

# HEARING GOD

DISCERNING HIS VOICE

## LIFE GROUP STUDY • WEEK 5

WEEK OF FEB 18



### READING ASSIGNMENT

*A Simple Guide to Experience Miracles* by JP Moreland – Chapter 7, pages 147-181



### GETTING STARTED

This weekend, we continued our series, *Hearing God* and learned that once we are grounded in the Word of God, we can then learn to hear and discern God's voice—both internally and externally.

As you begin this study, spend a few minutes *looking to Jesus as our model for life*. As you read Jesus' words, ask the Holy Spirit to empower you and help you follow His example.

*For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say. **John 12:49-50***



### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. This weekend we looked at a variety of ways God speaks to us, both internally and externally. What was one new thing you learned about hearing God's voice?
2. Joel taught about four ways that God speaks to us:
  - *Hearing God on the Inside: through Conscience and Oughtness*
  - *Hearing God on the Outside: through Others and Circumstances*
  - a. Which of these ways occurs most often or comes most naturally to you?
  - b. How have you experienced God speaking to you in this way?
3. JP Moreland shares a powerful story of one of his experiences hearing the supernatural voice of God. Read the story on pages 161-163. What is your initial response to this story? Is it surprising to you that God would communicate in this way? How so?
4. On page 155 of *Miracles*, JP Moreland writes:

*I think God speaks to us in ways we will understand, so one approach does not fit every person or situation. But by reflecting on cases in which we very likely heard*

*God's voice, we can learn, through trial and error, to discern how God's voice sounds to us. We learn to interpret the Scriptures through trial and error, learn from our mistakes, and do better the next time, so why not use that method regarding extrabiblical divine speaking?*

- a. Hearing God is a skill we can learn through trial and error, which is the same way we learn to interpret Scripture. How can you be more bold and intentional about practicing this skill in order to grow in learning to hear God's voice?
5. Conscience is the innate sense of morality that gets activated within us as the Holy Spirit is working in us. Read Ezekiel 36:26-27. How have you experienced God changing your desires and speaking to you through your conscience?
  6. Read the story of Paul's conversion in Acts 9:1-18. How does God use the gifts of prophecy, dreams, and visions to work in Paul's life?
    - a. When it comes to prophetic gifts, one mistake we can make is that we elevate our desire to have spiritual experiences over the reason why God gives them to us. The goal of fostering these gifts is not about what we get out of it, it's about building up His church. Read 1 Corinthians 14:3. How does Paul describe the purpose of prophecy?
  7. Joel gave us three quick thoughts on how to grow in hearing God through circumstances:
    - Ask people you trust (not just those who will say what you want to hear)
    - Move forward with purpose and open hands
    - Keep a record to look back on
    - a. Are there any decisions you are currently wrestling with that you can apply these principles to? How so?
  8. Sometimes, when we are trying to tune in to God's voice we pick up some "static"—maybe it's some distractions in our life, or maybe it's our dismissive or defiant posture toward God. One of the best things we can do when there is static on the line is to ask God to show us what's in the way. Take a moment and go before the Lord. Is there any static on the line that you need to acknowledge and remove?
  9. At the end of Joel's teaching, he asked one of our pastors, Andy Otis, to lead us in an exercise where we postured ourselves to listen to Jesus. Did you hear anything during this exercise? If so, what was it?
    - a. How might this exercise in learning to listen to Jesus help you going forward?

Christian God is real, and it is beyond reasonable doubt that he heals the sick today. And second, it means there are no completely lost, hopeless cases—no matter what the situation or how long we have prayed about it. So let's keep praying as we sense the need, and cry out with Jeremiah: "Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for You are my praise" (Jeremiah 17:14 NASB).

*Chapter 7*

## HEARING THE SUPERNATURAL VOICE OF GOD

**I**n a well-known quote, comedian Lily Tomlin gets to the heart of the matter: "Why is it that when we talk to God we're said to be praying but when God talks to us, we're schizophrenic?"<sup>1</sup> In the entertainment industry or the media, people who "hear from God" are almost always depicted as hucksters, deranged lunatics, or murderers. Even some Christians believe that God does not speak outside of his revelation in Scripture any longer. Yet the vast majority of Bible-believing Christians around the world do believe that, in addition to the Bible, God has specifically spoken to or guided them in one way or another.<sup>2</sup>

### FOUR INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this chapter, I will clarify the nature of how God speaks and give examples of six ways that God speaks directly to individuals or groups today (for example, church leaders). My purpose is not to defend each of these modes of divine communication, nor is this list intended to be exhaustive. Rather, I will give a brief perspective on each and share some real-life examples to build your faith in these supernatural interventions and enable you to seek God's voice more wisely and regularly. Before we dive into these examples, however, let's look at a few principles to guide us on our journey.

**First, the inspired, inerrant Word of God—the Bible—is the ultimate standard for any alleged word from God.** It provides us with the ultimate grounds for theology, doctrine, biblical ethics, and other matters on which it speaks. One way to learn how to recognize God’s speaking is to read, study, and sit under the teaching of the Bible. Claims outside the Bible can reinforce Scripture, address topics not explicitly or implicitly in Scripture, or possibly contradict or in some other way undermine biblical teaching. Claims in this third category—claims that undermine or contradict Scripture—are to be rejected and argued against. Those in the first—those that reinforce Scripture—are to be accepted with a grateful heart. And we are free to accept or reject those in the second category, depending on the evidence for them. All alleged cases of extrabiblical divine speech or guidance should be handled in this way.

**Second, there are a number of reasons God speaks to us personally.** God speaks to us to sustain an intimate, conversational relationship with us (Isaiah 58:9–11). He may speak to correct wrong thinking or actions (Philippians 3:15) or to apply the words of Scripture to our specific life situations (1 Corinthians 2:13–14). He also speaks to provide encouragement and edification (1 Corinthians 14:3) and to give us needed guidance (Psalm 143:10; John 10:3–4, 16, 27).

Regarding the issue of guidance, while I know I may be wrong about this, I am among those who believe that sometimes God has specific things he wants us to do and sometimes he doesn’t. Scripture and church history are full of examples in which God guided or spoke to someone about a specific thing he wanted that person to do. Yet when the prophet Nathan approached King David, rather than giving him direction from the Lord, Nathan said, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you.” (2 Samuel 7:3).<sup>4</sup> In other words, there are times when God wants to know what *we* want to do, and he

promises to back us up. After all, we exist to make real choices that really matter.

**Third, we should be aware of two objections to the reality of divine, extrabiblical communication.** The first objection is sometimes phrased this way: “When God speaks, he doesn’t whisper or speak unclearly.” These objectors point to the fact that much of alleged extrabiblical divine communication comes in the form of ambiguous impressions or thoughts that can be interpreted in a variety of ways. And these impressions do not measure up to the perspicuous clarity we find in the way God speaks to us in the Bible, and so they should be rejected on that basis. In response, we should point out that many cases of God’s speaking outside Scripture are crystal clear, so the objection is simply mistaken if raised against all examples of hearing God. In addition, the Bible does include some instances where God spoke unclearly to people.

The classic case involves the boy Samuel (1 Samuel 3), who did not understand or even clearly recognize that God was speaking to him until he finally received instructions from a wiser and more experienced mentor. There is also the example of the “gentle whisper” spoken to Elijah (1 Kings 19:12). The point of this passage seems to be that a standard way God speaks to people is not to bowl them over but rather to speak in such a way that someone must want to hear and listen carefully or they will miss what God is saying.

In the Old Testament we also read about “the company of the prophets” (1 Samuel 19:20 ESV, for example), or what some have called “the school of the prophets.” And what do you think they were studying together? Well, among other things, they were learning how to prophesy. And to do that, one must learn to hear what God is saying. If God’s speech is obvious and clear, why does one need training to discern what God is saying?

Finally, the Bible itself fails to live up to this extremely high standard. While there are clear texts in Scripture, many passages

also have various different interpretations. Even though only one can be correct, in cases like these, different interpretations all do justice to the text and it is unclear as to which one is the truth. Indeed, God has allowed his children to differ on what books should be in the Bible in the first place. I accept the Protestant canon, but there are hundreds of millions of Catholic believers who adopt a different canon. If there is a dispute about the canon of Scripture, surely there can be ambiguity in some cases as to whether an alleged word from God is in fact such a word.

I want to make a crucial application of this last point. Take any belief whatsoever, say, the belief that the state capital of Missouri is Columbia. There are three rational perspectives one can take about this belief. One can believe, disbelieve, or be fifty-fifty about it. It follows that we believe something if we are 51 to 100 percent certain—perhaps mistakenly; after all, we all have false beliefs—it is true. It also follows that the strength of a belief can vary. At an early stage in my Christian life, I was 55 percent sure that God answered prayer. I believed it, but not very strongly. As time went on, my confidence in this belief rose to 90 percent. And for many passages of the Bible I have what I believe is a correct interpretation of the passage, but I may be 55 percent, 60 percent, or 95 percent sure I am right.

The same is true of alleged cases of God speaking to someone. We don't have to be 100 percent certain God was the one speaking before we should accept that he was. If we are, for example, 70 percent certain we heard from the Lord, that's not a bad percentage. Of course, the less certain one is about a biblical interpretation or a case of divine speaking, the less strongly we should act on our belief. Still, if we are 51 to 100 percent certain, then we *do* believe the topic under consideration. Of course, just as we can be wrong in interpreting Scripture, so we can be wrong about hearing God. But so what? Just because we *might* be wrong doesn't mean we *are* wrong. My advice is that if we

believe we heard God correctly but our degree of certainty is low (for example, 55 percent) or the issue involved is very important, then we should ask God for extra confirmation that what we've "heard" was indeed from him.

A second objection is that Jesus is the unique, divine, messianic Son of God and as such is not a model for our hearing God speak to us. In other words, Jesus employed his divine prerogative when he did only what he saw the Father doing (John 5:19), but this does not apply to us mere humans. In response, I would say this objection is simply mistaken. New Testament scholars widely acknowledge that in the incarnation, Jesus did not utilize his divine nature but instead acted as a human being filled with the Spirit and living in constant communication with the Father. This is why we are exhorted to imitate him (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6), something that would be impossible if he had lived his earthly life from his divine nature.<sup>4</sup>

Among the ways that God speaks to us extrabiblically, I will focus on six in the pages to follow: impressions; thoughts and feelings; prophecy, word of knowledge, and word of wisdom; dreams and visions; angelic visitations; and life circumstances.

## SIX WAYS GOD SPEAKS TO US EXTRABIBLICALLY

### *1. God Speaks through Impressions*

There are different ways to describe what I will call "impressions" as one of the ways God speaks to us. It can be a sudden urge to do something, or perhaps a nudge, a prompting, or a sense that God is directing us in a specific way. It may be an intuitive awareness of God's presence and direction. Mark 2:8 tells us that "Jesus [was] *aware [epignous] in His spirit* that they were thinking that way within themselves" (NASB, italics added) and this can be an example of this sort of knowing. It is a sense, an intuitive

way of perceiving correctly something or other. The Greek word *epignous* (from *epiginosko*) means “to know experientially, to ascertain, to be directly aware of.”

This is similar to Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:18 that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened or illuminated, that we would have “spiritual eyesight.” The ancients believed, correctly in my view, that the chest area, especially the region where the heart organ is located, is a vehicle that human beings use to be directly aware or to sense or intuit invisible things, especially moral goodness and virtue. This is why in *The Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis bemoaned that today we produce “men without chests.”<sup>5</sup> By this, Lewis meant that while people respond to their reasoning minds and their visceral bellies, they no longer are able to perceive moral wisdom and virtue with the heart located in the chest.

In Nehemiah 7:5, Nehemiah announces that regarding a certain task, “my God put it into my heart.” This is another example of an impression—a nonverbal, intuitive awareness of what God wanted him to do. Before I illustrate this sort of speaking, here’s a short word of application: when you get up in the morning and at different times during the day, invite the Spirit to help you be aware of and discern divine nudges or impressions that come to you throughout the day. Such awareness is facilitated by habit-forming practice in seeking God’s voice and by an overall lifestyle with as much time for peace, silence, and solitude as possible, given your station in life.

Several years ago, I was preaching at a church in Southern California, and after my message, the pastor invited those who desired prayer to come to the front. We all stood as about ten people came forward. I was standing at the far left of the first row. As the pastor spoke some words to the congregation, my eyes kept being drawn to a young man near the back of the group, and I had the distinct impression that God wanted me to pray for him. It was just a sense I had, so I approached him to ask if I could pray.

Along the way, a clear thought had come into my mind from the outside: *Tell him not to leave his current ministry.* That was it. So after receiving permission to pray and lay hands on the young man, I said, “I have a sense that the Lord may be giving me a word for you—namely, you are not to leave your current ministry.” His jaw practically hit the floor. He responded, “Dr. Moreland, I graduated from Dallas Seminary, and I don’t believe in signs and wonders, including God’s ability to speak outside the Bible. But I heard you were preaching at this Vineyard church, so I came to hear you. Here’s the crazy thing—I’m a leader of a local parachurch ministry, and I’ve been struggling the last few weeks about whether or not I should leave and look for a new ministry. I have no idea how you knew this, but your words to me are exactly what I needed at this precise moment. May I call you at your home to talk further about this?” I agreed and gave him my number. And in the end he decided to stay where he was.

This example of hearing God began with an impression that I obeyed and turned into a series of thoughts that constituted a word of knowledge for this person. I’m sure you have had several experiences of the same sort. It may be edifying for you to attempt to recall some of them and share what you remember with a friend or family member. Remember, you don’t have to be certain it was God, and if you choose to step out based on the impression and are wrong, that’s okay—unless it’s such a crucial matter that a mistake could do great harm, in which case it’s wise to seek additional confirmation of the impression’s authenticity. As you experiment with this, you’ll find opportunities to grow.

## *2. God Speaks through Thoughts and Feelings*

We read in Nehemiah 2:12 that after arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah arose together with a few other men, but he refrained from telling anyone “what my God had put in my heart to do.” This sort of experience is not merely an impression or awareness

of a divine nudge; it is a cognitive experience that centers on receiving a series of thoughts that come directly from God.

Here's an example from my own life. In 2003, my family and I were hit with an unexpected financial crisis. Shortly thereafter, as I was taking a morning walk, I told the Lord that I was at a point where I really needed to see him intervene for me. A thought suddenly came to me: *Why don't you ask me to do something for you today?* I wasn't sure if it was the Lord or my own thoughts, but I responded to what I thought was his prompting and asked him to bring my family \$5,000 that very day. My faith was not particularly strong at this time. The mail came and went with no check. But at 5:40 that evening, completely out of the blue and totally unexpectedly, I received an amount *above what I had requested* (\$5,200) from someone who knew me but knew nothing of my situation. It was simply incredible, and besides the wonderful provision from God, this answer to prayer created "God confidence" in my entire family and me.

This amazing event provided me with an occasion to learn more effectively how to discern when God was the source of a series of thoughts I might have. Since my request in response to what I thought I had heard (a specific invitation) was miraculously granted, I had external confirmation that it actually was the Lord who invited me to ask him for something that very day as a way of allowing me to see him intervene on my behalf. So I reflected carefully on the precise nature of the experience, and I learned several things: (1) In contrast to my talking to myself, the series of thoughts had a distinctive feel of dawning on me from the outside. (2) The statement was in the first person: *Why don't you ask me [not God] to do something for you today?* When I talk to myself about God, I use the third person (for example, *Why doesn't God do something for me today?*). Over the years, I have noticed that when God is the source of a series of thoughts, they are expressed in the first person. (3) The thought's texture was

calm, steady, and matter-of-fact, with no nagging, no anxiety. (4) The thought had a feel of authority to it.

I think God speaks to us in ways we will understand, so one approach does not fit every person or situation. But by reflecting on cases in which we very likely heard God's voice, we can learn, through trial and error, to discern how God's voice sounds to us. We learn to interpret the Scriptures through trial and error, learn from our mistakes, and do better the next time, so why not use that method regarding extrabiblical divine speaking?

Here's another amazing example (names have been changed to protect privacy) that, miraculously, I was able to verify. About a year after Hope and I began attending Vineyard Anaheim in June 2003, a church friend named Brad Sweeney gave us a cassette tape (remember those?) and promised it would edify us if we listened to it. We listened, and what we heard was so wonderful that we both knew we would fervently seek to hear the Lord's voice for the rest of our lives. I hope my retelling of what we heard has the same effect on you.

The cassette contained a plenary speech from a conference on healing and hearing God, and from the crowd's applause, I'd guess there were five to seven hundred people in attendance. We listened to the plenary speaker, pastor Robert Reubens, PhD, and after a few minutes, he passed the microphone to his wife, Kathy Reubens, to share some things with the audience. Immediately, Hope and I both recognized some things about Kathy from the tone of her voice and her words. Clearly she was not used to being in front of an audience and was a bit sheepish in her presentation. But she had such a tender, warm, humble, and quiet spirit that it was hard not to feel love from and for this dear sister. Moreover, as unassuming as she was, Kathy kindly admonished the audience that when it comes to hearing God, we must be

filled with the Spirit, utterly dependent on the Lord, and completely committed never to try to manufacture anything. You could tell Kathy lived what she preached.

Kathy shared that in a junior high class she taught, a girl named Kaitlyn became very special to her. At a young age, Kaitlyn had been abandoned by both parents and was being raised by her grandmother. Unfortunately, Kaitlyn's grandmother had endured a difficult life and was a hardened, bitter person. While at home one day, Kathy received a phone call from the grandmother, something that had never happened before. In a deeply troubled tone of voice, the grandmother shared that Kaitlyn had disappeared and had been missing for three days. The grandmother had called all of Kaitlyn's friends and done everything she could think of to find her, all to no avail. So even though the grandmother was not a particularly religious woman, she was desperate to have Kathy pray for Kaitlyn to be found.

Feeling burdened in her heart, Kathy agreed. She acknowledged to God that he was omniscient and that he knew at that very moment where Kaitlyn was, and she asked for revelation to help find her. As Kathy reports it, later in the day, two thoughts came into her mind: the name of a woman and the name of a local town. Kathy knew no one by that name and had no idea where the town was, except that it was in Southern California. Because it was highly implausible that these two specific names would come to her under these circumstances, Kathy called the grandmother and shared what she had received from the Lord.

After hanging up, the grandmother called information, asking for a listing under that name in that specific town. And guess what? There was one, and only one, such listing, so the grandmother immediately called the number. What was about to happen shocks me to this day. When a woman

answered the phone, the grandmother asked her if she had found her granddaughter, Kaitlyn. The woman could not talk openly, because Kaitlyn was near her and she didn't want Kaitlyn to hear the conversation. So she chose to speak in broken sentences and managed to answer the grandmother's questions, beginning with a simple yes.

After a minute or two, Kaitlyn left the room and the woman could speak openly again, though she continued in hushed tones. She shared how earlier that day, while she was driving from Los Angeles to Palm Springs, she had spotted and driven by an attractive young girl walking on the side of the highway. As soon as she passed the girl, she sensed the Lord telling her to pull off the road and pick up the girl. She did just that, and the girl (who was Kaitlyn) had agreed to go to the woman's home for some food and a chance to freshen up.

The woman went on to tell the grandmother that she wanted to keep Kaitlyn for three days in order to lead her to Jesus and to guide her in the best way to return to her grandmother to work things out. Besides, the woman added, in three days, she had business to do in Los Angeles and, on her way, she would be happy to drop her off. The grandmother agreed, and after Kaitlyn returned to her grandmother's home, their relationship began to improve.

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I don't know about you, but to me this account is incredibly supernatural and encouraging. It whets my appetite to hear God more clearly. Hope and I could tell from Kathy's presence that she was telling the truth, but there is a miraculous sequel to the story that involved my attempts to verify it. For some reason, I believed that the Reubens pastored a church in the Los Angeles area, specifically, near Pasadena.



Wanting to interview them, I made dozens of calls to 411 for directory assistance, trying to locate them in several towns in the greater Los Angeles area, including surrounding counties like Orange County. I had absolutely no luck. I wondered why God did not help me find them, but I would learn three years later that God had other plans.

I gave up my search, but in the mentoring group I led each semester at Talbot School of Theology, I played the tape for each group as an encouragement to their faith. As a result, the incident came to my mind four or five times a year, and each time, I prayed that God would somehow help me find the Reubens.

In July 2007, our church held a four-day training conference, with 2,500 to 3,000 attendees from all over the country. Hope and I attended the entire event, and on the second day, a friend at the conference asked me to go to lunch with him. He said he wanted me to meet a couple who were his close friends. He thought it would be edifying for us to meet each other, so we went to Keno's for lunch.

As it turned out, they were a pastoral couple at a church in Ohio, and after a few minutes, I started feeling odd. I didn't know what was happening until it dawned on me that I recognized the wife's voice (I didn't remember their last name at the time), and moreover, I knew she was the Kathy who had shared her testimony about Kaitlyn. I was able to interview both of them and came away with no doubt at all about the veracity of their testimony.

Now what were the odds of me going to lunch with, or in some other way meeting and recognizing, the Reubens, given that I had no idea they were in Ohio and that 2,500 to 3,000 people were at the conference? Even if I had met them, how would I have known they were the very people I had prayed to meet over the last three years? The intelligent

agent principle provides the answer: *small probability + independent specialness* [I had prayed to meet and interview this very couple] = *an event brought about by an intelligent agent* [in this case, a miraculous, specific answer to prayer].

Besides a series of thoughts, sometimes God speaks to us by causing a bodily sensation in our bodies and, subsequently, giving us an impression of what it means. As Jack Deere notes, while this form of divine speaking can be abused, nevertheless, "Today it is not uncommon for God to speak to . . . people through bodily signs."<sup>6</sup> For example, one evening before I was speaking at our church, my friend Brian Slezak stood next to me and asked if he could pray for me. Little did he know that I was experiencing cramping in my stomach and a sense of oncoming diarrhea.

As Brian began to pray, suddenly he shared that a feeling of cramping and instability entered his stomach out of the blue. Based on past experience, Brian asked me if I was having troubles with my stomach. I was absolutely shocked he would bring up such a thing. After I acknowledged my problem, Brian prayed for healing, and—I am not exaggerating—the problem completely disappeared and did not come back. Honestly, I had been afraid I was going to have to run out to the bathroom right in the middle of my talk (and I feared I wouldn't make it there!). But after his prayer, the normal calmness in my stomach gave me confidence that the problem was behind me (pun intended), and I went on to enjoy the rest of the meeting.

### *3. God Speaks through Prophecy, Word of Knowledge, and Word of Wisdom*

In 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul admonishes us to "follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy." Gordon Fee observes, "It should be noted that the imperatives are directed to all, not to a select group of 'prophets.' One may assume

therefore, that even though in reality not all will be 'prophets' (12:29), nonetheless prophesying is as available to all as [is] the command to pursue love."<sup>7</sup> According to Sam Storms, prophecy is "the human report of a divine revelation."<sup>8</sup> The phrases "word of knowledge" and "word of wisdom" are used only once in Scripture (1 Corinthians 12:8 NASB), and while the context helps us understand what they mean, there is no consensus on the matter.

As a working definition of these three concepts, I offer one given to me by a well-known New Testament colleague at Talbot School of Theology: "I would define prophecy as an inspired word or revelation from God for encouragement and edification, the word of wisdom as an inspired word from God characterized by wisdom (for example, giving perspective or insight into a situation), and a word of knowledge as an inspired word from God of a more factual basis in regard to a particular situation."<sup>9</sup> To save space in what follows, I will use "prophetic word" or simply "word" for all three.

Over the last seventeen years, I have received a prophetic word for someone approximately two hundred times, and the vast majority of these have been during times I was praying over and laying hands on that person. Many times the word was so clearly confirmed as being from the Lord that its presence in my life sustained and increased my intimacy with God. I acknowledge that I am fairly well-known as a speaker, professor, and author. But I assure you that when it comes to miracles, including receiving words from the Lord, I am very, very ordinary. The reason I have received so many prophetic words for people resides in my willingness to risk, to offer a word and be mistaken, and to regularly lay hands on and pray for people after church, inviting the Spirit to come and speak if he so desires. Here are a few of a multitude of stories I could tell. Let them encourage your faith and move you to risk more often while praying for the sick and hurting.

On July 6 and 7, 2007, I spoke four times at a global leadership development conference held at Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, California. Both days I was scheduled to speak at 10:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., giving lectures on apologetics for an hour and a half, along with a question and answer time. The conference was led by my Talbot colleague professor Ben Shin and a few others. The forty-day training conference focused primarily on twentysomething Korean Americans, with participants from thirty states and five other countries. I would guess around 100 to 120 Koreans attended the conference.

I was to deliver my second lecture on Friday night at 7:00 p.m., but when I arrived, I was informed that there would be a full worship time before I spoke, so my talk would begin around 8:30 or so. During worship, I sat at the back of the small auditorium. Moved by the worship, I asked the Lord if there was anything he wanted to say to the attendees when I spoke. I quieted my heart and mind, held my hands out with my palms up, and waited.

In less than a minute, these thoughts came to me: *There are people here who are demonized and unable to sleep at night or derive any benefit from the conference. I want you to cast the demons out of them. And there's a man named Mike who came to the conference right after a painful confrontation with his pastor. He's blaming himself for what happened, but it was the pastor, not Mike, who caused harm to the other. I want you to identify him and tell him he needs to confront his pastor about the truth of what happened so as to bring repentance for that behavior.*

I am not exaggerating what I received—not even one little bit. And based on the tone in comparison with other times I had verified words from the Lord, along with the oddness of the word that was given (it surely wasn't something

that would bubble up from my unconscious mind—after all, I had never met a Korean American named Mike), I was about 70 percent certain it was truly from Jesus. At the end of my talk and after an extended Q and A session, I looked at my watch and saw that it was already 10:15 p.m. So I said, “Before I leave, I believe the Lord has given me something to share with you, so please close your eyes and open yourself to God.” I went on to express what I had received earlier from the Lord. When I finished, I divided the crowd into groups of four or five people, had them close their eyes again, and prayed a deliverance prayer over the group, commanding any demon present to leave. When we had finished, I drove home and slept soundly.

On Saturday morning, I was to speak at 10:00 a.m., but I arrived at the parking lot around 9:15. The conference leader and three students were waiting for me, and the leader approached my car as I was getting out. I thought to myself, *Oh no! He was offended by what I did last night, and I’m not sure what’s about to happen.* But I was dead wrong. The leader asked, “Do you know what happened last night?” When I told him I did not, he said, “After you left, the Holy Spirit’s presence filled the room, and students stayed in their groups until 2:00 a.m., crying out to the Lord, confessing sin, asking for his help, and so on. It was incredible! And by the way, three students are waiting to speak with you. The first one is Mike.” I honestly replied, “Are you kidding me? Is there really someone named Mike at the conference? I’ve never heard of a Korean American named Mike!” The leader replied—no joke—“There is one person here named Mike, and he needs to talk.”

After introducing himself to me in the parking lot, Mike said, “You have no idea the importance of what you said last night. How did you know all that?” I said, “Well, I was only

70 percent certain it was from the Lord, and I just took a risk and gave what I believed he gave me to say.” Mike went on: “Just before coming to the conference from my home on the East Coast, my girlfriend and I had an appointment with our senior pastor, who was rude and harsh toward us. Ever since that time, I’ve blamed myself for what happened since our pastor is a well-known Christian leader. I was unwilling to acknowledge to myself what I knew deep down—that it was really our pastor who needed to ask us for forgiveness. It has been eating me up all summer.”

After I expressed my sadness at what had happened to them, Mike said, “There’s one other thing I need to tell you. Part of this forty-day program is the chance to hear outside speakers like you. Next weekend, guess who’s going to be the outside speaker? My pastor! The timing of what you said could not have been better. Now I know I need to admonish him next week for what he did, and I have a week to pray about it. Thank you for letting God use you.”

After Mike walked away, two young women approached me. They hadn’t really known each other and were staying in different dorm rooms, but each told me they had been experiencing a kind of darkness and sleeplessness ever since they had come to the conference (since around the middle of June). They both told me that as I had commanded the demons to leave the night before, a sense of darkness had left them that was replaced by a warm presence, and they had slept soundly Friday night for the first time since they arrived.

Here is yet another personal example with an important lesson as well.

In July 1999, our church hosted a five-day worship and training conference that brought about three thousand

people from around the country. On the first evening, a dynamic time of worship was scheduled, and the sanctuary was packed to overflowing. While Hope and I were sitting in the front section waiting for the service to begin, I felt a tap on my right shoulder. Turning around, I saw a dear pastor-friend I'll call Aaron Smith from Northern California whom I hadn't seen in twenty years. We hugged, and he expressed his gratitude for being able to attend the conference and went to sit in the back in the sanctuary's upper-middle section.

After worship, an invitation was extended for those who wanted prayer to come to the front of the church. I'd estimate that about four hundred people responded. As I was sitting there, Pastor Aaron walked right by me on his way to the front. As he got on his knees to pray, I decided to join him, so I stood behind him, placed my right hand on his left shoulder, and silently prayed for Aaron. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a clear message came to me: *Tell him that I see him and that I approve of his ministry.* It was short and sweet, so I bent down and whispered, "Aaron, I believe Jesus may have given me a word for you: 'Tell him that I see him and that I approve of his ministry.'"

This is simply not the way I normally talk. I would usually say something like, "God is aware of your situation and is pleased by your ministry." But I've learned from experience to give the person exactly what I heard—nothing more, nothing less—so that's what I did.

Aaron began to weep uncontrollably from deep inside, so I asked him what had happened and how I could help him. I will never forget what he shared. "J. P., I've been going through a very dark, difficult time for several months. And while sitting in the upper section before the service began, I cried out to Jesus, 'Lord, do you even see me? Do you

approve of my ministry?' I prayed the exact words you gave me, and I know it had to be from the Lord. My tears are tears of deep gratitude, relief, and love." I am so glad I spoke exactly what I was given to say.

Here is another very interesting case in which God used prophetic words as clear guidance for a couple. This account was shared a number of times from the pulpit at our church, and the man involved confirmed all of the following details to me on May 13, 2020.

Lance Pittluck was born in Long Island, New York, and was raised in a secular Jewish family. When Lance was old enough to live on his own, he moved to Southern California to surf. There he found Jesus, eventually graduated from Fuller Seminary, and became a leader at Vineyard Anaheim.

In 1984, Lance returned to his childhood neighborhood on Long Island, where he pastored a church and helped pave the way for other church plants until 1997. In the summer of 1997, Lance attended a Monday through Friday conference at Vineyard Anaheim, the church founded and pastored by John and Carol Wimber. During the conference, Carol pulled Lance aside and shocked him by saying that, based on a long time of praying, she and John believed that the Lord wanted Lance to return to Southern California to pastor Vineyard Anaheim. John was dealing with a cardiovascular disease and eventually died on November 17, 1997. Carol went on to say that Lance needed to hear this leading from God himself, and they were willing to wait to see what would happen. Lance told me he doubted the whole thing and simply dismissed the idea. He loved his ministry in New York and had no intention of leaving. But all of that was about to change.

According to Lance, from that Wednesday to Friday, completely out of the blue, he received thirty independent prophetic words from people all over the country (including one man who called Lance from New Zealand). None of them knew that any of the others had received such a word, and no one knew anything at all about what the Wimbers and Lance had discussed.

One person woke up in the middle of the night right after a dream in which he saw a map of the United States with a flaming arrow departing from New York, shooting across the country, and landing on Vineyard Anaheim church in Southern California. The Lord told the man that the dream was about Lance and that it meant he was to leave New York and pastor Vineyard Anaheim. By Friday, Lance shared with me that he had received these thirty prophetic words, and all of them were specific and clear. On Saturday while sitting at a coffee shop, Lance heard God say to him, "You know what you need to do." Starting in October 1997, Lance Pittluck and his wife, Cheryl, became the lead pastors of Vineyard Anaheim until 2017.

Here is another case involving my wife, Hope, in which God used a prophetic word to reach out to someone who needed prayer. I was there when this happened, along with Klaus and Beth Issler, who also witnessed the entire event.

One Sunday morning after the sermon, our pastor, Lance Pittluck, waited quietly for a bit before inviting people to come to the front to receive prayer. Then Lance proclaimed to the congregation that he believed the Lord had told him there was a woman named Sally who was present, that she was deeply despondent and needed hope, and that the Lord saw her and her situation that morning. He invited Sally (no

one knew who she was) to join about seventy-five to one hundred people up front to receive prayer.

As soon as Lance shared this prophetic word, Hope prayed silently, *Lord, please let me be the one to pray for Sally.* We have a ministry team of about thirty people who are trained to pray for the sick, and after her prayer, Hope (who was on the ministry team) went forward and stood facing the congregation to see who, if anyone, would come to her for prayer. Hope noticed a particular woman who had come forward, and Hope approached the woman, asking if she could pray for her. Incredibly, the woman said, "My name is Sally, and I am the one Lance was talking about. I have lost hope that the Lord sees and cares for me." My wife responded, "Well, my name is *Hope*, and I prayed that I would get to pray for you, and here we are!" After prayer, the woman went back to her seat, obviously feeling encouraged and known by the Lord!

Here is another example of a prophetic word, this time being used in evangelism. The case is reported by John Wimber in his book *Power Evangelism*.<sup>10</sup> And as confirmation, on May 4, 2020, I had a long conversation with Carol Wimber (now Carol Wong), who vividly remembered the day when John told her the entire story as it had just happened to him. Carol said that in those days, this sort of thing happened often to John because he didn't know any better than to actually believe and act on the Bible!

Wimber founded the Vineyard movement, pastored Vineyard Anaheim, and taught in the church growth department at Fuller Seminary. He spoke at church growth seminars all over the country and frequently flew to and from conferences.

On this particular evening, having finished a grueling time of teaching at a conference in Chicago, John boarded

a plane for New York in an exhausted, completely spent state of mind. He hungered to sit back, relax, and read the newspaper before attending another conference in New York. So John buckled up and waited for the flight to take off.

While letting his eyes wander around the cabin, John's eyes passed by a middle-aged man seated across the aisle. Suddenly John saw the word *adultery* written over the man's face. He rubbed his eyes and looked again, and it was still there. The word was visible not to the eyes but to John's spiritual awareness. Noticing that John had been staring at him, the man barked, "What do you want?" As soon as this happened, a woman's name came clearly to John's mind, so he leaned across the aisle and whispered, "Does the name Jane Smith [not her real name] mean anything to you?" According to Wimber, the man's face turned white, and he blurted out, "We've got to talk!"

The plane had an upstairs cocktail lounge, and as John followed the man up the stairs, the Lord put this thought in his mind: *Tell him if he doesn't turn from his adultery, I'm going to take him.* The following is both funny and realistic, given Wimber's exhausted condition, so I will let him tell you what he felt next in his own words: "Terrific. All I had wanted was a nice, peaceful plane ride to New York. Now here I was, sitting in the plane's cocktail lounge with a man I had never seen before, whose name I didn't even know, about to tell him that God was going to take his life if he didn't stop his affair with some woman."<sup>11</sup>

For a moment, put yourself in Wimber's shoes. It would have been horribly embarrassing if John had been wrong, so he must have been quite confident to go forward with this word. "Who told you that name?" the man asked. "God did," Wimber blurted out. Eventually, John shared the gospel with the man, and not only did he receive Christ, but all of

his guilt and shame came gushing out and he prayed loudly the most heartrending prayer of repentance John had ever heard! Everyone in the lounge became intimately familiar with the man's sordid past! After the man received Christ, John told him he had to go back and confess to his wife. He did, and after a confusing time of turmoil, his wife also accepted Jesus. As they landed and exited the plane, John learned that the couple did not have a Bible, so John gave them his. And they went on their way.

#### *4. God Speaks through Dreams and Visions*

For millennia, people all over the world have rightly believed that some dreams and visions (dreamlike visual experiences that occur when one is awake) are cases of supernatural communication from God or from the evil one. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) was the first psychologist to focus his study on dreams, and ever since, the growing tendency in Western culture has been to treat dreams or visions as thoroughly naturalistic events able to be completely explained by psychological analysis.

I have no doubt that many, perhaps most, dreams are natural events. And I believe much can be learned about ourselves from analyzing our dreams in a psychological manner. But I am not willing to cede this entire area of life to psychologists and naturalists, nor do I think it is rational to do so. Clearly some dreams and visions *are* from God, and as believers we need to pay closer attention to them and not dismiss out of hand the possibility that on a given occasion, God may be speaking to us. Of course, we should also recognize the need to ponder the dream or vision from a psychological viewpoint as we are evaluating the origin of the dream or vision.

A faculty colleague's wife often receives supernatural dreams, and my colleague always takes them very seriously. While we should remain balanced—neither skeptical nor gullible—we

should not doubt that God speaks in these ways. With discernment, we should seek the Spirit's guidance. Many believers run around saying all the time that God told them this or that. These people need to calm down and seek wisdom. Others have provided guidelines for dream interpretation, but here's my advice: when you have a dream, pray the words of Psalm 139:23–24, ask God to make clear the dream's significance and meaning, and run it by wise, trustworthy friends or family members.<sup>12</sup>

As an example of a dream or vision, I begin with a supernatural vision that changed the course of an African nation. Hope and I have known Michael and Terri Sullivant for seventeen years and hold them, their marriage, and their family in high regard. In 2003, Michael gave me a prophetic word that changed my life permanently, and I owe him so much for that word and for his ministry to me over the years. I love him dearly—he's the real deal with a strong collection of supernatural gifts and a life of integrity and loving devotion to Jesus. Michael is the CEO of Life Model Works, as well as a church planter, an author, and a speaker. He has ministered in more than twenty-five countries during forty-five years of public ministry. Michael's latest book is *Thinking Biblically about the Life Model*.<sup>13</sup> Here is his story in his own words:

Sometime in the late 1990s, I was suddenly swept up into a divine purpose and appointment. I served on the staff of a growing local church with a team of fellow ministers. We were, and still are, very devoted to asking God to move across our world in unprecedented ways in our generation. Many gifted leaders were attracted to our ministry in Kansas City in those years.

Early one morning, one of my coworkers, David, had an unusual experience. He had a vivid image come to him, as in a waking dream, of an animated conversation between a wife

and her husband. They were in their bedroom, and David saw some of the specific pieces of furniture within it and the layout of their room. The woman was strongly encouraging her husband to put his trust in Jesus and to ask for God's wisdom to lead their nation. He overheard many specific words they were saying to one another, and he prayed that the husband might pay attention to the counsel of his wife. I cannot remember how, but he soon discovered that he had been allowed to see and hear an interchange between the president and first lady of a well-known African nation.

David had a friend from the United Kingdom who was a missionary to this nation and was able to get the official address of the presidential residence. He wrote a letter to the first lady and graciously reported to her the specific things he had seen and heard. It wasn't long before he received a letter from her that simply read, "When can you come?" So David came to me that very day and said, "Let's book flights to this nation right away. I want you to come with me." So we immediately did this and were soon on our way to East Africa. We arrived at the town outside the capital city where the airport was located, but no one was there to meet us. We booked two rooms at a nearby hotel and waited on the Lord in that place. We spent two nights there before a limousine came to pick us up on the third day, when we had been scheduled to meet the first family.

The time of waiting was providential. During both nights, my spirit was very alert and aware of the nearness of the Holy Spirit. I had multiple and repeated night visions in which I saw and heard messages that the president was called by God to share with various subgroups of the cultural leaders of his nation—lawmakers, educators, medical doctors, clergy, media leaders, social workers, and others. He was challenging them to put God first in all their fields of expertise and

service. He also talked to them about human dignity, human rights, and the importance of protecting the freedom of religion in their nation, since loving God cannot be coerced. However, he said to them it could be inspired by their life examples and by the creation of policies and procedures that embody God's wisdom. I woke up both mornings and journaled my experiences. I had also felt led to bring two copies of *The Divine Conspiracy* by my long-distance friend (and mentor to Dr. Moreland) Dr. Dallas Willard to pass along to the president and his wife.

It turned out that the president had been called away from the capital during our visit due to a military conflict in the northern part of their country, so we did not get to meet with him in person. However, after spending ninety minutes or so with the first lady on the morning of that third day at their residence and office complex—which was exactly like David had seen in his vision and recalled to me before our trip, from the wallpaper, to the arrangement of things, to the nature and color of the furniture—she promptly cleared her calendar and spent the whole day with the two of us. Her limo driver escorted the three of us and her assistant to various places where she had invested herself for years helping the needy orphaned children of their nation. We had rich interchanges with her about the realities of God's great kingdom and shared about our mutual joyful trust in Jesus Christ our Lord. We were able to convey to her the things that God's Spirit had given to us for her family and for the nation, which she gladly and warmly received.

We left that nation a couple days later very confident that we had been sent on a special and timely mission to sow seeds of God's word and thoughts from God's heart into the lives of the leaders and people we met. The first lady welcomed us to return in the future, but so far, I have

not been led to do more than continue to pray for this nation and its first family from afar.

One thing did happen a few years afterward that really encouraged me. I happened to see a video produced by George Otis Jr. called *Transformations II: The Glory Spreads*. In this video, I saw images regarding what God was since doing in this nation that captured exact images and words I had seen in my night visions while waiting on God! The whole experience taught me that God can easily and at any time take us from a place of obscurity and present us before the change agents he has raised up in places far from home for the honor of his Son and the furtherance of his good news among the nations.

Here is another example from someone I knew during my days with Campus Crusade (now Cru) in the 1970s. When I joined the staff in 1970, I was stationed for two years at the University of Colorado, where Marshall Rice was my roommate and trainer. Even though we live on different coasts and don't speak often, we have remained friends all these years. I had not heard from Marshall for many years when one day, he unexpectedly called me with great excitement in his voice. He had called to share a miracle story for my encouragement.

A young woman who worked for Marshall at Cru headquarters in Orlando, Florida, was also his good friend. The woman was short—a little over five feet tall—and timid. One day while in the grocery store checkout line behind a tall Middle Eastern man (whom she correctly took to be a Muslim), she noticed that he was leafing through a semi-pornographic magazine. Suddenly she sensed the Lord speaking to her: *Tell him to put down that magazine*. Well, that was the absolute last thing she was inclined to do, so she



blew it off. But the word came a second time, and she knew it was the Lord. So she took a deep breath, tapped the man on the shoulder, and told him to put down the magazine!

Anticipating a harsh reaction, the young woman was utterly surprised by what happened next. He complied and repeated several times, "You are a holy woman! You are a holy woman!" Wanting to share the Lord with him, she asked if he would wait for her outside the store so they could talk further after she had checked out. The man agreed, and when they met, she took out a "Four Spiritual Laws" booklet and said, "I want to share with you how you can become a child of God." Now keep in mind, this approach is far from the ordinary way Cru staff are trained to introduce the booklet. Usually one would say, "May I show you how to know God personally?" or simply "Have you ever heard of the four spiritual laws?" But that wasn't what she said.

Instantly, the man dropped to his knees in front of several people entering or leaving the store and began to weep. *What in the world is going on?* the Cru staff woman wondered. So she asked him just that. She will never forget what he said: "Last night, I had a dream that I would meet someone today who would tell me how to become a child of God. And you are the one in my dream!" Obviously, the man gladly accepted Jesus on the sidewalk in front of a bunch of people. If this happened to you, wouldn't you do the same?

### *5. God Speaks through Angelic Visitations*

In chapter 8, we will discuss contemporary angelic and demonic manifestations, but I must share one story now. The late Francis MacNutt (who lived from 1925 to 2020 and had a PhD in theology) and his dear wife, Judith, who worked as a psychotherapist for decades in private practice and in hospitals throughout Boston, are internationally known and respected for

their integrative ministry called Christian Healing Ministries. If you google Judith MacNutt and listen to one of her talks, you will be immediately captivated by her genuine love for Jesus and people and by the deep learning she shares. Judith has a gift of discernment of spirits and often sees angels and demons. Two of her books are the best resources I've ever read on angels.<sup>14</sup> Here is Judith's heartwarming story of how God used an angel to communicate his love and care to a needy little boy. Be forewarned, you may need a tissue.

Several years ago, my husband, Francis, and I were leading a healing conference in a large church. The long day had been filled with teaching and lively discussion. We knew that everyone was excitedly anticipating the evening healing service, as many had already told us about their need to receive God's healing touch.

During the service, a young mother came forward for prayer, followed closely by her six-year-old son holding tightly to the folds of her skirt. Tearfully she told us of her deep heartbreak. She was recently divorced from her husband of ten years. The way she carried her body clearly showed her despair and loneliness. Her deepest concern, however, was for her young son, Timmy.

Since the divorce, Timmy had withdrawn more and more from life and had shown symptoms of depression. He missed his daddy terribly and felt that he was somehow to blame for the breakup of the family. A fearful mother's heart had brought her broken son to the Lord for healing.

Unlike most six-year-old boys, Timmy had a face etched with sadness. His eyes were deeply sorrowful. As we laid hands on Timmy and prayed, he began to cry softly. Suddenly, something drew my attention to the ceiling. I looked up, and there, sitting on a wooden rafter high above the cross, was an

angel. A brilliant white light surrounded him, and his garment was shining—unlike anything I had ever seen before. His countenance was joyful, yet concerned as he watched us pray for Timmy. I had the distinct impression that he, too, was praying for Timmy.

After the prayer, Timmy tearfully thanked us and returned to the pew with his mother. Occasionally, I glanced at Timmy and noticed that he was looking in the direction where the angel was seated. Excusing myself from the healing line, I slipped into the pew beside Timmy. I asked him if he would mind sharing with me what had captured his attention. By this time he was staring at the angel, his eyes full of wonder.

He hesitated for a moment, and then he slowly said that he saw 'a large man sitting on a rafter.' He gave me a quizzical look, as if to ask, 'Do you believe me?' I smiled and assured him that he was seeing an angel of the Lord.

When I asked Timmy to describe the angel, he gave me an exact description of his hair, clothing, smile, and size. I asked him if he was bigger than my husband (who is six foot four), and he said, 'Much bigger.' I told Timmy he was greatly blessed to see this angel. A broad smile covered his little face. Excitement raced through his voice as he said, "I believe God wants me to know God sent this angel to always take care of me, since my daddy can't be around anymore."<sup>15</sup>

## *6. God Speaks through Life Circumstances*

Most of us have discerned that God speaks to us through circumstances. Now, once we are equipped with the intelligent agent principle (IAP), we no longer have to guess whether such circumstances are serendipitous accidents or genuine divine miracles—a specific provision or communication from the Lord. If the circumstances are highly improbable and in some way a special situation apart from the fact that they just happened

to occur, then we know the circumstances were brought about by an intelligent agent for a purpose. Remember, this principle has virtually no false positives (cases where employment of the principle falsely indicates the action of an intelligent agent). The "specialness factor" could be that the circumstances were just what one was praying for or just the thing required to meet an important need or bring a specific kind of comfort or encouragement. Here are some examples for you to consider.

In the summer of 2003, I experienced a series of anxiety attacks that led to a debilitating seven-month depression. Almost immediately after sinking into an emotional and spiritual abyss, I began to be plagued with doubts and self-criticism about my academic, scholarly work. My self-talk, which I believe was energized by demonic attacks, was filled with repeated accusations that I had wasted my life studying, writing, and lecturing, and that my intellectual endeavors for the cause of Christ had achieved very little by way of impact. This repeated thought plagued me for several weeks, plunging me deeper into depression. My work and life seemed meaningless. In the midst of this plunge, I went to Columbia International University in Columbia, South Carolina, to participate in a five-day lecture series. I live in Southern California and knew no one in Columbia, South Carolina, having never been there.

Before dinner on July 15, I came down with an extreme migraine headache. I can go five years without even a small headache, so this was a first for me. I took Tylenol, canceled my evening lecture, and went to bed. But things got worse. My head was wracked with pain. Around 6:00 p.m. I received a phone call from a conference attendee who lived in the area who knew my pain and said he was taking me to the emergency room. I slumped into the front seat of his car, and he drove me to a walk-in clinic about fifteen to twenty miles away in Irmo, South Carolina. I staggered in, left my driver's license at the front desk, and was

whisked away to the emergency room. Immediately, two nurses hooked monitors to my chest and brain and began doing tests to find out what was wrong. My blood pressure was off the charts. They gave me an injection to alleviate the headache, which began to work quickly.

After about five minutes, the doctor who was on call that evening walked in the door. Holding my driver's license, he said, "Are you J. P. Moreland? The one who teaches at Talbot Seminary?" Taken a bit off guard, I nodded. "I don't believe this! There are nurses here who would give their eyeteeth if a movie star walked through those doors. In my case, if I could pick one person in the entire country to come in here, it would be you. Dr. Moreland, I can't thank you enough for what you have done in the intellectual world for the cause of Christ! I have read almost all your books, and hey, you know that book *Body and Soul* you wrote with Scott Rae? I teach ethics at a local community college, and I use that as a text. I can't believe I'm getting to meet you!"

It turned out that I had most likely eaten some bad shrimp at dinner the day before, and it took about twenty-four hours for the food poisoning to hit me. But as soon as this doctor shared the impact I'd had on his life, the Lord spoke to me: *I am well pleased with your academic work for my name's sake. You have done well. Keep trusting me.*

At the very moment of my need to be reassured about the value of my intellectual work, I met a doctor who "happened" to be on duty that evening in a city in which I'd never been who valued the very work for which I needed consolation during my depression. What a "coincidence"! What a special, unique event, given my need. It has been my repeated meditation on things like this in my own life that has reassured me that God knows about my needs and that I can trust him to act when he knows the timing is right.<sup>16</sup>

Another example comes from the life of Lonnie Frisbee

(1949–1993), who was a key figure in the early days of the Calvary Chapel, Vineyard, and Southern California Jesus movements in the 1960s. Lonnie was a broken man, but there is no question that he was fervent in seeking and serving Jesus, despite his inability to deal with some deep sinful tendencies in his life. Yet his worldwide impact can hardly be overestimated. He was a hippie who operated with a supernatural gifting few people have. Several books have been written about his life, and he was also the subject of a 2005 documentary film titled *Frisbee: The Life and Death of a Hippie Preacher*. Several people at our church—Vineyard Anaheim—knew Lonnie personally and remember him clearly.

I have had several conversations with Lonnie's brother, Stan, who has been with our church since its earliest days in the 1980s. Stan remembers the story I'm about to share, and it is also included in Lonnie's biography.<sup>17</sup> The events described below took place in the late 1970s and are about Lonnie and a friend, Peter Crawford. In the fall of 2018, I called Mr. Crawford (who didn't know me), and while he was driving, he spent about thirty minutes answering all of my questions and verifying before the Lord that all the events are true and actually took place.

While on the staff of Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, California, in 1977, Lonnie heard the Lord say to him, *I'm going to send you to Africa. You're to quit your job and go to Africa.* Shortly thereafter, pastor Chuck Smith approached Lonnie and asked him point-blank, "How would you like to go to Africa?" Even though the church elders laid hands on Lonnie to commission his trip, a day or so later, Lonnie learned that he no longer had a salary from the church and that God would have to provide the funding.

During the next five months, Lonnie's money ran out, so he moved into his grandmother's house and met two roommates, one of whom was Peter Crawford. Peter wanted

to go with Lonnie to Africa, but his financial situation was bleak. Still, Lonnie knew that God had called him to take this trip, so he and Peter prayed and went to Costa Mesa Travel. The travel agent told them they could travel around the world in one direction for a year for \$1,900 apiece. With food and other expenses added in, the trip would total \$5,000.

So Lonnie and Peter booked a nine-country trip, with South Africa at the halfway point and a final arrival on the East Coast of the United States, from where they planned to make it back to Southern California. According to Lonnie, when they got the tickets, he was "suddenly struck with terror" because they had virtually no money at all. As he recalls, at that very moment, he looked at the clock on the travel agent's wall, which read 10:00 a.m. It was a Monday morning, and they were responsible to pay for the tickets no later than three days from that day.

On the morning the money was due, Lonnie and Peter were discussing what in the world they were going to do when the phone rang. It was Dee, the church secretary, who said that a \$25,000 check made out to Lonnie had just arrived at the church. It was from the owner of an oil company who wished to remain anonymous. After some sleuthing, Lonnie was able to find the man, and Peter, Lonnie, and this oil company owner had a meeting. The man told them a mind-blowing story.

On the Sunday evening before Lonnie and Peter first went to the travel agency, the host of a radio program named *Teen Challenge* needed a replacement, so Lonnie hosted the show that Sunday evening—the one and only time he was ever on the program. During the program, Lonnie shared his vision about the Africa trip. The donor reported that as he listened, the Lord told him to send a check for \$25,000 to Lonnie Frisbee. The next day, the gentleman wrote and wired

the check to Calvary Chapel, so it was there for Lonnie to pick up. But that's not all! At the very time Lonnie and Peter had been sitting at the travel agency—at 10:00 a.m. on that Monday morning—the man had been writing the check for their trip! God verified that the trip was his will by bringing it about through these confirming circumstances.

Does God still speak today? Yes, I believe he does—without a doubt. But there are other presences and voices all around us as well. As we learn to listen to the voice of God, we also need to learn how to be aware of and deal with this reality—the reality of angels and demons—in our daily lives.