

“Hearing God”

1 Samuel 3:1-11, John 1:43-51, 1 Corinthians 6:12 & 19-20

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Prayer for Understanding Ever present Lord, we thank you for your word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Holy Spirit open our eyes to the signs of your presence, open our ears to your voice and open our minds to your wisdom so that our hearts will be expanded with love. Amen.

How does one discern God’s will? How can you understand God’s desire for your life and the world?

God is constantly communicating with us. Any moment of joy, love, peace, hope, wonder, awe, or goodness is God connecting with you. God communicates through people, creation, scripture, our passions, and likes. It is helpful to stop, look, and listen. Stop your routine. Stop your stream of thoughts. Look for God. God is any form of goodness. Listen to God. God is every form of love.

Today many people, groups, and churches claim they know God’s will. Sometimes people on both sides of an issue claim they are acting on behalf of God. During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln in his second inaugural address said, “Both sides read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes God’s aid against the other.” There are several ways to discern God’s will, to understand God’s desire for your life, and the world.

Seek the guidance of others who are experienced in listening to God. Eli was Samuel’s mentor. **1 Samuel 3:1-11 NLT** “Meanwhile, the boy Samuel served the Lord by assisting Eli. Now in those days messages from the Lord were very rare, and visions were quite uncommon. One night Eli, who was almost blind by now, had gone to bed. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle near the Ark of God. Suddenly the Lord called out, “Samuel!” “Yes?” Samuel replied. “What is it?” He got up and ran to Eli. “Here I am. Did you call me?” “I didn’t call you,” Eli replied. “Go back to bed.” So he did. Then the Lord called out again, “Samuel!” Again Samuel got up and went to Eli. “Here I am. Did you call me?” “I didn’t call you, my son,” Eli said. “Go back to bed.” Samuel did not yet know the Lord because he had never had a message from the Lord before. So the Lord called a third time, and once more Samuel got up and went to Eli. “Here I am. Did you call me?” Then Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling the boy. So he said to Samuel, “Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, ‘Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went back to bed. And the Lord came and called as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel replied, “Speak, your servant is listening.” Then the Lord said to Samuel, “I am about to do a shocking thing in Israel.”

I regularly talk to a spiritual director to help me listen to God. A good spiritual director listens, then asks lots of questions such as: Where is God in your situation? What is God’s invitation to you? How is your soul? How is God asking you to love, to serve, to rest? How are you striving to perceive God? How are you being healed? What does God want you to be? What does God want you to do? How are you expanding love? What gives you peace, joy, and comfort?

Cultivate relationships with a few spiritual directors, Samuels, in your life. Regularly talk with them. Most people are honored to help another perceive God. We gather to worship to guide each other. My primary task is to provide a sermon that helps you perceive God. A great sermon does not provide answers, rather gives you great questions and tools to understand God’s desire for you.

There are an abundance of books by authors who seek to guide us on our journey with God. A few of my favorite authors are Augustine, Calvin, the desert fathers and mothers, Benedict, Aquinas, Julian of Norwich, Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., Merton, Rohr, Nouwen, C. S. Lewis, Wallis, Peterson, Yancey, Meyer, Lucado, Barbra Brown Taylor, Tutu, Ortberg, Evans, Achkerman. I am working on expanding the diversity of my readings.

Amanda Gorman’s inaugural poem provided spiritual direction for me. I also found her life story inspiring. If you have not heard or read Amanda’s inaugural poem, I encourage you to read it and ponder if God is speaking through her to you and our country.

A disciple is a person who is striving to follow God and guide others, to know Christ and show Christ. A disciple strives to learn and teach, to listen for themselves and give others’ questions.

Jesus calls everyone to be a disciple. **John 1:43-51 NLT** “The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. Jesus found Philip and said to him, “Come, follow me.” Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew, and Peter’s hometown. Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.” “Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” “Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied. As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.” “How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.” Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!” Jesus asked him, “Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.” Then Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.”

Philip followed Jesus because he embodied the Old Testament scriptures. Reading scripture is an excellent way to perceive God. It is helpful to read the entire Bible cover to cover to perceive the themes of scripture. You can read the entire Bible in a year by reading just three chapters a day. There are some dry chapters in the Old Testament. A great reading plan is to read a chapter from the Old Testament, a chapter from Psalms and Proverbs and a chapter from the New Testament. You can find a variety of these reading plans online. Reading the entire Bible enables you to perceive the themes otherwise it is easy to misinterpret a particular section of scripture. Once you have the themes from the entire Bible, then you can see if a particular perception fits with the theme. Thoroughly question any insight that do not fit with the theme. Context is critical to Biblical insights. What were the conditions, traditions, and customs? Who is speaking? Who is the intended listener? Who wrote the section of scripture? What do you think their purpose was in writing that section of scripture? The context of the Old Testament was a time when truths were told in stories and metaphors. Details are exaggerated to accentuate to the point of the story. Keep in mind that the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. Several sections of scripture are poetry. In the original language some scripture rhymes and other was song. This made it easier to share orally. Hebrew uses fewer words with wide meanings. The only way to determine the meaning is by context. If you are reading the Bible in English, then others have chosen a particular meaning on your behalf. All of this makes context and overarching themes critical for understanding. One of the primary reasons why it is beneficial to have an ordained teaching elder preach and teach scripture is we have had at least three years of education on scripture including the Hebrew and Greek language. Ordained teaching elders are human, some of our perceptions are inaccurate and everyone’s interpretation is incomplete.

Perceiving God’s desire through scripture is like exercising a muscle. Regular reading strengthens one’s perception.

The Holy Spirit is essential to perceiving God’s desire through scripture. It is helpful to pray, center, and meditate on scripture, seeking the insights of the Holy Spirit. Scripture is God’s living word. The particular insight for you changes depending on your situation and experiences. The particular insight for you changes depending on the aspect that the Holy Spirit highlights for you. A particular passage of scripture may have a different insight for each person who prayerfully reads it.

Some people believe that it is idolatry, that is worshipping oneself, worshipping human ideology, whenever one goes to scripture in attempt to support their perspective. One has a much higher probability of perceiving God’s desire when they read scripture with an open mind free of biases. One has a much higher probability of perceiving God’s desire when they read scripture seeking insight for themselves. When sharing one’s perspective, it is helpful to own your perception. This is the insight that I perceived. And then listen and be open to the perceptions of others.

The Apostle Paul writes, **1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NRSV “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” Galatians 5:22-23 NLT “The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”** Jesus said. **Matthew 22:37-40 “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”** Check your perceptions of God’s desire through a love filter. Is the perception loving for all people? Does the perception produce love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? The most excellent way is the way of love. Be extremely suspect of any perception that produces any form of hate, pain, fear, exclusion, or judgement.

When determining God’s desire for your life, God often gives you a variety of wonderful options. God created the cosmos with great diversity and variety. God honors the uniqueness of each person by communicating with them in unique ways and giving each person free will to choose their own way with a myriad of wonderful options. When seeking God’s desire for your life, imagine yourself living each option. Those that give you a sense of peace, excitement and love are likely God’s desire for you. Some of these options may be challenging and demand sacrifice, growth, and perseverance.

Is God beyond binary thinking and good, better, and best distinctions? Is it possible to embrace both and? Is there some form of truth in every perception? Humans are not capable of fully perceiving the love, joy, glory, holiness, creativity, majesty grace and on and on of God. All our perceptions are incomplete. By wary of anyone who claims they know the will of God, people other than themselves.

The Declaration of Barmen was written in 1933. I am going to share some exceptions. However, if you want to fully perceive it then it is helpful to read it in full. It is in our Book of Confession and you can find it online. To fully understand it one needs to study the context. Here are the excerpts that resonate with me from the introduction and the declaration. “*The Theological Declaration of Barmen* was written by a group of church leaders in Germany to help Christians withstand the challenges of the Nazi party. Adolf Hitler by playing on people’s fear abolished democratic processes. Most Germans took the union of Christianity, nationalism, and militarism for granted, and patriotic sentiments were equated with Christian truth. The declaration proclaims the church’s freedom in Jesus Christ who is Lord of every area of life. The church obeys Jesus as God’s one and only Word who determines the church’s order, ministry, and relation to the state. Unity of churches can come only from the Word of God in faith through the Holy Spirit. Thus, alone is the Church renewed. Therefore, we call upon the congregations to range themselves in prayer. Do not be deceived by loose talk. Try the spirits whether they are of God! Also prove the words to see whether they agree with Holy Scripture and with the Confessions. If you find that we are speaking contrary to Scripture, then do not listen to us! The inviolable foundation of the church is the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is attested for us in Holy Scripture and brought to light in the Confessions. The various offices in the church do not establish a dominion of some over the others. The church’s commission, upon which its freedom is founded, consists in delivering the message of the free grace of God to all people in Christ’s stead.”

Jesus said. **John 1:5 NLT “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never extinguish the light.”** My perception is Jesus is talking about himself as the light, and us as the light, and every good, loving, peaceful, joyful way as the light. Shine with all your perceptions of God that fill you with peace and expand love. Amen