

LISTENING TO GOD – BUT NOT REALLY LISTENING
By Rick Boxx

Richard Blackaby, an author and international speaker, tells the story about a businessman who expressed frustration that God had been silent when he sought wisdom about whether to accept an offer for a new job. This man claimed he had taken the job because he did not hear from God. It turned out to be a terrible decision.

Blackaby said while talking with the individual, he began asking some probing questions: “What did your wife think about the job?” “Oh, she never liked the idea,” the businessman replied.

Next, Blackaby asked about whether the man had consulted with his pastor. “He’s not a business guy, so I ignored him!” he responded. “Even my son told me not to take the job, but he’s just a kid.” Immediately recognizing what the problem might be, Blackaby observed, “It sounds like God spoke several times. You just weren’t listening.”

One of the most common questions about trying to live out one’s faith when confronting the challenges of life and work is, “How can I know God’s will?” We find examples in the Bible of individuals to whom God did speak directly and personally – Noah, who was instructed to build a huge ark; Moses at the burning bush; the prophet Eli when he was just a boy; Saul (who became the apostle Paul) on the road to Damascus, and others.

Perhaps you know of someone who claims to have heard God clearly speaking to them. Yes, the Lord can work that way, but such instances are very rare. He typically does not communicate with us audibly, post a message on a billboard, or use neon signs. Most often, God speaks to us in a variety of other ways. Let’s consider some of them:

God speaks through His Word. The 66 books of the Bible’s Old and New Testaments are packed with truths and principles applicable for everyday life, even for the 21 st century marketplace. As one top executive once said, “It’s the best business book I ever read.” I agree. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training and righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

God speaks through godly counsel. Sometimes we resist seeking advice or fail to heed what we are told because it goes contrary to our desires. But trusted, godly counselors – peers, colleagues, an intuitive spouse, and even a perceptive child – can help us avoid making life-altering wrong decisions.

“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure” (Proverbs 11:14).

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“Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise” (Proverbs 19:20).

God speaks through circumstances. In guiding us, God has a way of closing one door and opening another. “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). “A man’s steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?” (Proverbs 20:24).

The Lord can guide us in other ways as well, but the key is to listen and pay attention. In Matthew 11:15, Jesus said, “The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.” If we ask, God can choose to speak to us in any number of ways, but we do need to be willing to listen.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you – or someone you know – ever experienced God speaking to you in a very direct way? If so, what was that experience like? What were the circumstances?
2. Do you typically pray and seek God’s wisdom and guidance when making very important decisions? Why or why not?
3. In what ways do you think the Lord can speak to us through the Scriptures, giving us desired direction in planning, decision-making, and even correcting errors? Can you think of any examples?
4. How open are you to receiving and seriously considering advice and counsel offered by others? Would you be willing to accept the perspectives of your spouse, even if he or she does not work where you do or even have expertise in your chosen profession? Why or why not?

NOTE:

*If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
Psalm 119:9,11; Proverbs 10:9, 13:1, 15:22, 16:3, 19:21, 20:25, 21:30, 25:12*