

How do I know it's God?

Week 2: Try harder!

How do you know if it's God? That is the question we are going to be trying to answer during this next teaching series.

We have talked about the importance of hearing God's voice and then acting or obeying what he is communicating to you. But how do I know if it's God and not...my past, my desire to be liked, my mental illness, my addiction, that over domineering parent, or just the culture?

The idea is discerning, or being able to tell if it's God communicating something, or if it's another voice. Keep in mind that when we say things like **distinguishing God's voice**, or what God is saying to me, that **doesn't typically mean hearing an audible voice**. God can speak to me through...

- His Word the bible.
- The Holy Spirit connecting with my spirit.
- His body, which is the church, other Christ followers speaking into my life.
- Creation, nature, his obvious design.

That's how God communicates, but how do I "hear" him?

Sometimes it's through words from the Bible or another believer that just sticks with me. In my emotions I feel like this is something important. That could be The Holy Spirit. Or I hear it and it makes sense to me, I believe that I am hearing truth. Or it fits a need that I have in my life, a question I have had, something that is missing, and that question gets answered or a missing spot gets filled. I suddenly realize that what I am doing is wrong, it's hurting me and others, and it just clearly doesn't fit who Jesus is. It can be the motivation that life can be different for me, I can change. Other times, there are circumstances in my life happening and I believe that God might be trying to tell me something.

One of these weeks I'm going to put this in the outline, but if you want three nice categories, it would be these...

- **Heart**...emotions, motivation, passion.
- **Mind**...understanding, truth, answers to questions.
- **Circumstances**...events, life changes, good times or bad times.

But we are also going to debunk some absolute nonsense that you have been thinking, that absolutely isn't God. Last week, I teased one of these things that we think is God, but isn't. **It's time to challenge a time-honored lie that we think is God because we don't understand him.**

I put this one in quotes so that it appears to be the voice of God. In other words, we make **God the speaker** of this nonsense. **"I am good, you are bad, now go try harder."**

This is the **human mindset**...if you picked up a card for our **3 for 30 challenge**, you can see a diagram that describes the human mindset. It also shows what we call the **Jesus mindset**.

There are a lot of problems with this message, particularly the way it portrays God. It's like God is almost **vindictive**. He is that parent who leaves and tells the **4-year-old to have dinner ready** when he returns and have the counter cleaned, the one the kid can't reach. **What kind of parent does that?**

There's this standard that we strain for, but is out of reach. We are consistently falling short, getting up and trying harder, because the previous failure is about effort. "If only I tried harder or hard enough."

What does it do to the person who believes this? First, they live in **guilt and regret**. I feel guilty for constantly falling short. And I regret those times I fell short. It's a hopeless situation. **So instead of thinking about what God wants in our lives, we just give up and listen to the message of our culture.** **If that's you, I want to encourage you to lean in for the next few minutes. Particularly this next scripture, which tells a completely different story than "I'm good, you are bad, now go try harder."**

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ² 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. ³ The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. ⁴ He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit. Romans 8:1-4

Did you hear that? "No condemnation for those who belong to Jesus." Ok, maybe just a little bit of condemnation because I've been bad. **NO!**

We are people of the spirit, not the flesh with its desire to earn something. Trying to earn brings failure and death. That's what that stuff about the law means. This was God saying **when the standard is trying to accomplish a standard which is unreachable**, then that is doomed to failure. We could live, not up to this external standard, **because we are sinful**. But now, because of what Jesus did, **we are given the righteousness of Jesus** not told to try to earn it. **And we are people who have his spirit inside of us.**

So, what about that word **condemnation**? This is a big one because...**Condemnation creates fear of punishment.**

Fear of punishment can have two different effects in a Christian's life.

#1: I must be perfect, legalistic with others and myself.

#2: There's no use, I can't be good enough, so I'll just stop caring and do what feels good to me.

Listen to how different the message John gives. **¹⁷ And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence** because we live like Jesus here in this world.

¹⁸ Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. ¹⁹ We love each other because he loved us first. 1 John 4:17-19

If I am loved, known, and accepted by God, then I do not need to fear punishment. Being loved allows me to grow in His love and experience, the kind of love that chases away my fear of punishment.

It comes down to focus. When I am so focused on Jesus and his goodness and I'm falling in love with him, I don't have time to stare at something that might make me afraid.

Fear of punishment means that I don't really believe that I am accepted and loved. I believe that I don't deserve it and, therefore, can't have it. "God could never love someone like me."

Keep in mind, the punishment for sin has already been given out. Jesus received that punishment, therefore, we don't have to fear it. It's not lurking out there, ready to pounce. The piper isn't still playing and will demand payment. Here's our reality for those who are in Christ, who have repented, believed, and are following Jesus. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Somebody needed to hear that today. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. ¹⁷ And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. Romans 8:15-17

The Jesus mindset...you don't need to get close to God. Jesus has brought you close to God when you put your trust in Him.

You are adopted, this is your new reality...this will be confirmed by his spirit meeting ours...then we can respond to him as a loving child to a loving father...this affirms this new reality...now that we respond to him as a loving father, we can accept that we are heirs to his kingdom.

Did you see that there are **breadcrumbs to follow?**

- He adopts or chooses you.
- **His spirit connects** with your spirit to **confirm** that you have been chosen.
- **Then you can respond to him as a loving father, not someone who sets an impossible standard and then tells us to try harder.**
- **Relating to God this way affirms this new reality that I am adopted.**
- **Then we can accept our new status as heirs to a father, king.**

This relationship of loving father to accepted child cannot happen if we are afraid of being punished because...Fear destroys intimacy.

Fear of something or someone means **I keep a safe distance** between me and what I'm afraid of.

Would you rather be loved or feared? That's easy for God, he'd rather be loved. **If we are afraid of punishment, we cannot experience his love.**

This is not what the Bible says, "**the fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom.**" He is wholly other. It's looking at God and saying, He could crush me, but he doesn't. **How can he be so good to someone like me?**

³⁸ And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39

Nothing can, but **we can start living like those things can separate us from God.** We can allow them to destroy the love relationship we were intended to have with God.

If we respond to him because we are still fearful of his punishment, then we cannot have that father and child relationship.

Some of you had a parent you were afraid of. You can't get close to them.

The opposite of separate is "abide" or remain. That means we need to read John 15 again.

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. ³ You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in

you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

⁵ "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who **remain** in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. **For apart from me you can do nothing.** ⁶ Anyone who does not **remain** in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. ⁷ **But if you remain in me and my words remain in you,** you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! ⁸ When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father. John 15:1-8

My effort is now about remaining connected to Jesus, not trying to get his attention, appease him, or to achieve some unreachable standard. That means now I can **Replace trying harder with trusting more.**

Can there be a healthy relationship when there is no trust? The answer is no.

Grace is not anti-effort, it's anti-earning. Now the effort is directed at remaining connected to Jesus. **It is lingering in his presence. It is working to rest.**

Then what comes of your effort is only because of God. Not your own ingenuity, strength, or power. It is from God. It could only have been done by God.

We read this one last week, but **repetition is the key to success. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;** ⁶ **in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.** Proverbs 3:5-6

What might that look like for you to trust more? It begins with trusting in what Jesus did for you.

Trying harder is always about making up for something. Trusting demands effort but leaves the outcome to the one we trust.

Trust is the foundation for what God is saying to us...What we do hear is loving correction.

You cannot take corrections from someone you don't trust! That's because you really do think you know better.

In the church, we have used the word conviction. That is in the realm of our feelings, when we know we are wrong in our behavior or attitude and it's the holy spirit telling us this. **But this is not condemnation.** It's not about avoiding punishment, it's about trust.

Yes, conviction can be very uncomfortable, but it pushes us to trust, not to despair over an unreachable standard.

"Just trust me son/daughter, you will be ok without..."

- that sinful relationship with that person you aren't married to.
- That time you need to take away from what you want, to remain connected to me in reading my word and praying to me.
- That time that you take away from family fun, to get the family into fellowship with other Christ followers.
- That thing you are addicted to, so you can take that first step to get free.
- The need to take credit or blame for everything.

The only question is, will you respond to conviction and allow the spirit to correct what is killing you spiritually?

How do I know that it's God? It won't be "I am good, you are bad, now go try harder. It will be "trust me, I love you, and I want to correct in you what isn't like my son."

Steps of Obedience

1. **Continue the 3 for 30 Challenge.**

This is about understanding your true identity so that you don't end up pretending your whole life. You don't have to let your **environment decide** who you are supposed to be and how you view yourself.

Here's what it looks like...[pic of 3 for 30 card](#)

1. **One Thing today.** Do one thing. Literally take the **first step**. Don't worry about **the rest of the journey**. Do you trust the one leading you?

The one thing I've had to do to get my mind right, is going back to my **life cards**.