

March 1, 2022

How to Hear God's Voice: An Interview with Pete Greig

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Pete Greig One of the most astounding yet possibly confusing acts we can do is enjoy a real, conversational relationship with God, the very creator and sustainer of life itself. How should we be hearing his voice? How can we listen to God more clearly amid the clatter and clamor of daily living? What does the Bible mean when it describes God as having a “still, small voice”?

Bible Gateway interviewed Pete Greig (@PeteGreig) about his book, *How to Hear God: A Simple Guide for Normal People* (Zondervan, 2022).

Why do you say Christ's encounter with the people on the road to Emmaus is a master class in learning to hear God's voice?

Pete Greig: Almost every kind of way in which God speaks is modelled in this exquisite story. Jesus didn't just turn up with the couple on the Emmaus road and say “Hi, it's me!” Firstly, he took them through an extensive Bible study “beginning with Moses and all the prophets” (Luke 24:27). Isn't that amazing? The resurrected Jesus takes considerable time to deliver a lengthy biblical exposition in which he reinterprets God's Word radically in the light of his own life, death, and resurrection. In many ways everything has changed because Jesus has risen from the grave, but the Bible is still the foundation for faith and divine revelation.

But the Emmaus road story is more than just a Bible study. There is something powerfully prophetic at work here. The couple later say “were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road?” (Luke 24:32). And then, as well as God speaking through the Bible and through prophetic encounter, we find in this story something fascinating of God's shyness and hiddenness. We're told that “Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him” (Luke 24:15-16) and then later when “they recognized him he disappeared from their sight” (v. 31). We expect God to speak through a megaphone but mostly he whispers in “a still small voice.” We expect him to turn up in hobnailed boots but instead he tiptoes. He “tells it slant” as Emily Dickinson put it. No wonder the theologian N.T. Wright says of the Emmaus road story, “Learn to live inside this story and you will find it inexhaustible.”

Explain how the Bible is the language of God's heart.

Pete Greig: Nothing God says in any other way, in any other context, will ever override, undermine, or contradict what he has said in the Scriptures. Ultimately, the Bible is the language of God's heart because it communicates with us its very nature. In reading the Bible we receive truth and sound doctrine, but we also encounter the love and life of God himself. It is a “living book.”

What is the christological hermeneutic in hearing God's voice through the Bible?

Pete Greig: The christological hermeneutic is a wonderful and radical way of interpreting the whole Bible in the light of Christ himself. We make sense of the Old Testament, and the Pauline epistles, etc., through the Gospels. I believe this is what Jesus models for us on the Emmaus road when he explains to his fellow travelers how the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures points to him and is fulfilled in him.

This can have a radical impact on the way we understand the Bible. If we just pull isolated verses out of the Bible, regardless of context, we can make it say almost anything, and tragically this has often been demonstrated by people wishing to manipulate truth according to some other agenda. But when we read the Bible in the light of Jesus, it effects the way we understand everything from violence to sex. Jesus is the key that unlocks the meaning of the Bible. Or to change the metaphor, he's the pair of glasses we wear in order to focus and read the text.

Why and how should a person "pray the Bible"?

Pete Greig: The Bible is not meant to be just "read;" it's meant to be prayed. In many ways it's a conversation starter for our prayer lives. One of the great ancient tools that can help us to pray the Bible is the Lectio Divina. In this approach we read small sections of the Bible slowly and we may even repeat them several times. We become attentive to any particular word or phrase that the Holy Spirit seems to be illuminating. And then we turn those words and phrases into prayerful interaction with the Lord. We harness our imaginations to bring the Word to life in our own experience. This is not coming to the Bible as a textbook for sound doctrine (important as that is), but rather coming to it as an invitation for meditation and revelation through conversation with God.

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What is the spiritual gift of prophecy and how should it be handled to appropriately hear God?

Pete Greig: The apostle Paul says that "the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort" (1 Cor. 14:3). The prophetic gift enables us to strengthen, encourage, and comfort other people with God's Word which is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12).

In 1 Corinthians 12 the apostle Paul lists various expressions of prophecy including words of knowledge (in which God shows us things about other people that we had no other way of knowing), words of wisdom (in which God gives us great insight), etc. Elsewhere in Scripture we see God speaking very regularly through dreams and visions.

These are not gifts that have died out in the church. They have not been "replaced" by the Bible. We weigh prophecy against Scripture, but the Bible itself teaches us that prophecy is a gift of the Holy Spirit for all Christians essential for the building up of the church. In *How to Hear God* I give some important guidelines as to how we can hear God in this way and how we can handle this gift appropriately (because tragically it has often been abused).

What do you mean by God's gentle whisper and how should people listen for it?

Pete Greig: There's that wonderful story of Elijah on Mount Horeb. God tells him to "stand on the mountain for the LORD is about to pass by" (1 Kings 19:11). Elijah must have climbed Mount Horeb with great expectations knowing very well that this was where Moses had received the Ten Commandments. Stone tablets had been inscribed by the very finger of God amid howling winds, burning trees, and boulders split by lightning. And sure enough, these same signs did manifest before Elijah. We're told that "a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks," and after that there was an earthquake, and finally there was a fire. These were exactly the kinds of phenomena Elijah had anticipated as hallmarks of God's presence, and yet after each one a very surprising thing is said: "The LORD was not in the wind The LORD was not in the earthquake The LORD was not in the fire" Where then is God? And the answer, of course, is that his presence is manifest in the dullness after the drama. He speaks in "a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12), or, as the

original Hebrew says, “in the sound of gentle silence.” This is exactly our experience as followers of Jesus. Yes, he speaks in dramatic ways on occasion, but mostly he speaks to us quietly, intuitively, through whispered words.

What is a favorite Bible passage of yours and why?

Pete Greig: As you’ve probably picked up, the Emmaus road story is certainly one of my favorites in the Bible. Not just because it’s profound, but because it’s playful. I love the way that the couple get it so wrong. That reassures me! And the way that Jesus pretends he’s got somewhere else to go when they arrive at Emmaus until they invite him in for the meal. There’s something so wonderfully and reassuringly human about this most supernatural of encounters.

What are your thoughts about Bible Gateway and the Bible Gateway App and Bible Audio App?

Pete Greig: I use Bible Gateway every single day of my life. Often repeatedly. I cannot tell you how grateful I am for this extraordinary resource. I recently undertook a 330-mile solitary pilgrimage from the Scottish island of Iona to the Northumbrian island of Lindisfarne. Both these islands were centers of Christian faith and evangelization in the 7th and 8th centuries AD. Lindisfarne is particularly famous for the Lindisfarne Gospels. These are breathtakingly beautiful hand-written transcriptions of the Gospels illustrated in bright colors with wonderful designs. They’re one of the most treasured ancient manuscripts in all antiquity. It’s worth remembering how precious and rare the Bible was for many centuries so that we can be truly grateful for Bible Gateway that makes it so easily accessible in so many different versions and languages. What a wonderful gift God has given us in his Word, and in this technology that enables us to read it (and pray it) so easily.

Is there anything else you’d like to say?

Pete Greig: Nothing could possibly matter more than learning to discern the voice of God, but few things in life are more susceptible to delusion and deception. That’s why we need to be rooted in God’s Word, living each day in conversation with the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Living Word of God.

How to Hear God is published by HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., the parent company of Bible Gateway.

Bio: Pete Greig cofounded and champions the 24-7 Prayer movement, which has reached more than half the nations on earth. He is a pastor at Emmaus Rd. in Guildford, England, and has written a number of bestselling books, including ***God on Mute, Red Moon Rising, Dirty Glory, and How to Pray.***