

# Is That You, God?

5 November 2006

Bible passage: Proverb 3: 6 (The Message)

“Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, in everywhere you go. God’s the one who will keep you on track.”

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Do you ever have times when you wake up in the middle of the night and can’t get back to sleep? I do. For some reason, my mind starts jumping around and I keep mulling issues or concerns or problems or struggles over and over in my mind. I usually try praying, but almost always wind up falling back asleep. I guess I’m looking for an answer or direction of some sort, but often nothing comes clear.

Or have you ever been at home alone in the quiet, and found yourself reflecting on questions that seem to come out of nowhere? Or have you ever done what I have—been driving home, for instance, and have no idea how I got there? I can’t remember the route I took or anything else, because my mind was preoccupied with thoughts of the day just past or of what’s ahead during the evening.

What is all that anyway? Is it, in some mysterious way, God trying to get through to us, or is our imagination working overtime? I know people who come down in both camps, and some who just think that’s the way things are. I tend to fall in the category of believing that some inner conversations may be one of God’s ways of getting through to us.

In that regard, I can relate to the Proverb that is our Bible passage for this morning. It reads like this: “Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, in everywhere you go. God’s the one who will keep you on track.” That’s what I want us to think about together this morning—how is it we know it is, or isn’t God? How does God keep us on track, if that is, indeed, true.

In some ways, I guess I’m following up on something we talked about a bit the end of September when we shared our basic Garden theology. One of the things I said was that I don’t see a separation between the sacred and the secular. To quote myself: “God is in everything, and everything is in and of God. There is no “God in a box,” but God is within us, in every idea and insight, in every breath we breathe, in every move we make, in every hope and dream, in every tear we cry or laugh we share. God-ness permeates every instant of all of life.” That means that our lives are constantly (and I mean constantly) a part of God, never apart from God.

Now, there are a couple of assumptions that are pretty basic to this understanding. One is that God is not some being “out there,” but is right here, within us, a part of us. I believe God is a personal God, and cares for you and me in a very intimate way. While some believe that God somehow set the world in motion and then took leave of it, I’m not one of them. I see God as continually active in our lives and in our world.

That means that we can and do have encounters with that which we call holy. The translator of *The Message* version of the Bible that we’re using this morning, Eugene Peterson, says this: “The assumption of spirituality is that *always* God is doing something. So the task is...to become aware of what God is doing so that I can respond to it and participate and take delight in it.”

And there’s another assumption we need to talk about, and this is that God is not only active and present, but God is a seeker, too. God is seeking relationship with each one of us. I think God goes to every extent to connect with us in a way that’s vital and alive! As Sue Monk-Kidd said in one of her early writings, “When we seek God with all the longing God has planted in our hearts, we simply discover God seeking us, loving us—in all times and all places.”

If all that is true, how do we become aware of what God is doing so that we can respond and participate, and get on track? How do we know when it’s God? I have often said that I wish a bell would go off when something is God trying to get my attention, because I don’t always see it or get it. And there may well be times that what I think is God, isn’t. How do we figure that out?

You may be familiar with a 10-year-old book written by Neale Donald Walsch entitled *Conversations with God*. While I certainly don’t agree with everything in the book, some of what he says resonates with my own experience. For instance, when scribing God’s message, he talks about the inadequacy of words, and urges us to think of the sense of that God “communicates” with us, rather than insisting that God “talk” with us. Truly, language is limited, and words can never fully express that which is God. According to Walsch, God says, “I do not communicate with words alone. In fact, rarely do I do so.”

If that is true, and my own personal hunch is that it is, then how does God communicate with us? Again according to Walsch, God uses feelings, saying, “Feeling is the language of the soul.” By that, I think it means we need to pay attention to our innermost feelings. If our stomach is in a knot, we need to be aware of that. If our heart leaps with joy, we need to note that, too. Most of us have a hard time accessing our various feelings, but maybe we need to pay more attention to what our “gut” is telling us. What does that sixth sense, our intuition say to us? That might help us discover our true feelings, and God’s connection with us.

Thoughts and images and pictures are also ways that Walsch believes God communicates with us. When we get an unexpected insight, when we see a possible solution that we’ve never before seen, when our imaginations go wild and envision something far different from what is, I believe that’s a way that God is connecting with us.

And yet another way mentioned in that book is our life experience. If we look back on the road our lives have followed, what do we see? What has experience told us about ourselves and life in general? Sometimes I think we fail to value our experience, thinking that it's not valid. But if it is ours, then it has validity.

If these are ways, along with others, that God communicates with us, then how can we be sure that it's God and not our own selfish needs or interests at work? How can we know when it's God? As I've said before, the test for me is always to ask, "Is it loving? Is it good? Is it just?" If the answer is "yes," then odds are that's God's. If, in any way, what we see or hear doesn't ring true in our soul, if it is hurtful or vindictive or self-centered, then it probably isn't God, but rather our own egos talking. We must remember that the word "ego" could well stand for "edging God out." I think that's the biggest challenge most of us have—letting our egos get in our way of being aware of God's presence within us and around us.

Indianapolis native, Dan Wakefield, has written a book in which he talks about the difficulty of discerning God's message from all the other messages we receive. In his book, *How Do We Know When It's God?* Wakefield shares a story about being offered the opportunity to write a screenplay for Hollywood. Even though he had suffered through a failed earlier attempt at such a thing, the offer was very tempting for a number of reasons.

He noticed that, upon hanging up the phone after receiving the offer, his heart was pounding. "Was that a sign that this was right, of God?" he wondered, or was he just scared to death of another failure? He couldn't trust himself to make that decision, and the normal attempt at praying wasn't doing much either, so he decided to go on a quest, asking friend after friend, mentor, colleague. No help. He just got conflicting opinions and messages. Where was God in all this?

Finally, he decides to call and decline the offer. "You sure?" his co-writer asked. "You won't be able to change your mind again." "I'm sure," Wakefield responded. The he hung up the phone, and burst into tears, and for months was plagued with regret over his decision. Finally, Wakefield, who is in ongoing recovery from substance abuse, finds relief from his agony. He is able to write, "I make it through, without booze or drugs or pills. I am grateful, and reassured, that somehow, some way, my prayer was answered, not in some big life reversal or anything at all dramatic, but a simple thought, given to me, a gift that makes all the difference." That was God communicating with Wakefield in a way that he finally understood.

What about us? How is God communicating with us, and do we get it? I suspect that some of us think that we'll only find God in church, while sometimes that might be the last place to look! Some of us might assume that we only experience God when we're praying, but I don't think that's so either.

Some of us may assume that we'll know it's God when something out-of-the-ordinary happens. We seem to believe that the only real way to prove we've had an experience of God's presence in our lives is if it happens in some extraordinary way.

While I know that happens with some folks, I have to say that I think that kind of thing is more the exception than the rule. Rather, it seems to me that God is about communicating with us, as the Bible passage says, in everything we do and in everywhere we go. The theologian Paul Tillich, said it better than I when he said, "Through stars and stones, trees and animals; through tools and houses, sculpture and melody, poems and prose; through family relationships and voluntary communities, the Holy can encounter us."

It's up to us if we can see, hear, experience God wherever we go and in whatever we do. If we choose to, we can see God in a flock of geese migrating over our house in the fall, or when we wake up to rain splattering on the darkened bedroom window. It could be when a child reaches up to grab our hand, or when an unexpected conversation takes place that makes things clear.

It's all a matter of being aware, listening to our inner selves, looking around us at all of life, and being open to God's loving presence in ways we've never imagined. Are we ready for that?

#### Closing:

As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray that we will look with new eyes, and see God wherever we go and in whatever we're doing. Let's try it...we might like what we find.

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.