



HOW TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S VOICE

by Pastor Kevin Club, Cape Carteret Baptist Church, Cape Carteret, NC

Learning to Hear God's Voice

We're continuing in our series on Learning to Hear God's Voice. Last week you learned about four ways you can hear God speak. One of the ways is God gives us impressions in our mind. You were told we would come back to this today and finish up the message because it causes a lot of confusion. If God gives me impressions, how do I know when they're really from God. How do I know I'm not just talking to myself. I've found it very easy to confuse my desires with God's will. The Bible says Satan can talk to us. We can read things and they get put in our mind and we think that it's God, but it's just really someone else's words.

So how do you know when it's really God? This may not be a big issue if you're just trying to decide what restaurant to go to after church. But if you're talking about who to marry or a major career change, this is a major issue. You need to hear from God. God wants to talk to you. So how do I know when it's really God speaking to me?

"Don't always believe everything you hear just because someone says it is a message from God; test it first to see if it really is!"
1 John 4:1

Circle "test it." The Bible says we must learn to distinguish God's voice. We've got to figure out if it's really God or not.

I want to give you the seven ways to test an impression. They form a filter and they're all interrelated. You can't pick and choose. If an impression does not pass all seven of these tests you know it's not from God. You can disqualify it. On the other hand if you apply these seven tests to an idea or impression that you've got and it passes all seven, you can know with absolute certainty you've heard from God.

7 WAYS TO TEST AN IMPRESSION

1. DOES IT AGREE WITH THE BIBLE?

"Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away." Luke 21:33

God will never tell you to violate anything in this book. Never. He doesn't say one thing one time, and another thing another time. God is consistent. If He said it in the past, He's going to say it in the future. He is always consistent. He is never inconsistent. The Bible tells us very clearly, "Pay your taxes" so God is not going to give you the impression... "the government wastes your money anyway so just cheat, lie about it because they're not going to use it the right way anyway." God would never tell you that. We always get into trouble when we doubt God's word, when we don't listen to what it says.

"Even if an angel should preach a different 'gospel' than this let him be eternally condemned!" Galatians 1:8

There is much in your life that you don't even have to pray about. You just do what the Bible says. Some ask me "Do you pray about getting up in the morning and going to church?" No, I don't. I just get up. I don't pray about tithing, I just do it. I don't pray about telling other people the good news, I just do it. Because it's right here in God's word. When you build your life on this book, you're going to ask the right questions. If you don't build your life on this book, you're going to miss God's will much of the time.

2. DOES IT MAKE ME MORE LIKE CHRIST?

"In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:5

Jesus is the standard by which we measure everything we do. God says very clearly in the Bible that His goal for your life is to make you like Jesus. Not to be a god but to be godly. To have character, to have love, joy, peace, patience, all the qualities that Jesus had - in your life. He would never tell you to do anything that contradicts or would hinder you from reaching that goal. For instance, God says in James 3...

"If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition. . . such `wisdom' doesn't come from heaven. . . but is of the devil. The wisdom that comes from God is . . . pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, impartial and sincere." James 3:14-17

In other words, you know that impression doesn't come from God if it causes bitterness, envy or selfish ambition. So this is a filter you can run those impression through to see if they are from God or not. On the other hand, if the thought is pure then it's from God. If you get an impure thought that one obviously isn't from God.

His wisdom is peace loving. Ideas from God promote harmony rather than conflict. If you get an idea that's going to promote conflict it's probably not from God. You have to think what would this idea do to other people? Would it hurt them or harm them? Would it build them up or tear them down?

If an idea is genuinely from God, the Bible says it's considerate. It's considerate of how other people think. A lot of people say, "God told me to do this" and they just bowl over everybody and don't care how it hurts anybody. Because "God told them to do it." God didn't tell them to do something like that. The Bible says God's wisdom is considerate.

It's submissive. If you've really heard from God you're not going to be arrogant and bragging about it. Some people think they've heard from God but their behavior shows they really haven't because they're self righteous, egotistical and always putting everybody else down. "God told me this and therefore you're nothing!"

God's wisdom is full of mercy. If you've really heard an idea from God it's going to cause you to be more gracious towards people rather than judgmental. If after I've heard from God, it makes me more judgmental, and I put you down, and tell you what you're doing wrong and always criticizing you, you didn't hear from God. That's not the way Jesus lived. And Jesus is our model.

3. DOES MY CHURCH FAMILY CONFIRM IT?

When you become a believer, a follower of Christ, you not only get a new relationship to God, you get a new relationship to other people. It's called the church, the family of God. You become a member of the family.

God never meant for you to make a major decision in life on your own. He wants you to get help and advice from wise mature Christians, other believers who are grounded in the faith and have a little more Bible under their belt than maybe you have. Check it out over and over. The Bible says, "Smart people get advise. Fools don't." Fools just think they know the right thing to do and act on their own intuition without ever checking it out with anybody else who is a mature Christian.

"God's intent is that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known." Ephesians 3:10

If God has genuinely spoken to you, you've got an idea, an impression, He's going to confirm it through other believers. The biggest reason people mess up their lives, Christians, too, -- is they try to live their life without any accountability to anybody else, without any support, without any confirmation, any council, any guidance. The Bible says, "In a multitude of counselors there is safety." When we try to live a Lone Ranger approach to the Christian life we're going to fall flat on our face. When in doubt, check it out.

Check it out with other believers. If you don't, you're going to get in trouble. What we often do is start asking for advice and we keep asking until we find somebody who will agree with what we want to do anyway?

Sometimes, we don't like to check out major decisions with other believers because we don't want to be told we're wrong. But it's better to be told you're wrong before you waste the time, energy and money than it is after you have all the heartache and hurt from a stupid decision. If you've heard from God, really heard from God, other Christians are going to confirm it.

"The wisdom of the righteous can save you." Proverbs 11:9

4. IS IT CONSISTENT WITH HOW GOD SHAPED ME?

"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10

Before you were born God planned your life. God made you for a purpose. You're not here by accident. You're here for a reason. Matter of fact He knew you would be here in this place on this day before you were ever born.

Example: The pew that many of you are sitting in was designed in a certain way. It has a back, a seat – if you are in the older pews which are mostly in the front of the building, they where designed to help keep you cooler. There are airflow slots in the back part of the seats, these designs were made to fulfill a purpose. The purpose of a pew was so you could have a place to sit. A microphone has a very different design. It fulfills a different purpose. Pews were designed to sit on. You weren't designed to sit on a microphone. You speak through microphones, you sit on pews. Not vice versa.

The design reveals purpose. The same thing is true of you. You were designed a certain way. We call that SHAPE. God has shaped you for a career, a ministry, for life involving your spiritual gifts, your heart (your passions, desires -- some things turn you on, some things you could care less about; some things you love to do, some things you hate to do; some things you're interested in and some things you're bored to tears with). Where do you think you got that emotional makeup. God gave it to you. He gave us all different make ups. Different hearts. Why? He wants all the work in the world to get done. Some people love to do accounting and some people can't stand accounting. Some people love to do mechanics, some people can't stand mechanics. Some people love to cook, some people hate to cook.

He's given you Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities. You may be good with words. You may be good with numbers. You may be good with animals. You may be good with people. You may be good with mechanical things. Then He's given you a Personality. You may be extroverted or introverted. You may like routine or you may like variety. You may like to work all by yourself or you might like to work in a team. Who do you think gave you your personality? God did. He was designing you for a purpose. Then He gives you Experiences -- vocational experiences and spiritual experiences and educational experiences and painful experiences. All of these things shape your life.

Just as the design of a chair reveals it's purpose, the design or shape of your life reveals your purpose -- what God wants you to do. For instance, why would God gift you as a great musician and then tell you to be a mechanic. He wouldn't. That would be a waste of the shape He's given you. On the other hand, if you're blind forget trying to become a Nascar driver. If you're good at planning then your ministry in life will involve planning. If you're good at art or writing or with numbers or leading, then your life, your career, your ministry, your place, your niche in this world involves what God gave you.

When you get an impression from God you ask "Is it consistent with how God's shaped me?" If God were to say to me, "I want you to resign Cape Carteret and become a art teacher." I would know without a doubt that is not from God because I was never any good at art in school. A lot of God's will for your life has to do with looking at your design. What are you good at? What do you love to do?

"God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. . ." Romans 12:6

God's will for your life will never contradict how he has basically designed you. If you ever sense a leading in your life that is contrary to your basic shape, your personality, your experiences, ignore it. It's not from God.

5. DOES IT CONCERN MY RESPONSIBILITY?

If it's not your responsibility why in the world should God talk to you about it? In John 21, Jesus is talking to Peter and He tells him how he's going to die. He explains that he's going to have to suffer for being a Christian. Peter turns around and points to John the Apostle and says, "What about that guy? How's he going to die?" Jesus says "It's none of your business! Don't worry about it"

I only have to worry about what's going on in my life, I don't have to worry about God's will for your life. I can't figure out my own motives most of the time, much less figure out yours. If God is going to talk to you, you need to ask "Is He really talking to me or is He talking about something else? If it's somebody else, does it concern my responsibility?" When you listen for God to speak to you, you need to listen for God to speak to you, not your son or your wife. You need to say, "What is God's will for me?"

"We will all be judged one day, not by each other's standards, or even our own, but by the judgment of God. . . it is to God alone that we shall have to answer for our actions." Romans 14:10, 13

You need to be very careful when you think God's told you about something, somebody else should do. It's very dangerous. A lot of well meaning Christians, well intentioned but also presumptuous, have caused enormous amount of damage because they thought God was talking to them about what somebody else should do.

We all have direct access to God. God can speak directly to each of us through Jesus Christ, His son. You need to be very, very careful about saying "God told me to tell you to do..." Every believer has a direct access to God and you have enough difficulty handling your own sins much less worrying about anybody else's. God can take care of that.

Does God ever speak to me about other people? Yes, He does occasionally. But three qualifications:

1. God will use you to confirm what He's already said to them. It's very unlikely He's going to tell you first. God will use you to confirm what He's already said.
2. If God speaks to you to help somebody else, He'll usually do it without you knowing it. That way your ego doesn't get in the way and you start taking pride and thinking you're some super saint. He will usually use you without you knowing it.
3. Trust God to speak to that person first before you talk to them.

6. IS IT CONVICTING RATHER THAN CONDEMNING?

Conviction is from God, condemnation is from the devil. Conviction points the way to change, condemnation just makes you feel bad. When God convicts you of sin in your life it is always specific. He says, Here's an attitude, behavior, or something in your life that needs changing. He'll be very specific and put His finger right on it. "You're blowing it in this area." He will be very specific.

On the other hand, condemnation which comes from the devil, is very vague and very general and basically says, "You're bad. You're no good. You're worthless. You stink. God could never use you. Forget ever trying to be a Christian." He's very general.

"Satan is the accuser of believers." Revelation 12:10

Conviction always leads to an action to change; condemnation just makes you feel bad. When God is speaking to you, He'll say, "Here's what's wrong in your life and here's what you need to do." He'll give you specific things. The result is it always leads to confession, repentance and then forgiveness and the feelings leave.

On the other hand, condemnation is the devil saying to you, "You're worthless. You call yourself a Christian? Who do you think you are? You should give up trying to live for God because you can't do anything. You just keep falling and falling." He's always putting you down. Conviction comes from God, the Holy Spirit. Condemnation comes from the devil and you need to recognize the difference.

"If we confess our sins to him, God can be depended on to forgive us and cleanse us from every wrong." 1 John 1:9 IS II

7. DO I SENSE GOD'S PEACE ABOUT IT?

"God is not the author of confusion." 1 Corinthians 14:33

So if you're feeling confused that confusion is not coming from God. It may be coming from yourself or other people, but it's not coming from God. If you feel pressured and overwhelmed and driven to make a hasty decision, a major decision in life, and you're very pressured to make it, question it. That's not the way God works. There's not one single example in the Bible where God says, "Rush!" to a major decision. Not one. The Bible says God is patient. God would rather have you make the right decision than have you make the quick decision. Satan drives us compulsively while God's spirit draws us compassionately, gently.

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts..." Colossians 3:15

If God is genuinely speaking to you and you think this idea is from God, it's going to bring peace to your heart IF you follow it. God's Spirit produces a calm spirit. Worry and anxiety are never from God. Never. In the Bible it says, "Don't worry!" We are commanded not to worry! If you get an idea that is a worry, it's not from God! God would never give you an idea that He's commanded you not to have. You need to look for His peace.

God does not want to play games with you. God is not trying to confuse you. It's not a cat and mouse game of "Let's see if you can figure out God's will and let's see how hard I can make it!" That's not the way God acts to His children. He wants you to know His will, so much that He's given us these seven keys in which He says "Here are some ways that you can filter out and know if it's you or is it God talking to you?"

The secret to hearing God clearly is get to know Him better and better every day. The more you understand Him, the better you know Him, the easier it is to hear His voice in a split second when He wants to talk to you. Get to know God better and better every day.

You may think you've never heard God speak to you. That's a good indication that you don't have a relationship with Him. John 8:47 "He who belongs to God hears what God says." The reason you don't hear is that you don't belong to God. If you've never heard God it means you need to establish a relationship to Him. And we want to help you do that this morning.

Others of you are believers and in the past God's voice was very clear to you at different times but right now it's been a little fuzzy, a little distant. Maybe there's some static on the line and you haven't heard from God in weeks and maybe months. What's happened? How come you don't hear God as clearly as you used to? You've allowed sin to block the channel in your life. There is something that is wrong in your life that has come between you and God and until you deal with that, the channel is blocked. Your heart has grown hard and you're not as sensitive to God as you used to be. Come home to Jesus Christ.