

# *How Do We Know for Sure?*

by

Rocky Fleming

*And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left. Isaiah 30:20-21 (ESV)*

As I write this devotional, I will share that I have two very close family members who are in the midst of contemplating a change of careers, while they ask if God is leading them, or if it is some other influence that is coming at them. I also have some very close friends who are asking the same question about a career change in their life, as they debate moving into full-time ministry or staying where they are. I was also involved with the same process with our staff that came on board with Influencers a while ago, after they wrestled with their decision to step out in faith and join this ministry as vocational staff. So I've seen the struggle with the decision and those who make a change and those who do not. Oh yes, I have experienced personally the agony of that process and the wrestling that goes with it. What is in common with all of us is our question: *"How do you know when it is God leading you, or if the influence is coming elsewhere."* If you are going through this wrestling match right now, maybe our exploration of the question and how we answer it can help you know if God is leading you to take a step that you *think* He might be leading you to take, or maybe you should wait and see what else may be happening? I would appreciate your feedback if you feel that this devotional was for you.

To begin with, I have made enough mistakes to fill a boxcar and I hate every one I've made. Kind of strong words, huh? The truth is, a mistake generally has consequences, and the older I've gotten the more I hate those consequences. I hate them, for the consequences are sometimes painful, most of the time inconvenient, and all the time it requires some sort of recovery, or our mistake remains with us. It takes time and effort to recover and simply get back to ground zero, if we can do that at all. So it is a smart thing to not take a step in any direction unless we can be sure that God is leading us. Now God's path will also have some pain and inconvenience on it as all life paths do. So don't expect it to be an "easy street." For those of you who think there is any ideal place or situation in life that has no challenges and it will be an easy road, I will say that you will never find in this life what you are looking for. Therefore the question for God's child is not if we will have pain or challenges on a life path, for we will have them no matter where we find our self. Rather the question is if our pain and challenges are meaningful and purposeful and leads to something good. If those challenges are worth what is produced or what we are prepared for, then we have found our self in a

life that we have been led to by God. You see the life God leads His child toward is anointed with His presence and His plan design. Even though the painful process of being prepared for a great work that He has in store for us is extremely challenging, we will one day look in our review mirror and see that those challenges were necessary for the new work He brought us to. God's plan is far greater than we can see, or even appreciate when in a trial. His plan for our life fits into a delicate, complex puzzle that once completed begins to make sense as it unfolds. Rarely does His plan make sense in the present time. Rather, we see it more clearly in hindsight as we look back at the path He has taken us down. That is why personal abandonment and absolute trust in God and His sovereign plan is essential during our preparation time, and is a critical component in knowing that we are in a right place with God. But how can we know if it is God who has us on the present path we are standing on, and the one we perceive that He is telling us to now go to? That is the question. We have to answer that question by looking at the process God uses to direct us.

In the passage above, we see two critical *Divine Directives* that God uses to steer us in the right direction. Let's begin with the second *directive*, which is the one we all want to enjoy. It is to hear words behind us telling us which path to take. Man wouldn't that be great? To have God standing behind us and His voice be so clear to us that we can hear Him and without a doubt know that it is Him talking to us, would be an amazing comfort to us. Everyone would sign up for that opportunity, right? However, to hear Him like this we must develop *spiritual hearing* and learn to recognize His voice or we could be misled by other influences. Therefore, before we can hear His voice, we have to learn to distinguish it from the others. This is where the *first Divine directive* makes sense, even though it is a difficult process. We must understand that God uses a developmental process in our life to train and motivate us to distinguish His voice from all the other influences. This is where a big challenge comes to God's child, but what it produces in our life is worth it. The scripture points out the challenge above. It points out that God gives us the *bread of adversity and the water of affliction* to learn how to listen to our *Teacher* and distinguish His voice.

***“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” John 10:27 (ESV)***

***The bread of adversity and the water of affliction:*** The first *Divine directive* God takes us through is painful because it hurts to have our grip forced open, and we don't want to give up something we want to possess. It could be a false sense of security by what mankind and this world can do for us, as was the case with the Israelites who Isaiah was writing to. It could be an obsession with something, anything, and it becomes before our relationship with God. Any way one would look at it, it is something that God abhors if it comes before Him. What it points to is an idol that has moved into our life, and our loving God then begins a work to reveal it and help us understand that it must go for us to hear His voice. As an example would be that some of you who are going through some painful challenges right now. Look more closely, beyond the threat, and what may be going on in your life that you may not realize? Is the thing that is causing you pain something of a threat to take away something you delight in or trust in more than God? Is it the fear of losing this security, or a relationship, or your reputation the thing that is causing you grief? Does it *pain you* that it is being threatened? Do you put more trust in this *way and thing* more than your trust in God's ways and things? If so, you are seeing an idol in your life and the pain you are feeling will lessen when you relax your grip on it and allow God to take it away from you. This is where we see that the painful challenge to stay with and overcome the destruction of an idol in our life is worth what it will produce later, for in this process He is preparing our ears to hear Him. So my question to you is if you are equally

interested in the preparation process to hear God, as you are with the process of hearing Him, for we cannot have the ears to hear God in the way mentioned above without having our hearing trained for it. There is just too much clutter and misdirection in this world to overcome, and we cannot overcome it without this training.

So let's answer the question. How do we know if it is God's voice directing us? Here's my answer: When we allow God to develop our hearing through the process mentioned and cease fighting against Him, and when we instead press close to Him through our personal abandonment and absolute trust in Him, we can know that we are on the right path with Him. This is the start of hearing Him. When we make it our purpose to abide in Christ and let nothing come before this intimacy with Him, we put our self in His presence and in the most nurturing place we can be with God. He is then able to break through all barriers to make His voice clear to us. It is in this proximity that we learn to distinguish our *Teacher's voice* from all the others.

Hearing our **Teacher's** voice then becomes our *Shepherd's voice*, as we begin to live in a nurturing fellowship with our *Good Shepherd*, and within His affection. It is from this position with Him, and in the wisdom of His written word that He teaches us everything we need for life, and this is how ***we can know for sure that it is His voice we are hearing.*** Let Him take you to this place, and you will understand what I mean.