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## Discerning the Spirits

*1 John 4:1-6*

At the end of a seminar on angels, a woman came up to me and said that she had a wonderful angel story to tell me. It seems that this woman's best friend had a daughter who became seriously ill. The doctors were baffled about how to diagnose and treat her illness. One day as the little girl's mother was praying for God's help, she heard a weak scratching at her front door. She opened the door to find a small tabby kitten. The first thing she noticed, I was told, "was a white halo of fur around the kitten's ears." The kitten ran to the sick girl's room and jumped on the bed. The little girl was delighted and held the kitten close. Within two days the girl's symptoms had disappeared, and she was out of bed. On the third day, when the kitten was let outside in the morning, it never returned. The mother was convinced that the kitten was an angel who came to bring healing to her daughter.

As heart-warming as that story is, I have never repeated it as an account of a genuine angelic appearance. I haven't used it in that way for one simple reason. The story does not harmonize with what I read in the Bible about angels. In Scripture angels never appear to human beings as animals.

GROUP DISCUSSION. On a scale of one to ten, with one referring to a complete skeptic and ten referring to someone who completely accepts what other people say, where would you rank yourself when it comes to believing the accounts people tell of extraordinary spiritual experiences? Why?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. What are some of the results of being too closed-minded to new spiritual experiences or new insights?

What are the results of openly embracing any new teaching or experience that comes along?

Evaluating the experiences of other people is difficult. We feel so judgmental. This study will help you see the vital importance of doing just that, however. To fully accept whatever you are told may be dangerous to your spiritual health! *Read 1 John 4:1-6.*

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**1.** How would you characterize the Christians to whom John writes—too narrow-minded or too open-minded? Support your answer from these verses.

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**2.** We are told to “test the spirits” because there are many false prophets (v. 1). What would be some examples of false prophets today?

**3.** What “test” does John put forth to use in determining whether a particular teaching is from God or not (vv. 2-3)?

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**4.** John lists some other methods of recognizing falsehood in verses 4-6. Explain them in your own words.

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**5.** What are some other practical tests that you can use to determine if a teaching or a person’s experience is from God?

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**6.** What encouragement to help us face false prophets does John give in verses 4-6?

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**7.** Many Christians will justify a belief or an action by saying, “God told me,” or “I prayed about it.” In the light of these verses, is it sinful or judgmental to evaluate another Christian’s experience by the standard of God’s Word? Explain.

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**8.** How should you respond to someone if his or her belief or experience contradicts the clear teaching of the Bible?

9. How should you respond if the person's belief or experience doesn't contradict Scripture but is different from your belief or experience?

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10. We've come to the end of our study on these fascinating beings called angels. In what specific ways has this study changed your spiritual life?

*Ask God to give you the discernment to be able to separate truth and error.*

**Now or Later**

Read 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 and Galatians 1:8. In what ways might angels be involved in leading people away from the truth about Christ?

Imagine that your friend came to you and told you that he or she had received a message from an angel. What steps would you take to help your friend evaluate that angelic encounter?