

T A N I A H A R R I S



THE **EASY WAY** TO
HEAR GOD'S VOICE



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THE **EASY WAY** TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE

TO ANITA
WHO BELIEVED IN MY DREAMS

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1. THE FIRST TIME I HAD A GOD-DREAM

It is one of those tough times when your patience has well and truly run out. When frustration boils over in volcanic style. When God seems agonisingly, *run-your-fingernails-down-the-chalkboard SLOW*.

Sometimes he is *really* slow, right?

So I try to work out the timing. I try to work out how he's going to do what he says. *Maybe God if you could do it now - this way, then I can do this... or if you do it say next month, then I could do that...*

One of those times.

Then I have a dream.

I wake up to discover my house has been broken into. Somehow a thief has gotten in and stolen my stereo, pieces of jewellery, cash from my purse. I look across to the bedside table in shock wondering what time it is. Strangely the hands of the clock are spinning around wildly and I can't read the time. *Oh, I'll just check the clock across the room.* But again the display is unreadable. I can't read the time! I'm wondering, *What time is it? And how on earth could a thief break into my house while I was sleeping - wouldn't I have woken up?*

Then I wake up.

Nothing unusual right?

A silly dream.

That's what I think. Until I shower, dress and sit down with my Bible and devotional book for the day.

“Today’s reading is from Matthew chapter 24, verses 43 to 44”:

...If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

What?

I drive to work, greet my colleagues and make my coffee. At 9am I gather with the rest of the staff for our weekly meeting in the downstairs classroom, sitting neatly in rows and suits, listening to the Principal as he shares an exhortation after the usual briefing and announcements for the week.

“Please turn your Bibles to Matthew chapter 24.”

It falls open easily.

Let’s read from verse 43.

He pauses and looks at us. At me. I shuffle nervously in my seat.

Some of you here are like the people in this story. God is telling you to get ready. You may think it’s not the right time, but God is telling you to get ready anyway. His timing is perfect whether you know when it is or not. You need to do what he is asking you to.

He prays to finish. I collect my things; a little dumbfounded, a little peeved.

I guess that was you God. Telling me my attitude is a bit off.

But here’s the thing. I was used to the second method of God’s talking. A Bible reading, a devotional book. That happens. Normally.

I was also used to the third method. Preaching in church. That stir of conviction when the Holy Spirit nails it and you feel like God is breathing down your neck with a message you need to hear right at that moment.

But the first method? The dreaming one? Who’d ever heard of that before?

I hadn’t. Never heard teaching on it, never heard anyone talk about it.

So I did some research.

This is what I found.

While They Were Sleeping

Hearing from God in dreams is normal. At least biblically speaking.

God speaks in dreams all the way through the Bible.

If you took dreams and visions out of the Bible, you would remove more than one third of its contents.

John Loren Sandford¹

Why had I never noticed that before?

There's Abraham dreaming of a smoking pot and a blazing flame passing through a trail of bloody animal pieces, the symbols of ancient treaty making². There's Jacob seeing angels flying through the clouds and meeting a God he's not yet encountered personally³. There's Gideon gaining military assurance and Solomon dreaming of a genie-like offer he can't refuse⁴. There's Joseph and Daniel, Jeremiah and Zechariah, as well as unlikely dreamers like Abimelech, the Egyptian Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. Later on, there's Pilate's wife with blood on her hands, the Apostle Paul getting travel directions and who could forget the Apostle John who seemed to live out an endless dream with the freaky imagery of his Revelation⁵.

Some of the most pivotal points in biblical history began while someone was sleeping.

If that weren't enough, God himself takes the time to explain HOW he speaks.

I want to make it clear to you... This is how I speak:

I, the Lord, reveal myself to them (the prophets) in visions,
I speak to them in dreams.
(Numbers 12:6b)

Prophets and dreams.

This was their experience.

This was their expectation.

When King Saul is in a major conundrum and desperately trying to seek a message from God, his expectation is that it will come... in one of two ways:

"...By prophets or by dreams."
1 Samuel 28:15b

Actually for King Saul it didn't come (another story), but if it did come, he knew exactly HOW it would come.

It was the norm.

Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Zechariah. All the big guns had them.

But you say, *that's the Old Testament*, The Olden Days; those times reserved for aging men sporting long greying beards and hessian sackcloth.

Yet if you look closely enough, you'll see that phrase - prophecy and dreams - used elsewhere. Right there in the New Testament. In a place you least expect it.

For in amongst all the supernatural happenings on the Day of Pentecost - tongues of fire, spiritual languages and drunken experiences - something else happened; something even more significant.

...This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.”

Acts 2:16,17

It's not what you think it is.

It's not about old men having dreams because they fell asleep in the back pew.

Nor is it about young men having visions because they're youthful, motivated and especially energetic.

Or about everyone regardless of age or gender, finding purpose in their lives.

At least the early church would not have understood it that way. They knew that throughout biblical history God communicated with humanity in two main ways - prophecy *and* dreams. Prophecy - God speaking via another person, and dreams - actual, literal *fall-asleep* dreams.

And visions of course. But a vision is nearly the same thing as a dream. Both refer to what we see - one while we're awake, one while we sleep. A dream is often termed a 'vision of the night'. The Bible uses the words interchangeably and so do I⁶.

But back then hearing from God in this way was only for the *special people*. Those called-out ones known as The Prophets who wandered lone and bold through ancient deserts and fields, who visited the courts of foreign nations, met in kings' councils and had a direct hotline to Almighty God.

Everyone else had to wait for them. Take a ticket and join the queue.

The prophets knew this set-up was not ideal. They looked forward to a better time - a time somewhere in the future when the Spirit would come on ALL people. Sons and daughters, male and female, young and old. **Everyone!** Everybody would be able to hear from God for themselves. No longer would they need a neighbour to teach them. The Spirit would write his words on each of their hearts⁷.

Oh how they longed for this time! A better time. A new covenant; a fully upgraded version of their own experience. They prophesied it and waited for it and looked for it, wishing, hoping they would get to see it.

Peter saw it.

He was the first to realise everything had changed.

So can we.

In our day. In our time. The moment they were all waiting for.

The promise becoming reality. An ancient wish made manifest. **Now everyone can prophesy.** Everyone can hear from God through dreams and visions. From Judea, Jerusalem, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. You, your children, all who are afar off⁸.

So What's the Problem?

Why do you complain that God does not speak?

For God does speak.

In a dream, in a vision of the night.

from Job 33:13-15

Why do we complain?

I just wish God would speak to me more! I wish he would be clearer! If only he would speak to me!

For God does speak.

He is a talking God. He's not like all those other gods who are set in stone, having 'ears but they cannot hear, having mouths but they cannot speak'. It's in his very nature to communicate. His promise is that his people *will* recognise his voice and be able to follow it. He said that his Spirit will guide us into all truth. That he will remind us of the things we've been taught. That he would show us things to come. That having his Spirit will be better than having the living, breathing Jesus walking in our midst⁹.

But we don't perceive it.

So said Elihu in conversation with Job back in ancient times.

Now Elihu and his friends could hardly be counted on for rock-solid theological teaching. After all God rejected their opinions out of hand at the end of the book¹⁰. But Elihu's words reflect the thinking of his time. ***God did speak; one way or another, he spoke in dreams and visions of the night.*** The problem was not that God wasn't speaking. The problem was the people didn't perceive it.

Things haven't changed that much.

God IS speaking in dreams. To us, the inheritors of a better covenant.

But we don't recognise it.

1 Sandford, John Loren. *Elijah Among Us*. US: Chosen Books, 2002, p.163

2 Genesis 12:1-20

3 Genesis 28:10-22

4 1 Kings 3:5, Judges 7:9-145

5 Acts 16:9, Matthew 17:19, Revelation 1:9,176

6 Kelsey, Morton T. *God, Dreams and Revelation*. U.S: Augsburg Fortress, 1991, Loc. 350

7 Joel 2:28-29, Jeremiah 31:33-34

8 Acts 2:39

9 Psalm 115:4-7, John 10:27, John 16:7, John 16:13

10 Job 42:7

2. WHY THE WEIRD LOOKS?

In the Summer of 2003 I moved to Sydney. Resigned my job, packed up my life and farewelled the friends I'd known ever since we swatted for exams and sang annoyingly loud Abba songs in the train on the way home from school. Left it all behind to move from the city of Melbourne where'd I'd grown up and was well-established, to a place that was a thousand kilometres away where I knew virtually no-one.

Why?

Well if you had asked me in the hot stuffy January of that year when I was still adjusting to the spaghetti roads and sticky weather, I would probably have said it was to 'pursue a new work opportunity' or something really brave and noble-sounding like that. You would have smiled and then we would have talked about the weather and the release of the new *Lord of the Rings* movie and we would have carried on.

OR you may have been fortunate enough, *just lucky enough* to get me at a really honest raw moment. I may have looked in your eyes and sized you up as one who *might* be able to handle it. The real truth of what brought me here.

I would take a deep breath and say cheerfully as though it were the most normal thing in the world; "God spoke to me in a series of dreams."

Maybe you would have clapped your hands together, smiled and said, "Wow, that's amazing! What did he say?"

But much more likely, you would have raised your eyebrows, rolled your eyes and quickly changed the subject.

I knew what you were thinking.

And I used to wonder as I walked away, *Should I have said that?*

Why the weird looks? Why don't people - especially those who know God - Christians who believe in the work of the Holy Spirit - understand?

I would think back to another story. Another big move.

A young couple who packed up their belongings, left their community and arrived in a foreign country, homeless and alone¹¹.

And I wondered, *Did people roll their eyes when Joseph and Mary told the Egyptians why they'd come?*

Isn't it odd that when we read the Christmas story with its five spectacular God-dreams guiding and directing all the main characters, it doesn't cause us to roll our eyes and walk away?

There's a reason for this.

And I would like to share with you what it is.

Everyone Knows?

Nearly everyone knows that God reveals himself most often in dreams.

Tertullian¹²

Nearly everyone? Knows that God reveals himself in dreams?

Like *everyone*? All the kids in the playground? All the people in church? All the experts on spirituality?

WHO said that?

A New Ager who reads crystal balls and tarot cards?

A mystical type from Ancient Babylon who conjures spells and charms snakes?

An uneducated novice who refuses to walk under ladders or go out on the thirteenth of each month?

His name was Tertullian and he was an early church father who lived in Carthage, Northern Africa in the 2nd and 3rd century. You may not have heard his name before, but you probably have heard of the word Trinity. He is the one who coined the term and he wrote a lot about it. Yes Tertullian was one of the early church *leaders* - one of the *heavy weights*.

He said it like it was not news. No big deal. Like, *Yeh, you know how it is*.

In his time, in his day, everyone knew that God spoke in dreams. It wasn't unusual; not the exception, but the *norm*.

It had been like this all the way through the Old Testament and into the New. The prophets knew. The Israelites knew. The disciples knew. The early church leaders knew.

So how come we don't know?

We go from God speaking to Abraham in a dream, to God speaking to the Prophet Isaiah and the Apostle Paul in a dream, to God speaking to Tertullian in a dream, God speaking to Augustine and Athanasius and Origen in a dream, to God speaking to Aquinas in a dream, then... to us?

God speaking in a dream to the average God-seeking, Spirit-loving, Jesus-follower of the Western church of the 21st century?

I don't think so.

What happened?

When the Enlightened were Not So Much

Mrs Tudball was one of my favorite teachers. She had dark cropped hair, wore her broad smile in deep red lipstick and bounced rather than walked into our Year 9 classes. Using all-sorts of entertaining stories, she would effervesce about dates and movements in Asian history, eyes bright and hands animated, keeping us all enraptured until the bell rang.

She was the only one of my history teachers I liked. The rest were incredibly boring. They made us read piles of photocopied documents with long tangled sentences. I switched off most of the time, except in Mrs Tudball's lessons of course. So I can remember lots about the Japanese Samurai which meant I understood Tom Cruise's movie better, but not much about anything else.

The beauty of learning what happened in the past is that it explains why things are the way they are in the present. So to understand our reluctance to accept God-dreams we need to do a bit of a history recap.

It was that prosperous time in history when our eyes were opened to the fact that the earth was not the centre of the world after all, when slavery was questioned in the light of this new concept called 'equality'; when innovative machines like the microscope were invented and when we discovered that God was *well, probably not real*. Or at least if he was, *he wasn't that interested*.

The Enlightenment of the early eighteenth century brought us so many great things. The scientific method, Newtonian physics, freedom of speech, Mozart.

But at the same time we lost the faith to believe in the supernatural; miracles, God speaking... Everything like that took a big hit.

We didn't believe that superstitious stuff anymore. We rationalised it. We explained it. We said the miracles were metaphors, that Jesus didn't really multiply the loaves and the fish; it was just a figurative way of saying he was like bread. We said that the gifts of the Spirit were done and dusted, no need for them now since we have the Bible in its completion, neatly polished and canonised. We said that God was a good philosophical concept but he didn't have any real authority and we cut out all the references to dreams and visions in the commentaries of the early church fathers like Augustine¹³.

It's taken us a while to recover. To realise that God hasn't changed after all. That he actually still moves, speaks, heals and empowers, though no-one in the developing world really stopped knowing that. Thankfully we got most of it back. In the last century or so we've realised that the gifts of the Spirit didn't die after all, that miracles still happen and God still has some things left to say to us.

In the last century, we've recovered many things, but not this one about dreams. Not fully. Yet.

We're still not quite sure. Still a bit suspicious.

There may be another reason.

If the truth be told, we reject the whole idea of God speaking in dreams because sometimes people get fruit-loopy. Sometimes people see blue dragons in their dreams and they interpret it to mean Armageddon is around the corner. They're often the people wearing hippy skirts and tinges of purple in their hair and they meet in a special prayer group on a day the pastor doesn't know about.

Not that there is anything wrong with hippy skirts. Or purple hair.

It's just that we are missing out. If he chooses to speak this way, wouldn't that be a good thing? And wouldn't it be a good thing for more than those in the fringy prayer groups? Wouldn't it be a good thing for all of us?

God's methods haven't changed. It's us that need to do the changing.

11 Matthew 2:13-18

12 Savary, L., Berne, P.H., & Strehon Williams, *Dreams and Spiritual Growth: A Judeo-Christian Way of Dreamwork*. New York: Paulist Press, 1984, p.41

13 Kelsey, Morton T. *God, Dreams and Revelation*. U.S: Augsburg Fortress, 1991, Loc.1420

3. PEPPERONI AND CHEESE PLEASE

Imagine. God has sent you a letter. It's addressed to you. Signed with his name. Sealed with his immutable intent and power. It's there waiting for you. It holds answers to your questions, wisdom for your problems. A wave of inspiration, touches of divine foresight. An intimate expression of love.

But you don't notice.

It's sitting there inside the letterbox, edges curling, ink fading, waiting for you.

Waiting to be opened.

An uninterpreted dream is a letter unopened.

First Century Rabbi

"God speaks in a vision and a dream, one way or another but *we don't perceive it.*"

Why not?

I guess it's not surprising.

Dreams *do* speak a funny language.

You know it don't you? Those dreams where you're flying over the rooftops with a red superman cape, or you're running down an alleyway chased by two dark men with big guns, where your pet dog Rufus speaks to you in the same way your dad did or your old girlfriend from Grade 3 turns up in her pigtails and bobby socks and you wake up and think, *What on earth did I eat last night?*

Should have gone for the vegetarian.

Did the Egyptian Pharaoh feel the same way? A cow rises from the river, sleek and fat, glossy coat, bright eyed. One cow, then two, three, four, five, six, seven. Seven bountiful creatures meandering along, happily grazing among the reeds.

Then another cow appears. This one is different. Ribs protruding, gaunt brown eyes, stumbling to the bank. Another follows. Then another. Seven miserable creatures loitering on the bank looking for food, searching hungrily.

Suddenly there's a commotion in the herd. A flurry of hooves. Mud and water and reeds in a mass hunting frenzy. The reeds clear, the blood settles. Only seven cows left now, bellies bloating, eyes content. Smiling smugly with their wet and sloppy mouths.

Would you know it? The message of this dream directed the economic policy of the greatest Empire in the then-known world for the next fourteen years. It positioned Egypt to feed the nations all around it through seven hungry years of famine¹⁴.

Because one person took the time to seek out the meaning of a crazy cow dream.

And another person understood that the God who cares about things like the food we eat and the families we love sometimes speaks in dreams.

Most dreams need interpretation. Most speak symbolically. God describes them as a 'riddle to be solved' (Numbers 12:8).

It's kind of fun. Like a puzzle to work out or one of those Agatha Christie plots to solve.

They can be so dramatic. Like our feelings and thoughts and problems take on exaggerated form in the theatre of our minds. Fear becomes a monster, hope become a sunrise, frustration becomes a coat too small to fit in.

Once you get the hang of it, you see how it works. How a picture really does tell a thousand words.

Occasionally you'll get a literal dream. A snippet of the actual future. Now, *that* blows your mind. It's like God can actually *see* into the future and in an instant take you there. We knew that he *could* that, but now we actually *know* he can. It's the kind of dream that calls for great wisdom and I pray it for us.

But mostly they're not like that. Mostly they are like the dreams Joseph experienced, a little camouflaged, a little obscure. And as he said when he explained the dreams to Pharaoh, ***Do not interpretations belong to God? (Genesis 40:8)***

Letters to You

She was sitting in one of my seminars. Late 20s, earnest blue eyes, sweetheart face, hungry to understand, taking notes, eagerly listening. We got to the part about how dreams use symbols, how words are like pictures. Tears begin to fall down her cheeks. An *aha* moment. She inhales deeply.

She knows what it means now.

A recurring dream seen over and over.

A message that had been waiting.

A letter finally opened.

Words that bring hope and life, stirring anew the dreams in her heart. A message from a heavenly father sent to express his generous love. Thoughts that came all the way from the throne of heaven to a girl sitting on a plastic chair in suburban Sydney.

How amazing are your thoughts concerning me.
How vast is the sum of them!

Psalm 139:17

But it would have stayed there, unread, unknown, if she hadn't taken it seriously. If she hadn't taken time to reflect on it, pray about it, meditate on it; to learn the language it spoke.

Like any language, it can take time to learn.

Take time.

Learn.

There are plenty of resources available. You can find some of them in chapter 7. It's not difficult. It's the language used by young children when they first learn to read.

It will be worth it.

4. WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?

A woman told me her dream. She is in her bedroom trying to look in the mirror. Her partner is in the room too. He is pushing her away, trying to stop her from seeing what's there. Finally she gets to look, her husband standing in the reflection beside her. As she watches his face changes, morphing into the ghastly figure of a devil. Bright red horns, ghoulish face. She wakes up terrified.

The dream troubles her so much she begins to investigate her husband. She checks out the bank balances, on the lookout for something amiss. It was. He is later charged with criminal fraud and is taken away to prison.

Thanks to a dream.

But where did the dream come from?

Was it from God?

Or somewhere else?

And how do we know?

Everybody dreams. Scientists tell us that we all dream for a total of one to two hours a night. They know this because they hooked up a group of subjects to machines called electroencephalograms (EEGs for us non-psychologists) in a laboratory and measured brain activity while they slept. Fascinating stuff.

So we all dream. Some of us think we don't, but we do, we just don't remember them. We dream on and off in regular cycles throughout the night¹⁵.

Out of all the dreams we have, how do we know which ones are from God?

For some people, it's like every dream they have is from God. God said this, he said that. There's something new every morning, every dream is special; there's some hidden meaning in every image. There was a pink elephant and it was hanging off a tree and it was wearing a tutu and sunglasses. What do you think that means?

I don't think so...

Not every dream is from God in the same way that not every thought is from God.

But occasionally it is, and when it comes, we want to be able to recognise it.

Shadows

She was a lovely young woman. Integrous, kind, talented, a heart that longed to serve God and love others.

But she was having these terrible dreams. Scenes in her bedroom; the one she grew up in. They came into her room ferocious and angry with their daggers and bloodcurdling screams, foul words and lashings of abuse. She'd wake up sweaty and trembling. Then it happened again. And again. Over and over.

She hadn't been watching R-rated horror movies.

She'd never lived on the streets.

Never been attacked with knives.

Or been around people who spoke to her like that.

So why?

Where was this dream from?

Counsellors and psychologists study dreams. The first psychologist who took them seriously was Sigmund Freud early last century. He was followed closely by Carl Jung. Both Freud and Jung came to understand dreams as windows to the subconscious personality; an insight into what is happening beneath the surface. Like shadows reflecting a reality we don't always see, dreams tell us about our hidden selves. And usually they speak in symbolic form.

So we dream of turning up naked to an examination when we're anxious about that big performance review next day. We dream of being chased down a dead-end alley when we're faced with the stress of no options. We fly weightless over the treetops when we're longing for new levels of freedom.

That means a recurring dream of a violent attack is saying something. Something that a guileless woman may not be aware of. A dream that is trying to help her integrate who she is on the outside with who she is on the inside.

It's kind of like having your own personal therapist.

"No one who does not know himself can know others. And in each of us there is another whom we do not know. He speaks to us in dreams and tells us how differently he sees us from the way we see ourselves".¹⁶

Carl Jung

So it wasn't a God-dream then?

Ah no. But you probably knew that already.

Huh, it was one of those natural ones...

So we should ignore it then?

Actually, no.

In our bodies God created a super-efficient automated healing system. When we cut our finger with the jagged edge of the soup tin, we bleed, and within moments the body sends an urgent message to our brain. Blood vessels tighten, platelets congregate. Eventually scar tissue forms. Our body works to heal itself.

So it seems does the brain. With its in-built healing system, the brain uses dreaming to process the experiences of the day. It's kind of like housecleaning for the mind. Humans need to dream. That's why they've been called; 'the guardians of sanity.'¹⁷ Researchers even found that if you try to stop someone dreaming, they begin to show signs of mental illness.¹⁸

These kind of dreams aren't messages from God, *they are messages from ourselves*. They shout; "Alert, alert!" Something needs attention.

So they're worth listening to.

The young woman started seeing a counsellor. She worked through some of her experiences growing up where she felt attacked, where words spoken were like daggers in her soul. She forgave, she cried, she resolved the unspoken fears she'd carried all her life.

And she didn't have those violent dreams anymore.

Doorways

The ancient temple of Asclepius was the place to go if you were sick. You'd pack up your pajama-toga and sandals, head to the temple and go through a few purification rites. Then you'd make your way to the chamber in the holiest part of the sanctuary where'd you'd fall into sleepy-land hoping to dream of the famed Greek God of Medicine in the night. Next morning, a priest would interpret any dreams you had and use them to prescribe the appropriate therapy.

In practically every culture in history, dreams have been understood as a way of communicating with the spirit world. A kind of doorway between the earthly and the spiritual realm.

The American Indians have their dream-catchers.

The Chinese have their dream books.

The Ancient Babylonians had their professional dream interpreters.

Most religions too. The Hindus their Upanishads. The Muslims their Koran. Oh yes, and the Jews their Torah.

The idea that there is another significant world of reality that breaks in on the individual, particularly in dreams – occurs among people everywhere except in modern Western culture.

Mircea Eliade¹⁹

So spirits can be encountered in dreams. Spirits other than God. The spirits could even get it right²⁰. But it doesn't mean we should consult them. It doesn't mean they are from God. God-dreams are a stand out. They have a very special purpose.

Voices

There was an award-winning show on TV for a number of years called 'Medium'. I watched it once or twice. The blonde no-nonsense Patricia Arquette plays a suburban mum with a special gifting. She receives messages in dreams and amidst the domestic bustle of family life, uses them to solve crimes.

The episodes I watched were entertaining - cliffhangers with a creative twist at the end. But I could still tell it was scripted by someone - I could still tell it was written by a person. These were made up plot-lines - clever, but not clever enough.

When God speaks in dreams, he has a way of being extremely clever. His dreams contain supernatural thoughts. Surprising glimpses of foreknowledge. Wisdom that extends far beyond our reach. His stories are not easily invented.

And more than that, they speak personally, privately, intimately... Like a secret whisper in the corner with a trusted friend, a soft word of pillow talk, a faint wish shared late at night when no-one else can hear.

When it's him, you'll know it.

When it's him, you'll see him more. You'll experience more of his love.

When it's him, it will lead you to worship.

The thing about God-dreams is that they come in *exactly the same way* as other dreams come. It's not like they *feel* any different. There is not *usually* a hallowed golden glow surrounding them or a shimmering angelic presence when you wake. You find yourself in the shower afterwards wondering about it, munching into breakfast, thinking how it sticks out to you in some way. Strangely relevant, uncannily spot on. A voice you've heard before.

The voice of one you heard when you read that passage of Scripture, when you received that amazing prophecy, when you sat convicted in the pew listening to the words of the preacher touching and stirring.

The voice that breathes life, speaks truth, that sets you free; that can come on any day, at any moment, and even in the night.

15 Kelsey, Morton T. *God, Dreams and Revelation*. U.S: Augsburg Fortress, 1991, Loc.2891

16 Kelsey, *God, Dreams and Revelation*, 1991, p.177

17 Sanford, John. A. *Dreams: God's Forgotten Language*. US: Harper Collins, 1989, p.98

18 Kelsey. *God, Dreams and Revelation*, 1991, p,188

19 *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, in Kelsey, *God, Dreams and Revelation*, p.55

20 Deuteronomy 13:1-2

5. GOD CONVERSATIONS FOR DUMMIES

I titled this book, *The Easy Way to Hear God's Voice*. It's the last thing that people would say. *It's easy to hear from God? Nuh, I think it's hard.*

Most people find it hard. I know that because I ask them. I say; "Hands up who finds it difficult to hear from God" and 90% of congregations I speak to all over the world tentatively raise their hand, quietly wishing it weren't so.

So what makes hearing from God in dreams so easy?

This.

We switch off the light, lie down on the pillow, close our eyes. Zzzz. Snore a little. The light begins to filter through the morning window. A voice comes.

That's it.

The brilliant thing about hearing from God this way is that it is accessible to anyone. We all have to sleep sometime.

Hearing from God in dreams is easy. Because...

It's not about intelligence.

If it was, imagine how unfair it would be.

Those who had a four-year theology degree would get to hear God's voice the most. The one who knew every book of the Bible by theme, date and author, who could recite the entire 119th Psalm perfectly and explain in detail the differences between historical and textual criticism. Who could tell you what the *actual original Hebrew* meant without looking it up.

It's not about personality.

If it was, people like me wouldn't get to hear God much. Some of you get that. We're one of those people whose brain fuzzies the message with its rationalism and skepticism, one of those people who thinks too much, whose over-analytical mind gets in the way of; 'Be still and know'...

It's not about time.

If it was, pity the stay-at-home parent, stressed and frayed around the edges after chasing the two-year-old around the sandpit, shopping for groceries, cleaning the house, making dinner and flopping into bed at 9pm utterly exhausted.

It's easy because...

All we need to do is understand it could be God speaking. That it might be worth listening to.

I slept but my heart was awake...

Song of Solomon 5:2

It's just like being open to listen for God's voice in whichever way he speaks. It's easy because all we need to do is want it bad enough.

A Preaching Blooper

The crowd slowly builds, forming small groups along the shore. The lake is still in the morning light. Sounds of animated conversation rise as more and more assemble. They'd come because a great rabbi was preaching.

"Did you hear what happened last week in Capernaum?" The man asks flicking off his sandals and finding a place on the grass.

"Yeh I know, that man with the shrivelled hand? Can you believe it?"

"And his teaching has spread all through Galilee. They've been debating it in the synagogue. I can't wait to hear what he says today!" his friend replies.

There is a disturbance across the crowd. A fishing boat is set loose onto the water. A man stands, his face poised and serene, loose robes swaying in the breeze, balancing steadily against the gentle rocking of the water beneath.

It's Jesus.

He speaks.

Familiar scenes. Scattered seed. A sower waiting for harvest. Ground that is rich and moist, welcoming the seed as it falls. Then the dry harsh ground choked with thorny roots and tendrils that refuse it.

They listen, ears peeled.

Jesus continues. Then pauses. Looks intently into the mass of earnest faces.

In a loud voice shouts, "Whoever has ears, let him hear!"

His eyes pierce the crowd. He sits back down. His disciples take up their oars. The boat moves slowly away from the shoreline. The crowd murmurs.

"What?" the man says to his friend, incredulous. "That was it?"

"I don't get it," his friend answers, "What's his point?"

They place their sandals back on, wipe the dust off their robes and walk away with the rest of the crowd²¹.

Why did Jesus do that?

Why go to the effort of securing the attention of thousands; a grand opportunity to influence, then eloquently tell a story and neglect to mention the main point?

Did he not go to Bible College?

Did he not attend preaching class?

Homiletics, (n. used with a sing. v., Gr. homiletikos) the study of the composition and delivery of a sermon or other religious discourse.

Aim: To teach theological concepts, to enlighten hearers with principles of the kingdom, to proclaim the truth of the Gospel.

"How to Preach, Point 1'. Speak clearly, make your point so that your audience understands." (Don't let them walk away scratching their heads, screwing up their faces in confusion.)

Fail Jesus.

No graduation gown and framed certificate for you.

Why shroud a message in mystery? A message that has the potential to be life-changing, transforming, empowering?

Why make the secrets of the kingdom secretive?

Why speak in metaphorical words that require thought and reflection?

That need a seeking heart to decipher their meaning?

Ears that Hear

Perhaps Jesus knew something we struggle to know.

That revelation doesn't come from storing up vaults of knowledge, from honing the powers of the intellect or from trying really, really hard to be holy enough.

Whoever has ears, let him hear.

Whoever has eyes, let him see.

But which of them has stood in the council of the Lord to see or to hear his word?

Jeremiah 23:18

Which of them is waiting; looking; seeking?

Who of them watches for his message, who positions themselves to see what he is saying?

Who will have their ears peeled, listening for his voice as they wake, as they drive to work, as they read the newspaper, vacuum the floor, as they go about the everydayness of their lives?

There were two groups in the audience that day. Those who walked away in nonchalance, dismissing the message because it was too hard. Then there was the second group - those who were hungry to know, who sought to understand the truth of his obscure words, who went back and asked Jesus what he meant.

And got answers.

Something we can all do.

That's all it takes. It's God conversations for dummies. Just be hungry. Seek him alone. Be willing to listen to him whatever he says.

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach.

It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?"

Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?"

No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

6. CHECK TO SEE IF IT IS SO

There's one group of people in the Bible who strike me as being a little presumptuous. Even a bit arrogant. I imagine them sitting with their church in a big old house in town. Taking notes perhaps, squinting their eyes, leaning in to hear what the great Apostle Paul was saying.

And afterwards, getting together over bread and olives and wine, questioning and discussing, bandying around these new ideas, testing them to see if what Paul was saying was true.

The arrogance. The gall!

Ah the Bereans.

The Bible calls them 'more noble'. They didn't just hear a sermon and swallow it hook, line and sinker. They prayed, they meditated, they searched the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was so²².

So. How about you? Here's your chance to be more noble.

Search the Scriptures to see if what I am saying is true.

Not that I am the Apostle Paul of course.

Do some checking. Read some Scripture, chat about it with your best friend, meet with a small group and use the guides in this chapter to check it out for yourself Oh most noble citizen!

And may God give you great insight as you do.

Study 1: A Few Missing Pieces

Study 2: Jeremiah's Riddle

Study 3: Should have Obeyed

Study 4: Storymaker

STUDY 1: A FEW MISSING PIECES

Joseph has two important dreams early in his life. Read about them in Genesis 37:1-11.

1. What symbols are found in these dreams? What does each symbol represent?

2. What is the message of these dreams?

3. What details are not given?

4. Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-12. How does this passage inform our approach to our dreams?

5. How would Joseph know his dreams were from God?

6. What was an appropriate response to these dreams - for Joseph? For his father and brothers?

Read how Joseph's dreams were fulfilled in Genesis 42-43.

STUDY 2: JEREMIAH'S RIDDLE

The account of Jeremiah's calling and mission contains symbolic visions. Read Jeremiah 1:1-14.

1. The boiling pot symbolises the threat to Jerusalem of foreign armies from the north. The meaning of the branch of the almond tree is not so obvious. What do you think it represents?

NB. You may need to use a Study Bible or the footnotes for this passage in your Bible. The answer is not clear in the English translation. A clue: this is a clever wordplay – the word for almond tree sounds like the Hebrew for 'watching' (see verse 12).

2. Read Matthew 26:60-61. Jesus did not mean he would literally destroy the temple in three days. He was using metaphorical language. Read John 2:19-21. What did the symbol of the temple represent?

Read Numbers 12:6-8. Dreams and visions like Jesus' parables are full of symbolism that needs to be deciphered. The NIV translation uses the word 'riddles' (see verse 8).

STUDY 3: SHOULD HAVE OBEYED

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had two significant dreams that are recorded in Scripture. But he was unable to understand both of them. Fortunately Daniel was available to help.

Read Nebuchadnezzar's first dream and the events that followed in Daniel 2 and 3.

1. How did Nebuchadnezzar respond to his dream - initially? Later?

2. Read Genesis 20. Who does God speak to in dreams?

7. AND THERE'S MORE!

It's only just begun. It keeps getting better. This journey of hearing God's voice and getting to know him.

There is so much more! And it's better than a set of steak knives and a fat discount at the next big Christian bookstore sale.

Here are some resources that will help:

Does God Speak in Dreams? CD/MP3 [CLICK HERE](#)

A theological foundation for God speaking in dreams.

Awaken Your Dreams CD/MP3 [CLICK HERE](#)

Originally created for those who do not yet know God, this teaching will help you understand and interpret the symbolic language of dreams.

The Other Side of the Conversation DVD SERIES [CLICK HERE](#)

A 6-part DVD teaching series with Guidebook designed for use by individuals and small groups.

God Conversations PODCAST [CLICK HERE](#)

Fortnightly interviews, teaching tips and conversations with experts on recognising God's voice.

Awaken Your Dreams SEMINAR [CLICK HERE](#)

A half day/evening workshop that can be booked with your church or organisation.

God Conversations WEBSITE [CLICK HERE](#)

For articles, CDs, DVDs, MP3 downloads, videos and messages on recognising God's voice.

Books

There are many excellent books available on this topic. Below is a shortlist of my favourite:

Deere, Jack. Surprised by the Voice of God.

US: Zondervan, 1998

One of the best blends of practical wisdom and biblical teaching from an theologian who didn't always think that God still speaks today. Gives a strong context for hearing from God in general before very briefly looking at dreams and visions.

Goll, James W. and Michal Ann. Dream Language.

U.S.: Destiny Image, 2006

An easy-to-read book that includes a historic overview, sound pastoral advice as well as some basic instructions as to how to interpret the symbolism of your dreams.

Hamon, Jane. Dreams and Visions.

U.S: Regal Books, 2000

A user-friendly introduction to the topic with plenty of interesting and helpful examples that will help you understand your dreams.

Kelsey, Morton T. God, Dreams and Revelation.

U.S: Augsburg Fortress, 1991

By far the best treatise on dreams and visions I've read by an incredibly well-researched and insightful author and Episcopal priest. This pioneer work gives a thorough background and history of dream interpretation, though you will need to look elsewhere for the 'how-tos'.

Sanford, John. A. Dreams: God's Forgotten Language.

US: Harper Collins, 1989

Somewhat of a classic, this book brings psychological and spiritual perspectives together in ways few books have. Using fascinating case histories, Sanford brings wisdom and insight to the topic of hearing God's voice in dreams and visions.

Gentile, Ernest B. Gentile, Your Sons and Daughters Shall Prophecy.

US: Chosen Books, 1999

One of the few academic texts on this topic written by a scholar as well as a practitioner of prophetic ministry. While not specifically written on the topic of dreams and visions, it is an excellent resource for theological students and those who enjoy a more academic approach to Scripture and history.

8. WHO IS TANIA AND WHAT IS HER HASHTAG?



Ps. Tania Harris

M.A.Min, B.Ed., Cert. IV TAA.

This lady never dreamed of doing a ministry like this.

Now an accomplished Bible teacher and inspirational speaker, Tania started her professional career teaching primary children how to throw a basketball and swim backstroke. After a 'lights on' moment on the football field and a number of divine arguments later, she signed up for a Masters degree and began her ministry adventure.

Growing up in a conservative household where women were confined mostly to the kitchen sink, becoming a church planter in a beachside suburb of Melbourne broke every rule in her little book... She would still say that this experience was the most defining, terrifying and fulfilling season of her life.

Tania has a checkered range of ministry experience from working in cross-cultural mission to caring for homeless youth to developing online learning programs. She has even spent time as in the world of academia as lecturer and then Academic Dean - though she always wondered whether a grey beard and a beige cardigan would have assisted in her role.

Her ministry God Conversations inspires and equips people to recognise and respond to the voice of God in the midst of their everyday lives. It has taken her from the peaks of Switzerland to the hallowed halls of Oxford University to upstate New York and across her home country, Australia. She loves that she gets to speak to churches of all denominations and all ages as well as those outside of the church walls.

Tania would say her ministry now is much more suited to her than her first career - she still throws a ball like a girl. When not preparing messages and thinking deeply about the world, Tania loves hiking up very tall mountains and skiing down them, paddling a kayak in the early morning on Sydney Harbour and writing in her favourite café in a very funky corner of Sydney. Hillsong is her church home in Sydney, Australia.

Find Tania at:



9. ACCORDING TO THOSE WHO KNOW

An amazing ministry which makes people aware that their relationship with Jesus goes much deeper than head knowledge. Tania has the gift of marrying the two beautifully.

John Steele

Leader New Life Churches International, New Zealand

Tania's heart for people, her Aussie humor, her amazing teaching skills and her experience in listening to God's voice was life-changing for our students!

Björn Schäfer

Leader ICF College, Zürich, Switzerland

Since attending the God Conversations seminar a whole new spiritual dimension has opened for us.

Tracy Saar

Wife of Senior Pastor, Petersham AOG Church, Sydney, Australia

At a time when many people struggle to discern God's voice, Tania demystifies the concept with her practical and relatable teaching. Many felt the time we had with her was not enough!

Sandra Cavallo

Young Adults Pastor, Bayside Church, Victoria, Australia

We are inviting her back!

John Crawford

Lead Pastor, Thrive Baptist Church, Lake Macquarie NSW, Australia

As a 'top shelf' communicator, Tania held everyone lovingly in the palm of her hand and instructed thoughtfully and carefully from the Word of God.

Dale Stephenson

Senior Pastor, Crossway Baptist Church, Victoria, Australia

Tania really spoke to people's hearts.

Alison Newmann

Vicar, St Nicholas Church, Kent, England

Full of Biblical background and practical keys, we were left with a greater

expectation to hear God and wanting to pursue Him more.

Freimut and Joanna Haverkamp
Senior Pastor, Lakeside Church, Germany

Tania's ministry was inspiring. Many have taken it as a reference point for their relationship with God.

Dennis van Bodegom
Youth Pastor, VEZ Church, The Netherlands

People were so blessed by Tania's ministry at Grace!

Rachel Mellett
Ministry Leader, Grace Assembly of God, New York

Tania's seminar was probably the most successful seminar we have ever hosted in our church.

Peter Sewell
Pastor, Bayside Christian Church, Hervey Bay, Queensland, Australia

Tania's teaching was life changing for many of our women and they are still talking about it.

David and Louise Nahi
Senior Pastors, Vibe Church, Tweed Heads, NSW

Tania's ministry was a breath of fresh air, impacting in our church in a way that was far greater than what she said.

Hamish Thomson
Senior Pastor, Abundant Life Centre, Wellington, New Zealand

Tania has a real gift of making everyone she talks to feel important. We LOVED having her here.

Katie Mendis
Host, Cherish Youth Conference, Petersham AOG, Sydney, Australia

10. PASS IT ON

Thank you for reading The Easy Way to Hear from God!

I would love to hear from you! Leave your thoughts, comments and God-stories at the links below.

THE **EASY WAY** TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE

EASY TO HEAR GOD'S VOICE?
I DON'T THINK SO!

Most people would agree with you.

But in her easy-to-read book, Tania begs to differ. Recognising God's voice may not be as difficult as you think. Sometimes all it takes is a slight shift in perspective, a watchful eye and perhaps, a soft pillow.

 **God Conversations**
Heard from God lately?