

# LOVE THE LORD



## Lesson Thirty-seven - How can I hear and recognise God's voice?

August 2023

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### Summary of key points

- We have the privilege and joy to communicate with the Creator of the universe.
- God's Spirit can communicate with us through convictions in our hearts, words of knowledge, visions, dreams, burdens, and even new desires.
- We need to test if what we receive is from God, from our own imaginations, or from evil spirits (with 7 ways to test).
- Unbelief that God still speaks to people or will speak with us creates a significant obstacle in our hearts to hearing from Him. Other obstacles include hardened hearts, spiritual dullness, demands that God prove Himself, as well as Satan and demonic spirits.
- Seeking and listening to God is a daily habit we all need to develop, just as we make time for those we love (with 7 suggestions).
- We need to turn our hearts back to God and listen for His voice (with guided prayer).

### Watch the lesson online

<https://youtu.be/IQS5AwfBAis>

### Transcript

Welcome to lesson 37 of Love the Lord where we discuss how we listen out for and recognise God's voice.

We will begin by inviting God to speak to us personally through this study. Please follow along as we pray together.

First, let's thank God for our lives and His perfect will for us.

Next, please tell Him about the things that have been stressful and ask for His help and guidance.

Let us confess the ways we have sinned against God and against others, and ask for His forgiveness.

Please confess the ways others have sinned against us, and forgive them in Jesus' name.

Next, let us ask God to purify and open our hearts to receive His teaching.

Finally, please repeat these words, “In Jesus’ name, I silence all distractions and voices that are not from God. Amen.”

Let’s begin the lesson for today. How can I hear and recognise God’s voice?

First, let us start by reading about the almighty God whom we have the privilege and joy of communicating with on a daily basis, starting with verse 22 of Isaiah chapter 40, “*God sits above the circle of the earth. The people below seem like grasshoppers to him! He spreads out the heavens like a curtain and makes his tent from them. Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? He brings them out like an army, one after another, calling each by its name. Because of his great power and incomparable strength, not a single one is missing. The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding... those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.*” (Isaiah 40:22,26,28,31 NLT)

Does this not make us excited to hear God’s voice and communicate with Him? But how can we discern if what we receive is from God, from Satan, or from our own imagination?

First, it is helpful to clarify that God is Spirit. So while He can choose to speak to us in an audible voice, as He did with people like Adam and Eve, Abraham, Moses, Job, Elijah, and Samuel, the more common way He communicates with us is through our spirits.

*John 4:24 For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” (NLT)*

The Holy Spirit joins with our spirit to convey God’s messages to us.

*Romans 8:16 For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children. (NLT)*

One thing to note is that the Holy Spirit always speaks to us in a way that is loving, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. That is His nature. God’s Spirit communicates with us in different ways, through convictions in our hearts, words of knowledge, visions, dreams, burdens, and even new desires. Let’s take a look at each of these, one by one.

*Galatians 5:22-23 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! (NLT)*

In our daily walk with God, the Holy Spirit will at times, point out the patterns of our sinful nature and re-direct us down the right path of righteousness. We may experience this as a stirring or a prickling sensation in our hearts, a sense or a knowing whether something is right or not in our conscience. There is usually a split second when such messages will grab our attention and we have to decide if we will consider them and seek God for His will or suppress and ignore such messages.

*John 16:8 And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. (NLT)*

The Holy Spirit can also give us prophetic words of knowledge. This is God's way of revealing something to us that we have no way of knowing or logically deducing on our own. A word of knowledge may touch on matters regarding the past, present or future. It may reveal someone's spiritual or physical needs or even the prayer needs for a nation.

Prophetic words of knowledge will provide warnings, insights, wisdom, and even inspiration for new ideas or new ways of doing things. They are often given so that we can pray more incisively for people, situations, or countries. God shares His wisdom with His children so that we can build His Kingdom on earth. Words of knowledge will drop into our spirits spontaneously and we need the maturity, faith, and wisdom to test and discern whether they are messages from God — and if so, what we should do with them.

*1 Corinthians 12:10 He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit... (NLT)*

A third way that God can communicate with us is through visions. Because it is the Holy Spirit who gives us visions, we will not see them as we would the physical world around us but rather like how our imaginations work in our minds. Different people view visions differently. Visions can appear to some in full vivid colour and to others as grey or muted colours, or they may even look like images made out of water. They may last for a while, as if we are watching a movie, or appear just briefly and disappear.

*Acts 2:17 'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. (NLT)*

God can also choose to speak to us through our dreams, while our consciousness is asleep but our spirits are still active. The Holy Spirit often brings warnings or words of knowledge through dreams. It takes wisdom and patience to understand the messages that God gives to us in dreams, as we can see from various examples in the Bible.

Take the two different dreams that the pharaoh in Egypt had, recorded in Genesis chapter 41. His first dream was of seven skinny cows eating seven fat cows, and his second was of seven shrivelled heads of grain swallowing up seven healthy heads.

*Genesis 41:20-21, 25 These thin, scrawny cows ate the seven fat cows. But afterward you wouldn't have known it, for they were still as thin and scrawny as before! Then I woke up... Joseph responded, "Both of Pharaoh's dreams mean the same thing. God is telling Pharaoh in advance what he is about to do. (NLT)*

Both these dreams may seem disturbing, but in reality, God was telling the pharaoh in advance what He was about to do, so that the pharaoh could make preparations for an upcoming famine 14 years in advance!

If God gives us prophetic dreams, He will ensure that we can remember them when we wake up, so that we can write them down immediately and keep a record. Then we ought to continue to seek the Holy Spirit's revelations of their meaning and His instructions on what we should do with them next.

The Holy Spirit can also allow us to carry someone else's burdens in our hearts for a period of time. Emotions may arise spontaneously inside us that don't appear to be our own or even related to our present circumstances.

*Numbers 11:17 I will come down and talk to you there. I will take some of the Spirit that is upon you, and I will put the Spirit upon them also. They will bear the burden of the people along with you, so you will not have to carry it alone. (NLT)*

In such instances, the Holy Spirit may be showing us that a particular person is feeling hopeless, sorrowful, angry, afraid, and so on. We may feel moved to suddenly pray for them or reach out to them, simply on an instinctive gut feel. Because we have experienced the emotional burdens they are carrying, we will be better equipped to minister to and care for them in kind and compassionate ways. Such burdens will dissipate after we have extended that compassion to others or prayed for them.

Finally, God can also move us by giving us new desires. We may feel a new desire to love those we had trouble forgiving in the past, a new desire to serve God in areas that we used to try to avoid, or a new desire to give up all our addictions. He shows us the direction that He wants us to go by giving us a desire towards it.

*Galatians 5:17 The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. (NLT)*

What is common with all of these examples is that God communicates with us at any time and in any place, and we need to be spiritually awake or alert to receive His words and act on them. When God communicates a message to us, it may contradict our human wisdom and even seem foolish to us, but we will recognise His voice because He will often reference the Bible.

Let's read from 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 13 to 14, "*we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit... But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.*" (1 Corinthians 2:13-14 NLT)

As we grow accustomed to hearing from God, we will find that the tone of God's voice can vary. It can be calm and peaceful as He teaches us, warm and reassuring as He comforts us, firm as He disciplines us, and urgent as He warns us. It all depends on the situation. And the consequences of following God's voice will lead to a renewed spirit and life that looks more and more like Jesus'.

*John 6:63 The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. (NLT)*

Jesus describes us as His true sheep when we know how to recognise and listen to God's voice. When we are familiar with God's tone of voice, His character, and the types of things He would or would not say, we will not follow the voices of thieves and robbers. In the same way, we need to be able to reject thoughts and impressions that are not from God.

*John 10:8,14,27 All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (NLT)*

Getting to know God this way takes time but here are some quick ways to test if what we perceive in our spirits is indeed from the Holy Spirit or not.

It may not always be comfortable to receive responses or promptings from God because He may point out some hard truths that we don't like to hear, but the outcome of obeying Him will always bring peace.

*1 Peter 1:2 God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace. (NLT)*

So how can we test if a message is from God or not?

Firstly, there is never any confusion. Sometimes, distractions can come from our own fleshly instincts, from evil spirits, or from the pressures and expectations from this world. If we feel conflicted and confused in our hearts, then we ought to make time to be still before the Lord to ask Him for clarity. This may entail a walk in nature or a retreat time of solitude just between us and the Lord.

*1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, (ESV)*

Secondly, God's messages will bring conviction, but not condemnation. God is a redeeming God, not a punishing God. He will never condemn, belittle, or accuse us, He knows our weaknesses and desires and He will help us. He wants to transform us into the image of His Son, Jesus.

Evil spirits, on the other hand, will fill us with thoughts that are full of condemnation, blame, judgement, regret, self-validation, and pride . We find we have no peace when we listen to the voices and thoughts from our enemy.

*Romans 8:1-2 So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. (NLT)*

Thirdly, God will never contradict His own Law. In fact, He will use His Word to lead us back into His loving embrace as we confess the sinful motives of our hearts and turn back to Him.

*John 14:26 But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you. (NLT)*

Fourthly, God will never create division in His own Kingdom. God's people may become divided because of sin, pride, false teachings, and so on, but that is never His will.

*Jude 1:19 These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God's Spirit in them. (NLT)*

Fifthly, we recognise God's messages because they will always lead to the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

*Galatians 5:22-23 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! (NLT)*

Sixthly, God's messages will always result in quiet confidence, hope, joy, and peace as we trust Him and fulfil His will. He will never lead us to fear or anxiety. If the Lord of lords and King of kings ordains something, there is no need for apprehension or fear.

*Romans 15:13 I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. (NLT)*

And lastly, God will never ask us to glorify any created thing, including ourselves. He won't encourage us to form idols.

*John 16:13-14 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. (NLT)*

We may sometimes hear some people say that they don't hear from God. What they may not realise is that God's voice in our spirits is gentle and subtle, and He is always open to communicating with us.

Let's illustrate this with an example. When we feel stuck in a problem and suddenly get inspired with a brilliant solution, for instance, it could be that God dropped that wisdom into our spirits to help us. Unfortunately, we may not perceive that it is God who just spoke to us and may be inclined to take credit for the idea.

*Job 33:14 For God speaks in one way, and in two, though man does not perceive it. (ESV)*

God is always with us and He knows exactly what we need even before we even say anything. We don't necessarily have to ask God for something specifically before He will help us.

*Matthew 6:8 Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! (NLT)*

He may spontaneously drop inspiration, words, and ideas into our spirits while we are being still before Him and enjoying His peaceful and loving presence. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to hearing from God is unbelief. For instance, if we think that we cannot run a marathon, it is unlikely that we will ever run one.

*Psalms 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world." (NLT)*

It is not too different for spiritual unbelief. Here are examples of unbelief that block us from being open to hearing from God.

Examples of unbelief

1. "God has stopped talking to people."
2. "I am not worthy to hear from God."
3. "Only 'special' people can hear God's voice."
4. "God won't speak to a loser like me."
5. "God speaks to others but not to me."
6. "God is cold and silent."
7. "Other people don't hear from God, so neither can I."

If we keep telling ourselves that we won't be able to hear God, our unbelief will eventually close our hearts to His voice.

*Hebrews 11:6 And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. (NLT)*

Or perhaps we have heard God's voice in the past but we chose to harden our hearts by choosing our flesh over God so that now, our ears can no longer hear and our hearts can no longer understand His messages. We can also harden in our hearts by choosing not to feel anything, we put a fortress around our hearts. That fortress now blocks God's voice.

*Matthew 13:15 For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes—so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.’ (NLT)*

The Bible also shows that we can become spiritually dull and unable to hear God's voice, because we have chosen not to mature and grow in obedience to God. We may still remain too yoked to this world, and Satan who is the god of this world. In other words, we have been too complacent in the true eternal things of God and quenched the Holy Spirit in us.

*Hebrews 5:11-12 ... you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen. You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. (NLT)*

Perhaps we pray with the wrong intentions, only to test God and challenge Him to prove Himself to us. It's hard to imagine that God would reward such insolence by responding. Even Jesus said that He would refuse to give any miraculous signs to those who challenged Him to.

*Matthew 12:38-39 One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority.” But Jesus replied, “Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign... (NLT)*

Last but not least, God's messages may be blocked by Satan. When we give the devil access to our lives through sin, idol worship, and witchcraft, he can steal God's Word before we can even perceive it. Satan can also preoccupy our spirits by making us focus on chasing after the things of this world, so that we have no room left for God in our hearts.

*Mark 4:15 The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message, only to have Satan come at once and take it away. (NLT)*

What blocks us from hearing God

1. Unbelief
2. Hardened hearts
3. Spiritual dullness
4. Demands that God prove Himself
5. Satan steals



Another possible reason that our spirits may be dulled towards hearing God's voice, is that we don't make it a habit to seek His face throughout the day. We busy ourselves running our lives according to our own agenda without stopping to ask Him if we are walking according to His good and perfect will. If we cherish and love someone, we look forward to spending time with them, doing things with them, and simply being in their presence. When we don't make time to seek God and listen to Him, we demonstrate that there are idols in this world that are more important to us than He is.

So, let us humble ourselves and make sure we do make time for God each day, even if it is as simple as thanking Him for all the everyday things He has blessed us with.

*2 Chronicles 7:14 Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. (NLT)*

We should also make it a point to ask God to show if there is anything that offends Him so that we can repent and purify our hearts to hear from Him more clearly.

*Psalms 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (NLT)*

Another way we quiet and humble ourselves to listen to God is by taking time to fast from our meals and pray. This is a special time dedicated to the Lord in private. As we deny our flesh and attune our spirits with the Holy Spirit, we will find that we can perceive His voice more clearly and without distraction.

*Matthew 6:16,18 "And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do... no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. (NLT)*

Next, we can also delight in spending time to praise Him and adore Him. As we find our spirits lifted up in worship, our hearts connect with the Lord's more easily and we hear His response to us.

*Hebrews 13:15 Therefore, let us offer through Jesus a continual sacrifice of praise to God, proclaiming our allegiance to his name. (NLT)*

Because God will often reference His Word, we should also make time to study the Bible each day so that we can recognise the things that God will or will not say. For instance, God will never encourage violence, divorce, gambling, or drunkenness.

*Psalms 119:12-15 I praise you, O Lord; teach me your decrees. I have recited aloud all the regulations you have given us. I have rejoiced in your laws as much as in riches. I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways. (NLT)*

As we spend time with God and pray, we need to be willing to be patient and wait on Him. Sometimes His answers do not come immediately, they may even take a few weeks, or months, or even years. But we can have faith that if we seek God and to follow His will, He will respond.

*Psalm 37:7,9 Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. For the wicked will be destroyed, but those who trust in the Lord will possess the land. (NLT)*

Finally, we should test the spirits behind any thought or idea we think we have received in our spirits, if it is from our own sinful nature, from evil spirits, or from the Holy Spirit.

*1 John 4:1 Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. (NLT)*

1. Daily discipline to hear from God
2. Quiet and humble ourself
3. Ask God to show us if we have offended Him, repent
4. Fast regularly
5. Delight in praising Him
6. Study His Word
7. Be willing to wait
8. Test the spirits

Here are some practical ways we can test what we hear. We can ask a few questions.

1. Is this in line with God's Word and His character?
2. Does this lead to the Fruit of the Spirit?
3. Am I experiencing an unexplainable peace?
4. Have I waited enough to ensure I am not being impulsive?
5. Will I be led to respond in love and humility?
6. Will this ultimately glorify God or people?
7. Or simply ask, "Holy Spirit, is this from You?"

As we grow in our maturity in Christ, we will find that God is the perfect Friend, Counsellor and Lord. As we learn to cherish the times He speaks with us as we quiet our hearts before Him, we will find ourselves walking in greater joy, hope, and peace.

If you feel convicted that there may have been times where you squashed God's voice, here is a short prayer we can pray together. Are you ready? Let's pray.

*"Father God, I praise You! Please forgive me for not believing that You want to, or can, speak with me. I repent of closing my heart by believing in lies such as (please list). Where my parents didn't make time*

*to speak with or value me, I forgive them. I repent of projecting that image onto You and even doing that to You too! Lord, I welcome You to speak to my spirit, I long to hear from You and humbly wait on You. In Jesus' name, amen."*

We have now come to the end of today's lesson. Here are the reflection questions for you to prepare answers to before your small group meeting as well as a testimony to watch. We pray that you will be blessed. See you next time.

### **Time for reflection**

1. What are some reasons that people may feel unworthy to hear from God?
2. What would you say to someone in that position?

### **Watch the testimony for this lesson**



### **Personal notes**