He did to Elijah<sup>21</sup> – sometimes more subtle means are needed to get through to us.

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 3:2

<sup>20</sup> Read Judges 4

<sup>21</sup> 1 Kings 19:12



## PERSPECTIVES AND CONTEXT

There's a key aspect we need to appreciate...

As humans, we're confined to a limited standpoint, but our Heavenly Father looks at everything from an eternal perspective. We're confined to time and space whereas He is outside of those restrictions. We can't see perfectly into the future, but because He's the ***"Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End"***<sup>22</sup> He knows the end game – there's always an eternal plan in play – a plan created before the world began.

1 Peter 1:20 tells us Jesus, ***"... was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake"*** and in Ephesians 1:4 (NLT) we read, ***"Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes"***.

We're an integral component in an eternal strategy to create an everlasting family of people redeemed by Jesus. We're not pawns in the hands of a manipulating cosmic potentate but loved by a gracious, merciful Heavenly Father who wants us to thrive and be a blessing to others as we willingly submit to His purposes.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can see how my business and professional experiences equipped me to become a church leader. Even the way in which our move to Shropshire occurred – a company promotion – was ordained. And there were several *'confirmations'* along the way.

Seemingly by chance, whilst visiting

some friends, we met a Church Pastor who was looking to move on to a new phase of ministry. Later, following his move, he phoned me out of the blue having heard from our friends I was being posted to the West Midlands, to suggest we should check out the church which he previously led.



Interestingly I'd passed through the town on my way home one evening (another coincidence?) and I'd thought it looked a lovely place, just like a *'city on a hill'*, never thinking we'd end up living there for 20+ years.

After joining the church, when the Minister retired, the congregation asked me to take on the role of Pastor, shortly after I'd taken a voluntary redundancy package from my company (coincidence number three?). Subsequently my previous experience as a Chartered Surveyor enabled me to negotiate the purchase of the adjoining property which became the Church Office and Community Centre.

Sure, none of these experiences were coincidences. I may not have realised the ultimate purpose for us to move to Shropshire but I was an integral element in the context of God's eternal masterplan as He miraculously worked His purposes out.

Before we wrap up, I have some other questions...

<sup>22</sup> Revelation 22:13

# HOW DO I KNOW IT'S GOD?

Here are a few principles:

## ➤ Check it out against Scripture

The Holy Spirit will never encourage anyone to do something that isn't validated by the Bible. He will not lead us to steal; kill someone; commit adultery; cheat or lie. He will check us if we're slandering or gossiping, acting pridefully way or putting others down. These just don't fit with Biblical principles of integrity, justice, mercy and loving others as we love ourselves.<sup>23</sup>



## ➤ Check it out with others

We need trustworthy people's input and perspectives.

Proverbs 27:17 says, *"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."* I'm so grateful for Rosalyn's and other close friends' wise counsel, developing me and knocking off some of my rough edges. We may have a personal relationship with God, but faith is

designed to be shared – with those interested in starting a relationship with God and with Christians with whom we have fellowship.

There are over fifty *'one another's'* in the New Testament providing us with an operational manual to use in our relationships with others. We're not designed to be loners and need people around us to guide and instruct us. My advice to anyone who doesn't have a close confidante with whom they can share is to find one – without delay.

## ➤ Check it out with yourself

The Bible says we need faith to please God,<sup>24</sup> but whilst He may put us in new situations where our faith is stretched, He promises to never put us in a position in which we can't cope.<sup>25</sup>

He's fully aware of our natural gifts, abilities and talents; what we like and dislike; our personalities and make-up; how we act, react and interact with different people – He did make us after all – so why would He want to put us in a totally unnatural position?

There will be times when we get it wrong and when we fail, but if anyone finds teenagers an irritation, becoming a youth leader is unlikely to be a viable option. And someone who can't sing a note in tune or competently play a musical instrument isn't likely to be a suitable candidate to lead worship – although some people may have had experiences that will lead them to disagree with that statement!

Yes, we need to play to our strengths but sometimes we need to step outside of our established comfort zones and take a risk – that's what faith is all about.

<sup>23</sup> Mark 12:31

<sup>24</sup> Hebrews 11:6

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:13



## WHAT IF I DON'T HEAR FROM GOD?

In any relationship there are times of silence – even in our interaction with God, not because He has given up on us but there's a host of reasons why our wavebands might not be connecting. Here are a few:

### ➤ It's not the right time

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 outlines a key principle – there's ***"a time for everything and a season for every activity under the heavens"***. Timing is vital in every aspect of life as someone once said, *"God answers prayer in four ways: yes; no; wait; or I've got a better option."*

In preparing us for a better way He can see but we can't, we many need to develop the ***"fruit of patience"***, or persistence, instead of asking, *"Lord, give me patience but do it quickly"*.

God's timetable runs on eternity schedules not Greenwich Mean Time. He will eventually come through so instead of wanting Him to fit into our agenda, let's wait for His perfect timing.

### ➤ Spend more time with Him

God isn't like a slot machine – put in a prayer and receive an answer. Apparent silence may mean He's longing to spend more time with us before responding.

In times of silence, it's vital to maintain a close relationship with Him. Satan will attempt to derail us by making us doubt there's no point in waiting and watching for God's reply, but we should trust more, not less – it's not a time to quit in a huff and *'take our ball home'*.

### ➤ Something needs to change in us

If we haven't done what God's previously asked of us or we're involved in something we know deliberately offends Him, it will destroy our intimacy with Him and our ability to hear His voice.

The solution is simple and obvious – confess any disobedience, where appropriate ask for forgiveness or forgive someone else, and make restitution to anyone who has been hurt or offended by our words or actions.

Any combination of the three reasons above could be in play. But remember God is always interested in our lives – we may be waiting for answers but He's always working behind the scenes.

Isaiah 60 is a wonderful prophetic vision for Israel's future – the final stanza of verse 22 says, ***"At the right time, I, the Lord, will make it happen"***.<sup>26</sup> Remember the eternal perspective – He sees our lives from a different viewpoint than us and has all the time required to accomplish His purposes.

It may be uncomfortable, but waiting develops and hones the faith muscles we'll need in the future.



<sup>26</sup> Isaiah 60:22b (NLT)



## THE END IS ACTUALLY THE BEGINNING

This certainly isn't the definitive work on hearing God's voice – it's an introduction; an appetiser; a warm-up lap before the main race and here's a final **'SELAH MOMENT'** to consider.

As children learn to walk by taking small steps, our *'spiritual walk'* develops slowly, to acquire the balance necessary to confidently take huge strides. It's incremental progress not gigantic leaps.

Those small steps happen when we make ourselves available to God; listen to the Holy Spirit's promptings and try to emulate the way Jesus lived on

earth by loving and serving others. I've found when I commit each day to His purposes, He speaks into my life and shows me His will.

This may be the end of this short book but every day is a new beginning for us so now it's up to us to put into practice what we've learned – and go for it!

Here's that final **'SELAH MOMENT'** and a few questions to consider.

➤ **How willing are we to develop a deeper relationship with God?**

This isn't a competition – there aren't

extra brownie points for the number of hours we spend in prayer although the more time in seeking God, the more beneficial it will be. It's about quality not quantity.

➤ **When are we at our best to stop and listen?**

Some people function better in the morning and others later in the day. The Holy Spirit usually speaks to me early in the morning before I get distracted by the tasks on my to-do list and when I can "be still and know..."<sup>27</sup> and focus.

We all need to work out when is best for us and remember, our Heavenly Father is available 24/7.

➤ **What Bible verses have we prayed over our life or for other people?**

There are many Bible promises to personalise and claim, including:

<sup>27</sup> Psalm 46:10

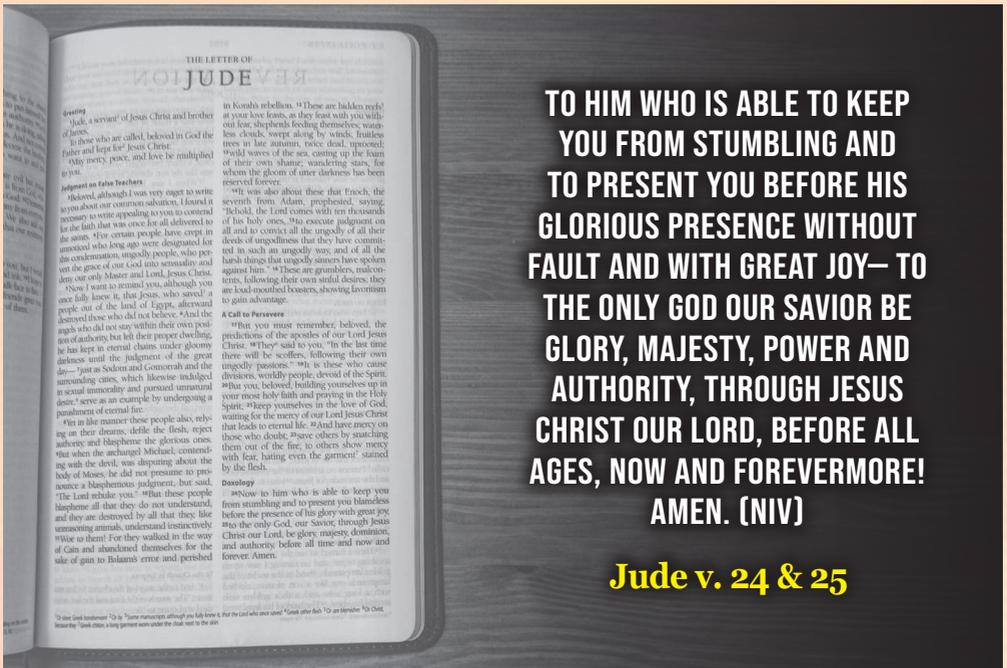
- Using the Lord's Prayer or Psalm 23 as a template and personalising the stanzas.
- There are at least 28 benedictions and doxologies in the Bible. For the non-theologians, benedictions are prayers of blessing or guidance, and a doxology is a short hymn of praise.

For starters look at Ephesians 1:16-23 to note how the Apostle Paul prays for the church or Jude 24-25 and pray them verbatim or adapt them creatively to pray for ourselves or people.

➤ **What about resources to help?**

There are plenty of good books and multi-media facilities available if we find it difficult to find the right words. Sign up for an online devotional – there are many to choose from, like Carl Brettle's *Faith Lift*, which is available via:

[www.faithlift.org](http://www.faithlift.org)





## LISTEN... LEARN... LIVE IT OUT

I pray this short book initiates a desire to begin a closer relationship with God and hear His voice, but it's only the first stage in a life-long journey. The Holy Spirit's desire is to share words of comfort, encouragement, and challenge because He has great plans for our lives.

Jesus said, ***"My sheep know my voice"***<sup>28</sup> and in living out these principles we will grow in spiritual maturity, achieve God's

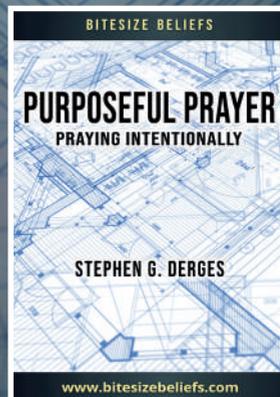
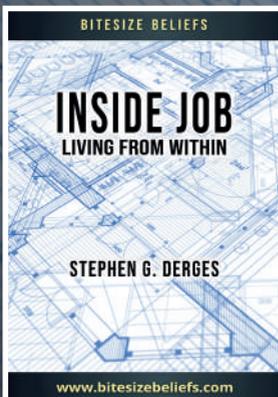
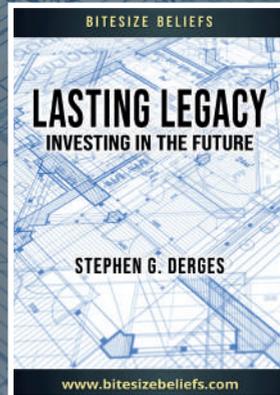
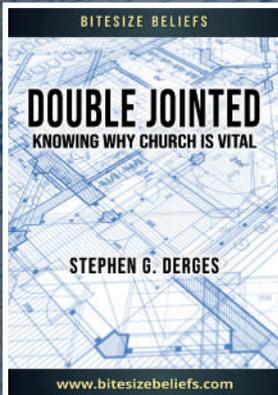
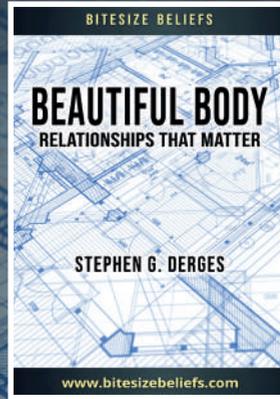
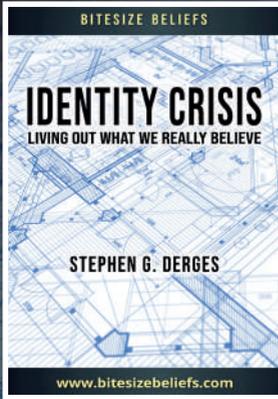
will for our lives and others will begin to understand God love for them. When someone notices our faith and asks us ***"to give the reason for the hope that is within us"***<sup>28</sup> we'll be able to share who Jesus is – but only if we're ready and prepared to listen, hear and obey.

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<sup>28</sup> John 10:27

<sup>29</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

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**BELIEVING**TOGETHER

We are bombarded by 'messages' all the time but what's important, trustworthy, and truthful?

If God 'speaks' today, how, when and where – and do we know it's God anyway?

If you've ever struggled with questions like these (and others) this short book will help you discover answers. Written in a practical, no-nonsense style, rather than a theological treatise, in a convenient 'pamphlet-style' book that can be read in one sitting over a cup of tea or coffee.

Find out that God wants to communicate with us and He has many ways in which He does!



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

Stephen Derges was previously Pastor of a Baptist Church and now a Trustee focused on leading an independent evangelical church in Devon.

He writes for various publications and websites, speaks at churches and conferences and has broadcast on local radio and television on faith and business leadership. Both he and his wife are certified Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® practitioners.

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