

THE COMPASS

SIGNAL STRENGTH: Hearing From God, Part 4

Just in the Nick of Time

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So I'm in Atlanta at the end of a business trip.
I'm running late, I'm exhausted, I want to get home.
I'm in the bus to the airport, I can't remember which stop is the stop for my airline, and the way the airport building is laid out, I can't see the names of the airlines over the curb.

So I have to listen for the announcement on the PA system. Which should be no problem.

Except that this bus is unbelievably noisy, there's music playing over the speakers, the driver mumbles into the mike along the way—

*ThankyouforchoosingHertz, itwilltakeusaboutfiveminutestoreachtheterminal,
listenforyourairlineandremainseateduntilyourstopiscalled....*

(And if you talk to the guy off-mike, you discover he sounds exactly the same!)

So I'm feeling the tension rising inside me.
I cannot miss this flight. I have to get the right stop.

And then, finally, the bus pulls to a stop — all the static and the music and the noise suddenly cease — the air clears — and in a brilliantly clear voice, in perfect American English, you hear a recording:

“This stop is US Airways.”

Just when you need the information, it comes to you.
Until that moment, you have no choice but to trust that it will be there when you need it.
Your only alternative is to burn a hole through your stomach worrying about it.

God speaks to me on the same kind of schedule.
God, when should I talk to Kristina about this issue?
God, how am I going to pay for my kid's braces?
God, if I miss the deadline I can't enroll in this class.
God, look at the calendar. Look at the clock. Look at the stopwatch! We're running out of time!

God's not speaking.
I'm worried if he does speak up, I'll miss it.
I'm not sure I can distinguish between the information I need and the information I'm getting; everybody else's input is mixed in there.
I want answers NOW.
This is making me crazy.

But here's what God says, in response to all of this:

I'm not as interested in your question as I am in your craziness.

The fact that this question is making you crazy does not fit in with my ideal design for your life.

In my design, you're at peace.

In the cocoon of a relationship with me, you can live with the unknown — because I am absolutely committed to caring for you.

You have agreed to be my child, I have adopted you as my own; and I will provide for you. I will protect you.

You have the luxury of totally trusting me.

To go crazy over this question is a waste of energy.

It's a waste of your emotional power.

It's a waste of my provision for you.

I want God to speak before I really need him to speak.

Come on, God, tell me what's going to happen in this situation.

Tell me what's going to happen a week from now, a month from now, a year from now.

If I marry this person, how's it going to go?

If I take this job, how it's going to be?

If I make this move, if I buy here or sell there, what are my chances?

Sometimes God answers questions like this.

But my experience is, more often, he remains silent.

He gives me an opportunity to learn trust.

Not cliché trust, like we sing about in hymns and campfire songs.

But real, active, everyday trust, where I have to consciously believe God is preparing for me and providing for me, even when I can't see or hear any activity whatsoever.

He says he is — he says he's working **"in all things for the good"** of people like me, people who love him (**Romans 8:28**).

He says in **Psalms 91:14** that he'll rescue me because I love him.

He says he'll protect me just because I acknowledge his authority in my life.

I don't have to be a brilliant Christian, I don't have to be perfect.

Just love him, look to him as my king, and let him handle the rest.

Jesus backed up the psalmist. He said in his Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 6:33,34**):

"...Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow...."

If I inspect my own thinking, I recognize that I often plead with God for early indicators in a situation — advance information — because in reality, I *don't* trust him in that situation.

I'm not resting in his care.

I don't believe it's all taken care of.

I'm squandering God's investment in me.

He is caring for me, he has it all under control, and I'm fretting as if he is sleeping on the job.

Learning trust will be healthy for me.

Waiting to hear God's voice will be good for me.

If I learn to trust God in today's situation, it will stand me in good stead for tomorrow's situation.

And sometimes God has a better way of dealing with a situation than I have envisioned. Sometimes, while I'm hoping to get direction from God, he is working in the background to solve my problem or advance my situation in a far better way.

It's like buying tickets to a Broadway show in New York City; they're obscenely expensive — but if you wait till the last possible moment, you can get fabulous discounts on the seats they've haven't sold in advance.

You just have to trust that the show you want, and the seat you want, will be available on the night you want.

God has committed himself to putting me — his child — in the best seat, in the best show, on the perfect night.

When King David was at his lowest ebb, he could still write:

Psalm 3:3 ...You are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.

In Psalm 18, David tells God what he has finally realized about God's provision:

Psalm 18:35 You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great.

That's amazing!

God is not going to be late, or inadequate, when it comes to caring for us.

Jesus confirmed this in **Luke 12:**

6 Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God.

7 Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

I think the apostle Peter had learned to live this way and love it: "**Cast all your anxiety on him,**" he said (**1 Peter 5:7**), "**because he cares for you!**"

So if I don't hear from God, it's not a matter of him being on vacation, or taking a sick day, or even a coffee break.

God is at work. He is taking care of me.

Hey — maybe he is not done preparing me to hear from him, preparing me to take the action that he's going to call me to.

A friend once said to me, "When the student is ready to learn, the teacher appears."

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You know what? God is on call 24 hours a day — but he doesn't need to answer his phone in order to get busy on my behalf.

He knows what I'm going to be screaming even before I dial 911.

Jesus said (in **Matthew 6:8**), "**...Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.**"

So my asking him for help is an exercise for *my* benefit ... to train me to turn to *him* as my source. To train me to remember that *he* is my provider, my king.

That reinforcement will be healthy for me. Perfecting that perspective will give me a life of deeper and more consistent peace.

When I ask God for help, he is not obligated to give me a clear answer immediately. He has obligated himself to answer me in whatever mode will be best for me in the long run, and that may involve a delay.

It may mean I have to wait till the shuttle bus stops at my gate.

In the meantime, I am learning to trust, to be the servant instead of the master.

God even worked this way with the prophet Daniel.

He gave Daniel an incredible vision of the future, made him write it all down — but Daniel was clueless as to what it all meant.

He says in **Daniel 12:8,9:**

8 I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, “My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?”

9 He replied, “Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end.

In other words, my purpose right now is for you to *not know* ... for you to have *partial* information ... for you to have the *question*, not the *answer*.

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Eventually, the answers come.

Yeah, sometimes God’s perfect moment to speak is the last possible moment.

Abraham was directed by God to sacrifice his own son, Isaac (**Genesis 22**).

He got all the way to the point of taking hold of the knife before an angel stopped him.

A last-second rescue. Isaac got another chance at life.

James Blake Colburn was scheduled to be executed by lethal injection at 6 pm.

At 5:59, just one minute before his execution, he got a phone call from the Supreme Court: reprieved.

A last-second rescue. Another chance at life.

In the city of Abha, in the south of Saudi Arabia, a young man was scheduled to be beheaded in the public square as punishment for killing his friend in an argument.

He had already spent 5 years in prison, hoping and praying for a pardon.

Under Saudi law, if the father of the murder victim would forgive him, his life would be spared.

But for 5 years, the father of the dead man remained silent.

Then, with only moments to spare, as the executioner prepared to do his duty, the father of the murder victim began shouting for the execution to be halted.

He would forgive. He would give that young man another chance.

A last-second rescue.

But God knows the end from the beginning, the Bible tells us, so the last minute doesn’t feel “last-minute” to him.

He planned ahead for the angel to step in; he had a ram stuck in the bushes and ready to substitute for the sacrifice.

God knew the Supreme Court was going to rule for a reprieve.

God knew the old man would forgive his son’s killer at the last minute.

Thomas Gordy puts it this way: “...The last minute is always the present moment.

Regardless of how you look at it, God is always present in every last minute.”

He is working continuously — and he is all-powerful — so the last minute is just as good

a time for him as any!

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And when God does speak, it probably won't be an audible voice. It will probably be simply an impression, in my spirit.

We looked at **Psalm 91** a moment ago. In the very next line of that psalm, God goes on to say that if I call on him, he *will* answer me — but how? Here's how he puts it: **“I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him....” (Psalm 91:15).**

God may well work on my behalf — he may actually *answer* me — simply by being with me through the trouble, and delivering me out of it, to the place I'm in now.

He may answer me by changing my situation suddenly and dramatically.

Or by changing my situation gradually and subtly.

Or by changing my own attitude about my circumstances.

Or by challenging me to make a change in my own behavior. (*I hate it when that happens!*)

God spoke for 23 solid years through the prophet Jeremiah to the people of Israel, until finally Jeremiah said, “You know what? This is not working” (**Jeremiah 25:3**).

“For twenty-three years ... the word of the Lord has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened.”

I think a lot of times God is answering me, but I'm not tuned in.

He's answering me through the Scriptures, but I don't like what I read there.

He's speaking through my conscience, but I don't like what I feel there.

He's talking, he's guiding, he's on the job — but I'm foolishly grasping and clutching and worrying.

He's promised me peace, he's arranged for me to receive this gift — he's committed the whole array of his supernatural resources to my well being, and he's planted his own Spirit within my heart — and yet I haven't unwrapped the gift.

I'm still struggling and choking with fear of the future ... instead of trusting God.

The psalmist went down this road. He finally saw this foolishness for what it was.

“I will listen to what God the Lord will say,” Psalm 85:8 says; “he promises peace to his people, his saints — but let them not return to folly.”

That's how I'm praying I'll learn to live.

Listening to God, living in his peace, and not going back to the foolishness of worry.

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And then — the reality is — sometimes my deadline comes and goes, and God still hasn't spoken in a way I understand.

But in God's view, there was no deadline.

I saw it as urgent; he knew better.

His answer is ... Doug, just keep hanging on. I'm working on the big picture, and you're a part of that.

Job was anxious for relief from his pain, but God had a bigger, better plan that Job couldn't see.

A plan that, in the short term, looked and sounded and felt like he had forgotten Job. Paul would have welcomed a last-second reprieve from the chopping block, but God's calendar called for the apostle to come on home that day. His work on earth was finished.

Jesus went to the cross. The time for being saved from the trouble came and went, without any last-minute rescue from God.

Even Jesus gave the Father ample opportunity to make something happen, rewrite the script, let him off the hook. But God had a bigger, better plan.

A plan that, in the short term, looked and sounded and felt like he had forsaken his child. Abandoned him forever.

He hadn't — but it looked and sounded and felt that way.

Maybe you've heard this saying: "It will be all right in the end. If it isn't all right, then it isn't the end."

We won't get the ultimate answers in this life.

We won't get the final "because" to our lifelong "why's" until we get to heaven.

Sometimes, for whatever reason I can't figure out, God decides that it's better to remain silent than to answer my cries for action.

Better to wait than to meet my deadline.

Maybe someone else is praying for something, but if God answered their prayer, he would have to limit me, restrict me, manipulate me, take away some of my freedom — and he won't do that to anybody.

So he won't give me what I'm praying for either, if it will manipulate someone else and undermine their freedom.

God is more committed to our free will than to our comfort.

He is more committed to our free will than to our understanding.

My perception of what's most important becomes skewed by my circumstances.

But God's perception never gets skewed.

Psalm 147:5 says "**his understanding has no limit.**"

That's why I can trust him.

Yeah, it can feel like a long haul, but God has promised to strengthen me while I'm trudging along, learning to trust him.

Isaiah recognized this. In **Isaiah 40:28** he says, Sure, "**his understanding no one can fathom**" — but he immediately goes on to say:

Isaiah 40:

29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

31 ...Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, They will walk and not be faint.

While I'm waiting for God to speak, for God to act, I can ask him for strength.

He's promised it. I may as well access it.

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So what's your deadline?

What's your stress point right now?

Are you hoping to hear from God about a situation in your family?

God is at work. Let's trust him together. He has your answer already in mind.

Are you asking God to speak to you about a work-related decision you need to make, and it feels like you're running out of time?

You can trust him to guide you in that decision. He's been at work in your workplace all along, and he's still at work there. He has your answer under way already.

Is it a medical situation, and you feel the clock ticking?

Let's trust God to be telling the truth about how totally, beautifully he has placed us under the shadow of his wings, in the cleft of the rock, to meet our every need.

He sees the end from the beginning, and when he gives you the perfect answer, it will be perfectly timed.

Are you struggling with a relationship? A habit? A secret?

Are you troubled by a mistake you made, or maybe a mistake you're thinking about making?

Are you dealing with your kids, your grandkids? Or a parent, a grandparent?

Financial trouble? What's eating you?

God is already there for you.

There's no "nick of time" with him.

He's committed to you, and before it's too late, he will answer your cry.