

# The Power of Whisper: Is That You, God?

by Senior Pastor: Bill Couch

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This morning we continue with our series of messages entitled “The Power of Whisper,” using as a resource Bill Hybels’ book by the same title. Last week I talked about how God is speaking to us all the time. We have a hard time hearing him often because we are so preoccupied with our own agenda and selfish plans that we really don’t want to hear from him. If we listen, God will speak to us through a still, small inner voice that is promptings from the Holy Spirit. When we listen and follow those promptings, God directs our paths. Next week we are going to talk about how we hear God’s voice when we are passing through dark periods in our lives.

An important question to ask is, “How do I know it is the voice of God and not my own inner desires or a thought planted in my mind by another person?” This morning I want us to focus on how we recognize God’s voice from all the other voices in our heads.

Luke gives us an example in the Book of Acts about how to recognize God’s voice.

<sup>1</sup> In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul.

<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

<sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 13:1-3

You are open to hearing from God—you are beginning to listen. A prompting, a nudge, an inner voice speaks to you. Then you wonder, “God, is that you?” How do we know? What if I misunderstand or misinterpret the message? We have heard the stories like the woman who claimed she heard the voice of God telling her to drown her children because they were possessed by Satan. That is an extreme example, but we can think of other people who claimed that God spoke to them and told them to do something that may have destroyed their lives or their families. How do we know when we are hearing from God?

The three verses we read from Acts 13 provide us with insight about how believers in the first century church discerned God's voice. While the church leaders at Antioch were fasting and worshipping, the Holy Spirit spoke to them to set apart Paul and Barnabas for the work to which he called them. They were to cease what they were doing in the Antioch church and go on a new kingdom assignment. There is no specific information about where they are to go at this point. After hearing the voice, the leaders did not just jump up and send Paul and Barnabas out the door. Instead they continued to fast and pray. They confirmed together that the message was from God, before they sent off Paul and Barnabas.

It was within the context of worship, prayer and fasting that the leaders heard God's whisper. Have you ever heard God whisper? Our lives are so full of noise we can't hear the Holy Spirit when he speaks. Cell phones, noisy restaurants, music blaring in our cars, TV's roaring at home—all the noise drowns out the voice of God.

"Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) Slow down. Focus. It is doubtful that you will hear God while multi-tasking. God is polite, if you are busy listening to other voices, he seldom interrupts. When you slow down, get quiet and listen, you are far more likely to hear from God.

Jesus modeled this for us. He frequently left the chattering, inquisitive crowds to find a quiet place to be alone with his heavenly Father. Before he began his ministry, he spent 40 days in the wilderness alone—fasting and praying. He prayed all night as he listened to his father's guidance in selecting

the 12 apostles who would carry on his work. Even Jesus had to shut down the noise to hear his heavenly Father.

I have found that the voice of God is clearest to me when I've spent a few days alone with my Bible, some devotional books and uninterrupted time for conversation with God. He has prompted me during those times to make some bold and difficult decisions. But once I was convinced I had heard from God, I could move forward through opposition and struggle. It gives us courage and tenacity to stay the course when we know we are following the direction God wants us to go. Unfortunately, with a busy schedule it is difficult to find time for a retreat of 2 or 3 days. I seek to carve out two to three hours once a week for an extended devotional time. I read God's word, a devotional book and pray. Sometimes I hear God speaking during those times, and sometimes I don't. But I'm more likely to hear him when I get still and focus and listen.

When we feel a prompting, a nudge or a thought—how do we know it is from God? Bill Hybel's suggests five filters that we can use to test a voice and see if it is from God.

**Filter #1: Is the prompting truly from God?** Occasionally I have persons come up to me and begin a monolog with these words: "God told me to tell you..." They proceed to tell me something I should or should not be doing. Now sometimes God speaks to me through other persons. But usually they do not try to trump their message with the "God card." The people who have delivered a word from God to me many times don't even mention God at all. They give me a suggestion or offer an insight—and the Holy Spirit prompts me to listen.

Sometimes they say, “I feel like I’m supposed to say this. I don’t know if this is a word from God or not. You pray about it and decide.” But when someone says, “God, told me to tell you....” I’ve discovered that the next words out of his/her mouth are usually about their own agenda for my life or the church. They use “God talk” to try to control me into doing what they want done. Sometimes they are telling me to do something that I perceive is not consistent with the character of God. When someone delivers you a message, ask “Does this message align with what I know about who God is? Is it consistent with his nature and character?” Slow down before you act on a prompting from within yourself or from the lips of another. Check it out. Does this message sound like it is from God as you know him?

**Filter #2: Is it scriptural?** God will never lead you to do something that is inconsistent with the principles found in his word. Can you imagine someone saying “God told me to cheat on my wife?” God has clearly stated his plan for sexuality in his word—one man, one woman within the marriage relationship. Any voice that tells us something different is not from God. This is why it is important to read the whole Bible and to keep reading it. We need to saturate our minds with God’s word so that we know his voice. We can test the nudges and promptings that come into our heads by asking, “Is this consistent with God’s word?” If there is any doubt, ask a mature Christian friend who knows God’s word.

**Filter #3: Is it wise?** Jesus told his followers to be wise. “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.” (Matthew 10:16) The entire book of

Proverbs is dedicated to pursuing wisdom. Too often we pursue things that are foolish because we don't take time to check out a voice. We purchase something on an impulse: "I believe God is leading me to get this new SUV so I can use it to take kids on youth trips." Slow down: is this God's voice or new car fever? Can you afford it? Be honest about your motives. Is purchase really wise or foolish? Is it really about serving God or getting something I want? God will not lead us into unreasonable debt that will lead to financial burdens.

**Filter #4: Is it in tune with your own character?** Hybels calls this the "wiring test." Is the voice calling you to do something for which God has prepared you? Does this fit with the person God has shaped you to be? A man approached Bill Hybels after a worship service. This man was so moved by a particular song that he felt God was telling him to quit his career as a stock broker and become a music minister. Bill asked him a few questions: "Do you have any musical training?" "No." "Have you had any experience leading singing or singing solos?" "No." "Do you sing in the shower?" "No." Hybels suggested that maybe God just wanted this man to enjoy the beautiful song as a moment of worship and connection with him. Perhaps he should explore how he could serve God as a stock broker rather than quit tomorrow and look for a job in music ministry.

Now there are times when God calls us to do something totally out of the box. He may call us to get out of our comfort zone. It is important to take some time and confirm this is God's leading. If it is God calling us to do something

radical and new, he will also provide opportunities that will equip us and prepare us to pursue that call.

**Filter #5: What do the people you most trust think about it?** Seek counsel from two or three mature believers to confirm the voice you are hearing. “Where there is no counsel, the people fall. But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.” (Proverbs 11:14) Humbly ask these mature believers: “Do you think this is a message from God? Is this the voice of God I’m hearing, or in your estimation did I get my wires crossed?” They might just save you from a huge mistake. I’ve learned to trust the wisdom of committees in our church. I seek their counsel about timing for building programs and launching new ministries. Recently I was considering several options for offering traditional worship services. I really thought we should go a certain direction. After presenting the idea to the Church Council, they helped me to see repercussions of that decision that I had not thought of. By seeking council we made a much wiser decision. Some pastors think they have the exclusive word from God about what should happen in their church. I’ve discovered that God speaks through the staff and lay leaders in our church with far greater wisdom than I have alone.

God is speaking. Are you listening? Is he setting you apart for something like he did with Paul and Barnabas? Is he leading you to a new opportunity? A new level of giving? Is he asking you to let go of a bad habit? Is he asking you to adopt a good habit? Is he calling you to serve the poor? If you sense God is telling you something, let him know your ears are open. Tell him you are willing to

do what he calls you to do. Check out the prompting with the five filters and if they confirm this is the voice of God, get ready for the adventure of your life!