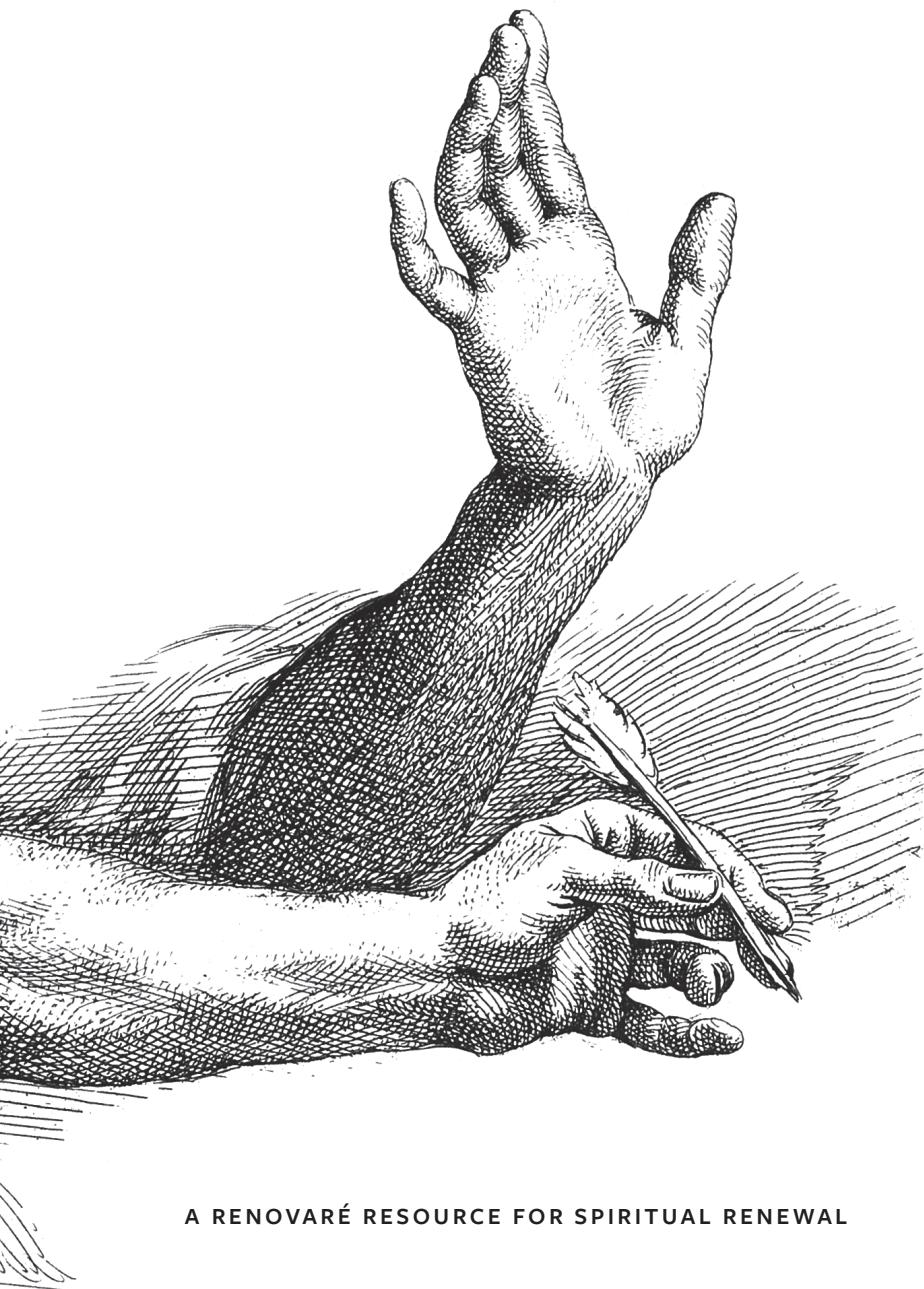


Learning to Hear God

TWO LISTENING EXERCISES



A RENOVARÉ RESOURCE FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

Learning to Hear God

T W O L I S T E N I N G E X E R C I S E S

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Introduction

The amazing reality that God speaks—

today,

to you and me,

personally and directly—

doesn't mean we automatically know how to listen. Hearing God is something we must learn. And not just learn once, but continue learning through ongoing practice. The more time we spend listening to God's voice, the more familiar the Voice becomes.

Dallas Willard writes:

Many people feel confused and deficient when it comes to hearing God.

... Being close to God means communicating with him, which is almost always a two-way street. In our ongoing friendship with God we tell him what is on our hearts in prayer and learn to perceive what he is saying to us. It is this second part of our conversation with God that is found by many to be so difficult or even unapproachable. How can you be sure God is speaking to you? The answer is that we learn by experience.¹

In this booklet are two exercises to help you learn by experience to recognize the voice of God and enjoy the “divine companionship for which our souls are made.”² The foreword, adapted from Dallas Willard’s *Hearing God*, lays a foundation for why and how we listen to God.³ At the end of the booklet you’ll find information about another way to deepen your two-way conversation with the Lord in community.

Even if you aren’t sure whether God has ever spoken directly to you or you have questions about hearing his voice, you can begin today with the help of these exercises to take little steps toward a conversational relationship with the Trinity. And if you are already deeply invested in your communication with God, I hope this booklet will help you continue to hone your attention to the Shepherd’s voice and will be a resource that you share with your community.

Grace Pouch, *Content Manager, Renovaré*

Foreword

Adapted from *Hearing God* by Dallas Willard

Hearing God? A daring idea, some would say—presumptuous and even dangerous. But what if we are made for it?

Sometimes today it seems that our personal relationship with God is treated as no more than a mere arrangement or understanding that Jesus and his Father have about us. Our personal relationship then only means that each believer has his or her own unique account in heaven, which allows them to draw on the merits of Christ to pay their sin bills. Or possibly it means that God's general providence for his creation is adequate to provide for each person.

But who does not think there should be much more to a personal relationship than that? A mere benefactor, however powerful, kind and thoughtful, is not the same thing as a *friend*. Jesus says, "I have called you friends" (Jn 15:15) and "Look, I am with you every minute, even to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20, paraphrase; cf. Heb 13:5-6).

ONE-TO-ONE WITH GOD

God walks and talks in our midst as part of how the kingdom of God is in our midst (Lk 17:21). Our relationship with God is not a consumerist relationship; nor do Christians understand their faith to be a consumer religion. We don't consume the merits of Christ or the services of the church. We are participants, not spectators. Accordingly, we seek to interact with God in a relationship of listening and speaking. ...

In the last analysis, nothing is more central to the practical life of the Christian than confidence in God's individual dealings with each person. The individual care of the shepherd for his sheep, of the parent for the child and of the lover for the beloved are all biblical images that have passed into the consciousness of Western humanity. ...

The biblical record always presents the relationship between God and the believer as more like a friendship or family tie than merely one person's arranging to take care of the needs of another. If we consider that startling array of biblical personalities from Adam to the apostles Paul and John, we behold the millennia-long saga of God's invading human personality and history on a one-to-one basis. There is nothing general or secondhand about the divine encounters with Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Nehemiah, Mary, or Peter.

The saga continues up to our own day in the lives of those recognized as leaders in the spiritual life. When we consider, coming through the ages, St. Augustine, Teresa of Ávila, St. Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, George Fox, John Wesley, C. H. Spurgeon, Phoebe Palmer, D. L. Moody, Frank Laubach, A. W. Tozer, or Henri Nouwen, we see in each case a person who regards personal communion and communication with God both as life-changing episodes and as daily bread. These are people who seek to focus their minds on God, to pray moment by moment. Untold thousands of humble Christians whose names will never appear in print, who will never preach a sermon or teach a class—can testify equally well to the same kinds of encounters with God as are manifested by the great ones in the Way.

Wilhelm Herrmann, a great theologian of the late nineteenth century, goes so far as to mark the Christian out in terms of a personal communion with God. “We hold a man to be really a Christian when we believe we have ample evidence that God has revealed himself to him in Jesus Christ, and that now the man’s inner life is taking on a new character through his communion with the God who is thus manifest.”⁴ Spiritual formation into Christlikeness—true change of character—comes from living in relationship to God.

THE PARADOX

In the light of all this it is not an exaggeration to speak of a *paradox* in the contemporary experience and understanding of hearing God. This paradox seriously hinders our practical faith.

On the one hand, we have massive testimony to and widespread faith in God's personal, guiding communication with us—far more than mere providential and blindly controlling guidance. This is not only recorded in Scripture and emblazoned upon church history, but it also lies at the heart of our worship services and our individual relationships with God.

Receiving guidance from God actually serves as the basis of authority for our teachers and leaders. Rarely do people profess to teach and lead the people of God on the basis of their education, natural talents and denominational connections alone. Authority in spiritual leadership derives from a life in the Spirit, from the leader's personal encounter and ongoing relationship with God.

On the other hand, we also find a pervasive and often painful uncertainty about how hearing God's voice actually works today and what its place is in the church and in the Christian's life. Even those who firmly believe that they have been addressed or directly spoken to by God may be at a loss to know what is happening or what to do about it. In the Bible, poor flustered Gideon said to the Lord, who in some fashion stood before him, "Do something to prove that you are the one who is speaking to me!" (Jg 6:17, paraphrase).

Even if we were to beg for a word from God, we may have so little clarity on what it should be like and so little competence in dealing with it, that when it comes it will only add to our confusion. I believe that this is one reason such a word may be withheld from us by God when it would otherwise be appropriate and helpful.

Our need for understanding is clearly very great. We are all too familiar with the painful confusion of individuals who make huge efforts to determine God's will for themselves—people who are frequently very sincere and devout. We see them make dreadful errors by following a whim or chance event that, because of their desperation, they *force* to serve as a sign from God. ...

We are also all too familiar, even if only through newspaper accounts, with the tragic domination of groups by those who lay claim to a special

sign or word from God. Religious dictators are in unceasing supply and show up in surprising guises and places. Often they are not effectively resisted precisely because the other members of the group have no clear idea, tested and proven in experience, of how such a word from God really works. They are vulnerable to madness in the name of God.

FIRST STEPS TOWARD A SOLUTION

As disciples of Jesus Christ, I believe we cannot abandon faith in our ability to hear from God. To abandon this is to abandon the reality of a personal relationship with God, and that we must not do. Our hearts and minds, as well as the realities of the Christian tradition, stand against it.

The paradox about hearing God's voice must, then, be resolved and removed by providing believers with *a clear understanding and a confident, practical orientation toward God's way of guiding us and communicating with us....* . But before we can even begin working on this task, there are three general problem areas that must be briefly addressed.

First, we need to understand that God's communications come to us in many forms. What we know about guidance and the divine-human encounter from the Bible and the lives of those who have gone before us shows us that. We should expect nothing else, for this variety is appropriate to the complexity of human personality and cultural history. And God in redeeming humanity is willing to reach out in whatever ways are suitable to its fallen and weakened condition. We should look carefully at these many forms to see which ones are most suited to the kind of relationship God intends to have with his people. If we give primacy to forms of communication that God does not on the whole prefer in relation to his children, that will hinder our understanding of and cooperation with his voice—perhaps even totally frustrating his will for us.

Second, we may have the wrong motives for seeking to hear from God. We all in some measure share in the general human anxiety about the future.

I fear that many people seek to hear God solely as a device for obtaining their own safety, comfort and sense of being righteous. For those who busy themselves to know the will of God, however, it is still true that “those who want to save their life will lose it” (Mt 16:25). My extreme preoccupation with knowing God’s will for me may only indicate, contrary to what is often thought, that I am overconcerned with myself, not a Christlike interest in the well-being of others or in the glory of God. ...

Closely aligned to wanting to hear God only to know the future, some people want to have God’s distinct instructions so they will not have to be responsible for their actions. But responsibility and initiative are the heart of our relationship with God. We are not robots, and he does not work with robots.

Third, misconceiving the nature of our heavenly Father and of his intent for us creates a truly overwhelming problem to block our understanding of God’s communication with us as his redeemed children and friends. From this then comes a further misunderstanding of what the church, his redemptive community, is to be like and especially of how authority works in the kingdom of the heavens. Indeed, all human troubles come from thinking of God wrongly, which then means, thinking about ourselves wrongly.

God certainly is not a jolly good fellow, nor is he our buddy. But then neither are we intended by him to be robots wired into his instrument panel, puppets on his string or slaves dancing at the end of the whiplash of his command. Such ideas must not serve as the basis for our view of hearing God. As E. Stanley Jones observed,

Obviously God must guide us in a way that will develop spontaneity in us. The development of character, rather than direction in this, that, and the other matter, must be the primary purpose of the Father. He will guide us, but he won’t override us. That fact should make us use with caution the method of sitting down with a pencil and a blank sheet of paper to write down the instructions dictated

by God for the day. Suppose a parent would dictate to the child minutely everything he is to do during the day. The child would be stunted under that regime. The parent must guide in such a manner, and to the degree, that autonomous character, capable of making right decisions for itself, is produced. God does the same.⁵

A CONVERSATIONAL RELATIONSHIP

The ideal for hearing from God is finally determined by who God is, what kind of beings we are and what a personal relationship between ourselves and God should be like. *Our failure to hear God has its deepest roots in a failure to understand, accept and grow into a conversational relationship with God*, the sort of relationship suited to friends who are mature personalities in a shared enterprise, no matter how different they may be in other respects.

It is within such a relationship that our Lord surely intends us to have, and to recognize readily, his voice speaking in our hearts as occasion demands. I believe that he has made ample provision for this in order to fulfill his mission as the Good Shepherd, which is to bring us life and life more abundantly. The abundance of life comes in following him, and “the sheep follow him because they know his voice” (Jn 10:4).

Dallas Willard, *Hearing God*⁶



Hearing God's Words of Love... for *You*

Exercise One: Writing a Beloved Charter

Trevor Hudson invites us to orient ourselves to the tone, quality, and content of God's voice by soaking in scripture, and then to listen as the Spirit impresses words of truth on our hearts in a personal way.

Does the truth of your belovedness reverberate through your being?

For many years, the mystery of my belovedness remained primarily an intellectual conviction. From the pages of the Bible I would gratefully affirm that I was beloved of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ. One of my earliest Scripture memory verses confirmed this truth of faith: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

By contrast, my everyday behavior, my constant looking toward others for approval, kept reminding me that this biblical truth still needed to bridge that massive crevasse between head and heart. More than twenty years of pastoral ministry in diverse settings has convinced me that many people lack a deeply felt confidence of their belovedness. ...

Throughout the Scriptures, there are numerous verses that underline the fact of our belovedness. When joined together to form what I like to call “a personal beloved charter,” they can induce us to see ourselves through the eyes of the Holy One and to feel about ourselves the way God feels. With hearts and minds we begin to grasp that every one of us represents God’s unfolding creation; that the Holy One is continuously attentive to what we are experiencing; and that there are eternal purposes that God has for our lives. Carefully creating such a charter,

committing it to memory through regular repetition, in the faith that the Spirit of God is whispering these words in our hidden depths, is one way of recovering the truth of who we are.

TREVOR'S BELOVED CHARTER SAMPLE

To give you some idea of what a beloved charter could look like, here is one I have formulated in recent years:

Trevor, you are my beloved child in whom I delight. You did not choose Me but I chose you. You are my friend. I formed your inward parts and knitted you together in your mother's womb. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, made a little lower than the angels, and crowned with glory and honor. You have been created in Christ Jesus for good works which I have already prepared to be your way of life. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you. You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you. I know all your longings; your sighing is not hidden from Me. Nothing will ever be able to separate you from my love in Christ Jesus, your Lord. Abide in my love.

FIRST STEP: A SLOW READ OVER SCRIPTURE

In preparation for writing your own Beloved Charter, slowly read over the Scriptures on the following pages. Circle any phrases that really jump out at you or speak to you deeply. Or, if there are other verses that remind you of the way God sees you, write those down as well.

SCRIPTURES THAT CONVEY GOD'S LOVE FOR US

Psalm 139:13-16

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Ephesians 2:4-8

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

Matthew 6:25-29

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Romans 5:6-8

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 Samuel 16:7

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

Titus 3:4-7

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Luke 12:6-7

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

2 Corinthians 12:9

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Hebrews 4:16

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Ephesians 3:20

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.

Romans 8:1-2

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Zephaniah 3:17

The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

2 Peter 1:3

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.

Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Romans 8:32

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Isaiah 41:10

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Psalm 8:3-5

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

John 1:12

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Isaiah 49:15-16

Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

Romans 8:35

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Song of Solomon 2:4

He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.

Psalm 62:5

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.

John 15:15

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Ephesians 3:17-19

...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

EXERCISE: WRITING A BELOVED CHARTER

1. Reread the circled phrases and verses on the previous pages that spoke to you about the truth of your belovedness.
2. Arrange the verses you have selected into a meaningful personal charter that expresses the things God is saying directly to you about your belovedness.

The very first word of your charter should be your own name, so that the entire thing is addressed to you.

You'll need to do some careful translation with any passages that are not already phrased as direct address from God ... i.e., you might translate the first portion of Jn 3:16 into: "For I so loved you that I sent you my only beloved son."

Don't try to put every single meaningful idea into the charter, just the words from God you are currently finding the most compelling. Your whole charter will likely be 4-6 sentences.

If you find this exercise helpful, you can always revise your charter over time as different verses attract your attention.

3. For Later ...

If you are willing, set aside ten minutes each day for the next month to be alone. Picture the risen Christ sitting alongside you, speaking these words to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to press home the message of your own belovedness. Notice your own inner responses (including places you feel resistant) and share them with God.

As you become increasingly convinced of your own belovedness, ask God to show you the belovedness of everyone else you encounter as well. Practice mentally applying your Beloved Charter not only to yourself, but also to each person you encounter.

YOUR BELOVED CHARTER



The Gentle Art of Renewing Your Mind

Exercise Two: Notice + Listen

Brian Morykon offers a gentle pathway out of negative, false, or self-focused thinking and into alignment with God's truth.

The practice helps us learn to recognize and elevate God's voice so that we can come to agree with what is true and live accordingly.

For much of my life, I tried to take every thought captive.⁷ In the process I became captive to my thoughts.

That's because my approach to negative thoughts and uncomfortable emotions was to conquer them through direct engagement: *Stop thinking that. Stop feeling this. You should be thinking or feeling this instead.* The problem with wrestling thoughts and emotions is that they wrestle back. Before long, you're tangled up or pinned down.

Thankfully, there's a better way to cooperate with God in renewing the mind, an approach that's more of a gentle art than a violent confrontation.

Two practices have helped me learn this gentle art of renewing the mind: noticing my thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations, and then listening for God's perspective.

First, let's talk about noticing.

A helpful metaphor—borrowed from a therapeutic framework called ACT—is to imagine myself standing on a bridge over a set of train tracks. Below on the tracks are train cars representing thoughts, emotions, or bodily sensations. This picture helps separate *who I am* as a child of God from the content of my thoughts and emotions.

If a thought or feeling becomes overwhelming and I get stuck in it, this is like “falling into” one of the train cars. I lose perspective. I see life *from* the thought rather than looking at the thought. For example, I buy into the notion *I am a bad father* rather than noticing *I am having the thought that I am a bad father*. (In psychological terms, this is called cognitive fusion, and it causes a lot of unnecessary mental suffering and unproductive behavior.)

So I like to imagine myself on that bridge beside Jesus, noticing my thoughts and emotions together, letting them pass by. From this perspective, I can “name” what I’m thinking and feeling. I then turn to Jesus, ponder who he is and what he’s done, and ask, “What are your thoughts?”

That leads into the next gentle practice that’s been effective for renewing my mind: listening for what I sense the Lord saying to me in response.

Frank Laubach, literacy innovator and 20th century missionary, used to meander out to a certain place alone and say his prayers aloud. On occasion, he did something that may seem presumptuous, even dangerous: he would say aloud what he sensed God was saying back.

It seems *presumptuous* because who are we to think we can hear from God?

It seems *dangerous* because what if we hear wrong? History bears scars large and small from people who said God told them to do something. And I’ve experienced firsthand how mistaking an internal voice for God’s can have terrible consequences.

Yet I’ve also “heard” the Father speak right to my heart. And it changed me in a way nothing else could. *Heard* is in quotations because it wasn’t an audible voice for me. I simply wrote down what I sensed the Father saying to me, which often took the form of truths from Scripture that spoke directly to my need.

“Isn’t it more presumptuous and dangerous,” writes Dallas Willard, “to undertake human existence *without* hearing God?”⁸

There are well-marked fencelines that make it safer to practice hearing from the Lord:

- be rooted in Scripture,
- be patient,
- know that God’s voice will always line up with the qualities of love outlined in 1 Corinthians 13 (patient, kind, doesn’t keep a record of wrongs), and,
- if in doubt, ask a well-rooted spiritual friend or mentor.

The exercise that follows combines these two practices. It is one way to stand with Jesus on the bridge and notice your thoughts and feelings, to get honest and be willing to face unpleasant emotions, and then to listen to what the Lord might have to say to you in response.

Begin with a particular situation. I recommend starting with something simple, perhaps anxiety about an upcoming event. Then ask the Holy Spirit to help you notice what is happening inside: your thoughts, feelings, actions, and bodily sensations. Jot these down without judgment or analysis. Next, craft what you’ve noticed into an honest written prayer. Finally, as you’re able, articulate what you sense God may be saying to you in response.

Describing a practice has its limits. So in the pages that follow you’ll find a personal example. The situation I chose to “notice and listen” about was preparing to give a workshop on this very topic. Hopefully you’ll catch the heart of the exercise and want to give it a try.

Sometimes we find that the still, small voice of God was speaking all along. We just needed “ears to hear.” And that Voice—which aligns with Scripture and pulses with love even as it convicts—not only renews the mind; it heals the heart.

NOTICE + LISTEN EXERCISE: BRIAN'S EXAMPLE

Situation

Preparing to lead a conference workshop that walks people through this exercise.

Notice Without Judging or Fighting

- I feel overwhelmed.
- I feel unqualified.
- I feel scared of being found out as a fraud.
- I am procrastinating by researching music equipment.
- When I think about being in front of people, there is a sensation of tightness in my chest.

An Honest Prayer

Lord, thank you that you see what's going on and that you understand my thoughts and emotions. Thank you that you're here, present with me, and that you don't leave me when I feel and think things I wish I didn't.

You know how afraid of rejection I am, and you know all the reasons underneath that. When I feel this way, over my head and out of my league, I want to run and hide. Jonah didn't want to see people repent. I just don't want to see a look of disappointment on their faces.

But I'm here, Lord. I won't hide from you, from others, or from what you are inviting me to do. You have good things in store for people at this workshop. If you want to use me to facilitate it, who am I to disagree?

The path of obedience always leads to life and peace, even if the way passes through dark and scary places. I'd rather face hard things with you than avoid them without you.

Help those who come to the workshop to have the courage to get in touch with their thoughts and feelings, the grace to notice them without shame, and the joy of hearing you speak to them.

God's Response

Brian, I'm proud of you. If you knew how much I loved you, your head would forever be lifted in praise. Take a deep breath. Fix your attention on me and what I'm doing, not on you and where you think you are failing.

I'm always at work. I'm always present. I'm for you and with you and want more good for you and for each person at this event than you can imagine. Stay with me. Stay with me when the shame is knocking on your door.

Stay with me when you are bored and distracted, when you are embarrassed or afraid. I won't abandon you. You are forever accepted. I went to great lengths to have you close to my heart. Let me love you, and as you do I'll love through you.

NOTICE + LISTEN EXERCISE: YOUR TURN

Step 1: Choose a Specific Situation

“Holy Spirit, bring something to mind for us to work through together. I trust you know what I can handle in this time and space.”

Step 2: Ask God for Help

“Holy Spirit, reveal my thoughts, feelings, and actions related to this situation. I’m willing to notice them with you.”

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. PSALM 139:23

Step 3: Notice Without Judging or Fighting

Write down specific thoughts, feelings, sensations, and actions related to the situation. Use noticing words instead of judgment words. For example, “I thought X,” “I had tightness in my chest,” “I felt scared of failing and being rejected,” “I avoided facing my feelings about the situation by doing X.”

Step 4: Write an Honest Prayer

Begin by thanking Jesus for being with you and for understanding what you are going through. Then, using what you've noticed, write an honest prayer. The Psalms give us permission to hold nothing back.

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. PHILIPPIANS 4:5-6

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do. HEBREWS 4:15

Step 5: Listen + Write a Response

Write what you think Jesus might say back to you in response. Don't get too hung up on whether you are doing it perfectly. It might help to imagine Jesus sitting in the chair across from you. What might his response be to what you've shared? An indicator that you're on the right track is a sense of being loved and seen. The Lord never accuses or condemns. It is God's kindness that leads to a new way of thinking.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. JESUS IN JOHN 10:27

Exercise One | Resources + Acknowledgments

Hudson, Trevor. *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity: Practices for God's Beloved*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2011.

Nouwen, Henri. *Life of the Beloved*. New York: Crossroad, 1992.

Exercise Two | Resources + Acknowledgements

Laubach, Frank C. *Letters by a Modern Mystic*. Purposeful Design Publications; 3rd edition, 2007.

The “Notice + Listen” exercise was heavily influenced by the work of Jonathan and Melissa Helser and their “Honesty Tool.” Search *YouTube* for Jonathan’s video, “How to Journal the Voice of the Lord.”

ACT in Real Life (actinreallife.com) is one Christian’s journey of applying Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and moving from fighting to noticing and focusing on values.

While not Christian, the *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life Workbook* takes an approach that is proven and helpful and can be done with God. (Hayes, Stepen C. and Spencer Smith. *Get Out of Your Mind and Into Your Life Workbook*. New Harbinger, 2005.)

Endnotes

Introduction

1 Dallas Willard, *Hearing God* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2021), 9.

2 Ibid.

3 InterVarsity Press has kindly allowed us to print these selections.

Foreword

4 Wilhelm Hermann, *The Communion of the Christian with God*, 3rd ed. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1909), 14.

5 E. Stanley Jones, “For Sunday of Week 41,” in *Victorious Living* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1938), 281.

6 Willard, abridged from Chapter 1, 17-35.

Exercise Two

7 2 Corinthians 10:5

8 Willard, 11.

Learn to Hear God in Community

9 Willard, 239.

Learning to Hear God Contributors



Dallas Willard (1935 – 2013) was Professor of Philosophy at The University of Southern California and an ordained minister who spoke at churches and Christian organizations worldwide. He was a founding member of Renovaré. He wrote, among others, *Renovation of the Heart*, *Hearing God*, and *Knowing Christ Today*. Dallas is survived by his wife Jane, son John, daughter and son-in-law Becky and Bill Heatley, and granddaughter Larissa, who continue his legacy and work.



Trevor Hudson has been part of the Methodist movement for over 40 years. He is deeply committed to the work of spiritual formation within local congregational contexts—primarily around Johannesburg. He also lectures at Fuller Seminary, the Renovaré Institute, the Dallas Willard Center for Christian Spiritual Formation, and the Jesuit Institute in South Africa. He is the author of 22 books including *Discovering Your Spiritual Identity*. Trevor is married to Debbie, and they are the parents of two adult children, Joni and Mark.



Brian Morykon is Director of Communications and Special Projects at Renovaré, where he uses words, design, and technology to help connect people with Jesus and one another. He studied Spiritual Formation and Leadership at Spring Arbor University. Also a singer-songwriter, Brian has two albums and has led worship at churches across the denominational spectrum. He and his wife Joy live in Lynchburg, Virginia, and have three children. Hear his music at morykon.com.

Learn to Hear God in Community

The two exercises in this booklet draw on the centrality of scripture as the “permanent address” of God’s thoughts in written form. In the Bible, we can find ourselves personally and presently addressed through words written long ago. Scripture helps us learn to weigh what we hear in our thoughts to discern whether it is God that we are hearing. The people whose stories are recorded in the Bible model for us how to listen to the Lord’s voice. Or, as Dallas Willard puts it, “We stand within a community of the spoken to.”⁹

That community continues to this day, and it is made up of people who seek to pray moment by moment and to follow the voice of the Good Shepherd. Renovaré has formed a way for those who share that longing to deepen their attention to God’s voice in community with others.

Fellowship of the Burning Heart is a special kind of small group in which silence, prayer, and liturgy create space for participants to journey together as disciples who are learning to hear God better. Steadily, our Burning Heart groups have launched and are multiplying. We now offer open invitations to visit an online Burning Heart listening group to see what it’s all about. You can find out more information by scanning the code below, or visiting renovare.org/fbh.



The more time we spend listening to God's voice, the more familiar the Voice becomes. In this booklet are two exercises to help you learn by experience to recognize the voice of God and enjoy the "divine companionship for which our souls are made."

As disciples of Jesus Christ, I believe we cannot abandon faith in our ability to hear from God. To abandon this is to abandon the reality of a personal relationship with God, and that we must not do.

DALLAS WILLARD

RENOVARÉ is a Christian nonprofit that models, resources, and advocates fullness of life with God experienced, by grace, through the spiritual practices of Jesus and of the historical Church. Christian in commitment, ecumenical in breadth, and international in scope, Renovaré helps people in becoming more like Jesus through print and online resources, gatherings and retreats, and educational initiatives like the Renovaré Institute.



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