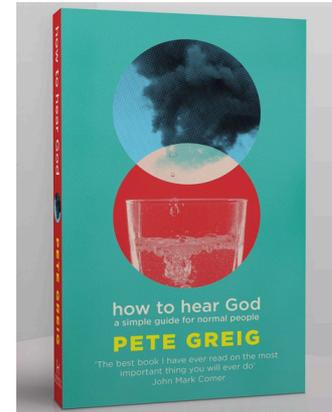


HEARING GODS WORD IN THE BIBLE

INTRO

Over the next few weeks we travelling through Pete Gregs new book called 'How to Hear God.' There will be quotes taken from it and practical tips for you to try out with each other. This week is 'by far the most important and consistent way in which God speaks to us, and perhaps the least dramatic.' (p46) Learning to hear God through the Bible. On the road to Emmaus Jesus took time to unpack scripture to the disciples, so in seeking Gods voice let us do the same.



Read Psalm 119: 97-104 aloud over your group. Pray for the Holy Spirit to help these words be true for you.

THE BIBLE

Worldwide, the Bible is indisputably the most successful literary creation of all time. The Bible has never been so easily accessible, it is the foundation of western culture and is the primary means by which God speaks to us. And yet so little is read. Research from America shows that 78% of people own a copy but only 9% actually read it regularly. 'We revere the Bible, but don't read it,' observed the famous pollster George Gallup Jr dryly. (p49)

Ask yourself how often do you read the Bible? We all struggle so try and be honest with each other, what gets in the way? Is it an easy thing to do? If you do find time, tell the group what setting works for you, is it a certain time, place, way of reading it?

CONTEXT AND JESUS

The Bible does require some study as it was written within a different culture, world view, time etc. Knowing the context helps us to make sense of the Bible. E.g. the apostle Paul is often dismissed as a sexist by people who don't understand the cultural context in which he was writing. Pauls instruction for a Christian households in Ephesians 5 and 6 are not oppressive but radical in advocating a level of tenderness and self-sacrifice unknown in the surround culture at the time.

Another lens to pay attention to is to view scripture through the person of Jesus. 'We must read the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, and the later New Testament in the light of the Gospels.' (p56) Jesus' overflowing love towards all people must impact how we interpret the rest of scripture - even the tricky bits. Are there any passages you struggle with?

Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 3: 10-17 that to be equipped for every good work is to know the Bible. A survey of 40,000 people aged between 8 and 80 discovered that reading the Bible has a profound effect on both our mental health and our spiritual growth, but only if it is done at least four times a week.¹ Once or twice a week provides a negligible benefit, and three times only results in a slight improvement. But among those who study the Bible at least four times a week there is a dramatic inflection point, a sharp uplift in their mental and spiritual wellbeing. In fact, these regular Bible readers are 30% less likely to feel lonely, 32% less prone to anger issues, 60% less likely to report feelings of spiritual stagnation, and 228% more likely to be active in sharing their faith.

If we want to discern Jesus voice we must spend more time in the gospels so that his words become familiar to us. 'the gospels provide the centre of gravity, the focal point for the whole of the rest of the Bible.'(p63) We process information differently so Pete Greg suggests these three different approaches in studying scripture. Have some fun and try a few of these out together.

Auditory Processors: Instead of just reading the words you may find it helpful to listen to the Bible, either by reading it aloud yourself or with one of the excellent audio versions available online (such as: <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>)

Visual Processors: You may find it helpful to deface your Bible! Write in the margins. Highlight the text in different colours. Make pages a feast for your eye - journaling Bibles have been designed with this in mind. Use a journal to doodle a verse, drawing images and thoughts that come up as a result. Take a trip to an art gallery and sit quietly in front of a depiction of a scene from the Bible. Watch a film like Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* or Dallas Jenkins' *The Chosen Series*.

Active processes: You may well engage powerfully with the Bible by putting its words into practice. This is of course, a necessary approach to scripture for everyone, and there are many ways of enacting God's word. E.g. after reading the words of Jesus in **Luke 3:11**, get up and fill a box for food bank from your cupboard or fill a bag of clothes for charity. You will experience great joy and will have undertaken the best bible study you could have possibly done.

¹ Cole & Ovwigho, *Understanding the Bible Engagement Challenge: Scientific Evidence for the Power of 4*, (Centre for Bible Engagement, 2009).