

Listen Up

Study Guide #3 Recognizing God's Voice

“I KNOW THE LORD IS SPEAKING TO ME *when I carefully consider the spirit, the quality, and the content of the voice I am hearing. The spirit of the voice of God is a spirit of gentleness. It is the Spirit of Jesus. When He speaks, He will not crush the needy or snuff our hope. The quality of His voice is one that draws and encourages rather than one that pushes and condemns. The content of His voice will be consistent with what He has already revealed in Scripture. That is why we must know Scripture. He will never contradict himself.”*
– Richard Foster, Author of *Celebration of Discipline*

A father and daughter talked intently about the daughter's decision to move in with her unsaved boyfriend. With both reasoning and counter-reasoning, his heart grew more impatient. She had apparently been woven into a web of rationalization to excuse her actions, some of which included Scripture references that were taken out of context. She was certain she had heard from God and that He was not only allowing but blessing her union with this young man. The father thought back to when his daughter accepted Christ and the spiritual fruit that decision had produced in her life. Knowing that the Holy Spirit was dwelling within her, he wondered how she could be so off base about God's voice.

The more acquainted we become in our relationship with God, the more clearly we will identify His voice in the suggested ways mentioned in Lesson 2. However, we still have to heed the right voice. The thing to keep in mind through this lesson is the understanding that God is not the only one speaking. The question to explore here is how can we hear and discern God more clearly against our enemy's voice, or even from the voices of our own egos?

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

*O Holy Father,
who desires to speak to us
more than we desire to hear,
grant us a heart that yearns to hear,
and the wisdom to discern the difference
in the many voices that ploy for our attention,
including the voice of our own inner desires and ego,
through the power of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Focus Scripture

John 10:1-15

1 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Thoughts From The Text

- ✚ Circle how is the enemy described in this passage? (vss 1,5,8,12,13)
- ✚ Underline what this passage tells you is the purpose and action of the enemy? (vss 10,12-13)
- ✚ There are three voices mentioned in this text. Obviously, the Shepherd is Christ and the thief and robber is our enemy. Can you find the third voice (vs 12,13). Who does this represent to you?
- ✚ Verse 3 states that he(Jesus) calls his by name. Beginning in verse 4 through 5, replace the personal pronouns that refer to sheep with your name. (i.e. "When he brought out Mike, he goes on ahead of him). Try this with the entire passage and read it out loud as an affirmation to you as to how much God wants you to hear him over the enemy.

Group Talk

- ❖ Looking back at verses 2-4, talk about the two things that the shepherd does for the sheep and the two things the sheep do in response?

Shepherd -

Sheep -

-

-

❖ How have you experienced this pattern? Give an example of how you have acted on or missed this situation.

❖ Respond to the following statement:

“THIS THIEF’S VOICE, INLIKE GOD’S VOICE, THREATENS AND INTMINDATES ON THE BASIS OF FEAR: *If you don’t do this now, you’ll be sorry.* IT MAY ORDER YOU OR TRY TO FORCE YOU TO DO THINGS. IT IS OFTEN URGENT AND PRESSING, MANIPULATIVE, AND/OR DEMEANING: *Do this now! If you wait, all will be lost!*” —Jan Johnson

- How accurate do you feel this statement is about the enemy driving and pushing sheep verses Jesus leading the sheep? Give an example.
- Is there a difference between the thief’s voice and our own selfish desires or ego?

Divine Moments

Sometimes we fool ourselves into believing that our will is going to be God’s will. Much of the time this comes out of a selfish desire, good as it might or might not be, to want something to happen so bad that we act before we ask, we leap before we listen. But if the voice we hear inside doesn’t come from God, then where does it come from?

- ✚ Read **Genesis 3:1-5** – Not only does the woman listen to the voice of the enemy, but she entered into dialogue with him because she believed it to be innocent and harmless. The enemy spoke in a way that placed the focus on what she did not have, and in addition that which God did not want her to have. She had the closest relationship to God as anyone, for at that time she was in perfect relationship with Him. Nevertheless, she chose to shut out God’s voice.
- ✚ Read **2 Samuel 11:1-27** – Verse one reveals David as being carefree and unprepared, at home taking it easy when he should be at war. Someone once coined a phrase that seems to apply here: *An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.* King David responded to the lust in his heart and committed adultery with Bathsheba. His decisions from there just went down hill. David simply shut out God’s voice and listened more to his inner voice.
- ✚ Read **1 Peter 5:8** – The warning in this passage comes first with an instruction – to be alert and self controlled. Why? Because, as we have seen above, there is nothing innocent or passive about the voice of the one who stands opposed to our heavenly Father.
- ✚ Read **Matthew 16:13-23** – Peter gives us an example that hearing from God can be an uncertain business. God is not the only source of thoughts and feelings coming into our hearts and heads. Thoughts or feelings (good or bad) can come from within ourselves, or they can also come from Satan. As seen in this text, Peter was at one moment speaking from God, and at the next moment speaking directly from the Devil.

John 10 makes it clear that the difficulty behind distinguishing between the voice of God and the voice of the enemy is the enemy tries to get us to think he is God by impersonating the voice of God

Learning Moments

- ❖ Consistent Traits of the Voice of God
 - God will never **contradict** His word.
 - God does not **confuse**, He **clarifies**.
 - God does not **condemn**, He **convicts**
 - God does not **drive**, He **leads**
 - God does not **bring bondage**, He **liberates**
 - God does not **tear down** people, He **builds them up**
 - God is not **impulsive**, He is **persistent**
 - God does not **push**, He **woos**

- ❖ Consistent Traits of the Voice of Satan
 - Satan will try to **twist** God's word.
 - Satan will try to **confuse** and **distract**
 - Satan will **accuse** and **condemn**.
 - Satan will try to **drive** you.
 - Satan will try to **enslave** you.
 - Satan will **insult** and **humiliate**
 - Satan will try to create **dissention**
 - Satan will try to **overwhelm**

Personal Application

Based on this lesson, there are three things to keep in mind.

FIRST, we must always test what we think God may be telling us by what He has *certainly* told us in His Word, the Bible. Again, God will *never* contradict His eternal Word.

Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. 1 John 4:1 NLT

SECOND, in moments when seeking guidance on a decision not directly addressed by God's Word, testing means to not act immediately until God has opened or closed a door, or given peace or unrest over the matter. In many cases, there will not be a direct biblical citation, but there will be a principal that God will bring to life. For example, Jill Briscoe tells of a time when wondering whether to go into some of the pubs in England to witness to the young people who were hanging out there. She worried about her reputation and what people might think of her going into such places. One day while reading Philippians 2, she read, "*He made himself of no reputation.*" Then she heard the still small voice say to her soul, "*What are you worrying about your reputation for?*" God quickened her spirit, affirmed His voice, and she went.

FINALLY, no one should feel less spiritual because they think God does not speak to them the way He seems to others. We are all wired differently, by design, as discussed in lesson 2. If you really want God to speak to you, and to speak to you the *best* way, get into God's Word, the Bible! We *know* He has spoken there!