

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Getting a Message From God

by Dan Trygg

“I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” Deuteronomy 18:18b

Did you ever feel like you were getting a message from God, either for yourself or someone else? I think God attempts to communicate with us much more than we typically recognize. **You don't have to read much of the Bible to realize that it is *all about* God communicating with people.** It is a record of God's interactions with people. The people and events described in the scriptures are all about God *communicating* His purpose, His plan, His will with humankind. It is a record of *more* than that, however. It also records His *actions* in history, as He deals with people who choose to respond to or disregard His truth. Hearing from God is more than just subjective experiences. **These communications are meant to provide understanding and guidance about God and about life. If we respond to the guidance of God we will find a fuller, richer life. We will discover our destiny and purpose for being here.** We will avoid heartache and danger, and discover blessing and honor. If we *disregard* God's counsel, we will often find confusion, disorientation, frustration and emptiness. We will *not* discover our real purpose for being here, because we were made *by* Him and *for* Him (Col. 1:16). We may occupy ourselves with many good things, but we will miss our highest calling. **Left to ourselves, we settle for so much less than what God has in mind for us.**

I am always looking for God's direction in my life. I find myself praying for His leading and guidance in my daily affairs numerous times throughout the day. **I often see little signs of His leading.** I have come to expect Him to encourage me with some personal insight, or a message of affirmation or guidance that applies to my situation in life. **I typically get up in the morning to spend some time in the Bible. I invest this time because I believe that God will not only school my mind, but that He will illuminate some truth that applies to me.** Hardly a day goes by where I do not feel that God has encouraged me or spoken to me in some way through His word.

There is an important distinction to make regarding getting guidance, or personal messages from the Bible. **There is a difference between good Bible interpretation, and the phenomenon some call illumination. Bible interpretation is all about uncovering the objective meaning of the logos-word of God, and making appropriate application to our situation today.** To do this, you have to ask yourself, “What did this mean to the original writer and recipients?” God meant to communicate something to people alive at the time the passage under question was written. In order to understand, we need to know the historical background, culture and circumstances. We also need to see how the passage fits in the flow of thought in the author's argument. Reading the paragraphs before and after the passage can often help clarify what is being talked about. **Our job, as good interpreters, is to sift through all of this context so that we can grasp what was really meant in that context. This is the objective truth.** This is what the Bible *teaches*, and it is what we can pass along to others as the basis of good Bible doctrine. **As we study those objective truths and principles, we begin to develop a Biblical worldview. This provides a check, measuring-stick and safeguard against which we can compare new ideas.** This is important. Without this filter, we can easily be misled or not correctly understand when we receive other input that may claim or seem to be from God.

By contrast, illumination is when the Spirit seems to be communicating a message through the surface language of the scripture, ...or through circumstances, signs and events..., that is very direct and personal in nature (a rhema-word). It is subjective, in that is meaningful and significant only to you. You may be convinced it is a message from God, but you cannot *objectively prove* to another person that this is the case. In fact, they may think you are crazy! **We must be careful about this kind of guidance. It is easy to be deceived, or to misapply something that God may have shown you about you, ...but is not meant for others.** Or, God may indeed show you something about someone else, ...but that is not a license to go drop the bomb on them! God may just want you to pray about it. It is wise to wait for guidance regarding *when* or *if* we should share these personal revelations. **Then, too, some people merely convince themselves that their own strongly-held opinions are a “word from the Lord”, when in reality these thoughts are just from their own minds, inflamed by emotion.** God is not pleased at the “God-talk manipulation” that goes on in His name. *We must be careful to claim something to be a “word from God”.*

All this is important background to lay out to describe what I would say is a fairly unusual experience for me. I went to Perkins for my study time one day. I went there with somebody else, someone who had been struggling a bit with life. We just went there together to kind of “hang out”. I was doing my thing, and he was doing his. There was no agenda to have a counseling session, or anything like that, ...nor was that even in my mind. Yet, **as I opened the scriptures and read, I had a very strong impression that some of what I was reading was about him.** These were verses that were meant for *him*! **I had a very strong impression that I should underline these verses, and put**

this other person's initials in the margin, along with the date. This is *highly unusual*. Yes, I am an inveterate underliner, but I don't put other people's initials or dates in the margin of my Bible! But, I was *strongly impressed* to do so, so I did. I typically read from four different areas of the scriptures. One was about Elijah on Mt. Carmel, "**How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, serve Him...**" (1 Kg. 18:21). Another passage was about John the Baptist, who was saying, "Repent (change your perspective), for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (nearby)." He was a voice crying in the wilderness, "**Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight**" (Matt. 3:2,3). In the culture of that time, this meant to clean up the streets, fill in the potholes, grade the road surface and put out the welcome mat for the king. John was using this metaphorically. It meant, "**Do all you can to make your heart accessible to God, and show Him you want Him to reveal Himself to you.**" We have a *choice* to throw our hearts open to Him, or keep ourselves closed off and preoccupied with other things. **We can seek after God, and prepare ourselves to hear the slightest whisper, or we can disregard Him by filling our every moment with other "noise".**

From there, I turned to Daniel 9. There, Daniel noticed that the prophet Jeremiah had written that the exile of the nation would last 70 years. That was not far off, so **Daniel decided to press in after God about this matter.** "**So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes.**" He humbled himself and intensely, diligently sought the Lord. (*Right after* reading, and taking note of, John the Baptist's admonition to "prepare the way for the Lord", *the very next passage* was about a man who knew how to do *that very thing!* Daniel is famous as one who *knew how* to draw near to God to hear from Him. I could read of his example, his methodology for preparing his heart for God.) **The focus of his prayer was for God's compassion and forgiveness for his countrymen, who had disregarded the Lord and His ways.** They had turned aside after other things. The interesting thing was that **Daniel was praying for the Lord's mercy and compassion even though the people had not necessarily changed, as yet.** He was asking God to work on the basis of covenant promises made to generations of the past. He prayed, "O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations...; for **we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion.** O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, *listen and take action!* For Your own sake, O my God, *do not delay...*" (Dan. 9:19). I couldn't help but think of the person across the table from me, and agree with those prayers. I underlined the verses, and wrote his initials next to them, along with the date. **I asked for compassion. I asked God to act without delay.** I asked Him to act not on the basis of this man's merits or performance, but because of His great love and compassion.

Then I turned to Psalm 146. The whole psalm is about how God is the deliverer. The writer exhorts us not to trust in or look to people to save us. They can't. However, **happy is the one who has God helping him. Blessed is the one who chooses to hope in God.** God is the all-powerful Creator. He is *more than adequate* to meet whatever challenges us. Moreover, He *keeps faith forever*. He is dependable. He executes justice for the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets the prisoner free. **Yahweh opens the eyes of the blind, He raises up those who are bowed down.** And, He thwarts the way of the wicked. Again, I really felt like this was in line with the progression I had been seeing for my study mate across the table. I wrote his initials and the date in the margin.

After reading four chapters in the Bible, I generally translate a chapter in the Greek NT. That day, I was translating II Corinthians 7. A couple of things stood out for me. First, was that Paul referred to God as the one "who comforts the depressed or downcast" (vs. 6). The Greek for "comfort" means "come alongside to help". I knew my friend was struggling with depression, and here **God was saying that He is the one who comes alongside to assist those who are downcast** in this way. The second "nugget", however, was in vs. 8-12. Paul had written them a letter to confront them about some things. This initially caused them sorrow, but, in the end, they responded to the painful rebuke. Paul had some insightful things to say about grief that is "according to God" or "according to the world". **Grief or sorrow can be beneficial, ...if it produces a change in perspective that results in positive action.** This is what God intends for us to gain through the pain we experience, at times. The alternative, however, is an unhelpful holding on to pain, by nursing regret and staying in the pain, even punishing ourselves. This is unprofitable, and separates us from what brings life and hope to us once again. **Pain itself can be a gift to warn us of hurtful things, but we must take heed to its message, and turn away from what causes the hurt. If we readjust our thinking, the painful experiences can teach us powerful lessons, and we can be stronger and better off in the end.** This is what God desires for us. I wrote my friend's initials in the margin, and dated it.

Now, you may not believe this, but I am actually a very shy, unobtrusive individual. I am not a demanding or pushy person. I don't go where I am not invited. So, **I was thinking about all this, wondering if there was some way I could share all this with my friend across the table.** *Just then, he looked up at me and said, "What have you been reading?"* Wow! **God did not delay, did He?** As I shared some of these thoughts, my friend opened up his heart to me to share some of his hurts, disappointments and disillusionments. He felt like God had not been there for him. I mentioned that *sometimes we have trouble recognizing when God is communicating with us, or we give up too soon.* I encouraged him to turn his attention toward God, once again, and see what He does. He said that he would do that.