

HOW TO GET A WORD FROM GOD ABOUT YOUR PROBLEM

We're in a series called "Try Prayer". The last two weeks we talked about the reasons for prayer or the four purposes of prayer. Last week we talked about the four conditions for answered prayer. There are four things God says you must do in order to have an answer to your prayer.

One of the conditions that we had to answered prayer is you have to have faith. You must believe. Faith is the key that unlocks the door through prayer. But sometimes the situation is so big and the problem is so overwhelming it's hard to have faith. The question is how do you get faith in a faithless situation?

Romans 10:17 (ESV) tells us where faith comes from. *"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."* The word there is *rhema* in Greek. It says we get faith by listening to the word of Christ. And the word of Christ, of course, can be found in the Bible. If you want to build faith, it's simple. Fill your life with the Bible. The more Bible knowledge you have, the more faith you're going to have. The less you know about the Bible, the less faith you're going to have. Because God can speak specific word to you, his rhema, through his word, the Bible. I'll explain more about it as we go through this message. Just hang in there.

For now, how do you pray about problems and difficult decisions? The keys to prayer in the Bible are the promises of God. There are over 3000 promises in the Bible. Some even say up to 7000. In any case, they're like blank checks, gifts waiting to be received. If you want to have a dynamic prayer life, you get a promise to claim onto, grab onto, and you can have your answer to prayer. There is a verse for every need, for every problem, in the Bible. The more promises you know, the more powerful your prayer will become.

The question then is why don't the promises always work? I was reading about a man who was a diabetic and he read the verse, *"If you ask anything in My name, I will do it."* John 14:14. So he said, "God, I'm going to ask that You cure me of diabetes," and he threw away his insulin and three days later he died. What happened? God promised. Why didn't it work? Why don't the promises of God always work?

You see, there's a misconception people have about the promises of God. The fact of the matter is this: You cannot automatically claim a promise that's been given to somebody else in the Bible unless the Holy Spirit gives it to you.

To understand what we're going to talk about today, you must understand that God speaks to people two different ways.

1. Universally -- to everybody.
2. Personally -- to individual people, specific messages for specific situations at specific times.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek. In the Greek there were two terms used for the term "word". *"Logos"* and *"rhema"*. Whenever you hear the phrase, "the word of God", sometimes it's the *logos* of God and sometimes it's the *rhema* of God. In John 1:1, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"* *logos* refers to Jesus. In Hebrews 4:12, *"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword,"* *logos* refers to the Bible. And that is what I want to compare with *rhema* in this message. *Logos* is the word of God to everybody. That's the Bible -- everything from Genesis to Revelation, the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the Twenty-Third Psalm. It is God's word to everybody. It is the foundation for the second type of word of God which is the *rhema*.

The *rhema* is the word of God to you personally, a specific word, a promise, to a specific person in a specific period of time, for that time only. We can only claim a promise when it is a *rhema* to us, when it's the specific word to us. I'm going to share with you how you get that.

Sarah was Abraham's wife. One day God came to Sarah and said, "Sarah, you're going to have a baby". There's nothing unusual about that except she was ninety years old and her husband Abraham was ninety-nine years old. That's incredible! It was a specific word to her. God didn't say, "The whole nation of Israel, every woman when she reaches ninety is going to have a baby." It was a specific *rhema*, a word of God to her and not to anybody else. Just to her.

Getting a personal promise of God like that is the key to miracles. It's the key to answered prayer. When God speaks to you personally, then you can act on it. Not when He uses it for everyone and you say, "He used it for that person so I'm going to claim it for me." That's why last week we looked at **John 15:7 that said, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."** It says, "If you remain in my *rhema* not *logos*... If you continue in My specific word to you, then you can have answered prayer."

Remember the story of Peter walking on water? Peter's out in a boat with all of the disciples. It's night. Jesus comes walking across the water and Peter says, "Lord, Call me and I'll come!" Jesus gives Peter a *rhema*, a specific word for one man in a specific situation. He says, "Peter, come on!" Peter gets out of the boat and starts walking across the water. Notice that no one else was anxious to get out of the boat besides Peter. Why? Because it wasn't a word to everybody. It was a word to Peter in a specific time. It wasn't a universal word, either. The next day, Peter didn't get up and say, "Let's go fishing, but we don't need a boat today. Let's just walk on water and catch fish." No, it was a one-time thing.

You don't read the book of Mark and read about Peter walking on water one day and figure you can walk across your swimming pool. Don't work on a *rhema* given to somebody else. We get into trouble when we try to force a general promise to everybody to work as a personal promise to us without the Holy Spirit telling us to do it.

For instance, I talk to people who read a verse in the Bible on healing. They'll say, "God healed them, therefore God must heal me." sometimes quoting verses on healing. So they pray and believe and have tremendous faith but even in spite of their faith nothing happens. Then they get mad and say, "God! Why didn't You heal me. It's in the Bible. You said so. You have to do it." And you argue. No. They didn't have a personal word from God for this particular thing. It was a general word.

Satan tried to do this with Jesus one time. Jesus was out in the desert and Satan came and said, "Jesus, why don't You jump off the temple because the Bible says God will take care of You." That wasn't faith. That was presumption. It was a general promise. "God will take care of you." That's like reading the verse, then going home, getting some arsenic and drinking it. God hasn't promised to take care of me if I drink arsenic! That was a general promise.

In order to understand how prayer works, you must understand that God speaks in two ways. He speaks generally, to everybody, the word of God to everyone -- *logos*. He speaks personally, to individuals about a personal thing and that's *rhema*. That's how you get answers to prayer.

The question is: How does God speak to me personally?

John 14. The principle I'm trying to share with you today is such a powerful process, it is the key to miracles in life, it is the key to understanding God's will, it is the key to difficult decisions, it is the key to having faith in a hopeless situation.

How does God speak to us personally? The Bible says it's the Holy Spirit's duty to take the Bible and make it apply to us personally, make it come alive.

John 14:26 "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." The job description of the Holy Spirit is to teach us and to remind us.

John 16:13 "But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth." So in these two verses, God the Holy Spirit is to do three things in our life: teach us, remind us, and guide us. It is the Holy Spirit's job description to make the Scriptures apply to our lives personally in a dynamic way. In other words, He takes the *logos* and turns it into *rhema*. He changes it. It's called illumination. It's His job, His duty.

There is nothing mystical about what I'm talking about. This happens all the time. It happens to you. Have you ever been in a church service where the preacher, the pastor is speaking and all of a sudden you feel like he's speaking directly to you? You feel like there's nobody else is in the room. You wonder, "How does that guy know? How does he know I've got this problem? How does he know that's exactly what I needed at that time?" Or maybe in a classroom like I was in when I started studying for the ministry. I traveled to Boston to attend one of the classes I needed for my first semester in Bible school. I was down at the time, I wasn't really sure I was called for ministry, I felt alone because of the fact that I didn't know anyone in Boston and in that class for that matter and I was contemplating of giving up when suddenly my professor mentioned a verse in the course of his lecture. **Matthew 4:19. It says, "'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.'"** That general word for everyone became a special word to me. It felt like God spoke to me directly. And that helped me to continue to finish the class and my degree.

So, God takes a general word that is meant for everybody and makes it specifically apply to you. He gives you a *rhema*. The Holy Spirit illuminates it.

Have you ever been counseling with somebody, talking with somebody about a personal problem -- a friend or a neighbor -- and you're thinking, "I wonder what I should say to this guy," and all of a sudden a Scripture verse pops into your mind? Just at the right time. Just exactly what you needed to say. How did it happen? God gave you a *rhema*. The Holy Spirit gave you a specific word, for a specific time, in a specific situation.

Have you ever been worrying about a major decision or a problem and struggling with an issue and all of a sudden you remember something that was said in a sermon three months ago. It fits perfectly and it applies. God gave you a *rhema*. He spoke to you personally.

That's the way God works in our lives. The Holy Spirit takes the general word of God and makes it come alive.

How do you know when it's God giving you those impressions?

1. It always will agree with the Bible. God never contradicts what He's already said. So if God gave you an impression with something that doesn't square with the Bible, you can be guaranteed it's not from God.

If you think that having an affair is the will of God for you because you're no longer happy in your marriage, I can guarantee you that it's not God speaking to you. It couldn't be because God never contradicts His word. It's a violation of a Scriptural principle.

2. All of a sudden the Scripture becomes alive. It takes on new meaning. It becomes dynamic, exciting.

Let's say I was to say to you, "I love you," and that is true. I love our church. But that is a general word to a large group of people.

My wife's sitting over here in the front row and she's part of that group and when I say, "I love you," does that include my wife? Yes. But it didn't do anything for her. Big deal! It's a *logos* -- a general word to everybody. However, if I were to walk over to my wife, lean down close and whisper, "I love you," all of a sudden I get a different reaction. Her eyes light up, her heart starts pounding (I hope). All of a sudden a *logos* became a *rhema*. I didn't say anything different. I said, "I love you". Was she included in the first one? Yes. But all of a sudden, it got personal and took on new meaning. This is a secret to answered prayer. Get this. It became a *rhema* -- a word to her specifically.

That's what happens when we're converted, when we become Christians. How many times did you hear before you became a Christian that God loves you? I must have heard it a hundred times. "God loves you!" and it just went over my head. Then one day, all of a sudden, God burned that truth into my life and I realized, "God loved *me*!" Wow! All of a sudden it hit me. Rolly Estabillo, with all of my hang-ups and all of my faults and all of my habits that are bad and weaknesses, frailties, fears and problems, God loves me! And it changed my life and I was born again. I was converted. All of a sudden, God's word to everybody in general became very personal. I realized it. I'd heard it many times but all of a sudden it came alive and made a difference in my life.

Have you ever had a quiet time, a devotional time, when you get alone with God, sit down and read the Bible and maybe you've read the verse a hundred times, but all of a sudden the verse just jumps out at you, and you think, "I've never seen that before!" Or all of a sudden you see a new way to apply it, and at the end of the day you find out it was exactly what you needed for that day. That's a *rhema*. God's Spirit took a general word to everybody and applied it to you in a personal and practical way.

Now, at this time, I'd like to give you the Steps on How To Get a Word from God About Your Problem or a difficult decision. Six things. What do you do when you're in a situation and you don't know how to deal with it? How do you know the will of God? You've got to get a *rhema*.

1. Confess any known sin in your life.

You say, "God, I don't want anything to be blocking our relationship. Is there any bad attitude I've got? Is there any thing I'm doing that You want me to stop doing? Is there something You've been telling me to start doing that I haven't been?" You stop and get your life all cleaned up, a kind of spiritual washing. The Bible says in 1 John 1:9a *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins."* Just confess it and make sure the channel is open to God.

2. Let the Lord Lead You.

Proverbs 3:5-6 *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."* You don't go out and try to figure it out all yourself.

Put yourself in neutral gear. That may take some time. You say, "God, about this problem I'm facing or this decision, whatever You want is what I want." Put yourself in neutral gear and keep praying until you can get that way about the situation. You say, "Lord, whatever You want is fine with me. If You want it, I want it. If You don't want it, I don't want it." The attitude is the attitude that Christ had in the Garden of Gethsemane before He went to the cross and He said, *"Not My will be done, but Thine be done."* You say, "I don't know. This is a difficult problem I'm facing and I don't know what to do with it so whatever You want." Put yourself in neutral gear and commit it to the Lord.

3. Ask God to reveal His will by giving you a desire.

After you've got your desire out of the way and you can honestly say, "God, I'm willing to go either way," then the third thing you do is say, "God, help me to know what You want by giving me a desire one way or the other." A lot of times God is in our desires. He can direct us with Spirit-controlled desires -- **Psalm 37:4** *"Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart."* If you're really trying to do what's right, your desires are going to be in line with God's desire.

How do you know if the desire is from God? One good test of a desire is time. Sit on it for a while and say, "God, if this desire is from You, make it stronger. If this desire is not from You, take it away." Ask God to do that. It's a legitimate request.

4. Compare your desires with Scripture.

Now that you have a clear desire, start reading the Bible and see if it's in tune with what the Bible says. God's Spirit never leads us contrary to the Bible. He won't contradict this. If my desire feels opposite to this book, I know it's not right. It's been called scriptural screening. It's like you make a grid of the Bible and then you pray and check it out to see if it squares with Bible teaching. If you don't know the Bible, how are you going to do that? That's why it's important to know the Scriptures. If you don't know the Scriptures that well, just check it out with someone who knows. Preferably, someone who is mature.

5. Listen for God to give you a personal promise, a *rhema*.

Listen for God to speak to you. You don't just go to the Bible and pick out a promise at random. There was this guy who said, "God, what's Your will today?" He opened the Bible and put his finger down and it said, *"Judas went out and hang himself."* That couldn't be right, so he tried again and it said, *"Go thou and do likewise."* But that couldn't be right, so he tried a third time.

"*What thou doest, do quickly.*" That's the kind of results you get when you dip and skip through the word and try to force a verse to apply to your situation.

Listen for God. Prayerfully read the word of God and wait for God to speak to you. The *rhema*, the personal word that God gives you about your situation will come in a variety of circumstances or ways. It might come just through Bible reading. You're reading the Bible and all of a sudden a verse applies in a new way. I read the story of a teenage Christian who was trying to make a difficult decision whether to stay at a Christian college or transfer to a new state school. She didn't know which. One day reading a verse that she had read many, many times -- it was a verse talking about there are many, many people in the world who still don't know God. The problem isn't that they don't want to come to Christ. The problem is Christians aren't willing enough to share with non-Christians. She read the verse she'd read many times and all of a sudden it jumped out at her and it was as if God was saying, "I want you to go to a school where there aren't a lot of Christians so you can share My love with those people." That wasn't a word to everybody. It was a word to her. And for one specific time. She went the next semester to a state school and as a result a number of friends she made at that school became Christians. That was in God's plan. She shared her faith with them and they became believers. She got a *rhema*. How? Through the word.

It may come in a church service. You're sitting in a church service and all of sudden something the pastor or somebody says hits you. It may just be a word in a song. And God says, "That's for you! That's your answer."

It may be in a Bible study group. That's why you need to be involved in Bible study, because you get more of the word. Your prayer life is never stronger than your understanding of Scripture.

It may be on a CD. It may be a radio program. Or you turn on the TV and there it is. Even on Facebook or Twitter. The Lord can use any means to deliver a specific word to you in your specific situation.

Are you willing to wait, to listen? Wait until God speaks to you. Don't get impatient. Listen for God to give you a personal word. After you've got the verse and it will pop out at you, come to you somehow, someway, in due time and after you've got that assurance, then ...

6. You move into action when God says, "Go."

Not when you think so, but when God says, "Go." When God gives an idea, He gives it in three parts. First He says what He's going to do, then He says how He's going to do it, then He gives you the timing -- when? The biggest mistake that people make is we get the first part of the idea and forget the other two. We get the idea and say, "God told me what He's going to do," and we go out and try to do it as if He doesn't care how it's done. We try to do it in our way and we usually fall flat. We don't know the timing so we try to rush things.

How do you know God's timing? Things start falling into place. It's obvious. Wait for God's timing.

Moses had the idea that he was going to be used by God to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. So, one day, when he saw an Egyptian beating a fellow Hebrew, he went to his rescue and killed the Egyptian. The next day he tried to mediate between two Hebrews who were fighting. Now, he was starting to get the messiah complex, thinking he could solve the problems of the Jews by himself. He was wrong. Because the two Hebrews who were fighting brushed him off and even said they saw him killed the Egyptian. In fact, what he did reached Pharaoh who tried to kill him and he left Egypt in a hurry.

Moses had the right idea, but the wrong time and wrong place. 40 years later, God spoke to him again, gave him a rhema at the burning bush on Mount Horeb.

God says wait on Him and when He says, "Go", you move into action. At that point you have to take a step of faith. It's like Peter walking on water. It was a tremendous miracle. If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat. You've got to take the step, take the risk.

Some of you are facing some big problems. You've got some difficult decisions on your mind. Maybe you're confused. You don't know what to do and you're about to give up.

In April 199 I was in a city called Krasnodar in Russia. I was with a group of young missionary trainees from around the world. We were divided into teams and I belonged to a team of about 8 people. It was our last night and our team gathered in a room where we were supposed to encourage one another by sharing verses with others in the group which we felt the Lord wanted us to share. That afternoon, I prayed for each person and asked God a verse that I could share with them. So, when I came to our meeting that night I was prepared.

I was glad that each person received the verses happily. There was this girl, however, who just stared at me and smiled a little when I shared my verses for her. They're from **Isaiah 40:28-31**, *"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but 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."*

After all of us have shared, we had some snacks. The girl who I shared the verses from Isaiah came to me and said, “Rolly, why did you give me those verses? How did you think of them?” “Oh, I prayed for you and asked God to give me a verse or verses for you,” I replied.

Then, she said, “Do you know that those are the same exact verses that my pastor gave me before I left home to come to this place? It’s just a confirmation that God is really watching over me. I’m going through a difficult time but now I know God is really interested in me.” I was amazed, too, at that instance. God gave her a rhema, a word to encourage her, a word that she needed at that very moment.

Folks, some of you, you may be going through a difficult time, too. God is interested in you, in your problems. Let Isaiah’s words encourage you. Let us stand and sing a song based on this passage.