

Week 6.

Today we're talking about listening to God. How do we know that God is speaking to us? And how do you know that it's actually God speaking? One of the confusing experiences that Christians try to navigate is the question, "is God telling me this?"

START

As a pastor, it's part of my normal life for people to come up and say, "God is telling me this _____." People often come up to me and say, "God is saying you should not do this." Another person will say, "God is telling me to do this." Then a third person will come up and say, "God is saying that we should do this." All three of those statements are completely different from each other.

Has God ever spoken to you? If so, how and what about?

How do we really know when God is speaking? How do we listen to God? How do we confirm what God is doing and how do we utilize that in our relationship with God?

Being able to listen to God and hear his voice is really important when you're starting your relationship with God. To have the fullest relationship with God, you need to learn to confirm what God is saying to you.

How do I know when God is speaking to me?

John 10:27 (NIV) says, "*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*"

Do you really know his voice?

If we are God's sheep and he is our shepherd, we should know when God is speaking to us. I know from my life there were times when I had no idea what God was saying.

I didn't know if it was God's voice or my own selfish thoughts. I was raised in a church wondering how do you hear God's voice. It's not an audible voice that narrates for me—that would be too easy. If God would narrate my life, it would be a lot harder for me to sin.

So, how do you know when God is speaking to you? How do we know when we can listen to his voice and hear it? What does that mean? What do you think it means?

Is God's voice spoken?

John 12:28 says, "Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

We know from multiple scriptures that an audible voice came out of heaven. It hasn't happened in my life, or probably your lives, or for the past couple thousand years, because God has worked differently since Jesus ascended into heaven.

He now works in the world through the Holy Spirit, which he left for us when Jesus ascended into heaven. It would be easier if we could hear God's voice—but we're human, and we're dumb sometimes. If God audibly spoke to all of us at once then none of us could understand what he was saying.

So how do we hear God?

Quiet?

We also know in Scripture God speaks in a quiet voice. 1 Kings 19:11-13 (NIV) says, "The Lord said, *"Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."* Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper." When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

All of these are really loud things. Have ever been in an earthquake? I was in an earthquake once in Youngstown, Ohio, thanks to oil fracking. The whole town shook. We thought our house was going to collapse. Up until that point, I had no idea what an earthquake was like until I stood over my kitchen sink, and everything started moving.

I thought I was going to die.

It was so loud. All my neighbors ran out into the street because they'd never experienced an earthquake before. But God wasn't in my earthquake.

And he wasn't in Elijah's either. He wasn't in the ferocious all-consuming fire. And he wasn't in the loud wind. Instead of speaking through those loud mediums, God spoke in a still, small voice.

God speaks to you and I in that way.

But how do I know that it's God's voice?

God speaks to us through **reading**.

When we read God's word, he can speak to us, because of the Holy Spirit. When we previously talked about the Trinity, we talked about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in us and helps us to understand what God is saying.

1 Samuel 3:21 (NIV) says, “*The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his Word.*”

God’s Word reveals to us what God is saying to us. Because we have **2-way communication**. We talked about this in the prayer lesson.

You’re supposed to talk to God, but you’re also supposed to listen to God. And sometimes that is the hardest thing. Psalm 27:14 (NIV) says, “*Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.*”

We’re supposed to wait.

I love how the verse says wait twice.

Do you feel like you’ve been waiting forever to hear God speak? What have you been waiting to hear? An answer? Direction?

We have to wait on God’s timing, but sometimes we miss God’s timing. When we wait, we become frustrated and often in our impatience, we do our own thing.

How do I confirm what God is telling me?

I’m going to give you ten steps to help you decipher God’s voice.

1. Does it agree with Scripture?

God will never tell you something that doesn’t agree with his Word. If he does, you misheard him. Or someone told you something, and you shouldn’t have listened to them.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV) says, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*”

If what God is telling you does not agree with Scripture, it is not God telling you. God’s Word is God’s Word.

If you’re trying to make a decision about a relationship—I’ll be honest, I see this a lot in teenagers. Christian teens will often try to do “missionary dating”. Christians teens missionary date someone who is unsaved and then try to save their soul.

That is against Scripture. We should be equally yoked. You should find someone who loves the Lord first before giving them your heart. We can be missionaries, but not through dating.

People will often say to me. “I know this goes against what the Bible says, but I’m going to do it anyway.” That’s essentially saying, “I don’t care what God says.”

I’ve had people say that to me. “I love the Lord, but I love this person too. I’m going to help them get saved, and then I’m going to marry them.” But more often than not, that’s not what happens.

Make sure that your lifestyle *and* what you feel like God is telling you lines up with his Word.

2. Do spiritually mature counselors agree?

Your spiritual counselors must be spiritually mature. They must already have an established relationship with Christ. They shouldn’t be a random person you met on the street.

Proverbs 11:14 (ESV) says, “*Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.*”

If you say, “God is telling me that I should sell everything and move to another country.”

There should be people who God put in your life to confirm that. If people say, “No, I don’t think that’s you. You sound crazy.” Then you might be crazy.

When it comes down to it, there are people who are called to sell everything and move to a different country. I have friends who’ve sold everything and moved overseas. That’s a plausible thing that God could be saying to you. But, he may not be telling it to *you* unless people in your life are confirming it. God’s powerful enough to put people in your life to give you counsel, support your decision, and pray over it with you.

An important part of this step is, you have to wait. Your mentors will need to pray and seek God.

When I say mentors—they’re not friends. Mentors are God-honoring Christians who have committed to help you on your spiritual journey. They are not a Facebook acquaintance or someone who follows you on Instagram. These are people who you have a relationship with, who are actual Godly mentors.

Ephesians 3:10 (ESV) says, “*so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*”

These people are also part of your church. Or *the* church. And they help bring forth the manifold wisdom of God in your life and assist you with figuring out what God is saying to you. When God is speaking to you, he’s going to put people in your life to help you know his voice.

Who are your spiritual counselors/mentors?

3. Does it make you more like Christ?

If God is telling you something, does it make you more like Christ if you do it?

Romans 8:29 (ESV) says, *“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”*

When God asks you to do something, it should always end up making you more like Jesus?

If it's going to make you less like Jesus, it's not God telling you.

If you say, “I might have to do something a tad bit illegal to do what God is telling me to do.” Guess what? Not from God.

Don't pay for those bogus test results for your children's SATs. Don't pirate movies or music. Have integrity and character.

God's never going to ask you to do something outside of his character, because he's constantly pursuing us to make us more and more like Christ.

When people ask me, “I shouldn't be doing this, but I feel like God is telling me to do it anyway. What do you think I should do?” My answer is always, no.

4. Is it consistent with my personality and gifts?

I think this is a big one.

1 Peter 4:10 (ESV) says, *“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.”*

God has created you to be uniquely you. God knit you together in your mother's womb. He has a plan for your life. You're wonderfully made. He structured you to have gifts, talents, and abilities that are uniquely you.

If God is asking you to do something that doesn't seem like you're uniquely qualified to do, it might not be from him.

Now, there are certain exceptions. You're most likely not the exception.

Moses was not gifted to be a public speaker to go to the Pharaoh and speak on behalf of God. He was a terrible speaker. So much that God sent Aaron to speak for him. But God prepared for Moses' weakness and gave a solution to help him move forward.

Although we may not have the skill or personality for something God is calling us to do, God will provide a way.

You may be thinking, “I don't know if this fits me, and God has not provided an Aaron.” If you're not getting that, then God's not telling you. God will always provide the way for something you're called to do.

Paul, who used to be Saul and used to try to kill Christians, was an overseer of a powerful group of Jewish spies. He had this innate ability to work with teams. So, when God called him to start churches, Paul was skilled to build teams and establish churches.

God called Paul into a role he was qualified for, and he often will do the same for you.

5. Does it motivate you?

Romans 12:11 (ESV) says, *“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”*

Are you going to be fervent—passionate? If God’s telling you to start an organization, become a missionary, or to serve in children’s ministry, are you excited and passionate enough to accept his call? Do you want to do it? Does it cause an uncontrollable fire to rise up in your bones?

Read Jeremiah 20:9. Have you ever had that kind of feeling about anything? If so, what?

If you’re not that excited about God, you may not be hearing the voice of the Lord. Maybe you need to slow down to hear the voice of the Lord.

Because we need to get fervent and excited.

6. Will it stretch you?

Philippians 3:13-14 (ESV) says, *“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Athletics is used as a comparison to religion a lot in Scripture. Because you have to train yourself and push yourself to grow and mature in many of the same ways. You have to practice and strain. When you’re called by God, you’re going to be stretched to be more like Christ.

God is asking you to do something that should stretch you. It shouldn’t be something simple.

That’s the thing about tithing. Tithing is not easy for anyone unless you’re super rich. Taking 10% or more of what you gain and giving it back to the Lord is a stretch for most people. But we are still asked to give, and God promises in his Word to be faithful if we give cheerfully.

God calls us to tithe. Everything God calls us to should stretch and strain us to make us better believers, and more in the image of Christ.

7. Will it require faith?

When God is speaking to us and asking us to do something, we need to think will it require faith? Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of Christ.

Do you have to rely more on him for our successes?

As a pastor, I have to come up with 52+ sermons a year. That's a lot. For me, part of my process is having faith that I'm going to do what I'm called to do and let God take care of the rest.

God will often give us the words we need to speak. We have to rely on him and have faith. For most of the things I've been passionate about in life, I've been scared and ill-equipped, but my faith got me through it.

When my wife and I talk about going on a mission trip or tithing more, it's scary—because it takes faith.

Many churches have a faith budget. They say, "God will provide." Most often, God does. And it's exciting when God shows up and provides. And when you exercise faith in your life, God will show up in a powerful way.

8. Do you have a peace about it?

God is not a God of disorder. He's a God of peace. Chaos is from the enemy. If God is saying something to you, do you have peace about it? You don't have to agree, but you should be at peace in your heart and mind.

Read 1 Corinthians 14:33. Do you feel at peace in your life? Or are you in disorder? Why or why not?

You don't even have to like what God is asking you to do, but again, you have to feel at peace about it.

One of the things I often share is about losing my daughter. We didn't want to lose her. We didn't want for her to be stillborn. But we had peace about it. God gave us peace. God spoke to us and confirmed that her death was supposed to happen. And even though we wanted a different outcome—we had peace.

Philippians 4:7 (ESV) says, "*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*"

9. Does it require God's help?

Ephesians 3:20 (NIV) says, "*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*"

Testimonies aren't great if it's just, "Well, Cyle did this and this." What's great is to say, "I'm ill equipped, but look what God did in and through me." Our testimony should always be about what God is doing in and through us.

You need to have faith and to rely on God's power for the success of what he's calling to you. God will help you and he will never call you to a task and then abandon you. The Holy Spirit will guide you, help you, and encourage you.

10. Does it fulfill the Great Commission?

Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV) says, "*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

This is your job. It's all of our jobs. Every single Christian needs to go into the world, make disciples, baptize them, and teach them. It's a task for every single believer—no exceptions.

If what God is asking you goes against this job, God's not telling you to do it. We should always be trying to mentor people, love people, and bring people into a closer relationship with Christ. What God is telling you should be confirmed in your Great Commission role in some way.

Ten Things:

I don't always need all ten of these steps to confirm what God is saying to me. But what I should do is ask myself these ten questions and start checking off boxes. If I have two out of ten, it's not very likely God is saying something to me. Six out of ten or seven out of ten, I should keep praying. If I get all ten, it's very likely. This process can help you hear and respond to the voice of God in your everyday life.

This isn't a biblical litmus test. Get a C- or better and pass. That's not the goal.

The goal is to make better decisions in your life based on what God is telling you. This process isn't going to help you pick out what flavor of coffee you want to drink at Starbucks, it's going to help you figure out the big things in your life that God is speaking to you.

Like, should I leave my job? Or, should I marry this woman? Questions that are important.

I think you can start anywhere on the list. There's not a specific order, but I will say, the Scripture one is a biggie. I know God will never go against scripture.

Christians often say, "God told me this." Just because you think something doesn't mean God is telling you. I'm very careful when I say that God is telling me something. I've been in church my whole life, and that's always bothered me. It's like basically saying, "I'm just going to use God to get my way."

I don't think God cares about the color of the carpet, or the walls, or the temperature.

What I know he cares about is more people coming into relationship with him. That's what he's calling us to do. I really try to guard myself to prevent myself from saying those words, and I encourage you to guard your words carefully also.

Take those ten steps. Make a card and put it up somewhere. Ask yourself each of the questions. Is Scripture aligned with this? Do I have peace about this? Does this make me excited? Do the counselors I have in my life agree?

And, if you don't have spiritually mature counselors, find one. You need to have mentors pour into you. They're going to give you advice based on God's Word because they love you. Not because they're trying to coerce you. It's how Christians help each other hear God, because God *does* speak to us.

God has spoken to my wife and I in many different ways throughout the years. Sometimes through people, and sometimes making his Spirit known through his Word.

We've always taken a process of confirmation. Is God saying this to me or do I want something and am I using God as my crutch?

What does this mean for you?

- It means that God wants to speak to you. He's your shepherd, and he wants you to know and hear his voice.
- You need to be in relationship with others to decipher what God is saying to you.
- If you don't know if you've heard God speak to you about anything, maybe it's time to get away from society and listen. Because when God speaks to you, and you know it's him, it's transformative.

Life is easier when you know what God is saying. It doesn't mean that you don't have problems. But there's joy in following the direction that God has for you. Because you know you're not alone.

Are you ready to **start** listening to God, maybe for the first time?