

## **Observe, Interpret and Respond**

### *What is God Saying*

There are many different ways God speaks: audibly, through the Bible, in visions and dreams, through the words of others, in coincidences and signs, and, most significantly and importantly, through his still small voice- his Spirit speaking to ours. No matter how God speaks - whether it is clear and explicit or subtle and implicit - we engage with what God is saying by observing, interpreting and responding.

#### **1. Observe**

Step one is to simply observe. If you've had a thought pop into your head while praying or you've had a dream, note what happened. What did you think, hear and feel? How does it relate to your life circumstances at the moment? Did it evoke peace and comfort or anxiety and fear?

It isn't easy for human beings to really observe what is happening, but God calls us to do it, and it is important, especially when it comes to discerning the voice of God.

#### **2. Interpret**

Step two is take the time and space to prayerfully interpret the meaning and the significance of what you have seen and heard. Again, this doesn't come naturally to us - we want to jump to what seems most obvious, but it is important. Is what you heard or saw actually from God? (If it seems to come from a place of shame or guilt or fear, it probably isn't.) Does what you heard relate to a specific circumstance (maybe an encouragement that a difficulty in your life is about to be resolved) or something more general (a promise that God will always be with you?) At this stage you might like to speak to a trusted friend for help with interpretation. You should also draw on the tradition of the church, the advice of others and the testimony of Scripture to make sure you are hearing God well.

#### **3. Respond**

The final step is to respond. We can't say that we believe what we've heard from God without responding to it. That would be like saying we believe the mechanic who says the brakes are about to fail on our car *and* getting in the car to drive it down the freeway anyway! To hear *is* to respond.

Again, it takes time, space and prayer to discern how to respond. God might want us to pass on a message to someone, or He may want us to be silent and pray for them and care for them with our actions instead. God may be calling us to make a sacrifice for His sake and the sake of others, or he may be calling us to relax and enjoy His gifts. As a guideline, God will call us to respond to Him in ways that grow us in Christlikeness - joy, peace, humility, self-control, kindness, not in ways that will make us more powerful, famous or influential.

It is important in life that we take the time and space to observe, interpret and respond. It is doubly important that we do so when discerning the voice of God.