



How do we hear the voice of God? What does he sound like? How can we be like the faithful Christians throughout history who have known with confidence that God was speaking to them? They've been so confident they have risked their lives. They've loved their enemies. They've been joyful instead of grumpy. How were they able to hear God so clearly?

Does he speak in an audible voice? Does he leave you a hand-written note, carefully placed in front of the coffee maker? Does he speak through your thoughts? Does he speak through your feelings? In today's sermon I want to show you how you can know with confidence that God is speaking to you. I want to show you how we become the people described by Jesus in John 10:27: *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."*

I've heard people say they wish God would speak to them like he did in the times of the Bible. Have you ever thought that? There is some appeal to it.

With Moses God spoke **audibly** through a burning bush. That experience would give you confidence! If a bush spoke to me and told me it was God, I'd do whatever it said.

With Joseph God spoke to him in **dreams**. Dreams are so weird. I don't want God to speak to me through mine. Dreams are mysterious. But God did speak to people through them during the times of the Old Testament.

With King Nebuchadnezzar God spoke by having an oversized **finger** write on his bedroom wall. That's convincing!

With the shepherds God spoke through **angels**. It would be obvious if a powerful, flying being of light spoke to us! We'd do what it said.

With the Kings of the Old Testament, God spoke through the **prophets**. And this was his primary way of speaking through the times of the Old Testament. A man would show up and deliver a message or write the message and send it.

This is how it used to be and sometimes it seems like it would be clearer and better to hear God speak like this today. "What's your will God? Just write it on my wall and I'll do it. Then I'd know with confidence what you are saying to me."

God wants you to have confidence that he is speaking to you. But God has changed his method.

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe" (Hebrews 1:1–2).

When Jesus came to earth in the flesh, he changed how God speaks to people. He no longer needed angels, prophets, dreams, or strange devices to communicate his message because he was here in the flesh. If we were walking around with Jesus, we could have asked him anything, and his words were God's voice.

Today, since we can't physically walk down the street with Jesus, there has been another evolution in how God speaks. He could have reverted back to the Old Testament methods of an audible voice, dreams, fingers on a wall, angels and prophets, but he didn't. There is a better way to hear God speak to us. He had the words of Jesus and the prophets and angels written down. So now we hear God speak to us through the Bible. Think of the privilege we have! Through the Bible we have unlimited access to hear God speak to us.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

God wants us to be confident that he is speaking to us through his word. As confident as we'd be if an audible voice were speaking through a bush; as confident as we'd be if an angel showed up; as confident as we'd be if a prophet showed up and accompanied his words with signs and wonders.

If you don't have that level of confidence, I'm going to explain to you how to get it. I'm going to give you seven tips so you can know with confidence that God is speaking to you.

7 Tips to Hear God Speak

Get in a quiet place

Chuck Swindoll said, "I cannot be the man I should be without times of solitude." The bombardment of noise and speed and activities in our lives is almost non-stop. I'm not bitter about this. I'm just being direct and honest about our environment. It will take effort for you to stop, get in a quiet place and listen to God because everything you're surrounded by makes it easy and natural for you to miss him speaking.

While God has the power to speak loudly, he often doesn't as illustrated in these verses in 1 Kings 19:11–13:

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

In a w-h-i-s-p-e-r the Lord spoke to Elijah. Do you have a whisper zone? Here's how I've created a whisper zone for the E100. I'm putting the Daily 100 Challenge Guide on my nightstand with a Bible. Every night, after the kids are down, my teeth are brushed, the dog has been let out, and the house is locked up, I'm going to get in bed and read my verses and listen to God speak to me.

How about you? In order to hear God's voice and then know with confidence that it was him speaking to you, you need a time sliver in your day to be quiet.

Read and meditate on the Bible

These are the absolute best ways to hear God speak to you. When I was 24 years old I spent a summer working at a Christian adventure camp in Northern California, the JH Ranch. One afternoon we were out in the wilderness having just finished doing trust falls off 6-foot tall boulders. It is an incredible experience in trust. Our Camp Director read Genesis 12 to us and explained how God called Abraham to leave his land and everything he knew and "go to the land I will show you." We spent some time pondering how much trust Abraham had in God. He was probably excited because God had spoken to him. He was probably petrified too. Wandering into the unknown without a destination. It's similar to the trust fall. You're afraid.

Afterward we were instructed to find a quiet place and ask God, "Is there anything you want me to entrust to you and I'm holding back? Speak to me, God."

Immediately, the thought that sprang into my head was, "I want you to leave seminary. Like I called Abraham to leave Ur, I'm calling you to leave school."

That was a big deal. My internship at my home church was contingent on being a seminary student. My free housing with mom and dad was contingent on being in school—let me emphasize **free!** My undergrad loans were deferred because I was still in school. My whole identity was wrapped around being a

seminary student, preparing for ministry. And God was saying, through the Bible, to leave.

That's what happens as we read the Bible. God will align the Words of the Bible to our lives.

"For the word of God is alive 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" (Hebrews 4:12).

Prayer in alignment with the Scriptures

Sometimes when I pray I sense God telling me something. One day a woman came to my office in Southern California and she wanted to talk to me about her troubled marriage. In about 5 minutes she proceeded to tell me how unhappy and neglected she was as a woman; how uninvolved her husband was in her life and the life of the kids. Being a Christian she had prayed about this and she told me that God told her to divorce her husband. She came to see me in order to get my blessing on this decision.

I started off my response by empathizing with her situation. It's a tragedy when two people who had loved each other so much could become so distant that they'd want a divorce. For that I was very sorry for her. Then I asked her the one question that would determine whether God had really told her in prayer that she should divorce her husband. I asked her, "Has your husband been sexually unfaithful to you or abandoned you?" She promptly said no. So I told her, God does not want you to divorce your husband because that would go against what God has already said about marriage in the Bible. God will not tell you something in prayer that contradicts his Word. She was quite shocked by this turn in the conversation, let me tell you!

When I showed her in 1 Peter 3 what God says a believing wife should do when married to an unbelieving man, she started to cry. She said, "I've never heard these verses before." That was obvious. I asked her to commit to me that she would not proceed down the path to divorce her husband and she agreed. I asked her to commit reading this passage of scripture daily and act according to what God says and she agreed. The next time I saw her it was four months later. A big smile broke out on her face and she said, "Thank you."

Godly counsel in alignment with the Scriptures

"Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm (Proverbs 13:20).

The benefit I've received from the input of godly people is immeasurable. It's so huge. When I was thinking of proposing to Cassie I sought out godly counsel. I asked three guys, men who knew me the best and men who had spent time with Cassie, what they thought about Cassie as a potential wife. Their thoughtful and Biblical input was instrumental in my decision to propose. They observed Cassie as:

» A woman who was big-hearted and talked with everyone at gatherings.

» A woman who was others-focused. She showed this by asking questions and truly listening to their answers.

» A woman who loved God. She read the Bible regularly, acted in obedience to what God said.

Not only did they approve, they said I'd be a fool not to propose!

With every job change I've made I've sought out the godly counsel of men and women I respect. It's usually comprised of 2-3 people; not a huge group. I'm always free to disregard their input. But over the years I've grown so dependent on the godly counsel people have given me.

Circumstances in alignment with the Scriptures

Sometimes we're in so far over our heads that we need God to just put the right job, the right spouse, the right opportunity, the right house right in front of us.

We've been praying and asking for him to speak to us and God decides to make our life a bit easier and just put it right there for us. Circumstances have aligned and although he didn't speak words, his actions speak to us.

In 2010 Cassie and I spent a frustrating and disappointing afternoon driving around the peninsula looking at rental houses. I had accepted a new position at Central Peninsula Church and we were very excited to move and start this new chapter in our lives. But we were facing an obstacle that we were praying about and asking God to speak to us about: Where are we going to plant roots and live?

The houses were too expensive and scary, dark, dirty, neglected. We were driving home on the 101 talking about our options. We fully trusted that God was faithful to meet our needs. We knew with confidence that God was calling us to come here. We knew that there was a gap between our reality and needs. That's where faith comes in, right?

So we weren't asking God to tell us what to do. We were asking God to show us what his will was through the availability of a house (that we could afford because that's in alignment with the Scriptures)—through circumstances we wanted God to speak. And that's what he did. We uncovered a charming, 3-bedroom house in San Carlos to rent and it was significantly cheaper than anything else we'd looked at. God spoke.

Act in obedience

“Walk in obedience to all that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess” (Deuteronomy 5:33).

When God speaks to us, he fully expects us to obey him and do what he says—to walk in obedience. So here's what happens when we fail to walk in obedience. We damage the relationship we have with God. Our disobedience isn't just ignored anymore than the disobedience of a child is not ignored by a parent.

So in order to restore a close relationship with God, we should confess our sin. Without confession, it works like this: We ask God to speak to us and God says, “What about the last thing I told you to do?” Or we ask God for insight into something complicated and God says, “What about the last time I gave you insight and you ignored me?”

In order to restore the relationship, we need to confess, admit we were wrong. And, if appropriate, act in obedience with what God previously told us. If we don't do this, I believe it becomes harder and harder to hear God speak.

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

Expect him to change your character more than direct a path

“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do” (1 Peter 1:15).

“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Colossians 3:12).

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

God wants you to thoroughly and completely trust that he will speak to you regularly through his Word. During the next 20 weeks as we are reading through the Bible, let's set our expectations high that God will be speaking and that we will be acting in obedience.

I am so excited to do the E100 with you because I can't wait to hear how God is speaking to you.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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