

Follow God 3: Hear His Voice

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by Deborah Brunt B



Living life well requires following God. Leading others well requires following God. Following God requires hearing God. Yet, usually, our Lord doesn't speak in an audible voice. We can't hear him with our physical ears.

He has given us Scripture. We can read what is God-breathed. What treasure! Yet no matter how faithfully we study his word, it remains locked to us if we cannot recognize his voice. Thankfully, God has made the way for every one of us to hear.

In John 10, Jesus said of a good shepherd: "The sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out and his sheep follow him because they know his voice" (vv.3-4). Jesus announced, "I am the good shepherd" (v. 14).

If Christ is your shepherd, you have the capacity to know his voice.

Many people think, "It would be much easier to know his voice if we had lived when Jesus walked the earth. If we could hear him with our physical ears, we would understand what he says."

As logical as that sounds, it's not true.

While on earth, Jesus said to the religious leaders, who stood before him with folded arms and

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hardened hearts, "I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say" (John 8:42-43).

Jesus said of the crowds who gathered to listen to him teach, "Though hearing, they do not hear or understand" (Matt. 13:13).

When Jesus told his own disciples, "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees," they thought he was scolding them for forgetting to bring bread. Jesus asked them, "Do you have ears but fail to hear?" (Mark 8:14, 18). Even the disciples didn't yet have the capacity to hear their Lord clearly and consistently.

We hear God in our inmost being. Jesus taught, "God is spirit" (John 4:24). Paul wrote, "Spirit can be known only by spirit - God's Spirit and our spirits in open communion" (1 Cor. 2:14 MSG). And thus, on the heels of Jesus' death and resurrection, God the Holy Spirit came to live within all who confess Jesus as Lord.

Jesus explained, "The Friend, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send at my request, will make everything plain to you" (John 14:26 MSG). Jesus said this, not to the religious leaders who openly rejected him, nor to the crowds, who followed him for the show. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would speak clearly to those whose hearts were set to follow fully.

Why might you not be able to hear him?

Maybe you've never confessed Jesus as Lord. - This confession is not something you initiate. It's not something you check off your to-do list because you think it's time. God himself initiates it, stirring deep within you, drawing you to himself. As he does, you see yourself and you see Jesus as you haven't before. Surrendering to him, you receive his atoning death and his resurrection life. Once he abides in you and you in him, you can continue to hear his voice.

Maybe you've quenched or grieved the Holy Spirit. - We shake our heads over the Pharisees' refusal to acknowledge Jesus as God, yet how often do Christians have a similar attitude toward the Holy Spirit? Sometimes we try to lay hold of the Spirit's power to use for our own ends. Sometimes we insist the Spirit operate within boundaries we consider safe.

Any time we try to manipulate the Spirit or to contain him, we're not honoring him as God. Any time we quench or grieve the Spirit, he asks, as Jesus did: "Why is my language not clear to you?" "Do you have ears but fail to hear?"

Maybe God is leading where you don't want to go. - If you've disobeyed your Father and have not repented, go first and set that right, with words and with actions. Why would the Lord speak again when you haven't done what he said before? If you're waiting until God gives an assignment before you decide whether to accept it, you're waiting in vain. As you set your heart to go wherever he leads, he tells you each next step.

Don't let fear or pride, stubbornness or self-effort keep you from acknowledging your need to

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hear your Shepherd in order to follow him. He delights to teach his sheep to recognize his voice.

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