



## Appendix 1. Listening for God's Voice – Participant Handouts

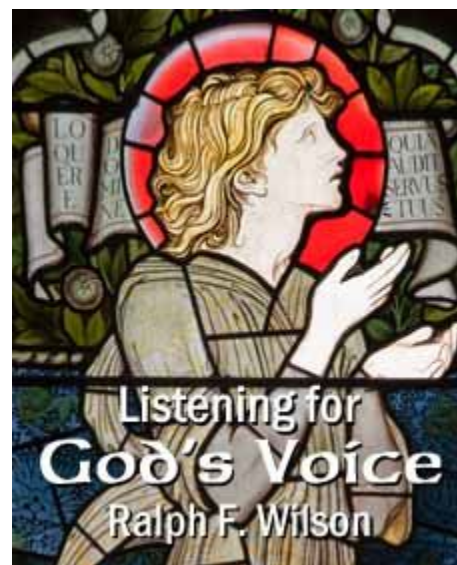
If you are working with a class or small group, feel free to duplicate the following handouts at no additional charge. If you'd like to print 8-1/2" x 11" or A4 size pages, you can download the free Participant Guide handout sheets at: [www.jesuswalk.com/voice/voice-lesson-handouts.pdf](http://www.jesuswalk.com/voice/voice-lesson-handouts.pdf)

You'll typically find 4 or 5 questions for each lesson. Each question may include several sub-questions. These are designed to get group members engaged in discussion of the key points of the passage. If you're running short of time, feel free to skip questions or portions of questions.

### Suggestions for Classes and Groups

Individuals who are studying online can probably complete one full lesson per week, though they'll need to be diligent to do so. But some of the chapters just have too much material for a one hour class discussion. Feel free to arrange the lessons any way that works best for your group.

This materials is available as a free e-mail Bible study ([www.jesuswalk.com/voice/](http://www.jesuswalk.com/voice/)) or in book format – paperback, PDF, and Kindle ([www.jesuswalk.com/books/voice.htm](http://www.jesuswalk.com/books/voice.htm)).



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## Introduction to Listening for God's Voice

Confront patterns of unbelief or fear:

1. God isn't interested in my affairs (1 John 4:19; Romans 5:8)
2. I'm not worthy of hearing God's voice (1 John 1:9; Isaiah 64:6).
3. God's voice today might compete with belief in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture
4. God will tell me to do something I don't want to do.
5. Listening to God's voice is "going off the deep end."

### Practical Assignments

Since we're trying to develop a skill of listening for God's voice, each lesson includes a practical assignment. Before you begin: (1) find a mentor, (2) find a spiritual partner, (3) get a notebook or journal, (4) begin or renew a daily Quiet Time.

## 1. Listening for God as a Biblical Pattern (Mark 1:35; John 5:19)

Jesus Prays in a Solitary Place (Mark 1:33-39)

- "At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place...." (Luke 4:42)
- "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." (Luke 5:16)
- "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God." (Luke 6:12)
- "Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, 'Who do the crowds say I am?'" (Luke 9:18)
- "He took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray." (Luke 9:28b)
- "One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'" (Luke 11:1)
- "Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you will not fall into temptation.' He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed." (Luke 22:39-41)

Psalms 63:1.

**Q1. (Mark 1:33-39) What pattern do you see emerging in Jesus' prayer life? Why do you think he spends Quiet Time with the Father before the day begins? How does this prepare him for his ministry? How did the disciples' desires for Jesus differ from what Jesus felt impelled to do? (Mark 1:37-38) Why? Do you have a Quiet Time? What could you do to improve the quality of your time with God each day?**

Seeing What the Father Is Doing (John 5:17-20)

The Son Can Do Nothing by Himself (John 5:19), (Philippians 2:6-7; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The concept of independent action is foreign to the Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Historically, there are two basic ways Christians have explained Jesus' miracles:

1. Jesus does miracles by virtue of being divine.
2. Jesus does miracles by the power of the Spirit.

**Q2. (John 5:19, 30) Why do you think Jesus said, “By myself I can do nothing”? (vs. 30). How do you justify this statement with Jesus’ divine nature as the Son of God? In what ways can we use Jesus’ example as a pattern for our own life and ministry? How do you think Jesus would “see” and “hear” the Father?**

Healing the Demon-Oppressed Boy (Mark 9:29), “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

Jesus Ministered in the Power of the Spirit. So must we.

(Luke 3:22; 4:1,14-15; 18-19; John 16:26-27; Matthew 28:20; John 14-16).

Promises of the Holy Spirit (John 14-16)

1. Guide disciples into the way of truth (John 16:13).
2. Teach the disciples (John 14:26).
3. Speak to the disciples what the Spirit hears from the Father (John 16:13a).
4. Declare to the disciples what is to come (John 16:13b).

**Q3. (John 14-16) What promises concerning the Paraclete – Comforter – Counselor – Helper – Holy Spirit does Jesus give in John chapters 14-16? How do these relate to guidance? To “hearing” God?**

The Spirit Reveals the Mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:9-11, 16)

**Q4. (1 Corinthians 2:9-16) How does the Holy Spirit make “the mind of Christ” available to us? How does this make you dependent upon the Holy Spirit? How does this relate to listening for God’s voice?**

Lessons for Disciples

1. Jesus set a pattern for his disciples to talk to the Father in the morning in a solitary place (Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28b).
2. In Jesus’ talks with his Father he received instructions for ministry (Mark 1:38).
3. Jesus depends on his Father for direction, and then acted on what he saw the Father do (John 5:19) and say (John 5:30).
4. God is always working (John 5:17), even if we’re not aware of it.
5. Jesus’ miracles are the result of the power of the Holy Spirit, not because of his unique divinity, since he had divested himself of many of his prerogatives of divinity when he became a human being (Philippians 2:6-7; Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14-15, 18-19).
6. The ability to cast out “difficult” demons comes from a life of prayer, which the disciples lacked early in their ministry.
7. In the Paraclete passages of John 14-16, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will: (a) guide disciples into way of truth (John 16:13); (b) teach the disciples (John 14:26); (c) speak to the disciples what the Spirit hears from the Father (John 16:13a); and (d) declare to the disciples what is to come (John 16:13b).
8. The Holy Spirit mediates to us the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:9-11, 16).
9. There is a clear Bible pattern of God speaking to people in both the Old and New Testaments.

### Week 1 Assignment. Set Aside a Regular Quiet Time to Spend with God

**Assignment 1:** As a way of patterning yourself after Jesus, who sought the Father early and often, set aside for yourself a regular Quiet Time to spend with God. You may be already doing this. If so, great. But even if you already do this, it's time to "up your game," to renew this time so it is most meaningful.

Set aside at least five to ten minutes a day – or more, depending on your schedule – preferably in the morning when you have your whole day ahead of you. Here's a simple guideline for a Quiet Time.

1. Greeting.
2. Praise.
3. Scripture.
4. Prayer. There's an acronym ACTS – Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication
5. Listening.
6. Take notes.

"Spiritual disciplines such as a Quiet Time as a way of putting up all the sails to catch the slightest breeze of the Spirit's whisperings."

## 2. Recognizing God's Voice (1 Kings 19)

### Elijah's Great Victory and Deep Depression (1 Kings 17-19)

Elijah has many of the symptoms of depression: exhaustion from years of stress, no remaining energy, no zeal, sleeping except to take food, then sleeping again. He is filled with fear. He has isolated himself from people, leaving his servant behind in Beersheba. He has gone into the desert to die.

### The Theophany to Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-13)

Similarities with theophany or appearance to Moses (Exodus 33:18-23). God restores Elijah to confidence and ministry (John 21:15-19; Galatians 6:1-2)

### The Still, Small Voice (1 Kings 19:12b)

The phrase consists of three Hebrew words:

1. *Qôl*, "voice, sound, noise."
2. *Demâmâ*, "whisper," a rarely used word that denotes "calmness, stillness, silence, whisper," from *dāmam*, "be silent, still; wait."
3. *Daq*, "thin, fine, gaunt," from *dāqqaq*, "to crush, grind, break in pieces."

"Gentle whisper" (NIV), "sound of a gentle whisper" (ESV), or "still small voice" (KJV) are most likely since *qôl* is clearly a "voice" (rather than an undefined sound) in verse 13 that follows. "Murmuring" (NJB) or "blowing" (NASB) are interpretations rather than translations of the Hebrew words.

### Learning from Elijah's Still Small Voice

This passage isn't *normative* – only a common way Christians experience God's voice. Observe that:

1. God's voice is not always quiet. Sometimes it booms like the sound of many waters (Ezekiel 43:2; Revelation 1:15; 14:2; 19:6), thunder (John 12:28-29; Revelation 14:2), and loud trumpets (Hebrews 12:19; Revelation 1:10; 4:1).
2. God's voice is not always gentle. Sometimes it comes to bring a strong rebuke (Acts 26:14).
3. God's voice is not always even a voice or sound. Sometimes it is an impression, or a nudge, a dream or vision.

But the "still small voice" is *common* among Christians.

1. **God's voice is often quiet.** Sometimes, unless you're trained to recognize God's voice, you might mistake it for a passing thought. It is quite possible that you've heard God's voice already, but didn't recognize it as such.
2. **God's voice can guide us in what to do.** Sometimes God's voice comes to clarify direction for us.
3. **God's voice can provide comfort when we are anxious.**
4. **God's voice can bring a rebuke** (Proverbs 3:11-12; quoted in Hebrews 12:5-6)

**Q1. (1 Kings 17-19) Why do you think the author contrasts the "still small voice" to the wind, earthquake, and fire? How does God's voice comfort and renew Elijah? Why is it easy to miss God when his voice is gentle and quiet?**

### Samuel Anointing David (1 Samuel 16:1-13)

#### We're Not All Prophets

We're not all prophets but we all have the Spirit (Numbers 11:29; Joel 2:28-29; 1 Corinthians 14:1, 5, 31). Only a few will have the *ministry office* of prophet (1 Corinthians 12:28-30; Ephesians 4:11).

## Words of Encouragement

Encouragements to Paul: Acts 18:9-10; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9; Acts 23:11; Acts 27:24)

**Q2. (2 Corinthians 12:9a; Acts 18:9-10; 23:11; 27:24) How do you think it feels to Paul for God to personally encourage him when he is afraid and hurting? What do we learn about God that he speaks to Paul in this way?**

## Guidance to Travel to Jerusalem – and Confusing Interpretations

Acts 19:21, ESV; “compelled by the Spirit” (Acts 20:22). Misinterpretations (Acts 21:11-12; 21:13-14)

**Q3. (Acts 19:21; 20:22-24; 21:12-14) What would have happened if Paul hadn't been sure of his instructions from the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem? Would you have tried to dissuade him? It's comforting to receive encouraging words. What level of maturity does it take to receive a direction that might lead us into hardship and danger? What happens when we choose the easy way, when God leads us on a difficult path?**

## Instruction to Testify in Rome (Acts 23:11; 19:21b)

Paul's arrest in Jerusalem actually enables Paul to give his **testimony** before: the crowd in the Jerusalem Temple (Acts 21:40-22:21); the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leaders (Acts 22:30-23:10); the high priest, elders, and Felix the Roman governor (Acts 24:1-21); Felix and his wife Drusilla, a Jewess (Acts 24:24-26); Festus the new Roman governor (Acts 25:6-12); Festus, King Agrippa, and his wife Bernice (Acts 26:1-29); the soldiers guarding him and the ship's crew on the voyage to Rome (Acts 27); the residents of Malta, and Publius, the Roman official of Malta where they shipwrecked (Acts 28:1-10); the Jewish community in Rome (Acts 28:17-28); the Praetorian guard in Rome, charged with guarding Paul (Philippians 1:12-14); Caesar, the Emperor himself (Acts 27:24).

## Peter: Don't Hesitate to Go with Them (Acts 10:19-20)

**Q4. (Acts 10:19-20) Why was it important for Simon to get a very clear command from the Spirit to go with his visitors? What would he have done if the word weren't so clear? What does he do when criticized for taking this action (Acts 11:2, 12)? What kind of faith does it take to obey the Spirit and take an action you know you'll be criticized for later? Do you disobey when you know you might face criticism for obedience?**

## Separate for Me Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3)

### Lessons for Disciples

1. God doesn't always speak quietly; sometimes his voice is loud and strong.
2. God revealed himself to Elijah in a “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12).
3. God's voice is often quiet. Thus we can easily miss his voice in the clutter of our minds, through “selective hearing,” or mistake it as one of our own passing thoughts.
4. God's voice in words and sentences can guide us what to do.
5. God's voice can provide comfort when we are anxious.
6. God's voice can also set us on the right path with a gentle rebuke.
7. God's voice can correct our preconceptions, as God did when Samuel was seeking a king among Jesse's sons (1 Samuel 16:1-13).

8. God's voice doesn't come only to prophets (Numbers 11:29). Since the Holy Spirit was poured out on the whole church at Pentecost (Acts 2), all of us have the Holy Spirit, who provides access to God's message, even if we don't hold the ministry office of a prophet (1 Corinthians 14:1, 5, 31; 12:28-30; Ephesians 4:11).
9. God's voice can bring words of encouragement to us when we are afraid and discouraged as he did to Paul on several occasions (Acts 18:9-10; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Acts 23:11; 27:24).
10. God's voice can bring us clarity, even when others dispute what God has shown us to do. Paul had such clarity about traveling to Jerusalem, even though people warned him "in the Spirit" what would happen there (Acts 19:21; 20:22-24; 21:11-14). Paul also had clarity about testifying in Rome, though politicians tried to make his imprisonment sound like his own fault (Acts 19:21; 23:11).
11. We are wise to persist in what God has shown us and to resist second-guessing God because of our unsundered desires.
12. Words from God can also give us direction for ministry. Examples are Peter taking the Gospel to the Gentiles in Caesarea (Acts 10) and Paul and Barnabas embarking on their First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-3).

### Week 2 Assignment. Learn to Quiet Yourself and Listen

One of the keys to hearing God is to quiet yourself before him. The Quakers call it "centering down," quieting one's mind and spirit before God. Some sing simple, repetitive praise songs. Others repeat a prayer over and over again. Others recommend listening to your breathing as a way of quieting your thoughts. Once your spirit has become quiet, I encourage you to talk to God about what's going on in your life and listen (Psalm 46:10; Habakkuk 2:20).

Your assignment this week is to practice quieting your spirit before the Lord so you can listen. Then talk to your mentor and/or spiritual partner about your experiences of quieting your spirit before God.

### 3. Nudges and No (Acts 8:26-40; 16:6-10)

Often God speaks in impressions, nudges, promptings, noes, inarticulate impressions in my mind to do this or that – or *not* to do something.

#### Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)

1. Go down to the road to Gaza.
2. Catch up with that chariot.

#### Where to Preach – and Where Not To (Acts 16:6-10)

1. Don't preach in Asia (Acts 16:6).
2. Don't preach in Bithynia (Acts 16:7-8).
3. The Macedonian Vision (Acts 16:9-10).

We learn several things from this string of incidents.

1. God doesn't always tell us where to go.
2. We are to keep going with the guidance we seem to have, even though our objective isn't clear.
3. God's guidance is sometimes a "no," rather than a clear positive word.

#### Q1. (Acts 8:26-40; 16:6-10) Are promptings

from the Holy Spirit clear enough when we're seeking God for direction? Why is "no" just as important an answer as "yes"? Have you ever felt God's promptings to take some action? If you followed through, what happened?

#### David Inquiring of the Lord (1 and 2 Samuel)

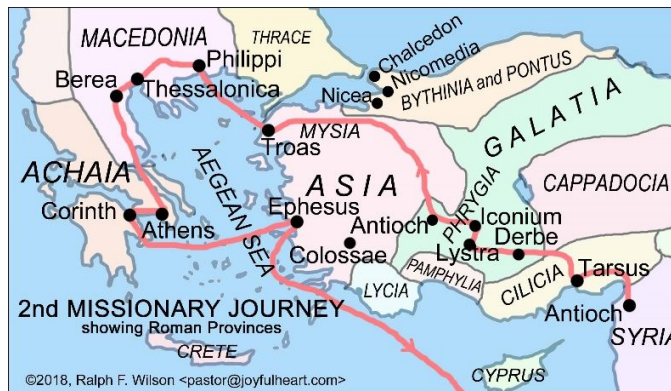
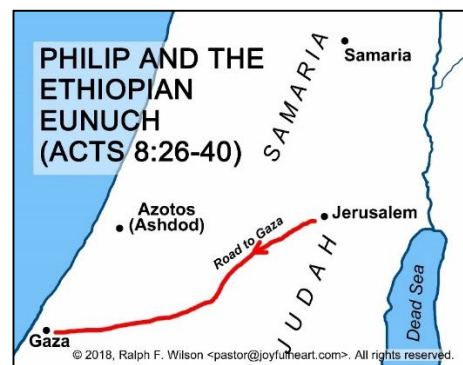
1 Samuel 23:6. This ephod was presumably part of the high priest's garments, to which was attached a breastplate pouch containing the Urim and the Thummim (Exodus 28, especially vs. 30; cf. Leviticus 8:8). Apparently sacred lots used by the priests to determine the will of God. They could give a positive answer, a negative answer, and occasionally, no answer at all. If Urim and Thummim were two marked stones that were cast, perhaps an answer of "yes" might be both up, a "no" both down, and "no answer" one up and one down.

- Whether to attack the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:19)
- Whether to rescue the town of Keilah from the Philistines (1 Samuel 23:2-4).
- Whether the residents of Keilah will betray David to Saul (1 Samuel 23:9-12).
- Which town to take refuge in (2 Samuel 2:1). The answer is "Hebron," but this can be explained as an answer by lot. See Achan (Joshua 7:16-18) and Jonathan (1 Samuel 14:41-42).
- Whether to pursue the Amalekites after their attack on Ziklag (1 Samuel 30:7-8).
- Whether to attack the Philistines at the Valley of Rephaim on the first occasion (2 Samuel 5:19).

**Q2. (2 Samuel 5:19, 22-25) What's the similarity between God's brief, inarticulate nudges or promptings, and David's use of the Urim and Thummim to receive direction? What happens when David needs more than a "yes" or "no" answer?**

#### Supernatural Spiritual Insight (Acts 14:8-10).

A word of knowledge? (1 Corinthians 12:8), an insight from God that a person wouldn't normally have unless God revealed it. (John 4:17-18; Acts 5:1-11; 8:23).





## Seeking Direction in Regular Prayer

**Q3. (Acts 5:1-11; 8:23; 14:8-10) Sometimes God nudges you by giving you insight into the spiritual state of people around you. What should you be asking God about once you receive this insight about them? Have you ever had a nudge from God that resulted in a person receiving help? What did you learn from this?**

### Is God Talking Non-Stop?

1. Don't be discouraged if you don't hear from God. He may not be talking to you right now.
2. We wait on God for his direction; he is not to wait on us or cater to our convenience. We have no right to demand the Sovereign of the Universe to speak to us. We're encouraged to "wait on the Lord" (Psalm 27:14. He is not *our* servant to order around; we are *his* humble servants.

**Q4. (Acts 16:6-10; Psalm 27:14) Why does God sometimes *not* talk to us? Is it always because we aren't receptive? What should we do when we don't hear anything from God?**

## God's Nudges to Us Provide Incremental Encouragement to People He Loves

### Lessons for Disciples

1. In addition to messages articulated in clear words and sentences, God often speaks to us in nudges, promptings, inarticulate impressions in the mind to do this or that – or *not* to do something.
2. An example of a nudge is Philip the Evangelist as he encounters the Ethiopian eunuch with two promptings: (a) Gaza road, and (b) chariot (Acts 8:26-40).
3. On his second missionary journey God tells Paul "no" to preaching in the Province of Asia, and "no" to preaching in Bythina. Only in Troas does he receive a vision of the Macedonian who invites him to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10).
4. David inquires of God by means of the Urim and Thummim (1 Samuel 23:6; Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8), which gave yes and no answers (e.g., 2 Samuel 5:19), but he also received complex revelations from God when necessary (2 Samuel 5:22-25).
5. Peter and Paul receive insights about the spiritual state of people they were dealing with (Acts 5:1-11; 8:23; 14:8-10). This might be similar to a word of knowledge.
6. God can give nudges about spiritual matters as well as everyday needs of our lives and the lives of others.
7. The question, "Where have you seen God lately?" is helpful to train us to discern what God is doing around us.
8. The Bible doesn't indicate that God talks to us non-stop, if we were only tuned in. So we shouldn't be discouraged if we don't hear from God immediately. Rather we should "wait on the Lord" (Psalm 27:14) as his humble servants.
9. God uses us to provide incremental encouragements to people under God's direction, not usually life-changing words from God.

## Week 3 Assignment. Sensitize Yourself: Where Have You Seen God Lately?

Learning to discern God at work is foundational to training yourself to hear his voice and pick up on his whispers, promptings, and nudges. Your assignment this week is to talk with your spiritual partner every day, and ask the question, "Where have you seen God working today?" Then explain where you have seen God at work that day.

## 4. Heart Preparation for Listening to God (1 Samuel 3:1-10)

Samuel: “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:1-10)

The name Samuel (*shemû`ēl*) sounds like the Hebrew for “heard of God,” *shāma`*, “hear, listen to” and *‘ēl*, the generic word for “God.” In verse 9:

“**Speak**” *dābar*, “to speak.”

“**LORD**” in caps designates God’s specific name, Yahweh.

“**Servant**” is *‘ebed*, “servant, slave.” In the case of a king, all his subjects are considered his servants, including all who serve him directly – his officers, officials, and ambassadors.

“**Is listening**” (NIV, NRSV), “**hears**” (ESV), “heareth” (KJV) is *shāma`*, “to hear,” in this case an *effective* hearing or listening, “hear, listen to, obey.”

### What We Can Learn from Samuel’s Call

1. You can worship but not know God, at least not know him intimately.
2. You can hear God speaking, but not recognize that it is God.
3. Sometimes a mentor can help us learn to recognize and respond to God’s voice.
4. We must come before God as humble and obedient servants if we want to hear what he is saying. (Isaiah 6:9-10)

**Q1. (1 Samuel 3:1-10) What was Eli’s counsel to Samuel, when he recognized that God was calling to the boy? Was it good counsel? What is the significance of Samuel recognizing that he is a servant?**

### It Is the Relationship, not the Voice, that We Seek

Hosea 6:3. Know” (ESV, NRSV, KJV), “acknowledge” (NIV) is *yāda`*, “know,” with many shades of knowledge, from intimate sexual knowledge (Genesis 4:1), to ‘discern,’ as well as the most intimate acquaintance, such as Moses, whom Yahweh knows “face-to-face” (Deuteronomy 34:10). Hosea calls on us to “**press on** to know the Lord.” The verb is *rādap*, “be behind, follow after, pursue” We are to chase after God, pursue him, so that we might know him well. Paul (Philippians 3:10-14)

A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (1948). Tozer cites a wide variety of Christian leaders, and then asks, What vital quality ties them together?

“I venture to suggest that the one vital quality which they had in common was **spiritual receptivity**. Something in them was open to heaven, something which urged them Godward.... They had spiritual awareness and ... **they went on to cultivate it until it became the biggest thing in their lives**. They differed from the average person in that when they felt the inward longing they did something about it. They acquired the lifelong habit of spiritual response.... **Receptivity is ... an affinity for, a bent toward, a sympathetic response to, a desire to have.**”

David, a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22; Psalm 27:8)

Hearing God’s voice flows out of a relationship. It is wed to our life of prayer before God.

**Q2. (1 Samuel 3:7; Hosea 6:3; Philippians 3:10-14) Why is a desire for a relationship with God more important than seeking to hear his voice? How does hearing his voice contribute to the relationship? Why are we commanded to “press in” to know the Lord? How does Paul’s passion for a relationship with God inspire you?**

## Learning to Follow Orders without Questioning

Part of a willing and submissive spirit is a willingness to obey:

1. Even if we don't understand why, and
2. Even if we don't know the final result.

Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854): "Theirs not to make reply, Theirs not to reason why, Theirs but to do and die."

Jonah is an example of a person who hasn't surrendered himself to God.

God Leads by Seeing the Whole Picture (Psalm 32:8-9)

We'll Only Know When We're Willing to Trust (John 7:17)

**Q3. (Psalm 32:8-9; John 7:17) Why is a willingness to obey without understanding the reasons for God's commands so important? How does obedience sometimes help us understand God's workings.**

Waiting on the Lord (Psalm 27:14)

"Wait" is *qāwâ*, "to wait or to look for with eager expectation."

The Subtlety of Pride

**Q4. How can pride corrupt our hearing from God? How do we protect ourselves from being deceived by our pride?**

Lessons for Disciples

1. You can worship but not know God, at least not know him intimately (1 Samuel 3:7)
2. You can hear God speaking, but not recognize that it is God (1 Samuel 3:4-6)
3. Sometimes a mentor can help us learn to recognize and respond to God's voice (1 Samuel 3:9). The mentor might then confirm that it is indeed God's voice that we heard (1 Samuel 3:18).
4. We must come before God as humble and obedient servants if we want to hear what he is saying (1 Samuel 3:9-10).
5. It is the relationship with God, not his voice, that is primary. We are seeking to know him intimately! (Hosea 6:3; Philippians 3:10-14; Psalm 27:8).
6. We need to cultivate spiritual receptivity, an affinity for, a bent toward, a sympathetic response to, a desire to have ... God (A.W. Tozer).
7. We must be willing to obey God quickly, without demanding to understand why – as soldiers who serve in an army under the direction of the general who sees the whole picture (Psalm 32:8-9).
8. We'll only know God's will when we're willing to follow him in trust (John 7:17).
9. Waiting for the Lord means that we trust him without demanding that he do something for us now! (Psalm 27:14).
10. We must beware of being filled with pride because God has spoken to us; humility is much more appropriate.

Week 4 Assignment. Ask God Questions and Listen for His Response

Your assignment this week is – every day in your Quiet Time – to ask God questions and then be still and listen. If he puts something in your mind write it down. Then share this with your spiritual partner, who may be able to help you discern if this is, indeed, God. Eventually you'll learn to discern God's voice on your own. But in the beginning, feedback from a sympathetic friend is helpful and encouraging.

## 5. Discerning God's Voice (Judges 6:36-40)

Yahweh Speaks to Gideon (Judges 6-8)

Gideon Asks for a Sign (Judges 6:36-38)

Tempting or Testing God

The word "test" (NIV, ESV), "prove" (KJV), or "make trial" (NRSV) in Judges 6:39 is the Hebrew verb *nāsâ*, "test, try, prove, tempt, assay, put to the proof, put to the test."

(Exodus 17:2, 7; also Psalm 78:18, 41; Deuteronomy 6:16; Psalm 95:7b-10; Isaiah 7:10-12; Matthew 4:7; Mark 8:11-12; Matthew 12:38-39; John 12:37; 1 Corinthians 1:22)

Humbly Asking for Confirmation

It is okay for us to ask God for confirmation the first time, or first few times, he speaks to us. But don't *demand* a particular confirmation.

**Q1. (Judges 6:36-38; Psalm 95:7-10) Does Gideon ask for a sign because of his unbelief? What is the difference between Gideon's seeking confirmation, and "testing God" in a way that displeases God? Does God mind if we ask for confirmation? When might God be upset with us for asking for confirmation?**

The Voices in Our Head

- God's voice – the real thing.
- The World – voices of others, peer pressure, worldly standards of success, etc.
- The Flesh – our own desires and thoughts, many of which are selfish.
- The Devil – demonic temptation and misdirection from Satan and his forces.
- The Conscience – our moral sense of right and wrong that we obtain from our upbringing. Sometimes we are hindered by a skewed sense of justice or righteousness – perhaps an extreme legalism, or perhaps an insensitivity to certain sins. Our conscience is strongly influenced by the culture we grow up in. However, the conscience can be educated by the Word of God as we seek his way.

A Learning Process Involves Mistakes (Hebrews 5:14)

**Q2. (Hebrews 5:14) Why will a person have to make mistakes in the process of learning to discern God's voice? If mistakes are part of the process, how can this be of God at all?**

The Voices of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil (Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 John 2:15-17)

The Renewal of Our Minds (Romans 12:2)

The Scriptures are necessary to help us discern God's voice from the voices of the world, the flesh, and the devil. *Do not neglect daily reading of the Bible*, since it is necessary for the "renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 5:26; John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

**Q3. (Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 John 2:16). Give an example of what the voice of the flesh – our lusts and desires – might sound like. Give an example of what the voice of the world might sound like. Give an example of what the voice of the devil might sound like. Why is a knowledge of the Scripture necessary for discernment of these voices?**

## Learn the Scriptures

Sometimes, God will “quicken” or make especially meaningful to you, a particular verse. This is a common way that God guides and speaks to us.

## Recognize and Surrender Your Desires (Mark 14:36)

### Confess and Repent of any Known Sin

Matthew 5:22-24;

Unconfessed sin injures our relationship with God and a sin-calloused heart is less able to hear his whispers, detect his nudges, and respond (1 Peter 3:7; 1 John 1:7-9). As you're listening to God and discerning, confess any known sins. Keep short accounts with God. This way you'll both (1) *want* to hear him, and (2) *be able to discern* his nudges and promptings.

**Q4. (Mark 14:36; 1 Peter 3:7) Why is it necessary to recognize and then surrender our desires when we are seeking God's will. What happens if we neglect to do this? How can holding on to sin distort what you think you are hearing from God?**

### Inner Peace (Colossians 3:15)

### Don't Be Rushed

### Counsel with a Spiritual Brother or Sister (Proverbs 11:14)

**Q5. (Proverbs 11:14) Why is it valuable to counsel with spiritual people in the Christian community when we're learning to discern God's voice? How is having a spiritual mentor helpful? What is the danger of always going to another person to confirm God's word? Why is out-growing a mentor a common occurrence?**

### The Voice of the Spirit (John 10:3-5; Romans 8:16; 1 John 2:20, 27)

### You Can Trust Your Shepherd

1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 14:29.

### Lessons for Disciples

1. Asking God for confirmation, like Gideon. When we really desire to know his will and aren't yet sure of his voice, seeking confirmation pleases our Father (Judges 6:36-38).
2. "Putting God to the test" springs from a heart of unbelief (and perhaps rebellion), that demands that God fulfill some sign before we believe in him. This is a heart difference, a motivational difference from asking God for confirmation.
3. Our task is to discern God's true voice and promptings from the other voices in our head: the world, the flesh, the devil, and our conscience.
4. We can't learn to discern God's voice without making mistakes; this is a learning process. However, we can learn to discern.
5. We've been used to listening to the voice of the world and the devil. God's word helps us recognize the difference between their voices and God's way (Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 John 2:15-17).
6. When we explicitly recognize and then surrender our own ambitions and desires to God in prayer, we are better able to distinguish between them and God's will, as did Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36).

7. Getting to know the Scriptures by daily reading helps us discern God's voice from other voices, to distinguish the acts of the flesh from the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-23), by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). If we neglect daily Bible reading, we can get in deep trouble without hardly being aware it.
8. One bonus of reading the Bible is that the Holy Spirit sometimes "quickens" or makes certain verses alive to us that we've passed over before.
9. To discern God's voice clearly, we must confess and repent of any known sin, which injures our relationship with God and makes our heart calloused, that is, less able to hear God's whispers and nudges, and respond to them (1 Peter 3:7; 1 John 1:7-9).
10. The presence or absence of "inner peace" is another way to discern God's leading (Colossians 3:15).
11. God's voice is gentle but firm; Satan's voice, on the other hand can sometimes be compulsive and pushy. Nevertheless, realize that Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light, so be wise.
12. Being part of a Christian community provides safety to us, since we can find spiritual men and women who can counsel us and help us discern God's voice (Proverbs 11:14).
13. The Holy Spirit provides an inner witness of our relationship to the Good Shepherd. "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit also teaches us and leads us into all truth (John 14-16; 1 John 2:20, 27).
14. It's not wrong to seek to discern what you believe God is showing you, just as it is not wrong to test prophecy to make sure it is from God (1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 14:29).
15. As you're learning all this, you can trust your Father, who understands that it takes children some time – and some falls – to learn to walk. God loves you!

### Week 5 Assignment. Converse with God While Around Other People

Your assignment this week is to talk to him during your day, especially when you're around other people. Pray quick prayers – "God, bless Helen over there. She seems like she is having a hard day." You may find that God nudges you to engage Helen in a conversation and encourage her – perhaps pray for her. Then share this with your mentor and spiritual partner. Even if you *thought* you should have engaged Helen, but were afraid to do so, share that. This is all a process of discerning God's voice and promptings, and then being willing to obey without questioning.

### Wrapping It Up

Here's the journey we've been on.

1. Listening as a Biblical Pattern (Mark 1:35; John 5:19)
2. Recognizing God's Voice (1 Kings 19)
3. Nudges and No (Acts 8:26-40; 16:6-10)
4. Heart Preparation for Listening to God (1 Samuel 3:1-10)
5. Discerning God's Voice (Judges 6:36-40)