

“Can You Hear Me *Now*?”

Job 33:14-30 ¹

The number 776-2323 looks like an ordinary phone number, but whose number is it? According to the movie, *Bruce Almighty*,² that's the phone number one uses to call God. As one web site put it, “Praying on hands and knees is so 20th century. Now you can talk to God on your cell phone.”

Movies usually use phone numbers with a 555 area code, which doesn't really exist. In *Bruce Almighty*, though, there was no area code given—just an ordinary seven-digit number, a number that is valid in many area codes. Radio station KLMO (1060 AM) of Longmont, Colorado happens to have this number. And they've received dozens of calls from pranksters as well as from persons who are genuinely trying to make contact with God.

Have you ever felt like you were having a hard time connecting with God? Have you ever wished that you could hear God better?

You and I usually relate to our hearing as we relate to our other senses—by taking it for granted. We just assume that our ears are going to work, and that the information they send to our brains is trustworthy and accurate. Much of the time, though, we're not really paying very much attention to the sounds around us.

The Millennial Generation is particularly into “listening.” Using iPods, cell phones, and any number of other gadgets, Millennials seem to always be listening to some sort of music. And, while music is great, we who are older sometimes wonder whether your world may be louder than is really good for you. In fact, most of our worlds are probably too loud and too noisy.

When we think about hearing God, God does sometimes speak to us in an audible voice. Sometimes God speaks to us through particular signs or events. Sometimes God even “shouts,” but not often. Most of the time, God speaks through a “*still, small voice*” (1 Kings 19:12).

Unfortunately, God's quiet and persistent Voice is usually drowned out by all the noise in our lives, because most of the time, we have to be very still to hear God speak. Without stillness, we're not very likely to hear God.

The text that we read together earlier from Job 33 notes several ways that God speaks to us. You might want to take that out and look at it as we review what it tells us.

In the first place, verse 15 talks about “**dreams and visions of the night**,” which are described in many places in the Bible. Some of the most famous biblical dreams are the dreams Joseph had in Genesis that resulted in his being sold into slavery and then becoming the second-in-command in Egypt (Genesis 37).

The New Testament Joseph had dreams, too, dreams that told him not to be afraid to marry Mary, that told him to take his family to Egypt to escape Herod's murderous intent, that told him eventually to return to Israel, and then to take his family to Nazareth, where Jesus grew up (Matthew 1:20-21; 2:13-15, 19-23). There are many others.

Dreams take place during sleep, while visions take place during wakefulness, but both are encountered at the boundary that lies at the edges of our consciousness. Most dreams do not represent revelation from God, though our dreams do frequently help us to understand ourselves more fully. But every now and then God does speak to us through nocturnal insights and

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on November 10, 2019.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Almighty

encounters. In my own experience, the time or two this has happened, there was absolutely no question about Who was speaking to me.

Second, beyond dreams, Job 33:16 tells us that God *speaks in their ears and terrifies them with warnings*. This verse refers to what I call “**spiritual promptings**.”

Here’s how spiritual promptings work: with or without any sense of an audible voice, you and I sometimes get a strong sense that we should do a particular thing or should not do a particular thing, and that sense persists. We may get a strong sense that we should call or visit a particular person, or that we should or should not take a particular road or trip.

While such impressions may be no more than random thoughts or even superstition, the more we know God’s character and how God speaks, the less likely we are to misunderstand. And obeying such spiritual promptings not infrequently leads to some amazing experiences!³

Third, Job 33:17 says that God *makes them turn from wrongdoing; he keeps them from pride*. The older I become, the more I agree with the ancient wisdom that regards pride as our root sin, from which all others grow.

We don’t have to look very hard at most sins to see and hear echoes of the serpent’s hiss: “*You won’t die! . . . You will become just like God*” (Genesis 3:4-5); and one of God’s most effective means of protecting us from pride is **failure**. I can’t speak for you, but three of the most productive spiritual seasons of my life followed what felt to me like catastrophic failures, wounds to my pride that were excruciating-but-necessary soul surgery.

Fourth, Job 33:18 says that God *preserves them from the pit, their lives from perishing by the sword*. I call this fourth manner of God’s speaking “**healing and rescue**.” All of us are going to physically die, of course, and for those who are in Christ, that passage is not the End but is rather our Final Healing; yet sometimes God graciously chooses to heal our diseases and grants us additional years in this life so that our healing might provide testimony that draws others to our amazing God.⁴

The flip side of such healing is found in Job 33:19-22: ¹⁹ “*Or someone may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in their bones,* ²⁰ *so that their body finds food repulsive and their soul loathes the choicest meal.* ²¹ *Their flesh wastes away to nothing, and their bones, once hidden, now stick out.* ²² *They draw near to the pit, and their life to the messengers of death.* The fifth way that God speaks to us is through **pain**.

We must be very careful here. Illness, suffering, and pain are no more likely to be God’s discipline than every dream is likely to be a message from God (see John 9:1-5). But in both cases, they may sometimes be so. It’s worthwhile to ask ourselves what God might be saying to us through pain, but we do well not to draw such conclusions for each other.⁵

³ Examples of spiritual promptings in “the Christmas Story” include the promptings that caused both Simeon and Anna to meet and to bless the infant Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:27, 38).

⁴ Examples of such deliverance include God’s saving of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace (Daniel 3) and Jesus’ raising of Lazarus from death (John 11; see also Psalms 18 and 103).

⁵ I’m unable to improve on the way C.S. Lewis put this in *The Problem of Pain*: “The human spirit will not even begin to try to surrender self-will as long as all seems to be well with it. Now error and sin both have this property, that the deeper they are the less their victim suspects their existence; they are masked evil. Pain is unmasked, unmistakable evil; every man knows that something is wrong when he is being hurt. . . . And pain is not only immediately recognizable evil, but evil impossible to ignore. . . . pain insists upon being attended to. **God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain:** it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

It was through pain that God worked to shape Paul's life and spirit, beginning on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19) and continuing through multiple trials and tribulations that never left him free from physical pain (2 Corinthians 11:22-12:10). And what Paul learned through that suffering has a great deal to do with the fact that you and I are followers of Jesus today.

A sixth way God speaks to us is through **angelic messengers**. The Bible actually exhorts us not to *forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it* (Hebrews 13:2). Angelic messengers appear throughout the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation, and angels are still at work today.⁶

It seems to me that you and I are most likely to recognize that we've had such encounters in retrospect rather than in-the-moment, even as did the men who met the Risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-34). Such meetings sometimes occur in the midst of ordinary life, as I think they have to some of my friends; but they are most likely to occur when we draw near to that boundary across which eternity lies. Persons who are nearing resurrection frequently experience unseen visitations that the rest of us may hear about but seldom see.

Finally, God speaks to us through three other means that don't appear in Job 33. These three are **nature**, **Scripture**, and **God's indwelling Spirit**, and it is actually through these three that God speaks to us most often.

I doubt that any of us are strangers to God's speaking to us through the wonders of Creation, and Psalm 19 eloquently affirms that *the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge* (19:1-2). Second, the Bible affirms about itself that *all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God's clearest and most specific guidance generally comes through this means (see Luke 24:27; Acts 8:30).

And third, it is always through the work of God's Spirit Who lives in us and Who is constantly speaking to us that we become able to understand the fullness of God's revelation through God's Word, through Creation, or through any of these other means (John 14:15-18, 16:13; Romans 8:9).

Time gets away, and I want to try to draw all this together with an unusual story. There's a scene in *Bruce Almighty* in which God shows Bruce all the things He knows about him. The information is stored in a filing drawer about a hundred feet long. The story I'm about to tell is somewhat like that. This is the account of a vision that came to Joshua Harris in 1995. Joshua was in Puerto Rico for a Billy Graham Crusade, and he wrote the following story after it came to him in a dream.⁷ It's called, "The Room." . . .

"In that place between wakefulness and dreams, I found myself in *the room*. There were no distinguishing features except for the one wall covered with small index card files. They were like the ones in libraries that list titles by author or subject in alphabetical order. But these files, which stretched from floor to ceiling and seemingly endlessly in either direction, had very different headings.

⁶ It was, of course, from the angel Gabriel that Mary learned of God's amazing plans for her own life (Luke 2:26-38).

⁷ This story circulates on the Internet as being written by 17 year-old Brian Moore, who wrote it and shared it with his FCA group shortly before being killed in an auto accident. Brian really did share it with his FCA group shortly before his death, but he hadn't written it. He saw it in Billy Graham's *Decision* magazine. www.truthorfiction.com

“As I drew near the wall of files, the first to catch my attention was one that read ‘Girls I have liked.’ I opened it and began flipping through the cards. I quickly shut it, shocked to realize that I recognized the names written on each one. And then without being told, I knew exactly where I was. This lifeless room with its small files was a crude catalog system for my life. Here were written the actions of my every moment, big and small, in a detail my memory couldn’t match.

“A sense of wonder and curiosity, coupled with horror, stirred within me as I began randomly opening files and exploring their content. Some brought joy and sweet memories; others a sense of shame and regret so intense that I would look over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching.

“A file named ‘Friends’ was next to one marked ‘Friends I have betrayed.’ The titles ranged from the mundane to the outright weird. ‘Books I Have Read,’ ‘Lies I Have Told,’ ‘Comfort I have Given,’ ‘Jokes I Have Laughed At.’ Some were almost hilarious in their exactness: ‘Things I’ve yelled at my brothers.’ Others I couldn’t laugh at: ‘Things I Have Done in My Anger,’ ‘Things I Have Muttered Under My Breath at My Parents.’

“I never ceased to be surprised by the contents. Often there were many more cards than I expected. Sometimes fewer than I hoped. I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the life I had lived. Could it be possible that I had the time in my years to write each of these thousands or even millions of cards? But each card confirmed this truth. Each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my signature.

“When I pulled out the file marked ‘Songs I have listened to,’ I realized the files grew to contain their contents. The cards were packed tightly, and yet after two or three yards, I hadn’t found the end of the file. I shut it, shamed not so much by the quality of music as by the vast amount of time I knew that file represented.

“When I came to a file marked ‘Lustful Thoughts,’ I felt a chill run through my body. I pulled the file out only an inch, not willing to test its size, and drew out a card. I shuddered at its detailed content. I felt sick to think that such a moment had been recorded. An almost animal rage broke over me. One thought dominated my mind, ‘No one must ever see these cards! No one must ever see this room! I have to destroy them!’

“In insane frenzy I yanked the file out. Its size didn’t matter now. I had to empty it and burn the cards. But as I took it at one end and began pounding it on the floor, I could not dislodge a single card. I became desperate and pulled out a card, only to find it as strong as steel when I tried to tear it.

“Defeated and utterly helpless, I returned the file to its slot. Leaning my forehead against the wall, I let out a long, self-pitying sigh. And then I saw it. The title bore ‘People I Have Shared the Gospel With.’ The handle was brighter than those around it, newer, almost unused. I pulled on its handle and a small box not more than three inches long fell into my hands. I could count the cards it contained on one hand.

“And then the tears came. I began to weep. Sobs so deep that they hurt. They started in my stomach and shook through me. I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of shame, from the overwhelming shame of it all. The rows of file shelves swirled in my tear-filled eyes. No one must ever, ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key.

“But then as I pushed away the tears, I saw Him. No, please, not Him. Not here. Oh, anyone but Jesus. I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn’t bear to watch His response. And in the moments I could bring myself to look at His face,

I saw a sorrow deeper than my own. He seemed to intuitively go to the worst boxes. Why did He have to read every one?

“Finally He turned and looked at me from across the room. He looked at me with pity in His eyes. But this was a pity that didn’t anger me. I dropped my head, covered my face with my hands and began to cry again. He walked over and put His arm around me. He could have said so many things. But He didn’t say a word, He just cried with me. Then He got up and walked back to the wall of files. Starting at one end of the room, He took out a file and, one by one, began to sign His name over mine on each card.

“**No!**” I shouted rushing to Him. All I could find to say was, ‘No, no,’ as I pulled the card from Him. His name shouldn’t be on these cards. But there it was, written in red so rich, so dark, so *alive*. The name of Jesus covered mine. It was written with His blood.

“He gently took the card back. He smiled a sad smile and began to sign the cards. I don’t think I’ll ever understand how He did it so quickly, but the next instant it seemed I heard Him close the last file and walk back to my side. He placed His hand on my shoulder and said, **‘It is finished.’**”

“I stood up, and He led me out of the room. There was no lock on its door. There were still cards to be written.”

And so, my friend, how are the file drawers of your life? Are your cards covered by the blood of Jesus? What sort of cards have you written *today*?

In South Carolina, 776-2323 belongs to an elderly woman who, like station KLMO, has gotten many calls since the movie came out. Let’s call her Eunice. One young woman called Eunice, naively but sincerely expecting to be able to talk to God. Eunice responded, “You don’t have to use a telephone to talk to God, Sweetie. Just ask Him to forgive you. He’ll hear you.” And it’s always a local call.

My friend, God is speaking to you, right NOW. God is inviting you to **“Come closer. Come in farther. Come up higher!”** Are you listening? Will you come?

It doesn’t matter where you’ve been. It doesn’t matter what you’ve done. It doesn’t matter what has been done to you. Speaking in Job, God tells us, *I have found a ransom for them—²⁵ let their flesh be renewed like a child’s; let them be restored as in the days of their youth’—²⁶ then that person can pray to God and find favor with him, they will see God’s face and shout for joy; he will restore them to full well-being*” (Job 33:25-26).

The apostle John reminds us that *“if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong”* (1 John 1:9).

And if we do this, we will be able to say, with Job’s friends, ²⁷ *“I have sinned, I have perverted what is right, but I did not get what I deserved. ²⁸ God has delivered me from going down to the pit, and I shall live to enjoy the light of life”* (Job 33:27-28).

For such Redemption, for such Salvation, for such Love, we give Thanks & Praise to God!