

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE VOICE OF GOD

The two most important elements in prayer are faith and persistence. If you are going to pray, somebody is going to be talking to you. How do you know when they are talking to you? The lesson today is How to Recognize the Voice of God. God is always talking. He is the great communicator. Ronald Reagan, in America, was known as the great communicator, but he is nothing like God. God has wanted to talk to people from the beginning. That is why He made man. He wanted man to be with Him, to fellowship with him and to know Him. If you just think logically, how in the world could you have any kind of in depth relationship with someone if they did not talk to you? That is one of the problems I see in marriages. One of the spouses just does not talk. It is so hard to have a relationship when one does not and the other wants to. You do not have to worry about that with God. He wants to talk to you, every day, all of the time. We have to learn how to recognize His voice.

(Look at these pictures. Here is a child praying to God. The next one is a woman listening to God. The last one is a man trying to hear God.) God says He talks to you. In John 10:27, God says "My sheep hear my voice and they follow Me, the voice of a stranger they will not follow." Have you ever heard anyone say, "That does not bear witness in my spirit." What are they talking about? We are spirit beings. We walk around in a body. We have a soul which is our emotions and our minds, but we are spirit beings. The spirit being will live forever, so will our soul. Our physical body will not but even then we get a new body. With your soul man, something either bears witness with that or not. By that I mean something just does not is not right about it.

If you belong to God, you can hear His voice. He says that, "My sheep hear My voice, they follow Me." If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, it is so much more than just believing in God. That was Jesus talking and He said "They hear My voice." You want to hear Jesus talking to you. You want to know what God's voice sounds like. If you have never asked Jesus into your life in this way, just bow your head right now and say, "Jesus, I accept You and I receive You as my Lord and my Savior. Forgive me of all my sins. I want to be born again. I want that born again spirit so I can hear you. Amen." God says that it will bear witness with your spirit. You will know His voice. You do not have to worry if God will now talk to you. He wants an intimate relationship with you and intimacy involves talking and communication.

Does God really talk to people every day? Yes, He really does. How does He do that? He does it through the Bible. If you read your Bible every day, before you open it up, just say, "Lord please speak to me today." Then as you read the Bible, you read it until something leaps out at you. About 85-90% of the time, God speaks to you through His Word. The Bible is God speaking. Someone wrote down what God said to write down. The Bible is full of God speaking all of the time. Sometimes people do not want to hear His voice. They might think, "Go away, I do not want to hear what You want to say to me. I want to do what I want to do." I see that a lot with women marrying the wrong man. They know they should not marry that person but they say, "Go away God. I have to have him. I can't live without him." They get him and then they cannot live with him. Even if you are in rebellion, God will still try to talk to you. Think about the apostle Paul. He was in total rebellion to Jesus and yet he could still hear God talk to him. God will speak to you. You just want to be open to it.

Isaiah 1:18 says, "Come, let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow." God says, "Let's talk about your rebellion, let's talk about your sins. Let's reason." The word reason is the key word in that passage. That means common sense, wisdom, enlightenment, understanding. We are to reason together, to talk about it. What gets in the way of most people hearing God? Probably they have never even been taught that he talks to people today. Maybe they have never known anyone that God talked to. One of the major ways I learned how to hear God was I was around people that said "The Lord said this. The Lord told me this. The Lord told me that." I would wonder what they meant by that. When I asked them, they would say "You just have an impression inside of you. You have an inner knowing. It bears witness with your spirit. You hear something. You read the Bible and it leaps out at you." I began to learn how to do what they did. Sometimes people have a distorted image of God. Maybe they grew up with a harsh father or step-father, or a harsh mother or step-mother. Their concept of God was harshness. I think somehow, someway, I was taught that God is out to get you. I do not know how I learned that. It must have been taught to me before I really could think that well. I did think that way about God, though, and I was afraid of Him. Are you like that? You have to learn that God loves you. The first two years I walked with God I would pray, "Lord speak to me" and He would always say, "I love you my child." That went on for two years and I would think "Can't you ever say

anything else. Speak to me Lord.” “I love you My child,” was always the answer. It took years to get that so deep inside of me that I knew He loved me. Some people think that God is impersonal or distant. So much is based on what your parents were like, or maybe the church you attended. Maybe they think God is angry all of the time. Some think that God is unpredictable; one day He might love you and one day He might be mad at you. Others think that God has favorites; He loves other people but He does not love you. If you have been a big sinner, you might think, “He certainly wouldn’t love me. Look what I have done.” Still others have a fear of what God would say, “What if He tells me to do something that I do not want to do.” That was how I felt and it was a very strong feeling in me. God began to send a Bible verse in the Living Bible across my life over and over until I finally realized that it was God talking to me about the fear I have of God. The Scripture was 1 John 4:18 “Perfect love casts out fear. We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly. His perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what He might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what He might do to us and shows we are not fully convinced that He really loves us.” That was mean. I changed and you can change, too.

Another one is unbelief. You have never been around anyone who was a believer. No one in your family goes to church, no one you know is a believer, none of your friends are believers. Yet, there is something inside you that wants to believe. Fear of making a mistake is another. So what. We have all made mistakes. God will even show you how to wait for a confirmation. “Lord I think this is You talking to me and telling me to do this. Would You please confirm it somehow.” He will because He wants you to know His will and He wants you to walk in His will. What about low self-esteem? “I am not worthy.” None of us are worthy when it comes to the pure life of God and not when it comes to the great sacrifice Jesus made for us. None of us are worthy, so get over that. None of us are.

What does God’s voice sound like? What do you think it sounds like? Do you think it is booming? Elijah thought it was. He thought, “I am going to hear God.” He expected it to be in a hurricane but it was not there. In the wind, but it was not there. In a storm, but it was not there. Elijah was just like us. He thought it was going to be a big booming voice. Instead, it was quiet and gentle and soft. That is what it tells us in 1 Kings 19:12. In the New Testament, what did they think it was going to be like? James 3:17 says it is peaceful, calm, pure, full of wisdom. It does not ever contradict God’s Word. I met a lady in jail once and she said, “God told me to steal that purse. That is why I am in jail.” I told her “No! It says in His Word do not steal and God is not going to contradict Himself. He is not going to say in His Word ‘Do not steal’ and then tell you to steal.” God is full of wisdom and direction.

There is a business man listening to me right now absolutely befuddled with no idea what to do. He cannot figure it out and everyone that he has talked to has not given him the answer. Sir, the Lord wants to tell you today, “I am your answer. If you will come to Me and pray, I will tell you what to do. It will turn out better than you ever hoped.” There is no problem you are facing right now for which God does not have the answer. Moses heard what to do about going to pharaoh and what to say. Sometimes when God tells you to do something, there is a fear in you because you think “That is going to be scary to do that.” You have to have faith and trust and realize that even if God tells you something hard to do, He believes you can do it, or He would not have told you to do it. It is never mean or cruel and never demeaning. It is never, “Hey stupid, can’t you hear Me?” It will never be like that. That is not God speaking if you hear that. God never quits trying to help you. He never quits trying to get an answer to you. Over time, if you do not get it, the nudge will be there, “You need to do this. You need to do this.” It will feel like a thought. “I need to do this. I need to call this person. I need to make it right.” That is just the Holy Spirit, who is God, part of the Trinity, nudging you to do that until you actually do it.

What are some of the main ways God speaks to us? The Bible is called the Logos; that is the written Word of God. Another way God speaks to you is called the rhema Word of God. Rhema means spoken to you in your heart in some way. It can be in the Bible. You could just be reading Jesus walked on the water and somehow something has been going on in your life and that is like a rhema word. You will hear people say, “That was a rhema word to me. God was telling me something.” I have had that happen many times. God can also give you a rhema word through other sources. He can do it through circumstances, through open or closed doors. By just the way things turn out, you can know, “That was God showing me the way.” Sometimes it is through the wisdom of others. That happens to me a lot. I go to people for wisdom all of the time. Do you do that? None of us is smart enough to do it by ourselves. We cannot do it. Sometimes it is the people in authority over you. If you are a woman, sometimes it is your husband. For men, sometimes it is your wife and you need to listen to her.

The wisdom of others can be God speaking to you. My children are adults now. When I have been praying, "Lord I don't know what to do. What should I do, what should I say?" I can be telling that to the Lord, and then I call one of my children and ask "What do you think about this? What should I do?" I get advice that is so wise. It is the same way with my best friend, Sherry. She has the spiritual gift of the word of wisdom, which is different from regular wisdom. She told me the other day "I was in this business meeting with our corporation and out of mouth came this sentence. I thought 'I didn't know I thought that.'" She said, "Betty, I knew it was God, giving us the answer for this difficult thing in our corporation." It can come through sermons, songs, books. There is a feeling inside of you, the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, "This is God talking to me." Once morning I was having a quiet time really early, and I felt that the Lord told me to call a woman. He said, "Call her and tell her I love her." I thought, "I don't know her that well. Should I do that? Was that really God talking to me or is that just me making it up?" Finally, I got up my nerve and called her and she said, "Thank you so much for being obedient. I really needed to hear that." That was God talking to me because He wanted to talk to her through me.

Prophetic words is another way. You can get a prophetic word that is just right there where you are right now. Sometimes it is a prophetic word for where you are going. Either way, God uses prophetic words to confirm what He has already been saying to you. There are times when you get a prophetic word and you have not thought that, so you put it on the shelf like Mary did in Luke 2:19. Think about Hannah when the prophet said "You are going to have a son by next year." What about Abraham when God said, "You are going to have a son," but they had to wait about 25 years. Sometimes you get a word from God that is a word to keep you going until the thing happens because it is going to take a long time for it to happen. I have experienced that, too. You can always ask God for a confirmation. He does not resent it. You can even ask for a couple of confirmations.

If you are in doubt about whether it is God or you, make it accountable to someone that you trust who is wise and walks with God. Just go to them and say, "I need to run this by you and see if you think this could be God." You are not always going to know the instant you hear it that it is God. Sometimes you have to ponder it, like Mary did, in your heart. Sometimes you have to wait for something to happen that confirms it. One thing is certain though. It will never contradict God's Word. God will never say, "Divorce this guy. Divorce your husband and marry this man." God is not going to tell you to do that because He says, "I hate divorce." Sometimes God will speak to you through dreams and visions. Some people might say, "That is spooky. How would you know that was God?" God can make it so clear there is no doubt. Think about Joseph, the father of Jesus. He made three major decisions concerning Jesus, the Son of God, and it happened because of dreams. He moved so fast that he moved in the middle of the night because of one dream.

You get better in time with recognizing it. You just get to where you know how God speaks to you. The more time you spend with God and the more completely sold out you are to Him, the better you will hear His voice, and the freer He is able to talk to you. When you have a real strong desire for something, or a strong desire for the way you want something to turn out, it gets hard to hear God's voice. It could be your voice telling you, "It is okay." That is when you need someone to run it by that you trust that is not going to be swayed by you or your emotions and desires. They are going to just make a valid judgment in your life.

When you are learning how to walk with God and hear God's voice in the area of praying for things, you will have some uncertainty and it takes faith. It always takes faith. You will miss it sometimes, no matter how hard you try. You are just going to miss it. You are not perfect and you are just learning, and God does not get mad. Look at his disciples. How many times was Jesus talking to them and they did not get it? You may not hear it the way your friends do. It may come when you least expect it. That is what I was talking to you about in the last lesson, about praying everywhere. Do not just have a corner or room where you pray. Learn to pray in the shower, when you are cooking a meal, driving, at a red light or listening to music. Learn to pray when anything prompts you to pray. God wants to talk to you in times like that. Sometimes in your prayer time you are very quiet. You do not feel the need to say anything. You just feel a desire to be quiet before the Lord. That is good, too. Sometimes in that stillness, that still, quiet voice speaks to you. When you are learning how to do this, write down the times that you know God has spoken to you. It will help you see for yourself how He is speaking to you. You will be able to see it.

There is a pastor named Jack Deere who has written books on hearing God's voice and teaching people about it. I learned so much from listening to him talk. He said that God makes Himself available to people who make themselves available to Him and are willing to do what God says. You have to be willing. When you pray about something, you have to be willing that when you hear the answer from God that you do it. I think Moses was

the greatest man, in terms of revelation, in the Bible. He heard how to lead the people out, how to design the temple. He heard so many things from God that were direct revelation, things that no one had ever heard before, but Moses heard it. Was there any character quality in Moses' prayer life in the time he spent alone with the Lord that you and I could have that would make a big difference. He was very humble. The Bible says Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth. It also says he was a friend of God. Humility plays a really big part in your prayer life in talking to God and getting answers. In fact, when you walk in humility, you carry the presence of God with you. When you are prideful, hard, harsh or critical, you cannot carry the presence of God with you because it grieves the Holy Spirit. Am I saying you lose your salvation, that you have to be saved all over again? No, I am not talking about that. I am talking about intimacy and relationship with God. In the book of Psalms it says, "He is intimate with the humble and He resists the proud." They do not hear God's voice. I heard someone say that God said, "I was born in a stable and I don't mind visiting people who live in stables." So you need to seek humility.

Can God speak audibly? Yes He can, I have heard Him. It was a long time ago but I do not doubt for a minute I heard Him. It was outside my head and the hairs in my ear tickled. God had to talk to me that strong because I did not want to live where I was living. I wanted to go back to where I had first found this wonderful, spirit-filled life with God. I was sitting in a chair crying out to the Lord, "I want to go back." He said, "It is not possible, Betty." I heard it, and it was outside my head. It was not inside my body. Think about when Jesus was baptized. They heard, "This is my beloved Son." Peter, James and John heard the audible voice of God when they were on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus.

I want to give you some less clear ways of hearing God than just reading it in the Bible. One is a picture in your mind. You can see a single picture, it could be a fleeting picture. I had one of those happen to me once. In the very beginning, a pastor said, "Can you remember when you got saved? Are you sure you were saved? Why don't you ask God to show you that you were saved?" So, I said, "Lord, I need to know that." I was sitting out in the back yard sunning because it was in the summer. Suddenly, in my head, it felt like a little movie camera. I saw the picture in my head of when I was 9 years old, standing at the front of the church and talking to the pastor. God can speak to you like that. He can do visions or dreams.

God wants to speak to you. Open up your heart. Let Him talk to you. Say, "God speak to me. I want to hear Your voice."

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. What does Scripture say about what God's voice sounds like?
2. What is the difference between logos and rhema?
3. How can you distinguish between God's voice and something else?
4. What are the main ways that God speaks to us?
5. What do we have to do in order to hear God's voice?

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