

How to Hear God
A Simple Guide for Normal People
Pete Greig

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Foreword

John Mark Comer

If there is a God . . .

If that God is not an abstract concept, a vague force, or an infinite sea of energy but a living community of Trinitarian Love . . .

If this God-who-is-a-relationship, motivated by self-giving love, moved out of himself and became human . . . to draw as many as possible to share in the Trinity's inner life of Love . . .

If he incarnated as Jesus, a rabbi, a teacher from Nazareth . . .

If he called disciples after him, students, apprentices, sitting at his feet, listening to his teachings, and learning to say and do all that he said and did . . .

And if, upon this Jesus' return to the Father, he gave his Spirit to be with all Christians everywhere for all time . . .

Then surely learning to hear his voice is at the center of all that matters in life.

Many years ago a mentor said to me, "Learning to hear God's voice is the most important task of a disciple of Jesus." More recently, another mentor said, "The primary posture of a disciple of Jesus is sitting at his feet and listening." Same truth. And yet: How? I don't wake up to an email from God every morning. Do you? Nor do I get a text message from heaven when I need to make an important decision, nor hear an audible voice from the sky when I'm feeling confused.

Enter my friend, Pete Grieg. I'm taking a bit of liberty calling him my friend; he is, but I view him more as a guide, a spiritual Sherpa for the heights of the kingdom, a living icon of the kind of Christian I want to grow and mature into in years to come. And Pete has simply written the best book I have ever read on the most important thing you will ever do: learning how to hear God.

Pete calls this book "a simple guide for normal people." It is, but "simple" is not the same thing as simplistic.

This book is disarmingly wise, deep, insightful. With his extraordinary grasp of the church down through history and across the globe, Pete transcends the Christian tribalism of our day - charismatic/non-charismatic/Reformed/Wesleyan/Anglican/Anabaptist/conservative/progressive/etc, etc. He is rooting us in something far more ancient, unchanging, timeless. What the early Christians called the Way. This ancient form of Christianity (predating the term Christianity itself) is the antidote to much of the modern church's pain. The cure for our ills. The future is ancient. The timeless is timely. And hearing God's voice is the key to everything.

How to Read This Book in Five Minutes

The Emmaus Road

Two of them were going to a village called Emmaus. —Luke 24:13

This is a simple guide to one of the most astounding yet confusing things you will ever learn to do. The Bible says that you were created to enjoy a real, conversational relationship with God. Hearing his voice is therefore the most natural thing in the world. (You probably do it already more than you realize.) But whenever God’s word is confused, abused, or ignored, it can become one of the most perplexing and painful things too. Throughout this book we explore one of the loveliest stories in the Bible. Christ’s encounter with the couple on the road to Emmaus is a master class for anyone seeking to learn to hear his voice, not just because it models so many of the ways in which God speaks, but because the couple so consistently and reassuringly get it wrong.

Chapter 1: Hearing God’s Word in Jesus

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near. —Luke 24:15 ESV

Jesus is what God sounds like.

He’s literally the “living Word of God.”

Hearing his voice is not so much a skill we must master, therefore, as a master we must meet. All the other ways in which God communicates—through the Bible, prophecy, dreams, visions, and so on—come through Jesus and point back to him too. In fact, you are probably reading this now because the covert Christ is drawing near, just as he did on the Emmaus road, inviting you to embark upon a slow journey of deep discovery that will change your life.

Chapter 2: Hearing God’s Word in the Bible

Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. —Luke 24:27

When it comes to hearing God, the Bible is the language of his heart.

Nothing he says in any other way in any other context will ever override, undermine, or contradict what he has said in the Scriptures. That’s why Jesus doesn’t just show up on the road to Emmaus and say, “Hi, it’s me!” Instead, he 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. This approach, the christological hermeneutic, can help you with the tricky business of hearing God’s voice through the Bible and of making sense of its meaning in your life today.

Chapter 3: Hearing God’s Word in Prayer: Lectio Divina

Were not our hearts burning within us while he . . . opened the Scriptures to us? —Luke 24:32

In this chapter we turn from reading the Bible to praying the Bible, using an ancient approach to spiritual listening known as lectio divina.

By harnessing the power of imagination and meditation, lectio divina can leave “our hearts burning within us” as fresh revelation begins to flicker from familiar texts. The four traditional steps of lectio divina are simplified here into the acronym P.R.A.Y.: Pause, Read (lectio), Reflect (meditatio), Ask (oratio), and Yield (contemplatio).

Chapter 4: Hearing God's Word in Prophecy

Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road? —Luke 24:32

The New Testament uses two Greek terms to describe the word of God: *logos* and *rhēma*. *Logos* refers to the expressions we've studied so far: God's living word in Jesus (chapter 1) and God's written word in the Bible (chapters 2 and 3). But the other term, *rhēma*, describes God's spoken word, living and active today, in prophecy. As the apostle Paul says, "The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort" (1 Cor. 14:3). In this chapter I set out some keys to help you grow in this important spiritual gift and some simple principles for handling it appropriately.

Chapter 5: Hearing God's Whisper

Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. —Luke 24:15–16

As we turn from God's word (his voice external) to God's whisper (his voice internal), we come to the heart of the problem that many millions of Christians have with hearing God; namely, their presumptions about what God sounds like and their expectations about how they think he should speak. His voice is relatively easy to hear when it comes to us loud and clear through an encounter with Jesus (chapter 1), through the Bible (chapters 2 and 3), or through supernatural prophetic utterance (chapter 4). But it's easy to miss when it comes, as it mostly does, in a voice hushed to "a gentle whisper" (1 Kings 19:12).

Chapter 6: Hearing God's Whisper in Dreams and the Unconscious

They recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. —Luke 24:31

One of the main ways God communicates in the Bible—and in which he continues to speak today—is through the subconscious realm of intuition. In this chapter I offer guidelines for those seeking to hear God in dreams and underline the importance of honoring the conscience, which is an essential yet fallible mouthpiece for the Holy Spirit. I also explore the Ignatian prayer of Examen, which can be such a powerful tool for connecting with our own inner worlds.

Chapter 7: Hearing God's Whisper in Community, Creation, and Culture

When he was at the table with them . . . their eyes were opened. —Luke 24:30–31

The Emmaus road story is inescapably an account of God speaking through the actualities of community, creation, and culture. When Jesus was born, God's people already had his word in the Bible (the Hebrew books at least), but it clearly wasn't enough. They also had his word through prophets and prophecies, but this wasn't enough either. They knew God's whisper in the still, small voice of Elijah and in their consciences, dreams, and visions. In fact, they had almost every expression of God's word we've studied so far in this book, but none of it was enough. Eventually, God's word had to become flesh—not in a book but in a body, not just mystically in heaven but materially "among us" (John 1:14). There is no aspect of God's creation through which he cannot and does not speak. This chapter is, therefore, about discerning the voice of God in the whole of life, not just in religious contexts but also in the actualities of community, creation, and culture.

Chapter 8: The Word, the Whisper, and the Way

Then the two told what had happened on the way. —Luke 24:35

It took perhaps three hours for the couple from Emmaus to realize that they were hosting the living Word of God. But the moment their eyes and ears were opened, their overwhelming attitude was, “Yes!” Hearing became doing. They hurried out of the house immediately, didn’t wait until morning, and walked the seven miles back to Jerusalem, where they found the disciples and “told what had happened” (Luke 24:35). This is the pattern: the more we say yes to Jesus, the more familiar and precious his voice becomes until ultimately, at the end of the road, at the end of the day, at the end of our lives, we look back as the sun sets and whisper in wonder and joy, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked?” Jesus is what God sounds like. He’s literally the “living Word of God.” Hearing his voice is not so much a skill we must master, therefore, as a master we must meet. All the other ways in which God communicates—through the Bible, prophecy, dreams, visions, and so on—come through Jesus and point back to him too. In fact, you are probably reading this now because the covert Christ is drawing near, just as he did on the Emmaus road, inviting you to embark upon a slow journey of deep discovery that will change your life.