

# OpenTheo

## How Should I Respond to Those Who Claim God Told Them to Do Something?

June 26, 2023



### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about the best way to tactically and tactfully respond to those who claim God told them to do something and how to get one's emotions under control when talking to a friend who joined a heretical group that preaches another gospel about her false doctrines.

\* What's the best way to tactically and tactfully respond to someone's claim that God spoke to them or told them to do something?

\* My friend has joined a heretical group that preaches another gospel, and I have sufficient knowledge to talk to her about her false doctrines, but how do I get my emotions under control?

### Transcript

I'm Amy Hall, I'm here with Greg Koukl, and this is Stand to Reason's hashtag S-T-R-A-S-C-Podcast. So, Greg, this morning, I have a couple tactics questions for you. Okay, I'm chuckling because I was just harassing Amy a little bit during the middle of the year, and I always get a kick out of there.

It's kind of like bugging my sister kind of thing. Okay, so tactical question. Oh, it will rise to the occasion on this one.

This first one comes from Matt. Okay, Matt, what's up? What have you found to be the best way to tactically and tactfully respond in conversation to those who claim that God spoke to them or told them to do something? Given that these alleged private messages from God are often very precious to those who claim them and form the foundation of how they view their relationship with the Holy Spirit, how do we handle it? How do we handle these situations in a way that is both gentle and honest? These things are really hard, and I will tell you, for the reasons, Matt, that you just described, I generally let these things slide. I just let them slide.

Actually, I was at Men's Retreat not too long ago, and I was confronted by somebody who raised this issue with me. In the sense that I heard you teach that these things are not appropriate for Christians or something like that. You know, that can't be, can it? You know, kind of respond.

I said, well, this needs to be qualified, but my view is that God could do it every once, but we can only teach what the Bible teaches. The Bible does not teach this as something we need to learn to do, and God doesn't whisper when He does communicate. He communicates clearly, and the Scripture is replete with examples of that.

Anyway, He got really bugged at me, which is what happens. Now, He actually asked me about it, so I gave a brief answer, knowing that I was probably going, my response would trouble Him, and I wasn't going to have an adequate time to deal with it. And to put it simply, it did not cool that well, which is why, if I can avoid these discussions in a casual situation where people are saying things like that, I just avoid them.

Now, if there are more, there are conversations that have to do with, say, leadership-type decisions, and a person is making their contribution to the group decision-making process, and this is what they offer. Now, you have to address that a little bit more closely, which, by the way, is one of the reasons that nobody on our standard-reason team holds that view. And for this reason, you can't have mixed understandings of biblical decision-making when you're on a decision-making team, like staff at standard-reason.

And oftentimes, we are all involved, giving input on decisions. And I've known people who've been in churches who said they had together, everybody got together. Okay, now, we've all talked about it.

Now, let's hear from God, everybody go home and pray and see what God's telling them we ought to do. Okay, which strikes me as odd in the sense that, what's the point of everybody talking about their own point of view, and then going back and praying? Why don't you save the first meeting and just go back and pray? Because that's what's going to be considered by them as authoritative. I think maybe when you have to address this, this is where the golden, golden, first question comes in.

What do you mean by that? Okay, now that, of course, there's a model question. There's dozens of different ways to characterize it. And in this case, what you want to do is ask more carefully what exactly is going on when you think, when you say that God has shown you this thing.

Help me understand that. And well, it's just a feeling, or it's just a thought, or I just have this thing come in my head and I can't get it out of my head. There may be different ways to characterize it.

But then the next question is, why would you think? Oh, no, the next question would be, can you show me any place in scripture where this kind of thing happened? Now, this has to be qualified. It's not someplace in scripture where God intervenes in a circumstance and gives special instructions. That happens 13 times in the book of Acts, which actually isn't very many when you consider the book of Acts covers about 30 years of time.

Okay. And each one of them is a supernatural intervention, at least where there's a description of what God did, a supernatural intervention angels show up. And the vision Jesus appears, a prophet speaks or something like that, or somebody is supernaturally transported to another location.

These are all very powerful thing. What we want to know is, where in scripture do we have a communication from God that's communicated in a nudge nudge hint hint. I think God may be telling me kind of thing.

That's the important part of the question that's called the phenomenology. That you think you've gotten it. Okay.

So that would be the next question. First, what do you mean by that described to me what you're talking about? What's happening? How is it you received this second question. Can you show me anywhere in scripture where this kind of thing is happening? Just the way you described it, the same phenomenology.

Okay. And the third question is, why should we believe that this is from God? And now that's really important. I know that in my local community number of years ago, the pastor, the pastor's wife wrote a letter from Jesus to a group.

Okay, so Jesus is saying this. This is the way she, that's the motif. It's kind of like a Jesus calling kind of motif.

But she felt that Jesus was actually saying this to the group. And I was shown the letter and I asked, did anybody ask her why we should believe that Jesus really spoke these words to her. And of course, nobody did.

You know why? He was the pastor's wife. Okay, but that's the question that should be asked, even of a pastor, or anyone in spiritual leadership. You're convinced.

I get it. Why should we be convinced that God told you these things? That's a fair question. And if there is a prophetic word given and this claim amounts to that, and I don't see how it can be otherwise, if there is a claim, then the prophets need to be tested.

Now, this in 1 Thessalonians 5, do not despise prophetic utterance. And incidentally, I don't think this qualifies even as a prophetic utterance. But we'll just, if, if this is a bona

fide communication, God, it amounts to a prophetic utterance.

The individual is a voice piece for God speaking. Okay. So Paul says, don't despise that, but examine everything carefully.

And this is almost never done in these circumstances. So if it's not a circumstance that you could just, okay, ignore, because it's not worth the trouble, given the nature of the circumstances, for all the reasons that Matt mentioned, these are really close to people and they get defensive. They get their feelings heard.

You're taking God away from them. I know the drill. All right.

If it's something that's more weighty, then those questions describe to me what you mean when you say that God has shown you this. Tell me about that. Secondly, whatever they describe, where do you find that kind of communication from God in Scripture? And thirdly, why should the rest of us trust that what you're saying actually is from God? These are all fair questions.

They can be delivered in a gracious fashion, but they are important questions to ask. And if people take umbrage at the questions, which they are likely to do, even if you're nice about it for the reasons, Matt, that you mentioned, then it might be good to go to 1st Thessalonians 5 and it says, do not despise prophetic utterance, but examine everything carefully. Now, if they say, well, this isn't a prophetic utterance, then you say, well, what is it? You said it was God speaking to you, right? And now you're speaking those words to us.

So you're an individual speaking God's words to us. How is that different? This is another question, by the way, so that's a tactical and you want to be really gentle with it, not accusatory in your tone of voice. And even the way I just role played it a moment ago, I probably would be even more gentle than that, but you're asking the appropriate questions about a serious spiritual practice or a serious practice that people think is spiritual and about their spiritual lives.

I think those three questions are so good, Greg. It's so important to get them to define what they're talking about, because I know people say it in all, they mean all sorts of different things when they say God told them something. And I think a lot of times it's just people not really being careful about the language they're using.

I mean, of course, there's a sense in which God is directing our lives without our even knowing about it. You don't have to figure out what he's saying. So let's say you say God, you know, God's God's indicating I should go here.

Maybe you just mean in my wisdom or in the wisdom of, you know, your his moral law and his people. This is what I've come to. I think people can mean all sorts of different.

And there's lots of times we just had our 30th anniversary a week ago today, actually. No, we could go yesterday or celebrations a week ago today. But as I look back in 30 years, I could see all the things that God did in position things that made all this possible.

But I was never listening for any instructions to do things. I was following an entirely different motif. By the way, one question not to ask.

How do they know it's God's word. It's God speaking to them, because now you're going into their subjective experience and they're just going to say, they're likely to say, I know, because I know, because I know, I know, whatever. The question isn't why they are convinced that this is God.

Speaking, the question is, where does this motif show up in scripture. That's our second question. And the third one, why shouldn't we believe? How do we know that God is speaking to you? Not how do you know that just pushes them back into the subjective.

And this is what an LDS is going to offer, you know, that kind of thing. Well, because I have the witness, I just know that I know I know down in my nowhere or something like that. And by the way, I think there is, that is a legitimate way of knowing things.

And, but, but the issue here since the claim is a bit extraordinary claim, even though it's made so frequently in conversation, God told me this or God. I think God's tell me to go here and calling me and et cetera, et cetera. Like I said, most of the time I just leave it alone.

It's innocuous. If a person thinks that God's calling them to be an apologist, I'm not going to mess with the words. It's a noble enterprise.

If they want to pursue it, they can do that. But don't ask them, how do they know? Because that's not going to get you anywhere. You want to ask them, why should we believe what you said? So it has implications for us individually, probably, given the nature of the relationship of the group.

And I know we haven't really gotten into all the details on this. So on our website, if you look for Does God Whisper? There's a three part article that will go into more details about the view you're describing here, Greg. Because I do think, I do think God does sometimes give people messages.

But if you are, if you're trying to interpret hints of some kind, I think that's where it goes. Where you really got a problem. If God speaks something to you, first of all, one thing you point out is in the Bible, it's always an audible voice.

It's a message that's clearly from God. It's not anybody trying to figure something out and trying to put hints together. Or it's clearly a message from God.

Well, the way I put it is, there are some places where it is clearly an audible voice. Moses was an example because the people heard it and they said, go away, talk to God over there. He scares us.

And when the text says, like to Elijah there in 1 Kings 19, the so-called still small voice passage, which most translators don't even have that language, God talks to him and there is a description of what he says. Okay, he's having a conversation. So whatever the phenomenology of it, it's coming to their mind in conversational form, whether it's going through the ear or not.

In every case, I'm not so sure. The key that I point out in the book of Acts is that where we have a characterization of the phenomenology, the means by which the communication is made, it is always supernatural. Like I said, an angel shows up or there's a vision or something.

And it's crystal clear. It is in vague. And I think that's the critical issue because God doesn't whisper when he's trying to communicate to us.

He doesn't try to talk to us and we got the rock and roll on too loud. We can't hear him. God doesn't try.

He does. And another thing I think people misunderstand when you talk about this great, you're not saying that the Holy Spirit doesn't convict us. Like let's say we're reading a Bible passage and the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and we see very clearly something we've done wrong and we're moved to repentance.

That's right. That's something you would agree that he does. Absolutely.

It's a biblical motif of the Holy Spirit's work and it's subjective. We are experiencing the sense of the bad feeling because of what we did wrong. And we are aware that God is, you could use some people use the language I wouldn't, but speaking to us saying naughty naughty naughty straight now.

We might throw some words in there, but what's going on is some is just the general conviction of the Spirit. You know, I can remember one specific time when I was reading a passage and I was so convicted that I had to repair a relationship that I went to do that and everything just fell into place just ridiculously. It was crazy.

And I knew for a fact that as I was reading that passage in Ephesians, when this happened, I knew that was from God. But I wasn't, I wasn't trying to interpret hints or anything like that. It was, this is me reading the scripture and the Holy Spirit revealing to me something that I needed to do in response to what I had just read.

You know, there's an interesting passage in 1 Corinthians 14. There, it's talking about tongues without interpreters. And Paul said, what's the point if you speak a tongue, and

there's not an interpreter.

And then he gives an illustration, I call it the lesson of the, the bugle. Okay. He said, if, if in military circumstances, you bugle, which was their comms back then the bugle is meant to bugle attack or bugle retreat.

If it's not clear, then how are you going to know what to do? Okay. That's the illustration. And then he says this, unless we speak with the mouth, words that are clear.

And now we're speaking of revelation in terms of tongues with an interpreter. How will it be known what we're to do? We'll be speaking in the air. But it turns out that multitudes of people are convinced that God is speaking with words that are not clear.

And it's our job to decipher the hints or the nudges, whatever. That goes directly against the point that Paul is making regarding special revelation, in this case tongues in 1 Corinthians 14. And I realize the context is about tongues, but there's a broad principle that he gives words from God need to be clear or else you can't obey them.

And he's applying it to tongues. The same broad principle applies equally to other types of revelation. But there, and there are other, because I part of this question was they view this as their entire relationship with God.

So I'm just trying to give people some sense of there are many things God does beyond giving you a direction or a specific decision you have to make or things like that. Another thing, God's comfort, his presence, a sense of his love. As we're reading, I'm sure we've all had this experience where you're reading the Bible and suddenly you see God so clearly in what's written there.

It's like a bail is taken away and you see a passage, you understand it in a way you never did before. There are all sorts of ways that God interacts with us without having to go to these, you know, trying to interpret signs and things like that. The Hans, excuse me, the Hans and the Gretel approach, you know, the little tidbits and we have to cobble these things altogether and hopefully we'll get it right.

And I know there are people who are listening to what we're talking about who have heard other people talk like this and have tried to do it themselves and it's been a tremendously frustrating experience. We're not sure. Is that God? Is that the devil? Is that me? Does this add up this way or does this add up that way? And my profound conviction, biblically, is if God has something specific, he wants to tell you, he will tell you very clearly.

God doesn't whisper in that sense. Well, I'm going to do one more question here, Greg. This one comes from Brittany Meyer.

My best friend has found herself in a heretical slash cultish religion that preaches

another gospel, the Hebrew roots movement. I feel like I have sufficient knowledge to finally engage in her false doctrines. However, I can't seem to get my emotions under control help.

Well, I guess that depends on what emotion she has in mind. Is she sad? Is she angry? She may be sad and every time she wants to talk to her friend, knowing the error her friend is in, she gets emotionally worked up and she she weeps or whatever. Actually, that's not a bad emotion to display when you're talking to somebody and you're trying to persuade them of a different point of view.

It shows that you care. If you're angry, well, that's not a, that's not the, it may be understandable, but it's not the kind of emotion you want to display in a conversation like this. And as I have often said in teaching about tactics, if we get angry in a conversation with someone else that we're trying to persuade, we're going to lose.

Okay. If we get angry, we lose because except for in very rare cases, displaying anger is not persuasive to people. They get defensive.

And so I, that is when you, you want to, I think, wait until you can manage that. It just depends on the emotion she's dealing with. I guess.

I can certainly understand it. I think about Galatians. I mean, Paul's, it's pretty emotional.

Pretty bad. You foolish Galatians. And it's over the same issue.

It's, it's over the issue of the gospel and people adding law into the gospel. So I absolutely understand getting, and I've experienced this too. I used to get a lot of questions about the Hebrew roots.

I don't as much anymore, but I would get really upset when people would be confused by it because here somebody is distorting the gospel, which is the beautiful thing that we've been given by God and they're turning it into something terrible and they're confusing people with it. So I, I can absolutely understand having to deal with that. And so can Paul.

So you're in good company. I'm just having a reflection here. Maybe in September at my 50th spiritual birthday, I will read this testimony that I wrote.

I think two years into my Christianity and I was being trained to give testimonies of your life. So I wrote this whole thing out, like four minutes or something like that. And I read it just last week.

And it was very interesting that one of the emphases that I, that was a focus of my testimony was the grace of God. And if you think about all the aberrant movements, they are either based on the, the person of Christ and distortions of who he is. That was a lot



of the earlier heresies, but the first heresy was the Galatian heresy, which is what Paul was dealing with there.

And the Jews were in Acts chapter 15 and the council there in Jerusalem of adding works to grace. And I'm so thankful that I had such a rich training in the grace of God's secure foundation in the grace of God, right from the outset, that really has held me in good stead, my whole Christian life, and understanding the forgiveness that we have without forgiveness were all lost, but with the forgiveness were completely rescued. And there's still discipline, as we've talked about before, but if you look at all of these groups that go south, whether it's LDS, whether it's Jehovah's Witnesses, whether it's this group, the Hebrew, whatever Hebrew roots.

Yeah, and other things like that, they cannot avoid the temptation to build works into salvation. And all of these groups do that. And there's an observation somebody else made, I don't think I made this, but it's a powerful one in the book of Romans, where Paul is explaining the grace of God in chapter four and chapter five for him who does not work, but believes in the God who justifies the ungodly Timmons record his righteousness.

That's chapter four. He is preaching grace so aggressively that it could be mistaken for license. And that's why he deals with that objection in the beginning of chapter six.

So if we are not preaching grace so aggressively that it might be understood as license. Oh, you could do it every one as Paul puts it. Oh, sin, all the more so that grace may increase.

No, no, no, no, no. That's not what I'm saying. You don't get it.

If you died to sin, how can you live in sin. That's chapter six. And so the point being that hinge there at the beginning of chapter six is he's he's clarifying what grace does in our life, because he's so strong and emphasizing grace.

It could be misunderstood as license. And if you're trying to do so called balance, a little bit of grace and a little bit of law or a lot of grace and a lot of law, this is not biblical. If righteousness comes to the law, then Christ died needlessly in another place.

Paul says, it's either grace or its law. It's not, it's not both. Okay.

And as a matter of fact, he points out, it's grace. Therefore, it's not law. But this is a tell for all kinds of aberrant groups.

They go after the grace of God and they want to add human merit to it in some fashion. Yeah, thanks, Greg. I have two quick suggestions, Brittany, for what you can do in this situation, because as Greg said, I don't think it's a bad thing to reveal that you're emotional about this to your friend.

One thing you could do is say, look, I'm just going to apologize in advance, because, you know, if you look at what Paul, his reaction and Galatians, you can see how how upset he is because he values the gospel so much and that's how I feel. And I look at what you're saying, what I'm hearing is that you're changing the gospel. So let's talk about that.

And I apologize if I get emotional about that, but I think this is important enough that that emotions are going to happen. And so you can just acknowledge that right off the bat. And then secondly, I would make your goal clarity.

So what you want to do is lay out what the Bible says about the gospel and about the law as clearly as possible. And you're going to leave it in God's hands because this is a spiritual issue that's happening here. So what I would do is just have your goal be clarity.

You want to make sure when you leave that conversation, she can explain exactly what you were saying and leave the persuading to God. And that takes some of the pressure off of you. And I think that will also help.

Yeah, that's excellent. I know we're a little over time and let me off on two more things. What you just said is critical.

Dennis Prager says, clarity, not necessarily agreement. That's great. You move for clarity.

And then you let God take over from there. And the second thing is we have this wonderful worker at standard reason. Her name is Rebecca and she lives in Utah and she talks with Mormons and she's asked them what must they do to be saved.

And they write the whole list out. You do this, this, this, this, this. And then they said to her, well, what's on your list? And she writes one word and turns it around and they see it and it just says, Jesus, Jesus.

I thought that was brilliant the way she put it because that's really what it comes down to. The simplicity of faith in the only rescuer and he rescues completely. And on top of that, Paul even takes it farther because in Galatians, he says, having been saved by the Spirit, are you now perfected by the flesh? There you go.

So now he's talking about sanctification and sanctification does not come through following the law in that way. So anyway, there's, there's a lot. I mean, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, what am I missing here? Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians.

Yeah, we just go through the list. But Romans and Galatians, especially, I think, yeah, I would go through those because he is so, this was such a big issue in the early church. There's so much in the New Testament about the law.

It kind of astounded me when I first started looking, you know, reading through the New Testament over and over and I realized how much of it had to do with that particular issue. So anyway, there you go, Brittany. Hopefully that will help you respond.

And we pray that God opens your friend's eyes. And thank you, Matt. And if you have a question, send it on Twitter with the hashtag STRAsk or go through our website at [str.org](http://str.org). This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

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