

**Why Can We Live with Hope
this Christmas? Pt. II**

~ John 1:18-25

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Healthy Communication is one of the most important components of relationships. If you have good communication with another person and learn some conflict resolution skills, you can deal with any issue that comes up. Healthy communication involves honesty and clarity and respect, listening discussion and resolution. It requires effort, time and commitment.

But to experience healthy communication, you need to communicate. This seems obvious but it is amazing how many relationships suffer as a result of unwillingness to communicate. Lack of communication can kill a relationship.

Meet Sherri and Bob for example. They've been together for a while and really like each other. But Sherri has come to the point where she wants to define the relationship. What are they doing and where is this going? Sherri writes Bob an email late one evening to lay out her thoughts. But Bob does not respond at all the next day. He refuses to communicate about this. This leaves Sherri with questions. Why won't he talk with me? Is he mad? Is something wrong? Is he losing interest?

So Sherri tries to restore communication. Through several text messages. "Hey, I miss you. What's up?" "Is something wrong? Talk to me?"

Bob still refuses to respond. No calls. No texts. No messages of any kind. Sherri can see Bob read her texts. Yet Bob refuses to communicate. Now Sherri really begins to wonder. "What happened? How could he do this? Doesn't he care? Is the end of our relationship?"

So Sherri tries to make contact over the next few days. Finally, she writes; "I don't understand why you have cut me off. It seems you don't want to talk to me anymore. I can't go on like this. Therefore, unless you get back to me, that's the end of our relationship."

How different things would have been if Bob responded to Sherri's initial email. Say she sent it late one evening after he was asleep. Now its after after 5:00 PM the next day. Yet at 5:30, Bob finally calls. Sherri says, "Why didn't you get back to me? I have been trying to reach you all day."

Bob responds, "I'm sorry. The meeting that I had in the morning turned into a marathon with lots at stake. We began to receive urgent calls and I spent the entire day trying to put out fires. But the second I could finally break free, I called you so we could talk now."

Think about how that might help Sherri. She says, “Oh, I’m sorry you had such an intense day. Tell me about it.” Sherri is filled with relief and hope because of this communication. Bob agrees to talk about her questions. There’s nothing wrong with the relationship. They just needed to communicate. Together they can move forward to what’s next.

Healthy communication is one of the most important components of a relationship. So how is your communication with God doing these days? Let’s transfer scenario onto our relationship with God. Are you like Bob, who is not responding to communication from God? Or like Sherri, who seeks to communicate but feels like nothing is coming back?

We ask questions like “What is God’s will for my life?” We desire His perspective on relationships, schools choices, life direction, jobs, careers, and big life decisions. When we go through a tough times, we especially long for communication from God. We want reassurance or comfort. Yet we conclude God is not communicating. This gets more confusing when we see how God communicated with people in the Bible.

Take Joseph’s life for example, the earthly father of Jesus. He faced a lot of twists and turns with his life plans. Yet God sent an angel

to appear in consecutive dreams to Joseph. The angel gave critical guidance to Joseph when necessary. Wouldn’t you like a step by step plan from God about what to do with your life through dreams? So, does God speak today? How do we know? How can we hear?

I believe that God has spoken and continues to speak today. I want to give you some evidence for this claim backs up this claim. I pray that this will encourage and give you hope this Christmas with whatever you face. **God has spoken and continues to speak.**

To examine it, we will go to a Christmas story passage where God spoke to Joseph. We will ask 2 questions of it. What does this passage reveal about Jesus? That’s the most important question the passage addresses. Then we will ask “what does the passage reveal about God intent to speak to His people? Following that, we will look at some key points to keep in mind so we can hear what God says today.

Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ¹ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call

his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife,²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew wrote his gospel for Jewish readers. He set out to prove that Jesus was their promised Messiah. He starts in Matthew 1 with a genealogy to show Jesus had the right lineage. He came from the line of David and Abraham. Then in today’s passage, Matthew address a rumor. People knew that Joseph was not Jesus’ biological father. Some concluded that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Mary and a Roman soldier. This rumor spread throughout the Jewish community.

Matthew immediately addresses it. He admits the betrothal of Mary and Joseph. It resembles engagement today. Yet engagements are not legally binding. Betrothals were. So if someone wanted to break off a betrothal, they had initiate a divorce.

Matthew also affirms Mary’s pregnancy before coming together with Joseph. But he explains this. She was with child by the Holy Spirit. Now think about all this from Joseph’s perspective when he gets this news. He is excited about his upcoming wedding to Mary. He likely

prepares a place for them to live. Then Mary comes along one day and claims she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit.

How might any engaged young man respond to such news? He was likely angry, hurt and confused. Yet he accepted the reality and concluded their betrothal could not continue. He had legal right to denounce her publicly. But Matthew tells us he was a just man, unwilling to put her to shame. So he resolved to divorce her quietly. Joseph decides to move forward in a way he believes will honor the Lord and protect Mary in some small way.

Then God speaks. An angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and gives him the full picture. Mary is telling the truth. The child is conceived by the Holy Spirit. So he must not fear and still take her as his wife. The angel also gives more info about the child. Joseph learns the child’s purpose in coming. “You shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.”

Then Matthew adds further info. Remember he writes to a Jewish audience. So he points back to their prophet Isaiah. He claims this virgin birth fulfills prophecy. “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ‘Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Immanuel,’ which means God with us.” So Matthew decisively addresses the rumor about Jesus.

Not only is Jesus conceived by the Holy Spirit. There is prophetic precedent for this miracle.

Then Matthew returns to focus on Joseph. When he wakes up he does as the angel commands. He takes Mary as his wife. He does have relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he, “Joseph,” called the boy Jesus.

This revelation about Jesus is the most important part of this text. God speaks to us when we learn about Jesus. Hebrews 1:1-2 explain this to us. “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. So God speaks to us by His Son. The more we learn about Jesus, the more we tap into God speaking to us.

Question 1: **What do we learn about the Son in this passage? He was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit’s power and born of a virgin.** This puts Jesus in an absolutely exclusive category. He is the only person in history to be conceived like this. It points to his divine nature. Yet it also reveals his human nature. Think about what God says to us in this. “I can do great miracles. I am concerned about humanity so I will become one of you. I fulfill the word of my prophets. The promised messiah was coming into the world.

Secondly, we learn **Jesus would come to save His people from their sins.** The angel says this plainly to Joseph. The English name Jesus is the name Yeshua in Hebrew like Joshua in Old Testament. It means the “Lord saves.” What kind of saving. They people expected a political messiah who would free them from oppression and reestablish them as a great independent nation. God would address an even bigger issue than political oppression. Jesus would save them from the spiritual oppression of their sins. So in Jesus, God says, “I send my Son to save you from your deepest problem.”

Thirdly, we learn **Jesus would be called Immanuel which means God with us.** In the name Immanuel, God says, “I desire to be with you. I desire relationship with you right where you are. “In these last days, God speaks to us by His Son.” He reveals much about Himself and His desire for relationship with us.

Beyond this, Question 2: **What does this passage reveal about God’s desire to speak to His people? God ensures His people have necessary information to move forward on His purposes.** Joseph had decided to divorce Mary. He would take that action soon. Yet because of the information given by the angel of the

Lord, Joseph adjusted his plans to God's plan. God constantly spoke to people throughout the Christmas story.

In the next passage in Matthew, God uses a star and the Scriptures to guide the wise men to Bethlehem. Then God warns them in a dream not to return to Herod to reveal the child's location. God then warns Joseph in a dream to quickly get up and take Mary and the baby to Egypt for Herod has ordered the massacre of Bethlehem's baby boys. They go down to Egypt for some time. Then in a dream, the Lord reveals the death of Herod and the need to return. It seems Joseph plans to go back to Bethlehem. But in another dream, the Lord warns Joseph about Herod's evil son reigning in that region. So Joseph and Mary end up going back to their home village in Nazareth up north. They received the info necessary to participate in God's plan.

The Gospel of Luke reveals that the Lord spoke to Zechariah in a vision that he and his aged wife would have a son. This son would be the forerunner to the Messiah. An angel of the Lord announces to Mary that she will carry God's Son by the Holy Spirit so she knows what's happening. The angels announce to the shepherds the birth of the Christ. So the Lord gives all of these people information they need to join in with God's plans.

But God shows His concern to communicate with His people in another way in this story. **He ensured that people throughout history** (including you and me) **would hear this message of hope through the Scriptures.** God inspired Matthew to include it in his gospel. So we all get to benefit from God's personal communication to Joseph. We discover these unique details about Jesus' identity. God communicated with Joseph. God communicated to Matthew to include this account of Joseph. God communicates to us through His Word.

Remember the claim I made at the beginning of this message? God has spoken and continues to speak. I hope you can see more evidence for the claim that God has spoken. He spoke in many times and ways by the prophets. He spoke by His Son. He spoke through Jesus' teaching. He spoke through Jesus life, death and resurrection. He spoke through the writers of the Bible Text. 2 Peter 1:20-21 – "Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." God spoke. God reveals Himself as someone who desires to communicate with His people.

So how can we discover what God says to us today?

We need to first **Refocus on truths about God**. If we come to the Lord with negativity and doubt about His care for us, we face a barrier to communication. Remember in the Garden of Eden how Satan planted doubts about God's character in Eve's mind? "Did God really say that? You will not surely die. God doesn't want the best for you." The devil loves to cast doubt on God's character and propose subtle yet suspicious questions. We may believe him, and think God doesn't think about us. We must fight these thoughts with truth about God.

So here's some truth about God and us. **God is for us**. 2 Chronicles 16:9 – "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him." Isaiah 41:10 Fear not for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

God is at work for our good. Romans 8:28 – "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." If we love God, we can approach every "task" with a strong confidence that God will turn it for good.

Psalms 23:6 - Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. Psalm 84:11 - The Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord

bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly."

God promises to supply everything we need for life.

Romans 8:32 – "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up on the cross for us all, he will most certainly graciously give us all things in him. Philippians 4:19 – My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Not every want or desire. Every need. Whatever we need to do his will, God will supply.

Remember, God speaks to us through His word as we prayerfully read it. Hebrews 4:12 – For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." We must not approach we're reading the Bible like reading some textbook required to pass a course. We must approach it as an opportunity to encounter God. We need to recognize that there's a spiritual battle going on prior to our reading of the Word. Do you think Satan remains inactive when we think about reading the Word? He will throw a thousand distractions our way. When we get to the Word, he works against our understanding it or cherishing it. That

might be the cause of those times we read the Bible and say “I didn’t get anything out of that.”

So we have to pray and ask for God’s help as we read. We can pray Ps. 119:18 - Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

Test every other impression or sense of God’s speaking through His Word. God speaks to us through prayer and the Holy Spirit. God can speak to us through circumstances, the church and other people. But we test it all against Scripture. So if you sense some direction from God through prayer, or an impression from the Spirit or the word of a friend or the arrangement of circumstances, test it with Scripture. Say you have a strong feeling of attraction towards someone you see in the store who is not your spouse. You think about claiming “God told me to leave my spouse and pursue that person.” Test that against Scripture. “Genesis 2:24 – Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.” Hebrews 13:4 – “Let marriage be held in high honor among all and let the marriage bed be undefiled.” God doesn’t contradict Himself so that feeling to pursue that person was just a feeling. It wasn’t God speaking.

But say you are dating someone and you’re wondering about marriage. You think that God is directing you in that direction. What

does God’s word say about that? It does say “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.” So is the person a believer? If they aren’t that’s a red flag. 1 Corinthians 7 talks about spouses looking after each other’s needs. Does the person have a desire to look out for your needs as you do theirs? Or is it all about them?

And Scripture also says you don’t have to marry. There is honor and value in singleness. So we test the impressions or sense we have of God speaking to us by the Scripture.

Trust God to bring specific guidance when needed. Like the Joseph story. Like Lori and I when we contemplated first moving from Edmonton to Ottawa back in 1994. We spent a weekend where we turned everything off. No TV. No Computer. No Radio. No visiting with friends. Just Lori and me talking and praying. By the end of that weekend, we had a strong sense that God called us to make the move to Ottawa and the church there.

As you wait on Him, continue to live and do life according to God’s general will. God didn’t tell Joseph everything he needed to do. He didn’t say “take this path to Egypt. Go talk that guy when you get there. Live in this house in Nazareth.” God gave Joseph key pieces of info necessary at the moment. Then he entrusted other decisions to Joseph’s ongoing walk with God according to the wisdom of His word.

So we don't stop living or making everyday decisions because we wait for the Lord's guidance in some specific areas. He provides everyday life wisdom through His Word.

All of this adds up to the statement - God has spoken and continues to speak to His people. Because God still speaks, we can live with hope this Christmas. God does not hold back or refuse to communicate. He desires that close relationship with us.

The cross demonstrates His deep love for us. So with whatever you might long to hear from the Lord about today, let's come to Him with a listening heart. Lift them to Him.