

You may notice that this week's Sermon Companion is shorter than usual. We purposely gave you fewer questions because we want all of our life groups to have plenty of time to practice listening prayer at the end of their discussion. Please keep this in mind as you are preparing for group this week!

BIG IDEA

Gullibility destroys credibility and discredits God.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO KNOW?

Share about a time when have you lacked wisdom or taken advantage of. Everyone has been taken advantage of or has made a foolish decision. Encourage everyone to share as this will play a large role in this week's discussion.

Read Joshua 9:1-18. How does this story illustrate this week's big idea? Support your answer.

What about the Gibeonites' story was convincing? What would have enticed you about their proposal?

Many times we can read the Bible and think that we would have acted differently. Help the group to put themselves in the place of the Israelites as you consider this question and the next one.

How did the gullibility of the Israelites discredit God?

The Israelites were supposed to inhabit the entire land of Canaan as fulfillment of God's promise to them. Making this covenant with the Gibeonites without consulting God compromised their position, because they were now under oath before God to protect the Gibeonites.

WHAT IS MY INITIAL REACTION?

How can you relate to Joshua and the Israelites?

Encourage your group to open up about how their pride or selfish desires got in the way of a decision and resulted in discrediting God.

Consider the following quote:

"It's easier to fool people than to convince them that they have been fooled."

— Mark Twain

How willing are you to admit that you have played the fool?



Read 1 John 4:1-2. What “Christian” superstitions have you bought into in the past? How did this affect the way you and others thought of God?

Most everyone has believed something about God that they later discovered to be untrue. These beliefs can affect how we adjust to the truth because our personal bias plays such a strong role in what we believe.

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?

Reread Joshua 9:14. Identify a decision that you are about to make. Have you merely “sampled the provisions” or have you inquired of the Lord?

Spend some time with your group in listening prayer in order to seek wisdom about this decision. What words of wisdom have you received from God?

As you lead your group in a time of listening prayer. Taking time to sit quietly in order to hear from God may be challenging or uncomfortable for some of your group members. That’s okay. Encourage them to listen for a word, a verse or even an image. After a moment or two, open up the room for dialogue. Invite your group members to share what they received and ask for potential input from others in the group.

In addition, share the following encouragement from Bill Hybels about listening for God’s voice in prayer.

Here is a list of five filters that can help you test the promptings you receive. If a prompting fails to make it through one of these five, you should question whether it is really from God. At the very least, you should move slowly to confirm its validity. At times a prompting makes it through all of the filters with no problem. In this case, no matter how confusing, challenging or unsettling it may be, you should attempt to obey it.

Filter #1: Is the Prompting Truly from God?

The first filter is to simply ask God, *“Is this message from you?”* Does this message square with who you know God to be? Is it consistent with His character? Is it aligned with His attributes? Is this You trying to convey something to me, or are there other voices getting into my head? Before taking a single step to obey the prompting you’ve received, be sure you get the all-clear that the voice you have heard could be from God.

Filter #2: Is it Scriptural?

Next, run the prompting through the Scripture filter. Scripture is replete with examples





of how God would behave in any given life situation, and the Example's name is Jesus Christ. Whenever you sense a prompting from God, ask if you could imagine Jesus taking whatever action you're considering taking. If you can't, your wires may be crossed. Read Galatians 5:16- 26. Check every prompting you receive against the thematic teaching of Scripture. Messages that contradict Scripture are not from God.

Filter #3: Is it Wise?

The third filter you should use is the *general-wisdom test*. Jesus was fond of telling His followers to be wise at all times. The entire Book of Proverbs is devoted to dissecting wisdom and attributes. Scripture is relentless in exhorting us to be wise in all our dealings, to be wise in all our ways. Be sure not to sidestep what is wise in favor of acting quickly on promptings. If God is indeed in the plan, it will likely not involve blatantly unwise action. God's direction rarely violates the wisdom test.

Filter #4: Is it in Tune with Your Own Character?

This may be called the *wiring test*. I would caution you against running headlong into a field that is totally foreign to your wiring patterns, education, expertise and your experience in life thus far. It's not that God can't endorse a dramatic 180-degree turn. It's just that typically when He does so, it gets affirmed in a variety of different ways.

Filter #5: What Do the People You Trust Most Think About It?

There is a fifth filter based on Proverbs 11:14. "*Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.*" This is called the *godly counsel test*. The idea here is that whenever you sense that God is speaking to you, find two or three veteran Christ-followers – preferably people you know well and who are further down the spiritual path than you are – and take some time to describe the situation to them in detail. Humbly ask them, "Do you think God really did speak to me? Is this the voice of God I'm hearing, or in your estimation did I get my wires crossed?" Listen openly and intently to the answers you receive, because they might just save you from making an unwise decision. Subject every prompting to the godly counsel test. It will save you from heartache and just might affirm God's best will for your life.

