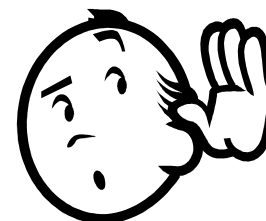


Hearing God's voice



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God wants to be our Lord. For this to happen He must speak to us so we hear His voice and know what He wants us to do. Then we must do what He says!

It's easy to understand when people speak to us. It's quite different when God speaks, though, because He speaks into our spirits. We need know it is God speaking, recognise His voice, and know how to respond.

That means we need to understand how God made us, and how He wants us to live in relationship with Him.

There are many examples in the Bible of God speaking to His people. eg. Moses Exodus 20:1, Isaiah 6:8, Elijah 1 Kings 19:11-13, Jesus' baptism Matthew 3:17, Paul, Acts 9:4, the early Church Acts 13:2,3; 15:28.

- **We are spirit (pneuma), soul (psuche) and body (soma)**

We are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). As He is 'three in one' so are we: spirit, soul and body.

May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Spirit:

- gives life John 6:63
- is sensed through our intuition and conscience
- is where we worship God John 4:24
- is eternal

Soul:

- is the seat of our personality
- is the 'me' that lives in my body
- enables us to think (mind), feel (emotions) and choose (will)
- is eternal

Body:

- is the structure in which our souls and spirits live
- enables us to sense the environment through sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch
- has strong inbuilt drives to nourish, protect and reproduce
- ages, and decays at death Genesis 3:19

- **God, who is spirit, communicates to our spirits**

God

rhema - the spoken word of God, communicated by the Holy Spirit



We do what God wants

God is spirit John 4:24

The words (rhema) I have spoken to you, they are spirit and they are life. John 6:63

As God speaks to us we gradually learn to know His voice. We 'hear' God's voice in our spirits; believe God; choose to obey and act in accordance with God's will.

This means we "walk by faith and not by sight." 2 Corinthians 5:7

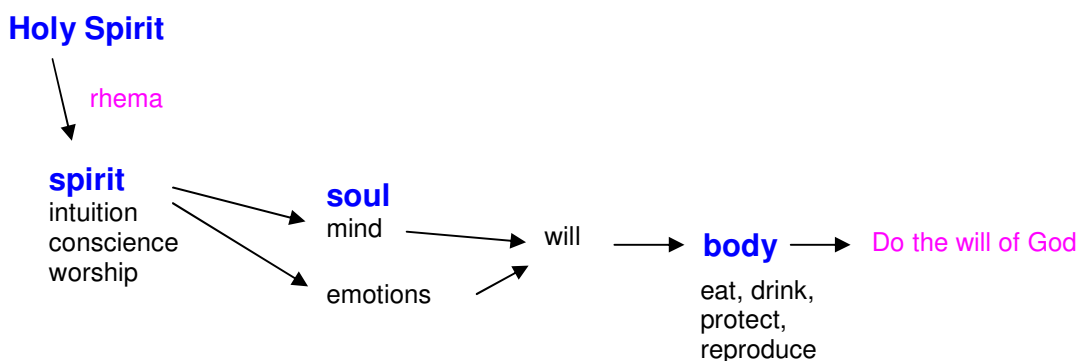
We are 'led by the Spirit' rather than by our own desires.

How can we hear God's voice and be led by the Spirit?

Romans 8 tells us how!

v5-8 We can live according to the spirit or according to our sinful nature (flesh)

Living according to the spirit brings life and peace; living according to the sinful nature is hostile to God and brings spiritual death.



v 9-11 The Holy Spirit brings life into all aspects of our lives

Spirit: our spirits are alive to God; our consciences are sharp; we have intimacy in worship; we sense God's voice clearly

Soul: our minds are clear, open, healthy and positive; our emotions are controlled and reflect the fruits of the Holy Spirit; our wills are set to obey God and delight in His will Psalm 40:8

Body: our bodies are healthy and fit to do God's will.

v 12,13 Living according to the sinful nature leads to spiritual death

If we live according to the 'flesh' God becomes irrelevant; and other 'gods' quickly take over eg. material things, jobs, idols We lose our sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

v 14-17 We are to be led by the Spirit

God speaks to us by His Holy Spirit. We are led by the Spirit as we hear His voice and obey. The Spirit then works in us to bring about His fruits and His life. (Galatians 5:22-26)

This is how God designed life to be lived!

If we focus on bodily desires eg food, drink, sex, material things they can easily take control of our minds, emotions and wills. This sours our spirits and we lose sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

If we focus on the things of the Spirit we are renewed in our minds and emotions and our bodies are refreshed. God's life flows into every aspect of our lives! This is when we know intimacy with God. This is what it means to be a Child of God!

Ways that God speaks

God speaks to us in many different ways! There is no 'formula' for this. He chooses how He wants to communicate with us and speaks accordingly.

We need to be open to God speaking and sensitive at all times to hear His voice. Don't be closed to any possible way that God could speak to you!

(But recognise that it is not easy to be sure it is God speaking; and that it is easy to mis-interpret what He might be saying, or even manipulate situations to our advantage eg. *'God spoke to me and said you should give me some money'!!!!!!*). Whenever you sense God is speaking make sure it is confirmed in other ways.

Every matter is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses.
2 Corinthians 13:1

Possible ways that God could speak

- a sensing in your spirit "I just feel God is saying".
- a Bible verse comes alive (Hebrews 4:12)
- a revelation, teaching (1 Corinthians 14:26)
- a dream, vision (Numbers 12:6)
- a prophecy, an interpretation of a message in tongues, a word of knowledge, a word of wisdom (1 Corinthians 12:7-11)
- a circumstance eg. something 'just happens' to catch your eye.
- an angel (Hebrews 1:14)
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(Not by putting out a fleece. God was angry when Gideon did this. Judges 6).

The anointing

In each of these the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you sense His anointing (eg. by a lift in your spirit, a sense of peace, a feeling of assurance, a raising of your heartbeat, warmth, tingling, etc.).

But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.

The anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as it has taught you, remain in him. 1 John 2:20, 27

anointing (chrisma)

- consecrating Jesus to the Messianic office, and furnishing him with the necessary powers for its administration
- enduing Christians with the gifts of the Holy Spirit

Understanding what God is saying

Along with this anointing you have a sense of what God is saying. More often than not it is just an understanding rather than specific sentences. The meaning becomes clear in your mind and you can say *'The Lord said'* or *'I believe that the Lord is saying to me ...'*

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word (rhema) of Christ. Romans 10:17.

Then you have a choice! Do you believe that it is God speaking? If so, in obedience to God's revealed will you must then speak it out; do what He says, act on it etc.
See 1 Corinthians 2:10-16

- The understanding is revealed by the Holy Spirit into your spirit.
- It is freely given to you.
- Spiritual truths are expressed in spiritual ways.
- People who don't have the Holy Spirit (non-Christians) can't understand this. It is foolishness to them.
- You can make judgements about what to do based on God's revelation.
- This is how you know the mind of Christ.

This is what it means to "walk by faith and not by sight." 2 Corinthians 5:7

You hear God's voice and do what He wants you to do. And that's when life is exciting!



How do I know it is God, and not just my own thoughts and ideas?

Everyone has a spirit. This means we are all continually experiencing spiritual sensations eg. impressions, intuition, pricks of conscience, feelings, "words",

This is a totally normal for all human beings.

These impressions can be from:

- God (coming as a rhema, which we sense as an anointing)
- others
- satan
- ourselves

The big question is:

How can I know it is God speaking, and not just my own thoughts, feelings and ideas?

The honest answer is "You can't"!!!

There's no little signpost that says 'This is God' or 'That's just your own idea'. (We are always to "walk by faith and not by sight". 2 Corinthians 5:7).

Whenever you receive a 'word' from God you'll always have to believe that it is Him who is speaking. You will also need to 'test it' to see whether it really is from God and have it confirmed in some way.

*Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God. 1 John 4:1
Every matter is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses. 2 Corinthians 13:1*

There are many different ways you can test whether a word is from God, and/or by which God confirms His word, so you can know He is the One who is speaking to you. As a result you can have lots of confidence that it is God speaking and not just your own good ideas, thoughts, or feelings.

1. If it comes from God it will be life-giving

The words (rhema) I have spoken to you, they are spirit and they are life. John 6:63

(We'll not concern ourselves with satan's attempts to influence us. He's a defeated enemy. Resist him in Jesus' name.

Submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. James 4: 7, 8.

If you feel satan is influencing you and you can't resist or overcome his attempts talk it over with counselors in the Church and seek prayer or deliverance).

2. If it comes from God it will have His nature about it

- it will be loving and compassionate *God is love.* 1 John 4:16
- it will lead to what is best for us in the situation
- it will come with peace 1 Corinthians 14:33
- it will be truthful and guide you into truth John 16:13
- it will be gracious
- it will have authority
- it will be warm
- it will bring hope
- it will lead to righteousness
- It will honour Jesus John 16:14
- it will acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh I John 4:1-4

3. If it comes from God it will reflect the fruits of the Spirit Galatians 5:22-24

By their fruits you shall know them. Matthew 7:16

4. If it comes from God it will line up with the Word of God (the Bible)

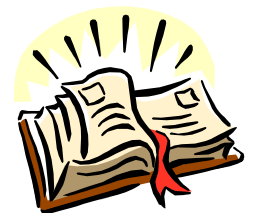
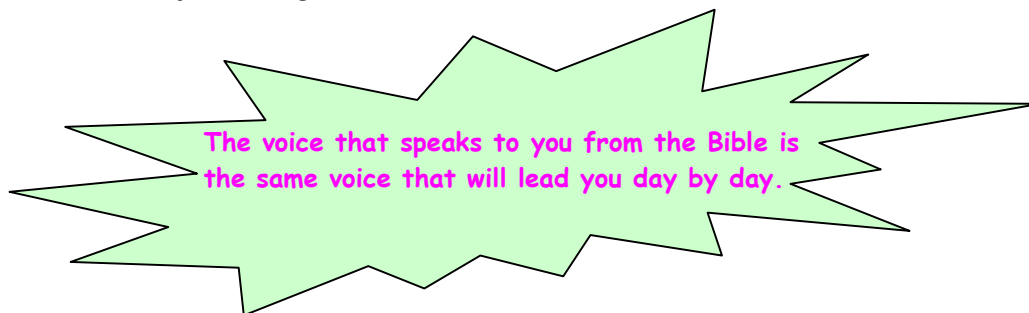
5. You will recognise it as the same voice that speaks to you from the Bible

One of the functions of the Word (logos) of God is to divide/separate/distinguish the soul and the spirit. ie. help you to know the difference between the Holy Spirit speaking (in your spirit), and your own thoughts and ideas (from your soul).

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12, 13

(The context in Hebrews Chapter 4 is about hearing God's word v2; combining it with faith v2, ceasing our labours v10, and so entering God's rest. ie. doing the things that God wants us to do. Only in the centre of God's will is there life, joy, peace, purpose, satisfaction.... ie. rest. That's why it is so important to hear God's voice and to know that it really is Him speaking).

The more time you spend in the Bible hearing God's voice the more you will recognise His voice as He leads you through life.



As you hear God speaking to you in the Bible (a safe place!) it becomes easier to recognise that it is Him speaking in the normal course of life. You know what His voice is like! Jesus said: *My sheep hear my voice.* John 10:27

His sheep follow Him because they know His voice. John 10:4.

(The word for sheep here refers to mature sheep, not lambs. If you want to be a mature Christian spend time in His Word. That's the best place to hear God speaking so you get to know His voice).

This is how the Word of God distinguishes the soul and spirit:

- you recognise and know your own voice, thoughts ideas etc ie. from your soul
- you also recognise and know God's voice speaking into your spirit

6. It will reflect God's wisdom.

James 3:14 - 18 describes two kinds of wisdom, and their effects:

Watch that you don't fall into the trap of thinking that everything from God is good (true), and that everything from you is bad (not true!). This is a hangover from an old philosophy called Gnosticism. There's still a bit of this thinking around among Christians.

	effects
<i>wisdom that does not come from God</i>	<i>envy, selfishness, boasting, denial of the truth, disorder, evil practices</i>
<i>wisdom that comes from God</i>	<i>purity, peace, consideration for others, submission, mercy, good fruit, impartiality, sincerity, a 'harvest of righteousness'</i>

How can we hear God's voice more clearly?

We know how to look after our bodies (through good eating patterns, sleep routines, exercise etc.) and to look after our souls (through reading, music, learning, wise choices, patience, study, personal growth etc.).

But what about our spirits? The world we live in is continually drawing us away from a spiritual relationship with God. Yet this is the source of our life in Christ! We need to be more spiritual in a materialistic world!

How? How can we develop in our spiritual lives? How can we be more led by the Holy Spirit? How can we be more in the centre of God's will?

To develop our spiritual life and hear God's voice more clearly we need to invest in the spiritual disciplines.

Take time to be still in God's presence.

This involves deliberately going aside from your normal routines and spending time focusing on God. Wait on God. Be still in His presence. Let His Spirit feed your spirit.

These personal quiet times can be helped by solitude, prayer, fasting, meditation, silence, worship It's not about the mechanism, it's all about the Lord. It's not about doing; it's about being. Being with Him!

As you spend time in His presence you will become more sensitive to the Holy Spirit; your spirit will be nourished; your love for Him will grow: and you will hear God's voice more clearly.

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Psalm 37:7

The lamp of the Lord searches the spirit of a man; it searches out his inmost being. Proverbs 20:7

It is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty that gives him understanding. Job 32:8




They that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will rise up on wings like eagles; they will run and not be weary; they will walk and not faint. Isaiah 40:31



Feed on God's Word



The word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12

There are many techniques you can use to feed on God's Word so that it is living and active:

-  **Read it out loud.** Read it slowly, carefully and systematically. Concentrate and listen to what God is saying to you.
-  **Underline it.** eg. Blue for promises and commands; red for salvation; green for the Holy Spirit; black for sin. Underlining helps you concentrate on what you are reading.
-  **Meditate on it.** Go over and over it discussing it with the Holy Spirit. Consider it from all perspectives.



His delight is in the Law of the Lord and on His Law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Psalm 1:2, 3

-  **Put it into your own words.** Summarising or paraphrasing helps you understand the meaning of the Word and makes it personal to you. It's best if you write down your thoughts as you do it.
-  **Study it.** You can study a book, a theme, a character, an event, Study involves looking up a range of resources (commentaries, concordances, dictionary, atlas, books etc) and using them to develop a systematic understanding. Again it's good to write down your studies.

searchgodsword.org is a great website for Bible Study!

Study to show yourself approved unto God; a workman who does not need to be ashamed; rightly handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:13

As you feed on God's Word He speaks to you! You hear His voice!

This is where you can learn to recognise God's voice and distinguish it from the myriad of other 'voices' speaking to you. The rhema speaking to you from God's Word is the same rhema that speaks to lead you through life.

Whether you turn to the right or the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying "This is the way; walk in it". Isaiah 30:21

So, there are many ways that God uses to speak to us, so that we hear His voice. Once we know He is speaking to us we can go forward in confidence, trusting Him as we do what He wants us to do. This is how to be effective in our Christian lives. And in doing God's will we will find meaning and purpose in life.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:15,16

Discussion questions

What are the main ways that God speaks to you? What is God's voice like for you? How do you know it is God?

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in communicating God's will to us? How does He speak to us?

What methods does God use to confirm that He is speaking to us?

What can we do to hear God's voice more clearly?

Some people open up the Bible and trust that whatever verse 'jumps out' at them is God speaking to them. Is this a reliable way of hearing God's voice? What place should the Bible have in the process of hearing God's voice?

How does the 'busyness' of modern life affect our ability to hear God's voice? What does this say about our priorities? What can we do about it?

What have you learnt about hearing God's voice from this study? How will you apply this in your life?