

# HOW GOD GETS OUR ATTENTION

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Have you ever had an important message to tell someone, but you could not get that person's undivided attention?

Perhaps you thought, maybe I should try to communicate this at some later time, but the urgency pressed you to keep trying.

**God's messages to us are always important and timely, and they deserve our complete attention.** Why? He has charted a perfect course for our life. Knowing the future completely, He sees when our own plans do not align with His. When we begin to wander from His course, He will take numerous measures to capture our attention and protect us from harm.



As Christians, it is our responsibility to be wise travelers, alert to our Master's voice as we journey through life. We must walk in the Spirit, which means being receptive and responsive to God's instruction, no matter how He chooses to speak. We must know how to distinguish between His voice and the others that vie for our attention: the opinions of our peers, rebellious attitudes, and lust for what the world offers.

All too often, the Lord's wisdom is muffled by the clamor of daily life. Sometimes we start out with God's agenda but get so far ahead of Him that we can no longer hear His voice. Preferring to do things our own way, we lose contact with our only true Guide.

God's objective in communicating with us is that we become conformed to the image of His Son and express His love to the world. He speaks primarily in four ways: through His Word, through His Holy Spirit, through another person, and through the circumstances in our life. Ideally, we should be so attuned to His voice that we hear as soon as He speaks. If you have been a Christian long enough, you have probably experienced this when the Holy Spirit prompted you in the middle of work or another activity, you sensed it right away and knew exactly what to do.

Unfortunately, we are not always spiritually alert. For such situations, God has a number of ways to help us take notice.

## A Restless Spirit

One of the simplest ways God gets our attention is by making us restless. When King Ahasuerus was unable to sleep, he ordered that the royal record books be read. As a

result, he discovered his life had been saved by Esther's uncle. In wanting to honor Mordecai, the king unwittingly set in motion a chain of events that caused Haman's planned annihilation of the Jews to be exposed. ([Esther 6, 7](#)) The Jewish nation was spared because the king was alerted when God gave him a restless spirit.

If you experience a restlessness deep within, something you sense but cannot quite identify, the wise thing to do is stop and pray, "Lord, are You trying to say something to me?" God does not work the same way in everyone's life, but I believe His primary method for getting my attention is by giving me a restlessness to show I need a change of direction. As I reread my old journal entries, a pattern emerges each time God was about to move me from one ministry opportunity to another, I would become very restless for a few months. This is a very gentle method God uses to correct our course.

## A Spoken Word

A second way God gets our attention is by a word spoken through someone else. Wanting to give Eli a message, the Lord woke the priest's young helper by calling his name. ([1 Samuel 3:4-9 \(NIV\)](#))

**<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am."**

**<sup>5</sup> And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.**

**<sup>6</sup> Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."**

**<sup>7</sup> Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.**

**<sup>8</sup> The LORD called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy.**

**<sup>9</sup> So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.**

At first, the boy did not realize it was the voice of God. Eli had to instruct him to listen carefully because God had a special message for him. Young Samuel did not know the Lord as deeply as did Eli, so God used the priest to pass along a word of encouragement to the boy. In a similar way, God also had Eli's attention for the forthcoming message He would deliver through Samuel. ([1 Samuel 3:11-18 \(NIV\)](#))

**<sup>11</sup> And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle.**

**<sup>12</sup> At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end.**

**<sup>13</sup> For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons made themselves contemptible, and he failed to restrain them.**

**<sup>14</sup>Therefore, I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"**

**<sup>15</sup>Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision,**

**<sup>16</sup>but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." Samuel answered, "Here I am."**

**<sup>17</sup>"What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you."**

**<sup>18</sup>So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes."**

## **An Unusual Blessing**

A third way that God speaks is no doubt the method that most people prefer: by blessing us in an unusual way. The blessing might be related to home, work, spiritual growth, finances, or health. But the Lord does not always choose this method.

For those who turn away and refuse to depend upon Him, a lavish blessing would likely result in even greater independence and self-centeredness. God would be totally ignored. If you are an overly self-sufficient person, be aware that the Lord may use some other method to get your focus onto Him. But remember that no matter which method He uses to get our attention, it is, without exception, an expression of His love.

## **Unanswered Prayer**

The fourth method is not pleasant: sometimes God will answer a prayer with "No." In [2 Samuel 12:16-18 \(NIV\)](#) **<sup>16</sup>David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground.**

**<sup>17</sup>The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. <sup>18</sup>On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While the child was still living, we spoke to David but he would not listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate."**

David implored God to save his infant son's life, but the child died. It is important to point out that God loves everybody equally, but He has different purposes for each life. The child's death was used to get David's attention in an extreme situation involving the nation's leader who deliberately acted against the will of God.

Sin is one reason the Lord will use unanswered prayer to get our attention. Even if what we pray may itself be the will of God perhaps even exactly what He wants to do. The Lord may close the doors of heaven and refuse to answer that prayer as a way of forcing us to examine ourselves. When necessary, God uses drastic measures, but we must never take it upon ourselves to pass judgment against fellow believers. That task belongs solely to the Lord.

## **Disappointment**

God will sometimes use disappointment to get us to listen. In [Numbers 14](#), the nation of Israel was poised at the border of the Promised Land, ready to take possession of it.

However, their spy "committee" voted ten to two against possessing what God promised to give them in battle. The Scripture describes His judgment upon the nation for their unbelief. The people acknowledged that they had indeed sinned, but had changed their mind and desired to enter the land. However, the Lord said no it was too late. While there must have been a tremendous sense of disappointment and mourning, God certainly had their attention. It was for their benefit that He revealed the error of not trusting Him. In a similar way, God today allows setbacks to keep us from charting our own course rather than doing His will.

## Extraordinary Circumstances

Sometimes God will use bizarre or unusual circumstances to get us to stop and listen. In [Exodus 3:1\(NIV\)](#) <sup>1</sup> **Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.**, Moses saw a bush that was on fire but not consumed. As he approached to investigate, the Lord spoke to Him from the flame. You and I must learn to look for the presence of God in every circumstance of life. He leaves His footprints and handiwork all around us, and we will recognize them more often when we are watchful.

## Defeat

Another method God uses is defeat. Following the Lord's stunning victory over Jericho, the Israelites approached the small town of Ai with overconfidence, and they neglected to fight in God's strength or with His military plan. ([Joshua 7](#)) God got Joshua's attention by letting him fail miserably. But notice there is a big difference between failing and being a failure. A terrible defeat may prove to be the greatest stepping-stone to success when we are wise enough to ask, "Lord, what are You saying?"

## Financial Troubles

In the book of Judges, "every man did what was right in his own eyes" and the nation fell into idolatry and disobedience. ([Judges 17:6](#)) God brought judgment through the Midianites, who devastated the land, leaving neither livestock nor possessions. At what point did the Israelites finally cry out to the Lord? When He took away every material belonging and drove the people into caves and mountains to hide for their lives. ([Judges 6:6 NIV](#)) <sup>6</sup> **Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help.** God knew exactly what it would take to get their attention. And when they did turn to Him, He delivered them from their oppressor and blessed them.

## Tragedy, Sickness, and Affliction

While we must never look at someone else's situation and presume why God allows a calamity, we should regard our tragedies and afflictions as reasons to inquire of the Lord, "What are You trying to say?" When King Hezekiah became prideful, God used illness to alert him to the problem. ([2 Chronicles 32:24 \(NIV\)](#)) <sup>24</sup> **In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. He prayed to the LORD, who answered him and gave him a miraculous sign.** Similarly, when Saul of Tarsus was persecuting Christians, he was stricken with blindness then the Lord certainly had his attention!

**At any given moment,** God knows exactly where you are in your journey and precisely what it will take to get your attention. So be alert; notice if any of God's methods are occurring or recurring in your life. Ask Him what He wants to tell you, and then listen, not simply to hear, but to obey. God wants to communicate because of His love for you and His desire to give you a hope and a future. [Jeremiah 29:11 \(NIV\)](#)

**<sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.**