

How to Know It's Really God Speaking to You

I know that a lot of Christians get frustrated about the subject of hearing God's voice. I can remember when I was a young Christian and older ministers would say, "The Lord told me this" or "The Lord told me that," and I would think, *What do you mean, 'The Lord told you'? Did He just talk to you? Did you hear Him out loud? How did you know it was the Lord?*

I would get more than a little irritated with them. But I have since come to learn, after walking with the Lord for a while, that He is the still, small voice that speaks inside my spirit—and He wants to speak to me and guide me even more than I want Him to. He wants to do the same for you. I can tell you that it takes a little practice, but now I hear Him all the time, and He leads me on a daily, even hourly, basis. He wants to do the same for you.

The Guide on the Inside

By "practice," I mean that you get into the habit of asking and listening, being aware of His presence in you. When you're on the job, driving your car or walking into a new situation, give ear to the Holy Spirit. Say, "Lord, what shall I do in this situation?" Start by practicing with small things, such as finding something you've misplaced or asking which way to turn while driving, and pretty soon you'll get good at distinguishing His voice.

How can you continue learning to recognize God's voice when you're making decisions? The answer is, look to the inside—to God's Holy Spirit within you. The Holy Spirit is "The Guide on the Inside," and every born-again believer has Him living within.

The children of God—that means you—are led by the Spirit of

God (Rom. 8:14). When Jesus left the earth and went to heaven, He left us His Spirit (aka the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of God) to live in us and guide us. The very Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ dwells in you as a born-again believer: "But you know Him, for He lives with you, and will be in you" (John 14:17). Jesus didn't leave us here helpless! He left us with a Helper to assist and support us, and to empower us to finish His work on Earth.

Our goal when making decisions should be to recognize and follow the voice of the Holy Spirit. John 10:27 says, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."

Never forget that! He knows you, and you hear His voice. And because you do, you can follow His leading.

In my own life, when I saw that Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice," I started believing that I could hear His voice. If a friend of yours calls out to you from across a dark room, "Come this way!" and you hear his or her voice, you can follow the sound until you find your way out. It's the same with hearing the Lord's voice, and the Bible says you do hear it.

Too many times I hear Christians saying things such as "I can't hear the voice of God" or "I don't know if God is talking to me or not." But that's not what the Bible says. It says we do hear His voice! It also says we know Him. Jesus Himself said, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, that He may be with you forever: the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, for it does not see Him, neither does it know Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you, and will be in you" (John 14:16-17).

You know Him! When you know someone, you recognize his voice and you know the intent of his heart. It's time to start believing the intent of God's heart toward you is always good and that you do know Him and hear His voice.

Then you need to listen. By that I mean stop and spend time in

God's presence—reading His Word and praying—so He is free to speak to your heart and lead you. Too many times we're so wrapped up in our busy lives that we give God no place to talk with us.

The Holy Spirit is a gentleman. He's not going to force Himself upon you or even interrupt your everyday life unless you give Him permission to. Very often, I think, He's waiting for us to turn aside from all our busyness and seek Him. Hearing Him is really more up to us than it is to Him.

I encourage you, especially when you're facing a decision, to spend more time with the Lord. By that I mean spend more time reading the Bible, meditating, listening and praying. Some of us have a pretty good daily devotional habit. If you don't, you need to establish one. Read the Bible every day!

For many of us, maybe in the morning, we read our one-page devotional and accompanying Scripture, then review our prayer list and pray for five minutes. And that's good. But when you're facing bigger decisions, that might not be enough. Sometimes drastic times call for drastic measures. You might need to put a little more time in if you need to hear the voice of God clearly before you can make your decision.

Instead of reading two or three Scriptures, read an entire chapter. Or find verses that pertain to what you're believing for, and spend time reading them and meditating on them to soak your spirit in God's Word until faith comes.

Be sure you spend time just listening. So many times when we're in need, we do all the talking during prayer. But prayer is two-way conversation between you and God—and He's the one who knows everything! You already know what you know. Instead, you want to know what He knows. So take time to listen.

How Do You Know It's God?

I don't know about you, but I've met many Christians who claim

God told them to do something, but the end result of their decision turns out really badly! That tends to make us all nervous because we think, *How then do we know when it's God's voice that's leading us?*

The way to be sure you're hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit, God's voice, is to spend time learning it. How did you get to where you could recognize the voice of your parent, your sweetheart or your children? You spent time with them. If you were never around them, you wouldn't recognize their voices. Well, it's the same with recognizing God's voice. You get familiar with His voice by spending time with Him, and you do that by reading and meditating on His Word because that is Him talking with you.

I once heard a perfect example of this. The way the Department of the Treasury trains its agents to recognize counterfeit U.S. money is by having them spend a lot of time studying real money. They get so familiar with the real thing by handling it, looking at it, smelling it and running it through various tests that a counterfeit bill will jump right out at them because it doesn't react or feel like a real bill.

It's the same for you. If you become so familiar with God through His Word—by studying it and recognizing how He thinks, acts and views you—then when a different voice tries to lead you, you'll recognize it instantly as a counterfeit or a lie.

You and I will never be able to recognize the real-deal voice of God unless we spend time in His Word. That's good news, because it means you are totally in charge of that part! You can decide for yourself how much time you spend in God's Word. Just know that as you do, you'll get more and more familiar with His voice.

The Inward Witness

The main way you and I “hear” the voice of God is not audibly. It's through what I'll call the “inward witness.” The Spirit

of God will give you promptings in your own spirit, or your inner man (Eph. 3:16), which is the part of you that has been born again and made a new creature in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Promptings are inclinations or thoughts. I like to describe a prompting as a “knowing in your knower.” It comes as you’re reading the Word, seeking God in prayer or listening carefully for His guidance. You’ll either begin to feel a peace as you consider the decision or an uneasiness. My spiritual father used to describe the peace as “a smooth, velvety feeling” in your spirit and the uneasiness as a “scratchy” feeling. I think that’s a good way to describe it.

I have been led by the inward witness more times than I can count, in big things and in small ones. I often say out loud, “Holy Spirit, which way should I go?” or “What should I do here?” And then I listen—not for an audible voice, but for that “still, small voice” on the inside, in my spirit (1 Kin. 19:12-13). I listen for His prompting.

I also do this very often when I am counseling someone. As she sits across from me and tells me her problem, I listen to her, but silently I ask the Holy Spirit: “How do I help this person? What should I say? What’s the answer here?” In essence, I have my spiritual antenna up, giving attention to the inward witness that will give me answers about how to best help the person.

Sometimes, when I’ve lost something, I’ll ask the Holy Spirit where it is (because He knows everything, you know!), and I’ll get a thought similar to *Go look under the front seat of the car*. Now, my mind might say, *That’s silly. It couldn’t be there*. But when I look, there it is!

Those may be examples of small things, but it’s good to practice on small things. When I’m making major decisions, I often will give myself more time to listen for the inward witness. I will let the Lord solidify the word in my spirit,

and then I'll "try it on" before making a move one way or the other.

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In Karen Jensen-Salisbury's book *How to Make the Right Decision Every Time: 10 Keys for Finding God's Direction* (Charisma House), you will learn how to apply biblical wisdom to every decision you make, reaping the blessing of peace. You can find this book at [www.charismabooks.com](#), or anywhere Christian books are sold.