

HEARING *HIS* VOICE

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A
BIBLE STUDY
LEARNING TO

HEAR GOD'S VOICE

THROUGH **HIS**
WORD
EVERYDAY

INTRODUCTION

BACK TO THE BIBLE

We were created to live in community with God. That's how it was in the beginning. In fact, before the fall, the Bible tells us that Adam and Eve spoke with God on a very regular basis. God would come down and go "walking in the garden in the cool of the day," (Genesis 3:8). Adam hid from the Lord after eating of the tree, not because it was rare for them to encounter God this way, but because he was aware of his nakedness and sin.

You see, that's the issue that still plagues us to this day... Our sin separates us from God. How amazing would it have been to experience intimacy with God without our sin getting in the way! Adam and Eve experienced it for a time, but that intimacy was shattered when they ate of the tree and sin entered the world.

And yet, we read story after story of God talking to people, directing them and leading them. Noah heard from God. David heard from God. The prophets of old heard his voice too. Heck, Job all but had an argument with God!

So, why is it so hard for us to hear Him? Why do modern day Christians struggle to hear God's voice even when we are devout and searching? Why do we feel so disconnected from our heavenly Father?

One thing we have going for us that even the New Testament Christians did not, is that we have a complete and full Bible including New and Old Testaments. We have the holy Word of God in its entirety at our fingertips. We can google passages or look them up by topic. We can download an app to our phones or tablets. We have hard cover or soft cover Bibles. Large print or small print. We have dozens of translations and even more commentaries to help us in our Bible reading.



And yet, we are still disconnected. I would venture to guess that even with all our tools and all the resources at our finger tips, the followers of God know His word less than those early Jews and early Christians we read about in the Bible. We have every reason to be experts at knowing God's word and yet we are not.

That begs the question of "why?" Why don't we know the Bible better? Why do so many Bible-believing, born-again, devout Christians struggle to understand the Bible, to hear God's voice, or to know how to be led by Him.

DISTRACTIONS



Many Christians admit that their lack of understanding of the Bible is due to their struggle to get time in the Word on a regular basis. How can someone understand something they only read once or twice a month, or even once or twice a year?

According to Religion News Service, as of 2013 only one in five American Christians surveyed said that they read the Bible on a regular basis. The crazy thing is, unlike many other Christians around the world, we in America have it at our fingertips! Eighty-eight of the respondents said that they owned a Bible and 80% believed the Bible to be a sacred text worth reading. The average house hold has 4.4 Bibles, not including digital Bibles. In my home, between my husband, kids and me, we have 8 different Bibles!!! Plus, my husband and I both have multiple apps on our phones to search and study the Word. Then of course there is the world wide web... So many different ways to read God's word!

It's almost as if we buy them, thinking that is what good little Christians should do. And we use them at first. But over time we get distracted and our Bibles start to take up space on our side tables, in our bed-side drawers and on our book shelves. Why?



I truly think that we, as American Christians as a whole, have lost the passion for God's word that we read about in the Old and New Testaments. We don't hunger for it any more. The Bible has been called "the good book", "the living word" and "the sword of the Spirit" to name a few. It has a reputation for life-changing truth, hard hitting wisdom and comfort that surpasses understanding. And yet, we have lost our desire for it. It's as if we are sick, we have the medicine at hand, but we have lost the will to take it.

One of the reasons I think so many Christians don't desire the Word of God any more is that we have lost the ability to hear God speak through His written word. At the very best we hear only the general overtones of the Bible but miss much of the deeper meaning. Without seeing how His words are food for our soul, there is no motivation to dive deeper. We have become satisfied with the status-quo and have settled for a basic understanding of God. This in turn has left us disconnected and struggling to know what following Him really looks like.

LEARNING TO HEAR HIS VOICE

Over the next few sections, I want to teach you a tool to help you dig deep into God's word, learn to hear His voice, and learn to apply it to your life. Hebrews 4:12 tells us, "the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword". I want to help you let it move in your life, cut away the junk, and open your heart to the voice of God.



V.O.I.C.E.

I have been a student of the Bible for a long time. And yet it was only recently that I learned how to really study God's word. I always lacked drive and hunger, and to be honest, there are still times that I lack the determination and motivation I need. But since I have started learning to study the Bible this way, I am experiencing the hunger and fascination that I always wished I had before. God's words are jumping off the pages and hitting deep parts of my heart. I am hearing His voice and learning from Him better than I ever had before.

These ideas are not my own... I have been taught them through amazing people, mentors and even in my school studies. Many of you will recognize the steps and the inspiration behind them. But I longed to pull together multiple different ideas and styles into one easy to understand and concise idea. I pray that the following method of studying helps you and grows your faith. First, though... a few tips:

1. BE CONSISTENT

Set aside time on a regular basis to get into God's word. Think of it as food for your soul. You wouldn't go a week without eating food, so don't starve your soul either.

2. GIVE IT YOUR BEST

If you are a morning person, do your studies in the morning. If you are a night owl, do them at night. Find the time of day that you are at your best and most likely to be distraction free and commit to that time.

3. DON'T STOP IF YOU STUMBLE

All too often, we start off strong and get a few days or even weeks of dedicated study under our belt. Then, life happens, things get in the way and we lose our momentum. Don't let it discourage you! Just pick back up where you left off and keep going. God isn't mad at you. He will still meet you right where you are. He is waiting for you with open arms, excited to teach you and grow close to you.

4. DON'T RUSH

The goal here is not to complete a Bible reading plan in a year or to read the most passages. It is not about quantity but instead is about quality. The goal is to really understand what you are reading. If you get to the end of your quiet time and you don't feel like you have heard from God or you don't understand something, then go back to that passage again tomorrow... and the next day, and the next. Whatever it takes to know God's Word.

5. FOCUS ON A RELATIONSHIP, NOT RELIGION

A true, intimate relationship with God is the ultimate prize. Don't settle for religious acts of righteousness. Don't let this become just some task that makes you a "better" Christian. Keep your heart set on getting to know your Heavenly Father and letting Him into the deepest parts of your heart.

V - VERSE:

IT ALL STARTS WITH THE WORD

The first step is to choose a passage you want to study. Start with the first couple verses or the first chapter of the passage you are going to study (depending on the amount of time you have to dedicate that day). Some people like to tackle multiple chapters at a time or even an entire book of the Bible all at once. But I find that going verse by verse, studying only a few verses or a chapter at most at a time, is best for me.

I do not recommend taking one verse out of a passage and studying only that without studying the entire passage around it. That is a risky way of studying because it is all too easy to take something out of context. However, I do like to break down each verse one at a time to get the full impact of what God is saying.

Here is an example of what I mean:

Passage to study- Matthew 5
Monday- Study verse 1
Tuesday- Study verse 2
Wednesday- Study verse 3
And so on until I get to the end of Matthew 5

Continue studying a few verses or one chapter at a time until you reach the end. This slower pace will help you to really grasp the text and in time going slow like this will aid in memorization, understanding, and hearing God speak through each and every verse (how exciting is that?!?!).

I also highly recommend looking the verses up in different translations. When I study I like to use at least 4 or 5 different translations. Now, I know what you are thinking, "gosh that's a lot!" But trust me, it is worth it. There are some amazing resources out there that you can use to study different versions side by side. My favorite is Blue Letter Bible (www.blueletterbible.org). I use this all the time for its resources.

O - OBSERVATION:

WHAT DID YOU NOTICE?

This section is all about picking the verse apart:

- Did you notice anything stand out to you?
- Did you see any words that were different in one translation to another?
- Did you notice anything that didn't make sense to you?
- Ask questions.
- Look for key words, action words, promises or key people.
- Look for transition words like "therefore", "but", "however" or "then"
- Create chapter headings or titles to help you understand the basic idea of each chapter
- Make lists or comparisons
- Markings: Use symbols or colors to mark similar ideas or thoughts. For instance you might underline every instance where God is referenced in the color purple. Or you could draw a cross over each instance. Some people find this step too distracting. If that is you, feel free to skip this. The goal is to make it easier to read the Word, not harder.



There are dozens of different ways to mark your Bible with symbols to help you visualize the context of the text. There is no wrong or right way to do this. If you need ideas, try a quick google search for ideas!

Ask yourself the standard questions:

- Who- who is this written by, written to, or about?

Cultural keys are huge in this step- look up the people that it was written to.

- What- What is this about?
- When- When was it written? What was going on at that time in history?

• Where- Where was it written and where was it written to? (Many of the Epistles were written in one location and sent to another.)

- Why- Why was it written? What was the purpose?

• How- What are the actions steps? What is the “how” of this passage?

• Here is where a good thesaurus can come in handy. Look up synonyms to key words in the verse. If you don't understand a word, look it up in a dictionary.

• If you have a concordance it can be really enlightening to look up words in their original form. Many times, our language doesn't really encompass what the original text said (thus the reason we have so many translations). So, looking up the original Greek or Hebrew word and its definition can be really helpful.

****Context is key**** Please do not make the mistake of studying verses out of context. Understanding what surrounds each verse, the culture of the time, and how the verse relates to the gospel message as a whole is very important.

Let's take a look at an example to help you see what I mean..."**I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.**"

- **Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)** Now, if I were to quote only a piece of this passage without the surrounding parts it could change the meaning entirely. By taking out the first section it would read: "**the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.**" That would be the exact opposite of what Galileo Galilei actually said. We would all scoff and say that it would be wrong to quote Galileo this way. Yet, people do this with the Bible all the time. They take one part of the Bible and build theology, rules and judgements based off this fragmented piece of a bigger meaning. It can be very dangerous and has led many astray. Please be careful not to do this!

I - INTERPRETATION:

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

WHAT WAS GOD SAYING TO THE ORIGINAL HEARER?

WHAT DID IT MEAN WHEN IT WAS FIRST PENNED?

This section is all about understanding what God is trying to say in this verse. Each step leading up to this point has been to prepare you to hear God's voice. By digging deep, understanding the individual words and what they mean, and by taking the time to really understand the verse you are preparing your heart and mind to hear from God. I cannot tell you how many times I have been digging into a verse in the Observation step and I have seen something I never saw before that totally applies to me. It is exciting!!

Once you have Observed the details of the verse, it is time to put them all together. Ask yourself, what does it all mean? How do the individual words or ideas work together to form a thought?

C - CALL TO ACTION:

HOW DOES IT APPLY TO AND CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

Many methods call this section "application" but I never liked that word. Application seems just too passive, almost like an option. God's word is never meant to be an option. When His truths are revealed to us it is a call to action. You should be moved by what you learn. Moved to dig deeper, moved to correct sin, moved to love God more.

There should never be this feeling of “that’s nice but I don’t see how that applies to me.” If you are feeling that or lack a call to action, take it to the Lord and ask Him to reveal to you something you need to learn here. There is always something to learn.

Maybe the next verse or the passage as a whole will reveal the call to action. But you should never move on from a passage until you feel God move your heart. Stay on the passage longer, go back and do steps O and I again, search out good commentary, or talk to a pastor or friend... do whatever it takes to really understand what God is trying to teach you.

This step can change over time too. I may learn something from a passage that rocks my world today in the present circumstances that I find myself. Then, years later, go back and study that same passage but in a different season of my life and learn something new all over again. That is the beauty of the Word of God - it is alive and active, constantly revealing more to us and helping us to grow in the current season we find ourselves in.

If you get to a passage you have studied before, don’t be afraid to study it again. God may be wanting to teach you something new or even just reaffirm what you learned the first time you read it. You can never read the Bible too much!

E - END IN PRAYER:

TAKE IT TO GOD

Your time with the Lord should always end in prayer. Take what you have seen and learned to your Heavenly Father. Talk to Him about it. Ask Him to help you see how you can fulfill your call to action. Ask Him to give you strength, focus, and perseverance. Praise Him for all He has done and continues to do. Lift your heart to Him in thanksgiving.





That's it. Pretty simple, but when used over and over, verse by verse, you will begin to hear the voice of God leap off the pages of your Bible. There are so many hidden treasures in God's word for you to discover! It's like a spiritual treasure hunt. The V.O.I.C.E. method is your map... Go search out God's treasure!!!

I pray God blesses you and keeps you. I pray His face shines upon you! May His peace which surpasses all understanding guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus!!



