

How to Hear God

✖ Have you ever thought God was saying something to you, but you weren't sure it was really His voice you were hearing? Have you found yourself thinking, How do I know it was really God I heard and not my own imagination—or worse, the enemy?

God's solution is simple: "'If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him'" (James 1:5, NIV). When we need to know if we are hearing God's voice, all we have to do is ask Him!

We can go to God, tell Him what we think we heard Him say, and then ask Him to confirm it or correct our hearing on the matter. God wants to give us an understanding of what He says to us because He wants to communicate with us. He is eager to teach us to correctly hear His voice.

What are some steps we can take to make sure we're hearing God?

1. Put your faith in the right thing. When I was first learning to hear God's voice, I went overboard in my need to double-check my hearing. I was so afraid I might hear God wrong that I tended to check and recheck my hearing on just about everything. I became very sluggish in obeying God because I spent so much time verifying everything I heard.

My problem was that I had placed my faith in the wrong thing. I was trusting in my ability to hear God—instead of in His ability and faithfulness to speak clearly and to correct and redirect me if I heard wrong.

I used to think that "correction" was the same as "punishment." But God revamped my thinking by reminding me of my old ice skating coach.

I really liked him. He would watch me try to execute a move and then offer feedback, saying something such as: "Your weight is drifting to the left when you turn. You need to keep it balanced over your skating foot."

I knew I had just been corrected, but I wasn't put down or made to feel small or punished. The intent of the correction was to help me excel, and as I applied what he told me, my skating improved.

God told me that I should look to Him as my coach when it came to hearing His voice. He promised that He would let me know when I got something wrong and how to correct it so I could excel in following Him. Suddenly correction became something to be desired instead of something to be feared, and I found out just how faithful and committed God is to the process of teaching us to hear Him.

2. Look for scriptural precedents. It is wise to get into the habit of checking what God says to us against Scripture. God will not say something to us that contradicts what the Bible says. There will be certain "words" we can eliminate immediately as "not from God" when we line them up against what God has already said in the Bible.

At the same time, there are many areas that the Bible does not address explicitly. Still, God is often willing to give us a scriptural precedent for what He says to us. For instance, imagine that you are trying to decide which of two job offers God wants you to accept. You believe He is telling you to take job offer No. 2, one that will put you in contact with hurting people to whom you can minister. But job offer No. 2 is a much lower-paying job than job offer No. 1, so you want to be sure you are hearing God.

You ask Him for a confirmation, and as you're considering your decision, God directs your attention to Matthew 9:12-13: "'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the I have not come

to call the righteous, but sinners.'" Those words come alive to you, and you realize that you have just received the confirmation you need to take the second job. God will often use such scriptural precedents to help confirm His communication to us.

3. *Don't fleece God.* We must not give God an ultimatum about how He is to confirm His word to us. That's called "putting a fleece before the Lord," and it refers to the experience of Gideon found in Judges 6:36-40.

God wanted Gideon to lead Israel in battle against the Midianites, but Gideon was not feeling very confident in his calling—or in his hearing from God. So he laid a fleece (a sheepskin) on the floor and asked God to make the morning dew come only on the fleece, and not on the ground around the fleece. God did this for him, but poor Gideon was still unconvinced. The next night he asked God to reconfirm His word by covering the ground with dew but leaving the fleece dry. Once again, God did as Gideon requested.

Based on this passage, some people assume that they can tell God precisely how to confirm or correct what they believe they have heard Him say to them. In essence, they believe they can dictate the "supernatural hoops" through which God must jump to prove He really said what they believe they heard.

God allowed Gideon to fleece Him, but there is no indication that He was setting a precedent for the rest of us to follow. In fact, there is a strong scriptural precedent against telling God specifically what to do.

Jesus Himself refused Satan's suggestion to put a fleece before God by casting Himself off the highest point of the temple. Instead, Jesus said, "'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Matt. 4:7).

When we go back to God for confirmation, we need to allow Him to choose how He will correct or confirm what we heard. It is

not our place to dictate how He does this. Instead, we must trust that He will do it in a way that we can clearly recognize as being from Him.

4. Avoid making assumptions. When hearing God's voice, we need to be very careful about making assumptions. God can speak to us very clearly, and we can hear Him accurately.

But we can still go wrong by making an assumption about what God means by what He says, only to discover later that we heard God but didn't understand Him. We have to be very careful not to put words in God's mouth.

Let me give you an example of how this can happen. A close friend of mine had been praying for some time about a deep and painful rift in her relationship with her sister. Then she received a prophetic word from a lady who seemed to really hear from God.

The word had to do with the restoration of a broken relationship in my friend's life. However, the lady proceeded to assume that the relationship in question was between my friend and her husband, and she began to minister to my friend about her marriage (which was, in reality, rock solid).

The prophet had received a very keen word from God about my friend's situation, but the power of that word was almost lost when she assumed the relationship involved was with a spouse. This is an example of how we can accurately hear from God and then make assumptions that mislead others and us. We want to be careful to avoid doing that!

5. Recognize areas of "hearing loss." We need to remember that there are certain areas of our lives in which our hearing is likely to be less accurate. It is more difficult to hear God clearly in areas where we have "big stakes" in the answer, where our hearts are tremendously engaged or where we know we have a history of hearing wrong. We must double-check these areas and ask God to confirm what we've heard.

Here's an example. A friend of mine who hears God pretty well in most areas of her life recently went through a divorce. After a "recovery period" of a few months, she met a single man who seemed to be everything she wanted in a husband. She thought she began to hear God speaking to her about this man, telling her that indeed he was the man He had for her.

I strongly suspected that this was her own heart speaking, not God, and I tried to find a gentle way to tell her this. But she thought God was saying more and more detailed things to her. She thought she heard Him tell her that her Christmas present from this man would be an engagement ring, with the wedding following shortly after that.

She was so sure she was hearing God's voice! But December came and went, and she didn't receive any Christmas present from this man—much less an engagement ring. Later he told her that he considered her no more than a casual friend.

She was devastated not only because the man was not interested in her but also because she had been so wrong in hearing God. She had failed to recognize her own heart imitating God's voice to her. She didn't double-check her hearing with God, because she so desperately wanted to hear what she thought she heard.

6. Be ready to obey. Once we hear God, it's important that we obey what we hear. There are two kinds of obedience: cheap obedience, which is obeying when the stakes are not very high or when it doesn't cost us much to obey; and expensive obedience, which is obeying when significant consequences are involved. The job decision mentioned earlier is an example of expensive obedience because it involved a choice between a low-paying job and a higher-paying one.

But money doesn't have to be the issue. For example, if you believe God is telling you to terminate a relationship because it's unhealthy, that is expensive obedience; if you've heard

wrong, you put a relationship that is important to you at risk. You want to be sure you have heard from God before you do something that could require expensive obedience.

On the other hand, if the obedience required is low cost or low risk, then you should always and instantly obey. It may very well be God speaking to you, and you want to be in the habit of obeying God instantly rather than spending a great deal of time double-checking with Him first.

God understands that it can be frightening for us as we begin venturing out in hearing and obeying Him. He knows we need confirmation from Him to be sure we have really heard Him correctly. But God is not only willing—He is also eager to meet us and teach us to hear His voice. All we have to do is ask.

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