

6. **Listen again and keep ignoring any of the other voices that arise from fear, worry, passion, hope, desire, logic, conventionality, need to appease others, and the like:**

The reality is that so many voices vie for control of our hearts and minds. It is so easy to follow our fears, passions, desires, what we think others want, and all other sorts of deeply motivated voices. To listen to God, we have to peel back all of these emotions, urges, and constraints in order to listen for God's deeper voice.

7. **Pay attention to the deepest voice, which will be a nudging or a peaceful sense of what is "right:"** My experience is that God's voice is usually the one at our deepest core. It is the one that is calm, still, and almost like a whisper. This is a voice that isn't a voice. It is almost like a faint nudge or push that just feels "right." This is the voice to follow. At the same time, I know that following this voice is hard because it is not the voice of certainty and clarity; and we want certainty and clarity. It is the voice of faith. We sense what God is telling us, but what if it's not God? The answer is to trust and have faith. This is what makes faith faith. Faith is trusting God when we don't know and aren't sure. Trust this deepest voice or nudge, and begin to act on faith.

8. **Confirm what you sense or hear with others – Find someone you trust – whom you think is spiritually mature and wise:** And talk with her or him about what you sense or hear. This can be a wise person you know in the church or your life, or it can be me (if you think I have any wisdom). Talk about what you sense in your deepest core,



and ask whether this person or persons also sense that you have heard God's voice. If you truly sense they have something of God's wisdom, trust their guidance. But ultimately take even their guidance back to God and seek affirmation from God as God speaks to you in your heart.

9. **Pay attention to outcomes:** The final way you generally sense if what you've heard is God's voice or not is the consequences to your actions. When we do what God wants, generally good things happen-- God's providence is evident. This is not 100% true, since sometimes God calls us to take actions that lead to times of testing and difficulty. Still, in those times we get a clear sense that we are called on a path that is difficult.

The more you practice this process of listening to God, the more confidence and faith you will have in it. Over time, it becomes more and more natural, and you will find yourself doing it without having to be so formal about it.

I wish you God's blessings in your listening.

A Guide for DISCERNING GOD'S WILL



*Listening for and Hearing God During
Times of Difficulty and Confusion*

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WHAT KIND OF VOICE DOES GOD USE?

God doesn't use a voice like we do--a vocal voice. God uses everything to speak to us. The primary way that God speaks to us is through scripture, which is why we call it the Word of God. But God's voice is richer and greater than that. God speaks to us through our hearts and minds, generally when we are quiet and still enough to hear. God speaks to us through people around us, especially those with wisdom and spiritual depth. God speaks through symbols, nature, experiences, art, books, television, and pretty much everything that can communicate a message.

But we have to be careful. Not every voice is God's voice. We have to test what we hear against our experiences: does what we are doing seem to be filled with God's grace and providence? Still, if you trust, you will hear.



Can We Really Hear God?

How can we listen for and hear God when God seems so silent? The following process will help you learn how to listen more deeply for God during times of difficulty and confusion.

1. **Become a regular reader of scripture :**

I'm not a big fan of the "open-the-Bible-and-follow-whatever-passage-you-find-first" method. Nor am I a big fan of searching through the Bible looking for specific answers. I do know that God can occasionally speak to us through both methods, but I believe it is best to simply to read the Bible regularly and to become familiar with it. Regular reading of the Bible helps us to become more sensitive to God's voice and guidance.

2. **Take time to center yourself:** One of the biggest problems people have when trying to listen to God is that they never take time in quiet, away from the bustle of life. They don't steep themselves in silence. It is extremely difficult to listen for God when we are listening to everything else. To listen for God's voice, we need to take time away from others to quiet our minds, hearts, and bodies so that we can more clearly sense God's voice.

3. **Ask God in prayer what God wants:**

People often refuse to be specific with God. We don't actually say to God, "I'm having problems with this. Tell me what to do." Instead, we pray for peace of heart, wisdom, God's will, for

help in general, or we tell God what we want and then politely tell God to just do it. We need to form a personal relationship with God and then be personal and specific in our asking. This means striking a balance between telling God specifically what we want and seeking God's will.

4. **Listen and then ignore the first voice, leading, or sense you get:**

The reality is that listening to God is a process of peeling back the layers of our pride and ego. Most of us really don't want what God wants. We would rather just have God do what we want. Listening to God involves letting go of our pride and ego so that we can hear God speaking at our deepest levels. So my suggestion is always to ignore the first voice we hear in our minds when seeking God's voice. I always assume that this first answer we get is the voice of pride.

5. **Listen more deeply and ignore the second voice :**

I always figure that the second answer or leading we get is our "guessing voice." In other words, our ego and pride work in very subtle ways. They want to be in control, and so they will say to us, "Well, if the answer isn't what I first wanted, then it must be the opposite." So, the second voice usually just makes a guess at what God wants based on the rejection of the first voice. This way our ego gets to be in control, even if it doesn't get what it wants. So, we need to ignore the second answer we sense inside.