

**Did any of you experience God speaking to you in a unique way this past week?**

**Have there been times when you heard someone say, “God told me...” or “God led me...” and then it became evident God hadn’t directed them in such a way?**

**How do we evaluate whether a message/prompting is from God, from our own imaginations, or from an evil spirit?**

**Keep in mind that Satan also wants to send messages and direct our paths according to his purposes. See the following scriptures:**

**2 Corinthians 11:13-14 (NIV)**

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

**1 John 4:1 (NIV)**

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

**1 Timothy 4:1 (NIV)**

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

With this in mind, we need to be very discerning to not listen to just any voice or message we hear. If Satan can masquerade as an angel of light, it will require spiritual wisdom for us to distinguish between what comes from him, and what comes from God.

**What are some ways you can think of to help us discern if a message is from God or not?**

**Evaluating a Message:**

- 1) Is it consistent with scripture?
- 2) Does it represent God's purposes?
- 3) Is it just a passing idea or an unrelenting burden?
- 4) Is there a unity of the Spirit with other godly people?
- 5) Does it stretch your faith?

**Let's explore these tests to understand them more deeply.**

**1) Is the message consistent with scripture?**

**Why would it be a problem for God to say something now that is different from what he spoke previously?**

God does not CONTRADICT himself.

**Read 1 Kings 13:1-26**

**What lessons can we learn from this story?**

- God does not contradict himself
- Even if the other person appears godly, do not sway from God's word
- Do not take God's message lightly
- Etc.

***Psalms 119:105 (NIV)***

*Your **word** is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*

**When all is said and done, our final authority is always the Word of God.**

**2) Does the message represent God's purposes?**

**What are God's two purposes for us?**

- a) To bring us into deeper RELATIONSHIP with him and his family.
- b) To empower us to REPRESENT his rule and love to the rest of the world.

**Every message from God is to help us fulfill the two greatest commands of loving God and loving our neighbour.**

**Matthew 16:13-17 (NIV)**

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

<sup>15</sup> "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

<sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

**Matthew 16:21-23 (NIV)**

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

<sup>22</sup> Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

<sup>23</sup> Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

**In the first example, Jesus says that Peter's statement is divinely inspired.**

**In the second statement, he is saying it is satanically inspired.**

**In what way do these two statements of Peter contrast?**

**Peter's First Statement:**

Peter's first message affirmed the identity of Jesus and the nature of his relationship with him. Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the promised king and saviour of the world.

**Peter's Second Statement:**

Peter rebuked Jesus, implying that Jesus had it all wrong and needed to be corrected in his perspective, teaching, and theology. Peter's framework was such that he believed people doing the will of God should not suffer. He believed that Jesus, being the Christ, was to set up a powerful kingdom on earth and therefore, talk of his imminent suffering and death was absurd. He could not conceive how suffering and death could play a role in the kingdom work of God.

**How was Jesus able to discern which message was from God, and which was not?**

Peter's first declaration affirmed what scripture taught about Jesus as prophesied in the Old Testament.

However, Peter's second declaration was in total contradiction to the purpose for which Jesus came as laid out in Isaiah 53 about the Suffering Servant.

Jesus came to give his life as a sacrifice for all, to bring others into eternal relationship with him. Peter's statement did not at all represent God's purpose in the world; in fact, it worked directly against it.

**What are some examples of a message that would not represent the purposes of God?**

- It's the other person's responsibility to make the relationship right.
- Don't go to church meetings where believers gather.
- Avoid other Christ followers.
- Do not share your faith with that other person, they will just reject you.
- You're worthless and shouldn't inconvenience others.
- Don't go to others for help, don't share your needs.
- You're not good enough for God.
- Etc.

**Satan will never call us to do something that strengthens your relationship with Jesus or builds up the body of Christ.**

**Jesus will never call you to do something that does not represent his purposes or love as he modelled in scripture.**

### **3) Is the message just a passing idea or an unrelenting burden?**

**If you're an "ideas" person, you've probably had many ideas that you were passionate about one week, and forgot all about the next week. Can you share some examples?**

**Have you ever had what you thought was a strong conviction from God about something, but then had that feeling fade within a short time? What do you make of these experiences?**

***Daniel 2:1 (NIV)***

*In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep.*

***Daniel 7:15 (NIV)***

*I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me.*

**How were Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel affected by the messages they received?**

**When God wants you to know or do something, he will impress it heavily on your heart.**

**Jeremiah's Dilemma****Jeremiah 20:8-9 (NIV)**

*Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. <sup>9</sup> But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.*

**Can any of you relate to Jeremiah? Can you share some experiences where God placed a heavy burden on your heart that simply would not go away until you responded?**

**How have you felt at times when you ignored these compelling thoughts?**

**4) Is there a unity of the Spirit with other godly people?**

**Why is unity within the body of Christ an important test of a message from God?**

**Matthew 18:19-20 (NIV)**

*Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*

**What does this passage imply is the priority – the unity of believers or prayers being answered? Why?**

Jesus specifically says that some prayers may not be answered unless believers are united together on the same page. More important than the task, is the relationship. When God's family is united in all that it does, it will become the means by which God will accomplish his purposes in the world.

**What are the implications for the person who has a "go-it-alone" mentality?**

**This can be phrased different ways:**

I'm going to do it regardless of what other godly people say.

What others say is ok, but I'm still going to do something different.

The rest of God's family may be headed that way, but I'm headed this way.

I don't care what others say, I know what I want to do.

When one person goes it alone, there is not a unity within the body of Christ. God wants his family to be on the same page, headed in the same direction, bringing all the resources of God together to accomplish his purpose. God works through his church as ONE BODY – not a bunch of separate entities.

**What should you do if other believers are seeking God's direction as well, but are not in agreement with you?**

1) **STOP**

Don't move ahead as there is not unity within the body. If there is no unity, Christ is not behind what is going on.

There are times when other believers may NOT be united with you because THEY are not spending time seeking God's will, and they miss what he wants to accomplish. In this case, the person needs to be obedient to God and still do what he/she is called to do. BUT be very careful in this – if the other spiritual leaders ARE sincerely praying, we need to trust that the Holy Spirit will put everyone on the same page. Be careful that YOU are truly seeking God's leading and not your own agenda.

2) **WAIT**

Sometimes it is the right direction, just not the right timing. God knows that some people need more time to assimilate an idea and he gives them that time. In other words, you might get a message now and share it, but it may take a year before God brings everyone else to the same conclusion. He gives that advance message so that other people have time to get on board.

If you barge ahead without the unity of the Spirit, you will probably misjudge God's perfect timing and you will not accomplish his intended purpose.

***Philippians 1:27 (NIV)***

*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then...I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel*

**What are some implications for us with regard to this passage?**

- Approach life as a unified family.
- Bring every major decision to your church family so they can help in the decision making process.
- Value unity in the Spirit above accomplishing your agenda.
- Etc

**5) Does the message stretch your faith?****Why would God's message to us often involve taking some step of faith?**

God's ultimate desire is that we grow into a deeper, more trusting, relationship with him. When he calls us to action, he invites us to partner with him in what only he can accomplish. In so doing, we step out in faith, trusting that he will protect and provide for us in every way. When we experience the thrill of seeing God at work, our joy and excitement in our relationship with him greatly increase.

Also, if God needs to speak in a dramatic way to lead us, it is because we would never have gone that direction in and of ourselves.

**If God gives you a message or call to action, it is because YOU need that in your life in order to grow in your walk with him. Otherwise, he would have given that message or prompting to someone else.**

**Jonah 1:1-3 (NIV)**

*The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup> "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." <sup>3</sup> But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.*

**Why did God call Jonah to take the message to Nineveh, knowing what his response would be?**

God called Jonah to the task because there were lessons Jonah needed to learn. God could have sent any prophet to Nineveh, but God loved Jonah and knew that there were biases in his life that were barriers in his own walk with God.

**What kept you from obeying at times when you felt the Holy Spirit prompting you?****How was your relationship with God affected at times when you did not obey his leading?****What was the result in your relationship with God, or the family of God, when you did obey a prompting from the Spirit?****Have there been times when you received a prompting and you knew it was not from God?  
How did you know? What did you do?**

There are many deceiving voices and we need to carefully discern which voices are from God, and which are not. Take comfort in the fact that Jesus says his true sheep will recognize his voice.

***John 10:3-5 (NIV)***

*The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."*