

**POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND**

1. The opening questions will get people thinking about what is required of human communication, which has some analogies to an experience of hearing from God. God is fundamentally relational and communicative. By opening up the conversation by thinking about human communication, there may be some helpful analogies for the group to carry through the entire discussion.
2. There are two extremes that we want to avoid in the conversation about hearing from God. The first might be a propensity to attribute messages and ideas to God that are not really a message from God. The second extreme would be to be so skeptical about hearing from God that we miss out on the love, comfort, and life God may be communicating to us.
3. A few observations from John 10: We may notice the discussion of voices that don't belong to Jesus. Those that know Jesus' voice won't follow the voices of others that lead away from him. There are those that want us for their own power and would seek to lead us away from the Way of Jesus. We may be encouraged from this text to learn the voice of Jesus well, so that we don't follow an alternate one. There is a tenderness to Jesus knowing his sheep by name and leading them. Jesus is not a rough or careless shepherd. The religious heroes of Jesus' day didn't pick up on what Jesus was saying. Whenever we read about the religious leaders in the Gospels, it is good practice to ask, am I not picking up on what Jesus is saying. It is easy to assume we are like the "good guys" in the Gospels, but we would do wise to look for ourselves in those characters who are getting it wrong.
4. That God has sent us a live-in tutor can be a great encouragement to us. God knows that we are going to get it wrong and that we will need help. The Way of Jesus isn't just a few ideas to keep in order, nor is it intuitive, for it calls us to empty ourselves of our selfish desires and to live for God's kingdom. The Holy Spirit is given to us to encourage us, to convict us if we get it wrong, and to help us get back on the right track, all within the sphere of grace and love. The Holy Spirit is like an advocate arguing our case and coaching us through life.
5. Challenge your group members to try the tactic of Expect, Engage, and Evaluate. Have them practice it and come back to talk about their experience each week.
6. Finally, sometimes we hear a negative, accusing voice in our head and mistake that for the voice of God or the Holy Spirit. If you need a reminder that God is for us, read Romans 8:31. It may be helpful to mention to your group that the Holy Spirit has all authority and is firm and not pleading. The Spirit's voice is not shrill or desperate or condemning. Dallas Willard says the Holy Spirit's voice is "sweet reasonableness," and the more we lean in and listen for the Spirit's voice, the more we can be confident that we are hearing from God and following the Spirit's leading in our life.

## WAYS GOD SPEAKS

**Scripture:** The Holy Spirit speaks to us through Scripture. You may have experienced this when you begin reading a passage and feel as if it were written for you. One way to listen is through a form of Bible reading called Lectio Divina. This mode of Bible reading entails taking a few short Bible passages and reading them slowly 2-3 times and asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you.

**Circumstances:** God can speak to us when we ask God to reveal what God wants and ask for God to give us a sign or a confirmation of some kind. One situation might be when you feel discouraged and a friend shows up with coffee to say they care about you.

**Other People:** It's common for people to hear from the Spirit when we're at church. This may come through a message on a Sunday morning, the counsel of a wise friend, or through a discussion in a small group.

**Nature:** The Scriptures attests that the power of God is made known in the world around us. It might help to read Psalm 19 or Romans 1:20. These passages tell us that the world around us gives us what theologians call "General Revelation," – God is revealed to everyone by observing creation and the human conscience, to name a few examples.

**Prayer:** Most of us know we can talk to God in prayer, but you can also hear from God in prayer. Some people liken hearing the Spirit to a strong impression or sense of something that arises as you pray about a specific situation. Other people describe a voice that speaks internally.

## TACTICS FOR HEARING FROM GOD

**Expect:** The first step is to expect to hear from God. Since we can relate to God, we can ask God to speak to us. A simple prayer of expectation might be "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." from I Samuel 3:10. You might also pray the ancient prayer of the church "Come, Holy Spirit."

**Engage:** The second step is to engage with God. Often this is getting quiet enough that we can hear the voice of God. Often our interior lives are so loud and crowded that we can't hear from God. The more we learn to stop, relax, and embrace silence, we are then in a good place for God to speak to us.

**Evaluate:** This final step is essential. Sometimes we believe we've heard from God, but we might be confusing God's voice with something we want to do or want to justify. A few questions to ask:

1. Is it Biblical? Does it run counter to God's revealed will in Jesus?
2. What does the community say about this? What do friends, pastors, and leaders say about what you've heard?
3. Finally, what is the fruit? In his letter to the Galatians, Paul says that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Messages from the Spirit will likewise bear this fruit.