



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN LIVING

Hearing and Obeying God's Word

Learning to Listen, Discern, and Faithfully Respond
to What God Has Said

The Short Answer

God has not left His people guessing about what He wants them to know. He has given His Word. He calls His people to receive it, believe it, remember it, and obey it. The Holy Spirit helps believers understand and apply Scripture, while Christians differ about prophecy, dreams, visions, and impressions. No claimed message from God may outrank or contradict Scripture.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 • 1 Samuel 3:1-10 • Psalm 119:9-16, 97-105 • Matthew 7:24-27
Luke 8:4-21 • John 10:27-30 • John 14:15-27 • Romans 12:1-2 • James 1:19-25 • 1 John 4:1-6

Opening Memory Anchor

Biblical hearing is attentive listening that is prepared to respond in faith and obedience.



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WELCOME

This study asks a deceptively simple question:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HEAR GOD?

Christians sometimes use phrases such as:

"God spoke to me."

"God put this on my heart."

"I felt led."

"The Spirit told me."

"I heard God say..."

"God gave me a word for you."

Sometimes those expressions simply describe prayerful conviction or wisdom. Sometimes they are used much more strongly. And sometimes sincere Christians mistake their own desires, fears, intuition, expectations, anxiety, or emotions for God's direction. So how can someone know? The safest place to begin is not personal experience. It is Scripture. Before asking: **"How can I hear God?"** first ask: **"Am I listening to what God has already said?"** Part One focuses on the biblical foundation:

- hearing Scripture,
- understanding it,
- remembering it,
- obeying it,
- responding when obedience is difficult,
- and returning to God when failure occurs.

Part Two explores more difficult questions:

- illumination and revelation,
- the Holy Spirit's guidance,
- impressions and promptings,
- prophecy,
- dreams and visions,
- continuationism and cessationism,
- mental-health experiences that can complicate discernment,
- "God told me" claims,
- spiritual authority,
- and how believers can seek God's guidance without treating subjective experiences as Scripture.

The purpose is not to make Christians suspicious of everything spiritual. Nor is it to make believers afraid that they might somehow "miss God's will" and ruin their lives. The goal is simpler: **Know God's Word. Walk closely with Jesus. Seek wisdom. Listen humbly. Test carefully. Obey faithfully. Trust God with the results.**



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PART ONE

BEGINNER GUIDE

HEARING GOD THROUGH HIS WORD

1. DOES GOD WANT PEOPLE TO HEAR HIM?

Yes. One of Scripture's repeated invitations is: **Listen**. Deuteronomy begins Israel's great confession: **"Listen, O Israel!"** Jesus repeatedly calls people who have ears to truly hear. God does not reveal Himself merely to provide information. He calls people into relationship with Him. Biblical listening therefore involves: attention, trust, and response.

MEMORY ANCHOR

God does not merely call people to hear words. He calls people to listen to Him.

2. HOW HAS GOD SPOKEN?

Scripture describes God speaking in many ways throughout redemptive history. He spoke through: creation, prophets, dreams and visions, angels, historical events, miracles, His written Word, and ultimately through His Son. Hebrews 1:1-2 explains that God spoke through the prophets in many ways and has spoken supremely through His Son. Jesus is God's supreme revelation. And Scripture faithfully bears witness to Him.

3. WHY IS SCRIPTURE FOUNDATIONAL FOR HEARING GOD?

Because Scripture gives God's people an objective revelation that does not depend upon moods, intuition, memories, or impressions. 2 Timothy 3:16 describes Scripture as God-breathed. Scripture teaches: who God is, what He has done, what is true, what humanity is, what sin is, who Jesus is, what salvation means, how God's people should live, and where history is going. Christians do not have to invent God's character or guess His revealed moral will. God has spoken.

4. IS THE BIBLE SIMPLY A COLLECTION OF RELIGIOUS ADVICE?

No. The Bible contains wisdom and instruction, but its central story is God's work of redemption. Scripture moves through: **Creation -> Fall -> Promise -> Redemption -> New Creation** And Jesus stands at the center. The Bible is not primarily: **"Here are principles for improving your life."** It is first: **"Here is the God who made you, the Savior who came for sinners, and the Kingdom He is bringing."**

5. WHAT DOES BIBLICAL "HEARING" MEAN?

Biblical hearing often means more than physically hearing words. It carries the idea of receiving what is heard seriously enough to respond. That is why Scripture so often connects hearing with obedience. Jesus asks why people call Him "Lord" while refusing to do what He says. Biblical listening therefore asks: **What has God said?** and then: **How should I respond?**

6. DOES HEARING SCRIPTURE AUTOMATICALLY CHANGE SOMEONE?

Not necessarily. A person can: read Scripture, memorize Scripture, attend church, listen to sermons, study theology, and know many biblical facts- while resisting what God says. James warns believers not merely to listen to God's Word but to do what it says. Information can fill the mind without transforming the life.

7. WHAT DID JESUS SAY ABOUT HEARING AND OBEYING?

Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount with two builders. One heard His teaching and obeyed. Jesus compared that person to someone building a house on rock. Another heard the same teaching but did not obey. Jesus compared that person to someone building on sand. See Matthew 7:24-27. The difference was not **hearing**. Both heard. The difference was **response**.



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8. DOES OBEDIENCE EARN SALVATION?

No. This distinction is essential. Christians are not saved because they obey well enough. Salvation is God's gift of grace received through faith. See Ephesians 2:8-10. But the same passage that says salvation is not the result of works also says believers are created in Christ Jesus **for good works**. Obedience is not the root of salvation. It is part of its fruit.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Christians do not obey so God will save them. They obey because God's grace saves and changes them. For fuller treatment, see:

Study #86 - What Is Salvation?

Study #87 - Repentance, Faith, and New Life

Study #88 - What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?

9. WHY DOES JESUS CONNECT LOVE WITH OBEDIENCE?

Jesus says: **"If you love me, obey my commandments."** See John 14:15. He is not describing a transaction: **Obey enough -> earn God's love.** He is describing relationship. Love for Christ changes what His words mean. His commands are no longer merely external rules. They are the words of the One the disciple loves.

10. IS OBEDIENCE THE SAME AS PERFECTION?

No. Christians still stumble. Peter loved Jesus and still failed dramatically. The disciples misunderstood Jesus repeatedly. Paul describes an ongoing struggle against sin. The Christian life is not sinless performance. It is a life increasingly characterized by: faith, repentance, dependence, growth, and returning to Christ when failure occurs.

11. WHAT SHOULD SOMEONE DO WHEN THEY DISOBEY?

Do not hide. Confess. Repent. Receive God's forgiveness. Return to obedience. 1 John 1:9 teaches that God faithfully forgives those who confess their sins. Failure does not become faithfulness by pretending it did not happen. Grace allows failure to be brought into the light.

12. WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

Repentance is more than feeling guilty. Biblical repentance involves a change of mind and direction—a turning from sin toward God. Repentance says: **"God is right. I was wrong. By His grace, I will turn."** Repentance becomes part of the believer's ongoing life with God.

13. WHY IS DELAYED OBEDIENCE DANGEROUS?

Because delay can become a way of saying no without admitting that we are saying no. A person may say:

"Later."

"When life settles down."

"When I'm ready."

"When this becomes easier."

"When I understand everything."

Sometimes time is genuinely needed for wisdom. But when God's Word is already clear, endless delay can become disguised resistance.

14. DOES OBEDIENCE SOMETIMES COST SOMETHING?

Yes. Jesus never promised otherwise. Obedience may cost: comfort, approval, convenience, money, status, relationships, opportunities, or cherished plans. Jesus tells His disciples to count the cost of following Him. See Luke 14:25-33.



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15. DOES COSTLY OBEDIENCE MEAN GOD WILL GIVE THE OUTCOME HOPED FOR?

No. Obedience is not a technique for controlling God. Someone may obey faithfully and still experience: rejection, loss, disappointment, suffering, misunderstanding, or unanswered questions. Faithfulness belongs to the believer's response. Results remain in God's hands.

16. WHAT IF OBEYING GOD MAKES LIFE HARDER?

Sometimes it will. Joseph's integrity did not immediately improve his circumstances. Jeremiah's faithfulness brought opposition. The apostles were persecuted for proclaiming Christ. Jesus Himself obeyed the Father even unto death. Obedience should never be marketed as a guarantee of an easier life. It is the faithful response of people who trust God even when obedience is costly.

17. WHY READ SCRIPTURE REGULARLY?

Because people cannot intentionally live according to words they rarely hear. Regular Scripture reading helps believers increasingly recognize: God's character, God's priorities, God's promises, God's commands, God's warnings, God's wisdom, and the story into which their lives fit. Psalm 119 describes God's Word as a lamp for the feet and a light for the path.

18. DOES A READER NEED TO UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING?

No. Scripture contains difficult passages. Peter even acknowledges that some of Paul's writings are hard to understand. See 2 Peter 3:15-16. Faithful Bible reading includes humility. Ask:

What is clear?

What requires more study?

What might be misunderstood?

What does the larger context show?

Difficulty is an invitation to deeper study-not permission to make the text say whatever is desired.

19. WHY DOES CONTEXT MATTER?

Because individual verses belong to larger passages, books, and the whole biblical story. A verse can be quoted accurately and still be used inaccurately. Good interpretation asks: Who wrote this? To whom? Why? What comes before and after? What kind of literature is this? How does this fit the rest of Scripture? How does it relate to Christ and God's redemptive story?

20. CAN SOMEONE OBEY A VERSE WHILE MISUNDERSTANDING IT?

Yes. Sincerity does not guarantee correct interpretation. That is why Christians benefit from: careful study, mature teachers, historical Christian interpretation, biblical scholarship, and conversation with other believers. No individual Christian sees everything perfectly.

21. WHY MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE?

Because what fills the mind helps shape responses. Psalm 119 describes hiding God's Word in the heart so that it shapes faithfulness. Memorization is not merely collecting verses. It gives the mind truth to return to when: temptation comes, fear rises, decisions become difficult, suffering clouds perspective, or false ideas sound persuasive.

22. WHAT DOES MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE MEAN?

Biblical meditation is sustained, thoughtful attention to God's truth. It asks:

What does this passage reveal about God?

What does it reveal about humanity?

What does it show about Christ?

Is there something to believe, obey, confess, remember, or hope for?

Meditation slows reading long enough for Scripture to move from quick exposure toward thoughtful response.



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23. SHOULD SOMEONE PRAY BEFORE READING SCRIPTURE?

Prayer can help create a posture of humility and dependence. A simple prayer might be: **"Lord, help me understand what You have said. Correct what is wrong in me. Help me believe what is true and obey what You make clear."** Prayer does not replace interpretation. It prepares the heart to receive truth.

24. WHAT ROLE DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT HAVE WHEN SCRIPTURE IS READ?

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would teach and remind His disciples of His words. See John 14:26. Paul explains that spiritual truth is understood through the Spirit's work. See 1 Corinthians 2:10-16. Christians often call the Spirit's work of helping believers understand and receive Scripture **illumination**. The Spirit who inspired Scripture does not lead God's people away from Scripture's truth.

25. WHAT IS ILLUMINATION?

Illumination is the Holy Spirit's work of helping people understand, receive, and respond to God's revealed truth. Illumination does not mean: **"This verse means whatever I feel it means today."** Nor does illumination create new Scripture. The Spirit helps believers see and receive what God has revealed.

26. CAN SCRIPTURE CONVICT SOMEONE PERSONALLY?

Yes. Hebrews describes God's Word as living and powerful. Scripture can expose: sin, motives, misplaced priorities, unbelief, pride, fear, bitterness, and false assumptions. Sometimes people read Scripture. And sometimes it seems Scripture is reading them.

27. IS CONVICTION THE SAME AS CONDEMNATION?

Not necessarily. Conviction exposes sin and calls someone toward repentance and Christ. Condemnation says there is no hope. Romans 8:1 says there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. The Spirit's conviction does not exist to drive God's children away from Christ. It calls them back to Him.

28. WHAT IF SCRIPTURE CONFRONTS SOMETHING SOMEONE REALLY WANTS?

That is one of the clearest tests of discipleship. It is easy to "hear God" when the hearer already agrees. The harder question is: **Will God be trusted when His Word challenges what is wanted?** Jesus prayed in Gethsemane for the Father's will rather than His own immediate desire. Christian obedience eventually reaches places where personal desires and God's revealed will do not immediately feel the same.

29. ARE FEELINGS BAD?

No. Feelings are part of being human. Scripture contains: joy, grief, fear, anger, longing, confusion, hope, and lament. But feelings are not infallible interpreters of reality. They should neither be worshiped nor suppressed. They can be brought honestly before God while His truth shapes the response.

30. WHAT IF SOMEONE DOES NOT FEEL LIKE OBEYING?

Obedience is not dependent upon emotional enthusiasm. Sometimes faithful obedience feels joyful. Sometimes it feels frightening. Sometimes it feels ordinary. Sometimes it happens through tears. A believer can pray honestly: **"I do not want to do this-but I want to want what You want. Help me obey."**

31. CAN OBEDIENCE BECOME LEGALISM?

Yes, if obedience is detached from grace and turned into a way of earning righteousness, superiority, or acceptance from God. Legalism can say: **"God will accept me because I perform."** The Gospel says: **"In Christ, grace has been received that could never be earned; now life responds to Him."** Grace does not eliminate obedience. Grace changes its foundation.

32. CAN "GRACE" BECOME AN EXCUSE NOT TO OBEY?

It can be misused that way. Paul directly rejects the idea that grace means sin no longer matters. See Romans 6:1-2. Grace forgives. Grace also trains. Titus 2:11-12 describes God's grace as training believers to turn from ungodliness and live wisely.



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33. WHY ARE OTHER BELIEVERS NEEDED?

Because Christian listening is not intended to be entirely solitary. God gives His people: teachers, pastors, elders, friends, mentors, parents, and fellow believers. They can help notice blind spots and understand Scripture more faithfully. But every human teacher remains under God's Word.

34. SHOULD A CHRISTIAN OBEY A PASTOR?

Christians should respect faithful spiritual leadership. Scripture teaches church leaders to shepherd God's people responsibly and believers to respond appropriately to godly leadership. But pastors are not infallible. A pastor cannot make something God's command merely by saying: **"God told me."** Spiritual leadership must remain accountable to Scripture.

35. WHAT IF A SPIRITUAL LEADER TELLS SOMEONE TO DO SOMETHING WRONG?

God's Word has greater authority than any human leader. When authorities commanded the apostles to stop proclaiming Christ, Peter and the apostles answered that God must be obeyed rather than human beings. See Acts 5:29. Respect for leadership never requires participating in sin.

PASTORAL SAFEGUARD - SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

Biblical teaching about obedience must never be used to demand submission to: abuse, coercion, exploitation, secrecy, or manipulation. A pastor, spouse, parent, mentor, ministry leader, or friend does not gain God's authority simply by claiming: **"God told me you must do this."** If someone uses God's name to remove another person's ability to: ask questions, seek counsel, examine Scripture, establish appropriate boundaries, report wrongdoing, or obtain practical or legal help, that is not healthy biblical discipleship. God's authority is real. Human beings remain accountable to Him.

36. WHAT IF CHRISTIANS DISAGREE ABOUT WHAT SCRIPTURE REQUIRES?

First determine what kind of disagreement it is. Some teachings are explicit and central. Other questions require theological inference or wisdom. Study #122 described four useful categories:

1. **Scripture**
2. **Theological inference**
3. **Wisdom / application**
4. **Preference**

Christians can create unnecessary conflict when they treat a personal preference as though it were a direct command from God.

37. DOES OBEDIENCE REQUIRE WISDOM?

Yes. Scripture gives many direct commands. But not every decision has a verse attached to it. The Bible may not tell someone: which job to take, which house to buy, whether to move, which college to attend, exactly how much to save, or which faithful church in the community to join. For such decisions, Christians seek wisdom while remaining within what Scripture clearly teaches.

38. WHAT DOES WISDOM LOOK LIKE?

Biblical wisdom asks questions such as: Is this consistent with Scripture? Is it morally faithful? What are the motives? What responsibilities has God already given? What are the likely consequences? What do wise believers see that may be missed? Is fear, pride, greed, anger, or impatience driving the decision? Can this be pursued with a clear conscience before God? Wisdom is not a lesser form of spirituality. Scripture repeatedly tells God's people to seek it.



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39. WHAT IF SOMEONE IS AFRAID OF MAKING THE WRONG DECISION?

Remember that God's will is not usually presented in Scripture as a hidden maze in which one accidental wrong turn destroys His plan for someone's life. God calls His people to: know Him, obey what He has revealed, seek wisdom, pray, act faithfully, and trust Him. Security rests in God's faithfulness-not human ability to decode every circumstance perfectly.

40. DOES GOD HAVE ONE HIDDEN "PERFECT PLAN" THAT MUST BE DISCOVERED FOR EVERY DECISION?

Scripture teaches that God sovereignly governs history and that His people should seek His will. But some Christians have been taught a **blueprint model** in which God supposedly has one hidden correct choice for nearly every decision, and the believer's task is to discover it through signs, feelings, or special guidance. That approach can produce intense fear:

"What if I marry the wrong person?"

"What if I take the wrong job?"

"What if I miss God's perfect plan?"

Scripture places far more emphasis on: God's revealed commands, wisdom, character, responsibility, prayer, and trust. Some decisions may genuinely involve several faithful options. The believer's responsibility is not omniscience. It is faithfulness.

MEMORY ANCHOR

God's will is not a spiritual escape room. Obey what is clear. Seek wisdom. Choose faithfully. Trust God.

41. WHAT DID SAMUEL MEAN BY "SPEAK, LORD, YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING"?

In 1 Samuel 3, young Samuel initially did not recognize that God was calling him. Eli eventually instructed him to respond: **"Speak, LORD, your servant is listening."** In its historical context, this describes God's prophetic call of Samuel. It should not be reduced to a generic technique for receiving private messages. But Samuel's posture remains instructive: humility, attentiveness, availability, and willingness to respond to God.



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PART ONE

BEGINNER GUIDE

Hearing God's Word means more than receiving information. God has revealed Himself supremely in Jesus Christ, and Scripture gives God's people the trustworthy written revelation through which the Gospel, God's character, and His revealed will are known. The Christian response is: **Hear. Understand. Believe. Remember. Obey. Repent when failure occurs. Continue walking with Jesus.** Obedience does not earn salvation. It grows from grace. And when Scripture is clear, the central question is often not: "**Has God spoken?**" but: "**Will what He has said be trusted?**"



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PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

INTERMEDIATE

DISCERNING GUIDANCE, IMPRESSIONS, PROPHECY, AND "GOD TOLD ME"

READER NOTE

This section enters areas where faithful Christians sometimes disagree. The goal is not to force every Christian tradition into one position. Instead, distinguish:

what Scripture clearly teaches,
what requires theological inference,

and **where faithful Christians reach different conclusions.** You do not need to master every debate to understand the central biblical point: **Scripture remains authoritative, spiritual claims require discernment, and Jesus remains Lord.**

42. DOES GOD STILL SPEAK TODAY?

The answer depends partly on what someone means by **speak**. If the question means: **Does God communicate His truth through Scripture?** Yes. If it means: **Does the Holy Spirit convict, guide, remind, give wisdom, and apply biblical truth?** Yes. If it means: **Does God still give prophecy, revelatory dreams, visions, or direct messages comparable to biblical prophetic experiences?** Faithful Christians disagree. That disagreement requires careful definitions.

43. WHAT IS REVELATION?

In Christian theology, **revelation** refers to God's making Himself and His truth known. Theologians often distinguish:

GENERAL REVELATION

What God makes known through creation and human moral awareness. See Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 1:19-20.

SPECIAL REVELATION

God's more specific self-disclosure through His redemptive acts, prophets, Scripture, and supremely Jesus Christ. See Hebrews 1:1-2.

44. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REVELATION AND ILLUMINATION?

Revelation is God making truth known. **Illumination** is the Spirit helping people understand and receive revealed truth. A simple distinction is: **Revelation gives the truth. Illumination helps believers see the truth.** Illumination does not make each believer a new author of Scripture.

45. WHAT IS GUIDANCE?

Guidance is broader than receiving new information. God guides His people through means such as: Scripture, wisdom, prayer, circumstances, godly counsel, providence, conscience shaped by truth, and the Spirit's work. Not every form of guidance requires God to dictate a sentence into someone's mind.

46. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE "LED BY THE SPIRIT"?

Paul uses this language in passages such as Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:18. In Galatians especially, being led by the Spirit is closely connected with resisting sinful desires and producing the fruit of the Spirit. Being Spirit-led therefore certainly includes moral transformation. It should not automatically be reduced to: **"The Spirit gives private instructions about every decision."**



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47. WHAT ABOUT JOHN 10:27 - "MY SHEEP LISTEN TO MY VOICE"?

Jesus says His sheep hear His voice, He knows them, and they follow Him. In context, Jesus is describing His relationship with His people. They recognize and follow the true Shepherd. The passage offers profound assurance about belonging to Christ. It should not automatically be turned into a promise that every Christian will routinely hear an internal audible or quasi-audible voice giving individualized instructions.

48. CAN GOD GUIDE THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES?

Yes. God's providence includes circumstances. But circumstances require interpretation. An open door does not automatically mean: **"God wants me to walk through it."** And a closed door does not automatically mean: **"God is forbidding this."** Paul sometimes encountered open opportunities. He also walked into hardship because obedience required it. Circumstances are information. They are not Scripture.

49. CAN GOD USE OTHER PEOPLE TO GUIDE SOMEONE?

Certainly. Proverbs repeatedly praises wise counsel. Other believers can: correct, encourage, teach, challenge assumptions, recognize gifts, and notice dangers another person cannot see. But counsel should be weighed. Wise Christians can still be wrong.

50. WHAT IS AN IMPRESSION OR PROMPTING?

Christians commonly use these words for an internal sense that they should: pray for someone, call someone, give generously, avoid something, speak, wait, or take a particular action. Such experiences may be meaningful. But an impression is not self-authenticating. A believer should not automatically move from: **"I strongly sense this"** to: **"God has spoken."**

51. COULD AN IMPRESSION COME FROM THE PERSON'S OWN MIND?

Yes. Human thoughts are influenced by many things: Scripture, memory, conscience, personality, fear, trauma, desire, intuition, expectations, habits, relationships, and circumstances. That does not mean impressions are worthless. It means humility is appropriate.

52. WHAT IF ANXIETY, INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS, OCD, OR OTHER MENTAL-HEALTH EXPERIENCES MAKE "HEARING GOD" CONFUSING?

This deserves particular care. Some people experience intrusive thoughts-unwanted thoughts, images, or impulses that can feel disturbing precisely because they do **not** reflect what the person wants or believes. Some people experience **scrupulosity**, often associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder, in which spiritual or moral concerns become trapped in cycles of: fear, doubt, checking, confessing, sign-seeking, or compulsive attempts to become completely certain. Severe anxiety or trauma can also heighten a person's sense that danger or moral failure is always near. And some people experience auditory phenomena or other perceptions that feel external or commanding. None of these experiences should automatically be labeled: **"God speaking."** A frightening thought is not automatically a command. An intrusive thought is not automatically a sin. The intensity of an experience does not determine its spiritual authority. Compulsive sign-seeking can also make anxiety worse rather than produce genuine discernment. People struggling in these ways may benefit from: clear biblical teaching, patient pastoral care, trusted Christian community, and appropriately qualified mental-health care. Those forms of help do not have to compete.

PASTORAL SAFEGUARD

Do not tell someone with intrusive thoughts, OCD, severe anxiety, trauma symptoms, or auditory experiences that every internal thought or voice must be spiritually decoded or obeyed. God's revealed Word provides a stable foundation when internal experiences feel unstable.



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53. HOW SHOULD CHRISTIANS TALK ABOUT IMPRESSIONS?

One helpful practice is to use language proportionate to certainty. Instead of: **"God told me you need to call your sister."** someone might say: **"You came strongly to mind while I was praying, and I wondered whether I should reach out."** Instead of: **"God told me to take this job."** someone might say: **"After prayer, Scripture, counsel, and considering the circumstances, this seems like the wisest direction."** Humble language leaves room for discernment.

54. CAN GOD PROMPT SOMEONE TO DO SOMETHING BIBLICAL?

Certainly an impression may draw attention toward something Scripture already teaches. For example:

"I should forgive."
"I should confess."
"I should pray."
"I should help."
"I should tell the truth."

But the authority comes ultimately from God's revealed truth-not the strength of the feeling. If Scripture says to forgive, private revelation is not needed before obeying.

55. SHOULD CHRISTIANS ASK GOD FOR A SIGN?

Scripture contains occasions when people received signs. But Scripture also warns against demanding signs from God. A sign should not become a substitute for wisdom or obedience. If Scripture has already said: **"Do not lie,"** there is no need to ask: **"God, give me a sign if You really don't want me to lie."**

56. WHAT ABOUT "FLEECES" LIKE GIDEON'S?

Gideon placed a fleece before God in Judges 6. Christians sometimes imitate this by creating conditional tests: **"If X happens, then I know God wants Y."** But Gideon's fleece is narrative description, not a command teaching Christians how to make decisions. And Gideon's repeated requests occur in the context of fear despite God having already spoken clearly. Christians should be cautious about turning Gideon's uncertainty into a universal decision-making formula.

57. WHAT ABOUT DREAMS?

God sometimes used dreams in Scripture. Examples include: Jacob, Joseph, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Joseph the husband of Mary, and others. Christians disagree about how commonly God may use revelatory dreams today. But even Christians who believe God may still use dreams should not treat every vivid dream as divine revelation. Dreams require discernment. And no dream can overturn Scripture.

58. WHAT ABOUT VISIONS?

Scripture records genuine visions given by God. But Scripture also warns about false claims to visions and prophecy. Therefore the biblical conclusion cannot simply be: **"Visions are impossible."** Nor can it be: **"A person had a vision, therefore God sent it."** Spiritual claims must be tested.

59. WHAT IS PROPHECY?

Biblical prophecy includes God's communication through people He appointed to speak His message. Old Testament prophets could declare: **"This is what the LORD says."** Their authority was extraordinarily serious. The New Testament also describes prophecy within the Church. Christians disagree about whether and how that New Testament gift continues today.



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60. WHAT IS CESSATIONISM?

Cessationism generally teaches that certain revelatory or sign gifts associated particularly with the apostolic era-often including prophecy and tongues-ceased or no longer function in the same way after the foundational apostolic period. Cessationists emphasize: the unique authority of the apostles, the foundational nature of the apostolic witness, and the sufficiency of Scripture. There are different forms of cessationism.

61. WHAT IS CONTINUATIONISM?

Continuationism generally teaches that spiritual gifts described in the New Testament-including prophecy-may continue in the Church today. Careful continuationists usually distinguish contemporary prophecy from Scripture and insist that modern prophetic claims must be tested rather than treated as infallible biblical revelation. Continuationism also exists in several forms.

62. WHICH VIEW DOES SCRIPTURE CLEARLY SETTLE?

Christians on both sides appeal to Scripture. Cessationists often emphasize passages concerning the foundational role of apostles and prophets and the completed apostolic witness. Continuationists often emphasize New Testament instructions concerning spiritual gifts and prophecy without seeing an explicit biblical statement that those gifts cease before Christ's return. This study will not pretend that a long-standing Christian disagreement disappears in one paragraph. What careful Christians on both sides should affirm is:

Scripture is uniquely authoritative.

Jesus remains Lord.

Spiritual claims must be tested.

No contemporary speaker has permission to contradict God's Word.

63. DOES "DO NOT DESPISE PROPHECIES" MEAN PROPHETIC CLAIMS SHOULD AUTOMATICALLY BE ACCEPTED?

No. Paul instructs believers in 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 not to despise prophecies **and** to test everything. Notice both: **Do not automatically dismiss.** and **Do not automatically accept.** Test.

64. HOW SHOULD SPIRITUAL CLAIMS BE TESTED?

Useful questions include:

1. **Does it agree with Scripture?**
2. **Does it honor the biblical Jesus and Gospel?**
3. **Is the person claiming more authority than Scripture permits?**
4. **What fruit surrounds the message and messenger?**
5. **Is manipulation or fear being used?**
6. **Can the claim be questioned?**
7. **Is the person willing to be wrong?**
8. **Is wisdom from mature believers welcomed?**
9. **Does the claim conveniently serve the speaker's power, money, status, or desires?**
10. **What actually happens when specific predictions are made?**

Discernment is not unbelief. Scripture commands it.

65. WHAT DOES 1 JOHN MEAN BY "TEST THE SPIRITS"?

1 John 4:1 tells believers not to believe every spiritual claim but to test the spirits. The immediate context particularly concerns false teaching about Christ. Christian discernment therefore begins with truth about Jesus. A spiritual-sounding experience is not trustworthy merely because it is: supernatural, emotional, impressive, or sincere.



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66. CAN SUPERNATURAL EXPERIENCES BE DECEPTIVE?

Scripture says yes. The Bible does not teach: **"If something appears supernatural, it must come from God."** False prophets, deceptive signs, and spiritual deception appear throughout Scripture. Christian faith is therefore neither: **automatic skepticism** nor **automatic credulity**. It is discerning faith rooted in truth.

67. WHAT IF SOMEONE SAYS, "GOD TOLD ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOU"?

Listen carefully without surrendering discernment. Ask:

Is this consistent with Scripture?

Does it confirm something wise and godly-or pressure me toward something questionable?

Is the speaker claiming authority over my decision?

Can I pray, seek counsel, and evaluate it?

No one is obligated to treat another person's impression as God's command.

68. WHAT IF SOMEONE SAYS, "GOD TOLD ME YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO MARRY ME"?

That claim does not create an obligation. Nor does:

"God told me you should give me money."

"God told me you must join my ministry."

"God told me you cannot leave this church."

"God told me you shouldn't talk to anyone else about this."

Invoking God's name can become a powerful method of control. Healthy spiritual guidance leaves room for: truth, wisdom, conscience, appropriate boundaries, and accountability.

PASTORAL SAFEGUARD

"God told me" must never become a spiritual trump card. No person's claimed revelation gives them ownership of another person's conscience.

69. CAN LEADERS MISUSE CLAIMS OF DIVINE GUIDANCE?

Yes. This can become **spiritual abuse**. Spiritual abuse occurs when religious authority, Scripture, leadership, or claimed divine guidance is used to: manipulate, exploit, silence, intimidate, isolate, or control another person. Scripture itself condemns false prophets and shepherds who exploit God's people. Examples may include using supposed divine authority to: control relationships, demand loyalty, obtain money, suppress questions, conceal wrongdoing, dictate personal decisions, or protect a leader from accountability. The stronger someone's claim to divine authority becomes, the more-not less-important biblical testing and accountability become.

70. WHAT IF A PROPHECY OR PREDICTION FAILS?

It should not simply be forgotten. Scripture treats speaking falsely in God's name seriously. Christians disagree about how Old Testament prophetic standards relate to contemporary New Testament prophecy. But repeated failed predictions should never be normalized by: continually changing dates, redefining words after the fact, or blaming hearers for lacking faith. Claims made in God's name deserve serious accountability.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

71. HAS THE CHURCH FACED FAILED PROPHECIES AND OVERCONFIDENT CLAIMS OF DIVINE GUIDANCE BEFORE?

Yes. Throughout Christian history, individuals and movements have sometimes claimed special revelation, predicted dates for major events, or spoken with more certainty than later events justified. Christians have also experienced periods of revival and charismatic renewal in which claims of extraordinary spiritual activity were welcomed by some believers and questioned by others. Those histories are complex and should not be reduced to: **"All unusual spiritual claims are false."** or **"Strong spiritual experiences prove God is speaking."** One recurring lesson is that enthusiasm does not eliminate the need for: Scripture, discernment, accountability, humility, and careful testing. The Church does not need to repeat every historical mistake in order to learn why those safeguards matter.

72. SHOULD CHRISTIANS SET DATES FOR CHRIST'S RETURN?

No. Jesus explicitly says His followers do not know the day or hour. See Matthew 24:36. Therefore claims such as: **"God revealed the exact date of Christ's return to me"** should be rejected. Biblical readiness means faithfully following Jesus-not decoding secret calendars.

73. WHAT ABOUT MODERN PROPHETS?

The label itself does not establish credibility. Evaluate: teaching, character, accountability, Christology, handling of Scripture, predictions, financial practices, willingness to admit error, and the authority claimed for their words. Celebrity, confidence, large audiences, emotional experiences, and impressive stories are not substitutes for biblical discernment.

74. CAN A SINCERE CHRISTIAN BE MISTAKEN ABOUT HEARING GOD?

Absolutely. Sincerity and accuracy are different things. A person may genuinely believe: **"God told me..."** and still be mistaken. Recognizing this should make Christians more humble-not less spiritual. A mature believer can say: **"I believe God may be leading me this way, but I could be wrong."**

75. WHAT ABOUT INTUITION?

Intuition can reflect accumulated experience and subconscious pattern recognition. Sometimes a person senses danger or wisdom before being able to explain why. That can be valuable. But intuition is not infallible. It should be evaluated rather than automatically baptized with the words: **"The Holy Spirit told me."**

76. WHAT ABOUT CONSCIENCE?

Conscience is internal moral awareness. Scripture treats conscience seriously. But conscience can be: informed, weak, wounded, misinformed, or hardened. Therefore Christians should seek to form conscience according to Scripture. A strong feeling of guilt does not always prove something is sinful. And the absence of guilt does not prove something is righteous. This is especially important for believers vulnerable to scrupulosity, where conscience may feel alarmed far beyond what Scripture actually requires.

77. HOW DOES PRAYER HELP WITH GUIDANCE?

Prayer expresses dependence upon God. Christians can ask for: wisdom, clarity, courage, patience, pure motives, discernment, and willingness to obey. James 1:5 encourages believers who need wisdom to ask God. Prayer is not merely asking God to approve what is already wanted. It includes surrender.

78. HOW DOES PEACE FACTOR INTO DECISIONS?

Christians sometimes say: **"I have peace about it, so it must be God's will."** Peace can matter. But subjective peace is not infallible. A person can feel peaceful about a foolish decision. Another can feel anxious while faithfully obeying God. Jesus experienced deep anguish in Gethsemane while remaining perfectly obedient. Therefore: **Peace may accompany guidance. Peace alone does not define truth.**



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

79. WHAT ABOUT COLOSSIANS 3:15 - "LET THE PEACE OF CHRIST RULE"?

In context, Paul is addressing life within the body of Christ. Believers are called together into peace. The verse should not automatically be converted into a universal decision formula: **"Whichever option makes me feel peaceful is God's answer."** Context matters.

80. WHAT IF TWO CHOICES ARE BOTH BIBLICALLY PERMISSIBLE?

Then genuine freedom may exist. Seek wisdom. Pray. Consider responsibilities and consequences. Receive counsel. Then make a decision. Christians do not need a supernatural sign before every morally permissible choice. Sometimes faithful decision-making really is: **wisdom + freedom + trust.**

81. WHAT IF SOMEONE MAKES THE WRONG CHOICE?

If the choice was sinful, repent. If it was an imperfect but morally permissible decision, learn. God is not surprised. His providence is not so fragile that one non-sinful decision places someone permanently outside His ability to guide and redeem. Christians can become paralyzed trying to discover one invisible "perfect choice." Faithfulness does not require omniscience.

82. DOES GOD HAVE A WILL FOR PEOPLE'S LIVES?

Yes-but Scripture speaks of God's will in more than one sense. God has revealed moral purposes for His people: holiness, gratitude, love, justice, truthfulness, sexual integrity, generosity, forgiveness, service, and conformity to Christ. God also providentially governs history in ways human beings do not fully know beforehand. The revealed will of God should receive more attention than speculation about His hidden providence.

83. WHAT IF SOMEONE KEEPS ASKING GOD FOR GUIDANCE BUT IGNORES SCRIPTURE?

Then the problem may not be God's silence. Imagine praying: **"God, tell me whether I should forgive."** Scripture has already spoken. Or: **"God, tell me whether I should deceive them."** Scripture has already spoken. Sometimes people seek additional guidance because they hope God will give them a different answer.

84. WHY DOES OBEDIENCE OFTEN BRING GREATER CLARITY?

Because some truths are understood more deeply through faithful practice. Jesus says in John 7:17 that the person willing to do God's will can recognize the source of His teaching. This does not mean obedience earns revelation. It recognizes that resistance can distort perception. A heart determined not to obey can continually manufacture reasons not to hear.

85. CAN KNOWLEDGE WITHOUT OBEDIENCE PRODUCE PRIDE?

Yes. Paul warns that knowledge can puff people up while love builds up. See 1 Corinthians 8:1. Biblical knowledge is precious. But knowledge disconnected from humility and love can become another form of self-exaltation. The goal is not merely: **Know more Scripture.** It is: **Know God more truly and increasingly live accordingly.**

86. WHY DID JESUS SOMETIMES SAY, "WHOEVER HAS EARS TO HEAR, LET THEM HEAR"?

Because spiritual hearing involves responsiveness. Jesus' parable of the soils illustrates different responses to the same word. Some hear superficially. Some respond temporarily. Some allow competing desires to choke the word. Others receive it and bear fruit. See Mark 4:1-20.

87. WHAT DOES THE PARABLE OF THE SOILS TEACH ABOUT LISTENING?

It asks readers to examine not merely the seed but the soil. The seed is God's Word. The question becomes: **What is happening in the hearer?** Is the heart: hard, shallow, crowded, or receptive? Listening becomes a form of spiritual self-examination.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

88. WHAT CAN CHOKE GOD'S WORD IN SOMEONE'S LIFE?

Jesus specifically mentions: worries, the lure of wealth, and desires for other things. See Mark 4:18-19. Modern life adds enormous competition for attention. A person can possess nearly unlimited access to Scripture while giving almost every waking moment to other voices.

89. DOES DIGITAL LIFE AFFECT THE ABILITY TO LISTEN?

It can. Technology is not inherently opposed to spiritual life. It gives Christians remarkable access to: Scripture, teaching, worship, study tools, communication, and global ministry. But constant stimulation can train people toward: distraction, reaction, impatience, outrage, comparison, and shallow attention. Hearing God's Word requires enough attention to actually receive it.

90. HOW CAN CHRISTIANS PRACTICE ATTENTIVE LISTENING?

Possible practices include: reading Scripture before opening social media, silencing notifications during prayer and study, reading a shorter passage more slowly, writing down one truth to remember, memorizing Scripture, leaving moments of silence, discussing Scripture with another believer, and identifying one faithful response. The goal is not a new legalistic checklist. It is making room to listen.

91. WHAT IF GOD SEEMS SILENT?

First remember: **God's apparent silence does not mean God has said nothing.** Scripture remains. The Gospel remains. Christ remains. God's promises remain. There may be seasons when prayer feels dry and God's presence feels distant. The Psalms show faithful believers asking: **"How long, LORD?"** Faith can continue listening even when emotional reassurance is absent.

92. DOES SILENCE MEAN SOMEONE LACKS FAITH?

No. Many faithful believers have experienced seasons of spiritual dryness or apparent silence. David did. Job did. Jeremiah did. The psalmists did. Jesus Himself prayed words from Psalm 22 from the cross. Lament is not the opposite of faith. Lament speaks pain **to God**.

93. WHAT SHOULD SOMEONE DO WHEN THEY DO NOT KNOW WHAT GOD IS DOING?

Return to what is known. A believer may not know: why something happened, when circumstances will change, or what God will do next. But Scripture may still reveal how to walk today:

Tell the truth.
Love your neighbor.
Pray.
Forgive.
Seek wisdom.
Reject sin.
Receive help.
Do justice.
Show mercy.
Remain faithful.

People often want a map of the next ten years. God frequently gives enough light for the next faithful step.

PASTORAL SAFEGUARD - WHEN GOD FEELS SILENT

Do not tell a suffering person: **"If you were listening better, God would tell you why."** Scripture does not promise believers an explanation for every tragedy. Job never receives the detailed causal explanation readers see in the opening chapters of his story. Paul's thorn remains despite repeated prayer. Faith does not require pretending unanswered questions have been answered. Sometimes obedience looks like trusting God while still grieving and asking why.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

94. WHAT IF OBEDIENCE DOES NOT PRODUCE THE RESULT SOMEONE PRAYED FOR?

Then faithfulness is still faithfulness. Obedience does not put God in anyone's debt. Someone may: pray faithfully and still wait, forgive and not receive reconciliation, tell the truth and suffer consequences, love someone who does not respond, seek healing and remain ill, raise a child faithfully who later wanders, or make a wise decision that still ends painfully. The outcome does not retroactively make obedience a mistake.

95. CAN SOMEONE OBEY WHILE GRIEVING?

Yes. Trust can cry. Trust can lament. Trust can ask again. Trust can say: **"I do not understand."** Jesus obeyed in Gethsemane while deeply distressed. Biblical surrender is not emotional numbness.

96. HOW CAN SOMEONE KNOW WHEN OBEDIENCE REQUIRES ACTION RATHER THAN MORE PRAYER?

Prayer and action are not opposites. Nehemiah provides a memorable example. Nehemiah 4:9 describes the people praying to God **and** posting a guard. They prayed. And they acted. Depending on God does not mean refusing responsible action.

97. DOES TRUSTING GOD MEAN REFUSING PRACTICAL HELP?

No. Christians may faithfully use: doctors, counselors, medication, legal authorities, financial advice, safety planning, education, skilled professionals, and practical assistance. God's providence often works through ordinary means. **"Trust God"** should never mean: **"Refuse the help God may be providing."**

98. HOW CAN CHRISTIANS BECOME MORE OBEDIENT?

Not primarily by trying to become spiritually impressive. Growth comes through God's grace and ordinary means He has given: Scripture, prayer, worship, Christian community, repentance, Communion, baptismal identity, service, accountability, suffering, and repeated acts of faithfulness. Obedience grows through practice.

99. WHAT ROLE DOES HABIT PLAY?

A large portion of life is shaped by repeated actions. Small habits can form people toward attentiveness or distraction. Examples include:

Opening Scripture regularly.
Praying before reacting.
Confessing quickly.
Telling the truth consistently.
Giving regularly.
Showing up for worship.
Serving when no one notices.

Ordinary obedience becomes part of spiritual formation.

100. CAN OBEDIENCE BECOME JOYFUL?

Yes. Psalm 119 repeatedly describes delight in God's commands. As believers grow, obedience can increasingly become not merely: **"I have to."** but: **"I trust the One who said this."** That does not make every act easy. But love can reshape desire.

101. WHAT IF OBEDIENCE STILL FEELS DIFFICULT AFTER MANY YEARS?

Difficulty does not necessarily mean failure. Some battles remain difficult. Some wounds heal slowly. Some temptations require lifelong vigilance. Some commands confront deeply rooted habits. Sanctification is ordinarily lifelong. The question is not: **"Why am I not instantly perfect?"** but: **"Am I continuing to bring my life under Christ's gracious rule?"**



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

102. WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEARING, FAITH, AND OBEDIENCE?

Romans 10:17 teaches that faith comes through hearing the Good News about Christ. The Gospel creates faith. Faith receives Christ. And living faith increasingly bears fruit. So the pattern is not: **Hear -> perform -> earn God's acceptance**. It is: **Hear the Gospel -> believe Christ -> receive grace -> learn to walk in obedience**.

103. WHAT DOES MATURE LISTENING LOOK LIKE?

Mature listening becomes less obsessed with extraordinary experiences and increasingly attentive to faithful discipleship. It asks:

What has God said?

What does this mean in context?

How does this fit the biblical story and point toward Christ?

What should be believed?

What should be repented of?

What wisdom is needed?

What faithful response belongs to today?

104. WHAT SHOULD SOMEONE DO WHEN THEY THINK GOD MAY BE LEADING THEM?

Use a simple discernment process:

1. SCRIPTURE

Does this agree with God's revealed Word?

2. PRAYER

Have desires and fears been honestly brought before God?

3. MOTIVES

What is wanted-and why?

4. WISDOM

What biblical principles apply?

5. COUNSEL

What do mature believers see?

6. CIRCUMSTANCES

What opportunities, responsibilities, and limitations exist?

7. FREEDOM

If several choices remain biblically faithful, can one be chosen wisely without demanding supernatural certainty?

8. HUMILITY

Is there willingness to admit that an interpretation of an impression could be wrong?

9. OBEDIENCE

Is something Scripture has already made clear being avoided?

10. TRUST

Can the best faithful decision available be made while entrusting the outcome to God?

A WORKED DISCERNMENT EXAMPLE

"I FEEL STRONGLY THAT GOD MAY BE LEADING ME TO QUIT MY JOB AND START A MINISTRY."

Suppose a believer has been praying and increasingly feels drawn to leave a stable job and begin a ministry. How might the ten-part discernment process work?



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

SCRIPTURE

Starting a ministry is not automatically commanded or forbidden. But Scripture does speak clearly about: integrity, providing responsibly for legitimate obligations, wise stewardship, humility, service, and character in leadership. The first question is not: **"How strong is the feeling?"** It is: **"Would this direction require disobeying anything God has already made clear?"**

PRAYER

Has the decision genuinely been surrendered? Or has prayer become: **"God, please confirm what I already decided"**? Prayer should include willingness for either answer.

MOTIVES

Why is leaving attractive? A genuine desire to serve? Frustration with a supervisor? A desire for recognition? Burnout? A longing for greater purpose? Financial opportunity? More than one motive may exist. Discernment does not require pretending motives are perfectly pure. It requires honesty.

WISDOM

What practical realities matter? Family responsibilities? Debt? Health insurance? Existing commitments? Training? Financial runway? The needs of people the proposed ministry would serve? Practical wisdom is not evidence of weak faith.

COUNSEL

What do mature Christians who know the person well see? Do they recognize gifts and character consistent with the proposed ministry? Or do they see risks the person may be overlooking? Healthy counsel can affirm, caution, or suggest waiting.

CIRCUMSTANCES

Are there actual opportunities to serve? Could the ministry begin gradually while current employment continues? Have doors opened-or is the decision being driven entirely by internal urgency? Circumstances do not determine God's will by themselves, but they matter.

FREEDOM

It may be possible that **both** remaining in the job and eventually leaving it could be faithful choices. Not every decision has one hidden spiritually superior option.

HUMILITY

Instead of saying: **"God told me to quit my job,"** the person might honestly say: **"I believe God may be leading me toward ministry, and I am trying to discern that carefully."** That leaves room to learn.

OBEDIENCE

Is there any clear responsibility already being neglected? Someone should not use a possible future ministry to justify present unfaithfulness.

TRUST

Eventually, complete certainty may never arrive. After Scripture, prayer, wisdom, counsel, motives, responsibilities, and circumstances have been considered, a faithful decision may need to be made. Then the outcome can be entrusted to God.

CASE-STUDY MEMORY ANCHOR

Discernment is not finding a magical sign. It is bringing the whole decision under God's truth, wisdom, and lordship.

105. WHAT IS THE SAFEST POSTURE WHEN CLAIMING GOD'S GUIDANCE?

Confidence where God has spoken clearly. Humility where He has not. Say: **"Scripture teaches..."** when Scripture actually teaches it. Say: **"I believe..."** when making a theological inference. Say: **"I think the wisest choice may be..."** when applying wisdom. Say: **"I sense..."** when describing an impression. Do not give human uncertainty God's name merely to make it sound authoritative.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

106. HOW SHOULD CHILDREN AND NEW BELIEVERS BE TAUGHT TO "HEAR GOD"?

Begin with what is clearest. Teach them that God has given Scripture. Help them learn: who Jesus is, what the Gospel is, what God's Word says, how to pray, how to seek wisdom, and how to obey what is clear. Be especially careful about telling children: **"Close your eyes and tell me what God says to you."** That can unintentionally train a child to assume every thought or image in the mind is divine communication. A better approach is:

"Let's read what God has said in Scripture."

"What does this passage teach?"

"How can we respond?"

If a child or new believer says: **"I think God put this on my heart,"** there is no need to ridicule the statement. Help them learn humble discernment. Ask:

"Does it agree with Scripture?"

"Could this be a wise thought or reminder?"

"Is it okay to say, 'I think' or 'I wonder' when we are not certain?"

It is spiritually healthy to say: **"I don't know."** The goal is not to make children afraid of spiritual experience. It is to root them securely in God's Word before teaching them to interpret subjective experiences.

107. WHY MUST JESUS REMAIN AT THE CENTER OF HEARING AND OBEYING?

Because Jesus is not merely one teacher among many. He is the Word made flesh. He perfectly obeyed the Father. He fulfilled Scripture. He died for sinners. He rose from the dead. He gives His Spirit. He calls His sheep. He forgives those who fail. He forms His people. And He will return. Christian obedience therefore begins and ends not with a rulebook but with a Person: **Jesus Christ**. Christians listen because He is Lord. They obey because He is trustworthy. They return when they fail because He is gracious. And they follow because He first called them.

THE HEARING AND OBEDIENCE PATH

GOD SPEAKS ↓ THE WORD IS HEARD ↓ THE WORD IS UNDERSTOOD ↓ THE HEART BELIEVES ↓ THE SPIRIT ILLUMINATES AND FORMS ↓ THE DISCIPLE RESPONDS ↓ OBEDIENCE BECOMES PRACTICE ↓ FAILURE LEADS TO REPENTANCE ↓ GRACE LEADS BACK TO CHRIST ↓ THE DISCIPLE CONTINUES FOLLOWING

FOUR QUESTIONS FOR EVERYDAY LISTENING

When reading Scripture, ask:

1. WHAT DOES THIS SAY?

Observe before applying.

2. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Read it in context.

3. WHAT DOES THIS SHOW ABOUT GOD AND HIS REDEMPITIVE STORY?

Keep Christ and the whole biblical story in view.

4. HOW SHOULD I RESPOND?

Is there: truth to believe? sin to confess? a command to obey? a promise to trust? wisdom to practice? a warning to heed? a reason to worship?

HARD QUESTIONS - QUICK REVIEW



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

Does God still speak?

God speaks authoritatively through Scripture, and the Spirit continues to teach, convict, guide, and give wisdom. Christians disagree about some forms of contemporary revelation.

Is every strong impression from God?

No.

Can Christians mistake their own thoughts for God's leading?

Yes.

Are intrusive thoughts automatically God's voice?

No.

Is every frightening thought a divine warning or command?

No.

Can anxiety or scrupulosity complicate discernment?

Yes.

Can seeking appropriate mental-health care be compatible with trusting God?

Yes.

Can God use impressions?

Christians differ on how they describe this, but impressions should be held humbly and tested.

Can a dream be from God?

God used dreams in Scripture. Christians disagree about their role today. No dream has authority to contradict Scripture.

Does prophecy continue?

Continuationists and cessationists disagree.

Should prophetic claims be tested?

Yes.

Does "God told me" end a discussion?

No.

Must someone obey another person's claimed revelation for them?

No.

Can spiritual leaders be wrong?

Yes.

Can spiritual authority become spiritually abusive?

Yes.

Can circumstances guide?

They can inform discernment, but circumstances require interpretation.

Does an open door automatically prove God's will?

No.

Does inner peace automatically prove God's will?

No.

Should Christians use Gideon's fleece as a standard decision-making method?

Scripture does not command this.

Do Christians need special revelation before obeying something Scripture already commands?

No.

Does God have one hidden decision that must be discovered for every detail of life?

Scripture does not teach Christian guidance as a hidden maze that believers must perfectly decode.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

Can more than one choice sometimes be faithful?

Yes.

Does obedience earn salvation?

No.

Does grace make obedience optional?

No.

Does obedience guarantee the outcome hoped for?

No.

Does suffering mean someone misunderstood God's will?

Not necessarily.

Does God's silence mean He has abandoned His people?

No.

Can faithful believers lament?

Yes.

Does trusting God mean refusing practical help?

No.

Can a faithful decision be made without supernatural certainty?

Yes.

What if someone fails?

Confess, repent, receive God's grace, and return to faithful obedience.

A BIBLICAL CASE STUDY

PETER - HEARING, FAILING, AND LEARNING TO OBEY

Peter heard Jesus personally. He witnessed miracles. He confessed Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. Yet Peter still struggled to obey what he heard. When Jesus explained that He would suffer and die, Peter resisted the very plan Jesus had revealed. See Matthew 16:21-23. Later Peter confidently promised that he would never abandon Jesus. But Peter denied Him three times. See Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75. Peter's failure teaches something important: **Hearing truth does not mean someone has fully learned to live it.** But failure was not the end of Peter's story. After the resurrection, Jesus restored him. Three times Jesus asked Peter about his love. And Jesus gave Peter responsibility to care for His sheep. See John 21:15-19. Later Peter faithfully proclaimed Christ despite opposition. The man who once denied Jesus eventually told authorities that he and the other apostles could not stop speaking about what they had seen and heard. See Acts 4:20. Peter's life was not: **hear once -> obey perfectly forever.** It was: **hear -> follow -> misunderstand -> fail -> repent -> receive grace -> grow -> obey courageously.** That is encouraging for imperfect disciples. Jesus does not excuse Peter's failure. But neither does He discard Peter. Grace restores him to faithful obedience.

PERSONAL STUDY AND APPLICATION

1. WHAT HAS GOD ALREADY MADE CLEAR?

Write down one area where additional guidance may be sought even though Scripture has already given clear direction.

2. WHAT AM I RESISTING?

Ask: **Is there something Scripture clearly teaches that I keep postponing?** Why? Fear? Comfort? Pride? Approval? Cost? Uncertainty?



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

3. WHAT VOICES ARE FORMING ME?

Consider how much attention goes each week to: Scripture, prayer, social media, television, podcasts, political commentary, entertainment, friends, news, Christian teaching. Which voices are shaping instincts most deeply?

4. WHERE AM I USING "GOD'S WILL" TO SEEK CERTAINTY GOD HAS NOT PROMISED?

Is there a decision where Scripture gives freedom and wisdom, but fear prevents action without a sign? What would faithful wisdom look like?

5. HAVE I USED "GOD TOLD ME" TOO QUICKLY?

Would more humble language better reflect what is actually known? Instead of: **"God told me..."** could the honest statement be:

"I sense..."

"I think..."

"I believe..."

"I've been praying about..."

"Scripture clearly teaches..."

Use certainty appropriate to the source.

6. AM I CAUGHT IN A CYCLE OF SPIRITUAL FEAR OR COMPULSIVE CERTAINTY-SEEKING?

Ask: Am I repeatedly checking whether I sinned? Am I constantly asking for signs? Do I feel compelled to confess the same uncertainty over and over? Am I afraid one wrong decision will permanently place me outside God's plan? Do unwanted thoughts feel like commands I must obey or neutralize? If so, the answer may not be **more decoding**. It may be wise to seek help from a trustworthy pastor and an appropriately qualified mental-health professional who understands anxiety, OCD, trauma, or related concerns.

7. WHAT IS MY NEXT FAITHFUL STEP?

Do not begin with ten changes. Choose one. **Hear. Trust. Obey.**

A SIMPLE DAILY PRACTICE

READ

Hear what Scripture actually says.

REFLECT

Consider its meaning in context.

PRAY

Ask God for understanding, faith, wisdom, and courage.

RESPOND

Identify one appropriate response.

TRUST

Leave the results with God.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Read. Reflect. Pray. Respond. Trust.

HELPING SOMEONE ELSE DISCERN

When someone says: **"I think God may be leading me..."** avoid immediately declaring either: **"Yes, that's definitely God."** or: **"No, God doesn't work that way."** Instead ask good questions: What does Scripture say? What makes you think God may be leading you? What are your motives? What wise counsel have you



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

received? Are you free to wait? Is anyone pressuring you? What responsibilities do you already have? Are several choices biblically permissible? What would faithfulness look like even without complete certainty? The goal is not to become another person's Holy Spirit. The goal is to help that person become a wiser disciple of Jesus.

MEMORY ANCHOR

Discern with people. Do not control them.

FINAL MEMORY ANCHORS

God speaks through His Word. His people listen with faith. Faith responds with obedience. Christians do not obey so God will save them. They obey because God's grace saves and changes them. Revelation gives the truth. Illumination helps believers see the truth. Scripture is authoritative. Impressions require humility. Do not automatically dismiss. Do not automatically accept. Test. "God told me" must never become a spiritual trump card. God's will is not a spiritual escape room. Obey what is clear. Seek wisdom. Choose faithfully. Trust God. Confidence where God has spoken clearly. Humility where He has not. Peace may accompany guidance. Peace alone does not define truth. Wisdom + freedom + trust can be genuinely spiritual decision-making. Faithfulness belongs to the believer's response. Results remain in God's hands. Trust can cry. Trust can lament. Trust can still obey. Discern with people. Do not control them. Read. Reflect. Pray. Respond. Trust.

KEY TERMS

Cessationism The Christian view that certain revelatory or sign gifts associated especially with the apostolic era no longer ordinarily function in the Church in the same way. **Conscience** A person's internal moral awareness; important but capable of being weak, misinformed, wounded, or hardened and therefore needing formation by truth. **Continuationism** The Christian view that spiritual gifts described in the New Testament, including gifts such as prophecy, may continue in the Church today. **Discernment** The process of distinguishing truth from error and wisdom from foolishness through Scripture, prayer, wisdom, testing, and Spirit-formed judgment. **General Revelation** God's disclosure of Himself through creation and human moral awareness. **Guidance** God's direction of His people through His Word, wisdom, providence, prayer, counsel, and the work of the Holy Spirit. **Illumination** The Holy Spirit's work of helping people understand, receive, and respond to God's revealed truth. **Impression / Prompting** A subjective internal sense that a particular action, prayer, warning, or direction should receive attention; such experiences should be held humbly and tested rather than automatically equated with divine revelation. **Inspiration** The work of God by which Scripture was given through human authors so that it communicates what God intended. **Legalism** In this study, treating obedience or rule-keeping as a means of earning righteousness, spiritual superiority, or God's acceptance rather than responding to grace. **Obedience** Faithful response to what God has commanded. **Prophecy** God's communication through those called to speak His message; Christians disagree about how the New Testament gift of prophecy relates to the Church today. **Providence** God's sovereign sustaining and governing of creation and history. **Repentance** Turning from sin toward God in response to His truth and grace. **Revelation** God's act of making Himself and His truth known. **Scrupulosity** A pattern of obsessive religious or moral fear, often associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder, involving excessive doubt, guilt, checking, confession, reassurance-seeking, or fear of unknowingly offending God. **Special Revelation** God's specific self-disclosure through His redemptive acts, prophetic revelation, Scripture, and supremely Jesus Christ. **Spiritual Abuse** Misuse of spiritual authority, Scripture, leadership, or claimed divine guidance to manipulate, exploit, silence, intimidate, isolate, or control others. **Wisdom** Skill in living faithfully before God by applying truth appropriately to real circumstances.

REVIEW QUESTIONS



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

1. What does biblical hearing involve beyond physically hearing words?
2. Why is Scripture foundational for hearing God?
3. Who stands at the center of biblical revelation?
4. What is the difference between hearing and obeying?
5. What does Jesus' wise-and-foolish-builders illustration teach?
6. Does obedience earn salvation?
7. How are grace and obedience related?
8. Why does Jesus connect love and obedience?
9. Is obedience the same as perfection?
10. What should believers do when they fail?
11. What is repentance?
12. Why can delayed obedience become dangerous?
13. Does obedience guarantee an easier life?
14. Does obedience guarantee the outcome hoped for?
15. Why is regular Scripture reading important?
16. Why does biblical context matter?
17. Why can Christians benefit from teachers and other believers?
18. What is biblical meditation?
19. What role does prayer have in Bible reading?
20. What is illumination?
21. Is illumination the same as new revelation?
22. How can Scripture bring conviction?
23. What is the difference between conviction and hopeless condemnation?
24. Are feelings inherently bad?
25. Must someone feel like obeying before obeying?
26. What is legalism?
27. Can grace be misused as an excuse for disobedience?
28. Why do Christians need community when interpreting and applying Scripture?
29. Are pastors infallible?
30. What should happen when human authority contradicts God's Word?
31. Why must biblical obedience never be used to excuse abuse?
32. Why should Christians distinguish Scripture, theological inference, wisdom/application, and preference?
33. Does every decision have one directly stated biblical answer?
34. What are some questions biblical wisdom asks?
35. Why should Christians not assume one imperfect decision will ruin God's plan?
36. What is the "blueprint" model of God's will, and why can it create fear?
37. What can Samuel's listening posture teach?
38. In what ways does Scripture describe God speaking?
39. What is revelation?
40. What is general revelation?
41. What is special revelation?
42. What is the difference between revelation and illumination?
43. What is guidance?
44. What does being led by the Spirit certainly include?



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

45. Does John 10:27 necessarily promise individualized internal messages?
46. Can circumstances be part of guidance?
47. Does an open door automatically prove God's will?
48. Can other believers help guide?
49. What is an impression or prompting?
50. Why should impressions be held humbly?
51. Can intrusive thoughts be mistaken for divine guidance?
52. What is scrupulosity?
53. Why can compulsive sign-seeking make discernment more difficult?
54. Why should mental-health care and wise pastoral care not be treated as competitors?
55. Why can "I sense" sometimes be wiser language than "God told me"?
56. Do Christians need private revelation before obeying clear biblical commands?
57. Should Christians routinely ask for signs?
58. Does Gideon's fleece establish a universal decision-making method?
59. Did God use dreams in Scripture?
60. Should every vivid dream be treated as revelation?
61. Does Scripture contain genuine visions?
62. Why must spiritual experiences still be tested?
63. What is prophecy?
64. What is cessationism?
65. What is continuationism?
66. What truths should careful Christians on both sides affirm?
67. What two instructions appear together in 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21?
68. What does it mean to test the spirits?
69. Does apparently supernatural activity automatically prove God's approval?
70. Must someone obey another person's claimed revelation for their life?
71. Why can "God told me" language become spiritually dangerous?
72. What is spiritual abuse?
73. Can spiritual leaders misuse divine-authority claims?
74. Why should failed predictions be taken seriously?
75. What can Church history teach about claims of extraordinary guidance?
76. Should Christians set dates for Christ's return?
77. What should be evaluated when someone claims to be a modern prophet?
78. Can sincere Christians be mistaken about hearing God?
79. Is intuition infallible?
80. Is conscience infallible?
81. How does prayer contribute to discernment?
82. Does subjective peace prove God's will?
83. What is the context of Colossians 3:15?
84. Can Christians have genuine freedom between multiple faithful choices?
85. What should happen after an imperfect decision?
86. Why is God's revealed will more appropriate to focus on than speculation about hidden providence?
87. What if someone asks for guidance while ignoring Scripture?
88. Why can obedience deepen understanding?



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

89. How can knowledge become spiritually dangerous?
90. What does the parable of the soils teach about hearing?
91. What can choke God's Word?
92. How can digital habits affect attentive listening?
93. What practices can strengthen attention to Scripture?
94. Does God's apparent silence mean He has said nothing?
95. Does spiritual dryness necessarily indicate weak faith?
96. What can believers do when they do not know what God is doing?
97. Why should suffering people not be told that better listening would necessarily reveal God's reasons?
98. Does obedience guarantee answered prayer in the desired way?
99. Can faith and grief coexist?
100. What does Nehemiah 4:9 show about prayer and practical action?
101. Does trusting God mean refusing practical help?
102. Through what ordinary means does obedience grow?
103. How can habits shape discipleship?
104. Can obedience become increasingly joyful?
105. Does continued difficulty necessarily mean spiritual failure?
106. How are hearing, faith, grace, and obedience related?
107. What does mature listening increasingly emphasize?
108. What are the ten elements of the study's discernment process?
109. How does the worked job/ministry example illustrate discernment?
110. Why should language reflect the actual degree of certainty?
111. How should children and new believers be taught about hearing God?
112. Why must Jesus remain at the center of hearing and obeying God's Word?

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

START WITH SCRIPTURE

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 Hearing, loving, remembering, and teaching God's commands. **1 Samuel 3:1-21** Samuel hears God's prophetic call. **Psalms 19** Creation and God's Word reveal His glory and truth. **Psalms 119** Loving, learning, remembering, and obeying God's Word. **Matthew 7:15-27** False prophets and hearing versus doing Jesus' words. **Matthew 13:1-23** The parable of the soils. **John 10:1-30** Jesus the Good Shepherd and His sheep. **John 14-16** Jesus' teaching about love, obedience, and the Holy Spirit. **Acts 4-5** Obeying God amid opposition. **Romans 8** Life in the Spirit. **Romans 12:1-2** Renewed minds and discerning God's will. **1 Corinthians 12-14** Spiritual gifts and prophecy. **Galatians 5:13-26** Walking by the Spirit. **1 Thessalonians 5:12-24** Prophecy, testing, and faithful Christian life. **2 Timothy 3:14-17** The inspiration and usefulness of Scripture. **Hebrews 1:1-4** God has spoken supremely through His Son. **Hebrews 4:12-16** God's living Word and access to grace. **James 1:5, 19-27** Wisdom and doing God's Word. **1 John 4:1-6** Testing spiritual claims.

RELATED 3NAILS STUDIES

#86 - What Is Salvation? For the biblical foundation of salvation by God's grace. **#87 - Repentance, Faith, and New Life** For a fuller treatment of repentance and the response of faith. **#88 - What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?** For regeneration and the new life God produces. **#96 - Worship** For responding to God through worship. **#97 - Fellowship & Church** For the role of Christian community. **#98 - Sanctification** For the lifelong work of growing in holiness. **#99 - Spiritual Gifts** For a fuller treatment of spiritual gifts and differing Christian perspectives. **#100 - Sharing Your Faith** For faithfully communicating the Gospel. **#116 - The Holy Spirit** For a fuller study of the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. **#120 - Living as a Disciple of Jesus** For



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the larger pattern of following Jesus in everyday life. **#121 - Rowboat, Sailboat, or Steamboat?** For understanding dependence upon God's power alongside active obedience and trusting God when outcomes remain unresolved. **#122 - Developing a Biblical Worldview** For distinguishing Scripture, theological inference, wisdom/application, and preference and for testing competing truth claims.

FURTHER READING

GORDON D. FEE & DOUGLAS STUART

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth A practical introduction to reading biblical genres responsibly and in context.

J. I. PACKER

Knowing God A classic work on knowing God's character and responding to Him.

JOHN STOTT

The Radical Disciple A concise treatment of faithful Christian discipleship.

DALLAS WILLARD

Hearing God A widely read treatment of divine guidance and listening. Readers should compare its conclusions carefully with Scripture and recognize that Christians differ over some aspects of contemporary divine communication.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Just Do Something A practical corrective to anxiety and paralysis surrounding the search for God's will.

SINCLAIR FERGUSON

The Holy Spirit A theological study of the Spirit's Person and work.

RESOURCE SAFEGUARD

Listing a resource does not mean 3Nails endorses every theological conclusion, interpretation, methodology, or application of an author. **Books should serve Scripture. Scripture should never be made to serve a favorite author.**

FINAL REFLECTION

Many Christians ask: "**How can I hear God?**" That can be a sincere and beautiful desire. But Scripture redirects the question before answering it. God has already spoken. He has revealed Himself in creation. He spoke through prophets. He acted throughout redemptive history. He gave His written Word. And ultimately: **God has spoken through His Son.** Jesus is not hiding behind a spiritual puzzle waiting for sufficiently perceptive people to decode secret instructions. He calls people to Himself. He gives His Word. He gives His Spirit. He gives wisdom. He gives His Church. And He teaches His people to walk by faith. Sometimes the next faithful step will be unmistakably clear because Scripture directly commands it. Sometimes wisdom will require careful thought. Sometimes several faithful options will remain. Sometimes Christians will sense a prompting and hold it humbly before God. Sometimes they will realize they were mistaken. Sometimes anxiety, intrusive thoughts, trauma, or scrupulosity will make internal experiences difficult to interpret. In those moments, faithfulness does not require treating every thought as a hidden message from heaven. God's Word remains steady even when the mind feels noisy. Wise pastoral care, Christian community, and appropriate professional help can all serve a believer without competing with trust in God. Sometimes God will feel painfully silent. Sometimes obedience will cost far more than expected. And sometimes believers will fail. But the Christian life does not rest upon human ability to perfectly decode every impression. It rests upon Jesus Christ. The One who calls His sheep is also the One who laid down His life for them. The One who commands obedience is the One who forgives repentant sinners. The One who gives His Word also gives His Spirit. And the One who leads His people remains faithful even when they cannot see the entire road ahead. So open the



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Scriptures. Listen carefully. Read in context. Ask for wisdom. Test spiritual claims. Receive wise counsel. Hold subjective impressions humbly. Reject manipulation dressed in God's name. Do not make fear of "missing God's plan" more powerful than trust in God's character. Obey what God has made clear. Where several faithful choices remain, use wisdom and freedom. Repent when failure occurs. And when the future remains uncertain, take the next faithful step and entrust what cannot be controlled to God. The goal is not to become a person who can constantly say: **"God told me."** The goal is to become a disciple whose life increasingly says: **"Lord, You have spoken through Your Word. Teach me to listen. Give me wisdom where I do not know. Give me courage where I do know. And by Your grace, help me obey."**

FINAL MEMORY ANCHOR

Hear the Word. Trust the Speaker. Follow Jesus. Obey what is clear. Seek wisdom where it is not. Test what others claim. Walk humbly with God. And trust Him with what you cannot see.