

WHISPER

How to Hear the Voice of God



C3 CHURCH DARWIN

CONNECT GROUP DISCUSSION RESOURCE

Based on the Book by Mark Batterson

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Introduction

God often speaks in a whisper. Not to make it difficult to hear Him, but to draw us close.

The answer to so much in life is to simply discern the whisper of God.

In the book 'Whisper', Mark Batterson unpacks 7 ways God speaks to us: Scripture, Desires, Doors, Dreams, People, Promptings, and Pain.



This Resource

Following are 7 SmallGroup Discussions ready to go. Each includes some of the key points on that topic, followed by thoughtful and practical discussion questions to get everyone talking & reflecting.

Together, with your group, go on the journey of growing in hearing the voice of God!

Key Scriptures

Key Points

Discussion





Overview

7 Ways God Speaks

- 1. SCRIPTURE
- 2. DESIRES
- 3. DOORS
- 4. DREAMS
- 5. PEOPLE
- 6. PROMPTINGS
- 7. PAIN

1. SCRIPTURE

KEY SCRIPTURES

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

KEY POINTS

The bible is the key of keys when it comes to understanding and hearing God.

- It is the final authority when it comes to matters of faith and doctrine. It is the inspired word of God and our foundation of truth. All other ways of hearing God should be filtered through the word of God.
- The Bible was composed by more than 40 different writers over 15 centuries in three languages on three continents. The authors range from farmers and fisherman and kings to poets, prophets, and prisoners of war. It covers nearly every subject matter under the sun: law and history, poetry and prophecy, cosmology and theology. Yet despite covering hundreds of topics, it doesn't contradict itself. That's because there is one author, the Spirit of God.

-2 things make the bible completely unique:

1. It is living and active. We don't just read the bible, it reads us. The Spirit who inspired the ancient writers as they wrote is the same spirit who inspires modern day readers as they read. When we read Scripture, we're inhaling what the Holy Spirit exhaled thousands of years ago.
2. We never get to the bottom of the bible. It is rich and deep in meaning. No matter how many times we read the Bible, it never gets old, because it's timeless and timely.

The goal of reading is learning to recognise and respond to our heavenly Father's voice so we can grow in intimacy with Him.

- The goal of bible knowledge isn't just bible knowledge. It's becoming familiar with His ways, His character, His voice.

The Holy Spirit quickens the word to us today.

-This is the difference between information and transformation.

-One way or another, get into God's word so His word gets into you. Then the Holy Spirit can quicken it when and where and how He wants.

-Jesus tells us to 'abide' in His Word

-The bible comes alive only when we actively obey it. We're called to do what we hear.

-When you feel like reading quickly, read slowly.

a)Read b)Meditate c)Pray d)Contemplate

DISCUSSION

- **Why is it so important to accept the Bible as the inspired word of God?**
- **Why is it important to involve the Holy Spirit in our reading and study of the Bible?**
- **Describe a time the Holy Spirit "quicken" to you as you read the Bible.**
- **In what practical ways can you abide in the Word?**



2. DESIRES

KEY SCRIPTURES

Psalm 37:4 Take delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Phil 3:8 'What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.'

Romans 12:6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

KEY POINTS

Pleasure isn't a bad thing, it's a gift from God.

-God delights in what He does and He wants nothing less for us.

-God wants us to enjoy Him!

-When we delight ourselves in the Lord, God will give us the desire to do whatever He's called us to do, no matter how difficult it is.

The key is finding the place where gifts and desires overlap.

-God-given gifts are what we're best at. God-ordained desires are what we're most passionate about. And the place where those gifts and desires overlap is the sweet spot.

-The Apostle Paul exhorts us to use our God-given gifts in the pursuit of God-ordained desires.

-Many of us lose touch with who we really are and what we really want. Instead of following our God-ordained desires in the direction of individuation, we get drowned by conformity. It's the fear of people that keeps us from hearing and heeding the voice of God. We allow expectations of others to override the desires God has put in our hearts.

Emotions can give us cues and clues to discern God's voice and leading in our life.

-Although unbridled emotion should never control the wheel, if we're delighting in God, emotions can serve as helpful clues. *Eg What makes me sad, mad and glad?* Tears of compassion can help us identify God-ordained desires, as can the anger we feel about injustice.

Competitive streaks and ambition can be sanctified for God's purposes.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition". The difference between selfish ambition and Godly ambition is simply: Whom are you doing it for? The only right motif is God's glory.

Some key wisdom:

*Check your ego at the door. God opposes the proud.

*If you want it too much, you might want it for the wrong reasons. It may be an idol.

*Emotion is a great servant but a terrible master. Self control is our emotional gatekeeper. We shouldn't make decisions when overly emotional.

*A key to discerning whether a desire is God ordained is deciphering whether it waxes or wanes over time.

DISCUSSION

- **Would you say you enjoy God? Why or why not?**
- **Do you feel you have found the sweet spot in your life where your gifts and desires overlap?**
- **Do you tend to welcome or dismiss your emotions? Talk about how our emotions can derail us, but also guide us at times...**
- **What would listening to God through your God-given desires look like for you today? How would it change the choices you make in how you spend your time and energy?**
- **In what areas of your life might you be responding more to expectations of others rather than the desires of your heart?**



3. DOORS

KEY SCRIPTURES

Revelation 3:8 "See I have placed before you an open door."

Mark 16:17 And these signs will follow those who believe:

Revelation 3:7 To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

KEY POINTS

Open doors and closed doors can be a sign from God in our lives.

Eg Pharoah & plagues; Noah & forecast of rain; Joseph & Pharoah's dreams; Moses & burning bus;; Saul & vision on road to Damascus; Wise men & the star.

- Ignoring signs is ignoring the God who speaks through them.
- Signs are subject to interpretation and there is a fine line between reading them and reading into them (eg beware of false, ungodly signs like horoscopes, tarot cards and palm reading)
- We must learn to read signs the way we read Scripture - with the Holy Spirit's help.
- The language of doors requires the gift of discernment. We must appraise a situation with supernatural insight, not merely contextual or emotional intelligence.

We don't interpret Scripture via signs, we interpret signs by Scripture.

- The gospel of Mark sets our precedent: "signs following".
- In our journey of faith, the signs don't precede, the signs follow. *Eg Moses had to extend his staff first, and the priests step out into the water, then the red sea split!* Often we need to prayerfully make decisions or step towards things, then trust God to confirm or or close doors
- It's human nature to second guess difficult decisions, that's why God is gracious enough to give us confirmations.

5 Tests to Employ in Discerning:

1. *Goose-Bump Test* (quickenings of the Holy Spirit, excitement moments)
2. *Peace Test* (In our heart of hearts, we know it's the right thing to do)
3. *Wise Counsel Test* (We don't discern the will of God on our own, seek out and listen to wise counsel of trusted Christians that care for you & have proven wise.)
4. *Crazy Test* (A God sized dream is always beyond our abilities, our logic and resources! It requires faith.)
5. *"Released from" and "called to" Test* (This is about right timing. We can feel drawn to an opportunity, but not yet be released from current responsibility. If in doubt, we're best sticking with what God last spoke or entrusted us to do, until things are clear.)

You can't pray for open doors without accepting closed doors. After all, one usually leads to the other.

-Someday we'll also thank God for closed doors as much as open doors. God closes doors to protect us, to redirect us, to keep us from less than His best.

-Sometimes they come in the form of failure, sometimes a check in the Spirit that keep us walking through in the first place.

-A check in our spirit is a feeling of uneasiness you can't ignore, a lack of inner peace. It's God's red light that we do well to obey.

What we perceive as detours and delays are often God's ways of setting up divine appointments.

Eg Paul kept from preaching in Asia, but divine appointments opened in Macedonia (Acts 16)

-Sometimes there is divine timing for a door. It's not no, but not yet. Wait for God to open!

-Jesus has a way of opening impossible doors when it's His will!

DISCUSSION

- **Have you experienced God providing a confirming sign after you've made a decision?**
- **In your experience, how do you know when the peace of God is ruling in your heart?**
- **Talk together through the 5 Tests outlined by the author. Have you utilised these in your life decision making before? Which is most helpful to you?**
- **Share examples from your life of how God opens and shuts doors as a way of giving guidance.**



4. DREAMS

KEY SCRIPTURES

Matthew 22:37 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

Acts 2:17 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams."

KEY POINTS

God is a dream-giver, whether it's dreams by night or dreams by day.

Eg Jacob's dream at Bethel changed the trajectory of his life, Daniel interpreted a dream that saved the wise men of Babylon, Jesus was saved by a dream that warned Joseph and Mary to flee Bethlehem, Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia that brought the Gospel to Europe, Cornelius had a vision of Peter and vice versa. The entire book of revelation is a moving picture recorded by John while he was exiled on the island of Patmos.

God dwells in the functioning of our brain and speaks to us at the level of thoughts, ideas and dreams.

-He designed and gave us imagination in our right brain.

-When we have a thought that is better than our best thoughts, it might be from God. -Discernment is required, but if a "God-idea", we do well to give credit where credit is due.

The supernatural by-product of being filled with Gods' spirit is dreams and visions.

-The dreams God gives us are for us, but never just for us, they're for everyone that will be affected by them.

Eg Peter's vision of killing and eating animals.

Tips on Dreams/Visions:

1. God-given dreams won't contradict Scripture
2. God-given dreams will confront prejudice
3. The meaning of dreams isn't always discernible (Some dreams make immediate sense, others might take decades).
4. If you want to establish God's reputation, you might have to risk yours.

DISCUSSION

- Does the Holy Spirit ever give you mental pictures when you are praying? What do you do with them?
- Can you recall times where you believe God spoke to you through your dreams?
- What God-sized dreams has God given you? How do you stay expectant?
- “Accomplishing a God-given dream is a secondary goal. The primary goal is who we become in the process”. What do you think this means and how might it change your perspective on a current dream?



5. PEOPLE

KEY SCRIPTURES

Heb 12:1 NIV Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

James 5:16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

KEY POINTS

We weren't created to live in isolation.

- God uses people in our life to keep us humble and draw out our potential.
- God uses relational encounters to get us where He wants us to go. No one is in our life by accident, everyone is there by divine appointment.
- We all have a cloud of witnesses of people who influence our life & draw out our best (family, friends, coaches, teachers, pastors etc). God wants to use them to speak into our lives, and us into theirs.
Eg Behind Moses there is Aaron, Behind David there is Benaiah. Behind Esther, Mordecai. Behind Elisha, there is Elijah. Behind Timothy, there is Paul.

We need trusted people we can be raw and honest with.

- We need to regularly confess our sins, excuses, fears, weaknesses & doubts to God, but also to others.
- It's in this that we help one another and hold one another accountable.
- We all have blindspots too, and need friends or spiritual fathers/mothers who have permission to speak the truth in love when needed.

God speaks through people but a good rule of thumb is to 'consider the source'.

- God tends to speak to us through friends more frequently than strangers. Speaking the truth in love is an earned right, and it's the by-product of relationship. The stronger the relationship, the more weight those words carry.

1 Cor 14:29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.

- Make sure what someone says passes through the filter of Scripture. And don't just consider the person's words, consider his or her character when giving weight to the words.

Apply wisdom when speaking into other's lives

-Sometimes God will prompt us to speak into someone else's life: a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge or a prophetic word (1 Cor 12:8-10). This can be an incredible blessing.

-In this though, we do well to remember Jesus' approach and first discern if the person is willing and able to hear. **John 16:12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear."**

-The right word has to be spoken at the right time, or it can actually have the wrong effect.

Prophecy

-Biblical prophecy is more forthtelling than foretelling.

-By definition, a prophetic word is strengthening, encouraging and comforting. It may confront but is always redemptive and should be delivered with a gentle spirit.

-We're encouraged to exercise the prophetic gift! We need to know we are a work in progress and will grow in it if we stay humble and led by love.

Some Wise Tips:

1. None of us are above a rebuke or beyond temptation. Listen carefully even if you don't want to hear it.
2. Don't allow criticism to pierce your heart unless it first passes through the filter of scripture
3. Don't make decisions in a vacuum. Utilise wise counsel.
4. Listen long and hard before dishing out advice.
5. Always encourage before you correct.
6. Tough conversations get tougher the longer you wait.

DISCUSSION

- **Why is it so important to do the Christian life with others and not to isolate yourself and our decision making processes?**
- **Who in your life do you have to bounce thoughts and decisions off? Do you consider their character and fruit when deciding how much weight to give their voice?**
- **Are you comfortable using your spiritual gifts or are you reluctant? Why?**
- **Have you ever had a prophecy or timely encouragement for another person? How could you grow in this?**



6. PROMPTINGS

KEY SCRIPTURES

Eccles 3:1 NIV There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:

Isaiah 30:21 Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

Ephesians 5:16 NIV making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

KEY POINTS

Discerning the voice of God includes perceiving His promptings and timings.

- Its our reaction time to these promptings that lead to being in the right place at the right time with the right people.
- There are 2 words for 'time' in the New Testament. Chronos (sequential, linear, past, present, future) and kairos (opportune time).
- The Apostle Paul especially encourages us in the kairos of opportunity. Making the most of opportunity can turn into a defining moment.
- Life is measured in kairos moments. Discerning those is part of hearing God's voice.

It's not easy discerning His timing and it's even harder trusting it.

- Often we give up too easily and too quickly. We often get ahead of God instead of keeping in step with the Spirit, or we fall behind in frustration.
- We get in time by getting in tune with His Whisper.
- We tend to think right here, right now. God is thinking nations and generations. God was working long before we arrived on the scene and He uses us as part of a far bigger picture than we can often see.
- Our heavenly Father is far too wise to give us what we want when we want it. He loves us too much to do that. Hold out for the best God can give.

Eg Story of Esther - divine timing, prompting.

Some Thoughts we can Learn:

1. God doesn't always reward good deeds on the spot. He rewards at the right time.
2. Insomnia is sometimes a sign God wants to speak to us
3. God can accomplish more in 1 day than we can in a lifetime

Learning to discern God's promptings takes practice.

-You don't always pick up the nuances at first, but give it time and you'll get better at hearing the subtle whispers.

-God is sometimes gracious enough to give us confirmations along the way.

Eg Acts 9:11-12 Saul on Damascus Road.

The Holy Spirit will 'stir our spirit' at times.

-It can be a restlessness or a God-ordained desire that becomes fire in our bones.

-We must beware of falling into the 'status quo' of doing what we've always done. Sometimes God wants to nudge and rock our boat.

-When God nudges us to pray, to serve, to give, to obey, we should respond!

-We need to turn up the volume of the still, small voice of God and make sure he's loudest in our lives.

DISCUSSION

- **Can you recall a 'right place, right time' moment in your life? What was the affect of this in your life and the life of others? Why is timing so crucial in life?**
- **Have you ever had a prompting from the Holy Spirit? Were you able to respond? How did God use it?**
- **How might you turn up the volume of God's still voice in your life?**
- **What nudges or promptings have you been sensing from God recently?**



7. PAIN

KEY SCRIPTURES

Job 6:10 Then I would still have this consolation— my joy in unrelenting pain— that I had not denied the words of the Holy One.

Matthew 27:46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

KEY POINTS

-The bible is a book about real people with real problems who experienced real pain.

Job lost everything, but even in calamity, had a thin thread of joy.

-In the midst of tough times, we may feel as if the Almighty has turned his back on us. So we turn our back on him. But that's when we need to lean in and lean on Him.

-Perhaps God is saying something that can't be heard any other way?

Pain can be a gift from God that He uses for His glory and our good.

-God's presence is felt and His voice is heard most clearly during pain. Nothing gets our attention like pain.

-We can hear God's whisper in our darkest hour and come out the other side by his grace.

-Caution: Don't be so focused on getting out of difficult circumstances that you don't get anything out of them. Sometimes the circumstances we're trying to change are the very circumstances God is using to change us.

-Lessons:

1. Don't pretend pain doesn't exist (its ok not to be ok)

2. Lets not explain pain away with trite truisms (say less, listen more)

Jesus knew pain: He had moments when the Father felt distant, and we probably will too!

-Faith isn't flying above the storm, it's weathering the storm. It's trusting God's heart even when we can't see his hand.

If you want to know where God will use you, you need to look no further than your pain.

-We help others in the places where we've been hurt. Our trials become our platforms. And our weakness is actually our strength because that's where God's power is made perfect.

-Pain is part of the curse, but it doesn't mean God can't redeem it, recycle it and speak through it.

A spiritually healthy way to respond to pain is to worship.

-We drown out the pain by singing and declaring God's goodness over it.

DISCUSSION

- **What are things you've learned through painful experiences in your life?**
- **How has pain you have experienced been used by God to help others in their pain?**
- **Why is worship a good way to respond to pain?**
- **What would you say is a weakness in your life and how might God use that as a strength?**

