

All-Access

Week 2: Hearing God

- Last week, if you were here, you may have noticed we had a little bit of an awkward transition
 - We always have a plan and order of service. Jalisa and I talk through the order throughout the week, we determine which songs we're going to sing, what we're going to do in the Selah moment, how to end the service, ect.
 - And before the service, Jalisa let's me know what songs we are going to do and last week, we were going starting off with Open the Eyes of My Heart, Selah moment, then Shout to the Lord, O Praise the Name, and then the Sermon
 - So we sing shout to the Lord, and I'm still in my worship zone, eyes closed, ya know, connecting to the Father, and the song winds down, and next thing I know Jalisa, is just walking by me to go sit down
- I'm like, "Oh we not doin another song?" She says, "Nope" and I'm like, "Ok. Let's open our bibles!"
 - It wasn't a big deal at all, but I still wanted to give Jalisa a hard time about it after the service
 - And she said, "The Lord said that was it." She said, she heard the Lord say that the "people were full," and it was time to open the Word.
 - And after the service, she had one of the our visitors from our Upper Cleveland family come up to her, thanking her for the way she ministered that day, and she specifically, "I'm so full."
 - Instantly confirming that what Jalisa heard from the Lord was, in deed, the Lord and she heard Him correctly.
 - Now, I have been in a lot of churches and services where it felt like the Lord of that service was the order of service

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- And no matter what happens we have to stay on the order and follow the regularly scheduled program
- But I don't know about you, but I am so thankful to have a Worship Minister that is not just open to the Holy Spirit moving and changing things, but intentionally and actively listening for Him to move and change things
- I am thankful for the leadership of our Worship Pastor, who is passionate about leading us into the Presence of God through music, and leading us there by following Him and listening for His voice
 - No matter what she had planned, or how she originally thought it was supposed to go
- Now we can hear stories like that and I think it leaves a lot of Christians hanging.
 - We may not ask it out loud, but we might be thinking, "What is that like?"
- How does Jalisa hear the Lord like that? Is that for everyone? Or do only the pastors and worship leaders hear God like that?
- Today, I want to revisit the book of John in chapter 10, if you have your bibles you can turn with me there.
 - But whenever we were in our John series, we briefly talked about this aspect that I want to expound upon today, and that is: How do we know the voice of God?
 - In John chapter 10, whenever Jesus is talking about Himself being the Good-Shepherd, he says:
 - ***"The sheep hear His voice, and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When He has brought out all His own, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice...I Am the Good Shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me"-John 10:3b-4, 14 (ESV)***

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- Here I believe that Jesus very clearly answers the question, who can hear the voice of God? Any man woman or child that has put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Every single Christian who has the Holy Spirit within them has the voice of God available to them.
- But do we hear Him? Do we Know the Voice of the Shepherd? And probably more importantly, are we listening?
- One theologian said, ***“Wherever there are hearts waiting for the Voice of God, that Voice is to be heard.” -G. Campbell Morgan***
- PRAY
- I am not a good multi-tasker. It’s not in my nature. And I don’t know if it’s a guy thing or a me thing, but I don’t think I’m the only one.
- And I know where I get it from because I remember times getting so annoyed with my dad. Where we would be in the middle of a conversation, and then all of the sudden he would stop responding, and I would look over at him. And he would be staring at his computer.
- And because he was looking at the computer and reading something, he did not hear a word that I said. “Dad!” “Huh, what? Did you say somethin’??”
- But I get it honest. Because there will be times whenever me and Rachel are sitting on the couch, and I’m lookin at my phone, doing something important like fantasy football or catching up with Philly Sports
- And my attention gets diverted by the important things I’m doing on my phone, by Rachel huffin’ and puffin’ saying, “YOU’RE IGNORING ME!”
 - We probably have this back and forth every 2 to 3 weeks
 - I say, “I’m not ignoring you, I didn’t hear you!”
 - “YOU’RE IGNORING ME!”

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- “No I’m not, I promise!” I put the phone down, “What did you say??”
- “It’s too late now. You shoulda been paying attention to me....”
- I think sometimes we don’t hear the voice of God in our lives because we may not be as good at multi-tasking as we think we are
- The number 1 reason why we do not regularly hear God in our lives is because we’re distracted.
 - We’re looking at other things, we’re listening to other voices
 - Because there are a lot of voices speaking into our lives, probably more than any other generation before us
 - We have the news voice, social media voice, tv voice, the voice of our peers, the voice of our enemies, our own voice, and God’s voice all vying for our attention
 - And we try to hear and listen to all at once and it just doesn’t work that way.
- Have you ever been in a large group of people, and you’re in a conversation with one person, but there’s a conversation that is going on beside you or behind you that peaks your interest.
- So now, you’re in a conversation with one person, but you’re tuned into a different conversation, so you’re not actually hearing a word that the person in front of you is saying.
 - That’s exactly how we treat prayer too often.
 - We treat it as a casual surface level conversation that we engage in mostly to just be polite
 - But we’re not really interested in the conversation, and the only thing we actually hear in the conversation is the things that we say because we’re tuning into all of the other voices around us
- Jesus says the sheep of the Good Shepherd hear His voice, and know His voice.

- So the question is, are we hearing His voice, and do we know His voice whenever we hear it?
- I 100% believe that God still speaks to His people today, but we still live with this tension and battle of God's Spirit and our flesh and sin nature
- *Which is why Jesus said that "The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*
- First off, I think we need to know what God's voice isn't.
- **GOD'S VOICE IS NOT: YOUR CHOICE**
- YOUR CHOICE DOES NOT EQUAL GOD'S VOICE
- Just because you want something, does not mean that it's God's best for you
- Like the young guy who likes a girl, and says *"God told me that we're supposed to be together"*
- *Then I ask, "How do you know God told you that"*
- *"Um, through prayer, through His Word..."*
- *"Ok tell me, one verse that tells you that God is telling you to be with that person."*
- ...crickets. I've never gotten an answer to that question
- Because it's not that God is telling them to be with that person, they just want to be with that person, so if they say, "God told me," Then that doesn't leave room for the other person to question or discern it.
- And it give us the improper perspective of thinking that we can be the voice of God
- **GOD'S VOICE IS NOT: YOUR VOICE**
- We are never the voice of God ourselves.
- Even me as your pastor, I am not the voice of God in your life.
- And you know what? I don't want to be. I don't want that pressure

- Now God appoints certain people to be pastors to teach the word and help His people discern what the Holy Spirit is teaching them at that time
 - One of my former pastors, whenever someone would say to him, “Oh you really stepped on my toes, today pastor.” He would say, “No I didn’t, I was at the pulpit. I wasn’t anywhere near your toes. That was the Holy Spirit telling you exactly what you needed to hear when you needed to hear it.”
- One of the main reasons for this series is so that you know that God can speak to you just as much or even more so than He does to me.
- I want to be careful and clear about this because I think too many pastors are very careless with this language, and they say, “God told me to tell you,” “God called us to...,”
 - And not to say that He didn’t, but I think a lot of times we as pastors just lead people to a state of confusion wondering why God doesn’t talk to them like that.

- Or we use it as a platform that makes people think they cannot question us, because WE heard from God.
 - You know what God’s voice is not
- GOD’S VOICE IS NOT: RELIGIOUS LEADERS**
- As soon as it is accepted that the religious leader hears from God, and the people that follow him do not. That is the very moment that religion becomes a cult.
 - And we have a lot of cultish christian churches around now a days, because we buy into this “man of God” agenda, where we elevate the microphone and a stage, and make the head of the church Pastor, rather than keeping the Head of the Church, Christ.
 - The only time I’m ever going to tell you what God told you do to is if it is a direct quote from scripture.
 - Dallas Willard said in his book, Hearing God, ***“It cannot be stressed too much that the permanent address at which the Word of***

God may be found in the Bible.” -Dallas Willard: Hearing God

- Which leads me into the next section of this message. We just talked about 3 things that God’s voice is not. Next let’s look at 3 ways that God does speak to us.
- First, is what we just hit on.
- **GOD SPEAKS THROUGH: THE WRITTEN WORD**
 - The Bible is the avenue in which we begin to get to know the heart and character of God.
 - Also, the Bible is where you find God’s will for your life.
 - So many people gripe and complain because they can’t figure out what God’s will for their lives is
 - But God’s will for your life is very clear in Scripture.
 - And it’s not that complicated, God’s will for your life is this:

- Love God, Love Others, Go and Make Disciples
- However, there will be times that you need to discern the specific ways that you can carry out God’s will for your life.
 - Specifically like a vocation or a where to live.
 - For example, if you feel called to be a doctor, being a doctor is not God’s will for your life. It is just the avenue in which you can carry out God’s will to love God, love others, and make disciples.
 - Many Christians will never make disciples within their vocation because they see the vocation as the calling and elevate their job above the actual will of God in their lives.
- Therefore, we need the Bible to keep us grounded and on track.
- And Our prayers should begin with scripture as home base. Tim Keller warns, ***“Without immersion in God’s Words [Scriptures],***

our prayer may not be merely limited and shallow but also untethered from reality. We may be responding not to the real God but to what we wish God and life to be.

-Tim Keller: Prayer

- Without a steady dose of the Bible in our lives, we will fall in love with our idea of God rather than God Himself and then we fall into the danger of being one of those that Jesus talks about in Matthew 7 when He said, Depart from Me, I never knew you.
- We will never truly know God with out the scripture, and we will never truly be able to discern His voice without the scripture.
- ***“God’s voice will never tell us to engage in any activity or relationship that is inconsistent with the Holy Scriptures.”***
-Charles Stanley
 - *Therefore, the scriptures give us a guide to hearing the Voice of God*

- That is why we should always filter what we believe God to be saying to us through Scripture.
- He gives us the Bible as a guide to better recognize His Voice
- So does what you think God is telling you, contradict scripture in any way?
 - “Well I think God is telling me to empty my bank account and give it all to a ministry.” ...well 1 Timothy 5:8 says, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”
 - So that might not be Him, that might be you getting caught up in the moment...
- So make sure it’s scriptural
- The Bible is a Living Word, He will always speak to us in new and fresh ways through His Word

- Theologian Fredrick B. Meyer once said, ***“The [written] Word is the wire along which the voice of God will certainly come to you if the heart is hushed and the attention fixed.”***

-Fredrick B. Meyer

- Ah, but that’s the hard part. Staying hushed and keeping a fixed attention

- That is why it is so vitally important that we develop the spiritual discipline of scripture reading

- Because the better we know the written Word, the better we will be able to recognize the next way that God speaks to us.

- GOD SPEAKS THROUGH: THE INNER WORD

- This is the “Still small voice,” that Elijah describes in the book of 1 Kings.
- This is the whisper that Job describes
- This is the Holy Spirit within you, in which God communicates to you and through you.

• John describes it this way, ***“But you have received the Holy Spirit, and He lives within you, so you don’t need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what He teaches is true—it is not a lie. So just as He has taught you, remain in fellowship with Christ.” -1 John 2:27 (NLT)***

- So whenever you come into a relationship with Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who continues to teach you, speak to you, and lead you into all truth.

- But for some reason we buy into a theology that says, that God calls you into salvation but then goes silent

- God wants to speak into your personal life, into your specific circumstances, into your exact season of life
- But would we know it’s Him when He speaks?

- Now God speaks to us all in a lot of different ways. He has designed us all specifically with different personalities and temperaments and He knows how to communicate to us specifically
- But do we take the time to listen?
- Because God speaking to us through the Inner Voice is something that is learned. It takes time, effort, experience, and practice.
- And that is natural in any relationship. Rachel and I throughout our dating process, had to learn how to best communicate with each other to grow the relationship.
- And we are still in the process of learning each other and working on our communication with one another.
- As soon as we lose that effort, that is when our marriage is in trouble.
- In the same way, whenever we lose the effort and intentionality of communicating with God, the whole relationship is off.
- And a lot of times, this doesn't happen to us because we're ignoring but rather we're just ignorant.
 - It's not that we're ignoring His voice, it's just that we've been ignorant to the fact that He wants to talk to us.
- I know for me, pursuing God's voice in my life wasn't anything I was against or taught against, rather I just never really knew that I could pursue His voice in my life.
- I don't remember ever being taught or told that God wanted to speak to me individually or that I could learn the voice of the Holy Spirit in my life.
 - That is until I got to my 3rd college and I was a part of a prayer group and we began to really practice and pursue the voice of God in our lives.
 - We began to learn, through trial and error, if and when God was speaking to us.

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- Some of it was in very immature, college student ways
 - Always seeking the spectacular sometimes getting caught up in sounding all spiritual and clever
 - But the more you grow in your prayer life, the more you understand that God doesn't speak in riddles.
 - I think we may think that sometimes because the way that Jesus would speak in parables, but that was a different circumstance
 - If you look throughout scripture, especially in the old testament, whenever God would give direction, His directions were clear
 - It was clear to Jonah that he was to go to Nineveh. He didn't want to, but there was no question what God's directions were
- So these were all things I was beginning to learn by experience, effort, and practice as I got more intentional with the Bible.
 - And all of that led to me sitting in Rocky Creek Baptist Church, in Greenville, SC one Sunday. And after the message, I was praying a very typical "God tell me what do you, I do whatever you want me to do and go wherever you want me to go," type of prayer.
 - Not even listening for a response but in that moment, I heard very clearly from the Holy Spirit "Go to Shelby."
 - Now, I did now hear an audible voice. The lights didn't flicker, the ground didn't shake, as a booming voice came from heaven.
 - It was the inner voice. The best way I can describe it, is it was like a very clear thought that I knew wasn't my own.
 - Dallas Willard describes it this way:
"Whenever He guides us in our conscious cooperation with Him as friends and collaborators, He does so by speaking to us, by giving to us thoughts and perceptions that bear within themselves

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the marks of their divine origination.”

-Dallas Willard: Hearing God

- Now I would like to say that at that moment I dropped everything, left all of my possessions and just followed in obedience.
 - But I didn't, I fought it. I passed it off as it was just my thought. Because the only reason that I knew that Shelby, NC existed is because I had dated a girl from there who had since dumped me.
 - I didn't wanna go there!
 - But the next day, I had a random lady in the meat section of the Bi-Lo I was working at tell me all of the reason why she thought I should go to Shelby
 - So yea, God wasn't gonna let me think that it was just me thinkin'
 - No, it was like He was saying through that lady, "That was my voice, those are my directions, and you better follow me son."
- I think whenever we pursue His voice, He will find ways to let us know that it's Him.
- Like last week whenever I told the story about my Aunt Jeanne waking up to pray for me at the exact time that I got into a car crash.
 - She asked why God would prompt her in that way.
 - And perhaps one of the reasons would be for her to better be able to recognize His voice.
 - There was no doubting that was God who prompted her after she saw my car all bashed up the next morning, and maybe the next time the Inner Voice needed to speak to her, she would better recognize, "Yea, that's God."
- We need those types of moments where we can confirm that God spoke to us, rather than it just being our own thoughts.
- And that is going to be a process to learn and experience that distinction.

- E. Stanley Jones says, ***“Perhaps the rough distinction is this: The voice of the subconscious argues with you, tries to convince you; but the inner voice of God does not argue, does not try to convince you. It just speaks, and it is self-authenticating. It has the feel of the voice of God within it.” -E. Stanley Jones***
 - This is another reason why we know that God doesn't speak in riddles.
 - Paul says He is not a God of confusion
 - Dallas Willard said He is not a mumbling trickster.
 - And sometimes we have a very hard time discerning God speaking to us through the Inner Voice because we are a victim to our expectations of what He sounds like and what He is supposed to be saying.
 - So for another couple sub-points, here are three things that can keep us from hearing the Inner-Voice
- First: **WE DON'T HEAR GOD WHEN: WE'RE DISTRACTED BY SIN**
 - If we are living in a way that is obviously contradictory to His Word, then obviously our relationship is going to be off.
 - And that is not Him turning His back on us, that is us deliberately turning our back on Him
 - Remember, there is a difference between sinning and living in sin.
 - We are all going to sin in various ways everyday, we're human, we're imperfect, that's why we need His mercies that are new every morning.
 - However, if we have a sin that we are deliberately unrepentant of, it will hinder our ability to hear Him.
 - Peter even says that if husbands are not treating their wives the right way it will hinder their prayers.

- So we should consistently be praying like David did in psalm 139 when he said, ***“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” -Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV)***
- Whenever we genuinely pray that, God will answer, and you will hear Him through the inner-voice answer very clearly what sin in your life needs to be dealt with. And we He does, we need to listen and obey.
- Next: **WE DON'T HEAR GOD WHEN: WE TREAT HIM AS THE SERVICE**
 - One Professor refers to this as treating Him as a Cosmic Butler
 - Whenever we treat God as a butler, we expect Him to come whenever we call, clean up our messes, and just tell us what we want to hear.
 - But it doesn't work that way with God. He's in charge, not us
 - And there in lies probably the number 1 hindrance to having an authentic conversational relationship with God...the fact that we want to be in charge
 - We want Him at our beckon call
 - It's apparently how little Christians actually want to know His voice by the way we rarely seek it unless we're in trouble or facing a big decision.
 - However, those who really understand His voice have an earnest desire to hear Him and know Him in the uneventful times as much as the difficult times.
 - A lot of times we only seek Him in the face of big decisions because of the third reason we don't hear God at times.
- **WE DON'T HEAR GOD WHEN: WE'RE LOOKING FOR A SCAPEGOAT**

- Many times we will be faced with a big decision, and we want God to tell us what to do, so we don't have to be responsible for making the decision.
- If things go wrong, then we can just blame God
- But that is a very blasphemous and immature way of thinking.
- A lot of times God will leave the decision up to you.
- Why? Well a child will never grow, mature, or become responsible unless they have to make some decisions on their own.
 - And there will be many times where we are faced with making a big decision, facing a few or many options, and we will be begging God to tell us what to do
 - And He'll give us crickets.
 - Almost as if He is saying, Just pick one.
- Sometimes it's time to take some responsibility, sometimes it's time to grow up
- And when we do so, we begin to really walk by faith because we make a decision trusting that God will be on the other side of it, rather than Him just carrying us along the whole time.
- Whenever we are consistent with the Written Word, we seek Him for Him, we can get these distractions and preconceived notions out of the way and really begin to hear Him.
 - So God speaks to us through the Written Word, the Inner Word and finally:
- **GOD SPEAKS THROUGH: HIS PEOPLE**
- There will be times where God has been impressing something on you, guiding you, and He needs to send another person to confirm it
 - Just like with Jalisa last week and like the Bi-Lo lady did for me
 - And I confidently believe God wants to use you in that way.

- I believe that there will be times when we are healthily walking in the Spirit, and God will put someone on your heart that He wants you to speak to and encourage.
- However, the way that you go about that makes all of the difference.
 - We talked about this toward the end of our last series, but when Paul is talking to the church at Corinth about the context of the gifts and moving of the Holy Spirit in the church, he says, ***“the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.” - 1 Corinthians 14:3 (ESV)***
 - Remember, that Word Prophecy in this context means, “to teach, refute, reprove, admonish, or comfort under the prompting of the Holy Spirit.”
 - So Paul says, if the Holy Spirit is prompting you say something to someone, the purpose of it is for upbuilding and encouragement and consolation.
- So if what you feel like the Holy Spirit wants you to say to someone is not going to be encouraging or comforting to them. It’s not of God, and you need to shut up and keep your comments to yourself.
 - I’m just paraphrasing Paul here
- And again, we have to understand that there is a good chance that we could misinterpret what we’re hearing from God. So we need to be extra cautious when delivering a word from God to another person.
 - Because if I approach and say, “God told me to tell you...” what if i’m wrong? I could break down and discourage that person instead of building them up
- But if I approach it with, “Hey, you’ve been on my heart lately and I’ve been praying for you, and I feel led to share this with you...”
 - Now that leaves room for discernment and if nothing else, that person feels loved and cared for and noticed.

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- Now, that is in no way being timid or faithless. That's just me admitting that I am not the voice of God and because of that there's a possibility that I could be wrong
 - Because Paul says we pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts
- And in that instance, I may be desiring the gift of discernment, wisdom, or knowledge...but I'm pursuing Love first and foremost.
- I think a good practice is to just get still before God, and ask Him "Lord, who do you want me to pray for."
 - And see who He brings to mind.
 - See who He burdens your heart for and how He leads you to pray for them.
 - Sometimes it might seem super random, but you never know how God could use you to encourage someone.
- *Some years, back, not exactly sure how long ago it was, but it was before I met Rachel. I had a lady, who I knew well, come up to me*

one Sunday and she said. "Hey, so I ask God to speak to me in dreams. And I don't know how often He actually does, but I was praying for you one night and I had a dream that you came to church with a tall blonde girl that none of us knew. You looked so happy, and I'm not sure if this is anything but I felt like I should share that with you."

- *Now I definitely thought that was a little weird, and I just kind of passed it off. But I don't know if you know, but my wife today, is a tall blonde bombshell that no one knew at the time*
- *And I didn't even think about that interaction I had with that lady again until I got engaged, and then the memory of that moment hit me.*
- *And I don't know, but maybe her telling me that, even though I thought it was weird, may have planted a seed in me of being ok that that my love life may not go the way I thought it would and gave me a little confidence to start putting myself out there.*

- *I don't know! But I do know that even though I thought the idea of her having a dream about my love life was a little weird, I still felt loved and cared for because of how she handled the conversation.*
- So if you have something like this happen to you. Where someone comes up to give you a Word from God and it's something that God has not communicated to you yet, here's what you do.
- Put it on the shelf.
- Don't reject it, but don't put stock into it either.
 - That way, if something comes of it. Cool! Praise God!
 - If nothing comes of it, you can have grace for a flawed human being like yourself who's trying.
- There is something so comforting about knowing that another person is taking the time to pray for you.
- I felt very passionately about going through this series together because I so desperately want our church to have a culture of prayer
 - Where we are consistently praying for each other, having God impress on us things to encourage each other with
 - And we don't have to be weird about it
 - We just have to care about each other and Seek Him.
- And if you're not sure where to start when it comes to seeking Him or pursuing His voice let me give you 4 practical steps where you can start:
 - Now these are pretty general and they should be because I'm very weary about putting formulas on things like your relationship with God.
 - So this is just a starting point for you as you develop your own routine with God in your own personal relationship with Him.
- **Set an appointment**

- Why? Because you are much more likely to honor your meeting time with God if you schedule it.
- If you think that's impersonal I would disagree
- The most personal time I ever spend with any of you is whenever we schedule out a time to share a meal or coffee together.
- We don't just spend that time together on a whim, we have to schedule it.
- So look at your schedule, and find a time that you are going to intentionally meet with God
- And whenever you make that appointment, the first thing you do is:
 - **Be still and worship**
 - Very simply, play a worship song. Is there a song that we have been singing together at church that has been speaking to your heart, play it.
 - **Pray and Read**
 - Mediate on the music and the words.
 - This is not mystical or emotionalism in any way. Because music is used all throughout the scripture to help usher in the presence of God
 - The difference between now and those times in the Old Testament is that now we are on the other side of the cross and because of His Spirit within us, we are always in the direct presence of God
 - But the music can still help us more spiritually experience and give us a deeper awareness of His presence that we are currently in.
 - After the song, you can leave some background music going if you wish but next:
 - **Pray and Read**
 - Open the Bible, ask God to give you insight to what you are about to read.

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- Ive heard is said that praying before reading your bible is like putting on your spiritual reading glasses.
- *Dallas Willard example*
- So whether you use this tool or not, after you're finished reading and praying through a passage, next.

- Listen and Write

- Have a journal, piece of paper, or even a notes app on your phone ready. Think deeply about the passage you read, and write down what you think God is teaching you through that Word.
- Let the Written Word spark the Inner Word, that leads you to apply the truths of scripture to your life.
- Also you could finish out your time by writing out a short prayer to God.
- Last week I encouraged you to pray out loud, this week try writing out a prayer every day

- Try these things and see how your intimacy with the Father develops