

Did You Hear That?

John 10: 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

This morning, I am reminded of an old story about a woman who woke her husband in the middle of the night, and in panic, asked him, “did you hear that.”

He wanted to roll over and go back to sleep, but it was undeniable that someone or something was moving around downstairs.

Naturally, the husband was curious, so he moved to the stairs to see what was going on when he surprised an intruder that was busy gathering the family’s personal belongings.

When the would be burglar realized that he had been discovered he started to run for the door when the owner yelled to the man, please don’t go, I want to introduce you to my wife, she has been listening for you for 40 years.

Anyone who seeks to hear God’s voice is likely to find themselves asking this question: “Which voice is God’s?”

Because when we listen for His voice, we often hear other voices speaking to us as well.

We can become frustrated very quickly.

Sometimes, our problem isn’t that we hear nothing, it’s that we hear too much, and all those voices can’t possibly be His.

So, how does a person who wants to obey God, sort through those voices, and select only that one which is really from Him?

How do we discern which is merely self-talk generated from somewhere in our subconscious, or even worse, a temptation or deception inserted into our thoughts by a spiritual enemy who is trying to lead us into trouble, and which voice truly belongs to the Holy Spirit?

There are some important steps we can take to prepare ourselves to listen that can help us eliminate much of this confusion.

Each step moves us toward a proper frame of heart and mind, and when we’re in that condition we are able to recognize His voice when we hear it.



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Today we will discuss four of these steps.

Each one is very simple, but just because they are easy to understand, it does not make them easy to do.

They require us to exercise self-discipline, and as we move from one step to the next, they require us to be very honest with ourselves and humble enough to correct those things that need correction.

And throughout this message we must remember that these are only guidelines meant to prepare us to recognize His voice.

None should be thought of as a substitute for His voice, in and of themselves.

In other words, the steps themselves can't provide the substance we seek.

That comes only when He speaks to us because our goal is to hear from Him in whatever way He chooses to communicate.

Yet if we take these steps seriously, and do them, we will discover that He is willing to counsel us far more often than we've realized.

We'll discover that our struggle to receive guidance in the past was not because God was silent, for He was talking to us all along.

Sometimes, our problem is that we don't know which voice was His.

God is free to speak to us anytime He wants to, and I would suppose that most of us have had startling moments when suddenly, in the most unexpected situations, He said something to us and there was no mistaking who it was.

Those are wonderful encounters.

They reveal His sovereignty in our lives and become some of our treasured memories.

But startling moments aren't the daily bread we live on.

We need to hear Him more often than that.

The example of Jesus during His earthly ministry tells us that regular communication with God is not only possible, it is essential if we are going to fulfill His call on our lives.

We are not being presumptuous to desire an ongoing conversation with Him.

But many of us don't have one, not because He has nothing to say to us but because we've not been taught how to prepare ourselves to listen.



The following guidelines are not merely helpful suggestions.

Each one represents a principle that is an essential precondition if a person is going to have more than a few “startling moments.”

I say this confidently, not based solely on my own experience, though I do practice these with some faithfulness and know their power, but because the Word of God proclaims them to us.

So, with each guideline we will include an example as best we can, of Scriptural support.

Let’s begin:

Set aside time to listen.

This first guideline may sound too familiar to some of us and our tendency might be to overlook it, but it is easily the most important of all.

In the contemporary church there has been far too little emphasis on prayerful listening.

If someone suggests that we set aside time and learn to listen for God’s voice the common reply is that we would love to do so but our schedule won’t allow it, I’m just too busy.

Matthew 14: 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,

If we’ve prayed about matters and know what He wants us to do, large amounts of time, money, and energy are saved by making the right decisions.

Whether we plan a regular schedule or not, hearing from God requires time.

And God isn’t the One who needs that time, it’s us.

How long it takes depends on the condition of our heart.

Sometimes we break through quickly and sometimes it takes hours to set aside the worries.

Evaluate my will.



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Before we ask for guidance we should ask ourselves this question, “Am I committed to obey whatever I hear Him say before I hear Him say it, or am I merely willing to consider His will as one of several possibilities?”

The answer to that question will reveal my attitude: whether I am truly submitted to Him or intending to control my own circumstances.

And it also reveals whether God will speak to me about that matter.

Luke 20: 1-8 One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up 2 and said to him, “Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority.”

3 He answered them, “I also will ask you a question. Now tell me,

4 was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?”

5 And they discussed it with one another, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why did you not believe him?’

6 But if we say, ‘From man,’ all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet.”

7 So they answered that they did not know where it came from.

8 And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

Luke 23: 9 So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer.

The painful fact is that there are times when God stops speaking to us because He knows we have no intention of obeying Him.

And our words won't fool Him.

We can say we're submitted, but if we're not He knows it.

So, if we want to hear from Him, we must search our motives and work through whatever fears or ambitions we find there, until we can honestly say, “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.”

Evaluate my spiritual condition.

Next, we must ask ourselves, “Am I in the Spirit or in the flesh?”

In other words, which one is controlling my mood right now, because both have a voice and given my present condition one of them is speaking to me louder than the other.



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Listen to Paul's explanation,

Romans 8: 5-6 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Recognizing the spiritual condition we're in is much easier to determine than we might think.

All we need to do is step back and honestly look at ourselves.

Are we fearful or angry, full of shame or sorrow?

If these feelings are dominating us at that moment, we are not in the right condition to hear the voice of God.

We are probably hearing voices that tell us to quit and run, or tell someone something unkind, or to stop resisting our wrong impulses and give in.

When we're in the wrong condition, those voices grow louder, and if we contemplate obeying them, we might feel a sense of relief from the pressure that's been building inside us.

And that relief can be mistaken for the "peace of God," because if I flee, I don't have to confront that person anymore, or if I fight, I don't have to restrain myself anymore.

But when we're in that emotional state the voices we're hearing are generally not from God.

So, what is the right condition of the heart that allows a person to hear God's voice?

It's the way we feel when we are close to God.

It's what happens to us when we worship into His presence or read His Word until our heart gets happy.

A profound change takes place: old, sour attitudes drop away and hope returns, and with it comes joy.

We feel confident that God will help us deal with whatever is in front of us.

Fear is replaced with faith.



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Our future suddenly looks entirely different.

And in this condition, we're able to recognize God's voice, primarily because we no longer reject it.

We are no longer afraid to walk the "high road" He asks us to walk.

Had we heard Him say such things in the wrong condition we would have rejected it because it felt overwhelming.

It seemed too hard, too frightening or that it would take too long.

But when we hear it with ears of faith, with God close to us, nothing seems impossible because we are no longer relying on ourselves to make it happen.

We are merely doing our part so that God can do His part.

When we are in a good spiritual condition it is very helpful to write down what we believe we hear Him say, because those words will remind us of the truth when at times, we are no longer in a good spiritual condition.

If fear or anger return, what we heard in the Spirit will sound very different from what we're hearing from the flesh.

Learning to cling to the one and ignore the other is a key step in our spiritual growth.

Submit what I hear to others I trust.

This is a missing step for many of us and may be the most challenging of all.

It requires us to identify certain people whom we consider to be trustworthy.

They are people who love us enough to tell us the truth, even when we don't want to hear it, and who won't use their influence to manipulate us to serve their own interests.

Such a friend might be an elder or a peer.

They might live nearby or far away, but one way or another we have seen in them a history of accurately hearing from God.

Their life is not in constant turmoil, even though there may be turmoil around them.

There is clear evidence of God's blessing on that which concerns them, and they are honest and pure.

Obviously, such people are not easy to find, and ideally, we need several such people in our lives.



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They are not there to take God's place in the guidance process.

Their role is not to tell us what God is saying, but to help us test what we believe we have heard for ourselves.

Particularly when it comes to important, life-altering matters we need to humbly submit to them what we believe we've heard, not necessarily with the words, "God told me this," but with the words, "I believe I heard God say this, what do you think?"

In effect, we need to give them permission to disagree with us, not dare them to disagree with us.

And if they do disagree, we need to take their thoughts to heart and seek God again asking Him either to confirm what we heard the first time or to correct us.

If indeed He confirms what we heard the first time, then we need to respectfully tell our friends what we have decided to do and why, and then take full responsibility for the choice we've made.

If it turns out to be correct, we can thank God for the courage He gave us.

If it turns out to be wrong, then we can openly acknowledge that and ask Him to show us where we made our mistake, keeping in mind that mistakes are part of the learning process for everyone.

Why must I hear His voice?

Here is a statement Paul made to the believers in Rome that explains why these steps we have just studied are so important for us to learn:

Romans 10: 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

In other words, there is a connection between hearing and believing.

In this verse Paul is talking about the gospel, but the connection between hearing and believing applies to anything God speaks to us.

When we hear His voice and know it's Him, faith arises in our heart.

Faith is easier than we think.

It's not something we have to generate within ourselves, it's something that ignites whenever we hear God's voice.

If I know I've heard from Him, an unshakable confidence arises in me, and it's simply this: "I know this is God's will because I know He spoke it to me."

It's really that simple.

That's why learning to recognize wrong voices and identifying God's voice is absolutely essential to walking in faith.

And no one else can do this for me.

I must hear His voice for myself to have the faith to do what He is asking me to do.

May the Lord teach each one of us to:

- **Set aside time to listen**
- **Evaluate my will**
- **Evaluate my spiritual condition**
- **Submit what I hear to others I trust**

May He teach us to know His voice!