

**Fil-Am Community Church**

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## **HOW TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S VOICE**

Good morning Fil-Am! It is so good to see you here this morning. Let me start by saying thank you. I know there are many other places you could be this morning, there are churches that are closer and more convenient for you. There are bigger churches with lots of programs to meet all your needs, but you came here and for that I want you to know we are very thankful. We do not take your attendance for granted; we consider it a pleasure with all humbleness to serve you.

This morning, we're going to conclude our series on "Can you hear me now?" We've been looking at how to hear God's voice. We said that God is trying to speak to you. He's constantly transmitting to you. But unless you're tuned in, you're not going to hear Him. And if you happen to tune into the wrong channel you may think its God, but it's not.

So how do you know when an idea is from God? How do you know when an idea is from Satan? How do you know when an idea is from yourself? A lot of times you're just talking to yourself. You talk to yourself all the time because you want somebody intelligent to talk to. But be careful. If you start arguing with yourself, you have a problem. In the same manner, if you confuse your desires with what God wants you to do the results can be fatal.

Proverbs 14:12, "*What you think is the right road may lead to death.*" It's very important to know when it's God talking to you or when it's just you talking to

yourself. On the other hand it's also important to know when Satan's talking to you. He talks to you all the time. We call it temptation. He puts ideas in your mind to do wrong. A lot of things today, God gets blamed for all kinds of evil that isn't God's fault at all. When people say, "God told me to do this," they didn't really hear from God. It was their own desires or their own imagination or the devil or whatever.

I read about a woman in Texas who stoned two of her little children, killed them. She said in court, "God told me to do it." Obviously the woman is insane. God did not tell her to do that.

So it's very important to know when it's God talking to you. The fact is one moment it could be the devil talking to you, one moment it could be God talking to you, one minute it could be you just talking to yourself. The Bible says this in 1 John 4:1 *"Don't believe everything you hear just because somebody says it's a message from God. Test it first to see if it really is."* Notice it says, "test if first." Circle that.

Jesus said in John 7:17 *"Anyone who wants to do his will can test this teaching [there's that word again] and know whether it is from God or whether I'm making it up."* Today, we're going to look at five ways to test an impression, whether an idea that you've got in your mind is from God or not. All five of these tests form a very strong filter. You can't pick and choose and say, "I'm going to take one, three and five and forget the others." No. If it doesn't line up against all five, it's not God talking to you. On the other hand, if you get an idea and it passes all five of these tests you can know for absolute certainty with total confidence that you have heard from God.

So how do you know when it's God talking to you?

## **1. DOES IT AGREE WITH THE BIBLE?**

That's the first way you can test an idea or an impression. Does it agree with the Bible? Because God will never contradict what He's already said in His word. The Bible is God's word given to us over thousands of years and God will never tell you to violate a principle that's in this because God is consistent. So He'll never tell you to ignore what He's already said. He'll never tell you to deny what He's already said. He'll never tell you to contradict what He's already said.

The Bible says this in Luke 21. Jesus said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away but My words will never pass away.*" Proverbs 12:19 "*Truth stands the test of time.*" What does that mean? That means if it's true, it's always been true, it always will be true. Because truth is not new. If it's new it's not true because truth has been around forever. If it was true 2000 years ago, it was true 4000 years ago, it was true 1000 years ago, it was true fifty years ago, it's true today. And if it's true it'll be true five thousand years from today because Truth stands the test of time.

Fads change. Therapies change. Trends change. Popular opinion changes. Even science changes. A science book written twenty years ago is already out of date. But the truth of God never changes. So God would never say something then change His mind later. So if God says in the Bible, which He does, "Marriage is between a man and a woman," then he wouldn't say later on that marrying same-sex couples is ok. God will never contradict himself. He doesn't change his mind.

In fact, Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament said, “Even if I contradict the Bible, don’t listen to me.” The Bible says this in Galatians 1:8 *“Let God’s curse fall on anyone including myself who preaches any other message. [In other words, other than the Bible] Even if an angel comes from heaven and preaches any other message let him be forever cursed.”* Did you know that many if not most of the cults that exist today started because they claim an angel came and said, “The Bible’s not enough. You need another book too.” God says even if an angel comes to you and says this is not enough, they’re wrong. The Bible is true.

So I first say is this impression I’m getting, does it match up to the Bible? The vast majority of God’s will for your life is right here in this book. All you’re got to do is read it. There are certain verses in here you probably ought to memorize that relate to your particular life. Why? Because then when you get an idea, you can go, “That couldn’t be from God because the Bible says this.”

You get another impression: “That couldn’t be from God either because the Bible says this.” If you don’t know the Bible you’re going to be duped by all kinds of Satan’s lies. So the better you know God’s word the more God will be able to talk to you. We always get into trouble when we doubt God’s word.

There’s a second question that you and I could ask ourselves when we want to recognize God’s voice and figure out whether it’s an impression from Him or not.

## **2. DOES IT MAKE ME MORE LIKE CHRIST?**

Does this impression, if I follow through on it, will it make me more like Christ? God's goal is to make us like Jesus Christ. That's the number one goal that He has in our lives.

Philippians 2:5 *"In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus."* If that is God's goal for our lives He obviously wouldn't put an impression in our lives that would contradict this.

2 Corinthians 10:5 *"We take every thought captive so that it is obedient to Christ."* So the impression we get should help us become obedient to Christ, to answer that question you heard a lot of times, "What would Jesus do?" – to act like Jesus would act in certain circumstances of life.

If you want a checklist for this, acting like Jesus Christ when an impression comes, James 3:14 & 17 is a great checklist. It's good to have with you anytime you're making a decision. It tells you how to know something is *not* an impression from God and how to see if something *is* an impression from God when it comes to the character qualities of Jesus Christ. The verse starts out by saying *"If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition, such wisdom is of the devil."* Obviously not from God. So how do you know it's not an impression from God? If it's from bitter envy it's not. If the impression is all about wanting to retaliate against somebody, getting even with somebody, if it's something that grows out of jealousy that makes you want to buy something or do something, then that is not an impression from God. We have those kinds of ideas all the time. We all have those feelings all the time. They are strong impressions but they're not from God.

Also selfish ambition. We get selfish ambition impressions all the time. But God's not going to give you those. God's not going to give you an impression to make you more selfish. He's going to give you impressions to make you more serving. God's not going to give you any self-serving ideas. We get enough of those on our own. The ideas that come from Him are going to be to serve others and make a difference in other people's lives. So if you get an impression this week that says, "I'm going to be famous! I'm going to be wealthy! I'm going to make other people envious of who I am!" that is not an impression from God.

There's also a list here of how to know it *is* an impression from God. "*The wisdom that comes from God is pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, impartial and sincere.*" So it's a checklist. These seven characteristics are all qualities of Jesus. So, an impression from God should make you more like Jesus.

Here's a third way to test an impression.

### **3. DOES MY CHURCH FAMILY CONFIRM IT?**

First you ask, Does this idea agree with the Bible? Second, Does it make me more like Christ? Then third, Does my church family confirm this idea? You see, you need the wisdom and counsel and advice of other godly people in your life to help you stay on track. God never meant for you to go through life as a Lone Ranger, on your own. That's why He created the church family because we need each other. Nobody has all the answers. Nobody has it all together. Nobody knows the right decision every time. Nobody. Not me. Not you. Not anybody else. That's why we need a church family. We need spiritually mature friends to bounce ideas off of and get feedback from.

Ephesians 3:10 says this “*God’s intent is that through the church* [circle “through the church”] *the manifold wisdom of God should be made known.*” God shares His wisdom with His body, with His family, with His flock, with us all in general.

What am I saying? Let me say it in two or three ways.

If God has genuinely spoken to you, you’ve got an idea, an impression from God, if it’s really from God then other mature believers will confirm it. They’ll say, “You’re right. You did hear from God.” If they do not confirm it you have every reason to doubt whether it’s really from God or not.

If you ask other people, other Christians who are mature, who’ve been Christian longer than you, believers longer than you, walked with God for a longer period of time, “What do you think about this idea?” you should listen to their advice. If you feel resistant to even sharing it, “I’ve got this idea and I don’t even feel like I want to share it with more mature Christians.” Where do you think that resistance is coming from? It’s coming from the devil. Run that idea by with other mature Christians and then you’ll know whether it’s from God or not. We all need each other’s counsel.

If you get an idea that no mature Christian confirms, you’re wrong. Because God speaks to His body not just to us as individuals. If you’re reading the Bible and you see something in a verse that nobody has ever seen before and you get an interpretation that nobody’s ever had before, you’re wrong. Because millions and millions of Christians have been reading this book for thousands of years and if it’s new it’s not true. I have never seen anything new in this book because it’s been seen before by millions of other people who are godly, mature, spiritually strong believers. So if a mature believer questions an idea that you think is from God,

you ought to question it too. I'm not saying drop it. I'm just saying you ought to check it out.

The Bible says in Proverbs 11:9 *"The wisdom of the righteous can save you."* It doesn't say the wisdom of your best friends, your good ol' buddies because they're going to kiss up to you and just tell you what you want to hear anyway. They're not going to tell you the truth. But the wisdom of the righteous, in other words people who have been walking with God longer than you. They're not perfect. There are no perfect people in the world. We're just talking about people who are least making the effort to grow. They're trying to grow. They're sincere. *"The wisdom of the righteous – getting advice from them – can save you."* Save you what? Save you time, save you money, save you energy, save you from mistakes, save you from failure. Save you from danger, from embarrassment. They can save you. I couldn't count the number of times I've been saved from a wrong decision because other godly people in my life said, "Have you thought about this? Have you considered this, David?" That's why you need other believers. That's why you need to be in a small group.

The two biggest reasons people mess up in life are these. One: They have no spiritually mature friends. Two: They don't listen to them if they do have them.

That's how people mess up their lives. They either a) don't have any spiritually mature friends, all their friends are non-believers, or weak Christians. So they can't give them good solid advice. Or if they do have some good mature Christian friends, they don't ever ask them. They're not open to receiving counsel. Yet we all need that feedback because nobody's right 100% of the time.



Proverbs 11:14 says this *“In the multitude of counselors there is safety.”*

If you want to make fewer mistakes in life get all the godly mature advice you can get, then follow it. It says in the multitude of counselors. Get as much advice from godly Christians as you can.

(You can include an episode in your life in which you asked for godly counsel from mature Christians before you proceeded with a course of action)

There’s a fourth question you and I can use to test an impression.

#### **4. Is it convicting rather than condemning?**

I need to explain the difference because a lot of Christians go through life living under condemnation and guilt thinking it’s the voice of God when it’s actually the devil’s.

Let me explain the difference. Conviction comes from God. Condemnation comes from the devil. The purpose of conviction is to correct something that’s out of order in your life. The purpose of condemnation is just to put you down and make you feel miserable and guilty and ashamed. The motivation behind conviction is love. The motivation behind condemnation is hatred. When God speaks to you about an area in your life for conviction He’s very specific. Condemnation is general. For example, God will come to you and point out an area and say, “Rolly, you were prideful just then.” He’s very specific. “He will give you a very specific area of your life, point out an area that’s out of order. Then He gives you the solution. Then, you confess it, you admit it, you say, “God, I admit it. I was wrong. Please help me change.” And voila! The conviction feeling leaves instantly. Condemnation on the other hand goes on and on and on. You can feel

guilty about it for weeks or months or years. That's not from God. That's from the devil.

Notice what the Bible says in Romans 8:1 *"There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus."* If you've accepted Jesus Christ into your life and you trust in what Jesus did on the cross then there's no longer condemnation for you. The reason Jesus died on the cross for you is so that you can be freed from the condemnation of sin and death. If you hear a voice that says, "You're hopeless! You're worthless! You're unlovable!", you can know that is not the voice of God. It never has been and it never will be. That's condemnation and it's coming from the devil. The devil is the one who wants to make you feel miserable, not God.

So what is conviction? The Bible tells us in Revelation 3. *"Those whom I dearly and tenderly love I tell their faults and convict and discipline. So, be earnest and repent [that means changing your heart, your mind, your attitude]"* Notice the motivation behind conviction – God loves you and He wants to help you change. So conviction is very definite and specific. God tells you what's wrong in your life. And as soon as you admit it, you confess it, say, "Help me change." The feeling goes away.

But condemnation doesn't go away. It just stays there. How many times do you have to ask for forgiveness to be forgiven? Once. So if you keep feeling guilty after you've confessed it and you confess it again and every time that thing comes back to your mind and you confess it again and say, "Please forgive me. Please forgive me." What are you saying? You're saying "God, I don't really believe You forgave me the first time." And that's a lack of faith. God forgave you the first time you asked for forgiveness.

I don't know how to say it any clearer than this. If you still feel guilty after you've confessed a sin, that guilt is not from God. It's from the devil. Because God doesn't make you feel guilty for stuff that's already been confessed. The devil wants you to think that God doesn't love you because of what you've done in the past.

A friend of mine went to New Zealand to find a job. Months went by, however, and she had no offers. She started to feel down and then thought that maybe God didn't love her anymore or didn't care for her anymore because she gave birth to a child out of wedlock. And she's a Christian. She cried and wondered whether God had really forgiven her. She was ready to give up, go back to the Philippines, feeling guilty and condemned. The next day, she was surprised because a letter came. It's an offer for a job, and not in New Zealand, but from Australia, which paid more and which she actually was aiming for. So, God doesn't condemn. He convicts and after you've asked for forgiveness, he loves you just the same.

Let me explain it like this. There's a big difference between the human court system and God's justice system. In a human court, here's what happens. First comes the conviction. Then, comes the sentencing or the condemnation. So, you get called into court because of some kind of crime. First, you get convicted of that crime. Then after you've been convicted then the judge orders the condemnation, the sentencing. Conviction – Condemnation .

But that's not God's justice system. First, God convicts you of something that's wrong in your life. You admit it. You say, "God, I admit it. It was wrong. I'm sorry. Help me to change." Then, God forgives you and wipes the slate clean. He

acquits you and tells you, “Don’t do it again” and you go scot-free. Conviction – Condonation. What is condonation? A pardon by treating the offender as if the offense had not occurred. So, God pardons you. Why can God do this? Because someone already paid for your sins. Jesus Christ! God’s only-begotten son. In fact, God sacrificed his Son for your sins so that you’ll be forgiven, or condoned, not condemned.

When Jesus Christ was hanging on the cross, he took all of our sins, sins we’ve committed and sins we’ll ever commit. At that very moment in time, God couldn’t look at him because he carried the sins of the world and that’s why Jesus said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

God forsook him for you, because he loves you. He doesn’t want you condemned to hell forever but to be forgiven and live in heaven for eternity.

Some of you had an unpleasable parent growing up. An unpleasable mom or dad and you have taken that voice and you have transferred it to God. Now every time you pray you imagine God saying, “Not good enough. I expect perfection. Not good enough. Can’t you do better?” It’s no wonder you don’t want to pray because God has become an unpleasable parent. That is an old tape you need to turn off and erase. Stop blaming God for the way you’ve felt about yourself. It is Satan’s job to make you feel bad. So those guilty feelings that are coming, they’re not from God.

Finally, here’s the fifth question you have to ask to be sure it’s God’s voice you’re hearing.

## **5. DO I SENSE GOD'S PEACE ABOUT IT?**

If you get an impression and it makes you feel pressured or overwhelmed or confused, you ought to question whether that impression is from God. Because God wants us to sense His peace, not to live lives of pressure.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14:33 *“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”* He wants to make sense in our lives. Those of you who are parents, do you want your kids to feel pressured all the time? Of course not. And God does not want us as His children to feel pressure all the time. He wants us to sense His peace as a part of our everyday lives. The only time pressure is legitimate for us as believers is when God has told us to do something specifically and we haven't done it yet.

Here's the difference. Satan wants to drive us compulsively. But God desires to draw us compassionately.

Someone said, “Ninety percent of what God says to us is encouragement.” Have you sensed God saying anything encouraging to you lately? Or is it all about pressure? God has some encouraging things to say to us.

There is a word for that pressure that comes into our lives that drives us away from God's peace. We're all familiar with this word. Another word for that pressure is “worry.” The Bible talks about the difference between our worries and God's peace over in the book of Philippians. Chapter 4:6-7 says, *“Don't worry about anything. Instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank Him for all that He's done. If you do this you will experience God's peace which is far*

*more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and your minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”*

This verse reminds us that worry is never from God. It only creates pressure in our lives. It also tells us this incredible promise. Just take it to Him and listen to His voice. It will bring peace if I only obey it. In fact, one of the clearest signs of impression from God is when all of a sudden you sense peace – God’s peace – in the midst of a storm of difficulty in your life.

I remember the story about how the founder of the Navigators, Dawson Trotman, accepted Billy Graham's invitation for him to develop a discipleship process for those people who have come forward to accept Christ at Billy's crusades. This was way back in the 40's or 50's. At first, Dawson turned down Billy’s invitation, not really believing in his crusades. But Billy Graham persisted and so Dawson said he would pray about it. Then, one day, while relaxing at the beach, Dawson felt a sudden peace in his heart and had an impression in his heart that God wanted him to help Billy Graham. And so, their partnership was forged and since then, the Navigators became a part of the Billy Graham crusades.

Note that Dawson was relaxing when he heard God's voice. That's why I always say, spend even just five minutes of quiet time so you'll be able to hear God.

Folks, these five ways to test an impression from God, they work. I’ve been using them for many, many years. Let’s read them together again. Number one, does it agree with the Bible? Number two, does it make me more like Christ? Number three, does my church family confirm it? Number four, is it convicting rather than condemning. And number five, do I sense God’s peace about it?

If you use these filters you will know whether you’re hearing from God or not.