

Guidance

Practical questions about hearing God

HEARING GOD

Living relationship

‘You will hear a voice behind you saying,
“This is the way, walk in it!”
(Isa 30:21)

Hearing the voice of the living God in our hearts, within life, is what makes the Christian life different from ‘religion’, which simply follows rules and duties. Ours is a living relationship.

- Jesus says, “My sheep hear my voice” (Jn 10:3,16)
- “The Holy Spirit will teach you ... and make you remember all I have told you” (Jn 14:26)
- “His Spirit teaches you about everything...” (1Jn 2:27)

First steps

As with all relationships it is a steady, developing, maturing experience. Things can go wrong, mistakes are made: -

- People say “God told me...” and it was wrong;
- People say “God told me...” and it was right.

Start gentle - listen, obey, check results, read scripture, share with others: -

- An inner sense of what is right with a sense of peace;
- A response to the words and principles of scripture;
- A willingness to seek the help and advice of other Christians.

Question

A young person comes to you and says,
“How do I learn to hear God?” What will you say to them?

GUIDANCE

Different approaches

Some one comes to your cell group and says they are selling their home, cashing in their shares, to give to their restless teenager to go into the world and find themselves - what advice would you give them? (Consider this in the light of Lk 15:11-32)



There are a variety of approaches to guidance:

- An inner sense of 'feeling led': but how can I be really certain?
- Advice from close Christian friends: but they are fallible aren't they?
- A clear verse from scripture: but there isn't a verse for everything is there?
- A striking and relevant dream: but how can I be sure of the interpretation?
- A use of common sense: but are not the things of God sometimes illogical?
- A use of random events [traffic lights?]: but does God really speak like that?
- Acting opposite to what I would really like: is that how God shows his love?
- Always doing just what I want to: but can't this end up in self-indulgence?
- Always doing exactly what my leaders tell me: but what of my responsibility?
- Avoid making serious decisions: but surely this leads to simple fatalism?

Many people end up with a mixture of the above; surely there must be some clear principles?

Clear principles

There are some basic principles to our understanding the nature of guidance:

□ **Sovereignty:** God is in control of the whole universe, he is sustaining it and we are to live our lives confidently under this huge canopy. He is working out his great purposes and they individually enclose us. This is not something detached or impersonal; we can live life with confidence even when there are no details. "All things work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rm 8:28). No sparrow falls without his knowledge (Mt 10:29). *Facts not feelings.*

□ **Revelation:** God has spoken and revealed his character and his ways, and we have the written record in scripture; there is also, both the moral sense we have within us, and the impact of creation (Rm 1). This tells us clearly how God wants us to live; so get on and do it! It requires us knowing and using the Bible with care, "Has God not said?" - It requires obedience. *Instructions not feelings.*

□ **Salvation:** God is fulfilling particular and central purposes in Jesus and this fact sharpens particular requirements (Acts 2:23; 20:27; Eph 1:9-11). Our will



must have its central focus in Jesus' character and teaching. *Discipleship not independence.*

□ **Grace:** God calls each of us to live under his grace; there is freedom and there is joy: there is chance and opportunity to be explored in harmony with all that God has already said and done. Most of what God has put in our hearts is there to be enjoyed, "God has given us all things richly to enjoy" (1Tim 6:17). *Freedom not rebellion.*

□ **Instruction:** God will speak to us directly; it may happen in numerous ways:

- A deep inner sense;
- A clear opportunity and peace;
- A prophetic word.

□ **Important safeguards**

- Harmonizing with scripture what you know of God's character;
- Sharing it with people you trust and praying about it together;
- Trying doors: gently seeing if things open to you;
- Keeping highly sensitive at all times for God to say, "No!"

□ **No safeguards!!**

- This is a high risk / high faith area, but God is not playing games with our lives!
- It is learning and maturing process;
- Putting the principles in play will save most of the problems.

Consider the following questions

Does God have a clear blueprint for each of our lives?

If it is God's will for a person to marry, is there just one chosen person for them to marry?

Is there such a thing as God's second best?

Can 'casting lots' ever find God's will; if so how? (Consider Acts 1:15-26)

How does chance work in our lives?

VOCATION

Knowing God's call

There are some important points about vocation that we need to consider: -

- Vocation / calling is not for the rare few as some imagine: eg Paul called 'Apostle' (1Cor 1:1);
- To be a member of the church is to be a member of the "called out ones";



- To be a Christian is to obey the call of Jesus, “Follow me” (Mk 1:17);
- The NT refers to a Christian as “one who is called”: ‘Holy brethren, who share the heavenly calling’ (Heb 3:1).

□ **Our call is in our commitment**

In responding to Jesus we have embraced our call. “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Mt 22:14); call is identified with response. The simple fact is, “If I am a Christian I am called”. Our calling is in Jesus; not in a label like ‘apostle’, ‘prophet’, ‘evangelist’, and our call is unique. Different people perceive us differently; the nature of our call is many sided, not single sided.

Developing God’s call

“Be zealous to confirm your election and call”
(2Pt 1:10)

“Paul and Barnabas ... the work I have called them *towards*”
(Acts 13:2)

STEPS

1. Affirm

- Your calling: “Yes its me”, “I am called”;
- Your circumstances: “my future flows out of my present” (cf 1Cor 7:24).

2. Assess

- Examine your heart: hopes, fears, strengths, weaknesses, dreams, and gifts;
- Examine your environment: opportunities, challenges, frustrations etc.

3. Attune

- Hear from God: what is God saying, stirring, giving you faith for;
- Hear from others: encouragement, correction, prophecy, and direction.

4. Attend

- To digging foundations: get as equipped as you can with new skills;
- To sharpening cutting edge: get better at things you are good at.

5. Anointing

- To receive gifts you do not have: where weak expect to be strong;
- To empower beyond your natural energies: where strong be stronger.

Questions

1. Someone prophesies that you should change your job. How do you decide whether or not this is in fact a word from God?

2. Do you think it is important for a Christian to have a sense of God’s calling?

3. A friend comes to you in some distress because they feel they have lost all direction in their life. They are uncertain about where they are living;



dissatisfied with the job they are doing and have few supportive relationships. How would you advise them in an attempt to help them make some key initial steps towards a way forward? What principles would you suggest they follow in developing faith-based life choices?

Reading & Resources

P Adam '**Guidance**' Grove Books 1988

M Blaine Smith '**Knowing God's Will**' IVP 1991

J Deere '**Surprised By The Voice of God**' Kingsway 1996

G Fitzpatrick '**How To Recognise God's Voice**' Sovereign 1989

G Friesen & JR Maxon '**Decision Making and the Will of God**' Multnomah Press

K Leech '**Soul Friend**' Darton Longman and Todd 1994

A Long '**Approaches to Spiritual Direction**' Grove Books 1988

T Merton '**Spiritual Direction**' Anthony Clarke 1975

J White '**Guidance**' UCCF Booklets

