

The Cloud



Cloud computing can refer to a couple of things. It was first used to describe a number of computers linked together and working together in real-time over a network (like the internet).

This term has been adopted to describe 'application service provisioning'. This looks like the pic on the left and is (hopefully!) explained a bit more clearly below...

In easy terms this is stuff like Google Drive and is basically where software and other services used don't 'live' on your home PC or device, but are hosted elsewhere and you access them over the internet.

So Google docs (as one example) isn't necessarily a programme you download onto your computer (unlike for example software that 'lives' permanently on your computer). Instead, you use google's software located 'at google' (on their computers called 'servers') – and your computer accesses this software direct from google over the internet.



'Cloud computing' has its advantages but can be a problem if you lose connection to the internet / the network... In this session we'll think about 'the cloud' and see how we this helps us to think about our relationship with God!

The Bible

Exodus 13.21-22 - By day the Lord went ahead of them in a **pillar of cloud to guide them on their way** and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the **pillar of cloud** by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Luke 9.28-26 - About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendour, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, 'Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' (He did not know what he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. **A voice came from the cloud**, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.' When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

How does God speak to us today?

Maybe get into groups or just get a chart and get people to shout out or write down ways that God speaks to us.



Download A4 sheet to print off to help with this (page 2 has the suggestions below)

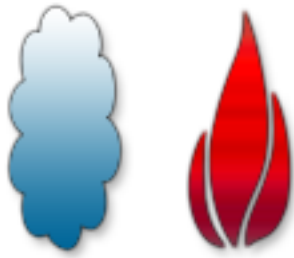
Suggestions of some ways God speaks:

1. The Bible (this is key, God will never say anything that goes against his Word)
2. In prayer
3. In worship
4. Word of other Christians
5. Actions of other Christians
6. Through Christian media eg books, websites
7. Through TV, songs etc – eg inspiring programmes
8. Dreams and visions
9. Through prophecy
10. Quiet-time notes

Movie Clip ('The Borg' from Star Trek)

Direct link - <https://youtu.be/WZEJ4OJTgg8>

God used 'the cloud' long before we 'invented it' !



In the Old Testament, we find the true account of how Moses was used by God to free all of Israel from slavery in Egypt. God was leading his people into the home he had promised for them - the Promised Land. But there was a journey to get there and no SatNav apps..

So God used the natural elements to lead the people - he sent a pillar of cloud in the day and a pillar of fire at night. (Just as well they weren't in the UK, the sky would be full of clouds! But God sent a 'pillar' of cloud - an unusual shape of cloud, just in case there was any confusion!)

God also spoke in the New Testament 'from the cloud' when Jesus went up a mountain with his closest three disciples. So God copyrighted the phrase 'the cloud' long before people starting using it! But what can we learn from this today...?

1. God speaks to us today

God speaks to us today. He mainly speaks to us through his Word (the Bible). The Bible is God's written word that he knows we need. It isn't everything about everything. Nor is it the complete wisdom of God. It's just a part - as much as God knows we need and can cope with. This is the main way God speaks and God never says anything else that goes against his Word. The Bible isn't 'old' in many ways. OK, so it was written down a long time ago but it was inspired by God who is outside of time. The Bible was also written down with God thinking about the whole of time. So it's as relevant today as it ever was and ever will be.



But God does also speak to us in different ways. We see in the Old Testament how God guided the people through a cloud in the sky and fire in the sky. These were in the shape of a 'pillar' so they weren't natural 'cloud' or 'fire' type shapes. The cloud didn't blow away and the fire didn't go out or spread. It was beyond what was natural - just as God is beyond our understanding. He speaks in different ways today as we looked at earlier. Some people hear from God in one way, other people hear from God in other ways - often depending on your personality, where you live, the type of church you go to etc. The important thing isn't really how God speaks - but the fact that God does speak to us, wants to speak to us, so we need to listen to him and do what he says. We can always go to the Bible and get to know more about God and the kinds of things he wants us to do and the people he wants us to be. When we pray, we can also listen to God. And we can listen to what other Christians say too.

2. We are all connected to God (but not like 'The Borg' !!)



Imagine being part of 'The Borg' (from Star Trek). The Borg are like a hellish version of 'the cloud' where the 'Collective' make decisions and all the Borg do what they say. You get 'assimilated' into the Borg (this means you have no choice - if they get you, you're stuffed!) Some people think that this is what God is like!

But God is nothing like The Borg (surprise, surprise!) Actually, the one who's most like The Borg is satan. He forces people to join him, makes them do evil things, destroys people and fills people with the worst bugs and viruses you can think of. But there's no bug or virus that God can't sort out - he's the 'human computer' virus expert as he's the creator of humanity!

God does not 'force' anyone to join the family of God. He doesn't make us do anything even when we are Christians. It's really important to know about this. God gives us free will. He made us in his image and Jesus willingly died to pay the price to mend the 'bridge' between man and God that man broke because they rejected God. God could have made us clones (like in iRobot) but he didn't. God could make everyone become a Christian. But he doesn't. God could make all Christians like slaves. But he doesn't. If we are a Christian, we are connected to God. John 15 talks about us being connected to God like a branch to a vine. If the Bible was written today, we might say that we're connected to God like he is a 'server' or 'the cloud' and we are 'devices' that need to stay connected to the server / the cloud.

In fact, God is the perfect, smartest, fastest (beyond fibre-optic speeds), greatest and most awesome version of 'The Cloud' that you can imagine. He's always there. There is never a 'power outage' or any 'server downtime' (when the internet stops working). He is always willing to listen to us. In fact, he loves it when we spend time with him. He downloads his heart and his love into our hearts (he doesn't force us to do anything, he fills our spirit with the Holy Spirit who helps us to do what is right). God never loses any data, no hackers can access him and leak information (not even any hacking group or Wikileaks!)



No-one can match God's 'cloud'. It is perfect and God speaks to all his children across the world, across languages, across time and into eternity. There's no code he can't understand and he'll never make you learn any difficult code. He may well challenge you but he'll always be there for you to 'search' and to 'create' with.

God has all the software you'll ever need, with free upgrades for life and eternity and you don't even have to pay for the software in the first place! The only thing you need to do is to say 'yes' to God and he'll work with you to sort out any bugs, viruses and malware in your 'system' (you).

A Prayer



Father God, I want to be connected to you and to stay connected to you. Help me sort out all the bugs in my system so that I can be part of God's cloud. I want to hear your voice and follow what you say.

Thank you that you love me, care for me and are always on demand for your people, the church. I pray that you would help me be all that you want me to be and to use my 'processing power' to help heal other people round me and show that the best thing in life is to be connected to God 'the perfect cloud'. Amen!