

**“Hearing God and Guidance”
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John 10:3 – 4; 27:

“The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”

“My sheep hear to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

Hebrews 1:1 – 2:

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”

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As a young Christian, as a fairly new believer, hearing God's voice and knowing God's will for my life was actually quite a consuming concern. Looking back, it did cause me a lot of angst.

Part of the reason was my perfectionist personality.

It wasn't helped that my early discipleship was in a church that for a time held to a particular strand of teaching when came to guidance. It was propounded by an internationally well-known Bible teacher. This particular strand of teaching said this: God has His perfect will for your life that you need to discover.

Inside God's perfect will is blessing and protection and so on.

Outside of God's perfect will is difficulty and missed opportunity, etc. So I knew what God expected of me ethically but I there were times when I doubt my decisions and wonder "Is this God's will? Am I in His will?"

I had an obsessive need for guidance.

I don't know about you if that was your experience at all but it does seem at times that it can be fraught for some.

I know that for other friends of mine there path for them was very straight forward.

All of this is grounded in the Christian belief in a God who communicates. A God who in ancient times spoke to his people through the prophets but now in the greatest way of all: through His Son Jesus.

Jesus who says my sheep hear my voice.

Sheep is not a derogatory term in Scripture.

Sheep were highly valued. Most of all they dependent on the Shepherd.

In John 10 Jesus uses this imager when he describes Himself as the good shepherd and His church as His sheep.

In this passage, the dependence of the sheep on the shepherd is not presented.

The sheep of Jesus know His voice, and He knows them. The sheep of Jesus are protected and provided for by Him. And most significantly and exclusively Jesus willingly lays down His life for His sheep.

With that is the promise of guidance – "they follow me".

So this God most clearly seen in Jesus is interested in the specific circumstances of your and my life.

So with that in mind:

"What has been your experience of decision making and hearing from God?"

How does God lead?"

When you look back on your how has God led you?
If you're comfortable, tell the person beside you.

We go to Scripture.

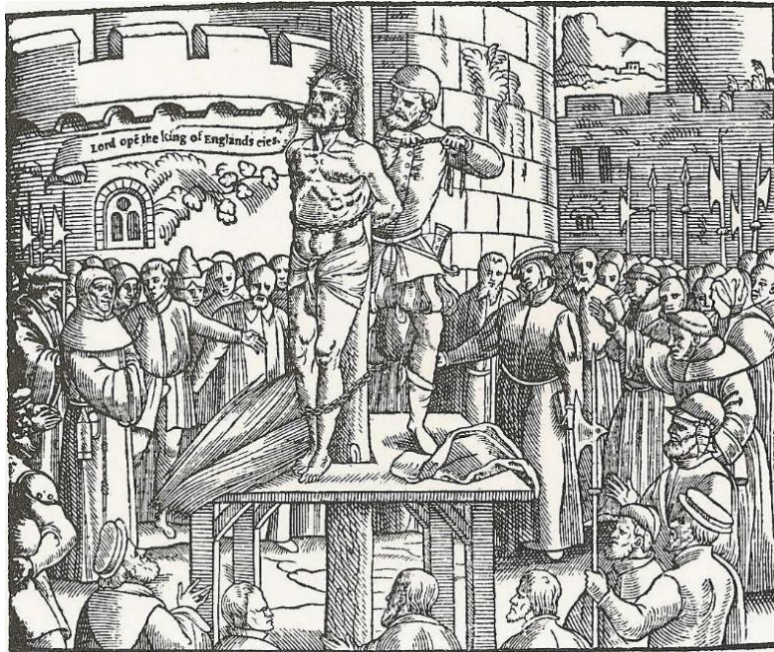
The reason why we value Scripture so much is because so much is that despite the scrutiny, the suppression and the continued attacks, it has shown itself to be trustworthy as the Word of God.

That in this book called the Bible, God has spoken to us through all sorts of people but most of all by his Son and He continues to speak today.

People have given their lives for this belief.

William Tyndale had a deep desire to translate the Bible into English at a time in England when it was only written in Latin and could only be interpreted by the clergy. What drove Tyndale was that as he read the Greek Scriptures he became aware the people are saved from their sins and come into relationship with God through faith in Jesus alone. Because of the opposition in England, Tyndale went to Germany. Six thousand copies were printed and smuggled into England. The bishops did everything they could to eradicate the Bibles – the Bishop of London had copies ceremoniously burned at St. Paul's; the archbishop of Canterbury bought up copies to destroy them. Tyndale used the money to print improved editions.

While in Belgium he was betrayed and arrested and after a year in prison, he was condemned. His punishment occurred on October 6, 1536, where he was dragged through the stone cobbled, streets, strangled and his body burned at the stake.



His final prayer was "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!"
And three years later, in 1539, Henry VIII required every parish church in England to make a copy of the English Bible available to its parishioners.

So a reminder: Scripture is God's word for all people, in all times and in all places.

And as God's Word it is authoritative.

The PCANZ confesses that:

The supreme rule of faith and life and the supreme standard of the Church is the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Other denominations have similar statements:

AoG

We believe that the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments are inspired by God and are the revelation of God to humanity; they are the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct.

Baptist

[Baptist's believe in] the inspiration of the Bible and its authority in all matters of faith and practice.

Anglican

The Anglican Church holds to and maintains the Doctrine and Sacraments of Christ as the Lord has commanded in Holy Scripture.

It has authority in the area of salvation, faith and conduct.

Whether you were a Christian in the North Africa in the 4th Century or part of the Reformation in the 16th Century or Chinese Christian in an underground church or Brazilian Pentecostal or kiwi in a church in 21st Century New Zealand, God's Word has and does speak into each and every believer.

Having said that, there is nothing in the Bible to say that God can't communicate outside the Bible in extraordinary ways.

There are gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians:

Prophecy – Spontaneous, understandable, inspired speech where someone brings a message from God to the wider body.
(Preaching is a sub-set of prophecy in that the preacher seeks the Lord and prepares a message in advance).

Word or message of knowledge – is the divine disclosure of information that the recipient did not know through normal or natural means.

Word or message of wisdom – is a message from God that reveals a practical way forward in the face of a pressing need.

There are exceptional means by which God communicates.

Dreams – Night-time dreams that when you wake you just know its significant. Some people write down what they dreamt. More often than not – because dreams are pictorial – you have to wait on God for an interpretation.

Visions

Visions (or pictures) are waking dreams from God.

Some people are see-ers, a 'seer'? There have been times when God gives a picture or an image when praying that is beneficial.

Audible voice

I have never heard an audible voice but I know others say they have and I believe them.

Prophecy, words of knowledge, words of wisdom, dreams and visions are to a particular group or specific person for a defined time facing distinct circumstances.

Not new information or doctrine about God but encouragement to follow God in a specific situation.

I believe in prophecies for the church. Often they are encouragements. Sometimes they are confirmations. They can be corrections.

As your pastor, let me say this: we should be wary of anyone who claims they are speaking for God or as God to the wider body of all believers. Claiming new revelation for all believers everywhere is to be rejected.

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So here's question we don't often talk about:

"What if Christian's 'hear' two different things?"

Often I hear statement's rather than questions.

"God told me"

"God said it. I believe it. That settles it."

Conversation over.

On matters of doctrine, well yes.

We are to hold fast to the word of truth.

Prophetic messages to the church are to be tested.

1 Thessalonians 5:19 – 22:

"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil."

In Romans 14 it talks about "disputable matters".

Disputable matters are issues on which the Bible does not give a clear directive. Disputable matters are those where Christians can and sometimes do take a difference stance.

It can be what God has said to you for season of life.

So for example as a new believer, I had a season where alcohol wasn't for me.

For some people that's for their whole life. And when you look at the harms of alcohol you can make a good case for that.

The difficulty becomes when a disputable matter becomes an accusation or a badge of honour.

I had this happen at my Laidlaw College graduation.

As all the new grad's were mingling with friends and family afterwards, someone who I had never seen before in my life came up to me and said, "Do you believe in a literal hell?!"

I was so taken aback that I mumbled something but it wasn't enough to satisfy.

(That reality is, on the subject of eternal punishment, from Scripture it's real and that is terrifying enough in itself).



So what helped me in the whole area of guidance and actually overcome this obsessive need for guidance?

Well the counsel of others has been so good.

Scripture talks a lot about the wisdom and the prayer and the insight of wise counsellors especially when you're trying to discern what God is saying.

- **Proverbs 15:22:** *"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."*
- **Proverbs 12:15:** *"The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice."*
- **Proverbs 20:18:** *"Plans are established by counsel; by wise guidance wage war."*

Proverbs 13:1: *"A wise child heeds his parents instruction; a mocker refuses to listen to correction."*

On the Big Stuff, there is place for submitting to discernment of others.

I heard of this guy who was pastor who felt to a church and from the outside looking in it was like they were chalk and cheese. You know the church had theology that went one way and the pastor that went a different. They had a worship that was quite structured and he was laid back. In other words, it didn't seem like a good fit.

So talked to people and told them what he was thinking and the response was, what are you thinking???

“Don’t go there. It’s not the kind of church where you will flourish.” His spiritual director was saying, “Hey don’t do it, you’re not a good fit.” Colleagues in the ministry were saying, “This is not where you should be going.” I mean literally one person after another was either challenging him or asking him, “Are you sure?” However he went ahead.

What do you think happened?

It was disaster.

He was gone within the year.

I have been so blessed with people have been that for me in my life.

We have been given personal agency. We are free-will agents.

In other words, God has said that we are to be decision makers.

I heard a story about a guy who was thinking about a girl who he loved but wondered, “Is she the one?” And he was praying asking God for guidance, for a clear “Yes” or “No” from God.

So he was sitting in class one day at a Bible College, thinking of her and wondering what was the right thing to do, when he heard a voice.

And you know what the voice said? “I will never have to live with her like you will, so you choose.”

And of course there have been those times God has gate-crashed my consciousness.

Passages of Scripture have come alive.

A few dreams here and that were unmistakable.

Prophetic words spoken over my life that were affirmed and encouraged me.

A definite sense or impression the later proved to be true.

I would also say this: you can trust Him.

You can trust Jesus.

He can make your way clear and you can trust Him to make it clear when where you’re not to go.

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I believe in a God who guides, who speaks, to leads, who gets involved in our lives today.

I also believe in lunch, so to finish.

You know, all of us can get stuck in the grind of the every day.
In our culture, for many of us it's so easy to shelve or even reject this kind of
God for a God who's manageable.

So when something gate crashers and invades your mind, don't dismiss it!

Dreams and visions,
Audible voices and thoughts that drop into our heads,
Pictures, impressions and new desires,
Passages of Scripture, prophecies and words of knowledge,
Divinely sent people, "coincidences" and God given inspiration.

Hold on to it and discern it.

And if you are at a crossroads this morning, I would like to pray for you.