

Appendix 2. Assignments to Sensitize You to God's Voice

Since we're trying to develop a skill of listening for God's voice, each lesson includes a practical assignment for you to put into practice in your life that week. This is not an academic study of Bible theory, but a practical study that will result in your life being changed.

Week 0 Assignment. Get Ready. Find a Mentor, a Spiritual Partner, and a Notebook

(To be completed before you begin the first lesson)

As you begin this series of lessons to help you discern God's voice, I want you to find a mentor – or at least a peer with whom you can share in this new lifestyle.

Listening for God's voice and promptings, and then doing what he shows you to do, is a learned skill of sorts. But it is more than that, it is an exciting way of life.

Manual skills can be learned by watching YouTube videos. But how does a new police officer become sensitized to the problems and crimes of a neighborhood? By riding along with a more experienced officer who points things out that the average person just doesn't see. In the process, the novice officer acquires trained eyes.

Though God has helped many people learn to hear and identify God's voice and promptings on their own, that is not the easiest way to learn. It is best to **find a mentor** in your church or community to whom you can go with questions that may come up. *Make sure this is someone who actually believes in and practices listening for God.* In some churches your pastor might be this person. Or it might be a spiritually mature man or woman. On some occasions, your mentor might even attend a different church. Nevertheless, diligently search out this person by prayer and by suggestions of others.

In addition to a mentor, you need to **find a spiritual partner** who can walk this journey with you. You'll learn from each other and be able to bounce ideas off of each other. When I was in college, Edson Lee was my dormmate. We went to the same church on Sunday. But during the week we learned together a great deal together about listening to and obeying God. I can remember at the end of a day, we'd get together to share about how we had seen God in action that day. One of us would always say, "God sure knows what he is doing!"

Note: In this course we share responses to discussion questions in an online forum. But I think it is best to share your experiences in hearing God's voice with your spiritual partner and mentor, who know you, *not* online. The reason is this. In any kind of cyber sharing, people can't know you in your real-life context. Helpful, honest feedback on hearing God's voice needs to take that context into consideration. For our spiritual partners we need people who can get to know us in a more rounded way than someone would be able to online.

So find a mentor if you can – and for sure find a spiritual partner, a peer who is willing to walk this portion of the journey with you. Get this person to sign up for this study with you. Then get together often, in person or on the phone, to share how you see God working.



Edward Burne-Jones, 'Eli with Samuel' (1897), stained glass, Martin's Church, Brampton, Cumbria, England. The design was first used at Christ's Church, Oxford (1872).

Beyond a mentor and a spiritual partner, **you'll need a notebook or journal** in which to write down what God is showing you. It's best if your notebook has decent binding so the pages don't start falling out. I found a journal a similar size to my Bible. What I settled on was a brand called Markings, a 5" x 8" journal by C.R. Gibson (markings.com), widely available in the United States. But really, any notebook will do. Make it a point to get one for this study.

It's absolutely essential for you to **begin or renew a daily Quiet Time**, 5 to 10 minutes (or more) that you spend with God in prayer, reading Scripture, and listening. I'll talk more about that in Lesson 1, but start today!

Week 1 Assignment. Set Aside a Regular Quiet Time to Spend with God

As a way of patterning yourself after Jesus, who sought the Father early and often, set aside for yourself a regular Quiet Time to spend with God. You may be already doing this. If so, great. But even if you already do this, it's time to "up your game," to renew this time so it is most meaningful.

Set aside at least five to ten minutes a day – or more, depending on your schedule – preferably in the morning when you have your whole day ahead of you.

Your Quiet Time is a time to touch base with your Friend and renew your relationship with him each day. It is also a discipline that serious Christians set up in their lives – whether they feel like it or not. Sometimes you'll be sluggish and not very spiritually in tune. Have your Quiet Time anyway; that's when you need it the most. Sometimes your Quiet Time may seem like just going through the motions. Do it anyway. Sometimes God meets you wonderfully in your Quiet Time. Rejoice!

Here's a simple guideline for a Quiet Time.¹

1. **Greeting.** "Good morning, Father," is the way I often begin.
2. **Praise.** The Psalmist encourages us: "Worship the LORD with gladness; come into his presence with singing (Psalm 100:2; NRSV). Offer verbal praise: "Lord, I come before you with thanksgiving and praise this morning." Perhaps sing a praise chorus.
3. **Scripture.** Ask God to open his Word to you. Then read a portion of Scripture, not just a verse from a devotional guide. But read systematically. You might begin with the Gospel of Mark or the Gospel of John and read a chapter a day. Each day, pick up from where you left off the day before. I try to read a chapter from the Old Testament, a Psalm, and a chapter from the New Testament each day. There's no right or wrong way here. However, whatever your practice is, stick with it – and don't coddle yourself! Over time, this regularity makes you acquainted with the whole Word of God. This helps you know the lines along which God is thinking, his values, and what pleases him. Then as God begins to speak or prompt you, you'll be able to discern whether it is God or not.
4. **Prayer.** There's an acronym ACTS – Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication – that is a useful guide. I confess my sins to God, and ask him to cleanse me (1 John 1:9). Then I bring before the Lord each of the people close to me and ask God to help them. Sometimes as I'm praying for someone, God will prompt me with some way I can minister to him or her.
5. **Listening.** We'll amplify this step in Lesson 2.
6. **Take notes.** Some people call this "journaling." It doesn't have to be formal, but be prepared to write down what God seems to be showing you.

¹ For more see my article, "[Apply Fertilizer Liberally.](http://www.joyfulheart.com/maturity/fertil.htm)" www.joyfulheart.com/maturity/fertil.htm

Sometimes my pattern for my Quiet Time seems to grow stale. Then I mix it up, perhaps reading a devotional book along with scripture and prayer. Perhaps spending more time singing. At least for a while. Then I usually return to my usual pattern after a few weeks.

Over the years I've observed that people who have a regular Quiet Time are the ones who grow as disciples. Greg Krieger sees spiritual disciplines such as a Quiet Time as a way of putting up all the sails to catch the slightest breeze of the Spirit's whisperings.

Setting up a daily Quiet Time is your assignment for this week. Then talk to your spiritual partner and explain what your plan is. Later in the week, share how this is going. It's easier to form new habits when you have some accountability built in.

Week 2 Assignment. Learn to Quiet Yourself and Listen

One of the chief reasons we miss God's voice is because we don't take time to listen. We rush through our devotions and then we're off to work or making breakfast or dinner, or something. We don't take time to listen.

I've found that it's much easier to quiet myself at the *beginning* of the day, before I review my e-mail and read the news. Those activities get my mind going a mile-a-minute in all sorts of directions. So the best time to spend with God is before I begin the activities of the day, when the day is new and my spirit is fresh.

I understand that this doesn't work for everyone. If you're a new mother, for example, there may not be quiet at the beginning of the day. Or you may not be a "morning person." You'll need to find some work-arounds, different times of the day when you can take some minutes with God by yourself.

If there are people around, explain that you're going to be praying for a few minutes. Then withdraw into your own thoughts. The more you do this, the better you'll be at it.

Whatever time and place works best in your circumstances, know that one of the keys to hearing God is to quiet yourself before him. The Quakers call it "centering down," quieting one's mind and spirit before God. My pastor sings simple, repetitive praise songs. Some traditions repeat a prayer over and over again. Others recommend breathing in and out, listening to your breathing as a way of quieting your thoughts.

I usually focus my attention on God through praise and worship. I might sing a hymn or praise chorus, or read a psalm. I've found that when I read silently, my mind can wander to other things. But when I read aloud it's easier to keep focus. I find that as I spend a few minutes in worship, my thoughts become less scattered and become aligned with God's.

These are all techniques to quiet one's spirit. Don't get hung up on the virtues of one technique over another. Your purpose here is to get the swirling currents of your mind quieted all flowing in the same direction – towards God.

Once your spirit has become quiet, I encourage you to talk to God about what's going on in your life and listen.

"Be still, and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)

"The LORD is in his holy temple;

let all the earth be silent before him." (Habakkuk 2:20)

Your assignment this week is to practice quieting your spirit before the Lord so you can listen. Then talk to your mentor and/or spiritual partner about your experiences of quieting your spirit before God.

Week 3 Assignment. Sensitize Yourself: Where Have You Seen God Lately?

At Rock Harbor Covenant Church where I attend, a common question we're encouraged to ask one another is, "Where have you seen God lately?"

It's sometimes an embarrassing question. Long silences ensue. But the purpose of the question is to train us to recognize God at work around us – in the little things as well as the occasional big things.

God is constantly at work. He doesn't stop for rest days (John 5:17). Our problem is that our eyes aren't trained to see him at work. What we see, we attribute exclusively to human causation. If we're to discern God's voice, this has to change. We have to become sensitive to him working all around us. Jesus said,

"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." (John 5:19)

Learning to discern God at work is foundational to training yourself to hear his voice and pick up on his whispers, promptings, and nudges. Your assignment this week is to talk with your spiritual partner every day, and ask the question, "Where have you seen God working today?" Then explain where you have seen God at work that day.

Week 4 Assignment. Ask God Questions and Listen for His Response

You may have started doing this already, but if not, after you have quieted your spirit before him, begin to ask God questions about what's going on in your life. Then be silent and listen to see what God might say to you.

You may receive some distinct impressions, thoughts he may put in your mind – or not. When you feel God is saying something to you, write it down in your journal. Just the act of writing down what you think God might be saying will help clarify it for you. Then ask him about what you think you're hearing. Perhaps you'll hear more. This is a conversation.

You won't always hear God say something. That's okay. Don't try to force God to speak to you or to answer you! He is the sovereign God, not you. Content yourself to be humbly silent in his presence where you can find your spirit renewed.

Nevertheless, you may find him putting thoughts in your mind. If so, praise God. That's a good start.

Your assignment this week is – every day in your Quiet Time – to ask God questions and then be still and listen. If he puts something in your mind write it down. Then share this with your spiritual partner, who may be able to help you discern if this is, indeed, God. Eventually you'll learn to discern God's voice on your own. But in the beginning, feedback from a sympathetic friend is helpful and encouraging.

Week 5 Assignment. Converse with God While Around Other People

So far you might assume that you can only hear God if there is stillness around you. Not so. Once you've begun to discern his voice in the quietness, you'll begin to recognize his voice when lots is going on around you.

As your communication system gets better established, God can use you as his agent any place, any time. That's where all this is going – to be God's servants, disciples ready and willing to do the Master's bidding 24/7.

So your assignment this week is to talk to him during your day, especially when you're around other people. Pray quick prayers – "God, bless Helen over there. She seems like she is having a hard day." You may find that God nudges you to engage Helen in a conversation and encourage her – perhaps pray for her. Then share this with your mentor and spiritual partner. Even if you *thought* you should have

engaged Helen, but were afraid to do so, share that. This is all a process of discerning God's voice and promptings, and then being willing to obey without questioning.

This is the last weekly assignment, but I encourage you to continue your conversations with your mentor and spiritual partner, so you can continue to learn and establish as a way of life, listening for God's voice and then obeying him.

