

### How do you speak?

Take a moment to think about the different ways you speak to your mates. It could be when you hang out, or by text, facebook, on the phone, email even. But there are other ways we 'speak' to our friends that aren't always so obvious. A little movement like raising an eyebrow or nodding the head is a way of speaking; a quick glance at someone with a knowing look is a way of speaking; so is smiling and other emotions on the face. There are also silent ways, like sitting next to someone we're mates with, or just thinking the same things because we're close to someone. When we think about who God is and how he's way beyond anything we can think of or understand and yet calls us his friends (John 15.15), it makes sense that God speaks to us in loads of ways too!

### Does God speak to us today? (Yes!)

Do you realise that God still speaks to us today?! Sometimes people who don't believe in God and who want to 'prove' that he's not real say all kinds of things. But one great truth is that Jesus is alive – you can find him working through his people, the church all round the world ! So God is still speaking and alive!

In this talk, we're going to look at Acts 10 and some of the ways that God can speak to us. We see all kinds of examples of how God speaks through the Bible but it's important to remember that the main way and the check to anything we think we've heard God say, is the Bible! So let's dive in to Acts 10...

### An Angel

Acts 10.1-6 – At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, 'Cornelius!' Cornelius stared at him in fear. 'What is it, Lord?' he asked. The angel answered, 'Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.

Cornelius was a man of God. One day he had a vision where an angel was sent to give him a message. Angels played a big part through the Bible bringing messages. An angel visited Mary telling her that she would be the Mother of Jesus; an angel also visited her husband to be, Joseph to encourage him. An angel turned up in prison and Peter was released miraculously, walking out the prison with no-one seeing. Genesis tells us of an angel protecting / guarding the way to the Garden of Eden. In Revelation and other books of the Bible, we see seraph angels ("fiery ones") around God's throne. We see angels in the Old Testament destroying thousands of evil people fighting against God's people. Through the Bible and today they are God's warriors and messengers who help us, though we usually don't see them.

But do angels appear today? Yes, of course! We know from the Bible that there is a war going on around us that we don't see. It's a war between the spiritual forces of darkness and good; demons against angels. There are hundreds of accounts of angels protecting people in all kinds of situations. I have heard true accounts of people having accidents and then an angel coming along, taking command and getting the person out of the car, with even the police obeying the angel. I've heard of angels surrounding a church protecting those inside from people sent to kill them. I have also got a photo and seen video footage of lights that move around two churches (the people who were there saw angels).

My family were once stuck on a steep hill with the car broken down, in the middle of nowhere, when someone appeared out of the fog and helped them push the car over the hill. The person then vanished! (This is just one example). God speaks through and uses angels today!!

## A Vision

Acts 10:9-20 – About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' 'Surely not, Lord!' Peter replied. 'I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.' The voice spoke to him a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

I once heard a famous speaker called Charles Stanley giving a talk. He said, "I didn't think God still spoke to people through visions, until he spoke to me in a vision."

We see in Acts 10 that Paul 'fell into a trance'. This wasn't some drug-fuelled trip. Instead, the same part of the Bible also describes this as a 'vision'. Peter saw a large sheet coming down from heaven with all kinds of creatures. He didn't understand what it meant straight away but the meaning came over time as he did what God had told him and went with the men to see Cornelius. This shows how important it is to obey God and do what he tells you to do!!

Some people seem to have more 'visions' and 'pictures' than a movie or an art exhibition and maybe this is the way that God speaks to them (he speaks to all of us individually). When I just became a Christian and knew nothing about anything (not a lot has changed!) God showed me 3 visions for my life and I have seen them happen! So God does speak to people today through visions and he may well speak to you this way – exciting or what! But we also need to remember that we must use the Bible as the top number-one source, as we know this is definitely God's Word. Anything that goes against God's Word goes against God's character and his will.

## The Spirit speaking directly

Acts 10.19-20 – While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.’

Have you ever felt like a little ‘nudge’ inside you? No, it’s not a curry that went down the wrong way, it’s like a “still small voice” as people often call it. This is one key way that God speaks to us and it’s like a small prompt inside you that is quiet, gentle and almost like a whisper. This is the voice of the Holy Spirit in us. Peter was thinking about the vision that he’d seen – not surprisingly, as it was a pretty amazing vision! While he was thinking about this, the Spirit of God spoke to him. So, first God gave him a vision; then God spoke to him directly ‘inside’.

Often when God speaks, it’s almost in your belly. I know, it sounds crazy but it’s as if that’s where the voice of God comes ‘from’. One way I have found to know something isn’t from God is if it comes straight from your ‘head’ or ‘mind’. Not that God doesn’t care about your mind! But often if something comes to mind in your head, it’s from your own mind and not necessarily from God’s mind – his ways are higher! (Isaiah 55.9). It’s hard to describe the feeling of God speaking this way but funnily enough an old version of the Bible called ‘King James version’ (written in 1600s in England and with language from that time which is often impossible to understand!) can help us here. In John 7.37-38, Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit like ‘living water’. And where does this ‘living water’ come from? *“He that believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”*

One time, I felt to take my laptop to church. I did and it was needed when the church PC didn’t work. Other times, I have felt this kind of ‘prompt’ but have just thought it was a thought passing by and I’ve missed out on doing something that could help.

So if you feel an almost whisper to do something or not go somewhere etc then try to obey – it may be God whispering to you. The good thing for Peter is that he heard the Spirit’s voice. Eventually, going with the three men (sent by Cornelius) led Peter to understand what the vision meant (that he was now to take the good news about Jesus to the Gentiles, the non-Jews).

## God’s Word

Acts 10.23-26, 39-43 – The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. ‘Stand up,’ he said, ‘I am only a man myself.’

(Peter said)... “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him

after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.'

God mainly speaks to us through his written Word, the Bible. This reveals the character of God so when we read the Bible and ask God to speak to us, he does and works in our hearts bit by bit to change us to be more like God.

We know this because Jesus told his disciples that whoever had seen him had seen God (John 14.7-11), plus John 17.21 says that Jesus and the Father are one. We also know that Jesus is called the Word in John 1, so the Bible reveals Jesus and Jesus reveals the Bible. If we know God we have the Holy Spirit in us who brings God's words to our memory and who works in us so that we become more like Jesus.

Peter was humble enough to know that the power of God in him was not because he was special. He also testified to Cornelius and the others about Jesus – what had happened and what Jesus had told them to do. He spoke God's Word and Cornelius and the others heard the words of Jesus. They then responded to this and Cornelius and his whole household were filled with the Holy Spirit! (A good thing!!)

There are lots of ways that God speaks through the Bible. The main way is that the Bible tells us about God and as we read the Bible and ask God to speak to us, something incredible happens – God begins to shape us to be more like him. He will speak to you specifically (eg he might say what he wants you to do in a situation), but God also speaks generally, revealing his character.

One amusing way God spoke to me recently was when I was going to play guitar at a gig but I was ill so couldn't attend. I woke up, looked at the time which was 11.11, felt much better and felt God say to look at John 11.11 which says, "After he had said this, he went on to tell them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.'" It made me laugh as I felt God had made me better and woken me up. So off I went to the gig – and got a free ride in an airplane!

## The Spirit poured out on people

Acts 10.44-48 – While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, 'Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptised with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Finally, we see that another way God speaks in in signs and wonders. God will use you to bring healing, to help people and as you speak his words, to see God change broken lives and restore people back to know God. God also does some things that are out of the box, things that we don't understand naturally. It's really important that we don't try to place limits on the way that God speaks to people or works. Some Christians would like to have a nice little box to put God inside, but God is so much bigger. For example across the world, Jesus himself is appearing to Muslims and non-Muslims in dreams and visions and they are coming to know him. We should always be cautious of things that go against the Bible and against Biblical principles – this is always the best test. But God will do things and use things that aren't in the Bible (for example websites!) to help people meet with Him and change lives. It's an exciting time we live in!!

## God wants to speak to You!

God will speak to you according to how he knows you best respond and will hear him. He will even speak to you according to your personality! If you're very logical he may speak in this way. If you're very creative, he will probably speak in creative ways! So ask God to speak to you all the time, stay close to him, keep reading your Bible asking God to show you what he wants to say to you and make sure you listen twice as much as you talk !!