

CHAPTER 10

**BREAK ME OFF A
PIECE OF THAT KIT
KAT BAR**

“Hello, my name is Mercy,” said the gentle yet confident voice on the other end of the telephone.

It was a snowy Saturday afternoon in January 1995. I was now an associate pastor at the Bible college I had attended.

“I’m a foreign student from Honduras. I’m at LaGuardia Airport in New York City, and I need directions to your Bible college.”

“Hi, Mercy. My name is Brian Alarid. So, your name is Misericordia, right?” (Mercy in Spanish is *misericordia*.)

“No, my name is Mercy,” she responded adamantly.

There was something special about her voice, even magical. My mind was racing a million miles a minute, trying to figure out what it was.

“What’s your middle name?” To this day, I still have no clue why I asked her that. It’s been said that the universe contains protons, neutrons, electrons, and *morons*. I was the latter.

“Nicole.”

“You mean to tell me that your parents gave you two English names? Are you serious? Your name is Mercy Nicole?”

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I thought to myself, *What's wrong with you, man? Stop badgering this poor girl about her name and give her the directions.*

But I couldn't help myself. I had to know more.

"Yes, that's right," answered Mercy in a frustrated tone. "Now, can I please get directions to your college? It's snowing, and I'm standing outside without a winter jacket, putting quarters into a payphone."

And then it happened.

"She's the one," whispered the Holy Spirit inside my heart. "She's your wife."

I beg your pardon. Is that you, Lord? Am I imagining this, or are you speaking to me?

This is what God had been trying to tell me for several weeks. Let me rewind the story about a month.

I was preaching in Acapulco, Mexico, and the nightly services were going well until I contracted a nasty intestinal infection, commonly known as *Montezuma's revenge*.

I spent three dreadful days in bed with diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and a puke bucket next to me. You know you're in bad shape when you start throwing up Gatorade.

The pastor who was hosting me took me to see his doctor, who diagnosed me with severe dehydration. He told me that I would have died in the next twenty-four hours without proper medical care.

As I was lying in bed the next day, trying to keep down as many liquids as I could, the Lord whispered to me, "You will know her by her voice."

"What's *that* supposed to mean, Lord?"

God repeated the message. “You will know your wife by her voice.”

“I still don’t understand what you’re trying to tell me, God. How will I know my wife by her voice? Is she a singer?”

Come on, Lord, throw me a bone here. I’m begging you.

But apparently, Jesus didn’t think I needed any more clarity at that point. Over the next few weeks, I tried to discern what God meant by, “You will know her by her voice.”

Then it all clicked in one split-second. The voice on the other end of the phone belonged to my future wife. She was the woman who God had tailor-made for me. Mercy was my helpmate, my better half, the missing part of me. She was everything I never knew I always wanted.

But was she hot? That was the only question my carnal mind could focus on. She was God’s first choice for me, but what if I wasn’t attracted to her?

After I finished giving her directions to our college, I said to the Lord, “I sure hope she’s good-looking. That’s all I have to say!”

Later that evening, Mercy walked into my college campus as I was heading into the gym to play volleyball.

Mama Mia, sopapilla! Break me off a piece of that Kit Kat bar. She was the incarnation of all loveliness. Of all the Bible schools in all the towns in all the world, she walked into mine.

“Hello, Brian. It’s great to meet you and put a face to your voice finally. I’m Mercy.”

She had me at hello.

For some strange reason, neither a full-body embrace nor a passionate kiss seemed appropriate at that moment. So, I extended my hand, instead, and greeted Mercy cordially. There

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was no doubt in my mind this sun-kissed goddess would be my wife one day.

Now, I wasn't the only one who received a surprise message from the Lord that day. While we were on the phone, Mercy had a strong impression from the Holy Spirit that I was going to be her future husband.

When Mercy first locked eyes with me in the Bible college hallway that evening, Hebrews 5:13 came to her mind, "For he is a *babe*..." One look at me, and she knew I was the one for her.

Over the next two years, I chased Mercy until she caught me. On February 3, 1996, I got down on one knee and professed my undying love for her. I was just a boy, standing in front of a girl, asking her to love me.

We tied the knot in April 1997 and have been happily married ever since. We experienced love at *first sound* before we experienced love at *first sight*. God longs to talk to you and guide you through the most important decisions of your life.

Just watch out for Montezuma.

That experience marked me for life. Since hearing God's voice about who He wanted me to marry, I've sought to make listening to God's voice a daily practice.

In my twenty-six years as a pastor, one question has surfaced the most: "How do you hear the voice of God?" There's a longing in the heart of God's children to talk to their Heavenly Father and hear His voice. Jesus declared in John 10:27, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." The Greek word Jesus used for voice is *phóné*—it means a voice or sound. Jesus made it clear His followers should hear and recognize not only His Word but also His voice.

The Bible is the primary way God speaks to His children, but it's not the only way. But before we go farther, let me make it clear that the voice of God will never contradict the Word of God.

Authors Henry Blackaby and Claude King explain it best: "If anything is clear from a reading of the Bible, this fact is clear: God speaks to His people. He spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis. He spoke to Abraham and the other patriarchs."⁶⁷

God spoke to the judges, kings, and prophets. God was in Christ Jesus speaking to the disciples. God spoke to the early church, and God spoke to John on the Isle of Patmos in Revelation. God does speak to His people, and you can anticipate that He will be speaking to you also."

The phrases "the Lord said" and "God said" occur hundreds of times in the Bible. God spoke to His people in Bible times, and He's still speaking to His people today.

If God has the audacity to call Himself our Father, what kind of father would He be if He never communicated with His children? The Bible shows us hundreds of examples of ordinary people who heard God's voice, and it forever changed their lives. God never changes—He remains the same forever (Malachi 3:6). And He longs to talk to you today just as He did the people in the Bible.

Prayer is a conversation with God. Brother Lawrence remarked, "There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God."⁶⁸

Now, in a conversation, both people take turns talking and listening. Prayer is meant to be a dialogue, not a monologue—an intimate conversation between two people.

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If you're doing all the talking, you're missing out on the best part of prayer: hearing God speak to you. Don't be a conversation hog with God. What God has to say to you is more important than what you have to say to Him.

Araminta Ross was born on a Maryland plantation in 1822. Born into slavery, she endured terrible whippings, hard labor, starvation, and abuse, including a fractured skull when she was a teenager.

Araminta escaped to freedom in 1849, making the treacherous journey to Philadelphia all by herself. Instead of enjoying her newfound freedom, she risked her life to free other slaves.

She changed her name to Harriet Tubman and became the most famous conductor in the Underground Railroad Network, which was dedicated to freeing slaves.

Harriet earned the moniker "Moses" for rescuing over 70 slaves. After she led slaves across the border into freedom, she would say, "Glory to God and Jesus, too. One more soul is safe."⁶⁹ During the Civil War, she was the first woman to lead an armed expedition, liberating 750 slaves at the Raid on Combahee Ferry in 1863.

What gave Harriet, standing barely five feet tall, her incredible courage and strength?

Harriet testified, "I prayed to God to make me strong and able to fight, and that's what I've always prayed for ever since."⁷⁰

Fellow abolitionist Thomas Garrett testified of Harriet, "I never met with any person, of any color, who had more

confidence in the voice of God, as spoken direct to her soul. She has frequently told me that she talked with God, and He talked with her every day of her life.”⁷¹

According to Harriet, “It wasn’t me; it was the Lord. I always told Him, ‘I trust you. I don’t know where to go or what to do, but I expect you to lead me,’ and He always did.”⁷²

It was her prayer life and dependence on God’s guidance that enabled Harriet to make such a profound impact on American history. When she passed away at the age of ninety, her last words were, “I go to prepare a place for you.”⁷³ In the end, Harriet was still on mission.

God longs to talk to you and lead as He did Harriet. Are you listening?

A STILL SMALL VOICE

The voice of God is powerful and majestic. Sometimes He speaks to His people in a strong, towering voice like when He spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. At other times, God speaks to His children in a gentle whisper.

After Elijah’s confrontation with Jezebel and subsequent depression in 1 Kings chapter 19, he was desperate to hear God’s voice. He hiked to the top of Mount Horeb, expecting God to appear to him in some demonstrative way. And God didn’t disappoint. He caused a strong windstorm to come upon the mountain, and it began tearing the mountain apart.

Elijah probably thought, *Now, that’s what I’m talking about. God is about to speak to me out of the windstorm.*

But God wasn’t in the windstorm.

God brought an earthquake that shook the mountain to its core. That would have scared most people, but not Elijah. He

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was sure God was going to appear to him out of the earthquake. This was the moment for which he had been waiting, and yet God wasn't in the earthquake either.

God was just getting warmed up. After the earthquake, He sent a massive wildfire that consumed everything in its path. Elijah was familiar with fire—this was his comfort zone. He told the prophets of Baal, “The god who answers by fire—He is God.”

Okay, this makes sense. God wasn't in the windstorm or earthquake, but now He is going to appear to me and speak to me out of the fire as He did with Moses. I'm ready, Lord. Lay it on me!

But much to his surprise, God wasn't in the fire either. God spoke to the prophet in the way he least expected—in a gentle whisper. “And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12).

The Hebrew word translated *still small voice* means “a whisper or gentle silence.” The God of fire and thunder and lightning and earthquakes is also the God of the gentle whisper.

We can easily miss His voice if we don't listen carefully. In this digital world, information overload bombards us. Quiet your spirit and tune out all the external and internal noise so you can hear God's voice.

I believe most Christ-followers long to hear God's voice, but they aren't sure how to recognize it and distinguish it from their own voice. Does Scripture show us how to hear the voice of God?

The prophet Isaiah heard God speak to him in profound ways. He recorded prophecies that were fulfilled hundreds of

years later, including the prophecy about Jesus being born of a virgin. In Isaiah 50:4-5, we see four keys to hearing God's voice:

“The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious; I have not turned away.”

1. Pray every morning. Isaiah stated that God awakened his ear every morning. Before you go to work, the gym, or to school, spend some quiet time with God reading His Word and listening to His voice. It will make a massive impact on the rest of your day.

Author E. M. Bounds shared this insight about morning prayer: “The men who have done the most for God in this world have been early on their knees. He who fritters away the early morning, its opportunity and freshness, in other pursuits than seeking God will make poor headway seeking Him the rest of the day. If God is not first in our thoughts and efforts in the morning, He will be in the last place the remainder of the day.”⁷⁴

2. Expect God to speak to you. Isaiah woke up every morning, expecting to hear God speak to him. He said God awakened his “ear to listen.”

Your expectations frame your experience. Jesus made this exact point in Matthew 9:29: “According to your faith, let it be done to you.” You receive according to the level of your expectations. If you pray but don't expect God to speak to you, He probably won't. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

3. Listen to God's voice and be ready to be taught.

Isaiah declared, "He wakens my ear to listen like one being taught." In addition to expecting God to speak to you, your attitude will determine whether you hear God's voice. When he prayed, Isaiah took the posture of a student who was eager and ready to learn from his favorite teacher.

Show up to your prayer time with your Bible and journal, ready to take notes. God speaks to you to inform you, educate you, and transform you. Why should God speak to you if you aren't ready to learn?

When the student is ready, the teacher will appear. (Who knew fortune cookies could contain so much wisdom?)

There's a vast difference between hearing and listening. The problem is that we hear, but we don't listen. Listening implies we incline our ear to pay attention so we can remember the message (Isaiah 55:3).

Renowned Christian speaker and author John Ortberg explains why we have such a hard time hearing God: "One reason why we fail to hear God speak is that we are not attentive. We suffer from what might be called 'spiritual mindlessness.'"⁷⁵

Now, you can't force God to speak to you, but you can position yourself to hear Him speak. God longs to talk to you. The question is—are you listening?

Do you pray every day, watching and waiting for the sound of His voice? Do you wait patiently for the Holy Spirit to speak to you? Are you willing to linger in God's presence to wait for Him to talk to you? Ecclesiastes 8:3 warns us, "Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence."

So much internal noise from work, the media, and our negative self-talk makes it difficult for us to hear God's voice. You need to clear the spiritual junk out of your life, quiet all the ambient noise, and listen to God's voice.

4. When you hear God speak, obey Him. Isaiah proclaimed, "I have not been rebellious; I have not turned away." The New American Standard Bible translates it, "I was not disobedient."

When God speaks to you, He expects you to obey Him. Jesus stated in Luke 11:28, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." You need to listen to God and apply it to your personal life. Job 5:27 instructs us to "hear it and apply it to yourself."

If you don't obey God when He speaks to you, He will stop talking to you at some point. If you are unable to hear God's voice right now, ask yourself if you have obeyed the last word God gave you. Obey the last message God gave you, and He will start speaking to you again.

Four Keys to Hearing God's Voice:

1. Pray every morning.
2. Expect God to speak to you.
3. Listen to God's voice and be ready to be taught.
4. When you hear God speak, obey Him.

As my good friend, *El Guapo*, would say, "The Lord speaks to us in a *plethora* of ways." There's not a "right way" to hear God's voice. God is so big and diverse that there are myriads of ways He can speak to you. Hebrews 1:1 confirms this, "In the

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past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.”

We’re all wired differently, and God speaks to us in ways we can understand. I would be willing to bet Bill Gates’ last dollar you’ve heard the voice of God. But perhaps you didn’t recognize it because it didn’t sound like Charlton Heston or come out of a burning bush.

In his book, *Whisper*, Mark Batterson reveals seven main ways God speaks to us. “God speaks through His word. That’s our starting point. He whispers to us through doors, dreams, and desires. He converses with us through promptings, pain, and other people.”⁷⁶

In my personal Bible studies, I’ve found several ways God speaks to people:

- The Bible (Rom. 15:4; 1 Thess. 2:13)
- His voice (1 Kgs. 19:12; Jn. 10:2-5; 10:27)
- Visions, images, and mental pictures (Gen. 46:2; Acts 2:17; 11:5; 18:9; Jer. 1:11-16; 24:3-9)
- Dreams (1 Kings 3:5; Matthew 1:20)
- Angels (Gen. 31:11; Lk. 1:19; Heb. 1:14; 13:2)
- Leaders, mentors, and advisers (2 Chron. 20:20; Acts 11:28; 21:10; Prov. 11:14; 15:22)
- Signs and wonders (Mk. 16:20; Acts 2:43; Heb. 2:4)
- Creative ideas (Ex. 31:1-6; Prov. 8:12; Amos 6:5)
- Strategy (Lk. 14:28-30; Prov. 2:11; 21:5)
- Creation and nature (Psa. 8:3-6; Rom. 1:20)
- Natural examples and illustrations (Acts 21:10-11; Mk. 11:12-13; Jer. 13:1-11)
- Internal warnings (Mt. 2:22; Heb. 11:7; 12:25)

- Perceptions (Acts 27:9-11; 1 Sam. 3:8; Lk. 5:22)
- Circumstances (Prov. 3:5-6; Psa. 37:3; Rom. 8:28)
- Peace or lack of peace (Col. 3:15)
- Pain (Job 1-2)

I'm sure you will find many more as you study the Word. You can't limit a limitless God to only speak in a certain way. God speaks to us in our spirit, thoughts, and emotions. He speaks to us through friends and strangers, pastors and leaders, our spouse and children, good people and bad people. He speaks to us through nature and life, prayer and meditation, praise and worship, and, most of all, through His Word. And don't say God doesn't speak to you if your Bible remains unopened, collecting dust on the bookshelf.

Over the years, I've developed a few tests to make sure I hear from God accurately. I believe they will help you as well.

1. God's voice never contradicts God's Word. You must filter everything you hear and feel through the Word of God. If it doesn't align with Scripture, you must reject it. That's how you make sure your *subjective* hearing becomes *objective*. Don't judge what you hear by how many goosebumps you feel; judge it by God's Word.

If what you hear contradicts God's Word, the Holy Spirit isn't speaking to you. God made this clear in Psalm 89:34: "I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips."

Henry and Richard Blackaby observed: "When God speaks, He does not give new revelation about Himself that contradicts what He has already revealed in Scripture. Rather, God speaks

to give application of His Word to the specific circumstances in your life.

When God speaks to you, He is not writing a new book of Scripture, rather, He is applying to your life what He has already said in His Word.

Throughout the Bible, whenever God spoke to someone, that person's life was never the same again. The same is true today. Our prayer is that as you listen to what God is saying to you, you will respond in love and obedience and your life will be transformed as well."⁷⁷

The more you read the Bible, the better you will be able to discern if God is speaking to you.

2. God's voice never tempts you to sin. Christians say some idiotic stuff. For instance, one guy made this comment to me, "I felt like God was telling me to go lay hands on that young girl, and just, you know, show her the love of God."

Give me a break, *Rico Suave!* Did God also tell you to rub her back and invite her out for dinner afterward?

God's voice is pure and holy, and it will never lead you into temptation. If the voice you hear is provoking you to sin, it's either the devil or your sinful nature, not the voice of God. James 1:13 confirms this: "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone."

3. God's voice convicts you but never condemns you. The voice of the enemy will remind you of your sin. He will throw your past failures in your face to shame you and condemn you. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, will convict you of sin

but will never make you feel condemned or worthless. Tune out the voice of condemnation and listen to God correct you in love and bring out the best in you.

Paul wrote in Romans 8:1, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” When God speaks to us, He always gives us hope and courage to face the future.

4. God’s voice empowers you to do His will. Whenever people in the Bible heard God’s voice, it empowered them to accomplish God’s will. His voice guided Noah to build an ark and sustained him for 120 years as he endured all kinds of mocking and reproach.

God’s voice enabled Moses to part the Red Sea. God’s primary concern is for His will to be accomplished on Earth as it is in heaven, and He’s always looking for willing vessels who will partner with Him to perform His will.

5. God’s voice is confirmed by God’s people. One of the dangers and pitfalls of pursuing God’s voice is people can succumb to pride. Be careful not to think you’re the only person who hears from God.

If what you hear *is* from God, you have nothing to fear by submitting it to other godly people who also hear God’s voice. God created a safety net to keep us on the right path—a multitude of counselors. Solomon explained it this way, “Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.”⁷⁸

Paul stated in 2 Corinthians 13:1, “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

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People who are being led by the Holy Spirit have the humility to submit what they hear to others because they recognize they are not infallible.

No one gets it right 100 percent of the time; that's why we need each other. As the poet John Donne wrote, "No man is an island, entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."

The people of the Bible heard the God of the Bible speak to them personally, and so can you. One word from God can instantly set you free from depression and deliver you from an ugly addiction.

God's voice can fill you with love, courage, hope, faith, and strength. One Spirit-anointed word can transform the hardest of sinners into the most obedient follower of Christ.

Jesus stated in Mark 4:9, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." What God wants to say to you is more valuable than what you have to say to Him. God has many promises and insights He wants to reveal to you. But you must become an active listener to hear His voice.

Pastor Jack Hayford explains: "Then comes the stringer, the point: 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear.' And it's right there that the Master's words issue timeless terms for knowing God's Word—really knowing it: You have to be a genuine listener. That's what 'having ears to hear' means."⁷⁹

One of the first verses I memorized with my children was Matthew 4:4 because I wanted them to experience the thrill of hearing God speak to them from a young age. "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

As believers, we live on every word that proceeds out of God's mouth. Feed yourself spiritually every day with the Word of God and the voice of God. Jesus loves you and longs to share the secrets of His heart with you. Your part is to listen to His voice. Without His voice and promptings, the Christian life becomes lonely and boring.

God wants to guide you by His voice, as He declared in Isaiah 30:21: "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"

When the Holy Spirit leads you, your life will be better than fiction. When you follow God's promptings, He will take you places you never dreamed possible. Being led by the Holy Spirit is the most thrilling adventure this side of eternity. You are never too old or too young to hear God's voice. All you have to do is listen.

Jesus declared in Revelation 3:20, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."

Right now, Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart. The question is: Will you hear His voice and invite Him to come in and fellowship with you?