

To Hear, Listen and Follow the Voice of God

*“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.
And I give them eternal life and they shall never perish... (John 10:27-28)”*

I. Introduction – To Hear, Listen and Follow (Obey) the Voice of God

Jesus speaking in John 10:27-28 makes a very clear statement about hearing the voice of God. Those who follow the Good Shepherd follow the voice of God. Faith in Christ is more than just participating in religious practices or learning about formulas to be successful. Living faith sets one upon the path of putting on the righteousness of Christ through a personal relationship with Him as one’s trust in Jesus and opens their heart to follow God’s voice daily.

John 10:27-28 catches us off guard as one asks themselves this question, “if they themselves or others can hear the voice of God?” Jesus gives a definitive answer to this question in John 10:27-28, “My sheep hear my voice” and “they follow me...I give them eternal life”. Some can hear but they never listen. Some can listen but they never obey. Followers of Jesus hear, listen and obey; this is the place where following the voice of God becomes a daily occurrence.

- A. Therefore, this teaching “following the voice of God” is for, all who believe that the Lord calls His flock, the body of Christ; to learn how to discern the voice of God over the loud voices of the world. He does this so that they can intimately journey with God into the gift of eternal life.
- B. What differences between God’s voice and the enemies voice can we discern?
 - 1. God’s voice: calms, comforts, convicts, encourages, brings clarity and slows us down.
 - 2. Enemy’s voice: obsesses, worries, condemns, discourages, brings confusion and rushes us.
 - 3. God’s voice is aimed at redeeming one’s time for loving God and others more.
 - 4. The enemy’s voice is aimed at telling us we are no good and will never change. Example:
 - a. conviction is meant to stop us and turn us towards God’s will.
 - b. condemnation is aimed to shame us and prevent us from loving God and others.
- C. King David wrote the well-known Psalm 23 to comfort and encourage the faithful to wait upon the Lord so that they will not miss the voice of God. Rather, that they would “hear, listen and follow” the voice of the Good Shepherd.

*“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;
For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23)”*

God’s highest priority for speaking to us is to communicate His love for us and to lead us in walking in His love.

His voice will interrupt our thoughts, words or actions so that we will follow the Good Shepherd.

This teaching is presented to help one develop their ability to hear, listen and follow the voice of God as they become sensitive to the many ways that God speaks to one’s soul. God’s children don’t acknowledge that God speaks into their lives because their understanding is limited to thinking God only speaks to them in an audible voice that is heard through their physical ears. God is supernatural!

II. The Importance of Developing an Ear to Hear

If all believers can hear the voice of God, why don't more Christians know how to identify when God is speaking into their life? Through God's Word, one must first let faith grow in their "heart and soul" to believe that God wants them to have the ability to clearly hear His voice. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)" God's Word teaches His children how to develop an ear to hear God and how to grow in faith. The following is how should we approach the Word of God:

A. Be captured by the enormity and beauty of God's creation as we read about it in Genesis and believe that God is still actively working today. He didn't just sit down after creating the world and does nothing in this world to lead His children. He still speaks and gives daily instructions to keep His flock following His voice just like He did with Adam before the fall of mankind.

1. God speaks light into creation's darkness;

"Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light...

God saw the light that it was good (Genesis 1:3-4)."

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

(John 1:1-4)"

2. Jesus emphasizes that the Father (Maker) continues to work daily to bring heaven to earth And to make His children into His image (Gen. 1:26).

"Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.

(John 5:17)"

B. God's voice leads one to better receive and respond to His activities daily as we:

1. Thank God for His gift of grace that forms and molds us into the image of Christ;

"Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6)"

2. Open one's heart and ear to receive His instructions and good gifts.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights (James 1:17)"

3. Listen to and obey God's voice to be vessels for God's ongoing work of reconciliation and redemption. Follow His Word and Spirit to be lead beyond our own knowledge and efforts.

"By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. (1 Cor. 15:10)"

C. Understand the importance of developing one's spiritual ear is mandatory to obey and follow the call to worship God in "Spirit and Truth" as Jesus speaks to us about all things!

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah (Christ) is coming". "When He comes, He will tell us all things. (John 4:23-25)"

D. Regularly position oneself (body, soul and spirit) close to where God is to hear Him.

"Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. (Luke 10:38-39)"

E. Know the difference between hearing and listening that leads to obeying God?

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matt. 11:15)”

1. Hearing is: easy, can be accidental, automatic function, passive, involuntary, effortless, physical perception of sound.
2. Listening is: hard; requires practice and discipline; being alert; active; a conscious effort, a focused effort; mental and spiritual behavior; capable of taking sound to an effectual response.

Surrendering oneself to God and focusing on following Jesus (Matt. 4:19) leads one to develop an ear for hearing, listening and obeying the Good Shepherd. It leads them into prayer and service for the glory of God. It leads them to deeper trust in the Holy Spirit’ presence who Jesus prayed for to help us and abide in us. *“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever. (John 14:16)”*

Jesus promised that His followers will know what to say and not to say especially in difficult situations. “Do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. (Matt. 10:19-20)” Therefore, the importance of developing an ear to hear God can’t be over emphasized.

III. Overcoming the Distractions Which Disrupt Hearing God

The world is full of distractions which we can compare to static on one’s communication line between their heart and God’s heart. It’s like the disruptive static sounds on the radio or TV that one needs to tune out in order to get a clear communication signal. This disruptive chatter is meant to redirect one’s attention away from God speaking into and through one’s life. Adding to the disruptive static problem is one’s natural inclination to drown out silence with noise.

Following Jesus, requires being attentive to His presence. The Good Shepherd desires His flock to hear His instructions as He guides them from one pasture to another. He doesn’t speak nonstop to His sheep but when He does, He wants them to listen. Even though at times the world’s issues shout at us, we can still overcome these distractions and be attentive to God’s presence. We have a supernaturally connection to God’s heart to hear His voice and receive His guidance.

- A. Examples of distractions that one should limit as it blocks their ability to follow the voice of God:
 1. being glued to social media programs from today’s culture;
 2. massive volumes of information about world events which captures one’s attention;
 3. panic and fear introduced through global events like epidemics, wars, tragedies, etc.;
 4. the busyness of life: chasing after wealth, over-scheduling one’s time and trying to find one’s identity in the world rather than in God’s eternal kingdom;
 5. wrong priorities like time consuming clubs, hobbies, sports and other time fillers rather than loving others in Jesus name;
 6. a hardened heart filled with world’s lusts, no agape love, no need for direction from God.
- B. Manifesting the fruit of the Spirit overcomes the ability of distractions to close one’s ears as it requires one to be sensitive to hearing God’s voice.
- C. Distractions can be properly managed as one: a) keeps a sense of urgency for sharing Christ; b) prioritizes the need for ongoing discipleship in one’s life and c) continues to partner with God to bring Heaven to earth through being Christ-like.

IV. Different Ways God Speaks to His People as We Call Upon Him to Lead Us

Throughout the Scripture, we observe God speaking to humanity in various ways as He echoes heaven to earth through His people of faith. He does this both as we journey with God in His creation and as we carry Him as He lives inside His children through grace by faith. Observing how God speaks to us both externally and internally brings forth the following general statements:

- 1) God is not limited by when He speaks to you;
- 2) God is not limited by where He speaks to you;
- 3) God is not limited by the way He speaks to you.

God absolutely desires to speak to us. As we believe this and begin to walk in the experience of having a daily personal relationship with the triune God we prepare ourselves to hear Him by:

- 1) Positioning ourselves to hear Him.
- 2) Posturing ourselves to hear Him.
- 3) Giving ourselves to partner with Him as He speaks to us.

The following are 10 different ways that God will speak to His people. Some of these ways overlap as following God's voice often requires knowing His Word and being open to His Spirit (John 4:23). Since God is not limited by the way He speaks to His people, this is NOT a complete list.

A. God speaking to us daily through His Logos and Rhema Word

1. Logos Word is the written Word (Truth) recorded in the Bible which teaches us about God's will and God's way. For example, God's moral law given to Moses in the 10 commandments never change when it comes to our behavior, even today under the covenant of Grace.
 - a. God spoke the Bible into existence through His prophets and Apostles. He now still speaks His Word directly to hearts as we read, study and follow His written Word. We follow the inner voice of God as His Logos molds our thoughts, words and deeds.
2. Rhema Word is the inspired and applicable Word of God which is received as if God is talking directly to your heart and mind. Through the Holy Spirit, God releases specific knowledge and provides guidance necessary to follow His Son Jesus immediately.
 - a. Each day God desires to impart to us specific information and immediate direction that helps in following the greatest commandments that Jesus gave us: to love God and others. As one desires to be an instrument of God's love, God's Rhema shared through the inner voice of God guides them in living for the glory of God.

The Word seen through the example of the life of Christ and the Apostles shows us what this looks like. *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)."*

B. God speaking to us daily through the Holy Spirit.

When God's children are born again (John 3:3) they begin to live anew (Romans 6:4) and to hear clearly the voice of God through the Spirit that now resides within them. *"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" The gift of the Holy Spirit enables and empowers God's children to follow God's voice through the following ongoing work of the Spirit:*

- 1) *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (John 14:26)"*
 - a) The Holy Spirit breathes upon the Word which has been planted in one's heart.
 - b) The Holy Spirit awakens one's conscience to walk in the righteousness of Christ.

- 2) Holy Spirit leads us on a journey of learning as we expect to hear God's voice and to be led by the Teacher, our God Shepherd who prepares us for every day and Christ' return.
 - a. "You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it. (1 John 2:20-21)"
 - b. The Holy Spirit seals God's promise of salvation in one's heart and keeps them seeking after walking with God in the "Truth and Love" of Christ (Eph. 1:13-14).

- 3) The Holy Spirit calls us away from what's perishing to live for the eternal Kingdom of Heaven. "Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matt. 4:17)" "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? (Mark 8:36)"

- 4) The Holy Spirit is poured upon and saturates hearts to reveal God's plan to His people. "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions. (Joel 2:28)"

Obeying the Holy Spirit transforms hearts to become love letters of Christ to "the least, the last and the lost (those feeling broken or unloved by God)". The Holy Spirit desires that His messengers would become the message! "You are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. (2 Cor. 3:3)"

AB. Combining These 2 (AB) Most Important Ways to Hear and Follow God's Voice

What truth are we acting upon as we follow God's Voice through His Word and Spirit? Worshippers of God worship Him in "Spirit and Truth". They value His presence above everything else.

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (Matt. 13:44)"

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matt. 13:45,46)"

The Holy Spirit breathes upon the written Word (Logos) in one's heart to share His Rema (living) Word with the followers of Christ. This common interaction between the Logos and Rema is the main source for the messages, the voice of God communicates to one's heart as they walk by faith.

What are 4 general guidelines for discerning if your heart is lying to you or telling you the truth?

1. Are you being directed towards walking by a faith that is expressing itself in love (Gal. 5:6, Matt. 22:37-40)

2. Are you being directed towards speaking truth through the Gospel of Grace over yourself or others? (Hosea 6:6, Eph. 4:15)

3. Are you being directed to express more of the fruit of the Spirit in your life or encouraging others to let the Spirit have more control? (Gal. 5:22-23) "Against such there is no law."

4. Are you leading a life like the pharisees in Jesus' day? What did they lack? (Matt. 23:24-29)
 - a. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"

b. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

c. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. (Psalm 51:10-11)”

Honoring and hosting God well through His Logos and Rema Word will always precede one’s ability to hear and follow the voice of God. The Lord will communicate to His people through various ways as will be reviewed. However, a person who isn’t learning how to hear God’s voice through His Word and Spirit is at tremendous risk of hearing the voice of other spirits, NOT the Holy Spirit!

“Beware of false prophets [voices presenting themselves as representing God], who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matt. 7:15-22)”

Following the voice of God is strongly dependent upon making it a number 1 priority in one’s life to hide the Word and Spirit of God in their heart. All who fell from grace or never knew God had other priorities.

All of the other ways that we will discuss now are like seeds sown on rocky soil, if those hearing the voice of God don’t process the message through God’s Word and Spirit. Many are telling stories about God talking to them on YouTube, etc. who present their messages with no biblical foundation. This is something that we NEVER want to do or listen to as we are called to testify about God’s Word becoming flesh. “And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” (Rev. 19:10)

C. God speaking to us through physical manifestations.

God from eternity past and eternity future has set His will upon creation. God’s speaking to us through physical manifestations is for humanity individually and for all His people together. Do you look for signs of God’s physical manifestations to speak to your heart? Why not?

Individual: *“Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass (Psalm 37:5).”*

ALL: *“Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him. (Matt. 2:1-2)”*

The following are recent personal examples:

1. I wrote a Facebook post on entering the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 18:3) and abiding in God's love for "God is love (1 John 4:7)" this week and later that day while I was walking with my wife in a park, the biggest lady bug I have ever seen landed on my arm and stayed for a while (sign of God's imminent love and favor). This week happens to be the first time I plan to teach this section on God speaking to us through physical manifestations.
2. Since I was a child, I have associated birds singing with the presence of God. Again, this week on multiple occasions the birds have been signing over me.
"Do not fear; Zion [heavenly city], let not your hands be weak. The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing. (Zeph. 3:16-17)"

Some examples of the ways God speaks to us through His creation:

1. It should be no surprise that there are times when God's creation testifies personally to our hearts as He speaks to us through His power and glory in the heavens. *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. (Psalm 19:1)"*

Many will seek the revelation of God's presence and glory through gazing at the night sky and regularly participating in outside activities which highlight the glory of God in creation. These activities including both gazing at the night sky and visiting magnificent natural structures while visiting: national parks, lakes and oceans or just observing the details of God's order in His creation. *"I have made the earth and created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded. (Isaiah 45:12)"*

If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:8-10)" [Selah – take this in...]

God's omnipresence is on display for all who care to see! Praise God! All glory to God! Have the scales of "being alone and unloved" fallen off your eyes yet?

2. God's activity affects the physical details of our life in His creation. *"You will also declare a thing, and it will be established for you; so light will shine on your ways. (Job 22:28)"*

There are physical confirmations given to us by God of His presence and power. He responds to our prayers and calls us to worship the Creator of heaven and earth. As we do this, we physically witness His creation speaking to us and confirming that we are His children and stewards of creation called to carry the righteousness of Christ and the Gospel into the world.

"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6-8)"

The story of Jonah documents many physical manifestations of God's control over creation as Jonah walked both in faith and in doubt (Jonah 1-4).

In the Gospels we observe that Jesus has total authority over creation through His miracles. We have been given authority and power in His name. Are we bold enough led by the Spirit to issues commands like Jesus did over creation? (Mark 4:39) This is a large step of faith one takes as they join with God's activity in creation and their role of being stewards.

3. There are stories in Scripture how God uses physical suffering and discomfort to communicate His presence to us and that He has something to say to us through Christ's suffering, our suffering or the suffering of others.

- a) The crucifixion of Christ speaks to many hearts about the need for our sins to be forgiven and our life to be redeemed (healed). *"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)"*
- b) Seeing others in physical pain and suffering moves many to acts of service and love. Some declare that God spoke to their heart as they witnessed the suffering of others leading to caring and praying for the needy. They are being led by the mercies of God. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)"*
- c) Even when physical pain comes unexpectedly upon our body God can be speaking to us about someone needing healing prayer for that specific area of their body where there is pain. As one believes that God can use their pain this way, they are quick to ask if anyone else is experiencing this same pain and pray for their healing. Both ours and the person who are prayed for can receive immediate relief.

There are other examples not mentioned in this list such as: a powerful conversion or healing experience leading one to open their eyes wider to immediately take in God's creation now (in bright colors) as one's perspective of eternal life and God's healing presence is spoken louder to their heart.

All these physical manifestations I would testify are there for us to know that we are NOT alone and that we are deeply loved by God! It's like the hand of God scoops us up into His loving lap.

D. God speaking to us as we pray.

God desires to speak to the "hearts, minds and souls" of His children as they go to Him in prayer and believe that prayer should be approached as a time of dialog (partnering in the Gospel) with Him.

1. God speaks to us as we believe that God hears us, helps us and joins us in our times of prayers and approach Him this way:
 - a. Invite Him through the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.
 - b. Slow down the rhythm of the prayer from just rattling off a list of needs to God, to speaking to an ever-present, loving Father who is there praying with you and through you.
 - c. Build your prayers to Abba (Lord Jesus) around these 2 verses:
"For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation... Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 149:4, 37:4)"
 - d. Believe that as God is leading the prayer, He's increases one's faith to trust in His love.
 - e. Commit and align one's heart with God's heart and sanctifying work as you pray.
 - f. Pause, reflect and be silent during prayer. Also, switching back and forth in and out of tongues to be drawn to a deeper time of prayer is productive.
 - g. Religious/liturgical openings are not necessary when praying with God. The highly repetitive use of saying the name of God or in the name of Jesus isn't necessary to draw God in. God desires more than us to dialog with and bless His children.
 - h. No need to rush to say amen after praying like we do at the table before eating. Hang on longer being silent in the Spirit for Him to deposit His answer or to lift up another petition.
 - i. Pray with the Lord's first petition in His prayer front and center, "His Kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven".

- j. Don't just walk away and forget about what you just prayed for. God can answer your prayer immediately or soon afterwards. Many pray and never think that what happens next is a connected/direct response to their prayer. What happens next, whether it's an event or insight, can be connected to what we were just praying about.

2. Find a place where you like to go to often for prayer and to hear from God each day. Make this a regular part of your fellowship time with God that goes beyond church on Sunday.

Some examples are:

- a. to sit in a favorite chair at your home;
- b. to retreat to a favorite quiet place in a hidden room or outside spot;
- c. to take regular walks in the neighborhood or a walking park, etc.;
- d. to drive in your car with the radio off;
- e. to play worship music to God before you pray...etc.

Since our prayers should sound more like conversations with God, we should seek solitude.

3. Remember, who you are as you come to the Father through His Son in prayer. We are God's children who approach His Throne of Grace through King Jesus. According to the Gospels:

- a. Jesus is Savior of the World and the Lord of Life;
- b. Jesus is our Bridegroom, King and Judge.
 1. As our bridegroom we know we pray to the lover of our eternal souls.
 2. As our King we know that as we adopted into His royal family and our lives matter deeply to King Jesus and the furtherance of His Kingdom.
 3. As our Judge we know that we don't have to seek vengeance because God's final act on earth before the return of Christ will bring total justice to bear on earth and ALL lives across all time.

Prayer is a very important time in one's life to hear in their heart what God desires to speak to us through the inner voice of the Holy Spirit. Here is the heart of God shared with Moses who commanded Aaron to speak on behalf of the Father to His royal priesthood as follows:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel.'"

'The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.'

So, they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them. (Numbers 6:22-27)"

E. God speaking to us through Other People.

"Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety. (Proverbs 11:14)"

We have spoken about hearing from God in His Word and Spirit, through prayer and physical manifestations. Periodically, God will use select people to be messengers in one's life as we seek to hear God's counsel for a personal issue or service opportunity. Two things that have to be emphasized here: 1) We don't seek people first for counsel and 2) it's important to choose carefully those we listen to. Are the other people faithful and do they believe God speaks to us through others? Do they choose their words carefully or speak only to impress others?

It's not a sin to have friends that aren't Christian, however, it's important to consider the source for the advice or information we receive from them before we act upon it. Here are two verses that give us discernment about the character of the people we are speaking to:

The worldly person's thoughts are captured by the world. *"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? (Mark 8:36)"*

There are wolves in sheep's clothing. *"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things. (Phil. 3:18-19)"*

The Best Group of Advisors

Seek after regular fellowship with kingdom-minded people; seek friends in Christ who list kingdom-minded priorities as the highest priorities for their life. These people live for the following:

1. These are living for the Kingdom of Heaven coming to earth (John 12:32) and can be used by God to be a confirming voice to us about difficult situations and decisions that will impact our witness. Their regularly time in God's Word, desire to walk in His Spirit and prayer elevates their words above those only living for themselves. Mostly we look for a confirming voice NOT a leading voice. Look for those are passive listeners who listen carefully and provide feedback.
2. They know, as God speaks to His children, many people that pray also pray that God will confirm through others something they believe they have heard from God.
3. What are some of the group settings where God can speak to us through others? 1. Worship, Bible studies, sermons, Christian radio or simply fellowship with a Christian friend. These words can be spoken directly to us or indirectly. Have you heard a word spoken to another which was great godly counsel for yourself as well?

It is a healthy practice to have close friends in Christ who hear, listen and follow God's voice. Often. We meet these types of people during service events. They replace are common circle of family members or friends at work or even at the bar (heaven forbid) who want to give us their advice.

How to Approach Seeking the Counsel of Others

"Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days. (Proverbs 19:20)"

As one begins walking by faith, they stop making major decisions without listening for God's voice. They pray over Scripture, in the Spirit and with the desire to manifest an upright, expression of God's love. They desire to be protected from receiving and running with the wrong advice that might come to us through others. There are some golden rules for measuring the advice received from others such as this one in Scripture, *"Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10)."* The Apostle John extended this thought by writing *"that if we don't love others we don't know the God of love"* in 1st John 4:8. Advice to get vengeance doesn't sit well against Scripture.

Nonetheless, maturity in Christ leads one to not just go to church with others but to build Christ-centered relationships with others. These Christ-centered relationships are a place of many conversations where wisdom can be gained and where we can be there for one another in difficult times.

There are testimonies that many share how God strategically placed others in their lives at different times to speak wisdom into our lives which helped them with a difficult decision or action they made. God can even go as far as placing angels in people's lives to point them in the right direction. *"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. (Hebrews 13:2)"*

There are those moments where God certainly uses a nonbeliever to speak to us but this isn't one of God's usual ways to speak to us through others. I have an example of God speaking to me through a co-worker. I was commenting with an older co-worker who was a logistics manager and not attending church about some people being pagans. He said to me "that's not an appropriate way to think of others". He was right, I was being prideful. This is NOT what Jesus would do, He died for us all.

F. God speaks to us through Dreams and Visions

“Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning” says the Lord. So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm. (Joel 2:12-13)”

Everybody dreams. If you didn't enter REM (rapid eye-movement) sleep where people dream you would suffer brain and emotional damage. God uses dreams to lead some to Christ and to repent. God uses dreams to encourage us to keep going in the direction we are going as we follow Jesus. God uses dreams to warn us of trouble on the horizon. Since God speaks to us in dreams, we should learn how to interpret reoccurring or troublesome dreams at the least.

1. We can learn to discern if dreams are from God or from the flesh (God or pizza we ate).
2. We can learn from the Bible how to decipher, interpret dreams from God.
3. We can learn how to use prophetic dreams from the Bible to interpret our dreams.
 - a. We can study what colors represent in the Bible;
 - b. We can study what symbols represent in the Bible;
 - c. We can learn how to identify the Holy Spirit in the dream;
 - d. We can learn how to identify evil (harmful entities) in the dream;
 - e. We can learn how to tie dreams to loving God, loving others (service), caring for self.

“And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. (Joel 2:28)”

Like dreams there are visions depicted in both the Old and New Testament. What do we know about visions from Scripture?

1. While God can give us visions for ministry clearly identified through answering a need, God can give us supernatural visions to speak to us about His desire to do greater things through us. These visions communicate His calling to us with symbolism and pictures.

“The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ (Acts 10:9-13)”

Peter was called through this vision to enter into gentile houses and eat with them because God desired that the Gospel could be fed to them through the Apostles dining with them. Peter made a quick interpretation of this vision as he was invited to Cornelius house almost immediately after having the vision.

2. What do we know about visions today?
 - a. Some as they have fasted and/or prayed are moved by the Holy Spirit to receive a vision.
 - b. Some operate out of the office of prophet and receive visions regularly to share through prophetic messages given to the body of Christ.
 - c. Some leaders have experienced a ministry changing vision which sets them upon a path of entering a season of experiencing the tremendous outpouring of God's favor and fruit.
 - d. Some leaders and individuals have been warned and saved from experiencing an early end of ministry or life due to a vision shared with them from another Christian.

G. God speaks to us through the Vocal Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all (1 Cor.12:4-7)” The vocal gifts are a subset of the Holy Spirit gifts purposed in the body of Christ for assisting them in sharing the Gospel. God speaks to humanity both through the inner voice of the Holy Spirit and the vocal gifts.

1. God speaks to us through the gift of Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues (1 Cor. 12:10).
“You, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20)”
 - a) The best way to be ready for the return of Christ and stirred up in one’s holy faith to be a light unto the world is through the operation of the gifts of tongues. God supernaturally speaks to one’s heart and mind as the gift of speaking in tongues is used regularly. This gift helps one to bypass carnal thoughts and emotions to receive God’s inspired messages from the throne of Heaven. Speaking in tongues impregnates heart and minds with God’s heavenly thoughts and strategies.
 - b) The interpretation of tongues happens both in a group setting and when alone praying in tongues. When speaking in tongues is allowed during a service, there are those who are gifted and ready to interpret the tongues released over the worshippers. God speaks to the congregation through the interpretation about direction and encouragement.
 - c) When one is praying while alone to God and running out of things to say they may start praying in tongues. The interpretation of tongues spoken while alone will sometimes release understanding to what has been spoken in tongues as one is able to hear the inner voice of God after using the gift of tongues. As individuals notice this gift being joined with their praying in tongues they could be led by the prompting of the Spirit to use this gift in church.
2. God speaks to us through the gift of the of Word of Wisdom (1 Cor. 12:8).
The word of wisdom is released to bless another with insight(s) dealing with their personal spiritual growth or ministry. This impartation related to God’s will is often released during teaching, preaching and prayer ministry. The person who operates in this gift knows that God wants to release the word via the Holy Spirit and it isn’t something prepared in advance. The person receiving the message through the Spirit believes that the wisdom spoken through this word is a God-sent word given to them which addresses a specific need they have. It’s a Spirit-to-Spirit gift that is received to grow the body of Christ. As a person believes that God speaks this way, they receive and apply these words for their sanctification.
3. God speaks to us through the gift of the Word of Knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8).
 - a) A word of knowledge often brings knowledge related to a past event or a season that is coming soon in one’s life. The gift can be used by evangelists to share knowledge about a person that no one, but that individual and God would know. This word opens the individual up to listen to the evangelist who is about to share the Gospel with them.
 - b) During healing ministry, the minister can be led before praying for healing to announce what ailments God wants to heal or pains He wants to remove. The word of knowledge released this way stirs up faith in the person being prayed for to receive healing.
4. God speaks to us through the gift of Prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1,3)

“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy...But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. (1 Cor. 14:1,3)”

a) Prophets in the Old Testament received visions that contained pictures or sounds while receiving these words. In the New Testament gift of prophesy, it is often triggered by:

seeing it in an image or picture;

smelling it through a pleasant or putrid aroma;

thinking it through a thought that just came into your mind;

saying it as the words flow out during prayer ministry or preaching;

reading it as you see a word displayed on a person or thing AND

feeling it as a physical sensation that relates to another person's suffering.

b) The gift of prophesy in the New Testament is different than Old Testament prophesy due to its special use in the body of Christ today. Rather than just being about foretelling, this gift of prophesy gives us the ability to share God's comforting, edifying and exhortation words from heaven to give voice to what the Good Shephard has to say to others. The purpose of this gift today is for children of God to be encouraged and empowered to shine the Light of Christ brightly which is why Paul writes to pursue love that you may prophesy.

The Lord has given us these special gifts of the Spirit when it comes to echoing heaven which unfortunately are under used by the body of Christ.

H. God speaks to us about bearing the Fruit of the Holy Spirit.

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law...”

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, kindness gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Gal. 5:16-18, 22-25)”

1. We should remember that the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit is something that God speaks to us about as we learn to surrender to His supernatural work within us.

Often, there needs to be a decision made when unforeseen challenges arise to let the fruit surpass our initial reaction to our inner emotions.

2. God will speak to us not only in quiet time but in the midst of the activity of the day about manifesting His fruit. Note that manifesting the fruit of the Spirit is more important than following the Law as the fruit equips and empowers one to overcome the challenges we face and to walk in love. *“For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love. (Gal. 5:5-6)”* Love is the first fruit of the Holy Spirit which leads to bearing other fruit.

3. When the Spirit convicts our carnal mind to stop following our wayward emotions, we can choose to come into agreement with the Spirit or succumb to the wayward emotions that quench the Spirit. These lapses are one way God can speak to us about walking in the Spirit's presence, His power and His desire to bear much fruit (both internal and external) through the Spirit within us (John 15:16).

4. Can you look at the list of the fruit above and think about times that you were being convicted by the Holy Spirit to surrender your emotions to God? Perhaps, there's a time when you heard the inner voice of God telling you to "be loving, joyful, patient..." to another.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!...Be anxious for nothing (Phil. 4:4-5)." Experiencing joy can require one to make a decision to be joyful even when situations are difficult. Why are these decisions so important? We already have the Spirit. Remember, the specific fruit we manifest can cause a chain reaction of other fruit being manifested. The fruit equips us to testify about the goodness of God.

"For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death [judgment], and to the other the aroma of life leading to life [salvation] (2 Cor. 2:15-16)."

I. God speaks to us as we live in community (Koinonia) with other Christians.

"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:41-42)"

No person in Christ is an island unto themselves. We were created for relationships and living together in community. The faith communities that one frequents can become an oasis to their soul as they hunger and thirst for God's righteousness. During times of Bible study, worship, prayer and service in community with other believers, often, the Lord will speak to hearts about one's faith, life, sonship and service (loving others).

Why did Jesus declare in John 8:32, "*And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*"? To be marked by His freedom from sin, eternal forgiveness (grace) is the spiritual gravity that keeps the spiritual feet of God's family grounded and able to move forward in faith together. He calls us into communities where we can learn best His many truths especially about being marked and equipped to tell others about Jesus and His Kingdom of Heaven (God's community) coming to earth.

God gives us Holy Spirit experiences as we meet together in worship and prayer. God responds to hearts in greater measures as we walk in community by the Spirit and abide in the gift of freedom from sin. "*Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

God's greatest light comes to us as we live by faith in community with His family and look towards the way God lives in holy fellowship, as the 3 persons of the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)"

J. God speaking to His children with an Audible Voice.

God is unchanging! *“Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)”* Therefore, some who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, have heard the audible the voice of God. Although many will testify that they heard the audible voice of God on this side of heaven, it’s not a regular occurrence. Nonetheless, it does occur in times like when there’s a crisis. While there are many other ways that God speaks to His children today, He still speaks audibly. It’s not crazy for somebody to claim that they’ve heard the audible voice of God. Here are some familiar stories from Scripture of servants of the Lord hearing God’s audible voice:

1. The young prophet Samuel learns to recognize the voice of the Lord in 1 Samuel 3:7-9.

“Then the Lord called yet again, “Samuel!” So Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” He answered, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” (Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the word of the Lord yet revealed to him.) And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. So he arose and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you did call me.” Then Eli perceived that the Lord had called the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, ‘Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.’”

2. Saul while persecuting Christians encounters Jesus on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:3-6. *“As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”*

3. Moses who desired to see the face of God was spoken to by the Lord in Exodus 33:11. *“So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”* Like for Samuel, Paul and Moses, a special time of being appointed to do a lifetime work of grace God has planned in advanced for one to do might be a time where God will actually speaks to His children with an audible voice (1 Cor. 15:10). Remember, many will not believe you when this happens. Who are friends of the Lord? Those who do the will of God. *“No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name [what would Jesus do] He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another. (John 15:15-17)”*

4. Why might God not speak to everyone with His audible voice? Often, the people who testify of hearing God’s voice audibly tell a personal story of having a major meltdown or facing death when God speaks to them audibly. Most times we hear God speak to us from His inner spiritual voice. This suffices for most who follow Jesus in all situations, as they walk by faith in obedience. However, there are those who have heard God’s audible voice during personal meltdowns and other tragic events. There are modern day prophets or leaders who testify to hearing God’s audible voice on a more regular basis (?)

In 1997, I had a powerful encounter with the Lord during the summer (7/13/97). I was struggling with personal addiction and its effect on my walk with God and marriage. I received the life-changing gift of the baptism of the Holy Spirit without tongues (they came later). My life was radically changed. However, the enemy was now sowing seeds of confusion into my mind related to doctrine and how to share the Gospel. “Do I tell others I was saved prior to or after my baptism

of the Holy Spirit?" This season went on for about 6 months even though my addiction ceased and my marriage was being healed. I was unsure how to best share my faith. One night on TBN, I heard a sermon on TV and said to the Lord right before going to sleep, "please don't let me forget this message", thinking I had heard the perfect sermon to end my season of dilemma.

The Lord gave me something better early the next morning at 5:30am as He sat me up from my sleep physically in bed and spoke these audible words into my ears, "I have given you my name." I knew it wasn't His inner voice because He sat me up in bed like never before or afterwards. I instantly experienced His supernatural peace and the comfort that God's grace had saved me and was with me. I knew that I must always emphasize being saved by grace first and then look for ways to speak about one's dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

I remember how low my soul was as I was failing Him miserably before I repented, and how I surrendered to Him from the depths of my soul. Jesus knew I needed more than a sermon and through this encounter gave me supernatural peace so that I could continue my journey in grace with Him to this day. He rescued me. He restored me. He redeemed me and is sanctifying me so that I can serve Him well. I have a peace inside of me that continues to enable and empower me to share about my personal relationship with Jesus to many.

There are many Bible verses in the Bible about receiving God's name like in Isaiah 43:7. My life is a testament to Isaiah 43:1-10 as I testify to having personal knowledge of God's grace and being His witness. "Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him"... "You are My witnesses," says the Lord, "and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. (Isaiah 43:7,10)"

5) There have been times where God's message was so strong it was hard to tell if it was verbal or non-verbal. One time while managing a church building project overseas, as I was getting very frustrated with my coworkers, God spoke to me strongly "go home if you can't love them".

God shouldn't have to shake us or shout at us to get our attention. "And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1 Kings 19:11-13)"

6) God prefers to speak to us indirectly (non-audibly) so that we will process what is going on around us and seek His will with due diligence. Think about this, needing to physically hear God's audible voice every day to obey is like needing to be yelled at to obey. Elijah was hiding in a cave. He knew that he was panicking, yet God passed by Him and led him to come outside of the cave, hear his quiet voice and to be set free from fear. If we hide ourselves in a cave away from God, saying in our heart we won't move until we hear His audible voice, we risk missing Him speak to us through many other ways. We don't want to insist that God speaks to us audibly and stay imprisoned by our fears, spiritual strongholds and the lust of the flesh (world).

While God still speaks to us in an audible voice, He wants us to learn how to hear Him speak to our heart through His presence surrounding us. Except for emergencies, God usually speaks to us audibly with short, hidden messages that are not a direct answer to our dilemma; they're not easily translatable and require us to use facets of the other listening methods. These other methods will be used in heaven.

Conclusion – Where is the Voice of the Good Shepherd Leading Us?

As we hear and follow the voice of God, the Lord takes us by His hand and leads us. The question for us every day is “do we want to hold onto God’s hand?” A two-year-old will sometimes hold onto the hand of their parent(s) and other times rip their hand out of their guardian’s hand. This is what the Psalmist wrote, “Let Your hand become my help, for I have chosen Your precepts (Psalm 119:173)”.

The hand has 5 fingers and the number five in the Bible means God’s grace and goodness. The following looks at 5 ways that God lead us as we hold His hand by following His voice:

1. “And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain. (Rev. 5:6)” Just like the olive branch extended to Noah through the dove as the flood which cleansed the earth was ending, God extends to us with the BRANCH (Christ’s hand), His life given for us to grasp by faith and end sin’s reign in His children.
2. “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:20)” Ambassadors point the way to being reconciled to God.
3. “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. (Matt. 5:14)” Jesus, the Light of men, must be carried by His flock into all the world and to shine His light into darkness.
4. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Tim. 1:7)” God’s children are Spirit led and walk in His power, love and righteousness.
5. “Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. (Psalm 96:1-3)” God’s children are a blessed people, thankful for His salvation who sing and proclaim the goodness of God among all peoples.

Remember, Jesus said “My sheep hear my voice and follow me! (John 10:27-78)” Walking with God in eternity is NOT something one does alone or without following the voice of God.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. (John 5:24).”

NOTE: If you want to learn more about following God’s voice, I strongly recommend this book “Echo Heaven” written by Marty Darracott.