

**Dedicated** to my seven grandchildren and their spouses: Jon, Tiffany & Alex, Ashley & Scott, Nicolas & Karalyn, Derek, André, and Katia, and to one great grandchild – Stetson.

## **Introduction**

If my stories are not about the God I love and serve, they are about nobody. I never forget that, humanly speaking, I am the least likely person to have had these experiences. Any evidence of insight or wisdom on my part is purely providential; God gets any deserved recognition or credit. With that understanding, and for your encouragement, I share these selected episodes with you. But first:

## **The Story *Before* The Stories**

**I believe God wants to connect directly and personally with each one of us.**

**I believe human life is a nonstop miracle.** (I believe *anything* to do with God is miraculous. God is our life. "In him we breathe and move and have our being.")

I make these two statements because many Christians don't believe this is true.

They see no miracles in their lives. At best, they believe we are guided throughout our lives by reading the Bible, because, they say, God no longer talks directly and personally to people. Some Christians are chronically skeptical about the experiences of others, especially if they themselves have not experienced the same or similar things.

Is my life miraculous? I believe it is. God is supernatural. I have been created in his likeness. God lives in me in all his fullness. The Christian life cannot be lived except supernaturally. I am a miracle. You are a miracle.

Does God want to communicate with people today? I believe he does. Although I read the Bible every day, I cannot have a person-to-person relationship with *it*.

The Christian life is not just a creed; it's a liaison – a living link with the Person of Christ. The resurrected Christ did not ask Peter, "Do you love my *word*?" He asked, "*Do you love me?*"

Fellowship – a relationship – requires on-going communication. That's what the Lord wants with his family. Apostle Paul knew God's Word well. He wrote a big part of it. But, he wasn't satisfied with writing or knowing Scripture. In Philippians 3:10, he says, "*I want to know Christ...*"

To be of optimum value, this divine initiative must work in both directions. The Spirit tells us we are the children of God. We are led by him. He works within us and with us. He guides our personal lives individually and, therefore, differently because we are all unique. I can get a clear sense of his leading only if he is somehow communicating with me – directly and personally.

His working in the Church – the Body of Christ – is another matter although, even in that setting, he uses individual members. The Body of Christ is made up of individual members. No individual members, no body. Throughout human history, even while God dealt with entire nations, he always communicated through individuals.

I may not hear God with my physical ear. It's not necessary. His Spirit can communicate with me using his multiple-media, all-purpose spirit voice. I am able to recognize it as his voice because it is always distinct, always the same, always consistent with God's character, insight and Word.

*"They [my sheep] hear my voice"* (John 10:16). I believe Jesus is saying: "You will hear my voice. You will hear my voice. You will hear my voice. You will hear my voice. You will hear my voice."

God started bonding with me in my early childhood. (His initiative.) In principle, I have kept that same unsophisticated impression (of who God is, what he's like and how he acts) right up to the present moment. It never crossed my mind that I should change my basic understanding of him as I grew older. On the contrary, he encouraged me to maintain a child-like attitude toward him – my heavenly Father.

God can and does 'communicate' with us through his Word. But, it is still the Spirit who gives the Word its life; it is still the Spirit who *speaks* to me through his Word; it is still the Spirit who conveys biblical truth to me. He personalizes his message to each of us, depending on our current orientation and need.

Not only does God 'speak' to us through his *written* Word, he also does so through other people and through circumstances. But all this can never take the place of his individually communicating with us. For this to happen we must allot the time and provide the place.

*I come to the garden alone...While the dew is still on the roses... And the voice I hear, falling on my ear...The Son of God discloses. He speaks, and the sound of His voice...Is so sweet the birds hush their singing..."And He walks with me... And He talks with me... And He tells me I am His own."* Poetic license or experiential fact?

Irrespective of who reads it, the Bible does not change its wording to suit the individual, even though a person is free to interpret the Word as he or she wishes. Hopefully, the reader is looking for the Holy Spirit's interpretation, since only he knows the exact meaning of what he has inspired godly men to write on his behalf.

God is an undying communicator. He wants, craves, needs individual, reciprocal interaction with his created beings. The Great Commandment says he desires a love relationship with me. I 'love' the Book, but I am not 'in love' with it.

I am in love with the author of the book. Love, joy, peace and the rest of the fruit of the Spirit are not the attributes of the written Word but of a living *Person*.

Scripture has no life apart from its life-giving source – the Trinity of Divine Beings.

God created Adam and Eve for fellowship with him. *"And [today] our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."* (1 John 1:3)

From as far back as I can remember, I have had to believe my life is a heartbeat-by-heartbeat miracle. That's all I have ever known. I have always experienced God's personal, direct and evident activity in my life. Since this began at a very early age, I had no reason to think I was different from others, especially Christians who claimed they believed in, and had

a personal relationship with a supernatural God.

I think of myself as a living, walking, talking miracle. But, I am not unique in this respect. I believe all of us are miracles of God. I see God's miraculous power all around me. For some reason, some people just don't see it. I naturally expect the supernatural. I *expect* miracles. That is the way God has worked in my life from day one. God can no more stop acting miraculously than he can stop existing. It's his nature. It's normal for him. He can't stop being himself. That's the only kind of God I have ever known.

The fact that I am sitting here writing this, in the flesh, on earth, is thanks to God's intervention, protection and preservation. I believe in nothing if I do not believe in a God of on-going miracles. The experiences I've had, the numerous close calls I've survived, the inherited genetic factors I'm strapped with, the sicknesses and diseases I've endured, all tell me it is God himself and God alone who keeps me this side of eternity. Add to all this the personal communication with God – often instigated by him – and the certainty is complete.

I never asked for the experiences I have had. God always chose the time, place and way of communicating with me, guiding me, protecting me, responding to me. I thought this was quite natural for any true child of God. Am I acting more like a trusting child of my heavenly Father when I take his protection and provision for granted? (“...*and all these things [food and clothing] shall be added unto you.*”) Or am I more spiritual when I *ask* God for “these things”? (“Give us this day our daily bread...”)

Personally, I tend to assume the Lord will look out for me, regardless. He has a commitment to me. And I'm grateful. But, when I do pray, I demonstrate family solidarity and support. When I ask him for food, I verbally acknowledge the source of supply. I also know he will encourage me to eat what he offers me, even when I don't ask him for food.

If we put God in a theological box of our own making, if we put our personal expectations, interpretations and limitations on him, if we think we can predict how he will think and act, we are the losers. He will perform no miracles for, in or through us (1) because of our unbelief or (2) we will not recognize and acknowledge the miracle when it happens. The Bible tells us that God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts and actions are different from ours. Did God make us in *his* likeness or have we created our god in *our own* image?

I continue to be thrilled and excited about who God is and what he is doing in the short, earthly life of this simple Ukrainian peasant who wasn't supposed to live beyond the first eighteen months of his earthly life. I give him the recognition and the glory he deserves. ◇◇