

Following the voice of God

Neil Townsend, April 2022

Welcome. This course is designed to help everybody who know Jesus and is filled with the Holy Spirit either to get going in hearing the voice of God and following up on what he says or to grow in that area. It is aimed typically at small groups to run over time.

Each session aims to be 15-20 minutes long with both some theological content, some practical tips, and an introduction to the exercise for that session. The course has 6 sessions:

1. Introduction: God speaks – to each of us
2. God is speaking: I can hear God
3. The heart of it: God wants to communicate his heart
4. What does God want to say to me
5. What does God want to say to others
6. What does God want to say to the Church

How a session work

Each session has a pattern:

A brief talk

A video with a talk covering the sessions material. It simply needs to be played, and it includes an explanation of the exercise at the end. Notes are provided: these are simply some of the key points from the talks, to help everyone follow along. They are not designed to replace the video, simply to help people follow the video for those who find written notes helpful as they watch and listen.

An exercise

Explained at the end of each video, and in these notes. The goal here is to make it as easy as possible for each person coming along to develop a habit of hearing God, of knowing his voice, and growing in confidence in sharing what they have heard.

Please do take time to make sure that everyone has really understand the exercise, some keys to doing that:

- Repeat the instructions again clearly.
- Model it, maybe even do an example run.

Please also set an atmosphere of encouragement and support – look for the positive in every contribution.

It is probably wise to record the things that are shared, so that they can be remembered more easily!

A final encouragement or challenge

This is not in the video. It is in these notes for the group leader to give to everyone once the exercise is over. It is a key part of the course, as it is designed to help everyone grow in the habit of hearing God.

Session 1 – Introduction, God speaks

Session notes

God has always wanted to work relationally

- God is trinity: a united, relational unity
- Impossible to fully describe, but it does tell us some key things:
 - God values relationship highly
 - God values communication highly
 - Therefore, God wants relationship with us (“created in his image” – Genesis 1.27), and for that relationship to include 2 way communication – us to him, him to us
- God is good and he wants the best for us, and so he wants us to benefit from his understanding of all things
 - His revelation and understanding of all time
 - His wisdom

God has always spoken

- Genesis 3:
 - End of day, in the garden of Eden, relationship, peace, restoration, vision, heart ...
 - Note how after the fall, Adam and Even wish to avoid relationship but God still wants it. He still comes towards them with openness.
- Genesis 5:21-23 Enoch (walks with God)
- Genesis 12.1ff Abraham (hears God and obeys (delay?))
- Samuel (audible voice, 1 Samuel 3)
- The prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc etc)
- Jesus (John 8:38.)
- Macedonian man (Acts 16)
- Agabus (Acts 11.28)

The bible makes it clear that he wants to speak to and through every believer now, although he will speak and communicate with each of us in a way that is matched to how he made us. He is willing to use “your language” (give example – me rowing pictures)

Exercise

In this course we will be doing plenty of practical exercise, to help us grow in understanding and practice! Today, we’re going to start with thinking about our experience so far. This week, two parts:

First: In groups of 4 or 5 people (perhaps 3, but not less), talk about your experiences of hearing God. How have you heard God and when? What did he say? How did you know it was God? Have an open discussion. Please be honest! IF it’s totally new to you, that’s great. If it’s common, that’s also cool – let’s share and learn from each other. Pick up on the idea that there are lots of ways, and it’s often different for different individuals. There are lots of ways of hearing God (a bit from the bible jumps out at you; you hear an audible voice, A thought comes into your mind just after you’ve asked God for wisdom, a picture which God then explains, a strong sense about something,)

Then, please take time to pray for each other that over the coming weeks of the course, we will each discover and grow in hearing and following God.

Final encouragement/challenge (not on video, session leader to give)

Over the next week, when you are in a meeting (church, work, whatever), look around and see what God highlights to you and what he wants to share through it. Look for an opportunity to share what he says appropriately.

Notes to help the session run well

Think about who to put in discussion groups so that each group has at least one person who has an active relationship with God and you know hears God, and can help explain the heart of hearing God. They don't need to be a prophet, or especially prophetic, but able to help with the revelation that God wants to speak to each of us, personally.

Following the voice of God, Session 2: God is speaking - I can hear God

Session notes

- God has always spoken recap (Adam and Eve, Jesus, Agabus)
- And he speaks now
 - John 12.49 - Jesus and the father's words;
 - Acts 21 – Agabus
 - John 10.4 – Jesus says that his sheep know his voice
- It's for all believers all the time 1 Corinthians 14.31
- Set some principles – how God speaks:
 - Out of a heart of Love – 1 Corinthians 13
 - To build up, encourage, comfort and instruct (1 Corinthians 14.1-5, 31)
- I saw God said model (Jeremiah 1, Amos 8.1ff; 7.1-9)
- Love is the reason why (1 Corinthians 13)

Exercise

I saw God said, as explained in the video.

Final encouragement/challenge (not on video, session leader to give)

Over the next week, when you are in a meeting (church, work, whatever), look around and see what God highlights to you and what he wants to share through it. Look for an opportunity to share what he says appropriately.

Notes to help the session run well

- If lots of people, split them into groups of 8-12 people.
- You need a good collection of diverse objects for each group of 8-12 people.
 - Or have a projected slide with 10-14 diverse pictures on it
- Pray for people to welcome HS, for him to highlight an object and to speak through them to each person.
- Leave space for people to hear God
- In each group, invite people to share what God has shown them, using the framework "I saw an XXXX; God said ..."
- When people are wrapping up, make sure people have had enough space and then ask how many people were encouraged by something that was said in the group.
 - If you have someone prophetically trusted in each group, ask them to spot where there is overlap in the words and to draw those threads out in each group, helping people to see how Holy Spirit might be underlying something.

Session 3: God wants to communicate his heart

Session Notes

- Welcome back to following the voice of God
- Intro name, session title – God wants to communicate his heart
 - Everyone can prophecy
 - 1 Corinthians 14 purposes: build up/exhort, encourage, comfort (and teach)
 - Always in line with the bible
 - Always in line with God’s character
- This session is about God’s heart. When I was courting D, yes I wanted to know what she thought, what her opinions were, and so on, but most of all I wanted to know who she is, what her “heart” was, as it were
- Same with God – except he knows both his heart and our heart better than we do, and longs to share that with us.
- First, there are a couple more things in 1 Corinthians 14 we didn’t cover last session:
 - 1 Corinthians 14.3: To people
 - Use their language!
 - 1 Corinthians 14.24-25
 - Into his presence: Meeting with God, not a meeting about God (being at a meeting vs reading the minutes)
- Therefore in hearing God we can expect him to ...
 - Share about his wonderful nature, his love, his fatherhood, his justice, his grace ...
 - Share about who we are in him
 - both in terms of being his children, royals priests
 - Share about his heart and visions for the present and the future
 - And in terms of his vision for those we are with.
 - Remember: it’s not about making something happen, it’s an invitation to a wonderful God imagined future.
- So, when we seek to hear God for others (which we’re about to do), we expect to hear him speak in those kind of ways.
- Last time we did I saw, God said, and I’d encourage you to keep looking out for objects that God highlights, this time let’s also be open to God putting an image in our heads, that couldn’t have got there on its own, and then ask him what it meant ...
- Explain pairs exercise.

Exercise

Hear God for someone you don’t know in pairs

Final encouragement/challenge (not on video, session leader to give)

How does God want to encourage someone you see regularly in your daily life (church, work, whatever). Ask him what he has to say to them and find a way to share it appropriately. Remember the 1 Cor 14 guidelines.

Notes to help the session run well

- Give everyone in the group a number, which represents someone other than themselves in the group and get them to pray for that person. It is wiser to do this men for men and women for women; it is also better to try and arrange pairs which go with each other.
- Give everyone time to pray and hear God *before they know who they are praying for*, then get them to go into their pairs and share what they had for each other.
- It may help to have a pile of objects for those who are still getting going.
- Remember to ask at the end how many (show of hands) have been encouraged by strengthen by what was shared with them.

A table like this can help to quickly pair people together, and it can be wise to avoid putting less confident people together. Note the random numbers stop people trying to “guess who they’ve got”. Please change them before actually using the table so that they really are random.

Men			Women		
No.	Name		No.	Name	
4		Pair	1		Pair
45			34		
2		Pair	5		Pair
78			18		
3		Pair	9		Pair
25			51		
48		Pair	27		Pair
93			52		
17		Pair	8		Pair
57			14		

And you can give everyone a slip like this (easy to print out and fill in on the fly)

Name:	Your number:
You are praying for the person who is number:	

Session 4: Listening for me

Session notes

- Recap
 - God wants to speak to you and through you, for you and for others.
 - To build up/call up, encourage, comfort
 - We're talked about highlighted objects (I saw, God said) and God putting images and pictures into our minds.
- This week, we're going to explore hearing God for ourselves, about ourselves
- This can be complex: the more emotionally invested we in something the more maturity is needed in discerning Holy Spirit from our spirit. And we are pretty emotionally invested in ourselves.
- A core aspect to this is therefore healthy spiritual habits – reading the bible regularly, personal prayer, praying in tongues, resting in God's presence, fasting ...this grounds us in God and helps us navigate ourselves, so to speak.
- God can also speak to us through the bible. A verse (or story) will jump out and speak to us, both to challenge us, or to comfort us, or to encourage us.. Jacob example?
- Another example: moving to Wantage. Story told by Clive, replicated in me.
- But key point: both of those examples were confirmed through prophetic input from other people and conversations with wise counsellors.
- It is good to hear God for ourselves, and good to bring it to others for input.
- Final note: God will generally encourage us
- He will also challenge us and call us up

Exercise

In this exercise we are looking for **encouragements** from God. In pairs: person A and person B, both people take time to listen for person A (first). Person A then shares what they felt God say to them; then person B shares what they had felt. It is more likely than not that they will have heard the same thing, or something that meshes together really well. Repeat for person B. This time everyone needs to have got into their pairs *before* starting the exercise.

Final encouragement/challenge (not on video, session leader to give)

Ask God what he has to say to you in your quiet time. Let him encourage you.

Look also for an opportunity to hear what God has to say in a meeting you are in and share it (church, work, etc).

Notes to help the session run well

Plan good pairs – try not to put two people who are low in confidence or are finding it harder to hear God together. It could be helpful to use the planning sheet from last week again.

Again, having some things that God can highlight in the room is helpful.

Session 5: Listening for others

Session notes

- We've covered a lot of the ground now, and this and the next session are more about growing more into the habit of hearing God and following his voice.
- We've mentioned the passage in Acts about the famine (Acts 11.28)
- Words to Paul about impending imprisonment
 - Acts 20.22 – going to Jerusalem constrained by the Spirit
 - Acts 21.7-15 – Agabus belt prophecy. Note the “I saw God said” aspect here!
 - What is interesting is how some saw it as a warning, but Paul received it as an encouragement.
 - Note also how this prophecy wasn't the “one big word”, but that it fitted with what Paul had sensed for himself and doubtless what others had prophetically shared with him (Acts 20.23 – in every city ...)
- Examples:
 - “Big”: Couple who moved to Oxford (one of them had a dream, then they were being prayed for by some prophets and exactly the same city was shared with them.)
 - “Could seem less significant”: My first word – God will be with you
- Key: It all counts, it all helps.

Exercise

Two options:

Either praying in triplets: Go round each each combination of 2 prophecy, 1 receive.

Or the “double circle” exercise (see below).

Final encouragement/challenge (not on video, session leader to give)

This week, pray specifically for someone in your small group and ask God for a word for them.

Notes to help the session run well

For the triplets, helpful to have some images and objects around.

As noted above, there is an alternative exercise for this session if you have plenty of space and enough people. Put people in groups of 8, 10, or 12 (must be even). Then split each group into an “inner” group and an “outer” group. They then form two concentric circles, the inner group form an inner circle and face outwards; the outer group form the outer circle (surrounding the inner circle) and face inwards. If you've done this bit right then each person in an inner circle should be facing someone in an outer circle, and vice versa.

Then, the people in the inner circle close their eyes, and the outer circles goes around the inner circle a few times, ending up with a different person in front of each person in the inner circle.

Keeping their eyes closed, as the inner circle to hear God for the person now in front of them, and pray that God would speak. Give time for people to hear God (eyes closed, so you may want to remind people about God giving images, phrase, bible passages).

Then, ask them to open their eyes and share with the person in front of them.

Repeat, but with the outer circle closing eyes and hearing God, the inner circle spins around.

Session 6: Listening for us

Session notes

- Acts 1/2 – selection of the replacement of Judas, using the pre-spirit method of hearing God. The last time we see this in the bible.
- From then on, we see: “It seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit”
- Paul and companions in Acts 16.6-10 – the Macedonian call.
- Examples

Exercise

Listening to God about the same questions for everyone in a group. As the group leader, try to think of a question which is relevant to the whole group. Perhaps your small group has a specific question that needs answering (“Who should we be focussing our outreach on?”, “How should we bless our neighbours this Easter?”, “”) or perhaps you know that there is an important question that one of the members needs answering, and is appropriate for everyone to seek God on. (Obviously: avoid emotionally sensitive questions, especially weddings, marriages, dates etc)

Final encouragement/challenge (not on video, session leader to give)

This coming Sunday (every Sunday!), look around the room and see who God would have you share an encouragement from him with? Go for it!

Notes to help the session run well

Have the question ready, and have sought God yourself before arriving. Then, be ready to draw together the different threads that will be shared into an overall answer.