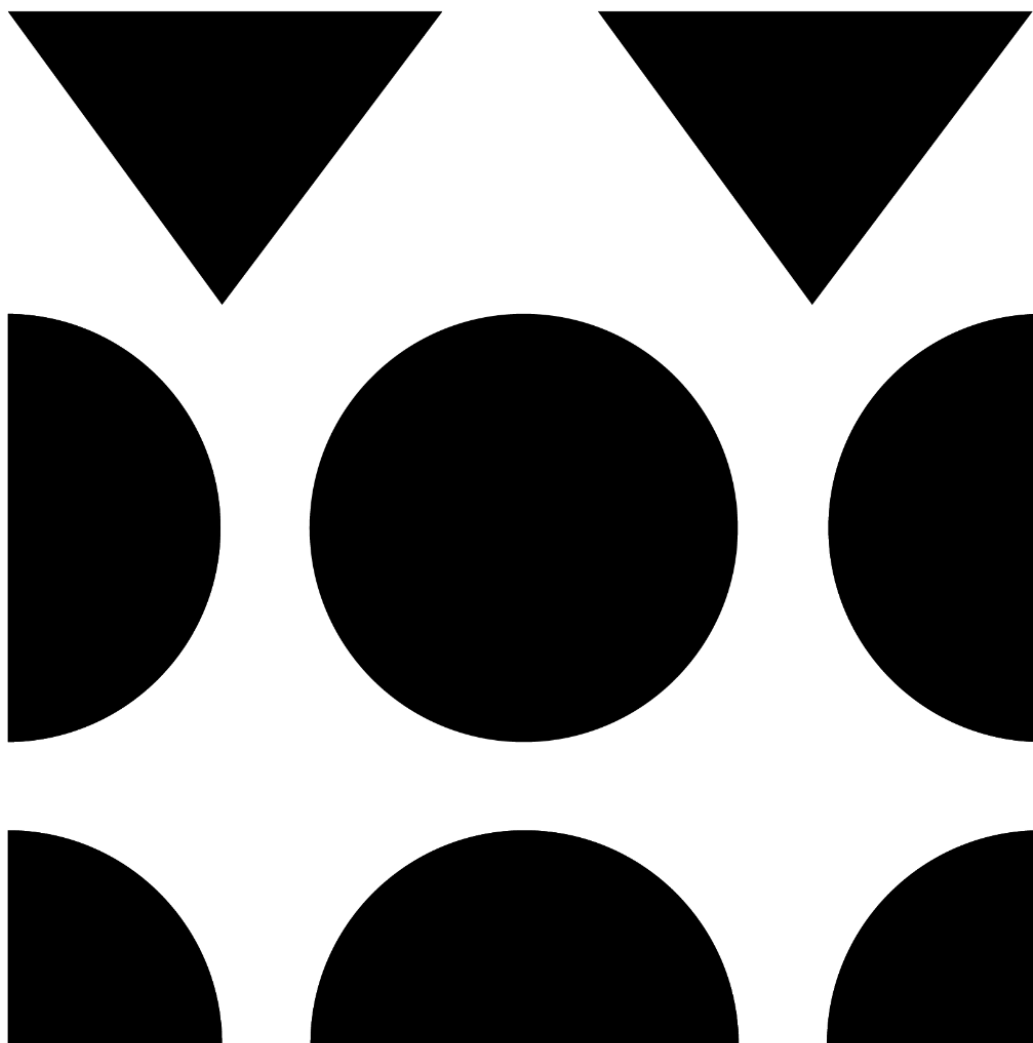


HEARING GOD

MOD-03

Participant's Name:



GOAL To grow in intimacy with God by intentionally engaging the practice of hearing God for ourselves and for others

KEY PASSAGES My sheep listen to my voice, I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. (Romans 8:14)



Week 1



Practice Introduction

"The Bible is more than a theological treatise. It is a guide to dynamic encounters with a God who works wonders. The Bible was given that we might hear God's voice and respond to that voice with life-changing faith."

JACK DEERE, HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD

One of the greatest privileges we have as followers of Jesus is to hear the voice of God. The God of the Bible is a God who speaks! His people enjoy a real, intimate, and *conversational* relationship with Him. Hearing God is not some other-wordly or foreign experience; it is a completely natural part of the Christian life. And pursuing the voice of God is one of the most important jobs we have as followers of Jesus.

Many Christians already hear God much more than they give credit for. They only "count" hearing an audible voice, or experiencing a miraculous confirmation for a big life decision. But because these kinds of experiences are rare, they feel discouraged and think "God doesn't speak to me". All the while God *is* speaking to them. He is stirring their hearts to passionately worship Him on Sunday mornings. He is opening their hearts to understand and believe His Word as it is preached and as they read it for themselves. He is prompting them by the Holy Spirit to honor Him in the way they live. Jesus said,

My sheep listen to My voice, I know them, and they follow Me.

John 10:27

Hearing God is not reserved for the "super-spiritual" – it is for *sheep*. It is for the normal, everyday Christian who doesn't have it all together. We may get it wrong again and again (much like the disciples did in the gospels), but like sheep we belong to our shepherd. We belong to Jesus. So we listen to His voice and we go where He leads.

Our goal in this module is to pursue hearing God's voice. We live in a noisy world full of the voices of man. We want to quiet those voices, and listen for the one voice that really matters. When we talk about hearing God, the challenge we face is not whether God is speaking, but whether we are listening and obeying the things that He is saying.

It is true that many Christians have abused the topic of hearing God's voice, which leads to experiences of pain and confusion. We have to be clear from the outset that the voice of God is the

voice of His Son – Jesus Christ – the Word of God. Jesus is God’s supreme revelation to us (Hebrews 1:1-2). As Pete Greig puts it,

“All the other ways in which God communicates ... come through Jesus and point back to Him too.”

PETE GREIG, HOW TO HEAR GOD

Hearing God is a Christ centered, and Christ glorifying endeavor. Nothing God says will ever contradict, override, or side-step His revelation in the Bible, and the point of the whole Bible is to direct our hearts to hope in Jesus Christ (Romans 15:4).

An “equation” for hearing God

In order to pursue hearing the voice of God, it is helpful to understand four key aspects of this practice that are shown in the equation below:

Hearing God = Faith + Intimacy + Availability + Practice

Let’s take these one at a time.

// Faith

Hearing God requires faith! We must believe that God *really* exists, and that he *rewards* those who come to Him (Hebrews 11:6). It takes faith to listen and expect God to speak to your heart. Often people think of faith as binary – either you have it or you don’t. But faith is more like a muscle that needs exercise in order to grow strong. The best way to grow our faith is not trying to “muster it up”, but rather to turn our attention and affection to the object of our faith. That means we need to read the Bible. We need to actually know who our God is. As Paul says, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:17).

// Intimacy

Hearing God flows from intimacy with God. God doesn’t merely speak to us for direction; He also speaks for *intimacy*. Paul says that the Holy Spirit continually speaks to our hearts the truth that we are God’s children (Romans 8:16). God promises to draw near to us as we draw near to him. God’s voice calms us, reassures us, and encourages us. He reminds us of our identity. He builds our faith and leads us to love others.

// Availability

Hearing God requires that we make ourselves available to listen to Him. This means setting aside intentional time to seek Him each day, and also *inviting God into the daily rhythm of our lives*. He is always speaking! He wants to encourage us and to use us – even in the mundane moments of

life. We need to be interruptible. Many of the good works God has for us begin with a thought, an impression, or an idea from Him that leads us to bless the people around us (at work, home, school, the grocery store, etc...).

// Practice

Just like any relationship, communicating with God takes practice. The key with practice is to *keep going*. If we expect to be pros right away, we will quickly get discouraged and give up. The goal is not a one-off experience, but a *lifestyle of hearing God*. It is worth the practice and effort it takes. A helpful tool is to write down in a journal what you feel God has spoken (if you're unsure it's from God or not, just write it down anyway). As we practice, we will learn not only to hear God's voice for ourselves, but also for others. Over time you can go back and review what God has spoken to you, and often we can see He was speaking exactly what we needed to hear during that time! The journal becomes a record of our practicing, and we begin to grow in confidence that God really is speaking to us!

Self Assessment

Reflect on your own experience of hearing God and answer the questions below on a scale from 0 to 5.

0	never true
1	rarely true
2	occasionally true
3	sometimes true
4	mostly true
5	always true

Reading Scripture leads me to experience intimacy with God as my Father. _____

God regularly speaks to me in a way that reminds me of who I am in Him. _____

God regularly speaks to me in a way that causes me to alter the normal direction of my day/week. _____

God regularly speaks to me on behalf of others. _____

I am confident in discerning God's voice instead of listening to my own thoughts and the lies of the enemy. _____

I feel confident to help someone learn to hear God's voice. _____

Practices for Week 1

Listening Practice:

Take 5-10 minutes at least 3 days this week, to pursue hearing God's voice, and then write down what you feel God is speaking to you. Here's how:

- 1) Begin by listening to a worship song - invite God's presence into your heart and set your attention on Him.
- 2) Ask God to speak to your heart - Lay specific areas of your life before him that you want Him to speak into. If there is nothing specific, just posture yourself to hear His voice.
- 3) Spend at least 5 full minutes in silence listening - don't worry about trying to keep your mind "blank". If your mind wanders, just bring it back to focus on Him and let faith build in your heart.
- 4) Write down what you feel God is speaking to you and what comes into your heart during that time. If you're not sure it's God, just write it down anyway.

Week 2



Hearing God in the Bible

"Have you ever noticed while reading the Bible that certain verses will sometimes stick out? It is almost as though something you have read before jumps off the page and takes on a new dimension. This happens all the time, but most of us brush past the sensation because we have to finish our reading for the day, or we only have a few minutes left before we have to move on to the next thing. We do not realize that this is actually the Holy Spirit communicating to us. He is saying, 'Stop reading; I want to talk to you. Slow down. There is something for you to see here.'"

COREY RUSSELL, *ANCIENT PATHS: REDISCOVERING DELIGHT IN THE WORD OF GOD*

God actively speaks through His Word. The Bible is not just the primary way that God chooses to speak to us, it is also a way that we can confidently discern and filter all the other voices that are clamoring for our attention. When we read the Bible, we are not just aiming to learn information, we want to encounter God! And so often when God begins to speak to our hearts through His word, we are off to the next thing. In order to engage with hearing God in His Word, we need a practice that will help facilitate meaningful encounters with God as we read Scripture.

It is important to note that there are multiple ways to read God's Word, and we need all of them as we grow in maturity as followers of Jesus. Probably the most common way to read the Bible is *devotional* Bible reading. The emphasis of devotional Bible reading is on our personal walk with Jesus, and aligning our hearts and lives with what He teaches us in His Word. (Note – a devotional Bible reading guide using the R.E.A.D. acronym can be found in the supplemental materials at the end of this document). Another way to read Scripture is *Bible study*. The emphasis of *Bible study* is taking the time and effort to dive deep into the meaning of Scripture in its historical and literary context. A third way to read Scripture is what we are calling Spirit-empowered Bible reading. The emphasis of Spirit-empowered Bible reading is an *unhurried expectation* of hearing the voice of God in the Bible. These three methods are not mutually exclusive, but compliment each other as we grow in maturity. Our goal this week is to learn the practice of Spirit-empowered Bible reading.

Below we've outlined 4 steps for this practice. The goal is to encounter God (or rather be encountered by God) as we read. The 4 steps of Spirit-empowered Scripture reading are as follows:

// Read

Prepare to enter this devotional time with a posture of prayerful expectancy. Find a quiet place, sit comfortably, alert, and relaxed. Set aside at least 15 minutes of undistracted time.

Try, if you can, to put away your thoughts about the day and prepare your heart to listen. Start with a simple prayer, "Lord, thank you for your loving presence. Prepare my heart and mind to receive your word."

Read the passage aloud if possible. Listen for a word or phrase that sticks out to you. Read the passage again. If one word or phrase stood out the first time, see if it does the second time.

Begin to repeat this word or phrase to yourself and let it resonate with you. If nothing sticks out, that is okay; just read again. Imagine someone taking a highlighter and pointing out one word or phrase. Remember, this is not a performance-driven exercise. Focus on spending time with God in His word.

// Reflect

Reread the passage. Meditate on your word or phrase and ask God how this word speaks to your life. Now take some time to mull over the words in your mind and imagination. Watch for words, phrases, sentences, or ideas that grab your attention. Reflect and see what makes these things significant to you. Notice how they connect with your life and experiences. This could be a realization, feeling, sensory perception, image, thought, etc. Let your imagination be engaged, as well as your heart and mind.

As these images, thoughts, and feelings come to you, take time to think about them. When you feel like praying, move to the next step.

// Respond

Pray. Thank God for the gift of speaking to you through His Word. In your prayer, lean into the things that stood out to you, and talk to God about them. Share what was significant to you from the reflection. Share your questions, concerns, worries, and joys with Him.

Then allow your heart and your thoughtful reflection to lead you into a response. Pray what you most desire to say to God. Praise Him for His Glory. Submit to Him in new ways. Commit to take action. Continue to listen.

Journal and write down thoughts that come to mind, and what you believe God is speaking to you. It could be an action to take, a truth to discover about God, a way of life to change, someone to forgive, or something to celebrate. As you sense God bringing the time to a close, move to the final step.

// Rest

As your worded prayer comes to an end, take time to simply be with God in stillness. Celebrate hearing from God and soak in the goodness of God's grace. Enjoy the silence then reflect on the experience. Thank God for the chance to encounter Him and His living Word and for the encouragement to learn more about Jesus. Ask God to empower you for action. Spend another moment in silence before ending your time.

Practices for Week 2

Spirit-empowered Scripture Reading

The week, take some unhurried time to practice Spirit-empowered Scripture reading (this is also known as lectio divina) with the following passages of Scripture:

- Psalm 84
- John 4:1-26
- Ephesians 1:1-14
- Psalm 16

Week 3



Hearing God for One Another

God speaks to us for other people. When we engage in the practice of hearing God, we realize He speaks to us about much more than our personal walk with Him. He wants to use us in the lives of our brothers and sisters. He wants to build them up, and give them courage to step into the good works He has prepared for them. It is a great privilege to be used by God, and it is a great gift to bring comfort and encouragement from God to His people.

The starting point for engaging with the practice of hearing God for one another is *love*. Paul says that if we don't have love we accomplish nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3). But if we love one another – if we have meaningful relationships with each other – the doorway will be opened for God to use us in each other's lives. When we hear God for each other, we align our hearts with God's heart – His heart of *love* for that person. And the words He speaks will always be grounded and saturated by that love – a love we can't earn, but that was purchased for us on the cross.

Therefore, Paul declares the purpose of hearing God for each other is “strengthening, encouraging, and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3). It is *not* for calling out people for their sin, or to rebuke or condemn them. It is a spiritual gift from God to bring the strengthening that our brothers and sisters desperately need. There is something so sweet and powerful about hearing God speak to you through someone else. It breathes life into your faith, and helps you believe things you've struggled to believe for yourself.

This week, we will take intentional time to hear God for one another. Our desire is that we grow in expectation for God to speak when we meet together. As we step into this practice, we trust God will show up in powerful ways and strengthen us as we follow Him.

Practice for Week 3

Hearing God for One Another

This week, take 5-10 minutes each day to pray for your assigned person from the life group.

Here is a simple guide to help:

- Begin by thanking God for this person. Celebrate what God has done in their life. Praise God for bringing them to your group, and for friendship with them.
- Ask God to speak to you for them, then take 2-3 minutes to be silent and listen.
- Then begin to pray for them – pray into the things you feel God has spoken to you for them, and pray for the things you know are happening in their life. If you are stuck, then simply pray that they would live in the key gospel identities.
- Write down what you felt God spoke. Don't edit yourself in the moment, trust the process but be humble when you submit it to that person.

Week 4



Self Re-Assessment

Reflect on your own experience of hearing God and answer the questions below on a scale from 0 to 5.

0	never true
1	rarely true
2	occasionally true
3	sometimes true
4	mostly true
5	always true

Reading Scripture leads me to experience intimacy with God as my Father. _____

God regularly speaks to me in a way that reminds me of who I am in Him. _____

God regularly speaks to me in a way that causes me to alter the normal direction of my day/week. _____

God regularly speaks to me on behalf of others. _____

I am confident in discerning God's voice instead of listening to my own thoughts and the lies of the enemy. _____

I feel confident to help someone learn to hear God's voice. _____

Practices for Week 4

Spirit-empowered Scripture Reading

The week, take some unhurried time to practice Spirit-empowered Scripture reading with the following passages of Scripture:

- Genesis 1:1 - 2:3
- Psalm 27
- Isaiah 53
- Hebrews 12

Supplemental Materials

1. Devotional Bible Reading Guide

R.E.A.D. SCRIPTURE

The R.E.A.D. method is intended to lead you through the process of reading Scripture devotionally. Devotional reading is about meaningfully reading Scripture as a way to connect with God. This isn't just reading your Bible; this is spending relational time with God through His Word.

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED:

1) Decide on a plan for your daily Scripture reading. A great place to start is to read one chapter in the New Testament and one chapter from the book of Psalms. If you want to add to that, you can add a chapter from the Old Testament. We strongly suggest you keep a chapter from Psalms in your planned reading. Psalms are songs and prayers from people with a heart after God who meaningfully communed with God. They tutor us and shape our own devotional times with God.

2) Choose a way to write down your reflections and prayers. A journal and pen work great. Try to avoid using single pieces of paper as it's super beneficial to be able to look back over time at what God has spoken to you. Using your smartphone can also work. However, if you don't have the discipline to be undistracted by texts, messages, and social media, stick with a non-electronic option.

3) Have a good study Bible that can be quickly accessed during this time. Referring to this will help clear up any confusion you might have over what you're reading.



RELY

1) Begin by praying for God to open the eyes of your heart as you read His Word. Ask Him to help you be attentive and expectant to hear Him speak.

2) Read through your planned reading for the day. Highlight words and phrases that stand out to you or impact you in a powerful way.



EXPLAIN

1) Once you've read through your planned reading, go back over what you've highlighted. Carefully think through it's intended meaning. You don't need to dig deep into everything you read. Focus on thinking through the intended meaning for the parts that stood out to you. If you need a little assistance, quickly refer to the notes in your study Bible. If something isn't clear to you, move on to what is clear. You can always dive into an in-depth Bible study or ask for help from another follower of Jesus when you have more time.

2) Explain the meaning in your own words. This is a crucial step to ensure your devotional reading is meaningful. This doesn't have to be long; it can be as short as a sentence or two.



APPLY

1) As you think about the parts of your reading that stood out to you, apply their meaning to your life. This is done by asking, "What does this mean for me?" Bring the meaning and truth of Scripture to bear on your heart and your thinking.

2) Write down specific steps as to how you can apply what God is saying to you today.



DEVOTE

1) Turn to God, asking for help as you devote yourself to the specific next steps you've identified. Acknowledge your dependence on God and ask Him to empower you to live faithfully to Him.

2) Move on in your prayer time by bringing specific requests before God that are on your heart.

3) End your time with expressions of praise and gratitude. Thank Him for His Word, presence, and faithfulness to you.

2. The Ways God Speaks

The Bible teaches us that God speaks in a myriad of ways to His people. Here are some examples:

- God speaks through creation. (Psalm 19:1-3)
- God speaks through appointed messengers.
 - Prophets (Old Testament and New Testament)
 - Angels (Matt 1:20)
- God speaks audibly. (1 Kings 19:9-12, Mark 1:11, John 12:28-30)
- God speaks through dreams. (Matt 2:13, Acts 16:6-10)
- God speaks through visions. (Acts 10)
- God speaks pictures and feelings. (Jeremiah 1:11-12)

It is very helpful to know that God speaks to us in various ways so that we don't limit the ways we expect God to speak. Here is a short case study on some of the ways God speaks in the book of Acts:

- Acts 8:26 - An angel of the Lord told Philip to leave a fruitful ministry in Samaria and go to Gaza. Then the Spirit "told" (8:29) Philip to join the chariot of the Ethiopian Eunuch. The result was that the continent of Africa was reached for the Gospel!
- Acts 11:27-30 - Agabus prophesied about a worldwide famine. The result was that a collection was taken and lives were spared!
- Acts 13:1-3 - The Spirit speaks during a meeting for prayer and fasting that Barnabus and Saul are to be set aside for the work He has called them. The result was the greatest missionary activity the world has ever known!
- Acts 16:6-10 - Paul receives a dream about a man from Macedonia. The result was that the Church of Philippi was planted and many people were saved

The truth is that we need God's voice to lead us every bit as much (and maybe even more) than the early church. Our confidence is that God is just as committed to leading us, guiding us, and encouraging us as he was to them!

3. Discerning God's Voice

When we engage with the practice of hearing God, it is very important to identify *counterfeit voices*. There are 3 counterfeit voices that are vying for our attention – the devil, the flesh, and the world. Let's take a look at what those voices sound like:

What does the voice of **the enemy** sound like?

- *Condemnation and shame.* Satan is the accuser. The Holy Spirit will bring conviction but not the heaviness and helplessness of condemnation. Satan will want you to compare yourself to others. He will make you feel that somehow you are no longer a child of God. His desire is that you question God's character, and that you are filled with anxiety, anger, and fear. The power of the gospel disarms the voice of Satan by declaring "no condemnation" for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1).

What does the voice of **the flesh** sound like?

- *You deserve to give into your sinful desires.* The flesh is often subtle rather than brazenly telling you to go have an affair. It's always pushing you to the next step of welcoming sinful thoughts, desires, and actions into your life. The flesh desires what is comfortable and convenient. It chooses short term sinful pleasure over long-term joy and fulfillment in following Jesus. The grace of the gospel stops the voice of the flesh. We were freely given what we *don't deserve* – restoration to God – and we direct our desires to be satisfied in Him rather than anything else.

What does the voice of **the world** sound like?

- *Throw off the moral constraints God is putting on you.* The voice of the world opposes God – His designed order, His morality, His authority. The voice of the world bombards us in TV shows, movies, music, podcasts, social media, and the news. All of these speak the message that *everything you desire can be found in the world*. However, apart from God, all the pleasures of the world leave us empty. The gospel teaches us that the world does not hold our salvation. We cannot find what our souls desperately desire in this world. Jesus alone satisfies our desires, and leads us to that which is truly life.

In contrast to these three counterfeit voices, God speaks. His voice sounds like a bridegroom speaking to His bride. It sounds like a loving Father speaking to His children (both affirmation and correction). It sounds like comfort for those who are mourning. It sounds like healing and restoration for those who are broken. It sounds like forgiveness for those who are guilty, hope to the discouraged, and power to the weak.

4. Testing What You Hear

There are three ways in which we can test or weigh something we believe God has said:

- 1) Check that it is consistent with the teaching of the Bible. God will never contradict what he has already said and caused to be written down in Scripture.
- 2) Check that it is encouraging, strengthening, or comforting (1 Corinthians 14:3). New Testament prophecy builds up, cheers up and lifts up. It never brings condemnation, even if God is calling us to change our attitudes or habits. It draws people to Jesus and calls out the best in them.
- 3) Talk to other Christians, preferably those who have experience of hearing God themselves, and our leaders. God has put us in community so that we can draw wisdom and strength from one another. Ask others what they think of what you feel you have heard from God.

Here are some questions to ask if you believe that God is speaking to you:

- Does it line up with Scripture?
- Does it reflect the character and nature of God?
- Does it cause me to love God and others more?
- Does this build up, encourage, and edify me or others?
- Does this lead me towards faith and mission?
- Does this line up with what others are hearing from God in the community?

