

Life Principles Center

Course: The Power of Prayer

T3_CA_L1: Learning to Pray the Bible Way Part 1 (AR049)

Introduction

If I were to ask you if you knew how to pray, you'd probably answer, "Well, sure I do. Every Christian knows how to pray!" But the truth is, I believe that many believers think of prayer as just a way of asking for things they want. Instead of seeing it as an intimate means of communication with their heavenly Father, they see it more like a letter to Santa Claus. My friend, that is certainly not how God views prayer.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, the veil in the Temple was torn completely in two, top to bottom. That signified the accessibility that all believers now have to the very throne of God. He wants you to come to Him not only in your time of need, but also in your greatest joy. Not only that, He wants to hear from you throughout the mundane, day-to-day moments of your life.

God opened the door to communication for one reason: He wants to hear from you. In this course, we will examine the blessing of prayer by learning what Jesus Himself taught on the subject. Then, we'll identify practical ways you can better hear the voice of God. Are you ready to give your prayer life a biblical boost? Then let's get started.

Lesson 1, Section 1

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 1, you should be able to:

- A. Memorize, understand, and reflect upon Matthew 7:7.
- B. Understand God's character at new depths.

Scripture

Read Matthew 7:7-11

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

Lesson 1

When you pray, do you have confidence that God will answer, or do you feel unworthy of God's attention? Are your prayers specific or general? Is your prayer life a haphazard response to needs and desires, or nourishment for the life of the Lord Jesus Christ within you?

One of the simplest but most profound passages on prayer in all of the Bible is found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:7-11. This is a wonderful passage in which we see Jesus making us a promise: God answers prayer.

J1: Memorize Matthew 7:7. What do you think God is saying to seek in this verse?

This may seem like a simple message, but how often do we grow tired, agitated, or weary as we wait to see the fruits of our prayers? The fact is, we may believe that God answers every prayer at just the right moment, but we rarely seem to be in tune with God's timetable. We want things to happen immediately; we like to see instant results in all that we do. However, God's will is not on our schedule. Because God exists outside of time and can see our entire lives—past, present, and future—all at once, only He knows exactly what we need and, more frustratingly, when we need it.

Prayer is not only asking and receiving, but also giving thanks, adoring, and praising the Lord God. There are two responsibilities in prayer—God's responsibility and our responsibility. You cannot have one without the other; prayer is both human and divine.

Notice the Lord's intensity in the progression in this passage: "ask . . . seek . . . knock." Clearly, Jesus had in mind that we are to become actively involved in the prayer processes. Prayer is not a spectator sport!

Every request, every desire of our hearts, and every need should begin with prayer—asking God for permission, seeking to know His will. Because Jesus Christ has come into our lives, and because He has now become our Life, we have the right and the authority to come to Him and make a request. (Ephesians 3:11-12, Hebrews 4:16)

God is always in the process of answering prayer. This simple message is the primary purpose of Matthew 7:7-11. Somebody may ask, "Does that mean that anybody and everybody can ask, seek, knock, and find?" No, because the Sermon on the Mount is addressed to the followers of Christ. He is talking about His own children.

J2: Compare these three passages: Ephesians 3:11-12, Hebrews 4:16, and Matthew 7:7-11. What do they tell you about God's character, His promises, your calling, and your responsibilities?

Lesson 1, Section 2

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 1, you should be able to:

- A. Gain insight into God's ways.
- B. Recognize the motivation behind God's ways.

There is a vital element in prayer that most people overlook—steadfastness in prayer. We may not see anything happening, but a delay between our asking and our receiving does not mean that God is not answering our prayers.

Why does Jesus place this emphasis on perseverance? Because He very often delays answering prayer requests, even if your request is, in fact, the will of God. Why does God delay? If He sees within us attitudes of disobedience, rebellion, bitterness, or unforgiveness, or if He notices certain unhealthy habits in our lifestyles, God delays the answer for His children. He may already have it packaged and ready to send your way, but He cannot and will not do so until you are in a spiritual position to receive it.

J3: Looking back at your relationship with God, can you recall a time when God's answer did not come according to His timetable? Can you see, now, why He delayed? How did He prepare you for His answer during that season of waiting?

A second reason for God's delay is that He is in the process of testing our earnestness in order to build into us an earnest spirit. If we are really earnest, we will not make our request known only once, and then give up if it goes unanswered for a time. That is why He says to pray, and to keep on praying, asking, seeking, and knocking. Persevere. Don't give up. Endure. Hang in there—even when you do not see any evidence that God will answer your prayer.

Third, God often delays answering prayer in order to test our faith. How does God build our faith? He does it by testing us. How does God test us? He does it by withdrawing. As you and I begin to ask, seek, and knock, something happens in our walk with God. When we talk to Him, we

are building and nourishing our relationship with Him. We are getting to know Him—who He is and how He operates. Do you realize that what God wants to give you above everything else, once you have become one of His children, is Himself? He wants you to know Him.

A fourth reason for God's delays is to develop patience within us as we endure in prayer until His timing is right. God's timing does not always match our own. He is far more interested in our knowing Him than our getting from Him all the things that our hearts desire.

Q1: True or False? One reason that God sometimes withholds His answers to our prayers is that we ask for too many things.

What I pray you are beginning to understand is that our God is not Santa Claus. We should not picture ourselves sitting on his lap and giving him our list of demands. Rather, God is our holy, righteous, and all-knowing Father. And, like any good father, He knows that we do not always ask for what is best for us. We must get in tune with His will for our lives, so that we can recognize those hard moments when God tells us "no," or when He calls upon us to wait for His answer. We may see Him as moving too slowly sometimes. In truth, though, He is always moving in His own perfect time.

J3: Now, return to your first journal question. Based on the last paragraph of this lesson, what do you think—according to Scripture—God most wants you to seek?

Prayer

Father, You've told us that You hear us when we pray. You've told us that You answer every prayer when we ask, seek, and knock. And Lord, we just ask that You give us the wisdom and the patience to wait on You. Help us to recognize Your unique, omniscient perspective on everything we ask of You. Take us to the point at which we can lift our prayers up and trust You completely for just the right answer at just the right time. In Jesus' faithful name we pray, Amen.

Homework

Scripture Memory:

The Scripture memory assignment for this course is given below. Be sure to commit this passage to memory before moving on to the next lesson. Then, practice reciting it over and over throughout this course.

Matthew 7:7-8

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened .

Read through the lesson again, and name the four reasons God may choose to “delay” (according to our timing) His answers to our prayers. Then, respond to these questions in your journal:

Knowing more about God’s timing and sovereignty based on His reasoning, how is your view of Him and your view of prayer enlarged or changed? Consider your true beliefs here, not what you know you’re supposed to believe. How is God challenging your old or current beliefs, and changing your view of Him as you work through this material?

Life Principles Center

Course: The Power of Prayer

T3_CA_L2: Learning to Pray the Bible Way Part 2 (AR049)

Introduction: Second Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." For that reason, we encourage you to complete each assignment before progressing to the next lesson. This lesson is structured with two separate sections to help you maximize your study time.

Lesson 2, Section 1

At the end of this section of Lesson 2, you should be able to:

- A. Reflect on your personal prayer life, and understand its reflection of your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Scripture

Read Matthew 6:5-6

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Lesson 2

Would you say that prayer is a vital, integral part of your daily schedule? There is no way for Jesus Christ to be my Life unless I am a praying man. I should be talking, sharing, and relating with Him all during the day. He is my Life!

My Christian friend, why is it that we become involved in so many other things that prayer begins to get shifted aside, and we diligently go about serving the Lord in our own strength, in our own wisdom? One of the primary reasons we do not pray is because we are not willing for God to take His scalpel and open us up all the way down to our innermost beings, and there deal with things that we have never overcome.

Do you realize that one of the largest veins of gold ever discovered in America was found only three feet from where previous miners had stopped digging? Christians often experience the same problem; just

beyond where we quit, just out of reach from where we are willing to go, is God's best blessing.

J1: Take some time to sit before God. Ask Him to reveal any mining spots from the past where you stopped "digging." Did He call you to make an adjustment in your life that you were not willing to make? Did He ask you to trust Him with an area that you have since taken back, thinking that your old ways and former beliefs are safer? God wants to give you His greatest blessings; ask Him to help you turn your entire life over to Him.

Now if God says, "This is not My will," then naturally we should stop praying about it. However, if there is something that you believe God is working out in your life, or if there is a serious, deep-felt need, do not stop praying. God wants to answer that prayer.

I can think of times when everything in me wanted to stop, and I would just keep on praying and crying out to God. Sure enough, suddenly, with no warning, the veil would lift; and there would be the answer, staring me right in the face. If I had quit the day before, I would have made some foolish decision on my own and missed what God wanted to give me.

Q1: True or False? Our fear of God saying "no" is often what keeps us from praying.

Lesson 2, Section 2

At the end of this section of Lesson 2, you should be able to:

- A. Apply Matthew 6:6 to your prayer life.
- B. Understand common hindrances in prayer and pinpoint the ones that have most impacted your personal prayer life.

Nowhere does the Bible say that prayer is easy. There is a struggle and there will be times when Satan will attack you as you are on your knees, harassing you with doubt and sending distracting thoughts into your mind. One of Satan's most effective weapons is often causing you to feel worthless before God. This worthlessness does not refer to proper humility, but to an unhealthy feeling that God cannot even look at you.

Scripture shatters this fear by boldly proclaiming that you and I have freedom in Christ to approach the very throne of God in prayer. When you go to the Lord, do not be meek and embarrassed; instead, bow

before Him and rejoice! Exclaim, “Lord Jesus, I praise Your name that You are my Life. I thank You that I can come to You in confidence because You have told me to ask, seek, and knock. And Lord, I’m coming. I’m coming as Your child, confident that You are listening to what I am saying. Confident that You will give me direction for my life. Confident that You are going to answer my prayer. I praise You and I accept ahead of time the answers for my prayer. Praise God, Amen!”

J2: Think about the last time you prayed for something. Did your prayers resemble the example on the previous page? If not, what do you think was holding back your confidence in Christ’s direction and ability to answer?

We do not always like the answers that God gives. He does not say that He will give you anything you ask for; instead, He promises in Matthew 7:11 that everything He gives is good for us. Surely you would not want God to give you something that would harm you or ultimately destroy your life, would you? For that reason, Jesus sets the limitation up front; He says that He will only give us what is good.

Do not worry about asking God for something too big. You cannot ask God for anything so big that He cannot do it if He deems it to be good. God is honored by big, great, difficult, and impossible requests when we ask, seek, knock, and trust our loving Father to always answer for our good.

Q2: Which of the following is NOT a common hindrance in our prayer lives?

- A. Praying until we receive the answer we want.*
- B. Not liking the answer God gives us.*
- C. Not believing that everything God gives us will be good.*
- D. Submitting to God’s will before we even know what it is.*
- E. Being afraid to ask God for something we view as too big of a request.*

If you will actively apply this simple truth, God will transform your prayer life, which will in turn transform your relationships, effectiveness, family, business, and all other aspects of your life.

The privilege of prayer is a heritage that belongs to every child of God, a potential that is beyond human understanding, and a work of God’s grace that He has given to each one of us. It is my prayer that you will not let that heritage be wasted in your life. Allow God to make you the

man, woman, or young person that He has chosen you to be. Learn to relate to Him. Nourish that inner being of Christ in your prayer life. Make your daily prayer life an ongoing, intimate relationship of conversation with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer

And Father, we thank You and praise You for the simplicity of Your Word. We try to make it difficult. You make it simple. You offer us such profound and yet simple answers to our questions, to our needs. I pray, in Jesus' name, that somebody who is struggling with some issue in his or her life may be willing, first of all, to humble themselves before You and ask that You surface anything and all things within their heart that should not be there; deal with them and then allow You to answer in Your generosity, in your love, in your pure wisdom.

I pray, Father, for someone who is unsaved that they might understand what they are missing by not having Christ and the privilege of prayer; that you do not answer the prayers of the lost except the prayer for forgiveness and the prayer for salvation of their sin. I pray today that somebody would give their life to Christ. That those who have made prayer an insignificant part of their life might recognize there will be no real development of a relationship until prayer becomes a priority is my plea to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Homework

Scripture Memory

Be sure to review your Scripture memory assignment for this course!

Matthew 7:7-8

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened .

[assignment deleted]

J3: Meditate on Matthew 6:6. How can you apply this verse to your own life? Use the goal-setting tools under "My Goals" to set a specific spiritual goal as it relates to your prayer life. Ask God what He wants your goal to be.

Prayer Community: Have you been using the Institute's Prayer Community by viewing the list of prayer requests from your fellow students and offering your own requests? If not, spend some time reviewing the list of prayer needs and become an active intercessor for the others working through the Institute studies.

Transcript of Video/Audio Teaching Clip *Your Role in Prayer*

If I were to ask you if you knew how to pray, you would probably answer, “Well, sure I do! All Christians know how to pray!” However, if you were to seriously examine the track record of your answered prayers, you may not be so sure.

In the seventh chapter of Matthew, Jesus emphasizes an important lesson on prayer. He asserts that prayer is not something that just “comes naturally,” but is an intentional, learned activity for God’s children. In this passage, He shows the disciples the three basic steps for an effective prayer life: asking, seeking, and knocking.

Unfortunately, many well-meaning Christians miss fantastic opportunities because they have a completely passive role in their prayer lives. Too often, we overlook seeking and knocking. We tend to ask God for something once or twice and then forget all about it.

For example, think about someone who honestly desires a deeper understanding of Scripture. What if he were to set his Bible down on the table and pray, “Lord, please open up the truths of the Scriptures to me. I desperately want to understand Your Word”? Well, my friend, that person may pray and pray and pray. But the only way for him to deepen his understanding of Scripture is to not only *ask*, but to also *seek* by getting into the Word of God. And even that is not enough! He would also have to *knock* on the doors of some Scriptures, dealing with difficult passages to gain greater insight.

As we work through this course, it is my prayer that you will make your own prayer life a priority. There is nothing that will transform and energize your walk with Christ like developing a deeper prayer life.

Life Principles Center

Course: The Power of Prayer

T3_CA_L3: Identifying the Voice of God (AP173)

Introduction: This lesson is divided into two sections to help you complete the entire lesson at your convenience. In order to renew your mind with God's Word and give you an accurate view of Him, it's very important that you take time to complete each assignment before moving on to the next lesson.

Lesson 3, Section 1

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 3, you should be able to:

- C. Evaluate your prior experiences in learning to hear from God.
- D. Recognize common misconceptions about hearing from God.

Scripture

Read Matthew 16:21-23

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Lesson 3

In the previous two lessons, we studied how to pray effectively to God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus. I would like to spend the remainder of this course examining an often-difficult area of prayer: identifying the voice of God.

When we talk about the "voice of God," we are not necessarily talking about an audible voice that we hear with our ears or in our minds. It is possible that God has, at one time or another, spoken to you in this way. However, by "voice of God," I mean to say that clear, definite call or direction given to you in prayer from God the Father. This can come in many forms, including an audible voice, a new understanding of Scripture, or simply a peaceful, calm assurance about a particular decision.

J1: Have there been milestones in your past where you knew you heard God's voice? How did He speak—was it an audible voice, a new understanding of Scripture, or a calm assurance? How did God confirm to you that the voice was His? Spend some time recording your personal history—including circumstances, decisions, and results—of hearing and obeying God's voice.

When we are listening to God, how can we be sure that it is God whom we are hearing, rather than some other voice? I hear this question quite often from people honestly seeking the will of God: "I am asking the Lord to give me direction, but I feel like I'm hearing two voices. How do I know that God is the one speaking, or if it is Satan, or if it is just my own thoughts?"

These are very legitimate questions, and in truth, it is often difficult to separate the different voices and leadings we may face in the Christian life. Even the apostle Peter faced this issue, as we see in Matthew 16:21-23. When Jesus told Peter about His impending crucifixion, Peter boldly replied, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

While Peter was sure this message was from God, Jesus quickly identified the true voice behind Peter's exclamation. He replied, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Q1: How is it that Peter might have so easily believed he had heard God's voice?

- A. Because it seemed unreasonable for God to allow the Messiah, for whom the world had waited for so long, to die after only three years of ministry.*
- B. Because it seemed illogical for God to allow His one and only Son to experience such suffering.*
- C. Because the voice that told Peter that Jesus' crucifixion was not God's plan seemed in line with Peter's own desires.*
- All of the above*
- D. None of the above*

Despite Peter's best intentions, he was listening to the voice of Satan who craftily spoke in tune with Peter's own desires (that Jesus not die). However, this was not the will of God. Even though Peter did not understand at that point, it was certainly the will of God that Jesus face that horrible death, so that He could accomplish the wonderful salvation that God had planned from the beginning.

Lesson 3, Section 2

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 3, you should be able to:

- B. Understand and apply Matthew 16:23 to your life.
- B. Identify methods to help you practice John 10:27.

J2: Carefully read Matthew 16:23. What did Jesus say was the source of Peter's confusion? Have you ever allowed the same focus to sidetrack you from hearing God's voice? Explain in your journal.

Before we look at how to identify the voice of God, I want to encourage you that you can, as a believer, distinguish God's voice from the others that may demand your attention. Remember, Jesus Himself testified to this truth in John 10:27, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." Our Savior is not distant. He speaks to us and proclaims that we can know His voice. The question then, is *how do we identify that voice among the others we may hear?*

I want to share five questions with you that you can use to test a word from God. Whenever you believe you have heard God speak to you, ask yourself each one of these to make sure that it is, in fact, God who is speaking.

1. *Is this message consistent with Scripture?* God would never lead us to do something that is inconsistent with His revealed Word. The truths of Scripture do not change; they remain steadfast and sure regardless of circumstances. This means that the Bible is the only absolute standard by which we can measure other voices, morals, or instructions.

Another point that I want to mention here is that we must measure the message against *all* of Scripture, not just a selected verse. You see, the Bible is a perfect whole; it does not contradict itself. So, we should not isolate any one verse from its proper context. In truth, it is possible to remove any verse from its context and twist it into saying all different types of things. This is a misuse of Scripture. Instead, we must measure the voice we've heard against the whole message of the Bible.

2. *Does the message conflict with human reason?* We often make decisions based on what seems to be the most reasonable solution. However, God does not operate according to our sense of reason. While

His logic may be clear to us on occasion, we simply will not always understand why God chooses to do something in a certain way.

Often in Scripture, we are instructed to do things that are contrary to human reasoning. We are told to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43-48), give away money in order to receive eternal riches (Matt. 6:19-24), and to think of other people as more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:6). From the anti-God, anti-faith perspective of the world, these things seem foolish; however, in God's eyes, these are the spiritual truths of success. Therefore, we should never discount a message from God simply because it doesn't make sense by human standards; rather, that just may be a sign that it is indeed a word from God.

3. Is what I'm hearing clashing with my fleshly nature?

God would never tell us to do anything for the sole purpose of gratifying our fleshly desires. Now, I am not saying that God wouldn't tell us to do something that would bring about great enjoyment. God is certainly interested in our joy, but this is never measured by our instant fleshly gratification. God is more interested in that which gratifies the Spirit within us, not our fallen, sinful drives and desires.

The world may argue, "If it feels good, do it." However, the truth of Scripture is that the right thing—the godly thing—may not always be the "happiest" or most personally pleasing option. If the voice you hear does nothing but work to gratify your human drives, then it most likely is not a Word from God.

4. Will this challenge my faith? God is always working to challenge our faith, because it is through those times of challenge and struggle that our faith can experience the most dynamic growth. These hard decisions often leave us with no other option but to throw ourselves solely upon God's mercy as we struggle through a confusing time. These experiences work to produce a great intimacy with God, as we focus completely upon Him. Simply put, if you hear a voice that challenges your faith and spurs you on to spiritual growth, it may well be the voice of God.

5. Does this decision call for courage? It is rarely easy to follow God's will in a fallen world. Therefore, when He calls us to do something, it almost always requires a hearty amount of courage to accomplish. Any time we are instructed by God to do something that challenges our faith or clashes with our fleshly natures, we must make a courageous stand against what seems "reasonable" in the world's eyes.

Q2: Matching. Fill in the blanks to complete these five important questions to consider when distinguishing the voice of God.

- F. Does this decision call for _____?
- G. Is what I'm hearing clashing with my _____?
- H. Will this challenge my _____?
- I. Is this message consistent with _____?
- J. Does this message conflict with _____?

- C. Scripture
- D. Faith
- E. Courage
- F. Fleshly nature
- G. Human reason

There is no “secret formula” to discerning God’s voice, but these few questions will help us to cut through some of the issues that often distract us and lead us away from God’s true message. Like Peter, even when we feel our motives are pure, it is easy to get sidetracked by our own desires or the crafty misdirection of Satan. In the next lesson, we will continue this study by examining six clues that may help us see the true direction of the Lord.

Prayer

Father God, I thank You that You still speak to Your children today. Thank You Lord for being an ever-present, always active Guide in my life. And Father, won't You please help us to hear You more clearly as we try to distinguish Your voice from the other noise in our lives? We praise You for speaking to us, and for allowing us to know the voice of our Great Shepherd Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Homework

Scripture Memory

Be sure to review your Scripture memory assignment for this course!

Matthew 7:7-8

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened .

Carefully consider Matthew 16:21-23 in light of the five questions presented in this lesson. If you were Peter, how might you have responded to Jesus' troubling news? How might each of these five questions have led Peter to reconsider his rash reaction? Respond in your journal.

Life Principles Center

Course: The Power of Prayer

T3_CA_L4: Identifying the Voice of God (AP173)

Introduction: Second Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." For that reason, we encourage you to complete each assignment before progressing to the next lesson. This lesson is structured with two separate sections to help you maximize your study time.

Lesson 4, Section 1

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 4, you should be able to:

- E. Personalize the prayer of Psalm 55:1-3.
- F. Understand the importance God places on the people who are affected by your decisions.

Scripture

Read Psalm 55:1-3, 23

Give ear to my prayer, O God; and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Give heed to me and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and am surely distracted, because of the voice of the enemy, because of the pressure of the wicked; for they bring down trouble upon me and in anger they bear a grudge against me.

But You, O God, will bring them down to the pit of destruction; men of bloodshed and deceit will not live out half their days. But I will trust in You.

Lesson 4

In the last lesson of this course, we looked at several questions we can use to help identify the voice of God. To review, those five questions are:

1. *Is this message consistent with Scripture?*
2. *Does the message conflict with human reason?*
3. *Is what I'm hearing clashing with my fleshly nature?*
4. *Will this challenge my faith?*
5. *Does this decision call for courage?*

If you do not remember the significance of these questions, I encourage you to review the previous lesson. Now, I would like to continue with this examination of the voice of God by suggesting six clues that may reveal God's message to you.

J1: Meditate upon Psalm 55:1-3. What does David imply will be a result of God's attention and His answer? Record your answer in a journal entry. Have you ever felt restless in your spirit about a decision to the point of distraction? Write about it; what was the outcome?

First, when God is speaking, ***He is going to cause you to think of the effects of this decision on other people.*** You see, we live in a world that is predominately self-centered. Most people seem to be motivated only by what will bring the most personal gain. Satan loves this ploy; he gently whispers, "Don't worry about anybody else. Do your own thing. You've got to look out for yourself." God, however, never speaks on those terms. God is concerned about the influence and witness that we, as believers, have upon other people.

God does not talk about what we "deserve" or what our "rights" are. Rather, God talks about our humility, putting other people before us, and yielding control to Him. We're also given the responsibility of caring for the image we project to other people, so as not to bring shame or harm to the Gospel. (1 Corinthians 8:8-13)

Therefore, if you believe that God is telling you to do something that will elevate yourself and most certainly do harm to others, it is most likely not a Word from God at all. While it is impossible to please every single person with every single decision, God always calls us to consider the consequences upon our brothers and sisters.

Lesson 4, Section 2

Objectives: At the end of this section of Lesson 4, you should be able to:

- A. Carefully examine and understand Scripture as it relates to hearing God's voice.
- B. Apply the principles of hearing God's voice to your life.

Second, if God is speaking, ***He will caution you to be patient.*** Nowhere in Scripture is God seen as rash or impatient. In fact, He is described as "slow to anger" several times throughout the Old Testament (Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Psalm 86:15; 103:8). Moreover, as God's

people, we are also told to exercise patience in our walks with Him. Psalm 37:7 instructs, “Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him.”

Q1: True or False? Psalm 37:7 and Psalm 37:34 call us to wait passively.

The pressure of the world and the trap of Satan is to urge you to make a decision in an instant, with little or no consideration. How many times have you made a decision under such circumstances? Usually, the outcomes of such choices are disastrous. Therefore, if you feel God leading you into a decision that calls for a rash, immediate judgment with no thought to the consequences, then you can be confident that message is not from God.

Third, if God is speaking, **He will lead you to consider the future consequences of the particular decision.** Not only does Satan lead us into rash, impatient decisions, but he also attempts to hide the future outcomes of those choices. However, God calls us to carefully consider the results of every decision.

You may have heard the old expression, “Eat, drink, and be merry.” Did you know that this is actually a biblical expression? What you may not have heard in popular usage is the full context of this phrase. You see, this was not spoken as an instruction to believers, but rather from the mouth of a fool who squandered his life. He decided to store up riches for himself with no thought of God or to the service of others. Seeing his folly, God responded, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?” (Luke 12:16-21) The message in this parable is that the man was foolish for thinking only of his immediate needs. The wise man is the one who considers the future consequences.

Fourth, if God leads you to get advice from another person, **He wants you to carefully examine the lifestyle of that person.** Whether we realize it or not, most decisions have the capacity to seriously impact our lives and the lives of our families. Considering the tremendous impact these choices can have, we must be careful when seeking counsel from other people.

I think this is especially true when getting advice from unbelievers. This is not to say that the unsaved people in the world have no wisdom or good advice; however, as obedient servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must be careful to examine the lifestyle and wisdom of those people whom we ask for advice. I think that it is entirely appropriate, in these situations, to ask ourselves, Is there wiser advice from a godly man or

woman in this area? Regardless of the circumstances, it is always wiser to go to somebody who knows the Word of God and can therefore advise you with spiritual principles.

J2: Read Psalm 1:1. What does it say in relation to the fourth principle in hearing from God? Record your personal insights in your journal.

Fifth, if God leads us to do something, ***He will direct us toward that which will contribute to our spiritual growth.*** God would never lead us into anything that would set us back spiritually. Rather, the things He designs for us—whether they seem simple or complex—will be exercises in our spiritual growth.

There are times, however, when we get sidetracked by our own desires or the pressures of other people. I can remember one time when a lady told me of her plans to marry a man whom she knew had already been unfaithful to her, who had a problem with alcohol and gambling, and who was not a believer in Jesus Christ. I said, “You mean you know all of this and you still believe that God is leading you into this decision?”

She said, “Well, yes. I’m going to win him to the Lord.”

I replied, “Oh no you’re not. At least, if you do, you will be the very rare exception.” You see, God does not call us into situations in which we will be in danger of spiritual pitfalls. If you believe you are being called into such a situation, I encourage you to re-think what you are doing. If the likely result of that decision is a setback in your walk with God, you can be sure that it is not God’s will for you.

Sixth and last, if God is calling you into a particular decision, ***He will grant you a calmness in your spirit.*** We have this promise in Philippians 4:6-7, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your mind in Christ Jesus.” God’s will brings us peace; on the other hand, we will never have God’s peace about disobedience.

It is certainly not an easy thing to discern the voice of God amongst all of the competitors trying to get our attention, but we have the assurance of Scripture that God does speak to us. And, we have the word of Jesus that we can, in fact, hear His voice. (John 10:27) As you continue to develop your prayer life, let me close this course by encouraging you to give the Lord the chance to speak in your prayer time. Just like you should never dominate every discussion with your close friends, you should not come to the Father and do all the talking

1. *What elements of hearing God's voice has He impressed upon your heart that are new or unfamiliar, have been misunderstood in the past, or have not been put into practice consistently?*
2. *Is there a specific area of your life about which God has been speaking to you?*
3. *Is there a particular Scripture verse you've read (either in this lesson or in the previous lessons of this course) that God has used to convict, challenge, or inspire you in a specific way?*
4. *What decision are you facing in which you need direction from God?*
5. *Do you firmly believe that God will answer you with perfect timing?*
6. *Do you believe God loves you and has the best in mind for your life?*
7. *Reflect on your answers and record in your journal any insight, guidance, or directives God gives you.*

Conclusion

What an awesome privilege we have to approach almighty God in prayer. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we've been given access to the Creator of the universe. Not only that, we have the ability and the right to approach Him at any time, in any circumstance. Scripture testifies that when we pray, God hears us and He always answers our prayers. Now, He may not answer the way we would like, but we can be sure that He will always answer in the way that we do *need*.

Before moving onto the next course, spend some time in quiet prayer and meditation. God has not only promised that He will hear us, but also that we can hear Him. Don't forget to give the Lord a chance to speak as you pray. You just may be missing many of the wonders He wants to share with you in your life.