

Mark Henningshaw &  
Jennifer Schuchmann

NINE  
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GOD  
ALWAYS  
SPEAKS\*

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*Nine Ways God Always Speaks: Offer Only Available in Certain States*

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# CHAnnel 101.0

## HEARING VOICES

SOME THINGS ARE TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE:

living to be 101  
winning the lottery  
hearing God speak

Despite the fact that these things are out of the ordinary and even unlikely, they happen every day to people all over the world. With a healthy diet, exercise, and regular checkups, it's possible that you could outlast your genes. Buy enough scratch-off tickets, and eventually you'll get lucky. But hearing God speak? Is there anything you can do about that?

We think so.

And so do others.

*Many* others.

One of them was Mrs. Murphey. Whenever God spoke to Mrs. Murphey, it usually signaled a painful or traumatic

event in her family. As her son Cecil recalls, this particular time was no different.

My brother was maybe five feet two and weighed around one hundred pounds. He was a career man in the Navy, and he worked belowdecks. One night my mother had a dream that his ship had hit something, and when my brother went into the compartment to try and shut it off, he got trapped. This all happened in my mother's dream. She was agitated, but there was nothing she could do. There was no way for her to communicate with her son, and besides, who would believe her anyway?

A few weeks later, she was at a prayer meeting at our church in Davenport, Iowa. It was a mostly fundamental church, not the kind that believed in visions from God. But while she was there, she was gripped by a panic that what she dreamed was happening right then. She interrupted the meeting and said, "My son is drowning. You have to pray for him right now!"

The whole group stopped what they were doing and prayed for ten or fifteen minutes. A sense of peace came over my mother, and she told them they could stop. It was over.

About two weeks later, we got a letter at the house. It was from my brother, and he told us that he had almost drowned. The ship went aground, and one compartment started to take on water. My brother and several others went to close it off. In the confusion, the others left the compartment, locking my brother in.

He said that the water kept rising until it was above his neck and almost at his mouth when one of the guys said, “Where’s Murph?” They figured out he was in the compartment, and they returned to rescue him.

Though the dream and the events surrounding it took place nearly a half-century ago, Cecil Murphey still remembers the details. His mother was known for having dreams that predicted terrible events—events of which she couldn’t have had prior knowledge.

Cecil recalls a second dream, in which his mother learned about a divorce in the family (at a time when divorce was very rare) before the couple announced it. In still another dream, she was warned that another brother of Cecil’s was dying of lung cancer before he had been diagnosed. Cecil believes his mother heard from God.

Is it possible for God to speak through dreams?

Cecil believes that God also speaks to him—just not through his dreams.

Off the top of his head, Cecil can quickly tell nearly a dozen stories of when God has spoken, helping him to perceive future events, make decisions, or gain insight into situations that he wouldn’t have been able to except through divine knowledge.

He describes hearing God’s voice inside of himself like an “anointed intuition.”

I feel a sense of conviction so powerful that I would die before I’d turn away from it. Say what you want, I can tell you I’ve been a Christian for fifty years, and I’ve never been wrong any time I had one of these

strong convictions. If I had to give up the conviction or die, I'm ready to die for it; it's that clear to me.

Does God speak that clearly to you?

### 101.1 CRAZY TALK

Perhaps God has spoken to you in the past and you'd like to experience that kind of communication again.

Maybe you've never heard from God personally—but you long to.

Or could it be that you are skeptical that God speaks at all?

One reason people say they don't pray more is because they feel as if nothing happens when they pray, that God isn't listening, or worse, that he is not there at all.

A one-sided relationship isn't worth much.

If we're expected to talk to God through prayer, shouldn't we know whether he will talk back? And if he will, how we will hear him?

So does God speak to you?

Think carefully before you respond. People are likely to make judgments about you based solely on how you answer this question.

In the mid-eighties, Jennifer was a high school sophomore actively investigating the claims of Christianity, but she hadn't yet made a decision as to their veracity. While riding in a car with a guy from school, she had a disturbing conversation, so disturbing that twenty years later she can't recall the context or the guy, just the conversation. She remembers he was smart, cute, and she had a crush on him. And he was a Christian. Though cute and smart are good boyfriend traits, she wasn't so sure about the Christian part,

especially when he happened to mention that God spoke to him.

I clearly remember that he said, “God told me . . .” and all I could think was, *This guy must be crazy*, and I didn’t mean crazy in some fun-loving way. I meant crazy in a certifiably deranged sort of way. People who hear God’s voice do crazy-people things like shoot their mother or drown their kids in a bathtub.

I have to admit, I was nervous riding in a car with someone who thought he was hearing God speak, but like I said, he was cute. So I asked him about it.

“God speaks to you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you hear voices? Do you hear a deep voice like in the movies?”

“No, not really—”

“Well, what does his voice sound like?”

“Well, it’s kind of—”

“Wait. Do other people hear him when he speaks to you?”

I wasn’t sure how I wanted him to answer that question. If God spoke only to him and no one else heard God’s voice, then this guy was not boyfriend material; he was drown-our-future-kids material. But if he said that other people also heard God speak to him, like eavesdropping on a conversation at a restaurant—Cute Guy and God discussing football scores—then it was even weirder.

Was this guy a member of some strange cult?

Had he been drinking?

Or was it possible that God *really did speak* to him? Was he speaking to everyone? And if so, why didn't I hear him?

Fortunately, Cute Guy interrupted my thoughts with an explanation.

"No, it's not like God says things out loud to me like Charlton Heston shouting through a megaphone. It's more like it's a passing thought that comes into my head from out of nowhere. It's more like a feeling than an audible voice."

"Then how do you know it's God?" I asked before peppering him with questions about what he heard, how he heard it, and if he was taking any prescription drugs.

I left that conversation more curious and a little less skeptical. But if God really spoke to people, why wasn't he speaking to me? And could I get him to start? I wasn't yet convinced that he directly communicated with people. And I knew I wouldn't believe it based on someone else's reports. If God wanted me to believe that he really does speak, he'd have to speak to me personally.

Perhaps this is your story too. You're not sure that God communicates with us here and now. Or maybe the thought of the God of the universe talking personally to *you* creeps you out. Maybe you don't even believe that God exists—let alone that he speaks.

Or could it be . . . you have a great deal of head knowledge or scriptural knowledge about how God communicates but you don't have much in the way of personal experience?

Maybe you've grown up in the church or around religious folks who discuss how God talks to us, but you're not convinced that God talks—to *you*.

Maybe you're chuckling as you read this because you *know* that God speaks and that God speaks to you personally. But maybe your expectations of how and when he speaks are limited by your experience.

Regardless of your story, your preconceived ideas, even your experiences, what if your thoughts on God communicating with you (or not) are wrong? Or maybe not expansive enough?

What if there's a whole lot more to it than what you've seen so far?

What if God does speak?

What if he is speaking right now?

## 101.2 IT'S NOT ABOUT CHURCH

As a young boy, Mark was comfortable with the God language that spooked Jennifer. As the son, grandson, and great-grandson of preachers, Mark truly believed that God spoke personally to people.

In church.

Literally, *in church*.

Growing up in his father's congregation, Mark thought he knew exactly how God spoke—through the singing of traditional hymns, Scripture reading, and fiery preaching.

Mark knew what to do to receive a personal message from God. You put on a coat and clip-on tie and, together with your parents and two sisters, piled into the family's Oldsmobile Vista Cruiser, drove to the church, and solemnly entered the sanctuary. Once inside, you passionately

participated in the singing and actively listened and responded to the preaching. Then at the end of the liturgy when the altar call of repentance came, you went forward, kneeled on the carpeted step, and wept. That's where God spoke to you—during the 11:00 a.m. service on Sundays and the evening services on Sundays and Wednesdays.

Although he was only eight, Mark understood this was the thing he needed to do to put himself in a position to hear God. What Mark didn't know was that God also spoke to little boys in their neighbors' living rooms—while their clip-on tie was still at home in the closet. Wearing a T-shirt, jeans, and Converse high-tops, Mark heard God speak.

And he didn't even have to kneel.

Twin Lakes Baptist Church was the largest evangelical congregation in Santa Cruz, California. Each year they sponsored an annual vacation Bible school—ironically named, since it was a vacation from neither Bible nor school.

Neighborhood children, like Mark, gathered in local church members' homes to do crafts (making Jesus and his disciples out of Popsicle sticks), to eat snacks (Rice Krispies Treats in the shape of an ark), and to hear flannel-graph stories from the Bible (think clip-art PowerPoint presentation replaced by cutouts on a flannel-covered bulletin board).

I remember the woman had just finished telling a Bible story, the one about Jesus calling Zacchaeus down from the tree. I had heard that story countless times before, but this time when she finished, I began to feel something strange in the bottom of my stomach. I felt nervous, but there wasn't anything to

be nervous about; I was just sitting on the couch with my friends.

But then I began to think of a bunch of things I regretted. Nothing important, just trivial eight-year-old stuff like picking on my sister or lying to my mom. But I began to dwell on the specifics of each incident, and I felt ashamed. I could feel my cheeks burn, and I couldn't figure out why.

My friends didn't seem to notice. They didn't seem to be feeling what I felt. But to me, I felt as if a fifty-pound sack of guilt had been thrown on my back.

The woman telling the story noticed. She came over and asked if she could pray for me. I remember crying because I felt so bad. She spoke some simple words from the Bible and asked me to repeat them after her. When I did, something changed.

Immediately those feelings of shame and guilt evaporated. I felt as if I had been swallowed by a warm ocean of love and pleasure. In that moment of euphoria, I heard God speak.

The voice wasn't audible, but to me, it was real. It happened forty years ago, and though I can't remember the exact words he said, God told me that he loved me. But more than that, he said, "I have an adventure planned for you."

Any eight-year-old boy would be thrilled with an adventure, but one from God? I was positively pumped. I knew I'd heard from the Creator of the universe, that he knew my name, and that he had an adventure planned for me. This was so unlike anything I heard at the altar at church that I couldn't wait to tell

my dad. I ran the entire four blocks back to my house.  
As I ran, I thought, *My feet aren't touching the ground.*

Is hearing from God reserved only for tie-wearing, head-bowing church boys? Or is it possible that eight-year-old Mark, with glue-stained fingertips and Rice Krispies on his shirt, really heard from God?

Mark believes he did, but frankly there's no proof.

If evidence were required, the woman leading the event could testify to the change in Mark's countenance. But she wouldn't be able to swear on a Bible and say she heard God speak to him. She, like Mark, might believe it happened, but she'd never be able to prove it.

That's the problem, isn't it?

If you've never experienced God communicating with you, there's nothing anyone can say or do to make you believe it's possible.

But if you've experienced God in this way, there is a deep conviction that it happened—regardless of how weird the circumstances. It's like *knowing* you're innocent when all of the evidence seems to point to your guilt. There is nothing anyone can say or do to make you deny it. You'd give your life for what you know to be true.

Perhaps that's why there's still so much controversy over a seventeen-year-old girl who sacrificed her life for what she knew to be true.

### 101.3 LITTLE GIRL HEARING VOICES

Jeanne was born in a small village in northern France at a time when girls didn't learn to read or write. But Jeanne had a devout mother who taught her sacred lessons, and

as a result, Jeanne was known for her gentleness, charity, and holiness.

One day, while tending her father's sheep, she heard what she described as "a worthy voice"<sup>1</sup> and saw "a great light that came in the name of the voice."<sup>2</sup> Jeanne credited this voice to the archangel Michael and to two early Christian saints, Catherine and Margaret. Jeanne was not yet a teenager when she received her first vision; she cried when the voices left because they were so beautiful.

Her visions continued. In time, they became quite specific and directive. *They* wanted *her* to rescue France. At the age of seventeen, Jeanne d'Arc, known to us as Joan of Arc, heeded the call of those voices.

She cut her hair short and persuaded her uncle to give her a horse, a dagger, a tunic, trousers, boots, and a boy's black cap. She mustered a six-man escort and made them swear an oath to take her safely to Chinon.

Though yet uncrowned, Charles VII lived in the castle at Chinon and sat on the royal throne while the Hundred Years' War divided France. Charles had been declared illegitimate by none other than his own mother. Charles was weak, without money, and incapable of reaching Reims for his own coronation. France had no true king.

The country was a mess. Charles's own wimpish persona left him impotent to resist England's army. But learning of the young girl who had visions, Charles felt a glimmer of hope and decided to test her.

Before she arrived, Charles asked one of his nobles to take the throne while he hid among the ranks of his courtiers. When Joan arrived, she barely looked at the man on the throne. Instead, she walked up to Charles and curtsied

to him as the king.<sup>3</sup> Still, Charles wasn't convinced. Only after she told him exactly what he had prayed for while alone in the palace chapel did he trust her.

Despite his faith in her claims, Charles subjected her to the scrutiny of his theologians. After passing their tests, she received a sword, a banner, and the right to command the king's troops.

Joan and her army marched to Orléans in 1429. At first, the leaders of the French military didn't want to follow her command, but they quickly found that nothing went well when they ignored her orders, and all went well when they heeded them.

God told Joan that her victory sword—a blade with five crosses cut into the steel—was buried in the church of Sainte-Catherine-de-Fierbois. When Joan announced this, knights were dispatched to search the church. They found the weapon just as Joan had prophesied.

Then, in the heat of the battle, Joan was wounded in the shoulder and carried from the field. One of her knights cut the head of the arrow off. She removed the shaft herself and, despite her wounds, went on to lead her army to victory in the liberation of Orléans. A few days later, in Reims, Charles was anointed as Charles VII, king of France.

The voices spoke again, this time to warn Joan that she would be captured by her enemies. "Then let me die quickly without a long captivity," she pleaded. The voices told her not to be frightened but to resign herself for what was to come next.

On May 23, 1430, Joan was at Compiègne, fighting the Duke of Burgundy. She was captured and turned over to the English, who sent her to church officials, where she

was put on trial for heresy. Charles VII didn't lift a sword to save her.

Cauchon, the bishop of Beauvais, prosecuted her case. His tactic was vicious scorn. The voices, he claimed, were not God's guidance, but the devil's. Unmoved, Joan refused to deny her counsel.

At the age of nineteen, Joan was convicted. On May 30, 1431, she was burned alive at the stake with a paper cap on her head, on which was written, "Heretic. Relapsed. Apostate. Idolatress."

Despite her trial, many thought she was innocent. When a couple of English soldiers laughed, one English noble, terrified at the scene before him, turned and said, "We are undone; we have burned a saint."<sup>4</sup>

The controversy that existed in Joan's life continued long after her death. But Joan's mother was as strong-minded as her daughter and wouldn't let the case rest. Working with King Charles VII, she insisted the case be submitted to the pope. Twenty-four years later, a new trial opened in Paris.

In 1456, Joan was pronounced innocent by Pope Callixtus III.

In 1909, she was beatified by Pope Pius X in the first step of her canonization into the Catholic church.

Finally, in 1920, Pope Benedict officially declared her a saint.

Did Joan hear God's voice?

Obviously, church leaders disagreed.

Those present at her trial and at her death had differing opinions.

Six hundred years later, historians still argue whether the young girl actually heard the voice of God.

Some say she was mentally ill. Some say she was suffering from delusions as a result of a disease. Some, like the bishop of Beauvais, say it wasn't God she heard, but the devil.

As authors of a book on hearing God speak—which we guess makes us unofficial experts—we'd like to go on record with our opinion. We would like to say conclusively . . . we don't know.

There is no way for us to prove that Joan of Arc heard God's voice or even the voices of his divine messengers. There is no way for us to prove that she didn't. But *Joan* believed she heard God. More importantly, she acted on her belief in a way that not only changed the course of history, but resulted in her willingly sacrificing her life for what she believed.

We know that some people may be willing to die for something they believe is true. But no one is willing to die for something he or she *knows* is false. The fact that Joan believed she heard from God, and then sacrificed her life in defense of that belief, is the strongest evidence we have that Joan believed God spoke to her.

Understanding a bit of Joan's controversy makes it easy to understand why there is so much passion surrounding another teenage girl who also had a vision.

#### 101.4 LITTLE GIRL HEARING VOICES—TAKE TWO

We don't know if she was smart or beautiful, but we know she was poor—a peasant girl in a small and humble town in the Middle East. The town was so insignificant that at the time people were quoted as saying, "Can anything good come from there?"<sup>5</sup>

Though her name, Mary, was a common name in first-century Palestine, by all accounts she was uncommonly good. At least that's what people thought until she started hearing voices. Voices that said some pretty wild and far-out things like, "You're going to have a baby even though you've never had sex." And "Oh yeah, your elderly cousin is pregnant too."

The details of her visions and the accompanying events are recorded for us by a doctor who wrote it all down in a letter. Though there were eyewitness accounts circulating at the time of the events, that wasn't good enough for Dr. Luke. From the beginning, he cautiously investigated everything and wrote his findings in a careful account so that the recipient of his letter could be *certain* of the truth.<sup>6</sup> Two thousand years later, the Gospel of Luke is part of the best-selling book in the history of the world.

Mary was engaged to a man named Joseph. Like many brides-to-be of her time, Mary was probably in the middle of her prewedding chores—addressing hand-engraved invitations, finalizing details for a honeymoon at Joseph's dad's house, and mending her best dress to wear on the special day—when an angel appeared:

"Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"<sup>7</sup>

"Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"<sup>8</sup>

Could this make sense? After all, Joseph was a descendant of the great King David. But a throne? And Son of the Most High? And oh yeah, one other thing . . . Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”<sup>9</sup>

Yes, the obvious.

The angel spoke as if Mary were already pregnant. For a poor Jewish girl, it was stupefying to think of her son on a throne or her boy as the Son of the Most High. But being pregnant? Well, for such a good girl, that was *impossible*.

The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God.”<sup>10</sup>

It’s not unusual for a virgin bride to be nervous about her wedding night. She’d have all kinds of questions: How would it feel? Would it hurt? Would she know what to do? But imagine a young girl being told that she was going to be impregnated when the Holy Spirit came upon her.

In addition, Mary had to be afraid of what those closest to her would say. This was an offense for which she could be stoned. What would Joseph do?

If Mary was confused before, she had to be out of her mind with fear by now.

But the angel gives her something else to think about:

What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she’s now in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.<sup>11</sup>

This gave Mary something to hang her head scarf on. If indeed Elizabeth were pregnant, it would be a miracle, because Elizabeth was, well, really old. It would be nothing short of God's intervention if Elizabeth were with child.

Perhaps that is what gave Mary the confidence to respond, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true."<sup>12</sup>

So did Mary hear from God via his messenger Gabriel?  
She believes she did . . .

. . . like Mark, who believed he heard God not in a church but in a living room.

. . . and like Joan, who believed the voices enough to let them guide her.

Dr. Luke goes on to say, "A few days later Mary hurried to the hill country of Judea, to the town where Zechariah lived. She entered the house and greeted Elizabeth. At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's child leaped within her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit."<sup>13</sup>

Mary's faith in her supernatural encounter caused her to pack up and go visit her cousin in the hills. When she arrived, any doubts she had were dismissed. Beyond all rational explanation, her aged cousin was pregnant.

Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me? When I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what he said."<sup>14</sup>

Never mind the formalities of hospitality. There's no "Oh, it's been so long. How long are you staying?" Or even a "Can I get you something to drink?" Elizabeth doesn't waste words: "We're both pregnant. With little miracle babies!"

Buoyed by Elizabeth's faith, Mary is reassured. This is confirmation that she isn't crazy, that she heard what she thought she heard.

So how does Mary react? Well, she starts babbling about how good God is and how much she loves him:

Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.  
How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!  
For he took notice of his lowly servant girl,  
and from now on all generations will call me blessed.  
For the Mighty One is holy,  
and he has done great things for me.<sup>15</sup>

If you translate this from the original Greek into 1970s Northern California preteen boyspeak, it's basically the same thing Mark thought on the way home from hearing God speak in the neighbor's living room: *My feet didn't touch the ground the whole way home!*

But not everyone would have believed what Mary was saying.

The residents of Bethlehem may not have known where electricity came from, but they knew where babies came from, and it wasn't the Holy Spirit. Imagine the taunting she must have taken as she stood next to her school locker, confiding this secret to her BFF.

"Yeah, right. . . . If you didn't *do it*, then how'd you get knocked up? Hey, everyone, listen to what Mary says

happened to her. Go ahead, Mary; tell everyone the part about the Holy Spirit.”

Even Joseph was skeptical.

And you can understand his doubts. Right?

After all, here’s a guy who has chosen Mary to be his wife, not for her dowry but for her character. Then she tries to tell him some crazy story about God speaking to her, evidently to justify a reality that has only one commonsense explanation. Joseph would be stupid not to rethink his decision to ask this woman to bear his children.

Matthew records Joseph’s story this way: “Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.”<sup>16</sup>

What we love about this is—*he doubted*.

Because, frankly, many of us do too.

We identify with him.

He is real to us in his struggle to believe.

In fact, we identify so strongly with Joseph’s doubt that when he eventually overcomes it, we can take courage and overcome ours.

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”<sup>17</sup>

When the vision ended, Joseph was a believer. And we can prove it. Here’s how:

“When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord

commanded and took Mary as his wife.”<sup>18</sup> But (and here’s the kicker), “he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born.”<sup>19</sup>

See?

Proof.

Proof that Joseph heard from God.

If a man hears a voice and then doesn’t have sex with his new wife as a result of hearing that voice, it means the dude is convinced that something big happened.

How else could you explain a testosterone-filled newlywed bearing the brunt of the nasty rumors that swirled around them? Joseph must have been absolutely certain that he had heard from God.

If Joseph heard from God, it only makes sense that Mary did too.

## 101.5 STORIES THAT STICK

Most of us haven’t experienced something so dramatic and life changing. It’s hard to imagine that such a thing could be real.

We know that you’re likely to read a story or two in this book that you don’t believe. You’ll explain away the events in some rational or scientific way. But there will also be at least one story you can’t explain—a story that defies your logic and experience. That account will stick with you.

Like your tongue returning to a piece of popcorn wedged between your teeth, your brain will return to that story and try to make sense of it. In the process, you tell others, hoping they can add insight or understanding that will make it go away.

Perhaps that’s what Mary’s story was like.

The Bible says that Mary treasured the things that were happening and pondered them in her heart—but that was after Jesus was born. Until then, could the events have been a sort of spiritual irritant?

There are lots of details about her pregnancy Mary could have included, like her first trip to the doctor and how cute Jesus looked on that first ultrasound. She could have included more details about the birth, like the fact that the donkey kept braying, and it was really driving Joseph crazy, or the fact that she asked him to sterilize the manger, but they forgot to bring disinfecting wipes. But she didn't share those details. And Luke didn't record them. These kinds of things are easily dismissed and forgotten.

The details that Mary dwelled on, the story that she told over and over, was the story of those visions, of meeting Elizabeth and receiving confirmation of her circumstances, and of Joseph's disbelief until he also had a visitation. Those were the details that stuck in Mary's teeth—the ones that she returned to, pondered, and treasured in her heart.

So she told the story of the vision—at Jesus' birthday parties, his bar mitzvah, his graduation from carpentry school, and to the twelve buddies he roamed the countryside with. That stuck-piece-of-popcorn story was passed on until someone like Luke heard the story, investigated it carefully, and wrote down his conclusions so we could believe what he came to believe.

That it is true.

Do you believe it is true?

Or are you still picking at your teeth?

Are there other God stories that have you stuck?

What if you could actually experience such stories for yourself?

How would that change what you think about how God communicates?

It's not likely you will have a virgin birth or lead an army into battle. But what if God did something equally improbable for your time and circumstances? Would that allow you to consider whether he could have done something similar for someone else?

If God can speak to others, then it's possible God can speak to us. By hearing the stories of God in another person's life, we become more aware of God's voice in our own.

Ultimately, the proof we need that God speaks is hearing God speak *to us*.

To have that listening experience, we need to be open to all the possible ways God speaks. We need to better understand how God communicates with us and others.

It sounds like a circuitous argument, but if we ever hope to understand it, perhaps we need to step into the middle of it.

## 101.6 WE'RE SURROUNDED

You're already in the middle of it.

Right now you are being bombarded with hundreds of thousands of electronic signals. You can't see them, but they're constantly swirling around you. Each signal has a specialized frequency. The electronic current has variations depending on whether it's for an AM or FM radio, UHF or VHF television, cell phone, cordless phone, walkie-talkie, Wi-Fi, pager, or satellite signal.

At any time, you can tap into just about any signal you want. All you need is the proper decoder.

Want the signal sent out by the American Broadcasting Company? Take your decoder and choose a channel that amplifies and decodes the signal into a television picture. For most of us, this means turning on the TV and using the remote to find our local ABC affiliate.

Want to talk to your mom? Pick up your handheld signaling device, enter a series of codes that will then be transmitted into an electronic frequency, and somewhere in Omaha your mom's phone will ring. (Assuming, of course, that Mom lives in Omaha.)

Want to trade chapters with your coauthor when one of you is at a Caribou Coffee in Minneapolis and the other is at Alley Beans in Canton, Georgia? With a couple of keystrokes, and through the magic of a connected computer, an electronic exchange of information takes place in less time than it takes to order a latte.

What if communication with God worked similarly?

What if there were divine signals constantly swirling around us?

Is it possible that, like an electronic signal, we can tune into certain channels and hear God speak?

What if he is speaking to you *right now*?

Are we in the right place to decode his frequency and make sense of his signal?

Or is it possible our receivers need to be tuned to the correct spiritual channel to hear what he is saying?

If so, what might these spiritual channels look like?

When you pack up the car to embark on a multistate road trip, sometime after you fasten your seat belt and before you put the car in drive, you tune the radio to your favorite station. For miles, the music and the banter keep your mind

occupied. But at some point, the signal begins to get a little fuzzy. It's harder to hear than when you left home. Eventually, you hear only static, you can't hear anything at all—or your station is overtaken by a different, stronger signal. If you want to continue listening, you'll have to fiddle with the dials until you tune in to another station. Your favorite preset station is no longer working for you.

Sometimes that happens in life.

Before Mark's encounter with God in the neighbor's living room, Mark's spiritual receiver was only on at church. It was only after God's signal was strong enough to overcome the static in Mark's life that he figured there was more out there than his preset channels were picking up. Mark learned that God wasn't only on the AM station on Sunday mornings; he was also on the FM country channels and the rock-and-roll stations.

To know God, we have to hear from him. But hearing from him doesn't mean we have to spend our lives in a Benedictine monastery, climb a mountain and meditate, or even wait for the pastor to speak during the Sunday service. But it does mean that we have to tune in to the channels on which God speaks. And maybe even give up our preset channels to discover new ways of communicating.

We've identified different channels on which people claim to have experienced the presence of God. As you read the following chapters, tune in to different channels—signs and circumstances, the words of other people, history, dreams and visions, nature, your emotions, your conscience, and Scripture—and perhaps you will hear him in ways you never have.

Are these the only channels?

Not likely.

But these are the airwaves that seem to carry the most traffic.

And let's just get this out on the page: both of us authors believe that God speaks to us. Not in a Charlton Heston voice but in other ways—including the stories in this book.

God speaks,

and

sometimes we even hear him.

It's not always like we expect; sometimes it's downright surprising. Unexpected. Confusing. Frightening. Peaceful or disturbing. Both of us have learned a few things from our initial encounters with hearing God speak—and we believe he does.

But it's equally important that you know we're not Kool-Aid drinkers—we don't believe everyone who claims to hear God speak actually does.

As friends and cowriters, we've shared intimate details of our spiritual lives, we know each other's strengths and weaknesses, but frankly, we can still have doubts about each other's stories. As we should have. These kinds of things aren't provable. We eye the stories in this book as skeptically as we eye each other's stories.

The paradox is this: Sometimes we're all skeptical of another person's story. But we're never skeptical of our own. Mary gave up her reputation for her belief that she heard God. Cecil Murphey was willing to give his life. Joan of Arc did. When we have such a convincing experience, we can move past our own skepticism and begin to believe others' stories.

Hearing God speak is a personal thing. In this book,

we have no plans to convince you that God is speaking to you or even speaking at all. You will be convinced only when you experience it. You may read this book and doubt whether these stories happened as we describe them. We even have some doubts as we write them. But the question isn't whether God speaks to Mark or to Jennifer, to Joan or to Mary, or to any of the other people mentioned in this book. The question is, Does God speak to you?

We believe he does. And as you read this book, we'll be your guides on a listening journey that shows you how he does.

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Most of all we thank God, who desires to communicate

with each one of us. He divinely orchestrated every story at the exact moment we needed it. He also knew from the beginning of time that you'd be reading this right now and which of these stories would speak to you. If your hearing improves half as much from reading this book as ours did from writing it, you will be blessed indeed.

~Mark and Jennifer

# NOTES

## 101.0 Hearing Voices

1. Allen Williamson, "Biography of Joan of Arc (Jehanne Darc)," [http://www.joan-of-arc.org/joanofarc\\_life\\_summary\\_visions.html](http://www.joan-of-arc.org/joanofarc_life_summary_visions.html).
2. Ibid.
3. World Book Encyclopedia, s.v. "Joan of Arc, Saint."
4. Ibid.
5. See John 1:46.
6. See Luke 1:2-4.
7. Luke 1:28.
8. Luke 1:30-33.
9. Luke 1:34.
10. Luke 1:35.
11. Luke 1:36-37.
12. Luke 1:38.
13. Luke 1:39-41.
14. Luke 1:42-45.
15. Luke 1:46-49.
16. Matthew 1:19.
17. Matthew 1:20-21.
18. Matthew 1:24.
19. Matthew 1:25.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Dr. Mark Herringshaw**, Ph.D., is a pastor, leader, and teacher. He currently serves as a teaching pastor of the 7,000-member North Heights Lutheran Church in Roseville, Minnesota. He is professor of leadership at the Master's Institute Seminary in St. Paul. Mark is a writer, speaker, and seminar leader, having written more than 75 articles appearing in various periodicals, as well as *Six Prayers God Always Answers*, his previous book also co-written with Jennifer Schuchmann. His doctorate is in organizational leadership from Regent University. He is the founder and director of eEmbassy, an organization that develops interactive educational experiences for youth, families, and businesses. Mark and his wife, Jill, have four children.

**Jennifer Schuchmann** is an award-winning writer. She has contributed to several books, including *Six Prayers God*

*Always Answers*, also co-written with Mark Herringshaw (Tyndale, 2008); *Your Unforgettable Life*, with Craig Chapin (Beacon Hill, 2005); *The Church Leader's Answer Book* (Tyndale, 2006); and a couples' study Bible (Zondervan, 2007). Jennifer holds an MBA from Emory University, with an emphasis in marketing and communications, and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Memphis. She lives in the Atlanta area with her husband, David, and their son.