

RECOGNISING THE VOICE OF GOD

—by Peter Hammond

DISCERNING THE VOICE OF GOD

In order to understand the Will of God, it is essential that we recognise the Voice of God. We cannot do His Will if we cannot discern His Voice from the clamour of peer pressure, the noise of the world and the cacophony of our emotions.

Our duty to hear

One of the persistent commands in Scripture is for us to listen to God and to hear His Word: *"Blessed is the man who listens to Me, watching daily at My gate..."* Prov 8:34. *"The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise."* Prov 15:31. *"...Let every man be swift to hear..."* James 1:19. *"He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches..."* Rev 2:11.

The sin of spiritual deafness

Spiritual deafness is condemned throughout the Scriptures: *"Behold the Word of the Lord is a reproach to them; they have no delight in it."* Jer 6:10. *"But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders and stopped their ears so that they could not hear."* Zech 7:11. *"And they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."* 2 Tim 4:4.

When last did God speak to you?

What did He say?

Did you obey?

Do not expect God to speak to you again until you have obeyed what He has told you before.

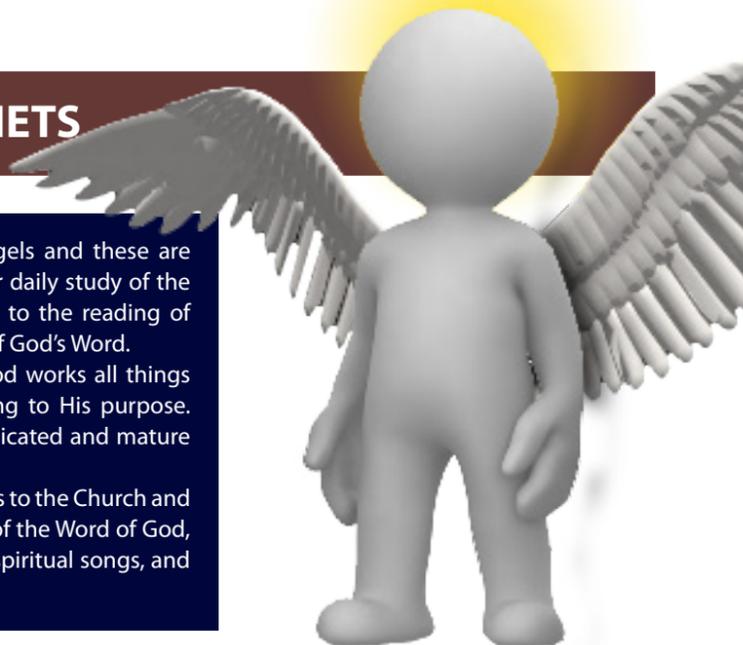


ANGELS, DREAMS, PROPHETS

God has spoken audibly, through visions, dreams and through angels and these are recorded for us to study in the Bible. Generally we are guided by our daily study of the Scriptures, through memorised Scripture, through careful attention to the reading of God's Word, and listening attentively to the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

We can further see God's hand in the circumstances wherein God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. The conviction of our conscience and the advice and counsel of dedicated and mature Christians can be used of the Lord to guide us in His will.

God has given prophets, teachers, apostles, evangelists and pastors to the Church and through their collective wisdom and knowledge we can learn much of the Word of God, the ways of God and the Will of God. Through Psalms, hymns and in spiritual songs, and when we are attentive in worship, we can discern the voice of God.



"And the Word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread Revelation...Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, nor was the Word of the Lord yet revealed to him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time...And Samuel answered: 'Speak, for Your servant hears.' Then the Lord said to Samuel: 'Behold, I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle.'"

1 Samuel 3:1-11

THE CONDITIONS FOR HEARING GOD

WAYS IN WHICH GOD SPEAKS

1 A CLEAN HEART. Sin is a barrier to hearing from God. *"...Your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear."* Isa 59:1-2. *"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the Blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin. But if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* 1 John 1:5-9.

2 FAITH. *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...by faith we understand...but without faith it is impossible to please God, for He who comes to God must believe...He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."* Heb 11:1-6.

3 RELATIONSHIP. The more we hear God speak the better we will be able to recognise His voice. *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me."* John 10:27.

4 WORSHIP AND REVERENCE. When God has your attention in worship you can discern His voice. *"This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"* Matt 17:5.

5 APPLYING THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST TO ALL AREAS OF LIFE. Our attitude needs to be: *"I will go wherever You send me. I will do whatever You tell me. I will do whatever You tell me."* When we are receptive and responsive to the Word of God we can expect to hear from God.

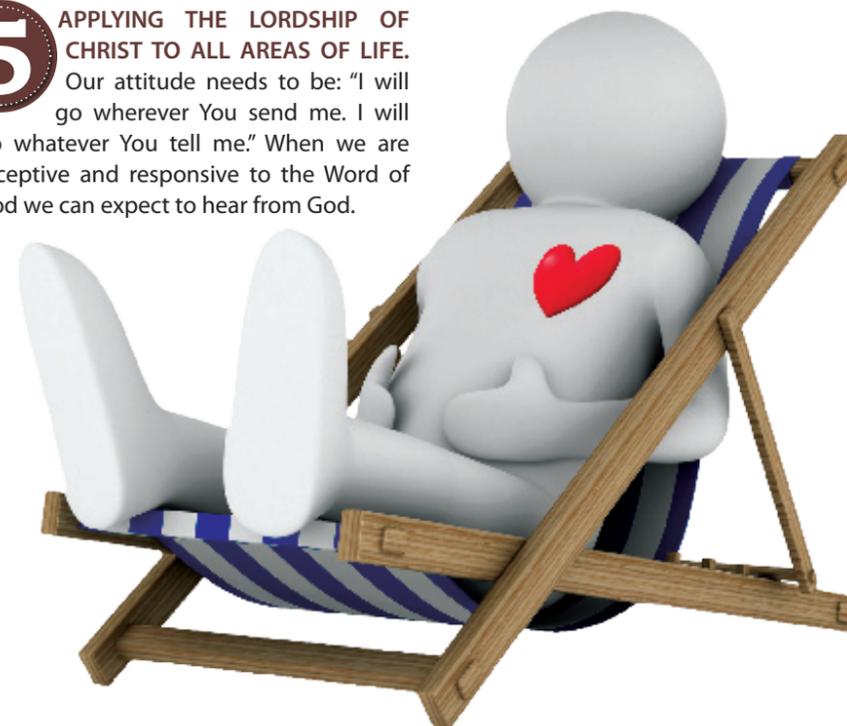
"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, that you do not know." Jer 33:3.

1. God speaks through His Word, the Bible - in our daily quiet time as we study and meditate on His Word. *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in His Law he meditates day and night."* Ps 1:1-3

2. Through memorised Scripture. *"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another..."* Col 3:16.

3. Through the reading of Scripture. *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."* 2 Tim 3:16-17.

4. Through the preaching and teaching of God's Word. *"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."* Rom 10:17.



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BEWARE OF BEING DECEIVED

There are many warnings in Scripture against deception. *"The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?"* Jer 17:9.

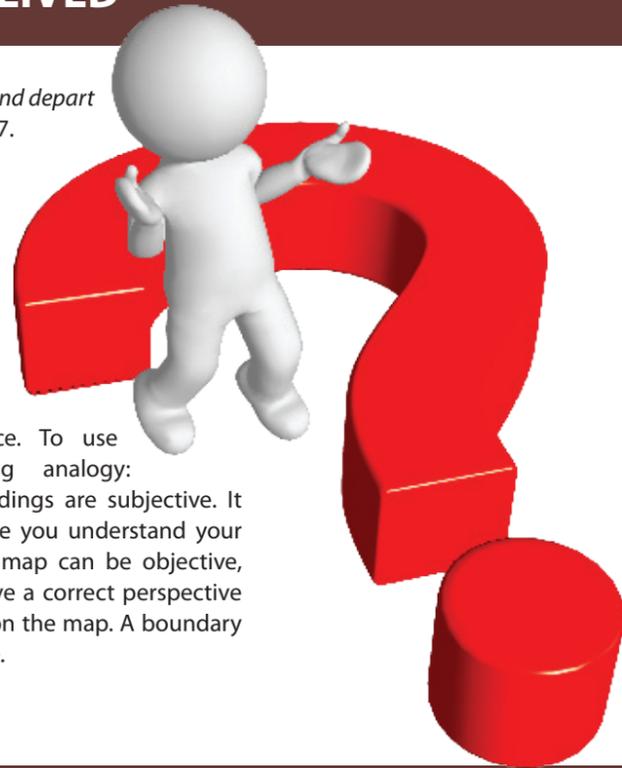
We cannot trust our emotions. We must never confuse voices in our head with the Voice of God. God guides us primarily through the principles and commands of Scripture. Our duties and responsibilities in the light of His Great Commission determine His will for us on a daily basis. It is easy to become disorientated and confused. Therefore we should seek the advice and counsel of dedicated Christians and learn not to trust our own inclinations.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil." Prov 3:5-7.

Distinguishing between subjective and objective guidance

We need to discern between subjective and objective guidance. To use a mountaineering analogy: Your compass readings are subjective. It is relative to where you understand your position to be. A map can be objective, as long as you have a correct perspective of where you are on the map. A boundary marker is objective.



ARE YOU GOING THE RIGHT DIRECTION?



Following your conscience. This is subjective and cannot be taken as confirmation of anything. Compass readings can be misleading if interfered with, for example by a magnet. The map is like the Word of God, objective reality. However, we can sometimes be completely lost even while having the perspective that we are making good progress according to our understanding of where we are on the map. You can even be on the right path, but going in the wrong direction.

Follow the guide

It helps to have a guide who has travelled this way before. Godly counsel from mature and experienced Christians can be a tremendous help. So too are finding boundary markers. When we come across a cairn, a pile of rocks, perhaps cemented

with the name of the location, ravine, beacon, etc. it enables us to orientate ourselves and recognise where exactly on the map we are. If the boundary marker does not accord with where we perceived ourselves to be, we need to recognise that our perception is what has been in error.

Seeking confirmation

In the same way, if we are confronted by a boundary marker of an authority in our life, such as our parents, pastor, mission leader, or an employer, who informs us that we are off the path and out of bounds, we need to be humble, teachable and re-evaluate our position in the light of God's Word. The Scripture encourages us to test all things. We should ask for confirmation, and in major matters we should expect major confirmations.

It is easy to be lost while climbing on the mountains, particularly in bad weather and with limited visibility in cloud cover. Following your compass reading is similar to fol-

QUESTIONS TO ASK



1 IS IT SCRIPTURAL? It is always right to do what the Scriptures command: To repent of our sins, to do thorough restitution, to be thankful, to be wholehearted in our duties, to seek sanctification and holiness.

2 DOES IT GLORIFY GOD? *"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."* 1 Cor 10:31. *"For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's."* 1 Cor 6:20.

3 IS IT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAWS OF GOD? *"The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."* Ps 19:7

6 WHOSE COUNSEL HAVE YOU SOUGHT?

4 WHAT DO THE AUTHORITIES IN MY LIFE SAY? *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right... Bondservants be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye service, as men pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the Will of God from the heart with goodwill doing service as unto the Lord, and not to men."* Eph 6:1-7.

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7 HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT THIS IS GOD'S WILL?

God never guides His people to disobey His Word. When man listens - God speaks!

"Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls, but be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves... He who looks into the perfect Law of liberty and continues in it and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." James 1:21-25. ■

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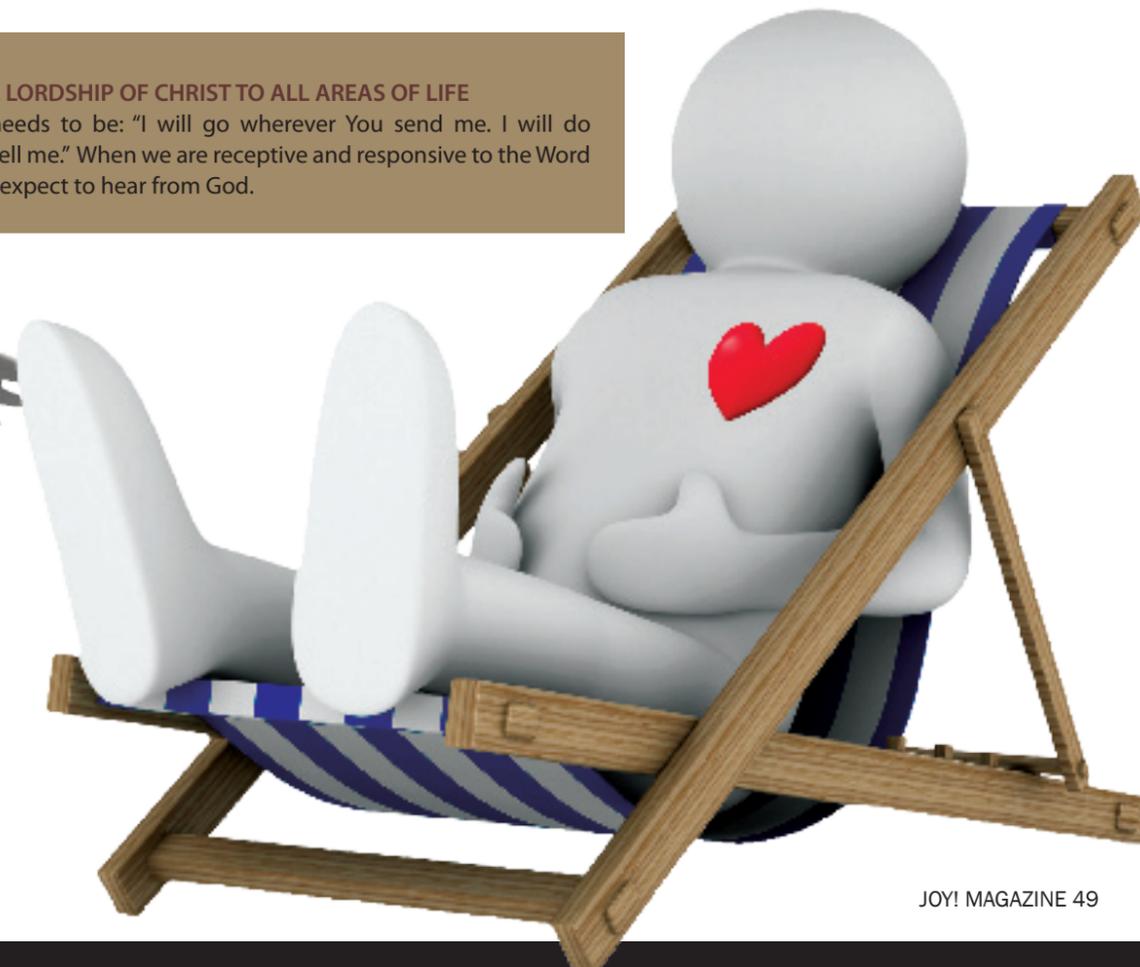
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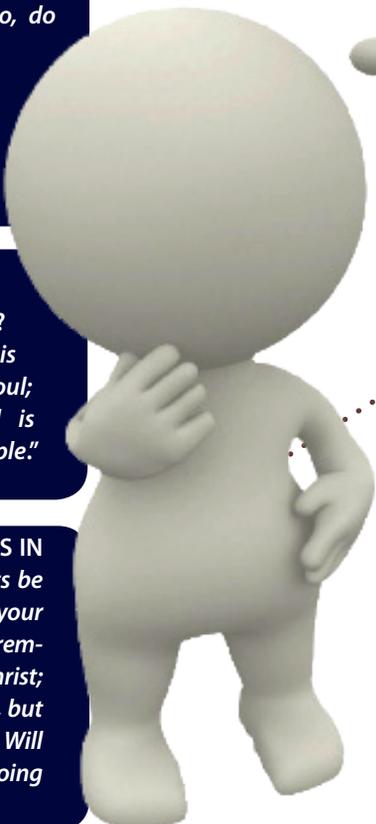
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