

# Hearing and Discerning the Voice of God

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**John 10:1–6 (NKJV) “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.’ 6 Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.”**

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He calls His own sheep and they hear His voice. A stranger’s voice they will not follow. Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice. Jesus says this in the context of the thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Although Satan is behind every evil work, Jesus is speaking about false prophets who try to lead God’s people astray. Unfortunately false prophets are deceptive—dressing up like sheep, mingling with the sheep, and even talking like sheep, but something about them just doesn’t ring true. If we are not walking and talking with Jesus on a regular basis, we may fall victim to the thief. We must listen to the voice behind the voice to make sure it is the Good Shepherd speaking.

John the Beloved, one of Jesus’ closest disciples, warned of the danger of false prophets in 1 John 4:1 (NKJV): “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” To paraphrase this and the following verses, John is saying, “You must not be gullible in spiritual matters! Just because someone claims to speak for God doesn’t mean they are! Just because someone preaches Jesus doesn’t mean they are teaching and preaching the Jesus of the Bible. You had better test their message and lifestyles against what we have told you about the real Jesus and His message to make sure they are genuine! If you are gullible and fail to discern the wolves, you will likely end up as their next meal!”

Paul says that there are many languages (literally, “sounds” or “voices” in our world (1 Corinthians 14:10). Each of these voices has a message and an agenda and clamors for our attention. That is why these words from Jesus are so important. We must hear and discern the voice of Jesus over all of these other voices. Why do Jesus’ sheep not fall victim to the deception of false prophets and teachers?

First, Jesus said that His sheep *hear* His voice (John 10:3). In other words, their ears are alert and attentive to hear His voice. They know He is their Shepherd and they understand the dangers around them. They know their very life and existence depends on His oversight in their lives.

Second, Jesus said that His sheep *know* His voice (John 10:4). A husband and wife are able to discern each other’s voice over the telephone because they have spent so much time hearing the other speak. In the same way, Jesus’ sheep know or discern His voice from all of the other voices seeking their allegiance because they spend much time becoming familiar with Jesus.

Third, Jesus' sheep *follow* Him (John 10:4). Because He is their Shepherd, His sheep will follow Him. They follow Him because they know that they belong to Him. They know that they do not belong to themselves or to any other. They do not turn their focus to another but keep it upon Jesus.

Fourth, Jesus said that His sheep *will not follow a stranger* (John 10:5). Granted, they hear the other voices seeking their attention, but they know the voices are not authentic. It is not the voice of their Shepherd, and thus they will not follow. In fact, the stranger's voice causes the true sheep to draw closer to Jesus. Beloved, it is just as important to know who NOT to follow as it is to know WHO to follow!

How can we make sure we are hearing and discerning the voice of Jesus rather than another voice? You must first understand that you cannot know His voice without first knowing *Him*. HIS SHEEP hear His voice! You must submit your heart and life to Jesus Christ one hundred percent as your Lord and Savior. If you are straddling the fence or trying to live with one foot in the kingdom of God and one foot in the world—forget the wolves—you are deceiving yourself!

Second, once we have submitted our lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we must pursue a lifestyle of holiness. This means we must purify our lives from every mixture of sin. Sin distorts our hearing and discernment. The sin you accommodate will speak to you the loudest.

Third, we must learn to fast often. Fasting involves discipline—denying our flesh so that we can develop sensitivity to the Spirit of God. Fast from food, television, music, and other things that distract you. Make fasting a regular part of your life.

Fourth, spend time in God's presence through prayer and worship. Prayer and worship involves entering God's presence where we are most likely to hear His voice. Don't hurry in and out of God's presence. Take time to rest and commune with Him.

Fifth, spend time in God's Word. God's Word is His will. You can be sure that God will never speak or direct us contrary to His will. If you hear a voice that tells you something contrary to God's Word—run the other way no matter how good it sounds! Read the Word, study the Word, memorize the Word, and meditate on the Word. Those who neglect the word of God or seek to rob it of its authority are the most vulnerable to deception.

Sixth, be submitted to God's delegated authorities in your life, especially godly pastors and elders who faithfully teach you the Word of God and hold you accountable to it. Each of us is vulnerable to our blind spots. God put godly authorities in our lives to lovingly watch out for your soul (Hebrews 13:7). Pride tells us we can be our own pastor and watch out for our own soul.

Seventh, be obedient to His voice. Those who harden their heart to disobey God's voice will find themselves becoming dulled in their hearing (Hebrews 3:7-11). Obedience enables us to continue hearing God's voice. If you have not been hearing God's voice clearly, ask yourself when was the last time you heard God speak to you about something and have failed to obey Him

Finally, trust in God's sovereignty. Ultimately God is in control of our lives. Proverbs 16:9 (NKJV) says, "*A man's heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.*" God will open doors and close doors. Trust that God is working in your life during times when He seems to

be silent. Don't be tempted to listen to a stranger's voice when God is silent. Be patient, stay obedient to what you know to be true, and keep listening. In His time, you will hear the Shepherd's voice again. In following these principles you are sure to hear and discern the voice of God as one of His sheep.

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