

# PLAIN TRUTH®

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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

## Listening to God



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**M**any believe God makes himself known primarily through catastrophic events—like hurricanes and earthquakes and floods. During such times, the “accepted wisdom” is that God is expressing his displeasure with someone or some group of people.

God, some say, is actively sending a message when the land is dry and parched by drought or when fires rage, destroying homes, crops, animal and human life.

Does God communicate in what insurance companies call “acts of God”? If he does, are “acts of God” the only way he has of communicating (presumably only his displeasure)? Are there other ways God “speaks” to us?

Some would say (I am among

them) that we hear God through the birth of a baby, the love of a child and through a sunrise or sunset. We can, I believe, sense and smell God in the fresh aroma after it rains, and in the forgiving, cleansing purity of a fresh snowfall, its white coat gently covering the barren and besmirched earth.

Many religious professionals who say they speak for God, or at the very least try to explain God, believe God sends messages through loud, attention-grabbing catastrophes and suffering. Some church-goers have been so brainwashed they feel a “good” sermon fills them with shame and guilt. Many evaluate the effectiveness of a sermon based on whether they felt so low and beaten down they could have left the closed door of the church by

slithering, like a worm, under it.

By that token, if “good” sermons are characterized by bellowing and shouting, then, if you have seen any footage of the spell-binding propaganda of hate, swill and rubbish that spewed out of the mouth of Adolph Hitler, you’d think he was an exceptional preacher.

### Noise and Busyness

Our world is filled with noise—the bigger the city we live in, the more people and the more traffic, the more noise we are exposed to—even small towns are overwhelmed by racket and clamor.

One cannot escape the clamor and hubbub of traffic, factory and office, for when one returns home, much racket and commotion continue. Washing machines, vacuum cleaners, microwaves, blenders, televisions and all kinds of sounds from electronic devices seem to be incessant, warring against a quiet place that offers a peaceful sanctuary.

Even as one day becomes another, in the early hours of the morning, there are train whistles, sirens of police and emergency vehicles and sometimes police helicopters whirring overhead.

Lawn mowers and leaf blowers rudely interrupt the blessed quiet of mornings. Houses with children come alive with chatter, arguments and debates. Early in the morning, school buses rumble and giant garbage trucks rattle their way through neighborhoods.

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Buses rumble on city streets, horns honk and even when trucks and cars are stopped at traffic lights, they are belching exhaust—then the light changes to green. These devices of transportation accelerate and reverberations are left in their wake.

Ironically, the most common remedy to find “peace and quiet” involves plugging into a different kind of noise and busyness. It seems the most widely used cure is the discordant commotion and demands for immediate responses from electronic devices and gadgets.

In all our progress and technology, it seems our appetites (or is it addictions?) for clamor, commotion, hustle-bustle and frenzied activity have increased, and in turn, our desire and capacity for being still have greatly diminished.

Have we been acclimatized to seeking “peace and quiet” by plugging in to more noise, listening to “phones” and virtually enslaved to all manner of electronic devices? ***Does noise equal connection?***

With the volume of sound so loud and almost inescapable, how do we listen for God? Has our cultural noise deafened us to God? How can we hear him?

## Hearing God

I’ve worn hearing aids for about two years. With an assist from these devices, my hearing has improved. Having my physical hearing improved has helped me become more aware of my need to listen more carefully to God.

Of course, God doesn’t need any devices or aids to help him hear me, but I readily admit to being “hard-of-hearing” on many occasions when he communicated with me. I need *spiritual hearing aids* enabling me to listen by grace through faith. Such hearing aids are not humanly produced and marketed. Such spiritual hearing aids are the gift of God.

Some say God is silent, particularly at times of trauma and pain in their lives. Others say they speak for God and will say that they know God better than anyone. They are dogmatic and opinionated. They say they have all the answers.

But the fact is, in spite of characterizations of many who say they speak for God, there are many times in our lives when God seems to be passive or silent. There are many times when he does not answer us when we pray, or, better said, he does not answer us in the way we expect or desire. Surely he hears us—does he have selective

hearing (as many wives conclude of their husbands)?

On our part, we must admit that we only want God to say something when his message benefits us. We are delighted to accept God’s silence when it comes to a past we don’t want to be reminded about or want anyone to know about.

We are thankful God is silent about how bad we have

been—but we would really like to hear him tell us how pleased he is with how good we are—at least when we think he owes us because, in our less than humble estimation, we have done some remarkable, exceptional and wonderful things.

Why does God seem to be silent when we believe he should be recognizing our righteousness and goodness? Why is God silent when we think he should be pinning a medal or ribbon on our chest, or giving us another spiritual trophy for our trophy case? Why is God silent when he could stop pain and suffering?

Why doesn’t God say and do *what* we think he ought to say and do *when* we think he should?

## God Speaks to Us

Some believe that God will make himself known, always, through blessings and curses—they think that God will always give us feedback about our actions. So, when we do the things we are told will make God happy, then the sun will shine and everything in our life will come up roses.

According to this common misunderstanding of who God is and how he speaks to us, when we do the wrong things and displease God, then we will immediately hear from him—we will have bad experiences, the car will break down, the roof will leak, we will get sick, we will lose our jobs. All of that and more will be messages from God trying to get our attention and set us straight.

The idea of a God who always responds with blessings and curses is a pre-Christian idea of God—in fact it is a popular misconception of God that permeates history and is overwhelmingly present throughout all religion in this 21st century. This false idea of God has insinuated itself into many churches within Christendom.

The truth is, when you examine the biblical revelation of God, in the person of Jesus, God is seldom



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loud or overbearing. The obvious question is this: Why are so many people who say they represent God so loud, belligerent, authoritarian and domineering?

The life and teachings of Jesus are evidence that God does what he wants, when he wants and is not captive to our ideas about what he should do and when he should do it.

God does not march to the beat of the religious songs we sing nor does he dance like a puppet on a string when we do what we deem to be righteous, religious things.

When we pray, for example, we do not hear an audible response from God. Neither do we normally discern an immediate answer—and in many cases we never experience the answer we ask and hope for.

***It is a huge mistake to assume that God thinks and talks*** in the same way we do.

***It is a huge mistake to assume that God is dramatic*** and that he uses what we call “acts of God” to get our attention, effectively turning up the volume so we will listen.

The fact is that we, like so many throughout history, are less in tune with God and less apt to carefully seek him out and “hear” him out. God may seem to be silent, but we are not listening—we may have hit our spiritual remote control so that we are listening to other messages, other channels and other programming... thus we are not listening to God.

Rarely does God reveal himself to us with thunderous pronouncements. More often, it is the

“silence of God” that we experience. We often listen most acutely to God in our own silence, when we turn from and mute the cacophony of messages that bombard us from our culture and world.

In I Kings 19:1-13 we read that God came to Elijah in a whisper, instead of the earthquake, great wind or fire. Perhaps God was saying, “I am with you Elijah, even though I don’t dance to your tune or perform according to your expectations. I am with you even though I am not doing the breathtaking, miraculous and spectacular things you think I should.”

***Perhaps God is saying that we can listen to him just as well, or even better, in silence than we can in a noisy world.***

Isn’t that one of the major lessons and incredible counterintuitive insights we learn about God from the revelation of God in the person and life and teaching of Jesus?

Jesus did not come to us in pomp and ceremony and fanfare. Jesus did not hold people spellbound. Jesus performed miracles but his miracles were unexpected, rather than expected.

Jesus was and is the king of an upside-down kingdom—he did not, in his earthly ministry behave like any kind of king anyone had seen or heard of. He does not now work in our lives in ways that we would often expect nor does he always do what we want him to.

God always hears us. He always listens. He forever loves us. May we more carefully listen to him. □

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***Christianity Without the Religion—Quote for the Day***