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Can you actually *know* what God is saying to you? How can you be sure that it is God talking to you and not just a figment of your imagination? How can you be sure you are hearing Him correctly? After all, He doesn't usually speak out loud.

If you're asking these kinds of questions, you are in the right place! Ready to get started on finding the answers?

Getting Started

You need to begin by asking yourself this question:

Are you really listening or are you like the nation of Israel?

"You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing." (Is 42:20)

If the extent of your communication with God is telling Him what you want and then expecting Him to immediately answer "yes" and in a way that is blatantly obvious, you will be greatly disappointed!

Sometimes God *does* answer quickly and obviously, but not always. Why? Because He isn't our cosmic genie waiting to grant our every desire! He is like a good father who doesn't spoil his children with everything they want, but gives them only what is beneficial. God wants to be in relationship with us, not to be our vending machine.

In order to have a good relationship with someone, we need good communication. That involves both talking and *listening*. Communication with God in "Christianese" is otherwise known as prayer.

Prayer is an invitation to intimacy with the very Creator of your soul. God Himself said:

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." (Jer 33:3)

If we only see prayer as a means to get what we want, we're missing out on some of the sweetest fellowship we could ever know! So our attitude—about prayer (how we look at it) needs to change from...

Something we do to get something from God

TO

Something we do in order to commune with the Maker of our souls.

What if God does not demand prayer as much as gives prayer? What if God wants prayer in order to satisfy us? What if prayer is a means of God nourishing, restoring, healing, converting us? Suppose prayer is primarily allowing ourselves to be loved, addressed and claimed by God. What if praying means opening ourselves to the gift of God's Own Self and presence? What if our part in prayer is primarily letting God be Giver? Suppose prayer is not a duty but the opportunity to experience healing and transforming love?

~Martin Smith

Perhaps you never saw prayer as a 2-way street—with you talking and listening to God and God talking and listening to you. But Scripture bears this out. I talk at length about how to communicate with God in my first book, [*Our Knowable God: Learning How to Relate to Our Invisible Lord*](#). In there I mention that our Lord does communicate with His people and He does so clearly. So what's the problem then? If God hears our prayer, then why doesn't He answer? I believe much of the problem lies in the following things:

- Our lack of understanding about *how* God speaks—through His Word, prayer, His people (the church), and circumstances
- The inability to recognize His voice and to distinguish it from our own, the world, or Satan
- Unconfessed sin and living in disobedience (Ps 66:18; Zec 7:13)
- Asking with an improper attitude towards our holy God—pride (Is 66:2-4)
- Asking with wrong motives (Jas 4:3)
- Having wrong expectations

How to Listen and Recognize God’s ‘Voice’

First, I must say that recognizing God’s voice has been a longing in my heart for a very long time. I also have to say I have not arrived, but I have come a long way. What I have learned is that it takes diligence and a great desire, but it is invariably worth the effort. Effective communication with humans is difficult—just ask husbands if they understand their wives—how much more so with our transcendent God?

Nevertheless, Jesus tells us in John 10:1-16 that His sheep *do* recognize His voice and they follow Him. So then, it is a matter of *learning* how to listen and to do so with the right heart attitude.

God *wants* you to be able to distinguish His voice—His leading, so that you *can* follow. With His enabling you will recognize it in increasing manner.

Twelve Tips

1. Understand a few facts:

- This is a lifelong process of learning.
- Accept the fact that it is a matter of trial and error.
- If it's God talking to you, He will *never* contradict His Word or His character.

2. Learn the ways in which God speaks

God speaks to us through creation, people, circumstances, and His Word. God doesn't speak to us in the same way as humans. Although God could speak audibly, today He usually chooses not to. However, there have been times when God spoke to me so pointedly that it wouldn't have been any clearer if He had spoken out loud. If He wants to communicate with His child, He can do so unmistakably and clearly.

One of the methods He uses to communicate with us is speaking directly to our hearts. More often, though, I have found that He communicates to me more with a general sense of His will, which He confirms with time.

God's communication to us can come in various forms

- Conviction of the Holy Spirit for something we've done wrong, which manifests itself as guilt
- A warning with a small or great sense of uneasiness
- A burden on our hearts to pray or call someone, or for a ministry need
- A sense of urgency to do something right away
- A sense of overwhelming peace, love, or comfort
- A sense of His presence

I cannot verbalize exactly how God conveys His message to us. All I know is that He does.

God's communication comes primarily through His Word

The vast majority of times that I have "heard" from God *correctly* was while I was praying, reading, and meditating on His Word or listening to biblical teaching. That's why it is so important to gain knowledge of the Bible, not just a verse here or there.

Warning

Beware of your emotions interfering with discerning God's voice. It's very easy to confuse your feelings for God's voice, especially when you desperately want something. Ask the Lord for confirmation. (See [Determining God's Will](#) blog series for more help.)

3. Make sure you have a clean heart

Our biggest hindrance to hearing God is unconfessed sin.

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. (Ps 66:18)

4. Desire to hear

We need to develop an attitude that God is the most important person in our lives. When someone is important to you, you care about what they think and say. You do want to listen and pay attention to them.

5. Give God full attention

God is there, at any moment, ready to give His full attention to us. Couldn't we at least try to give God our undivided attention some of the time? I think we all suffer from "attention deficit disorder" because our lives are so busy, with a million things vying for our attention. But God can teach us not to be this way, if we let Him. I believe if we would ask our Lord to help decrease our distractions and our wandering minds, and to quiet our hurried hearts, He would respond with a resounding "yes"!

I personally have struggled greatly in this area of being still, quiet, and undistracted.

3 Practical Tips for Focusing our Full Attention on God

1. Learn to quiet your hearts (Ps 46:10, Ps 131:1-2)
2. Start each quiet time with prayer
3. Minimize distractions

6. Be sensitive and available to hear

God may choose to speak to us at odd, and sometimes inconvenient times. The question is, "Are we willing to stop and listen?" What if it was in the middle of the night? Is sleep more important than hearing from the Creator of the universe? I must tell you I have had some of the sweetest fellowship with my Savior in the wee hours of the night.

7. Have a humble, yielded heart

Are we listening in humility and submission? Or are we demanding an answer or listening with a "I'll consider what you say, but not necessarily do it" attitude? God is God and we are not! Without humility and submission we will not hear what the Lord is trying to tell us, and therefore, we will not grow in our intimacy with God.

8. Expect God to answer

In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation. (Ps 5:3)

9. Give God time to answer

God may speak to us immediately, or later that day or week, or it may even take years! Sometimes it simply depends on what we are asking.

10. Don't just make requests

Wouldn't you grow weary if your child constantly asked for things, but never conversed with you about anything else? How do you think God might feel when we do the same to Him?

11. Develop an utter dependency upon God

We are more likely to seek an answer and closely pay attention for an answer when we are in great need.

12. Be aware of Satan's schemes

Satan doesn't want you to listen and recognize God's voice because he knows how much that will strengthen your walk and increase your effectiveness for the Kingdom. You can be assured he will try to interfere.

CONCLUSION

If you apply these principles, you *will* be able to recognize God's voice and therefore grow deeper in your relationship with Him. However, I can only give you guidelines. It is the Holy Spirit Himself who will teach you how to speak and listen to God. It is inevitable that you will make mistakes along the way, but you can learn from them. God can even use those mistakes to work for your good (Rom 8:28).

Communication with your Creator involves a lot of effort, more spiritual than physical. In reality, it can be a spiritual battle, but the victory is oh, so sweet! The rewards of getting to know your Savior far exceed any effort! He is worth it!

Along with Paul, I pray these words for you...

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:14-19)

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[Our Knowable God](#)

