

CONFIRMED

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Unconfirmed

“There are unconfirmed reports of another earthquake in China.” What are we to do with an “unconfirmed report”? Should we panic? Should we pray that it will prove false? Should we pass it on to others? (That’s how rumors usually begin.)

My mother-in-law once received an unconfirmed report that she had an abdominal tumor. Several months later it turned out to be... her third child!

“Unconfirmed” means the story is uncorroborated, and has not yet been shown or proved to be true. In some cases, lack of confirmation may result only in mild uncertainty or anxiety. But in some cases — such as war-time MIAs, or general disasters (like earthquakes), or abductions — waiting without confirmation can be heart-breaking and lead to post-traumatic stress. How can you resolve the matter? Do you move forward? Can you start again?

In the realm of Christian living, lack of confirmation leaves us uncertain of the will of God. And if we are unsure of what God wants from us, we cannot pray in faith and we cannot act in faith (only presumption). It is just as likely that we will simply not act at all.

That’s the power of confirmation! Without it, effective work for God is nearly impossible, forward progress is derailed, and confidence is eroded. But with it... with even a little confirmation, great things can be accomplished.

Bad News

Of course, the confirmation of *bad news* can sink hope, scuttle plans, and devastate lives. Let me take a few moments now to address that angle, with what I hope will prove to be helpful advice.

“For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me.” (Job 3:25; NKJV)

“It’s definitely cancer.” That is not a confirmation one hopes for. While it may elicit fear, anger, despair, and grief — and these are all normal reactions in such a case — it may also be found to bring some relief (from worried uncertainty), some resolve (making sure the target of your remedial efforts), some perspective (on the relative and absolute values of life), and some focus (on what is *present* and *real* and *truly important*).

Disillusionment is usually considered a negative experience. But if its alternative is to continue to live in an illusion, perhaps it is not so negative after all. It removes the blinders. It clarifies reality.

It cannot give you courage to move forward, and it may not make clear your next step, but it can surely show you where you *cannot* or *must not* step. Eliminating what could not work, can help you make better choices.

Check Your Attitude

Thomas Edison did not invent the light bulb on his first effort. Of his many experimental failures he said, "I have learned a thousand ways *not* to make an electric light."

Is the glass half empty or half full? This question raises a subject that is connected to, but quite different than the water in the glass. That water may quench your thirst. But the question is concerned not with what *is*, but with what may come next.

If your answer is "half empty" it means the glass will soon be drained and there will be no more water. If your answer is "half full" it suggests that there is room for more, and more is on the way.

From this you may see that your condition — whatever is the present condition of things in your experience (socially, personally, emotionally, physically, spiritually) — is only the present, and does not by its nature predict what is to be. Four ounces of water in an eight ounce glass could be on its way to empty or on its way to overflowing. In life, sometimes things go down and sometimes things go up.

When Job's wife, in the face of their grief and his agony advised him to "Curse God and die," he replied, "*You talk like a foolish woman. Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?*" (Job 2:10; NLT)

Paul instructed us, "*Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*" (1 Thessalonians 5:18; NLT) In *all* circumstances.

No matter what the immediate situation may be, there is always room for faith. And since Jesus is alive and God is on His throne, there is always reason for faith.

"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24; NKJV)

For the rest of our time, let's look to the positive side, where confirmation may turn what, a moment ago, was imaginary and speculative into something true and real.

Thunk!

Imagine a group of treasure hunters, who have followed the blurred markings on a tattered napkin through the jungles of South America. Torrential rainfall nearly obliterated their map one day; the next day, escalating heat threatened them with exhaustion. At last, they arrived at the beach shown on the map, just east of the two coconut palms. They paced off the necessary steps and began to dig. Hours passed, as the hole deepened and the sand pile grew, but there was no sign of a treasure. Uncertain of their whereabouts, unsure of what they expected to find, their minds began to play tricks on them. Memories of their journey to this point became confused and they argued about whether they had turned right or left at the big boulder. Tempers were growing thin, and voices were growing louder, when one of the shovels made a "thunk"! All eyes were immediately focused on the location of that sound. Bodies that had been too weary to shovel anymore, leaped to the edge of the hole. Arguments suddenly ceased, for that dull sound had made them a team again, with only one purpose. "Thunk!" was all the confirmation they needed to regain emotional and physical energy and to press ahead.

That's the power of confirmation. Confirmation can arouse passion, inspire faith, increase strength, unite opposing parties, direct energies, and lead to great achievements.

Divine Confirmation

God always confirmed the covenants He made with people with both an oath and an act (such as Noah's rainbow; Abraham's miracle son, Isaac; Moses' stone tablets of commandments; Jesus' resurrection). On these two — the oath and the act — they could hang their faith and keep their end of the agreement.

In the Roman Catholic church, confirmation has a specific sacramental meaning. As the culmination of an academic and prayerful pursuit to draw closer to Christ, the priest will lay his hands on an individual and by prayer and blessing "confirm" them with the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the ritual equivalent of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which Jesus gives to all who ask Him in faith. It confirms our relationship with Him and His presence in our lives.

But I am not speaking today of a ritual, but of an experience. Nor am I speaking of a one-time experience, but of a repeated element of our walk with Christ.

Decision-making

Receiving confirmation makes all the difference when you need guidance. Confirmation breaks the grip of indecision, so that a person or a group or a church can move forward.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5; NIV)

This counsel is immediately followed by this caution: *"But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."* (James 1:6-8: NIV)

Many Christians respond to that warning by fearing and fighting every doubting thought that enters their minds, hoping those thoughts will not disqualify them from receiving what they need.

Find Confirmation

May I suggest that the answer does not lie in fending off doubting thoughts, but in finding confirmation. Nothing will silence your uncertainties like confirmation of your hopes. Seek confirmation!

Where should you look for it? I propose five sources:

- Providential confirmation
- Circumstantial confirmation
- Personal confirmation
- Subjective confirmation
- Biblical confirmation

Here's an example of providential confirmation. For some time I had contemplated the need to remodel our 60-year old buildings for more effective service, but wondered when we might do it. One day I realized that God had brought into our congregation two contractors, one painter, one plumber, one landscaper, one concrete worker, and one building inspector — and I thought, "It's time!"

Circumstantial confirmation is similar. It is the alignment or arrangement of circumstances that affirm and enable the activity we have hoped for. Add to the providential involvement of multiple construc-

tion workers a positive cash flow and the agreement of the City fathers, and you've got circumstantial confirmation, too.

Personal confirmation comes through people in your life. It may simply be in the course of conversation, or it may be in the form of trusted advice, or it may be a prophetic word given by the Spirit. When you hear the word, something in you rises to meet it, for it confirms something you had been considering.

Subjective confirmation is the witness of the Spirit in your own heart — perhaps in prayer or meditation, or while listening to a sermon or a word of prophecy. Your heart says, "Amen!"

Last, but not least, is Biblical confirmation. When the Spirit uses the very words of Scripture that you are reading to confirm your own thoughts or aspirations.

Of these five sources, which is most important? If you think I will say, "Biblical," you will be mistaken. Not because the Bible has less value, but because, even though it is the Word of God, it is subject to twisting and misapplication. Do not think in terms of *one* being more weighty than the rest, instead seek the confluence of *all five!*

A word of prophecy that lacks the witness of the Spirit in your own heart should be rejected as inapplicable to you. Circumstantial alignment that crosses a clear word of Scripture should be rejected as coincidental.

His Purpose

When you need to know God's calling, His purpose for your life, you *must* get confirmation. I'm not referring to the next thing He wants you to do, but to the *Big Thing* He wants you to do — how He wants to express and reveal Himself through your life, your primary function as a member of the Body of Christ.

This is not something you want to guess about. Nor is it something you want to leave in the hands of other people, no matter how well-meaning they may be. This is *your* life. No one else can hear God for you like you can. Just because it hasn't come automatically, doesn't mean it won't come. It just means you need to grow into it. You need to pursue it. You need to learn to listen.

Although I had been a pastor for over ten years already, it was during training to serve as a suicide-hotline counselor that I learned to listen actively and compassionately, and not try to "fix" things for people. We also must learn to listen actively to God's Word and not try to use it for our own purposes or advise Him of His business.

Our hopes for property renovation were all but dashed three years ago when the housing market took such a dive that our fund-raising effort yielded only one-tenth of what we had anticipated. Up to that point we had nothing but green lights. Then we were stopped in our tracks. We had to scrap our plans.

Was God shocked? Was He caught off-guard by the economic downturn? Did He have to scrap His plan for Trinity Community Church? No! Not for a moment!

His plan had never been to renovate a building; His plan was always to renovate a people! Pursuing the renovation of our building is His tool-of-the-moment.

Through praying together, planning together, waiting together, and now revising our plans and preparing to work together with volunteer crews, God has been refining us, shaping us, and fitting us to display His glory through us.

What good would a fresh facility be if the same old stuffy people used it? A fresh facility deserves a fresh people — humble, faithful, generous, committed to one another, united in the love of Jesus. That's what we're becoming; that's what God is working on.

With a new design that emphasizes relationship-building and interaction, with the help of skilled volunteer leadership, and the support of the City of San Rafael, we're just about ready to begin the reconstruction. But that transformation is not our goal (nor is it God's); it is only the next step. What we do with our modernized facility, how we honor God with it, and how we better represent the Good News of Christ to the people of Marin — that is the goal before us.

And God continues to confirm His will and purpose in this course. Confirmation upon confirmation upon confirmation... This is the hand of God. It does not mean there will never be a struggle, never be a question, never be a setback. But if we are learning how to listen — if *you* are learning how to listen and are seeking God's confirmation — He will surely see us through and bless us mightily.

On the Giving End

Confirmation is not only for receiving; it is also for *giving*. Someone else, who is looking for confirmation, may need *your* input.

You may give it in the form of a word of *encouragement*, when you have seen in them what they could not yet see or trust in themselves.

Or you may give it in the form of an expression of *comfort*, when you recognize in them a need greater than their strength.

Or you may offer some *lesson* from the Word of God or from your own experience that confirms what God has been speaking in their heart.

With a loving heart and a listening ear, look for the opportunity, and when the Spirit nudges you, reach out.

This is the power of confirmation. It plants a stake in the ground. It marks a clear path to follow. It provides a track record of your history, and gives assurance as you move forward.

May God confirm this word to your heart.