

The Voice in My Head

I love my husband's recent Christmas gift to me: a hearing aid. (Actually, he appreciates it about as much as I do, since I'm not daily asking, "Excuse me?" and "What?") A number of years ago I had been diagnosed with a 25% hearing loss in one ear, but it had grown to 45%. That's a lot of missed words in conversations, sermons, and TV shows.

Mine is a little device that sits in my ear canal, pretty much invisible. Because it's so small, the battery is teeny tiny and needs to be replaced every five days or so. I know it's time to swap it out when a little metallic voice suddenly says "Battery" in my ear. That means I have maybe two minutes before a final, second "Battery"—then a small click that means my wonderful restored hearing is gone and I'm back to the world's sounds being muffled till I put a new battery in.

I am grateful for that little voice because it tells me something very important about something I need to do, and fast.

And every time, I am reminded of Isaiah 30:21—"And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." My immediate prayer is, "Lord, please teach me to hear you as clearly as I hear that little voice in my ear!"

Hearing God's voice is a realistic part of being in relationship with him. In the Old Testament, Jeremiah 33:3 records God's invitation: "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known." In the New Testament, Jesus promises, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27).

So how do we hear God's voice?

1. **Choose to listen.** It starts with being intentional. We need

to believe that God speaks to His children, and act on that belief by putting ourselves in “listening mode.” That’s not about sitting down with a demanding spirit that says, “OK, Lord, you have five minutes to talk to me or I’m outta here.” In my experience, the God of the universe does not respond to self-centered demands like that. It’s more like turning on a baby monitor and leaving it in the “always on” position. And keeping one ear “open” for any sounds coming from the monitor.

The primary way God speaks to us is through his word. Sometimes as we read the scriptures, a verse seems to leap off the page, right into our hearts, and burn with a personal application. Even as a new believer in college, I knew that when I read Isaiah 55:2, the context was God speaking to his people Israel: “Why do you spend your money on that which is not bread, and your wages on that which does not satisfy?” But in 1973, struggling with a holy discontent about my college degree plan, God spoke to me through this verse, giving me the freedom to stop college at the end of my junior year. And sure enough, in the 43 years since, I have never once regretted not earning a degree in elementary education because being a classroom teacher was never God’s plan for my life. Teaching, yes, but not in a school classroom.

But God also speaks to us in our spirit. My friend Bob was a pastor. One morning he felt impressed to drive to a nearby lake to meet with God. He sat there on a picnic bench waiting to hear from God (and, frankly, expecting some direction on what to preach the following Sunday). After 45 minutes of just quietness, hearing nothing, he sensed God say to him, “OK, Bob, you can go to your office now.”

Eyebrows raised, he said, “I thought maybe you were going to give me some instruction on what you want me to preach this Sunday . . .? What’s the point of sitting here for almost an hour, Lord?”

In his spirit, Bob heard, “I just wanted to spend some time

with you.”

It takes time and practice to learn to hear God like Bob does (and he learned over time and by practicing). But that’s what friends do. They talk with each other.

2. Expect God to speak. Who knows how many things in life we miss simply because we weren’t expecting them, so they blow right by? When we live with an attitude of expectancy, it’s a lot easier to hear that “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12) when God does speak to us.

I learned this while at a conference a number of years ago. So many of the conference attendees lived with this attitude of expectancy that it was common mealtime conversation to share what people had heard and experienced from the Lord that day. I wanted that for myself! I went from one session to the next “with my ears on” (in old CB-radio lingo), hopeful to hear from God.

I was in one breakout session about fifteen minutes when I suddenly became aware of a strong impression—a pressure on my heart—that I was supposed to call my husband. Right then. It came out of the blue, connecting to nothing I was hearing in the breakout, so I left the session and walked to my dorm room to get to a phone (oh, how things have changed with the invention of the cell phone!) When my husband answered, I learned that he was very sick and was feeling even worse because there was no way to contact me and he was feeling not just miserable, but *alone* and miserable. He was quite surprised to learn that God had told me to call him. There wasn’t anything I could do from the other side of the country, but it was comforting to both of us that God intervened so that we could talk to each other.

3. Predecide to focus on God’s voice despite what other voices you’re hearing. It takes time and experience to learn to recognize his voice, but I can promise you this: it will never

contradict his word, and his peace will be attached. We hear the “voice” or sounds of what matters to us. I once read a story about a native American who accompanied a city dweller to New York City. As they walked down the sidewalk, the native suddenly stopped in the midst of all that concrete and said, “I hear a cricket!” His city dwelling friend scoffed: “Are you kidding? How can you hear such a small sound with all this racket?” At that, the native pointed to the soil surrounding a small tree growing out of a concrete planter in the sidewalk; sure enough, there was a cricket rubbing its legs together. His friend shook his head, amazed. The native said, “It’s not so amazing. We hear what’s important to us. Watch this.” He reached into his pocket, pulled out a handful of coins, and threw them on the sidewalk. Instantly, scores of people around them stopped, swiveling their heads at the sound of money hitting the ground. “See? What’s important is money to them, and nature to me. We hear what’s important to us.”

We need to filter out the sounds and voices of the world, which would call us away from intimacy with God, and “keep the first thing, the first thing.” When God speaks, we want to be found listening.

Because when he speaks, it’s something far more important than “Battery.”

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Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear?

Have you ever missed a great opportunity because you weren't listening carefully? Twenty centuries ago some clues to impending good news of monumental import eluded most folks. Fascinating prophecies of Jesus' birth and life bring revealing insights into your own life today.

Have you ever missed a great opportunity because you weren't listening carefully?

If Mark^[1] hadn't been willing to listen, he might have missed some great news. He enjoyed an adequate income, fulfilling work, a comfortable home, and many close friends. Then his employer offered a promotion requiring a move to another state. At first resistant, he eventually decided to listen to the offer and make the move.

Mark's job responsibilities expanded, his growing reputation opened doors for wider influence, and he met and married Gail. Reflecting twenty-five years later, he was glad he had carefully listened to news of the offer.



At a business convention Joan heard a brief announcement of an advanced degree program. Distracted by current concerns, she dismissed it. When the announcement was repeated the next day, Joan caught something she had missed. The degree would be from one of the most prestigious universities in the world. Her company was encouraging managers to participate, promising them time to study, and offering to help pay for it. Joan investigated, enrolled, and her career was greatly enhanced. "To think that I almost missed the good news about this program because I was distracted," Joan reflected. "What a

tragedy that would have been.”

Perhaps you, too, have encountered news that first seemed insignificant but later became momentous. Great news isn’t always trumpeted by headlines or television broadcasts. Sometimes the best news could slip right by if you’re not attuned to its importance.

Twenty centuries ago some clues to impending good news of monumental import eluded most folks. A baby born in relative obscurity in the Middle East was hailed by a few as a future king who would rescue people from their troubles. “Good news of great joy for everyone!” said one announcement of Jesus’ birth.[{2}](#)

Relatively few contemporaries acknowledged His importance. His followers later showed numerous clues to His identity, prophecies written many years before His birth. You may not share the faith of those early believers, but perhaps you’ll find it interesting to eavesdrop on some of the clues, the prophecies. Consider just a few.[{3}](#)

Prophecies Fulfilled in Jesus’ Birth

The Hebrew writer Micah told around 700 B.C. of deliverance through a coming Messiah or “Anointed One.” He indicated this deliverer would be from Bethlehem. He wrote, “But you . . . Bethlehem . . . are only a small village in Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past.” [{4}](#)

Matthew, a first-century biographer, noted that “. . . Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. . . .”[{5}](#)

Isaiah, writing around 700 B.C., foretold an unusual aspect of the Messiah’s birth, that He would be *born of a virgin*. He wrote, “The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”[{6}](#)

The name “Immanuel” means “God is with us.” The indication—to all who were listening—was that God Himself would be physically present with humans through this child. What a promise! What good news to people who often felt abandoned by God.

Matthew recorded this about Jesus’ birth:

Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. . . . Joseph . . . brought Mary home to be his wife, but she remained a virgin until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.[{7}](#)

Jewish prophets mentioned several clues about the Messiah’s lineage. He was to be a *descendant of Abraham*. Moses, a famous Jewish leader writing fourteen hundred years before Jesus’ birth, recorded a prophecy about the Jewish patriarch Abraham. He wrote, “Through your [Abraham’s] descendants, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.”[{8}](#)

The Messiah was also to be a *descendant of Isaac*. Moses recorded another promise. He said, “God told Abraham, ‘ . . . Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted’.”[{9}](#) In other words, something important was going to come through the descendants of Abraham and specifically through the line of Isaac, one of Abraham’s two sons.

The Messiah was also to be a *descendant of Jacob*. Abraham’s son Isaac himself had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Some ancient Jewish scholars[{10}](#) believed that another prophecy that Moses recorded prefigured the Messiah. Moses wrote, “A star will rise from Jacob; a scepter will emerge from Israel.”[{11}](#)

Luke, a first-century physician, traced Jesus’ lineage through these three Jewish leaders. He wrote of “Jesus . . . the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham. . . .”[{12}](#)

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, of a virgin, and from the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The pieces of the prophetic puzzle were starting to become clearer. The details of His life would fulfill the prophecies further.

Prophecies Fulfilled in Jesus' Life and Death

Though Jesus was born in humble circumstances, learned leaders traveled great distances to hail the child as a king. In His youth, scholars marveled at His wisdom. In His thirties He began to publicly offer peace, freedom, purpose and hope to the masses. His message caught on.

His enemies plotted His demise and paid one of his followers to betray Him. His closest friends deserted Him. He was tried, convicted, sentenced and executed. In agony during His execution He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[{13}](#)

Many hurting people feel forsaken by God. But Jesus' cry of desperation carried added significance because of its historical allusion. The words had appeared about a thousand years earlier in a song written by Israel's King David.[{14}](#) It said, "All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads."[{15}](#) "They have pierced my hands and my feet."[{16}](#) "They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."[{17}](#) Historians record precisely this behavior during Jesus' execution.[{18}](#) It was as if a divine drama were unfolding as Jesus slipped into death.

Researchers have uncovered more than 300 prophecies that were literally fulfilled in Jesus' life and death. He would be preceded by a messenger who would prepare the way for His work.[{19}](#) He would enter the capital city as a king, but riding on a donkey's back.[{20}](#) He would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver,[{21}](#) pierced,[{22}](#) executed with thieves[{23}](#) and yet, though wounded,[{24}](#) would suffer no broken bones.[{25}](#)

In His dying cry from the cross, He reminded His hearers that His life and death were in precise fulfillment of a previously stated plan. According to a biblical perspective, at the moment of death He experienced the equivalent of eternal separation from God in our place. He suffered the divine penalty due all the shortcomings, injustice, evil, and sin of the world, including yours and mine. Then—again in fulfillment of prophecy^{26} and contrary to natural law—He returned to life. As somewhat of a skeptic I investigated the evidence for Christ's resurrection and found it to be one of the best-attested facts in history.^{27} To the seeker He offers true inner peace,^{28} forgiveness,^{29} purpose,^{30} and strength for fulfilling living.^{31}

Jesus' birth, life, and death fulfilled many prophecies. Many of these fulfillments involved details that were beyond His human control. But could this be coincidence? Could the prophecies have been fulfilled by chance?

Prophecies Fulfilled by Chance?

My good friend and mentor, Bob Prall, likes to make a distinction between prediction and prophecy^{32} and uses a sports analogy to illustrate that distinction. I got to know Bob when I was a student at Duke University and he was the Campus Crusade for Christ director. Now, sports fans will know that Duke's men's basketball team often has contended for the national title. Alas, the Duke football team has suffered many losing seasons.

Bob notes that prediction can involve careful analysis of current events to make an educated guess about the future. Stock market analysts, political pollsters, social scientists, and CBS *Survivor* fans all seek to predict outcomes. But prophecy often involves events and situations hundreds of years apart or without apparent human connection. Bob explains that if someone were to study the Duke men's basketball team and announce they would win the national championship, and

then it happened, that would be successful prediction. But if someone evaluated the Duke *football* team and announced they would win the national championship, that would be prophecy!

Could the 300 prophecies Jesus fulfilled have been fulfilled merely by chance? Peter Stoner, a California mathematician, once calculated the probability of just eight of these 300 prophecies coming true in one person due to chance alone. Using estimates that both he and classes of college students considered reasonable and conservative, Stoner concluded there was one chance in 10^{17} that those eight were fulfilled by fluke.

He says 10^{17} silver dollars would cover the state of Texas two feet deep. Mark one coin with red fingernail polish. Stir the whole batch thoroughly. What chance would a blindfolded person have of picking the marked coin on the first try? One in 10^{17} , the same chance that just eight of the 300 prophecies “just happened” to come true in this man, Jesus.[\[33\]](#)

With all these signs, why wasn't more attention paid to Jesus' birth? No reporters with microphones and cameras waited outside the stable to interview the new mom. (Maybe if she'd had quintts?)

Some back then were looking for a conquering king promised by Hebrew prophets and did not anticipate a lowly birth. Others were perhaps too entangled in their own self-importance or preoccupied with the details of life: working, families, relationships, emotions. Maybe they were a bit like us.

What does all this mean for us this Christmas?

Today's Good News

Jesus' “good news” offers a chance to hook into God's unchanging love, to be forgiven of all wrong and to live forever with Him. He can help you accept yourself, replace

anxiety with peace and provide the best friends you've ever had.

If His news is so good, why do people still miss it today? Some are enmeshed in careers or relationships that offer little time for reflection. Chasing dollars blinds some. Family strife can make life a blur: teens experimenting with sex or drugs, a spouse wanting out. Western life itself can be exhausting: media overload, the rush to taxi kids or complete shopping, cellphones, beepers, PTA, soccer practice, e-mail, laundry, Web surfing . . . Help! Maybe you could use some time to reflect.

I suspect you've had hints of God's good news. Maybe you've admired the majesty of the universe and wondered Who was behind it. Perhaps a friend told you their story of faith. Maybe a magazine article got you thinking.

For eighteen years I heard the story of Jesus but did not understand it. The summer before entering university, I wrestled with concern over my own afterlife but gave up because it seemed too complicated. That fall I met some vibrant Christians whose love, joy, and enthusiasm attracted me.

They told me I could not earn eternal life. Rather I needed to receive Christ's free gift of forgiveness accomplished by His death for my sins and His resurrection. They told me all this would be a "gift of God; not . . . a result of works, so that no one . . . [could] boast" about it.[\[34\]](#) That was good news to me. I accepted His gift of forgiveness and have found Him to be a wonderful friend.

Life hasn't been perfect. I've had my share of domestic strife, job conflicts, and minor health struggles. God never promised perfection, painlessness, or complete prosperity in this life. But He does offer unusual peace, pardon from guilt, ultimate purpose, and the inner power to cope with any

struggle. He promises to cause “all things to work together for good” to those who love Him.[{35}](#) He is a friend who will never leave.[{36}](#)

Might this Christmas season be a good time for you to ask God to forgive you and become your friend? It’s a decision that only you can make for yourself. You can simply talk to Him right now, ask Him to forgive you and become your friend forever. Then contact this station or visit the Web site Probe.org to learn more about a relationship with God.

Maybe there’s some good news for you in the story of Jesus. Do you hear what I hear? Are you listening?

*This article is adapted from Rusty Wright, “Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear?” *Pursuit* VII: 3, 1998, pp.12-15. Copyright © 1998 Rusty Wright. Used By Permission.

Notes

1. Names and some details in certain stories in this article have been altered for privacy while preserving the points of the stories. Details of stories that name me personally have not been changed.

2. Luke 2:10 NLT.

3. Adapted from Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, Calif: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972) 147-157 ff.

4. Micah 5:2 NLT.

5. Matthew 2:1 NASB.

6. Isaiah 7:14 NIV.

7. Matthew 1:18, 24, 25 NLT.

8. Genesis 22:18 NLT.

9. Genesis 21:12 NLT.
10. McDowell, op. cit., 154.
11. Numbers 24:17 NLT.
12. Luke 3:23, 34 NASB.
13. Matthew 27:46 NIV.
14. Psalm 22.
15. Psalm 22:7 NIV.
16. Psalm 22:16 NIV.
17. Psalm 22:18 NIV.
18. Matthew 27:39-44, 35; John 20:25.
19. Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:1,2.
20. Zechariah 9:9; John 12:15; Matthew 21:1-9.
21. Zechariah 11:12; Matthew 26:15, 27:3.
22. Zechariah 12:10; John 19:34, 37.
23. Isaiah 53:12; Matthew 27:38.
24. Isaiah 53:5; Zechariah 13:6; Matthew 27:26.
25. Psalm 34:20; John 19:33, 36.
26. Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:31-32.
27. See McDowell, op. cit., 185-273.
28. John 14:27.
29. Colossians 1:14.
30. Matthew 28: 18-20.

31. Galatians 5:22-23.

32. Bob Prall, *The Master Plot of the Bible* (Houston: Emmaus Books Trust, 1997) 56; Bob Prall, *As You Are Going... Make Disciples* (Houston: Emmaus Books Trust, 2001) 108-109.

33. Peter W. Stoner, *Science Speaks* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969) 99-112.

34. Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB.

35. Romans 8:28 NASB.

36. Hebrews 13:5.

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