CBN.com - What am I going to do with the rest of my life? Where should I go to school? Should I take this job, or is there something better on the horizon? Who should I marry?

Life is a never-ending series of choices. Can we know whether we are making the right decisions? Should we consult our horoscope? Maybe we should call the psychic hot-line? Do we go with what the experts are saying or rely on our gut-feeling?

Should we look to the stars -- or should we seek the Maker of the stars?

I recently received an e-mail in response to my article, The Harness of the Holy Spirit in which a CBN.com reader makes these thought-provoking statements:

"Your article is typical of many books I have read. Everyone talks about doing what the Holy Spirit says, but you do not state how you 'know' it is the voice of GOD. I have yet to read any book or article that can lay that out. It is easy to say The LORD told me to leave this or do that, and I was blessed down the road because of it. Anyone who can present a way one can actually know that the voice they are hearing is from GOD, not man or Satan, would change the world. That's probably why the world hasn't changed."

Well I have good news for my friend, and for you -- God wants to speak to us, and yes, you can 'know' that you hear His voice.

God wants to fellowship and communicate with us. That's two-way communication. Why? Because you can't really have a relationship unless there is true dialogue. How do we get to know a person? By communicating with them. By talking and listening.

It's the same with our relationship with God. He talks, we listen. We talk, He listens.

God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to take our place and to die for us. He did this so that we could once again have fellowship with Him. In the book of Hebrews we see that we can have access to God's very presence, "...having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way..." (Hebrews 10:19-20a).

He also wants us to be fulfilled, blessed and successful in the plan that He has established for our lives -- so that we can be a reflection of His love and blessing in the Earth. In Jeremiah 29:11 the Lord makes clear His intentions for you and I, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."
We see in Genesis 3:8a, "...they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day..."
This is how God wants to relate to us today as well. It is God's desire to walk with and to communicate with His children.

He wants to talk to us. And He wants us to listen and talk to Him, too.

There is more good news -- we can hear His voice. The Bible, God's love letter to mankind, makes it clear that we were created to have two-way communication with Him. Jesus tells us in John 10:27, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."

While in college I interned in video production at a local public television station. One day the producer and I traveled to a video shoot with a young woman who worked in the donor relations department. Along the way she told us that, at the urging of her father, she had recently purchased a flat with two apartments. Still uncomfortable with the big step she had just taken she thought out loud, "How do you know if you are making the right decisions in life?"

That's the question of the ages, isn't it?

But as a child of God we don't have to walk blind. We can have confidence that we will hear His voice. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Conversely, this scripture implies that if we are God's children, if we are born-again, we will be led by His Spirit.

We have further assurance of this promise in Psalm 37:23 and 24, "The steps of a good (righteous, born-again) person are ordered by the Lord, And He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the Lord upholds him with His hand." God will order our steps, and even when we blow it, if we are truly trying to do His will, He will lift us up and give us a second chance.

The most difficult part of hearing God is the fact that it takes time to learn to discern God's voice -- and it takes a humble heart. Jeremiah 29:12-13 says, "Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."

We can't make demands on Almighty God. We can't shake our fist at the sky and say, 'all right God, let me hear you.' But we can ask, seek, and knock, and the Bible promises that God will open the door. God will reveal Himself to those who humbly seek Him.

The writer of Proverbs describes the way that our thoughts and intentions line up with God's will when we submit ourselves fully to the Lord. "Roll your works upon the Lord [commit and trust them wholly to Him; He will cause your thoughts to become agreeable to His will, and] so shall your plans be established and succeed" (Proverbs 16:3 Amplified Bible).

The Lord manifests Himself to us and through us as we humbly seek Him. The familiar passage in Proverbs 3 makes it even more plain. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).
My friend pointed out in his e-mail to me that there are three different voices that we can hear -- and he is absolutely correct. Now that we know we can hear God's voice, we need to be alerted to the fact that there are other voices whispering into our ears as well. In fact, there are three voices that we can hear -- the voice of God, the voice of our own fleshly desires, and the voice of the Devil. But Jesus tells us in John 10:4b and 5, "...and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

The writer of Hebrews tells us that we can train our ear to recognize the voice of God above all the noise. "But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). It is by practicing, by reason of use, that we are able to discern whether what we hear is of God, our flesh, or the Devil.

Isaiah 30:21 says, "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," Whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left."

So God will speak, and you can hear His voice, but you must be careful -- especially when you are a young Christian -- that you objectively confirm that you are following the Holy Spirit and not another voice. Our own flesh can scream pretty loud (especially when we are under pressure, or we want something very badly). And the Devil is the father of lies -- he is the great deceiver.

So how can we know whether we're hearing the voice of God? The Bible gives us seven basic keys or filters through which every possible leading should be judged. We are to carefully examine the thoughts and intentions of our hearts -- and the words of godly people who may have influence on us by their words and actions -- through the use of these seven keys:

- **Scripture**: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

- **The Holy Spirit speaking to our heart**: "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow citizen, and everyone his brother, saying, 'know the Lord,' for all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them" (Hebrews 8:10-11).

- **The Prophetic (word of knowledge, word of wisdom, personal prophecy)**: "Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good" (I Thessalonians 5:19-21).

- **Godly counsel**: "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).

- **Confirmation**: "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed" (Matthew 18:16).
• **The peace of God**: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Colossians 3:15).

• **Circumstances/Timing**: "After these things he (Paul) left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working; for by trade they were tent-makers" (Acts 18:1-3 -- this relationship between Paul, Aquila and Priscilla -- which happened as a result of circumstances -- became one of the most important strategic partnerships in the book of Acts).

Many times the Lord will confirm His direction to us through three, four or more of these keys -- especially when we are in the process of making an important, life-changing decision.

The bottom line, as Pat Robertson has said for years, is that big decisions take big prayer. In other words, as we humble ourselves before the Lord, seek His guidance in our lives, the Good Shepherd will be faithful to lead us, "...in paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (Psalm 23:3).

In the coming weeks we'll look more closely at these seven keys that God has given to help us discern whether what we are sensing is of God, our flesh or the Devil. Because God loves us and wants us to relate to Him, He has given us these clear principles in the Bible to guide us.

The New Testament talks of the early disciples -- people like Paul, Aquila and Priscilla -- as people who heard the voice of God. My friend who wrote the e-mail will be happy to know that this was the report made of them:

"These who have turned the world upside down have come here too" (Acts 17:6b).

Yes, my friend, you can hear and know the voice of God. And because of this the world is changing -- more than perhaps you've heard.