

PREPARING FOR THE LESSON

- > **SPEND THE WEEK STUDYING.** Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > **DETERMINE** which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > **PRAY** for our pastors and the sermon series, the upcoming service, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the lesson.

WHAT MATTERS MOST

God's guiding voice can be trusted.

WHAT HAPPENS FIRST

INTRO TALK

Have you ever been unsure about a very important decision you've had to make? Where should I go to college? Should I date this guy or girl? McDonald's or Burger King? OK that last one might not be too hard, but we all make decisions every day of our lives, and it can be tough to know if we are basing our answers on God's will or our own desires. Or, we could even be hearing the voice of the enemy as he tries to distract us or get us off track. Making matters worse, our friends, family, and even strangers offer advice, adding to the voices in our heads. How can you cut through all the voices and ensure it's God you're hearing?

Discerning between God's voice, our own desires, and the voice of the enemy can be complicated and, at times, scary. Over the next three weeks, we are going to study what the Bible says about the voices in our heads, and how we can know it's the voice of God we're listening to.

The voice of God should be the guiding voice that we follow. Understanding and following God's direction is critical to our Christian walk. The good news is that God's voice can be heard through His Word. We have access to know exactly what His will is for our lives when we read the Bible. If the voice in your head matches the Bible, it's God's voice and it can be trusted.

In addition to God's voice, we also need to understand our own voices. Too often we take our fleshly desires and act like they are what God wants for us. Nothing can be more confusing than sifting through our own emotions, wants, and temptations to determine if they are from God or not. We've heard the phrase, "Just follow your heart." But the Bible tells us that our hearts are wicked and deceitful, and we would be fools to trust them. If the voice in your head is telling you satisfy your desires with anything that doesn't match God's desires, the voice is probably yours.

The Bible is also clear that the voice of the enemy operates to distract and deceive us. Starting in the garden of Eden, the enemy lied to Adam and Eve to get them to disobey God. Later, Satan confronted Jesus in the desert and tried to discourage Him, tempting Him with power. The Bible tells us that the enemy prowls around like a lion seeking out whom he can destroy, and we are to be wary of his efforts at all times. If the voice in your head is doubting God and telling you to rebel against Him, it's probably the enemy.

Today, we're going to look at how we can know it is God's voice we hear. What better place to look than the actual Word of God—the Bible. In John 10, Jesus shared a parable with a hostile crowd in Jerusalem. Let's examine how He clarified the different voices we hear.

INTRO ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY 1

Have the large group leader give an overview of the book of John—something out of a Bible commentary or just off-the-cuff knowledge. As he is speaking, have two people (off stage and unseen with wireless mics) make comments about how he really feels about the audience. Do this for a few minutes, either in tandem with the intro talk or with commentary content to introduce the lesson. This can help communicate how voices in our heads can confuse us and provide some laughter. (Or use the activity listed for MS students below.)

Examples for the out-of-sight speakers to say while leader speaks:

"I hope no one notices the coffee stain on my shirt."

"I would really like to give that kid in the front a time-out. Or a knock-out."

"I hope I don't look nervous when I speak."

"Man my wife looks hot today. But her breath—wow."

"I am such a great speaker."

"I need to confess my sin for wanting to give that kid a time-out/knock-out."

"I wonder if we have any donuts left over."

Transition sentence: We all have to deal with the different voices in our heads. Let's look at what the Bible says about understanding God's Word

ACTIVITY 2

Do a PowerPoint or ProPresenter Game in which cartoon movie characters are shown, and let students name the actors/actresses that voice them. Have three choices for each character. Optional: allow students to use smartphones to get answers, making it a race instead of a test of existing knowledge.

Examples to use:

Kung Fu Panda - Po - Jack Black

Cars - Lightning McQueen - Owen Wilson

Brave - Merida - Kelly Macdonald

Finding Nemo - Nemo - Alexander Gould

Cinderella - Cinderella - Ilene Woods

Beauty and the Beast - Beast - Robby Benson

Transition sentence: It's interesting to see who is behind the voices of all of these different characters. Let's look at how the Bible helps us determine if it's God speaking to us.

ACTIVITY 3

Have a few leaders leave the room and set them up an iPhone equipped with the Voice Changer app. Pick leaders that may be a little more shy or low key. Tell students that they have to guess which leader is speaking. Have each leader call the person on stage with the Voice Changer app in effect and say a scripted sentence into the phone. Whoever is leading the large group should answer using speakerphone through his or her mic, so the whole group can hear. Let students guess, and when they get it right, send the leader in. Use some cheesy scripted sentences to add to the fun.

Examples could include:

How do you make a handkerchief dance? Put a little boogie in it.

Can anyone teach me how to Dougie?

What is Gangnam style? Why is there a Gangnam style?

**Use things that your group can identify with and that will make the leader selection stand out as fun.*

Transition sentence: Sometimes it's not easy to know whose voice we're hearing. Let's look at what the Bible says about understanding God's voice and how He speaks to us.

WHAT?

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 10:24-27.

Do you think it makes sense that Jesus would use sheep as a description of people who follow Him? Why or why not?

What does Jesus say about the sheep that belong to Him? Which of these is most important to you?

In John 10:24-27, we see a group of people who wanted Jesus to say that He was God. Jesus told them that He had already done so, and they had not believed. Jesus made it clear that if they really were interested in following Him, then they would understand His voice. It is critical here that we understand that Jesus is the shepherd of every believer. As our Shepherd, Jesus lays out three key points in these verses about how we hear and know He is the One who is talking to us.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 10:26-27 AGAIN.

1. Jesus speaks to those who follow Him.

We see in the beginning of these verses that Jesus speaks to those who follow Him. We can know that if we have a relationship with Jesus, He will speak to us. Whether it is through His Word (1 Timothy 3:16-17) or through the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16), we can be sure that if we are followers of Christ, He will speak to us. It is vital that we trust that He wants to communicate with us, or we will miss His voice every time.

2. We hear God through an intimate relationship.

In John 10:27, Jesus said “I know them.” This is very important. Although Jesus can speak to anyone because He is God and is capable of anything, we see here that Jesus has a personal relationship with those He speaks to. This logically leads to the conclusion that the closer we get to Him, the more we will understand His voice. By spending time with Him in prayer, in the Bible, and even in corporate worship, our familiarity with Him grows and we learn better how to hear His voice.

3. Following God is evidence of hearing God.

In John 10:27, Jesus said that the sheep who know His voice follow Him. Think about it for a minute. If you knew it was God speaking to you, you would probably want to do what He said. One of the main ways we can know if we are hearing the voice of God is to obey God’s Word and move in the direction He is telling us to go. A true follower of Christ is called to obey Him. The relationship between Jesus and His sheep is one of trusting and obeying. Knowing that God will never contradict His Word gives us confidence in discerning His voice. When we trust God’s Word and obey what He says, we see the fruit of His Word and will in our life.

SO WHAT?

Now that we know what the Bible says about how God speaks to us, what do we do with that knowledge? How does it impact our daily lives? Let’s take a closer look at what John 10 means for daily living.

Let’s focus on three things:

1. HEARING GOD

What are the ways Jesus speaks to His sheep? Have you ever done something God led you to do? What happened?

How do you spend time in God’s Word? Share some specifics with the group.

Why is it important that we can trust God’s Word to remain unchanging?

What would be the result of spending more time in God’s Word than you do now? What’s keeping you from doing it?

2. DEEPENING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Jesus said, “I know them,” in verse 27. This speaks of an intimate relationship not just cursory knowledge. He was talking to the group using a parable about sheep and shepherding, a word picture that everyone would have understood clearly at that time. The shepherd’s flock was worth a lot of money, and a shepherd cared for his flock with great urgency and detail. He knew every sheep. Jesus was saying that likewise, He knows everyone who has a relationship with Him.

When has your relationship with God been the strongest? Why?

Do you think your friends would be interested in having Jesus know them? Why or why not?

Would the type of relationship you have with God be worth your friends' time? Why or why not?

3. OBEYING THE WORD OF GOD

It's one thing to hear the voice of God and quite another to obey His voice. When Jesus said, "they follow me," He was referring to them doing what He said. When a shepherd guides sheep, they obey his voice. In the same way, those who have a relationship with Jesus will obey His commands.

How difficult is it to obey the commands of Christ? What is the most difficult one for you to follow?

Why is obedience so important in terms of knowing whether or not we are hearing God's voice?

What happens if we stop obeying God's voice?

NOW WHAT?

Understanding what Jesus tells us about hearing His voice is key in understanding how to be clear it is Him speaking. Since God has spoken and His Word is readily available to us, it is important for us to know His Word. By knowing His Word, we are better able to cut through all of the voices in our heads and be sure it is God's voice we are listening to. Let's discuss a few ways we can apply this to our lives this week.

What are some ways you can get to know God's Word better this week?

What can we do as a group to hold each other accountable to growing in God's Word this week?

Has God's voice been telling you to do something recently? If so, what is the next step you can take to respond to Him?

PRAY

Ask a few students to volunteer to pray for the group. Have each one pray specifically for one of the following:

- That God will help the group commit His Word to their hearts this week.
- That each person will remember we are the sheep and Jesus is the Shepherd.
- For the group to grow in the area of prayer for each other and personally.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up e-mail to your group with some or all of the following information:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **Have you been able to spend more time in the Word this week?**
 - **Have you been able to commit Scripture to memory this week?**
- A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.
- The challenge to memorize Psalm 119:11.

JOHN 10:24-27

OVERVIEW:

The events in John 10:24-42 occurred about two and a half months after those described in John 10:1-21. John put them together because in both messages, Jesus used the imagery of the shepherd and the sheep. The encounter (vv. 22-24). The “Feast of the Dedication” (Hanukkah, “the feast of lights”) takes place in December, near the time of the Christian Christmas celebration. The feast commemorates the rededication of the temple by Judas Maccabeus in 164 B.C., after it had been desecrated by the Romans. This historical fact may bear a relationship to the words of Jesus in John 10:36, for He had been set apart (dedicated) by the Father and sent into the world. The Jewish leaders were celebrating a great event in history yet passing by a great opportunity right in their own temple.

The leaders surrounded Jesus in the temple so that He had to stop and listen to them. They had decided that it was time for a “showdown,” and they did not want Him to evade the issue any longer. “How long are You going to hold us in suspense?” they kept saying to Him. “Tell us plainly—are You the Messiah?”

The explanation (vv. 25-42). Jesus reminded them of what He had already taught them. He emphasized the witness of His words (“I told you”) and His works (see John 5:17ff, and 7:14ff for similar replies).

But our Lord went much deeper in His explanation this time, for He revealed to the Jewish leaders why they did not understand His words or grasp the significance of His works: they were not His sheep. From the human standpoint, we become His sheep by believing; but from the divine standpoint, we believe because we are His sheep. There is a mystery here that we cannot fathom or explain, but we can accept it and rejoice (Rom. 11:33-36). God has His sheep and He knows who they are. They will hear His voice and respond.

LET’S TAKE A DEEPER LOOK AT THE SPECIFIC VERSES:

Verse 24. The Jews gathered around Him. Actually they “closed in (**ekyklōsan**) on Him.” The hostile Jerusalem leaders were determined to pin Him down so they surrounded Him. His enigmatic sayings plagued them, and they wanted Him to declare Himself on their terms. **How long will You keep us in suspense?** they asked. **Keep us in suspense** is literally “hold up our soul.” They insisted, **If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.**

Verses 25-26. Jesus responded that the miracles (lit., “works”; cf. vv. 32,38) He had done are clear evidence that He is from the Father (cf. Isa. 35:3-6; John 3:2; 9:32-33). He is the One the Father sent, but He did not match their expectations. He was no Judas Maccabeus nor would His ministry be like Moses’. Their problem was a lack of spiritual perception and faith. **But you do not believe because you are not My sheep** is a simple statement of fact about their conduct. It also reminds one of the ultimate mystery of God’s election (cf. 6:37).

Verse 27. Jesus’ flock is responsive to His teaching. They listen to His voice (vv. 3-5,16). They have an intimacy with Jesus (**I know them**; cf. vv. 3, 14), they understand His message of salvation, and they follow Him (vv. 4-5). To follow Him means to obey the Father’s will as Jesus did.