

“Hearing” the Voice of God – Is It Biblical? With Greg Koukl

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FRANK:

Ladies and gentlemen, how do you make decisions? Does God, the Holy Spirit, tell you what to do every day? Are you putting out fleeces? Are you looking for hints? Are you looking for little signs that you got to track down and find the X marks the spot of the job you need to take, of the person you need to marry, of even maybe the restaurant you need to go to?

Are you praying for all those signs? Is that the way the Bible says that God communicates with us? I would say probably most Christians think that is the case, but I've got a friend here who's brilliant and has looked into this in great detail, and you might be surprised to see the conclusion he comes to. His name is, of course, the great Greg Koukl, and here he is right here at the Cross Examined Instructor Academy.

This is the 19th year we're together doing this.

GREG:

That's right. It's a mind-blower, and what I was talking with somebody about earlier is when you started, and the quality of people you had there were good people, but a lot of newbies and you, for the last actually more than 10 years now have been attracting a magnificent crowd of very committed and very skilled people that you're able to invest your time in; it's fabulous, and here's Alisa on the docket, who was a student, what, eight years ago.

FRANK:

Alisa Childers, yeah, and you helped shepherd her through that process because I remember when Alisa Childers, who, those you don't know, Alisa was actually in Christian music early on in her career.

GREG:

ZOEGirl.



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FRANK:

Yeah, and she decided that she wanted to get into apologetics, so she came to CIA, the Cross Examined Instructor Academy.

GREG:

It wasn't quite a decision. It was she was thrust into it because of a faith crisis that she had which everybody knows about because she wrote a book about it called—

FRANK:

Another Gospel.

GREG:

Another Gospel.

FRANK:

Yeah, and then Natasha Crain came too. Now she's one of the instructors, so It's great, and of course, you do tactics or street smarts every time you come, which of course is critical to be an apologist or an evangelist to know how to ask the right questions and maneuver in a conversation skillfully. You're so great at that. I want to talk about today something that I think is almost assumed by Christians, and you kind of challenge that idea that God is giving you hints every day.

The Holy Spirit is telling you what to do, telling you where to go, and you've got to decipher those hints. And people will say, "Hey, Greg, what about the passage that says, "My sheep hear my voice." This appears to be how God wants us to make decisions, and you say what?

GREG:

Well, I think after this discussion we have together, I'm going to have a whole lot of people that are really going to be mad at me, but I'm also going to have a whole lot of people that aren't breathing a sigh of relief.

And frankly, this is the mixed response that I get every time I talk about this. And the first time I taught in this was in the spring of, let's see, 1982. 1982, that was a prior millennium. Some of your listeners weren't even born then. But this is how long I've been trafficking in this issue, and studying it, and fielding challenges and complaints, and writing on it.

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And right now, I'm kind of structure this material properly so I can get a book proposal out to Zondervan, and they've already said they want it. They just want me to organize something, and then I'll put it out. So that'll be probably my last written work, my last published book. But it's not apologetics. It's about an issue of practical Christian living.

And it's hard to imagine what is more important in a Christian's life once they're a believer, they're walking with the Lord in terms of day-to-day living than making decisions in a way that's consistent with, I'm just going to use the phrase right now, at least in a broad sense, consistent with the will of God. Now, different people understand the meaning of that phrase differently, and that's going to be what we're going to talk about, but we're either making decisions or we're living with the consequences of the decisions we've made.

How can we do that properly in a biblical way? That's the issue here. And you mentioned about, you made a reference to people having kind of absorbed a way of doing this from their culture. I call it kind of a received tradition, Frank. So you have three different received traditions that are broadly under this umbrella of God communicating to each individual Christian for different purposes.

One might be decision-making issues. Another one might be just ongoing relationship kind of issues. Another one might be understanding using Scripture to communicate something special. So I think of that in there's this scriptural element, and it amounts to a lot of times people reading between the lines. And what they think the Holy Spirit is telling them through this isolated verse, or someone might say, "Well, God gave me this verse for you." And so, the meaning then that you're intended to get from it really is unrelated in this circumstance, unrelated to the contextual meaning.

You know, you get that, well, that's for everybody. But here, you isolate the phrase and God is speaking directly to you on something entirely different than what the writer intended. So that's one iteration of this received tradition. Another iteration you already mentioned is decision-making. Does God decide for us? And then we got to figure out what God decides, has decided so that we can then decide.

And this is the nudge nudge hint hint kind of thing that God's dropping hints that we have to decipher in order to figure out what his will is, and we call that finding God's will. We're looking for it. It's lost, so we're trying to find it. And John MacArthur puts it put it this way in the past. He said it's like God has hidden his will under a bush like a divine Easter bunny, you know, and we are running around looking for it.

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He's saying you're getting warmer, you know, kind of thing. So that is, obviously he doesn't hold this view. He thinks that's inappropriate which is why he's making this joke, but when you think about it, it isn't actually like a put-down. It is a description of the way people are operating. And when sometimes when you look at these habits Christians have that they think there's a theological justification for, and then you kind of stand back from a little bit; it looks kind of a little bit silly, but they don't think it's silly because they received it from other Christians.

They have proof texts like you mentioned a moment ago; we'll get to, and they must be right. Everybody else is doing it, and so they labor at trying to do that in decision-making. And I think one of the reasons that many people who listen to what we have to say here over this time of this interview is they will breathe a sigh of relief, is they'll realize that they have been under a false perception of decision making, hearing God, whatever you want to call it, and it hasn't worked for them.

And they think that this reflects on their own personal spirituality. And I've had many, many people who have listened to the I almost said tapes, you know, that dates me, obviously. The what do we say now? I recordings that Stand to Reason provides at str.org on decision-making, the will of God, and other things related to this.

And they say to me, they say, thank God, this has finally set me free. From what I think is a non-biblical and really a kind of superstitious way of dealing with this issue. I mean, superstition is when you when you apply some, a certain value or weight or kind of supernatural significance to something that doesn't really have that significance.

So then you're superstitious, like when we were kids, you could get a rabbit's foot, right, you know and that brought you good luck. That's superstition. Now my dad made the observation that the rabbit had four of them. You know where's the rabbit now? You know, it didn't do him any good. Anyway, so people get relieved when they realize that there's this is there's another way biblically to do it. The third area I mentioned how we read our Bibles, how we make decisions.

And the third area I'm just going to call the still small voice of God, for lack of a better way of characterizing. This is the kind of thing that really wonderful, good people like Dallas Willard, for example, has promoted. And there are many like him, but I only mention him because he's well known.

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FRANK:

I think J.P. Moreland has promoted this.

GREG:

J.P. is, yes, J.P. and I disagree on this but congenially we've had quite a number of discussions about it in the past, and we just don't we, you know, we agree to disagree on this, but he was a student of Dallas, took his PhD under Dallas at USC, and Dallas was a great influence on his life, and has had a great influence on a lot of people.

But he's written a book about having a conversational relationship with God, and I think it's come under two different titles. I'm not sure what the most recent one is, but his—

FRANK:

The Divine Conspiracy, is that it?

GREG:

No, that's a different enterprise altogether. And so I just want to make it clear that I have a lot of respect for Dallas, and I think he's written other things that are really good but I am concerned that this material is not biblically sound.

Okay, so the still small voice of God, this concept comes or this phrasing comes from 1 Kings 19, when Elijah hears from God, and that's construed as an example of hearing the voice of God that we can, I almost said imitate but that's not quite what I mean; we can have that same experience that he did, okay, or how Samuel was called by God and when he was a little boy and Eli had to, on this characterization, teach him how to recognize the voice of God because Samuel didn't recognize it; he thought it was Eli and he went in and so in the same way some will say that those who have developed the skill of hearing the voice of God, can impart that skill as a discipleship issue, teach others how to recognize the voice of God, just like Eli did to Samuel, and that's in First Samuel chapter one through three as the entire account.

FRANK:

Now maybe 30 years ago Henry Blackaby had a series called "Experiencing God" and I'll never forget the cover of that; it had an image, what was supposed to be Moses, and it seemed to say that you can have the same kind of intimacy with God and communication with God as Moses.

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GREG:

There was no seeming about it. Said that, and he said essentially it was very clear that this, all the things like this that happened to these men in the Old Testament are available to Christians now if they are, if kind of they're tuning in properly. In fact, he was, said very strongly in you cited what turns out to be John chapter 10, my sheep hear my voice.

And I hesitate to give the reference right now because that's the question I ask when people bring up my sheep hear my voice. There you go. What could be more obvious? I ask them where is that? Well, they could hardly ever. I had one person ever say—

FRANK:

Tell you where it was.

GREG:

Who is fussing with me about it? Who could tell me where it was? The second question I ask is what was going on in John 10 and nobody's ever told me that. But Blackaby uses that passage, and he points out that Jesus' statement is indicative.

In other words, here is what happens to real sheep. My sheep hear my voice. Well, what if you're not hearing Jesus' voice then? Well, maybe you're not one of his sheep. Blackaby says this. Now this is what causes all this consternation for genuine Christians who hear this kind of thing from people like Henry Blackaby, Experiencing God, and then they wonder, well, maybe I'm not really a Christian.

Well, it is in the indicative, and Jesus does mean my sheep do hear my voice. But Jesus did not mean my voice in the way that Henry Blackaby thinks he means it. And this becomes really clear when you just read the passage. Now we have a rule at Stand to Reason.

FRANK:

Never read a Bible verse.

GREG:

Never read a Bible verse. And the reason is because with a few exceptions, it's very difficult to get the correct meaning of a verse. And when I say correct meaning, what I mean is what the author meant when he wrote it. What did the author mean when he wrote that, as communicated to the people who are reading it? That's the way we need to read this. And which is pretty much how we take anything else.

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But people get goofy when they read the Bible. They isolate these verses out. And in any event, it is an indicative but Blackaby thinks that, his main project is that we have to get our, what does he call assignments from God. So how do we pursue an effective Christian life?

We get our assignments from God. God speaks to us like He spoke to Jesus. Jesus said in John 5, I never do anything unless I see my Father doing it. And so if Jesus is our model, and so therefore that we should be following what Jesus, we should be getting our directives from God. It's interesting that he says, I never do anything unless I see my father doing it. He might say another, it's what I've heard from my father, but he's using these different ways of explaining it. What does he see his father doing? You know, and so you're going to have to unravel that. But it isn't like my father tells me what to do, and you should wait and hear from the Father, and the Spirit will help you to hear from the Father, so you'll know what to do. He never says anything like that.

By the way, he never actually puts himself, his own relationship with God, the Father, on the same level as our relationship. He tells the disciples to pray, Our Father. He doesn't include them in that. To Jesus, it is my Father. There's a very different relationship. Tom Gilson, who I think you might remember, wrote a great book about, I think it's called Too Good to Be False, is the name of his book.

And he points this out. Anyway, so we have a whole, what's curious about John 5 that Blackaby uses as an example is if you just keep reading, the disci- the Pharisees get really mad at him. You being a man, make yourself out to be God because you're claiming God as your Father. Well, now we realize this passage has a whole different application than Jesus being the perfect human being that we're supposed to copy in the way we live our lives.

Because that's the passage where Jesus says that the Father's given all rights to me. I can raise up any man that I want to, and you honor me even as you honor the Father. I like that. That's why I tell my kids and my wife. You honor me as you even as you honor God because I'm following Jesus. No, no, obviously.

FRANK:

So the same passage he talks about no, that he does that in John 17 about I share the glory that we shared before the foundation of the world.

That's John 17, the high priestly prayer. So Jesus is at another relationship with God the Father than we are, quite obviously. And so you're saying it's the same thing going on here in John 5?

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GREG:

So we just have to be careful how we use the sayings of Jesus, the comments of Jesus, because some Jesus was the perfect man. And so we are to in a sense mimic or follow the model, the behavior of Jesus the perfect man.

FRANK:

In a sense.

GREG:

Okay, but he was also the Messiah and the Son of God. And there are other passages that speak to his behavior comments, pertaining to those unique characteristics. Well, that's not something we emulate. And this is what's going on in John 5. And there's no question when you read through this, but this is where you know sometimes people are reckless in their exegesis even when they write books and even when they should know better.

You see, this is not properly used in context, okay? And this is a big point that I make. Let's jump over to John 10 again. John 5, John 5 begins a motif of Jesus talking about hearing the Father's voice or hearing the Spirit's voice. There's a bunch of references to it, and the dead will hear his voice, and they will live.

And I mean, you see this motif. And in John 10, it kind of, there's another reference in John 18, but right there in John 10 it kind of comes to a head. My sheep hear my voice. I am the good shepherd. My sheep hear my voice and follow me. Okay, that's like verse 3, 4. And then in verse 6 it says these things he spoke as a figure of speech. Thank you, John. That helps a lot.

Now we know how we're supposed to attend to these words. He's speaking metaphorically. He's not speaking in any sense literally, because he's having a fight with the Pharisees, and this is two different sections there in John where the, John 10, where he's encountering them, and he's having a fuss with them, and he's saying, look at, you're not hearing my voice.

Do you think they could hear that? They could hear that. What they weren't hearing is something else that would make the difference. You don't hear my voice. Why not? Because you're not my sheep. The Father has given my sheep to me. He hasn't given you to me. Therefore, you're not able to hear me. Okay. Now, people can do all kinds of things theologically with that.

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The point here is that Jesus is not talking about hearing voices that are features of directive guidance for the Christian life. And in fact, in that passage, it's the non-Christian who hears his voice. Which is, if I wanted to give a label to it, is the effective work of the Spirit, calling, calling them.

You've got the universal call, and you have the effective call, calling them into salvation, effectively drawing them into salvation, and that's what it's about. It's the, and Jesus puts it this way later in the same chapter: my sheep hear my voice, and they follow me, and I give them eternal life. Okay, there's the sequence. So this is—

FRANK:

So it's fair to say just so I understand this properly, Greg, in this passage Jesus is more talking about how people get saved, how they get justified; it's not a literal voice, and it's not a way that people make decisions every day about how they live their lives.

GREG:

He is not more talking about that; he is only talking about that; he is only talking about you cannot take these statements, and I had an online debate with Michael Brown, great brother great apologist, but Pentecostal, and he was taking up the other side on this, and so when I raised this issue about John chapter 10, my sheep hear my voice, he agreed with me that was the major application, but he said it has a broader application to us hearing you know in other circumstances and having a conversational relationship with God.

I disagreed because I didn't think there was any justification in that passage to expand the application in that way? He was reading into it what was his point of view rather than taking it out of it. I mean, all respects to Michael. I, you know, don't want to get in a fight with Michael Brown. You know he's that heavy hitter, but I just think in that case he was making a mistake. And this is where I think in many ways this is a way of thinking that is in search of a proof text.

Okay. And this is one, okay, my sheep hear my voice. That fits my view—

FRANK:

Sounds good.

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GREG:

There's another one that people use all the time: led by the Spirit. I honestly, in common parlance, Frank, where people talk about being led by the Spirit, I have never. I'm 50, what, almost 52 or 53 years old in Christ.

I have never heard anybody use the phrase led by the Spirit the way that Paul was using it. Romans 8, Galatians 5; it's the only two places where it even shows up, where Jesus is led by the Spirit in the wilderness. It's a whole different structure of the Greek and it's not even referring to the same thing. He is taken, just like Satan took him to the high mountain.

The same language there. No, Paul's talking about something else, okay? And what we understand is here's the way God guides us. He nudges us. Nudge, nudge, hint, hint, and we feel led by the Spirit. This is what the language. Now, all I want to talk about right now is this verse. I'm not talking about whether or not there are motifs that God uses to move us to decision-making.

The way I want to approach this is one verse at a time, because this other way of understanding God's working in our lives, is buttressed by and reinforced by different passages like led by the Spirit, or having a peace about it, or open doors and closed doors, or there's a host of them. I know them all. Trust me. And if we can show individually with people not being defensive for a view, but just to look at the text to see what it says, I promise you, not any of these passages are tricky.

They don't take your knowledge of Greek, or you don't take right theological acumen. All it requires is you to read the passage. Okay. Now if we do that and we look and I'll get to the led by the Spirit in more detail in a second, but I want you to see the bigger picture. If we can take that and say, oh well, that isn't what that means, just like John 10: sheep hear my voice, well, that doesn't, that's not that isn't what it's referring to, okay what about having a peace about it?

Oh, well, oh wow, I read the whole thing. That's not what it's referring. Pretty soon you have a doctrine or a practice or a discipline that Christians practice, and you have no verses to support it. That's actually my approach. So then the question is, why are we believing this thing? Why are we acting this way? Why are we implicitly teaching other people how to do this? Actually, the whole book is that will teach you how to line these things up and then you have, like, the lighthouses, you know, and all the triangulate the signs, and Charles Stanley wrote a book on it.

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God bless him. He's a good man. You know, he's with the Lord now. And you know, he's just wrong. And you can find out he's wrong by just looking at the passage. So let's just use led by the Spirit as a case in point.

FRANK:

In which passage? Romans 8?

GREG:

Okay, let's just start with Romans 8. Because it's a —

FRANK:

High crescendo chapter in the Bible. Maybe the peak of the entire Bible. Romans 8.

GREG:

Romans 8, yeah it's a wonderful chapter. Of course it's a bum; it's kind of weird to say that was a great verse or that was a great chapter. What's wrong with the rest of them? Are they all bummers or what?

FRANK:

No, no, but the way he gets to that point.

GREG:

There's so much there. So what he is talking about starting in Romans, the beginning of Romans 8 is two different trajectories he calls them according to the spirit and according to the flesh.

Now we use that language in Christian parlance differently; we say I went to church, I was really in the spirit. And then I went to the beach. Man, did I get in the flesh you know. No, that and the way that Paul's using those words, he's not talking about whether you are operating spiritually and then you, then you're sinning. I understand what people mean. The difficulty is when we have a way of using it in common conversation, and then we read that meaning back into the text.

And it's exactly what people do, not only with in the spirit and in the flesh, but led by the Spirit. So. What does he mean by in the spirit and in the flesh? He means when he says in the spirit, he means regenerate. You are not in the flesh if the Spirit of God dwells in you, and if he doesn't, you're none of his. So it's really clear he's talking about two different trajectories.

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You could be non-believers are going this way, believers are going this way. Now, what is characteristic of believers? Well, they're not following the flesh. They're not living according to the flesh because they're not in the flesh; they're in the spirit, and they are putting to death the deeds of the flesh. For as many as who are led by the Spirit, these are sons of God.

So led by the Spirit is right back to back with putting to death the deeds of the flesh as part of the flow of thought, the characterization of believers who are following the Spirit and growing in their sanctification by actively, with the Spirit's help, becoming more holy, putting to death; being led by the Spirit means putting to death the deeds of the flesh.

It means walking in a way that you are overcoming the fleshly desires, evidencing that you're a child of God. It is, anybody watching, go back to Romans 8 and just read it and from verse one right on down to this section, and you're going to see this is the flow of thought. Okay, now what about Galatians 5, you go to Galatians 5, and there's the phrase led by the Spirit.

You walk by the, he says first, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. What's that? Well, then he puts a bunch of nasties in there, okay, but if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now, why aren't we under the law? Because if we're led by the Spirit, we're fulfilling, we're manifesting the fruits of the Spirit, which comes next.

It's right there next, right in the same category. And therefore we're fulfilling the law by our behavior already. And we're not under that law, which is a big part of the book of Galatians anyway. So, walking in the Spirit and being led by the Spirit are in parallel in that passage, and they have to do with overcoming the flesh. And manifesting fruits of the Spirit.

Oh my goodness, that's the same meaning in Romans 8. Exactly. Where is the indication that being led by the Spirit, the way Paul is using the phrase, has anything to do with decision making? It's not there.

FRANK:

It's not, yeah.

GREG:

It's not there at all. Now I've had people said they they're shocked when I say this. They say, don't you believe that the whole; we are led by the Spirit?

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I said, of course I believe we're led by the Spirit, but I believe it means what Paul meant it means, not what you say or think it means right now. Okay. Now this is just another occasion where we've taken one of these very powerful proof texts for a view, and we've shown look when you read it in context, it doesn't make your point. It's about something else. You can do that with having a peace about it in Colossians 3, as you know, a sign.

Well, if you have a peace about it, then God wants you to do it. If you don't have a peace about it, then God doesn't. I mean, that's another one of those nudge, nudge, hint, hint things.

FRANK:

You know, I should say that there is an entire book on this that was written about 40 years ago.

GREG:

Garry Friesen.

FRANK:

Garry Friesen and Robin Maxson, I think.

GREG:

I don't, I didn't know it was co-authored. But it's come out with a, like a 20-year edition it has it revised. It's an excellent book.

FRANK:

It's called Decision Making and the Will of God, but it's so long that what I normally recommend is I recommend they go to the STR website, Greg, and to look up three articles you wrote. One is called Does God Whisper? It's part one, two, and three. We'll put them in the show notes because I know it can be hard to keep track of everything we're talking about here. Does God Whisper is kind of a skeleton view of—

GREG:

Yeah, I think it's, I'm wondering if that's, that is the working title of the book I'm writing, but you'll find it—

FRANK:

Yeah, we'll put it in the show notes

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GREG:

Maybe by a different title, but yeah, where I'm trying to deal with these passages and make them, Kevin DeYoung has written a book that's smaller.

It's called Just Do Something is the title and then he's it's a long subtitle about not working looking for liver quivers or voices in the clouds or whatever. So that's also a shorter version. But there is a point about Friesen's book. Friesen's book is long.

FRANK:

Yes, very long because he goes through the traditional view. Well, all of these —

GREG:

It's more than that. You can get a lot of books on all of this other view, and they're short because those books do not exegete; they cite verses and then record experiences.

And now people ask me what about this that happened to me? I say, look it I don't exegete experiences, but what Garry does is he exegetes passages; that's why it's longer; that is also why it's more reliable, okay. God can do anything he wants Frank, that's my view, what he can do, look he could, He can speak to you through a leprechaun under your bed if he wants, speaking Greek, you know.

But the question isn't what God can do. I'm not putting God in a box. The question is what does the Bible teach we should expect?

FRANK:

What's the normative way God communicates?

GREG:

The normative and normal. It's just, this is what. And when you go through the text, much more could be said obviously, but when you go to the text, the text always drives us back to the text, constantly to the Word of God itself.

It's constantly driving us past. Study to show yourself approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of truth. This is chapter 2 of 2 Timothy. It's Paul's last gasp before he dies as a martyr on the Appian Way, and he lays this stuff out for Timothy his own disciple, about here's the important things.

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You know, guard what has been entrusted to you. Don't be ashamed of the gospel. Disciple the things you've learned from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will teach others also. And handle the word accurately. For the times will come and you know this passage well when they will not endure sound doctrine but want to have their ears tickled. And accumulate to themselves teachers of their own.

FRANK:

Do you think the people that take this view, which is probably a majority of Christians, the view that God is giving me hints and all this, do you think they would, most of them, Greg, say or disagree with the statement, the primary way God communicates to us today is through His Word?

GREG:

I think they would all agree with that. Okay. There's a difference between what people say and what people do.

FRANK:

Yeah, good. Okay, okay.

GREG:

So, and I'm not taking exception with that affirmation. They do. But so anything I think, here's how it plays out. And I've had many conversations about this. They say anything I think God is telling me to do has to be consistent with God's word. Okay. Well, look at, if you think that God is telling you to marry Mary Beth and she's a Christian, well, the Bible is not going to weigh in aye or nay directly on that issue.

I mean, I think it does weigh in in the way that I would suggest people make decisions, but not in that way, ay or nay. So, you got to figure that out in a different way. God's not going to tell you who to marry in Scripture. He'll tell you who not to marry. No non-Christian. But He won't tell you who to marry. So now how do I make this? God's got to tell me. All right. Now here's the deal. They not only have to make sure that the method they're using doesn't give them an answer that is contrary to Scripture.

They have to find out whether the method they're using itself is consistent with Scripture. And this is what isn't done, except for in, I think in a shallow fashion where people grab these proof texts and figure this is right. Okay. The underlying principle here, the presumption that is taken

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for granted when it comes to decision-making, is God makes our decisions for us, at least the most important ones.

FRANK:

We just have to discover what the decisions are.

GREG:

Yeah, we got to discover what it is, and the finding God's will is the discovery process. But think about it. It's presuming that this presumes that God has something important for us to know from Him. Then why is He hiding it under a bush and saying you're getting warmer? You know there's not a single place in Scripture where God speaks and the person to whom he's speaking doesn't hear him.

FRANK:

I remember you saying this. Maybe you can unpack this. Does God try? Because you hear people saying, well, I think God's trying to tell me something. Explain.

GREG:

Well, this is pretty simple and I wrote an article for Stand to Reason called "When God Speaks," because there are times when God does speak to individuals and does certain. Book of Acts has 14 occasions of interventional direction okay.

Now, a couple of them are jailbreaks and usually there's something miraculous going on, okay that's another issue, but I, in this piece that you can find on our website, and maybe you'll link it, called "When God Speaks," I qualify these different things, you know what God laid on my heart we see these references in the Old Testament, and I talk about that.

But the important thing to keep in mind here is when people say God is trying to talk to everybody, but you know the rock and roll is too loud, whatever, this, that, you're not paying attention, you're not attending properly. And if we learn to attend properly, we'll be able to hear the faint whispers of God, okay. If we say that God is trying, that means God is attempting to do something that he may fail at.

That's what try means. Okay, but can God fail? There's only two ways to fail, because you don't know enough or you don't have the ability, the power. But God is omniscient and omnipotent. He's got all the potence and all the nitions. You know, He is not short in any of those ways. Therefore, He does not try. He's not a wannabe.

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He's a be. He does whatever He sets His mind and will and effort to do. And this is why, in every case where, in scripture, people hear. I think of Paul, Saul of Tarsus, unregenerate, no Holy Spirit, murdering Christians. Saul, Saul.

What? I haven't learned to hear your voice yet. Let me read the book. No, no, no, no, no. This approach limits God. Now some people want to go back to little baby, little young boy Samuel. Look at Samuel. He didn't recognize the voice of God. Well, first when you read the account, because remember I intimated earlier that this is somehow pressed into service as an example of an older believer, we'll say Eli in this case the priest, an older believer who has the skill of recognizing the voice of God, and a younger believer, let's say Samuel in this case, who doesn't have the skill to recognize, and there's a process of education, teaching.

So this is the way I understood it from some of the things I read by people who promote the idea. So I went back, and I did, you know, I wish it was something most people would do. I read the passage. I started in chapter 1 of 1 Samuel. I went to chapter 3 because that's the end of the account. By the end of chapter 3, Samuel's an established prophet. Now here's a couple of things that I learned.

First of all, Eli was not a godly man. He was an ungodly man. In fact, the only time that we know that he heard from God about anything is when a prophet knocked on his door and pronounced a curse upon him and his family because of you know Hophni and Phineas and sleeping with the girls in the temple, and their dad Eli will not do anything about it. So he's cursed. Second thing you learn is that words from the Lord were rare in those days.

That's in the text. The next thing you learn is Samuel's not a believer. He didn't know the Lord. That little kid, he didn't know the Lord. How do you know that? It says so in the text. Samuel did not know the Lord. Then God speaks to Samuel. Samuel. Samuel hears him perfectly. Now, what does he do? He's a little guy in the temple who's there to help Eli.

In the middle of the night, he hears somebody calling, so he runs into Eli. That's understandable. Eli said, it ain't me, go back to bed. This happens three times. The third time, Eli, the text says something like he comes to his senses and he figures out, wait a minute, I'm not calling. He's hearing something. This is the third time around. Tell you what, say this, you know, speak your servants listening. And then God speaks to little Samuel, and then Eli says, after you tell me everything God said, this is a guy who hears from God all the time, please.

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And then it says at the end of the chapter, all of the things that Samuel proclaimed came to pass, which is a test of a prophet. And thus Samuel was declared to be the prophet of God, so he's the last judge, the first of the great prophets other than Moses. And do we want to believe that first of all that this even taking someone like this is a model for us, the average Christian, that's a mistake.

But nothing in the account fits the paradigm that people have characterized it to be. Nothing, except for the name Samuel. Eli, but nothing else fits. Okay, there is no need to learn to hear the voice of God. If God wants to say something, directive or otherwise, He's going to do it.

And in fact, when you look in the book of Acts, these 14 times, the times that we have a clear characterization of the phenomenology, the way God speaks, as it were, communicates, it's all right there and it's miraculous. It's miraculous. An angel shows up. There's a vision. You know you have three or four, it's only 14 times, and there's maybe three that have to do with the conversion of Paul.

They have two of them at least with the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, and you see them clustered in these particular ways. There is no sense that for the 30 years of the time of the history of the book of Acts that God is intervening all these times, giving all these words. In fact, I've chronicled 70 occasions where disciples make decisions to do things where there's absolutely no indication that God is telling them to do it.

They are thinking through their original marching orders, and they are doing what God has already told them to do. And every once in a while, there's a timeout, and God says, no, don't go there, go here. They're forbidden from going here.

FRANK:

But you're saying 14 occasions over 30 years. That would be like one every two years. If you, and people think God's talking to them every day.

GREG:

Yeah, that's the sense they have because they're reading it all quickly, you know, it all seems like, but it isn't happening like that. And that's why I did this analysis myself and when you look at the motifs that are involved, these are these are supernatural. It's not a nudge-nudge hint hint kind of thing. So I mean my main takeaway and I'm not sure how much time we have, but I don't want people to get lost in the details here.

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The main takeaway is that there is no biblical indication, and I'll just say it this way for the New Testament Christian, there was other things that happened, you know David didn't ask the Lord if he could do such and so blah blah blah people point to that. Well, David's kind of a special case, and for the New Testament Christian, there is no indication whatsoever that we have to get our personalized directives, directions from God.

He's given us the Bible, 66 books, so that we can take the things we learn from it and make good decisions. For the record, this is 33 years. You know this with Stand to Reason. For me, I mean, that's how long ago I started the organization with Melinda Penner, and I never had any experience that I could say was remotely like hearing from God to start STR.

I had very particular reasons for going ahead with the encouragements that people gave me, which is, by the way, a good feature. People saw how I operated in the body of Christ saying, you do this well, do more of that. Okay. So just as a small aside here, God does not distribute ministry through calling. It is not in the Bible.

FRANK:

It's through gifting.

GREG:

It's through gifting. It's through gifting. First Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, First Peter, what three or whatever. You know, you have all these passages that talk about using our gifting. And so I, in these comments to me, they were identifying my gifting. Focus. And remember, that's what the Bible teaches.

Focus. We start out here and we focus, focus, focus. We're a hand or an eye or whatever we are, you know. And so that's, we have individual purposes in the larger role of the body. So, when I started, I gathered people together and said, I got this idea. What do you think of it? And a lot of them said, well, I kind of like the idea, but I'm not sure what the idea is.

FRANK:

And we look at the book of Proverbs and it would say that with many advisors, plans succeed.

Ladies and gentlemen, why do we even have a book of Proverbs if God is going to directly tell us what to do every day? You know.

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GREG:

And look at any. Anybody, I was going to say any fool, but I said look at anybody can take orders. You don't have to be anybody special. You don't have to know anything. You don't have to have any wisdom. God doesn't want to build order takers. He's trying to build wise human beings.

Grow in wisdom and stature, right? Like Jesus did. Wisdom and stature. As we grow in wisdom, we are learning different things, and we are becoming more complete people. We're becoming more virtuous, and we do this by learning what the word says and how to apply it in different circumstances. Now that's a herky-jerky affair. How do you learn, how do you learn to make good decisions?

Through wisdom? How do I get wisdom? Through bad decisions. You know, okay—

FRANK:

And reading the text.

GREG:

Reading the text.

FRANK:

Because there is wisdom—

GREG:

Yeah, absolutely. And how many times have you and I had many conversations about all kinds of things together, you know, and with others as well, because we're trying to gain the wisdom. Now, just so I'm clear, we're not, on my view here, I'm not trying to get wisdom from Frank to suggest that this is the way God's telling me what to do.

I'm not looking for what God's telling me to do. Sometimes, because I don't think that's the right motif. I don't think that's the biblical motif.

FRANK:

Well, let's just say that God does give us directives on moral issues, right? Marry somebody in the Lord, not somebody outside the Lord. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Those are directives. But you then, we then, all of us then, have to decide how we're going to make certain non-moral decisions.

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And is this going to advance the will of God? The general will of God and the idea that God wants us to make disciples. So how do we go about doing that? And what's the wisest way to get to that end?

GREG:

Yes, that's right. So you've touched on the basic elements, I think. Just to clarify. So, God's moral will, we have to do that.

We've got to circle all these things that, given any situation, whatever moral precepts apply, we got to obey that. Okay. And then we have to be smart. That's the wisdom, okay. Now, now in biblical wisdom, biblical wisdom is actually a circle that is inside the moral, God's moral command because biblical wisdom is moral. In other words, that it's fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom it says there.

So there isn't real wisdom that's wrong. You can't have it. Oh, there's a really smart way to commit a crime. Okay, that's not wisdom. You know, that might be knowledge. But it's not wisdom, okay? So we have all the things we are supposed to do, and it applies to our actions and our motives, our intentions, stuff like that. And then we have, okay, well, what's smart given any particular decision?

Let's take marriage for example, because in some ways this is this is simple. So when you get married, you've got to marry, didn't need to always say this one, but let's just make it clear. Biblically, you have to marry a member of the opposite sex. Okay. So now I've really simplified how many people in the world? What, eight billion?

FRANK:

Yeah, four billion. You got, and many of them are married already.

GREG:

I just removed four billion. Okay. Secondly they have to be believers. Well, there's billions more that just removed from the mix, and then I've got, I think you just touched on it, there are some people who are not remarriageable. You know, that's hard saying, but Scripture does indicate that.

So it's now we have three disqualifiers for any individual that you might choose. Well, there's still like maybe a billion left. Right. Okay. Now it's up to you. Okay. You're not going to sin by doing that; now what you want to do is be smart. Okay. And Proverbs speak to this. It says, for

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example, but keep in mind that the writer of Proverbs is a father speaking to his son, so he's going to use a woman as this example.

But he says, like the gold ring in the snout of a pig, is a beautiful woman without discretion. Okay. So is it a sin to marry a beautiful woman who has no discretion?

FRANK:

If she's a Christian, no, but it's unwise.

GREG:

That's right. You get the gold ring. But the pig comes with it. So, that's it. It's just not smart. It's not smart. And there's lots of things, not just in Proverbs, but another thing. This is why you know we have conversations with others when we're thinking about getting married. Help me to know. Now again, I want to say don't use the conversation as kind of an alternate way that God is speaking to you about who you should marry. Take it as human advice that you weigh in making your decision, because it's your decision, not God's.

FRANK:

Let's just point out that if God wanted to tell you who to marry, He could.

GREG:

He could.

FRANK:

And that would be good, right? But He doesn't most of the time. Let's just point that out.

GREG:

Yeah, that's right.

FRANK:

Now, I can already, because we only got maybe 10 minutes to go, Greg. I can already see people out there. There's two reactions. One of them, one reaction, probably the minority, is going, this is liberating.

I don't have to track down all these hints anymore. Because I think Greg is right about the biblical exegesis here. I think he's right about how God communicates with us primarily through His Word normatively. There may be special occasions when He goes direct, but—

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GREG:

God can do whatever He wants.

FRANK:

Yeah, never happened to me.

GREG:

But we can't teach whatever we want. We have to teach from the text.

FRANK:

And there's a whole other group of people out there now going, Greg, you've just taken God away from me.

Greg, this is the way I make decisions every day. I mean, even in the Bible they cast lots, they put out fleeces. So how do you respond to that?

GREG:

Well, they, the only occasion that I know in the New Testament lots were cast was in Acts chapter 1.

FRANK:

Matthias.

GREG:

It's interesting when you look through the details they first had a number of criteria that they whittled down the number to two.

And they had two that were qualified. They had to be with them all the time. And they had to be witnesses of the resurrection, right? And so they did have wisdom criteria to whittle down who might be the last apostle. Then they just flipped a coin.

FRANK:

So this is a description, not a prescription.

GREG:

Yes, I think that's right.

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FRANK:

It's a description. A key distinction, ladies and gentlemen. There's a lot of descriptions in the Bible that are not prescriptions for us.

GREG:

Yeah, that's a good point. And also notice that there were some criteria that they used, and that's important because they didn't just say, all right, we don't know how to choose. Jesus chose us. Okay, Jesus, choose somebody. No, they were smart. Okay. You mentioned fleeces. So we have a fleece in what Judges chapter six. So Gideon. If you read the account, because Gideon was not a, he was a goof.

Gideon the goof. That should be the name of the chapter. Gideon the goof. Because he had already received instruction from God. About what God wanted him to do—

FRANK:

He didn't need the fleece.

GREG:

He didn't need a fleece. And notice, by the way, it was a supernatural fleece. He said, water on the outside, dew on the outside of the ground, no dew on the fleece, right? And then God accommodates him, gives him the sign. Well, he's still, oh, how about best two out of three? You know.

FRANK:

He doesn't want to do it.

GREG:

Now he reverses it, right? So he gets- he had one supernatural sign when the angel appeared to him, the angel Lord's, two with the fleece. One way, three with the fleece; another way. He still was doubting, okay? So that's why he went down into the camp of the Midianites, and you can read about that in Judges. But there is no indication that this is the right way for us to do anything, like just put out the fleece.

Although people will say that all the time, okay? So here's the deal with fleeces. And if you want to be careful, because somebody will say, oh, look at, if she picks up on the second ring, she's the one. You're like, oh. Well, maybe she just picks up by accident. How do you know you're not

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getting a false positive? So here's the way you do it: you say, God, if you want me XYZ, levitate Frank. Okay.

FRANK:

Or just tell me directly.

GREG:

No, no, no. This has got to be like third-person public. Okay. This has got to be like levitate Frank. Okay. Now, because Gideon asked for a fleece, that was third-person public, right? Anybody can see the water or the dew alright. But what happens if you don't get levitated? Oh. Well, the assumption is then God's telling me no about that.

Well, wait a minute, maybe that's a false negative. So you have to have two fleeces so to speak, if you want me to do it, levitate Frank. If you don't want me to do it levitate Koukl. Now if neither of us levitate then we know that God's not speaking through the fleece. That is the only safe way to do it. Now nobody's going to do that because they guarantee you they are nobody's going to think anybody's going to be levitating.

Because that isn't the way God speaks now. God is capable of doing it. Why isn't He doing it? Because He's choosing not to. That's why there must be another way. So even though we see these incidents in Scripture, there isn't that indicate; they aren't offered prescriptively but descriptively, as you pointed out already. This is just what happened; it isn't the way that we are supposed to function in the New Testament.

You see something else going on in the New Testament, you have God's Word with its instructions, reprove rebuke, and exhort with great, you know, preach the Word this is chapter 4 of 2 Timothy, and there's so much in there that scripture is meant to apply to our life. So, in one sense, whatever group is feeling, oh, pressure's off.

Well, I just put a different pressure on. Now you got to be a student. Now you have to talk to people. Now you got to interact. Now you have to be responsible for your decision before God. You can't blame it on God. You have to be responsible. This sheds an entirely different light on things.

FRANK:

Let's talk about this in the last few minutes, Greg. How then, because I can hear people thinking, well then what kind of interaction do I have from the Holy Spirit?

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How does, and this is a big topic. We got five minutes. Kind of give me kind of what you think the way the Bible teaches that God interacts with us, the Holy Spirit interacts with us.

GREG:

So this is a really perfect question. I get asked the question a lot and it really depresses me. And I'll tell you why it depresses me because when I tell people that the Holy Spirit is not standing on their shoulder talking into their ear, they say, well, then what good is the Holy Spirit?

In other words, they have no pneumatology. They have no doctrine of the Spirit. They don't know that the Spirit regenerates. They don't know that the Spirit you know comforts. That they don't know that—

FRANK:

Convicts.

GREG:

Pardon me?

FRANK:

Convicts.

GREG:

That there are and all we're doing is quoting verses basically. They don't know the Holy Spirit fills Ephesians 5.

They don't know the Holy Spirit produces fruit in our life over time; fruit doesn't come out like that, takes time. They don't, Jesus said the Holy Spirit will convict sin, righteousness, and judgment there in the upper room. The Holy Spirit, will in the case of the disciples, very important distinction here often misunderstood. In the case of the disciples, the Holy Spirit will bring to remembrance everything that Jesus taught you personally in his earthly ministry and guide you into all truth.

FRANK:

But that's the disciples, not us.

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GREG:

That's the disciples. That's why I'm very careful. Because if that was meant for us, then of course then the Holy Spirit has failed. Because obviously you and I disagree on a number of important things, and you're free to be wrong. But we both have the same Holy Spirit. That isn't what he meant. The point I'm making is there are all kinds of things the Holy Spirit does, and those people who are thinking only of the Holy Spirit speaking to them in that fashion, and I'm saying it doesn't, they're not aware of the Holy Spirit.

Get yourself a good systematic theology and look up pneumatology. You're going to have these many pages talking about all the things the Holy Spirit does in our life. And by the way, the Spirit's already doing that in the life of people. When people say, you know, you're taking God away from me, I am very sympathetic to that. I did talk to Gary Friesen years ago about his book and the writing, and he said, you got to be careful when you talk to people because this is really hard for a lot of people to hear because they'll think you're taking God away from them.

And what I have to say about that is, I understand the feeling, but I am not taking God away from you in any way that He actually was with you to begin with. Because what you thought was God wasn't God. God is still with you. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you, even unto the end of the earth. He is always there with you, you know.

But, and He's working through the Holy Spirit, doing all kinds of different things in our lives, and He is guiding. But the guidance that God not gives, in my view, is God's getting his job done through your life without you having to look behind the curtain of his sovereign purposes, you know. And I think that's what was going on in the Old Testament.

Reflectively, when was it Nehemiah or one of those guys, I get them mixed up, you know, with the return rebuilding the wall of the temple, and he said, God put it on my heart. It also says God put it on Cyrus's heart. So Cyrus wasn't aware of God talking to him. That's identifying something that God was doing that was adequate to move the believer in the way that God wanted to move.

I trust in the sovereign working of God, so I don't have to hear voices or anything else. Whether it's I'm not going to strain at the phenomenology, doesn't have to be a voice in my ear. Although that's usually clearly the way God spoke to prophets, et cetera, in the Old Testament. Regardless—

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FRANK:

But even then, Greg, in the Bible, it was rare God spoke. I mean, we are getting people that are prophets hearing from God, but how many thousands of people didn't hear from God?

That's why they had prophets.

GREG:

That's right. Well, look at even Solomon. I just finished the portion of 1 Kings with Solomon. That was like he was a good guy and then he was a really bad guy. And God appeared to him only three times in his entire life. And the first time was when Solomon prayed. Well, God appeared, and he said ask what you want, and he prayed for wisdom.

Now he could say God, you're right here I don't need wisdom; I can ask you anytime; you'll show up, but that isn't the way it worked with Solomon. He said give me wisdom so that I can lead these people. Curious, even in the case of Solomon, he prayed for wisdom for leadership to guide the people. Now he went south at the end of his life because of a bunch of women that he shouldn't have been messing with, you know.

FRANK:

Which were unwise decisions and immoral decisions.

GREG:

Immoral, especially in his case, he was told not to do that, which is repeated in the text. So, basically, in decision making, if I were to sum it up, among the choices you have, choose what is morally acceptable and what is smart, and then within those categories, do whatever you want. If what you want is morally acceptable and smart. Do it. You don't need God's permission.

FRANK:

You're sounding like Augustine. Love God and do as you please.

GREG:

Oh yeah, there you go. Yeah.

FRANK:

If you love God, you'll follow Him morally. And you'll get wisdom from Him and then you do as you please.

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GREG:

John MacArthur made the point that especially when you look up how the phrase will of God is used, that will of God is that in the New Testament, it's that you be spirit-filled, that you be saved, that you suffer. That you—

FRANK:

Flee from sexual immorality.

GREG:

Sexually pure. First Thess 4: that you pray always give thanks you know in all things, that's First Thess 5. So we see, all of, you think, wait a minute what about who I'm supposed to marry? What about what job I'm supposed to take, what school? What John MacArthur says is God's will is not any of those things. It's you. God's will is not what school you go to, what student you're going to be.

Not who you're going to marry within the moral constraints that we talked about, but what kind of husband in my case I'm going to be. Not what kind of job, what job you're going to, but what kind of worker you're going to be. Simply put, our God's will is for us to be like Jesus. And by the way, that is in Romans chapter 8 too. You know.

FRANK:

Yeah, to be conformed to the image of his son.

GREG:

There it is. That's right.

FRANK:

God is more concerned about who you are, than where you are. Who you are. Where you are is important, not where you are necessarily.

GREG:

That's right. And so follow that pattern, which is the New Testament pattern. If God wants to do a timeout and jump in, then He can do it anytime. But I'm going to tell you what, you won't be able to miss it.

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FRANK:

Yeah, right. He's not going to try. He's going to do it.

GREG:

He's not going to try. And it's not going to be a really strong hint either. Because you didn't see that in the New Testament.

FRANK:

Now, there are so many great resources we'll put in the show notes. Greg, we got about an hour. We could spend a lot more time. I think you probably helped a lot of people. If you're mad, it's Greg, not me.

GREG:

This is not going to be a five-star book. Two and a half. Half fives and half ones.

FRANK:

Hey, if Greg is right, and I think he is, this is called the wisdom view, by the way, Gary Friesen called the other the traditional view.

GREG:

Something like that.

FRANK:

This is the wisdom view, and I think it makes a lot of sense, and it is liberating, and you become more like Jesus by studying and becoming more like Jesus rather than saying, you know, God, tell me what to do every day. No parent's going to make a kid a mature adult by doing that.

So thanks for being with us, ladies and gentlemen. It's always great having Greg on. His website, as you know, is Stand to Reason, STR.org. He does some great podcasts. One is called STRAsk. I listen to all of them. They're Q&A podcasts with the great Amy Hall. That's Greg's mentor, Amy Hall. And then, of course, the Stand to Reason podcast is once a week as well, so check all that out.

Thanks for being here. We'll see you next time Lord willing, God bless.

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