

“From the day we are born our quest for love is so powerful, we will do whatever it takes to have it. Sadly, most of us are not taught how to love and we follow our passion down roads that have the potential to leave us broken and angry. The answer to our deepest craving is God’s love. This book is a powerful journey of discovering the truth about a love that is so radical, it will turn your thinking upside-down. Be prepared to be transformed.”

— Heidi McLaughlin, International Speaker and Author of  
*BEAUTY UNLEASHED: Transforming a Woman’s Soul,*  
*SAND TO PEARLS: Making Bold Choices to Enrich Your Life*  
[www.heartconnection.ca](http://www.heartconnection.ca)

“The word radical, like the word awesome, is generally overused; flipped around as casually as a penny. *Radical Love* is a wonderful exception: these two women use the word in its truest sense, to describe something deep, wild, dangerous, extreme; namely God’s searching, healing, liberating—his radical—love for you. The book is both a celebration of that love and a step-by-step guide to experiencing more of it. Donna and Kimberly are wise and gentle companions. I hope many women (and at least a few men) will take the journey with them.”

— Mark Buchanan, Author of *Spiritual Rhythm,*  
*Hidden in Plain Sight, Your God is Too Safe, Things Unseen,*  
*The Holy Wild, The Rest of God,* and more  
[www.markbuchanan.net](http://www.markbuchanan.net)

“Practical, scriptural and delightfully readable; Soesbee and Lowe show readers how to find their “one true love” in a relationship of radical love with God. The authors expose the wrong thinking so prevalent among Christians today and use foundational biblical principles to teach truth. Then they back it up with plenty of real-life examples we can all relate to. If you don’t plan to loan out your copy, you’d better buy a stack because this is a book you’ll want to give to everyone who matters to you.”

— Connie Cavanaugh, International Speaker and Author of  
*From Faking it to Finding Grace*  
[www.conniecavanaugh.com](http://www.conniecavanaugh.com)

“I recommend *Radical Love* without hesitation, because the authors, Donna Lowe and Kimberly Soesbee take the reader away from the popular counterfeit processes of becoming a Christian into the authentic process. Their biblical imagery of the engagement by the Holy Spirit with God’s love is fresh and exciting and needed by those both inside and outside the institutional church. They draw upon personal experience as well as reliable biblical and historical research to explain the process of Christian spiritual transformation for each of us.”

— Dr. Larry D. Ellis, Author of  
*Forgiveness: Unleashing a Transformational Process*  
[www.theforgivenessbook.com](http://www.theforgivenessbook.com)

“Through story and touching personal anecdotes, Kimberly and Donna demonstrate how they discovered the blessings to be had by loving others radically. This book will speak to your heart, as it did mine, and challenge you to start loving as God does, and the place to start is your own heart.”

— Lisa Hall-Wilson  
Book Reviewer, Maranatha News  
[www.maranathanewspaper.com](http://www.maranathanewspaper.com)

“*Radical Love* is a book that I believe will help all who read it experience God in a new, fresh way. I concur with the writers’ statement: ‘You can begin your transformation from someone who is called a Christian but certainly doesn’t feel the joy of Christ, to someone who is living out your salvation with the abundant joy that Christ came to give.’”

— Carole Lewis  
Director Emeritus, First Place 4 Health  
Author of *Live Life, Right Here, Right Now*

RADICAL  
*Love*  
Forever Changed

Donna  
**LOWE** & Kimberly  
**SOESBEE**



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My husband David: You, my loved one, are a never-ending source of love. Thank you for each reminder that God loves me, that God is faithful, and that God is all about redeeming that which has been lost. I love you.

My fabulous children: Cooper, your creativity makes me smile. I am so proud of you. Benjamin, my little evangelist, never lose your sense of humor or the excitement for adventure that you carry within you. Kacey, my beautiful daughter, you are wise beyond your years. Dream big things and let God show you His goodness.

My mom Sandy: Your faithfulness is something I am thankful for every day. Thank you for the sacrifices and for being my example of a mother's love.

My sister Kryston: Through every trial we face, my prayer is that our hearts will be mended together as sisters in Christ.

I could fill books with the names of the friends who have been a source of love lessons in my life. Donna, I love you! Kimberley Miller, I love you! Lisa Simmonds, I love you! Tamara Reid, I love you! Kristy Senger, I love you!

Most importantly, we have written this book *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. He loves you, dear reader, and we are grateful to you for embracing God's call to love radically!

## *From Donna:*

The following people have profoundly impacted my life and have taught me that humility is better than pridefulness, and loving others deeply from the heart is far more important than self-preservation:

My husband Kelly: Sharing faith, life, and family with you is the single greatest gift God has given me. You've taught me how to let the small stuff go and to have some fun.

My beautiful children: Brandon & Becky, Jadyn & Cherise, Taelyn, and my sweet grandson, Carter, each one of you has taught me how to take my eyes off myself for the sake of a sacrificial love. You are my calling.

My dad: You have loved me through some of the most difficult and rebellious years of my life, and you have taught me a persevering love.

My sister Jolene, and my brother Keith: You were my first best friends. You and your families have been the source of much love and a whole lot of fun. You've taught me how to laugh in the face of adversity, and I've learned that together we have a far greater impact than we are ever capable of having individually.

Two friends: Esther Isaac, among the many things you taught me, most important was to always seek the truth. I could never veer to the left or the right because you were right there pointing me toward the narrow path.

Kim Soesbee, there isn't enough room to write about all that you have taught me. You truly are an ambassador of God's reconciliation. Throughout the years, and the many ups and downs, our friendship has been a testimony to God's faithfulness and provisions. Jonathan and David-like, we are knit together at the heart for all eternity.

Finally, my mom, and my sweet friend Joanne: You two courageously trusted in Jesus' goodness throughout the final pain-filled days of your lives. You taught us all that the miracle of God's Radical Love is not only possible to live out—no matter what trials you face—it is also what's best.

I am forever changed because of all of you, and I thank my God for the joy you've given me.

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# Introduction



## *“I’m Sick of Myself!”*

This is a book about love. Before you close it and reach for something else, please stay with us for a moment. You see, we can assume you were going to put this book down, because we would have done the same.

We live in a culture obsessed with love. It’s everywhere! Movies, song lyrics, books, and plays, all portray love in as many varied ways as there are stars in the sky. There are almost 100,000 books in Amazon.com’s Self-Help section; many of them either have “love” in the title or are subtitled as addressing an aspect of love. So why would we endeavor to write yet another book on love?

Because even with all of the information available to us on love, there are still too many Christians who say, “I’m sick of myself!” Too many people are going through life trying to be one person on the outside, with a wilted soul on the inside. People who know in their heads they are supposed to love others like Jesus loves, but feel hopeless when it comes to living out that command.

Still others are waiting for someone else to change before they believe they can be happy. If you think that this book was written for someone else, we believe God has a message for you. At the root of this problem is deception. This book was written to free you from the deceptions keeping you from experiencing God’s radical, life-changing love.

You need to know, without the power of the Holy Spirit, radical love is not possible. We believe Satan would like you to camp out in one of two places of deception:

1. Belief that you have received the gift of God’s Holy Spirit, when in reality you have not, or

2. If you have received the Holy Spirit, Satan would like you to believe that God’s Holy Spirit does not have an important function in your daily life.

If you are not fully engaged with the Holy Spirit, you will not be able to experience God's radical love. You will find yourself in a place of fear, misery, bitterness, anger, or frustration.

It is time to stop living your life trying to be one person on the outside, with a wilted soul on the inside. It is time for you to stop wishing things would be different and for things to start being different.

The people around you, your life situation, your job, your kids, your spouse, or your family do not have to change at all in order for you to be different. It begins with learning the truth about your relationship with God and the truth about love.

### **Donna's Story**

I am a hopeless romantic. I "love" watching the W Channel; especially curled up with a warm blanket on a cold winter day. I prepare for my experience with some freshly popped corn (dripping in butter, of course) and a warm frothy drink. Then, I settle in with my favorites; perhaps a good Julia Roberts double-header that kicks off with *Pretty Woman*. You know what I'm talking about.

I always envisioned what it would be like when my "Once Upon a Time" day came. I just knew that my knight in shining armor would show up and rescue me from the mundane world. Then I would start my real life. Imagine my surprise when I married my prince, and I found out that there were times when he wasn't so charming, and my happily-ever-after didn't look like it did in all those movies.

I have been married for more than twenty years. As in any marriage, we have our ups and downs. There are times when things are easy, and times when things are very difficult. In tough times, I've been tempted to ask myself the question, "What if I married the wrong man?" When I compare my man and my marriage to what I see in relationships that appear to have the fairytale ending, one might conclude that I had "settled." I'm sure there were times I contemplated divorce because what I believed love was supposed to be didn't match reality.

Statistics from The Barna Research Group<sup>1</sup> report that between thirty to thirty-five percent of Christian marriages will fail. In Dave Carder's book, *Torn Asunder: Recovering from Extramarital Affairs*<sup>2</sup>, Carder notes that adultery and divorce rates in the evangelical population are nearly the same as the general population in the United States. Within the first three years of Christian marriage, a large percentage of women will have an affair because

of the disillusionment in which they entered marriage.

Marriages and other relationships fail continually because of disillusionment about love.

One day towards the end of 2008, a verse from Scripture leapt off the page at me. “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). I felt the need to spend some time studying it. In doing so, I realized God wanted me to apply the truth in this verse to my life in a unique and personal way in the upcoming year. I did some serious study on these words and their context. In doing so, I had two strong impressions on my heart:

1. God was **commanding** me to live as a new creation. It was not merely a suggestion, or an option.

2. Living as a new creation would **only be possible** if I walk in the Holy Spirit’s power.

Basically, God told me I needed to get to know His Holy Spirit better.

From the time Kim and I first met, God consistently teaches us similar lessons in our personal lives. (I’ve been reminded more than once of how Jesus sent the twelve disciples out in pairs.) Around the time I received the command and promise of new life through my 2 Corinthians verse, without the full realization of what we were doing, Kim and I embarked on one of the most critical “search for truth” excursions in our entire faith lives to date.

We spent the next year uncovering what we call the worst conspiracy ever contrived. You might ask, “What could be worse than the shameful atrocities led by Hitler or the attacks of the Al-Qaeda network in 2001?” The schemes orchestrated by those people killed millions. So what could be *worse* than the death of millions?

Here it is: Many who consider themselves to be saved, are not. If you call yourself a Christian, it would be safe to say you believe that on the day of your death you will find yourself in heaven. What if, on that day, you find yourself standing in front of Jesus and He says to you, “Depart from me, I never knew you?”

My heart aches to ensure that we shine light on Satan’s strongest weapon... deception about your eternity.

Now just to be clear, Kim and I weren’t “the” ones who first discovered, or even exposed, the truths we present in this book. The truth is

thousands of years old. However, many in this generation have been and continue to be greatly deceived.

A new creation is, indeed, being formed in me. I am learning to love through the example of my Christ. I have realized that although I cannot make the salvation decision for my children, or for anyone else, through my testimony I can show the narrow path; the one that leads to eternal life with Christ.

By the grace of God my marriage is strong. Kelly is a good man and I love him with all my heart. This is not a book about marriage, but if you are married, I pray that at the end of these pages God will do a transforming work in your heart and your marriage will be impacted.

### **Kimberly's Story**

I began gymnastics classes when I was three years old. By age nine, I was labeled a superstar and started training seriously, with Olympic dreams very real. A major injury at age fifteen ended those dreams. At the time, it felt like incredible failure. Had I wasted the past twelve years of my life and countless dollars striving towards something that would never come to be? It was extremely disappointing. I felt like something was taken from me.

Shortly after my accident, I received a call from the gymnastics coach at my high school. She heard that I was no longer training for USA Gymnastics and asked if I would consider competing on the high school team. "High school gymnastics?" I remember thinking. It was a huge step down from the level of competition I was used to.

My failed expectations of my gymnastics career initially clouded my enthusiasm for competing for my high school. Looking back, pride and vanity were likely fighting for position in my young, teen-aged brain. However, I could not be more thankful to Coach Malunowe for making that phone call. In addition to developing life-long friendships with terrific people, by keeping up my gymnastics skills throughout high school, I was awarded a full athletic scholarship to Penn State University. Penn State is a place I would not have been able to go without having the scholarship.

The outcome of my gymnastics career wasn't at all what I had expected.

A number of years later, my first son was born. I previously had a miscarried pregnancy, so when this baby came out with his ten fingers and ten toes, I rejoiced that all was well. But all was not well. By the time he was sixteen months old, it was obvious that he had significant developmental

delays. I began to seek out doctors and specialists, and at age three he was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

At that point and every day since, my life as a mother has taken a very different path than what I had expected my family would look like.

I give you these two examples from my life to get you thinking about your own expectations. Have you ended up somewhere you never expected? Have your circumstances left you feeling ripped-off, bitter, and frustrated? You are not alone.

The word **expectation** means ‘having a strong belief’ that something will happen.

Expectations can be wonderful when they are fulfilled, or devastating when they go unmet. When we think about love, automatically we start forming images in our mind. Those images are often based on our past experiences, combined with what we believe to be true about love. Quite simply, we have expectations about love, don’t we?

It is likely that some component of your expectations, fulfilled or not, would cause you to want to run from this book. We truly hope you don’t. Donna and I come from very different backgrounds, we have different life experiences, and are as unique as any two of God’s creations can be. Yet God has ignited within us a flame burning white hot with a need to bring truth to the deceptions that cause Christians to miss out on the radical, life-changing love that He planned from the beginning of time.

We are going to ask you to do something that may be slightly unfamiliar to you. As you travel through the pages of this book we ask that you suspend all of your former thoughts for a while. Lay down whatever expectations you may have about love, and even about what love looks like in your life. Each time you pick up this book, pray and ask God to keep your mind open to anything He might want to say to you. In Jeremiah 33:3 God urges us saying, *“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things that you do not know.”*

God can’t tell you something you do not know if you already think you know it.

Suspending your expectations is important because expectations can prevent you from growing. Come into this learning experience as an explorer. Consider each verse, each lesson, as if it were new to you. Then God will be able to reveal those things you need to hear most in order to love better. And we believe each lesson will speak individually to each one reading.

This is NOT another how-to or self-help book. Your help must come from God and He has a unique discipleship plan for you as you wrestle through the very truths we've wrestled through. Truth begins with having a personal, loving, real relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We'll talk more about that in chapter 4, but we want you to know that our only truth comes directly from the Word of God. Therefore, we ask you to test everything you learn here against Scripture. Don't take our word for it, go to the Bible for affirmation.

We do not believe in any magic formula, but we do believe in hard work of the soul. If you bear emotions and behaviors that do not resemble love; if you find it downright exhausting to keep up the facade of loving others; if you are wilted inside; then we invite you to join us for a radical journey.

Allowing God's Holy Spirit to guide and direct you is the only way to true and lasting change. He has never allowed us to teach something we have not first learned and experienced ourselves. We are continually amazed that as different as we are, He has brought us together to experience His radical love and has enabled us to deliver this message to you. A message that we pray will leave you forever changed.

# Part 1



## Spicy Meatballs

Anyone up for some meatballs? We are! We don't mean the kind of meatballs served with your Monday-night spaghetti dinner; we are talking about meatballs that will make your head spin and your throat feel fiery!

A few years ago, we were wrestling through a difficult biblical question related to tithing. In response, Kim made the statement, "Now THAT'S a spicy meatball!" Since that time, whenever we come across a challenging moral, ethical, or societal question or statement for which we really have to dig into God's word to seek out the answer, we declare it a "spicy meatball."

There is no easy, flippant, run-of-the-mill answer that can be given for a spicy meatball. Spicy meatballs don't go down easily, and seeing them through requires tough spiritual work.

During the course of this book, we suspect some of the things that you are challenged with might seem very much like a spicy meatball to you. We address deceptions, and you might find you have fallen under their power. This can be tough to digest. The good news is that lies will be replaced with biblical truth.

It would seem pretty hopeless to learn you have been deceived if you did not have truth presented in its place.

In Part One, we address the big meatballs regarding the foundations of Christian faith. What you hold to be true about the answers to the questions presented impacts your ability to experience God's radical love and your ability to give that love to others. Nervous? Don't be. In our experience, when God has taken us through the hard work of tackling a spicy meatball, there has always been growth and freedom on the other side.

1. "Do you believe God speaks to you?" Notice the question isn't: "Do you believe God speaks to others?" It is important to know if you believe He

speaks to **you**. There is no way you can learn how God wants you to love others if you do not believe that He speaks to you. Together we will break deceptions regarding God's communication.

2. "Does God have an individualized, detailed plan for your life that you are searching for?" Many people spend their entire lives searching for God's plan. If this describes you, then you need to know that you are probably wasting your time. In trying to figure out your future, you are missing out on the fullness of God's love for you in the present. We will see what His Word reveals about this issue.

3. "Do you understand the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in your life?" From the beginning of creation, God's Holy Spirit has had a critical role as the provider of life and is the only agent through which change can take place. If you desire to change your behavior to that which reflects God's love, you need His Holy Spirit.

4. At the end of chapter 4 you will find yourself face to face with one simple question. "Are you saved?" Is it possible to have head knowledge of Jesus, even recognize Him as the Messiah, but not receive the gift of eternal life? The deception we examine in this chapter is perhaps the greatest deception Satan could possibly have someone under. The deception that his or her eternity is secure.

Your answers to these questions will prove foundational for the transformation that will or will not happen in your heart. You can then move confidently into the second part of the book, where we work through what God's love looks like in action and examine what holds you back from it. Will your change be radical?

Merriam-Webster defines the word radical in this way:

a: marked by a considerable departure from the usual or traditional; extreme

b: tending or disposed to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions

c: of, relating to, or constituting a political group associated with views, practices, and policies of extreme change

d: advocating extreme measures to retain or restore a political state of affairs

We did not simply select the word radical to describe God's love because we liked the way it sounds. We have personally been shaken up, turned upside down, knocked flat on our faces, been held close, and then shaken up some more through the transformation of our own hearts. We have realized the word radical perfectly describes God's love. When you have it, you will know it and you won't be able to stop it. You will be radically different.

You may want to have your Bible and a notebook handy as you read through this book. We expect God will challenge you with your own spicy meatballs as we get down to business.

In our ministry, we have heard many people say things like, "I want to change, but...

...you don't know my husband/wife."

...you don't know my circumstances."

...my kids are too far gone."

... \_\_\_\_\_ (insert your own reason why change is tough for you)."

We said it in the introduction and it bears repeating because this is one truth you **MUST** grasp hold of, if things are ever going to be different for you.

The people around you, your life situation, your job, your kids, your spouse, or your family do not have to change at all in order for you to be different.

Right now, today, you can begin your transformation from someone who is called a Christian but certainly doesn't feel the joy of Christ, to someone who is living out your salvation with the abundant joy that Christ came to give.



# Chapter 1



## God Speaks

*“Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”*

–The word of the Lord given to the prophet Jeremiah

### God’s Voice

One Tuesday morning, I (Donna) was on my way to Kim’s house. Our plan for the day was to work on a Bible study that we were writing. On the way there, I reflected on a passage from John 10 that I had read that morning.

*“The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, ‘How long will You keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.’”*

As I drove, an idea formed. When I arrived at Kim’s, I would read her this passage, then send her out for a walk to reflect upon it. I thought she could probably use a break from her little ones and this would give her the chance to get some fresh air. I would watch her kids, and she could have some

alone time with God. I wanted to bless my friend in that way. I arrived at Kim's house and told her the plan. She was quite eager to put on her winter gear and head out, reflecting on John 10:24-29...

When I (Kim) left my house, I headed along my usual walking path. It was brisk outside and I welcomed the opportunity for a few minutes of alone time. The verses Donna read to me had a lot of substance to them. The one part of the passage I kept coming back to in my mind was: "*My sheep hear my voice.*"

I asked God, "Show me what this looks like in action. How do we hear your voice during the day?" I prayed, observed nature, and kept thinking about the verses.

I came to a little parkette and spotted a bench along the path. I heard a whisper in my head (not an audible voice, but impressed in my head, very much like an idea would come to you), "Go sit on that bench."

I went and sat. I continued to pray. After a couple of minutes, further down the path I spotted two people, a man and a woman, walking away from where I sat. Again, I heard the whisper. This time it said, "Go and talk to that man."

"God, I can't do that. I have nothing to say to him. I don't know them." I am pretty sure that if it is possible to whine in your head, I whined back to God.

Gently, but firmly, I heard again, "Go and talk to that man. Ask him about climbing a mountain."

They were getting further away. I knew that if I argued a bit more, it would be too late, they would be gone. So I said to God, "How do I know this is God telling me to do this?"

God's whisper got very stern with me. "You sit here asking Me to show you what My voice sounds like, and then when I tell you to do something, you don't obey? Obey what I tell you to do!"

That last part made my heart skip a beat. I was shaking as I got up and walked along the path after the couple. I kept hoping they would vanish before my eyes, but no such thing happened. They left the path and headed up a residential street. I got closer and closer. I was nearly upon them and still had no idea what I was to say. Time stood still for me as they stopped walking and, at the same time, both turned around and faced me inquisitively.

Somehow I found my voice. "Um, excuse me, but are you going to climb a mountain?" I asked the man, who I now realized was considerably

younger than the woman. They were most likely a mother and son.

The guy smiled and stuck his hands in his pockets. “I am. I am leaving next week to climb Mount Everest,” he said. He looked a bit sheepish as he continued, “I’m just climbing to base camp this first time, but I’m pretty excited.”

Wow! I couldn’t believe it. I didn’t know what was going to come out of my mouth next. They were staring at me and I knew I had to say something.

I said, “I need to tell you that God would like you to ask Him to accompany you on your journey.”

The woman looked confused. The guy smiled and said, “Thanks.”

There was an awkward pause, after which I turned around and walked away. When I knew I was out of their sight, I ran. I ran all the way home, and by the time I got there I had tears in my eyes and I could barely breathe. I heard God speak to me.

I wasn’t the only one, however. Let’s look at all of the ways God spoke in this incident.

First thing in the morning, Donna read God’s Word in her devotional time. She heard a message from God through reading Scripture.

Driving in her car, as Donna reflected on God’s Word, she heard from God as He impressed upon her the desire to bless her friend with some alone time.

As I walked, I prayed and asked God for wisdom on the meaning of His words. What I heard from God as an impression in my head and heart, led me to sit and wait.

My attention was drawn to the couple on the path. God made me notice them, and He then gave me instructions as to what He wanted me to do.

When I caught up with the couple, I had no idea what I would say. I opened my mouth and out came the exact message that God wanted me to say and the message that the climber needed to hear.

That is a lot of speaking. At any point along the course of this morning, any one of us could have chosen not to obey the prompting of God’s Spirit. Because that is indeed what it was... the Holy Spirit prompted us to act. What Donna thought was a “good idea” or I thought was just being attentive, was God’s Spirit nudging us into action. We had a choice at each checkpoint. Obey. Do not obey.

In chapter 3 we talk a lot more about the Holy Spirit, so we will not delve into the ministry of the Spirit at this point, but there is one blazing truth

we would extremely remiss if we did not draw it to light.

This whole morning, **which was full of communication from God**, began with one woman reading His Word.

### **God Speaks Through His Word**

Have you ever wondered why we bother to read God's Word? Why are there multitudes of verses **in** the Bible that tell us to **read** the Bible?

As someone who longs to know Him better, the reason you should read the Bible is because you believe God will use its contents to communicate with you.

Instruction manuals walk us through how to do something, right? Novels are read for entertainment. So why do you read the Bible? You read the Bible because you want God to communicate to you about your unique life, right here and right now, so you can apply what you learn to your current situation.

If you have a Bible nearby, pick it up and hold it in your hand for a moment. Do you believe that the God of that Bible is a God who wants Himself to be known, or a God who wants to remain anonymous?

Let's see what the Bible in your hand reveals about God's communication...

Beginning in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we counted 89 occurrences of some phraseology such as "And the Lord said..." or "God said to..." God has a lot to say in Genesis.

Next, in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, we find outlined very clearly the instructions from God to the people of Israel. God speaks directly to Moses to give these instructions.

In the book of Joshua, the Lord appears to Joshua to instruct his leadership and build his confidence.

The Lord sends His angel constantly to the Judges with warnings, reminders, exhortation, and instructions as they lead the people of Israel.

The book of Ruth shows us how the Lord stirs kindness in Boaz to care for Ruth and they both become part of Jesus' lineage.

In the books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, we read that the Lord once again speaks to His leaders (Eli, Samuel, David, and Solomon to name but a few). God even speaks to Saul in his wickedness to warn him of his destruction if he does not have a change of heart.

The books of the prophets share "The word of the Lord..." as it is given to them from God to deliver to the people.

Shall we continue? Esther, Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes—these are all written by people who hear from God and lay bare all of their emotions to Him. And those are just the Old Testament writings!

The New Testament details Jesus' life from four different men and then provides instructions to His disciples (that includes us!) from at least five other Christ-followers of the early church.

The very fact that Jesus came to earth and taught the things He wanted known is in itself the greatest proof that God desires to have intimate communication with us.

We ask again: Do you believe God speaks to YOU? If not, let us ask, why would God go through all of that effort to make sure everyone else got His messages and then select YOU as someone with whom He won't speak?

The lie that many Christians (and even non-Christians) believe is that God no longer speaks to people. Or, if He does, He only speaks to the "really spiritual" people—whatever that means. This is simply not true. He speaks every day, in a variety of ways, and quite often it begins through the Bible.

If you don't think you are hearing from God, we challenge you to answer honestly, how much time do you spend in His Word? If it is indeed the greatest communication tool available (combined with the Holy Spirit), why *wouldn't* you spend as much time as possible reading it?

In 1 Timothy 4, Paul writes to Timothy:

*"In pointing out these things [the things of God] to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following."*

Nourishment contributes to growth. God's Word provides nourishment to your spirit. God's Word contributes to your growth.

### **How Do I Know it's God Who is Speaking?**

People can take any passage from the Bible, pull it from its context and twist the words to mean anything in order to suit their purposes. It has happened historically, it is happening today, and will continue to happen until Jesus returns.

Distorting God's Word is one of Satan's tricks. If Satan can't get you to believe God doesn't speak at all, then he will try to convince you that what

God says is a lie. Let's have a look at the famous interaction between Satan and Eve found in Genesis chapter 3.

In verse 1, Satan asked Eve about God's commandment regarding the tree in the middle of the garden (the commandment itself is found in Genesis 2, verses 16 & 17). Notice, he didn't repeat God's instructions word for word, Satan changed a couple of them. He asked Eve, "Did God say that you shouldn't eat from *any* tree of the garden?"

Eve responded by telling Satan that God's instruction was only regarding the tree in the *middle* of the garden. She explains that God said that they were not to eat from it or touch it, or they would die. Notice, she didn't repeat the instructions in quite the same way God gave them either.

Satan proceeded to explain to Eve what God *really* meant. He put his spin on the instruction to make the forbidden seem very appealing. He told her that they wouldn't die, but instead would have their eyes opened and become like God, knowing good from evil. We all know what she and Adam did next. They ate. So who was correct? Satan or God? Did Adam die?

*"So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died." (Genesis 5:5)*

Adam did what? **He died.** Looks like Satan lied.

Satan is on the prowl, looking for whom he can deceive. When you commit yourself to read and study God's Word, you can be sure Satan will seek to find ways to distort it. This being the case, you might ask, "How do I know what I hear is God speaking to me, and not Satan, or just wishful thinking on my part?"

Good question. You need to be aware that the voice in your head could be Satan's. Your own fleshly desires could cause you to try and fit God's Word to say what you want it to. The voice we must listen to is the voice of our Shepherd. It is a faulty assumption to think every little idea that comes into your head is directly from God. However, there are ways to test what you hear to ensure you are not deceived. We are going to give you three of them.

### **1. Test it against His Word**

God will never ask you to do something that is in direct opposition to His Word. If you feel impressed upon to say or do something that goes

directly against a principle or command taught in Scripture, we feel we can confidently say, it is not from God.

For example, God will never tell you it is okay to cheat on your spouse, or steal, or intentionally lie to another person. Sometimes our own desires cloud this basic reality check. We can talk ourselves into or out of almost anything. As you seek to hear God's truth, you need to know He is consistent.

Hebrews chapter 13 begins with character descriptions of a person who is treating others with love. Right after these descriptions we read: "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.*" (Hebrews 13:8)

The Hebrews writer goes on, cautioning us not to be carried away by varied and strange teachings. This means, don't stray from His Word when it comes to taking instruction. We believe the Hebrews writer put that reminder of Jesus' consistency right there because he knew that we were going to be easily swayed when it comes to taking instructions on marriage, on treating others, and on demonstrating Christ's love. The writer knew that the world would throw other teachings about these things at us, and he wants us to know that the way of Christ will not change. Ever.

His Word will not contradict itself. His voice whispered in your ear will not contradict His Word. A message from God spoken by another believer, or even from a pastor, will not contradict what you read in the Bible. Not if it is really God speaking.

Always test what you read, learn, and hear against His Word.

## **2. Study His Word with Other Believers**

Meet regularly with others who are actively pursuing to become more like Christ. Hebrews 10 verses 24 & 25 tell us, "*and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together; but encouraging one another...*"

Get together with people who also spend time in God's Word. Talk to them about what you read in Scripture. Study it together. Getting together for the purpose of simply enjoying each other's company is great, and necessary.

However, intentional time with people pursuing Christ-likeness is the example Jesus gave us. After Jesus taught in the synagogue, or had a time of teaching to the masses, He debriefed the message with His close group of twelve disciples (see Mark 4:10 for an example). God speaks to you during your study and discussions with other believers.

### 3. Strengthen Your Spiritual Listening Muscles

There are disciplined, intentional activities you can do that will put you in a posture to hear from God. The Bible is full of examples to incorporate into your daily routines that will strengthen your listening muscles. We discuss them at length in part three of this book, so we won't get into specifics right now, but know that God has provided us strategies to help us hear His voice, and before this book is through we will show you the things that have proven effective.

One last thing we want you to know is that in whatever you do, it is biblical to ask God to check your intentions to ensure they are right in motive.

He is the only One who knows the true intentions of your heart, so go ahead and ask for confirmation. In Psalm 139, verses 23 & 24, the Psalmist asks God, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.”*

Make this your prayer too. We know He will give you the affirmation you need as you hear His voice.

So does God speak to you? This question is a spicy meatball that some people just can't get past. If this describes you, give the principles in this chapter a solid effort before you decide God doesn't speak to you. Use them as you progress through this book. Our experience is that God has quite a lot to say, and He wants to say it to you. We trust you will find Him.