

Listen Up

Study Guide #5 Confirming God's Voice

"I KNOW GOD IS SPEAKING TO ME *when He confirms things to me through His Word that are already happening around me. There have been many times that I've allowed anxious thoughts to consume me and cause me to be confused and downcast. I have found, though, when I've taken the time to open His Word for help that He will speak very specifically to that hurt or stress and cause it to flee. Lately, God has also used dear friends and the church community around me to speak into my life in a very powerful way and to confirm again what I felt he was saying. When I'm hearing the same theme from a few different sources around me, I know that I need to posture my heart to hear Him and not miss where He's leading. — Christy Nockels*

It always fascinates me to know that when Jesus got up from his time of prayer with the Father that he knew exactly what to do, where to go, or what to say. In fact, Jesus tells us in John 12:49,50 that Jesus only spoke what he heard the Father teach or tell him to say. Jesus is the prime example of one who confirmed God's voice. Our relationship with the Father, on the other hand, is not at the perfect level as was Jesus'.

That is why this study addresses the basic question: "How do I know if it is God speaking to me?" Certainly, it is directly linked with our level of intimacy with God and how well we continue to focus on Christ as the center and purpose of our lives.

You are invited to begin your time with God this week with prayer:

*I belong to you, O Lord,
but I long to give you more of myself.
When I hear and confirm for myself that I have heard your voice,
I want to go wherever you send me or do whatever you ask of me.
Only go with me, my Lord. I cannot make the journey alone.*

Focus Scripture

John 10:2-4, 10b

²The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.... ^{10b}I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Thoughts From The Text

- ✚ Who comes to whom in this text? (vs 2)
- ✚ According to this passage, what are the sheep doing before the shepherd speaks their names? (vs 3)
- ✚ How did the shepherd call the sheep? (vs 3)
- ✚ What was the sequence of events that take place in vs 4?
- ✚ Based on verses 2-4, what does confirming and knowing God's voice have to do with verse 10?

Group Talk

- ❖ According to the custom of Eastern shepherds, each sheep was given a name that was characteristic of that particular sheep. Think of the dwarf's names in Snow White. What characteristic about you would Jesus use to call you by name in a way that you would recognize it? Why that name?
- ❖ Share with others a time when you know you heard God? How was this confirmed to you?
- ❖ Do you think there is a connection between the idea of listening to God's voice and having life to the full? Explain.
- ❖ How do you think the sheep got to know the voice of the shepherd? How might that connect with our knowing the voice of God?
- ❖ Is there are an event, circumstance, decision, or impression on your heart that might be Christ attempting to call you by name to lead you out to follow him?

The Practice of Confirming God's Voice

"I know the Lord is speaking to me when He impresses something on my Spirit internally and confirms it through a person or circumstance externally."

—Tony Evans

It has been my experiences that there are times you simply know that you know that you have heard from God. You might hear someone say, "God told them..." What is meant by this statement is not that God spoke audibly to them, though we cannot rule that possibility out, but rather that God had placed a strong impression or burden before them.

We must also bear in mind that when it comes to confirming God's directives, the depth of one's relationship with God plays a key part in this assurance. For example, a person can have such a rich and growing relationship with God that he or she instinctly knows what decision or direction will be pleasing to him and what is in accord with his will.

But outside such occasions, God's word and the experience of others teach us that there are practical steps to confirming for yourself that the impressions you are feeling are from God.

Consider the following aids:

1. Does the impression challenge your faith to trust Him more fully?

If an impression leads you to stretch your faith, you can confirm it as God's voice. When God gives us an impression, it will in most cases require us to act upon that interaction with obedience. That in and of itself is an act of faith. To believe that you have heard God and to act on that belief is shows your trust for God to bring to fruition what he desires in you and through you.

📖 *"...but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith." Hebrews 4:2*

Faith in God and his Word is a necessary component to hearing and knowing for certain you have heard from God. But faith is not only belief or possession, it is active. When we obey, we move from our agenda to his, and his agenda is what brings life to the fullest.

2. Is the impression free of an internal argument?

E. Stanley Jones, missionary to India during the first decades of the last century, counsels that one way you can determine if an impression is from God or is from your own desires, is an argument. When God speaks to you, there will be no internal argument. You will know what is required of you. This is God's Spirit witnessing to your spirit. From that point, your choice will be to do it or not do it.

Argument brings turmoil, but God's voice bears peace. Paul states:

📖 *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Php 4:6-7*

Note that peace is not just given, but it also acts to guard your heart and mind. This element alone gives the assurance that God has spoken clearly and that you are safe to act on the impression you are discerning.

3. Does the impression line up with the wise counsel in my life?

When you need to confirm the directions the Lord has given you, seek counsel from people in your life who are wise in the ways of God. This is why being active among a community of believers is so important. First you have the tradition of your church community. If God has placed you in a Bible-based congregation that has a history and a tradition of walking by faith, then most likely the practical teachings of that faith community will help you confirm what the Lord said to you.

📖 *“And since we’re all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.” Romans 12:5(NLT)*

📖 *The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” 1 Corinthians 12:21*

📖 *Fools think they are doing right, but the wise listen to advice. Proverbs 12:15 (NCV)*

Have you taken your impression(s) and shared it with another trusted person to talk and to pray with you over?

4. Is this impression persistent?

God wants us to hear Him. If you aren’t sure that you have heard God correctly, God will send you the message again. This may come in different ways, leaving no doubt that it is not some coincidence of events.

📖 *“From the time I brought your forefathers up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, “Obey me.” Jeremiah 11:7*

Again and again equals persistence. Does it seem like your impression keeps popping up? Are you seeing signs of God urging you to heed what He has told you? Persistency is a clue that an impression is from God.

5. Are there circumstances that go beyond coincidence?

There is an old spiritual adage that says where God guides, God provides. However, the thing about God providing usually means that we have to take the first step of faith. One thing that helps us see this truth is to see how faithful God has been in our own past to provide for us.

📖 *“The Lord your God has blessed everything you have done; he has protected you while you traveled through this great desert. The Lord your God has been with you for the past forty years, and you have had everything you needed.” Deuteronomy 2:7*

Your impression may be accompanied by unforeseen events or circumstances that become evidence for you to do what the Lord has told or leading you to do. And in most cases, this will be a test of your faith. When you act on that confirmation, you will see further doors opening, allowing you to access resources, giving you opportunity to accomplish God's will. Provision is a clue that an impression is from God.

Here is an amazing promise to claim: *"Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'"* Isaiah 30:21
Unexpected evidences are given to confirm that what we are seeing or experiencing are not coincidences, but divinely placed for us to follow the Shepherd.

6. Does the impression conclude with peace?

Consider the role of Peace. God is not about confusion. Remember that He wants you to know His will, so there will be a sense of peace concerning what God has spoken to you about. Knowing that the disciples would be facing life-changing decisions and challenges, Jesus stated:

📖 *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* John 14:27

📖 *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* Php 4:6-7

There are times when God very well may be leading us in directions that we do not want to go, such as extending forgiveness to someone, moving out of our comfort zone, or acting in an area of faith we have never acted on before. But even there, God can confirm his voice if we ask him to give us his peace.

Personal Reflection

Read the following passage and complete the following:

📖 Isaiah 55:8-11

🔗 What does this tell you about how much God wants you to hear and confirm what he is speaking to you?

📖 John 10:10b *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*

🔗 Where might God be leading you to make a decision now or in the near future, or when you have asked God for direction in a matter?

🔗 In what ways will you look for external evidence to confirm God's voice and will for you?

