

LIVING YOUR DESTINY

A TRAINING CAMP



COACH'S GUIDE

LIVING YOUR DESTINY

Living Your Destiny Training Camp and related materials are published by Life Training Center. It's the fifth Training Camps in Series 1. These are not "ordinary" Bible studies. The camps identifies spiritual "skills" that Christians need. The teachings explain why the skills are important and how to develop the skills.

But the camps then go a step further than what you expect in a Bible study. Like a sports or performing arts coach, we break the skills down into small steps that can be practiced. Each camp has exercises that are geared towards developing skills. The trainees are led through the exercises together in each group session. They are also encouraged to practice the exercises on their own through the week. This is their homework.

The exercises always include Bible reading, but not just to look up certain verses and fill in some blanks. The Bible reading and other parts of the exercises are solely geared toward the trainee practicing God's presence. They are about spending time with God to know His heart, not about learning facts about Him. We want to develop in trainees a thirst to know God more deeply. "As a deer longs for streams of water, so I long for You, God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I come and appear before God?" (Psalms 42:1-2)

For more information, and additional resources, go to www.LifeTrainingCenter.org.



This guide is intentionally called a “Coach’s Guide,” not a “Leader’s Guide” or “Teacher’s Guide.” Leading this Training Camp (or any of them) requires you to think like a coach, not a teacher. A teacher imparts information to prepare students to pass a test. A coach demonstrates skills, and leads players in practicing the skills together to enable a team to win games.

We Christians are God’s team. We are not just in a game, but a battle. However, the process is the same. A recruit must be shown the skills they’ll need in order to not just survive, but be victorious. Then they must be led to practice those skills over and over so that they can face the enemy in battle and win.

The lessons in this Training Camp explain important principles. But the most important part of any training camp is practicing the skills together. So, the exercises are the most important part.

In this workbook, you will see everything that’s in the “Recruits” workbook plus additional materials to help you lead the group.

1. Each page of the recruits’ workbook is reproduced in this guide, (with the blanks filled in).
2. Additional background notes and discussion ideas are added where appropriate. There’s also space for you to write your own thoughts about the material.
4. At the beginning of each lesson section will be a box. You’ll see this exact one at the top left of pg 4.

What’s the “big idea”?

Lesson 1: The purpose of the whole book of Ephesians (not just chapter 6) is to equip believers for spiritual warfare.

These boxes will contain a short statement of the main focus of the lesson to help you stay on target.

LIVING YOUR DESTINY OVERVIEW:

Recruits who have been participating in the Training Camps in the order they’re planned, will have just finished three other training camps. They will have had a great deal of practice soaking in the scripture, praising, and praying in the Spirit in order to hear God speak. They will also have had a lot of opportunity to practice doing something about what they hear. “Hear and do!”.

This Training Camp will continue to use those skills, and help the recruit apply those and other skills in order to be living the destiny that God has for each of them. The camp takes twelve weeks. On the “odd” weeks (1,3,5,7,9,11) there will be a video lesson. On the “even” weeks, the focus will be on practicing the skills together and sharing experiences and tips.

The way we practice is as you would expect, we do prescribed exercises. We do them together in class and encourage the trainees to continue doing them on their own through the week in the sections that start like this: **LESSON 1 EXERCISES**. You and the recruits will need the Armor workbook for following along with the video lessons. They’ll also need a journal or other notebook for the exercises. The Word Comes Alive Training Camp journal works well for this.

While you cannot make anyone do the exercises, you must do everything you can to encourage that. First, you should do the exercises yourself. Second, you need to include group sharing about the exercises in class.

welcome to the first session of a series on Living My Destiny. I encourage you to read the synopsis of the Training Camp method on the inside front cover. Be reminded of how important it is to constantly be honing our fundamentals. But, I'll start by reading a short description of the series on page 1 of your workbook

Many Christians believe they have a destiny, and want to reach it. We've been told and believe that God has a plan for each of us. But for many that plan is a mystery or something always somewhere in the future.

This training camp will look at examples from the Bible of those who lived out their destiny. We'll discover skills that help us find and walk in our destiny, as well as what stands in our way. Most importantly, we'll practice those skills together to help learn to hear God's voice better, be discovering His plan, and living it.

That's very important. I don't feel like it's my job just to pass on information to you, not just as a teacher, but as a coach to be helping you put these things into practice. Finding ways for you to exercise the skills. Sometimes we look at spiritual things that because they're gifts and supernatural, they just happen. Jesus used parables about earthly things to show the truths of spiritual things. So we know there are parallels between the way spiritual things and natural things work.

Destiny is a big, important sounding word; impressive, deep, and intense.

I start the first lesson by asking a few questions to get a sense of the audience's view of destiny. I have an opinion of how people view it, and I wanted to see if I was right. I asked the audience to just raise their hand to indicate their response to the questions.

TRAINING CAMP



Vince Lombardi, the Green Bay Packers legendary football coach, had an interesting way to begin pre-season training camp. Football in hand, Lombardi walked to the front of the room, held out the pigskin in front of him and said, "Gentlemen, this is a football."

In only five words, Lombardi communicated his point: We're going to start with the basics and make sure we're executing all the fundamentals.⁽²⁾ Why in the world would a seasoned coach talk to professional athletes like that? Lombardi operated on a simple philosophy. He believed that excellence could be best achieved by perfecting the basics of the sport.⁽³⁾

Life Training Center's Training Camps bring together "pros" and "rookies" to learn from and sharpen each other. It is a concentrated time of learning new skills and sharpening old ones. Michael Jordan said, "You have to monitor your fundamentals constantly. The minute you get away from fundamentals, the bottom can fall out of your game, your schoolwork, your job, whatever you're doing. Get the fundamentals down and the level of everything you do will rise." We must keep our fundamentals sharp at all times. The Training Camps are a means of ensuring that we are constantly raising the level of everything we do for God's Kingdom.

**"Gentlemen,
this is a football"**



Professional and amateur athletes, as well as performing artists, and even sales people have coaches. Often when a professional's performance is slipping, the first thing a coach will do is take them back to the fundamentals. No matter what level they're at, rehearsing the fundamentals is... well, fundamental. We never get too good at what we do that we have no need to brush up on the basics.

NAME & DATE

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- How many believe everyone has a destiny? (if you believe that, raise your hand) (practically everyone).
- How many believe YOU have a destiny? (most)
- How many know your destiny? (lot fewer hands on that one, which is what I expected.)
- How many feel confident that you're moving toward it? (Very few hands on that one.)

There are people who seem to know their destiny. They seem to see the big picture and they're making a beeline for it.

Me? Not so much. Based on the very impromptu survey I just took, that's true of many of you as well. You believe you have a destiny, but knowing what it is and moving in that direction; is a whole other issue. It's like the road sign on the cover of the book. We're constantly faced with options, choices, decisions. "Oh God, which way do I go?"

Throughout these 6 lesson videos, I'll share many of my experiences as they relate to the topics. During the sharing times, I'll also ask you, coaches, to share. You'll want to ask your recruits to share as well, and you'll learn from each

other. It's not just about me as "teacher" handing out all my vast knowledge about this, because I don't have a vast knowledge. I do have some. Each of you has some experience and knowledge also.

In the Lesson 1 video, I shared my initial experience on this road of living my destiny. I became a Christian on January 8, 1974. I was going to art school in Pittsburgh which was at that time, a center of the Charismatic Renewal. That was a long time ago and I find that many people today don't know what that was. It was a time of Holy Spirit revival in mainline denominations that had been historically resistant to that. The Catholics were on fire, especially around Pittsburgh, where I was.

I got saved, and I was baptized in the Spirit at the Catholic Charismatic Conference that was held there that

Living your DESTINY

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Other Training Camps in Series One:

The Word Comes Alive | Power for Living | Putting on the Armor | Kingdom Minded Prayer | Catch the Wind

Training Camps in Series Two:

Bible Memory | Beyond the Rearview Mirror

year. Within a short period of time, I was also baptized in water. There were a number of us being baptized one night in a big galvanized tub in the basement.

After my baptism, I was walking away with someone to get dried off and changed. I heard someone speaking behind me. However, I wasn't paying any attention to it because I assumed it was just the next baptism taking place.

However, the person accompanying me, stopped me and turned me around to look back towards the baptism tub where I realized that the person speaking was not the pastor baptizing, but the man who had been the guest speaker at the service earlier, and he was pointing at me. This man was giving a prophecy to me, about my future, about God's plan for me. In front of all these people, God had a message for I'll ole' me. I had no means of recording what was said, or even to make any note of it. Honestly, I was quite stunned by the whole thing. So, I don't remember the exact words that were spoken, but I will never forget the gist. However, I'm not going to tell you, at least not today. Maybe in later lessons.

The reason I tell you that much right is to point out that you could say I've known my destiny since 1974. But that prophecy, that destiny didn't come with a road map or a set of instructions. So, for me, it was still a lot wandering and wondering, guessing and stumbling and trying.

If you're kind of like me and you feel like you've been wandering and wondering a lot more than you've been living your destiny, I want to tell you there's hope for you. There's hope for all of us.

I also share my up and down experiences as a challenge for some of you. I have two very important words for you, "THERE'S MORE!"

There's always more! There's always more of God. We always need to be aiming at the "more". Whether you're a newbie or you've been doing this forever; Whether you have no clue what your destiny is or you feel like you know it and you're on your way and you're practically there, there's always more. So keep shooting for the more. Don't get comfortable where you are. Stretch!!!

Let's get into Lesson 1 now. At the top of page 3, you see a brick with the word "Bible" on it. I'll explain that later. The title of today's lesson is, "Skill & Obstacle." Each week we're going to discover AND practice skills, yes, spiritual skills.

We Pentecostals often seem to think the idea of being Spirit led is totally the opposite of something like a skill to be learned. But they're not. They're like two sides of the same coin. Though we certainly don't act like being Spirit led is a skill to be learned, I'm here to tell you and show you that it is.

There's the power of the Holy Spirit. He can do all kinds of amazing things, and He may, but there's also a lot of learning and practicing and skills.

You see this in 1 Timothy 4:7-8. In this passage, Paul is giving Timothy instructions about how to be a good servant of Jesus, and how to help others. Here's what Paul is saying to Timothy...

⁷...train* yourself in godliness, ⁸for the training* of the body has a limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

So you see that Paul is comparing training in godliness, with physical training. He's saying that godliness training is more beneficial than physical training, but that doesn't mean we should think we don't need training in godliness. It emphasizes the IMPORTANCE of training in godly things. If you look up the word training in a Greek/English dictionary, it looks like this...

***gymnasia (or gymnasia)**

You see a very familiar word there, “gymnasium”.

You see that the training word, here, in the original Greek greatly resembles our English word “gymnasium”. Think about the kinds of things that happen in a gymnasium; exercises. We do physical exercises to increase strength, agility and power.

We can do “godliness” exercises in the same kinds of ways for the same kinds of purposes. We’re going to do that throughout this Training Camp.

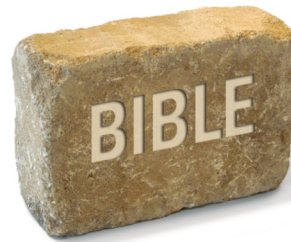
I’ll be demonstrating skills that we’ll practice together to hone our spiritual abilities.

Think about this in regard to prayer, for instance. Prayer must be Spirit led, right? But the disciples said to Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray.” And He gave them a model prayer, (we call it the Lord’s prayer). He didn’t give it to them so much for them to repeat it word for word, but for them to learn a pattern from it. He often took them aside with Him at times practice praying with Him.

As I teach these skills in the next 6 weeks, I will sometimes be giving you a step by step process to follow. I’ll give you reasons why they work and I want you to try it. But, I’M NOT GIVING YOU RULES. I’m not saying that you’ve got to do this, this, this and this, or else you won’t hear from God. But these are things to try and ways to stretch yourself, to maybe find out something you didn’t know before. Then adapt it to fit you.

Maybe everything I’ll tell you and show you in these next weeks is second nature to you. Maybe you’ve got it, and it’s all automatic to you. Please try this stuff anyway.

Even if it doesn’t help you so much, you might learn something and then come across someone else like me, for whom it’s not automatic and it’s not second nature. And you’ll be able to show them these skills and exercises as a way to help them get into finding their destiny.



LESSON

1

SKILL & OBSTACLE

I. PREVIEW

- A. Skills. 1 Timothy 4:7-8, T r a i n yourself in godliness.
- B. Hindrances.
- C. Safety Net.
- D. Practice.
- E. Pursuit. If you want to know and reach your destiny, pursue G o d!

Not surprisingly, there will also be hindrances, lots of them. We're going to look at one obstacle each week; things that can hold you back from knowing and living your destiny.

Today, I'll tell you what I believe is THE BIGGEST hindrance for any of us living our destiny.

Mentioning hindrances introduces the fact that there are challenges. There will be risks involved in pursuing God's plan for us. But I want to assure you that there is a safety net. I won't be able to give you the details about that until Lesson 3, but I just wanted to start out by giving you that assurance. There is a safety net. I'm going to ask you to do some things that may be pushing the envelope a bit, stretching yourself. There will be some challenges, but remember the safety net.

And as I said, we'll practice skills together because they are skills as well as gifts. We'll break things down into smaller, easier steps, try them together. Help each other.

The topic of the last lesson will be "Pursuit." We're talking about our destiny! In a sense, we're pursuing our destiny. But what we really need to be pursuing is NOT our destiny. If we want to know and reach that, what we need to pursue is GOD! Sometimes we may think we're doing that. We're doing our best to be pursuing God. And God is gracious. I'm so thankful that He is. I can testify to that, but sometimes we may need to get back on track a bit. I may realize that I've not so much been pursuing God's agenda as pursuing mine. I can be trying to get God to bless my agenda rather than finding out what His is. So this is all part of us trying to get ourselves shifted around, constantly readjusting and returning ourselves to be aiming at God's agenda, and then we will live our destiny.

Before we go any further, we need to define the term destiny. What exactly does that word mean? Definitions sometimes suggested are journey, path to the future, purpose, or reaching a goal. Those are all part of this. Certainly one thing we all want to know is, "what's God's plan for me?" What am I supposed to be doing.

I admit that using the word destiny can throw us off from what I believe we need to know and what I believe this camp's purpose really is, because it has the same root as the word destination. Therefore, we tend to think about and focus on an end result rather than a process.

Obviously, the first place I went to in preparation for this study is the scripture. I've got to tell you, the word isn't used very often in the Bible. I have a couple of references listed in your book. I'll let you look those up on your own. All of the references I found, like those two, are talking about the pre-determined destruction of those who don't follow Jesus.

That points us to our first dictionary definition of "destiny." A pre-ordained future. I have a place for you to write that in your workbook, but I also have a question mark after it. Though that is the dictionary definition, I think at the very least, looking at it like that brings us too close to a kind of fatalism. That definition sounds like "whatever is going to happen will happen, I'm just along for the ride." That is so NOT TRUE! God is absolutely in control. God is sovereign, but He chooses to give us a part to play in all this. I don't know how He does that. But He's God!

For those of us who are Christians, the Bible doesn't use the word destiny regarding OUR future. It does talk about God having plans for us; a goal and future for us. One well known scripture is Jeremiah 29:11.

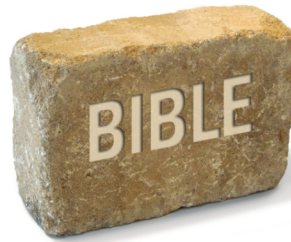
"For I know the plans I have for you" (and he's talking to Israel, His people) — this is the Lord's declaration — "plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

Yes, Amen, hallelujah! Praise God! That's what we want, right? To look for, discover and understand God's plan for us and to be living it out.

That brings us to another dictionary definition which is closer to what we're going to focus on is... life's purpose. B-u-u-ut I've got a question mark after that one, too. It's certainly kind of true. It's closer, but I think it still misses the mark and can lead us down the wrong path. It's certainly NOT going to be the direction of this Training Camp, and I hope you're not disappointed in that. Let me explain.

I think that definition makes it sound like each of us has basically ONE thing we're supposed to accomplish. That's where I think it is misleading.

So, now let's get to my definition of destiny, which is the definition I'll be using in the rest of this camp.



LESSON

1

SKILL & OBSTACLE

I. PREVIEW

- A. Skills. 1 Timothy 4:7-8, T r a i n yourself in godliness.
- B. Hindrances.
- C. Safety Net.
- D. Practice.
- E. Pursuit. If you want to know and reach your destiny, pursue G o d!

II. DESTINY

- A. What does the word "destiny" mean? 2 Corinthians 11:15; Philippians 3:19; Jeremiah 29:11.
 - 1. P r e - o r d a i n e d f u t u r e?
 - 2. L i f e ' s p u r p o s e?

I'll give you my definition of destiny based on Ephesians 2:8-10, and this is what we're going to be focusing on in the Destiny Training Camp.

⁸For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift — ⁹not from works, so that no one can boast.

These are 2 verses people often memorize and quote, and they're very important for us to know that we're saved by grace, we can't earn it. But often, people don't continue and connect this to the next verse...

¹⁰For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.

God, as we read in Jeremiah, has a plan for us, a goal, a future. But, it's not predetermined. It's not out of our control. We have a role to play in that. He's created us FOR GOOD WORKS, but not just any good works. It's specific works that God prepared ahead of time for each of us. Now it's our responsibility to walk in them. You see there that this is ongoing. It's not something that's just out there somewhere that we hope to reach someday. It's works, plural, and it's ongoing. They've been prepared ahead of time and we should be walking in them.

So, here's my definition that I'll be using for destiny, "God-planned" good works. It's important to keep that in mind as we continue to make it clear what we're shooting for. Then we can take the right steps towards doing whatever good works God has planned for each of us.

Jesus is our first example. I'm going to take a very brief look at what his destiny was and how He walked it out? As with Him or any of the examples we'll look at over the next weeks, I want us to be thinking about the questions, "When did they know their destiny?" AND, "When do they live their destiny?" And remember that the definition we're using is God-planned good works.

¹⁸The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way...

²⁰...an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to (Joseph) in a dream, saying, "...don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is by the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

That was Jesus' destiny; His BI-I-IG destiny. But He had a lot of God planned good works all along the way. Many of them were Old Testament prophecies that absolutely had to be fulfilled by Him, or He could not have been the Messiah who saved us.

He had to be the Lamb that was slain, but also the Lamb without spot or blemish. He had to start from day one being sinless, living His destiny. Now God is great! He views us differently. He views us through Christ, so we are spotless and blameless in Him. We don't have to get down on ourselves because we missed something. We don't have to live a perfect life like Jesus did. God can and does turn things around for us. But, going forward, we want to be seeking God to find out the God-planned good works He has for each of us and doing those to the best of our ability.

II. DESTINY

A. What does the word "**destiny**" mean? 2 Corinthians 11:15; Philippians 3:19; Jeremiah 29:11.

1. Pre-ordained future?

2. Life's purpose?

3. Ephesians 2:8-10, God-planned good works.

B. Jesus, our first example. Matthew 1:18-21.

As I said, there are skills for us to learn and practice, and today I want to tell you what I believe is the most necessary skill for living our destiny; the one and only most necessary skill. All the other skills we'll talk about or that we might even imagine or come up with are underneath and a part of this one.

We see this in Luke 8:21, I love the way this verse boils it all down. Jesus is talking to a bunch of people and someone tells Him his mother and brothers are outside and want to talk to Him.

²¹(Jesus said) to them, “My mother and My brothers are those who hear and do the word of God.”

There you have it. The MOST NECESSARY SKILL for any of us to be living our destiny is to hear and do. HEAR GOD and do what He says! The skill. That's it. Everything else we do or learn should be because we heard God and we're doing what He wants. That should be our goal in everything.

This is also shown very clearly in John 10. This whole passage is about Jesus the good Shepherd leading us, His sheep. I'll read a few verses now. You can read the rest of the chapter on your own.

³...the sheep hear (the shepherd's) voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. ⁵They will never follow a stranger; instead they will run away from him, because they don't recognize the voice of strangers.

In all this passage, You can learn a lot about the shepherd and the sheep. But the only instruction in here for us sheep to do is to hear the Shepherd's voice and follow. We get all caught up in thinking, “I gotta learn where the dangers are so I can avoid them.” And “I got to learn where the good grass is...” No! Just follow Him. He knows all that stuff.

Hear & Follow God. That's it! It's the most essential part of living our destiny. If you've been in any of my training camps, you know that I emphasize it in all of them because that's the key to everything. We get so bogged down with so many other things. And we get involved in so many things. We belong to a church and the church has ministries, there are jobs that need done, and that's great. That's fine. But if we are so involved in those things, but we're not taking time to say, “God what do YOU want me to be doing” and then following that, we're going to get off. We may accomplish some things but we won't really have accomplished the God-planned good works He has for us.

And this is one skill; 2 parts, one skill. Hear & Do. Hear & Do. Hear & Do. If you don't do, you haven't really heard. If you think you're hearing something and you don't do anything about it, you're not going to hear any more. I'll talk about that later in this lesson. You have to DO SOMETHING if you want to KEEP hearing. We need to work on that skill.

Today's lesson and this week's exercises are going to be a review of the FIRST way that we can learn or improve our skill of hearing God and that's through soaking in the scriptures. That's why I have the brick with the word, “Bible” on it at the beginning of this lesson.

We can learn to hear and improve our skill of hearing by soaking in the scripture. When I say that, I mean spend some time in it, but specifically spend time in it EXPECTING God to meet with you and speak to you. Not to learn rules. We want to know the rules. We tend to have this list of stuff we shouldn't do. God wants us to know Him, talk to Him, listen to Him, so that we're following Him, not rules.

And we need to come to the Bible that way. It's alive. It says it's alive!

God speaks through so many different ways. I'm going to highlight a few general categories. There's no way we could imagine all the ways God might choose to speak to us. But He wants that relationship with us more than anything. More than getting us to do certain things, more than getting us to accomplish certain tasks, He

wants the relationship. So we need to put that first and foremost to learn to hear Him, so that whatever He's saying, whenever He's saying it, I hear and follow.

There's a song that I've loved for many years and it's actually been a prayer of mine. That may be why I've come as far as I have in learning my destiny and living it. It says, talking to God, "when Your heart beats, I want to feel it.

When Your eyes cry, I want to catch the tears. When Your voice speaks I want to hear it. I want to know You." Before everything else.

I am so amazed and so touched by the scripture that says God catches every one of my tears, but what about us being close enough that when He cries, we catch His tears. "Oh, God! What's breaking Your heart today? I want to cry with You. What are you excited about today? I want to rejoice with You." Even more than, "well what do you want me to do for You today, God?"

"How's it going God?" I have to say, I've never started a prayer like that, but I may. "How's it going God?" .

That's the most necessary skill. What's the BIGGEST OBSTACLE?

III. MOST NECESSARY SKILL

- A. Luke 8:21, H e a r & d o.
- B. John 10, H e a r & f o l l o w God.
 - 1. This is the most essential part of living our destiny.
 - 2. God is always speaking to us, we need to learn to hear.

IV. BIGGEST OBSTACLE

This is going to be how I see it, but I'll show you why.

Most people would say it's disobedience. I have that in your workbook, but there again, I've put a question mark after it. Disobedience? Yeah! Disobedience has got to be the biggest obstacle to us living our destiny, but I've put a question mark after it because I think we need to be more specific. When we just list that general category, we miss a lot of things that are most important and necessary.

I believe the biggest thing that stops me or you from hearing God is... "resistance to change." Another way of saying that is, being in a rut! This is what I always do, so this is what I'm going to keep doing. God don't mess with me, I've got my plans. I've got this to do today, I've got to get this done today, go here, go there. So, I'll talk to you later, God, but I don't want to talk to you right now because You might have other ideas about what I should do.

If we're going this way, we tend to keep going this way. If I'm sitting here, I tend to just keep sitting here. God may be trying to say something to me to get me to do something, and I might begin to hear, "maybe God wants me to do that... But I'm not sure, so I'll just sit here until I hear an audible voice." Good luck with that. It hasn't happened for me.

We're going to need to work on changing some things up if we want to hear God's voice; and live our destiny. We've got to be willing to go out on a limb a little bit. Over these next six weeks, I'm going to ask you to go out on a limb, but just a little bit. Be brave! You can do it. And we're all in this together. One of the reasons I like to do these things together is that we can help, support, encourage and even nudge each other.

This obstacle is demonstrated in Hebrews 3-4 where it talks about a hardened heart. That's one of those terms that we tend to think of as those horrible awful pagans out there or maybe even Christians but one's have just so turned away from God and they are absolutely willful and stubborn. And that doesn't apply to me.

But sometimes it does apply to me and you, because we can have our hearts hardened a little bit. OR our hearts can be hardened in certain areas and not others. Think about a hardened artery. One artery can be hardened and clogged into your heart. You're still functioning, you're still gonna be okay, for a while. But you're missing something. You don't have quite the full strength you could have. You don't have quite the abilities you should and the likelihood is that the hardening is going to continue, and then your whole heart's gonna be hardened if you don't change.

So let's read at what it says in Hebrews 3:7 to begin with.

⁷Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: (notice what this is connected to) Today, if you hear His voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness.

Verse 15 is practically identical.

¹⁵...Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

Let me tell you that when the Bible says something multiple times, listen up! it's really important. And this is said 3 times in this short passage, once more in chapter 4 verse 7,

⁷Again, He specifies a certain day — today

— speaking through David (he says): Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

So this is about what we're doing right here, right now, today, and it's all about if we hear His voice and don't do, then we're hardening our hearts. Our hearts are becoming what we might call calloused.

A callus is defined as “something made unfeeling” because you keep rubbing against it, and rubbing against, and it rubbing against it. It hardens. It develops a callus. If you’re working in the garden that could be a good thing because it could keep you from continued damage. But, though it protects, it also desensitizes.

When we hear God’s voice and we don’t respond, and we hear God’s voice and we don’t

respond, it’s developing a callus on our spiritual ears. And that thing needs to be broken off, sometimes painfully. I’d rather not have If we develop a callus over our ears of our heart; we’re not going to hear any more. So we have to break it off. I’m going to try to help us do that in this group over the next 6 weeks by practicing in some easier things, some simpler things; practicing doing something in response to what we believe we’re hearing from God.

That points to one of the things that we’re going to be doing as part of our exercises as we go through this study. We’ll keep looking at different ways God speaks to us.

IV. BIGGEST OBSTACLE

- A. Disobedience?
- B. Resistance to change!!!
- C. Hebrews 3:7, 15; 4:7, hardened heart, i.e. callous.
 - 1. cal-lous, adjective: having a callus; to be made unfeeling, as parts of the skin exposed to friction.
 - 2. Protects, but also desensitizes.

As I said, there are risks in this, but we want this to be a safe environment for taking some small risks, trying some new things.

There is, flat out, a certain amount of trial and error. You just can't get around that. We don't learn anything without trying some things, and oftentimes, messing up, and learning from our mess-ups. I love what Thomas Edison said because he tried thousands of ways to create a light bulb before he succeeded. He failed thousands of times and when someone asked him about all of his failures, he said, "Those weren't failures, I succeeded in eliminating a thousand ways that didn't work." I feel like I have succeeded in eliminating thousands of ways that don't work, and I'm here to give you the benefit of my knowledge, so maybe you can avoid some of those. But there's still going to be some trial and error for you too.

So, we need to be hearing God and Job 33:14 tells us.

¹⁴For God speaks time and again, but a person may not notice it.

God speaks in many ways.

In the next few weeks, we're going to look at several broad categories of how God speaks. I don't claim to be have an extensive list. But, we're going to explore AND practice hearing God speak within several broad categories. You see listed there, the topics we're going to cover.

The first that we're going to look at is that God speaks through the Bible. We'll do a quick review today on why we should expect God to speak to us through His written word, and HOW we can capture what He's saying to us. This will give you an opportunity to refresh that skill if you've had it and kind of let it go. Or, if you haven't been through the Bible Training Camp, then this will give you an opportunity to learn to hear God speak to you through the scripture.

I teach people to SOAK in the scripture. It's not about learning information. It's about meeting with God and listening for Him. It's certainly not about checking it off of a "to do" list. Check, did my duty today. NO. It's a way through which we know God wants to speak to us.

I had been a Bible teacher for many years before what I'm about to share with you happened. I had had a dream that I knew meant I was supposed to start teaching the Bible. I hadn't done that before this dream. I'd led Bible studies, which meant facilitating discussions around some curriculum. You know, you get the book and ask the questions and make everyone else answer them. I was good at that, but to actually teach, I'd never done it before. So I had this dream, and knew that was what I was supposed to do. I was terrified, but I did it. I know that was part of the God-planned good works for me.

I studied the Bible, God showed me things, and I shared them with people. I know that He used me. However... what I'm talking about in this and all the Training Camps is not studying the Bible. It's SOAKing in it. It's a relaxing thing, just resting in it; reading it and letting it soak into you. It amounts to meditating. BUT with one very important distinctive, EXPECT GOD TO SPEAK. That's what we're looking for. I'll tell you why I say that, believe that, and experience that. And this is still the number one way God speaks to me.

I had been on staff at a church where I had been shown a process that's basically the same thing I teach people today. This was actually required for those of us on staff. Every week in staff meeting, that's what we did together. We followed this plan, beginning in Genesis on January 1 and ending in Rev 22 on December 31. The first hour of the staff meeting, we each on our own read the assigned portion of scripture for the day, we went through this SOAK process and wrote in our journals about what we read, then we all shared. What did you get from it?

I was just a secretary. This totally intimidated me. Plus, I didn't tell the pastor that hired me that I didn't read

the Bible. I studied it to teach my class, but I didn't read it regularly. Not even close to regularly. So, in these Monday staff meetings, it was a challenge, but it showed me things. I got to watch everyone else do it. I got to listen to what everyone else got out of it. It also kept me from giving up. Usually, in the beginning of January, I'd start one of those plans where you read through the Bible in a year. I won't ask you all to raise your hands to find out how many of you have tried that. I actually had someone tell me once that they were an expert on the first 30 chapters of Genesis. 'Coz that's about how far they'd get through one of those reading plans before they gave up. So I knew it wasn't just me.

I'd start following one of these plans and I'd miss a day and then another day and soon I'd be so far behind, I'd just give up and quit. Doing this regularly in staff meeting kept me from falling behind. I didn't tell them I hadn't read anything in the days in between. I just read where everyone else was that day so I'd stay up with them. I say this all in a joking way, but I really did want to read the Bible regularly. I knew that it was good for me. I'd tried, but hadn't done so well. So this was a different approach, so I was working on it.

Following the recommended process, I actually got all the way through Genesis and into Exodus, woo hoo! And I came to Exodus 25, which is part of a long passage about how to build the tabernacle and everything in it. This is this long and this high and this is made out of this, and this is made out of that and this is BORING! What in the world has this got to do with me?

But I was trying to be good, keep reading, working the process. First step, is to be looking for some verse or phrase to stand out. I came to verse 22 and it certainly did stand out to me, because God said to Moses there...

²²I will meet with you there above the mercy seat, between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the testimony; I will speak with you from there about all that I command you regarding the Israelites.

WOW! Can I have a room like that in my house? That's where my thoughts were going. There was a place where it was GUARANTEED that God would show up to meet with Mo and speak to him.

I wanted a place like that... Wouldn't you? *Could* I have a place like that?

I was working through this process. S was a scripture that stands out. That was verse 22. Steps 2 and 3 in the process were O for observation and A for application. What can I observe here? What is it about this place? Maybe there's something there that does apply to me.

I read it again, looking for anything that might apply to me. I saw gold cherubim, don't think I'm supposed to setting up anything like that. I saw a mercy seat? I need mercy, but I don't know what's this seat things is about.

I saw that this was over the Ark of the Testimony. Hmmm, what's that? That sounds familiar, so I looked some things up about that and I found that the Ark was a box. It's a very, very fancy box, but bottom line is it's a box. And it contained some things, one of which was the stone tablets that God carved for Israel. That was the

V. HEARING GOD

A. Job 33:14, God s p e a k s in m a n y ways.

1. Through the Bible.

a. Exodus 25:22 and John 5:39, God promises to m e e t with you and s p e a k to you over the container of the testimony which is the s c r i p t u r e.

b. John 8:31-32, If Y O U abide (soak) in the scripture, you'll know truth which will set you free.

2. When we praise, pray in the Spirit.

3. Through the ordinary.

4. Through people.

5. Through the not so ordinary.

4

law that He spoke to Moses on the mountain. But it's not called "the law" here. It's called the testimony. Okay, this is a box that contained the testimony.

Where do I find that testimony today? I remembered some scripture about that. I looked for it and found it in John 5:39. Jesus says to some Jews:

³⁹You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, yet they testify about Me.

Where is the container of the testimony today? The scriptures are the container of the testify today, the testimony about Jesus from cover to cover. So, I went back to that Exodus verse, and suddenly, God wasn't saying this to Moses. He was saying it to me.

I'll meet with you and speak to you over... the scripture.

That was my application. This revolutionized my Bible time. I was not immediately, daily, consistent. I wasn't immediately turned around, but I did immediately change why I read the scripture. I came saying, what do you want to say to me today, God? What's on your heart? Like that song I told you about earlier. What's exciting You today, God? What's breaking Your heart?

From then on, I came to the scripture to SOAK in it much more than to STUDY IT. Because when we study the scripture, we come to it with our agenda. I want to find out this or that. But when we just read through and SOAK in it, we're saying God here I am. What's YOUR agenda today. I got to know Him so much better, and I heard His love for me, and He continued to light up so many scriptures to me.

Most of the teachings from these training camps come from SOAKing in the scripture, expecting God to speak, not so much studying a topic. I saw things no one had ever taught me, including this that God lit up to me shortly after the one from Exodus; John 8:31-32

³¹Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you really are My disciples. ³²You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

How many of you have memorized that last verse? How many have quoted that, "You'll know the truth and the truth will set you free." How many of you paid attention to the IF beforehand. It's a BIG IF!!!

If YOU abide (soak) in the scripture, you'll know the truth, and the truth will set you free. We are far too prone to look for the truth dispensers, the pastors and teachers and commentary authors. I need to know this, so I've got to find the person who can dispense truth to me about that, expecting that to set us free. NO, it's not what it says. If YOU abide in the word, you'll know truth and that truth will set you free.

And these promises are not just for me, but for you, too. The promise in Exodus that I read to you, I have subsequently found it several more times. In Exodus 25, it was said to Moses. Other times it was said to the priests, but significantly, once it was said to all of Israel.

I want to share one example of how this worked in my life. This happened shortly after seeing this truth.

One weekend, I suddenly started experiencing double vision. It started out affecting me for just a few minutes, then it would clear up. But quickly the periods of double vision lasted longer and longer, until it was constant.

I could not have walked through an area like this with all these tables without holding on, because it all ran together. I couldn't drive. I could barely work.

I went to the doctor and was very quickly diagnosed with Myasthenia Gravis.

Myasthenia gravis is a chronic autoimmune neuromuscular disease that causes weakness in the skeletal muscles, which are responsible for breathing and moving parts of the body, including the arms and legs. The name myasthenia gravis, which is Latin and Greek in origin, means “grave, or serious, muscle weakness.”

There is no cure for it.

At the time, I was on staff at a Foursquare church, which is very similar to Assembly of God. I knew the healing scriptures and I claimed them. I knew the promise to have the elders lay hands on and anoint, and I had that done.

I had been diagnosed quickly after first symptoms, was seeing a neurologist, put on steroids that were supposed to relieve the symptoms, but it wasn't working. I also continued to claim those scriptures, the healing truths that had been dispensed to me, but the muscle weakness continued. As a matter of fact, I ended up in the ER twice in one day, once because I fainted and once because I couldn't breathe. I was barely functional.

However, I continued soaking in the scripture, expecting God to speak. I wasn't saying, “God tell me how to be healed.” I wasn't looking for healing scriptures. I was just following a reading plan through the Bible day by day, saying, “God what do you want to say to me?” I came to a scripture IN LEVITICUS... (how many of y'all skip over Leviticus. I admit that I have done that many times, but I don't do it any more.) This passage explained that Israel was going to go into captivity in Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. [Leviticus 26:34; cf. 2 Chronicles 36:21 and Jeremiah 25:12) Specifically, this verse referred to their sin of neglecting to keep the sabbath years for the land. Every seven years, Israel was supposed to let the land rest for one year; no planting or reaping, but they hadn't done that. The 70 years they would be in captivity in Babylon were to make up for the years they hadn't kept the sabbath for the land.

¹³Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, and you are in the land of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths.

What God said to me through that verse was,

I'll meet with you and speak to you over... the scripture.

“You WILL keep my sabbath. You can keep it voluntarily by choosing to rest one day a week, or you may keep it by being sick. You may even keep it by dying early, but you WILL keep it.”

I said, “sir, yes sir.” Being on staff at a church had meant there was no rest day. This has been my experience in every church I've been in. It's work (ministry) 24/7, every day of the week. At that particular church, the office was closed on Fridays but everybody pretty much worked either at the church or at home. But when I heard God say this, I said, I'm keeping a sabbath. I WILL rest one day out of seven.

I STOPPED going in to the church office on Fridays. I shut off my cell phone and didn't look at my emails. I didn't work on my SS lesson or any other tasks. On Fridays, I will rest. I didn't see this as having anything to do with the MG, I just saw it as instruction from God that I needed to obey.

But amazingly, once I started keeping a sabbath, the symptoms of the MG went away. I was still taking meds, but remember, they hadn't been helping. After this, no more issues.

I continued seeing a neurologist, but I also started reducing my meds, (without asking) until I was totally off them. I still had no symptoms. Last time I went to the neurologist, about 15 years ago, I had been experiencing no symptoms, I passed all his tests. I told him I'd been totally off the meds for quite some time. He said I didn't need to come back unless I started having symptoms again, and pronounced me to be in remission. I pronounced me to be healed.

This didn't happen because someone dispensed truth to me. It happened because God spoke truth to me through His living scripture. I obeyed and I was set free from what was expected to be a life long, progressive condition. God will speak to us through the scripture. We need to just be reading through and listening, trusting Him to come up with what we need to hear.

Recently I was sharing a concern with some of you about one of my granddaughters. I won't go into the specifics now because it would take too long. But again, I was just reading through the scripture and I came to a verse in 2 Kings about breaking down a small portion of Jerusalem's wall. This was the beginning of God giving direction to help with my granddaughter's issues. If we focus on what we think we need to hear, we may hear it or not. If we focus on asking God to show us whatever HE wants us to see, then we'll hear what we need, whether it's what we want or not. But ultimately, it will be wonderful.

We need to practice hearing God. But as we look for God to speak in any way he chooses, we also have to remember that there are other "voices." I'm going to encourage you to push the envelope, stretch, have some faith that God is speaking to you. We're listening for God and we're trying to be sensitive and opening up our minds to think that anything could be God speaking to us. But with that we also have to remember that everything else in the world is talking to us. As it says in 1 John 4:1

¹Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to determine if they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

How do we do that? There are some obvious ways, but I'm going to start with something not so obvious. We can use some help. Get to know some seasoned listeners. We need to test. We need to ask questions

But one of the most amazing things that has changed my life so much is hanging around other people who hear God. Hanging around that pastor who showed his staff a different way to read the Bible and did it with us. Hanging around some dear friends who were always having dreams and visions and saying, "God told me this" and "God showed me that".

I didn't feel like I had been experiencing that very much, but hanging around them, I did seem to start having more dreams. At first they seemed to be weird, pretty off the wall. As a matter of fact, the first one I remember after getting to know this group, I had this dream. I thought maybe it was God, maybe not because... it was about Kurt Russell. Yeah, that's what I thought. Kurt Russell? That can't be God. But I thought, what the heck, I'll share it with these friends.

We discussed it and they asked me questions, one of which was, "what do you know about Kurt Russell?" I didn't know anything about him personally. I just knew the characters I'd seen him play in movies. He always seemed to be the maverick who bent the rules, but in the end, he saved the day.

In this dream I was in great danger, being chased; but Kurt Russell led me in ways that seemed foolish, but in the end, he led me to safety.

In that dream, Kurt Russell, believe it or not, represented the Holy Spirit. With the help of these friends, I saw that God was warning me. I did have through the next couple of years, some awful, awful circumstances through which I had to closely follow the Holy Spirit, and do some unconventional things that did not seem to make sense, but I followed Him and I got through okay. God warned me, and I was able to understand the warning because of these friends.

For a Bible example of this, let's look at first Samuel 3:1-14. Samuel was a little boy and he's been given to the service of the temple. Eli is the high priest at the time. This is how it starts.

¹The boy Samuel served the Lord in Eli's presence. In those days the word of the Lord was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread.

I think they had had some callousing happening. I'm going to skip through. This happens three times. The Lord calls to Samuel, Sam thinks it's Eli, but Eli doesn't know what's going on. Finally, Eli gets it...

B. 1 John 4:1, Test the spirits. Remember, there are other "v o i c e s".

1. 1 Samuel 3:1-14, Luke 6:40, Hang out with s e a s o n e d
l i s t e n e r s.

And says, go back and lie down and say, "speak Lord for your servant is listening. So Sam did that. God speaks again. Sam responds,

¹⁰The Lord came, stood there, and called as before, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel responded, "Speak, for Your servant is listening."

And then God goes on to give him a revelation about what's going to happen to Eli, to Israel and many other things. This was the first revelation to Sam, but by no means the last. It was said of Sam that none of his words fell to the ground. Everything that he spoke from God came true.

But think about this. God called to Samuel. He said his name. Samuel heard Him, a very clear voice. Why didn't God just say, "Hey, Sam, this is God. I got some things I wanna tell you. dadadada" I don't know. He could have. He didn't have any trouble getting Sam to hear him. Why did God let Sam go through this process?

I can't say I know why. But I do know this is not at all atypical. God did the same thing to Paul. God knocked him down and spoke very clearly to him to go to Agabus, and AGABUS would tell Paul God's plans for him. Why did God make Paul go through that process rather than just tell him right then and there what was going to happen and what to do. Dunno.

But I see the two sides to this. God WANTS to speak personally and intimately with each one of us, especially since the empowerment of the HS, but He also wants us to work together and learn from each other. That's what we want to do in this group. Get to know other seasoned listeners.

Before I read this next scripture that also emphasizes the need for someone to show us how to hear God, I need to tell you some things about myself. From the very beginning of my becoming a Christian, I've believed that God still speaks to people and I've wanted to hear Him. I wanted to clearly know what He wanted me to do. And I was sure that He had more specific instructions for me than to just be a good girl. I didn't want to just fumble around and guess at what to do. So I believed that it was true, and every once in a while, I'd had a dream or vision, but wasn't really sure what they meant most of the time.

I used to watch the 700 Club very regularly. Through years and years and years. Pat Robertson was the main person on the show. I'd read his books and heard him speak, and he was definitely someone who heard and recognized God's voice. On the show he was always saying, "God's saying this" and "there's a person being healed of this." I thought that was great. But he also always had a sidekick, like Ed McMahon to Johnny Carson. And through the years, the sidekick changed from time to time. And I noticed something about the sidekicks. At first, the sidekick didn't have any words from the Lord to share. But over time, that changed.

At first it was just occasionally, but it grew to where it happened with the sidekick as often as with Pat. I saw this same thing over and over; Ben Kinchlow, Danute what's-her-name, Sheila Walsh, Scott Ross, Terry Meeuwsen. Each one started out without any words from the Lord, but over time, it became as common for them as it had always seemed to be for Pat. And this really got me wondering why. I thought, is this something you can catch like a cold, from hanging around someone who has the virus? Is it contagious? I had this

question in my mind for a long time until one time as I was reading this in Luke 6:40...

⁴⁰A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained* will be like his teacher.

(*there's our gymnasium word again)

The teaching doesn't have to be something official, like me standing up here teaching. It's just getting together in groups. There's more, and I want that, so I'm making it a point to hang around others who have got what I need. Connecting with seasoned listeners is very important, AND you always need to be asking relevant questions. Here are a few that are VERY important to ask when you think you're hearing something that might be God.

Number one, is it biblical? I'm not even going to take the time to go into that. It's self explanatory and obviously critical.

Another question you need to ask for which the answer is not as clear cut is, "Is this for now?" We may be hearing something from God, but is it for now or some future time? Here's something a little different that I want to introduce to you.

We need to LEAN INTO OBEDIENCE, ACTION, DOING SOMETHING. As I explained with the callous, if we think we're hearing something but we don't do anything about it, we dull our ability to hear more. But I want to help you figure out a way to do this, so I want to let you know it's okay to "test the ice".

When I was a kid, I loved to go ice skating with my family. It was up north, and there, in those days, we didn't have ice skating rinks. We waited for some nearby body of water to freeze. I remember my brothers-in-law finding the biggest rock they could and rolling it out onto the ice to see if it held. They'd roll it out little by little and if it didn't break through and there were no cracks, they'd roll it out a little further. If they got the whole way across, we skated. They pushed it a little bit at a time. We could have stood back on the edge all day and said, "I wonder if the ice is frozen?" we never would have skated. We tested the ice. We are looking for ways to obey, take a step of faith.

In what I call (forgive me. I think these crazy ways) a risk/reward analysis. It sounds so unspiritual, so corporate, but what I'm talking about is looking for a way that I can take some risk. Not too much, but so that I'm at least moving in the direction of obedience.

If this is God, and I do this, how bad could it be? If it's God and I do it how much could I mess up? I've acted on plenty of those that turned out to not be God, but that's okay. I'm still here to tell you about it, and I learned some things.

We're looking for WAYS to take a step or two IN THE DIRECTION OF obedience... in the direction of acting like it is God. YOU ARE NOT LOOKING FOR excuses not to do anything. You're looking for something that is a step in the direction of "if this is God, what should I do?" And I have plenty of examples from my life that I could share, but we're out of time.

Isaiah 30:21 says.

**²¹and whenever you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear this command behind you:
"This is the way. Walk in it."**

When you're MOVING, you'll hear further direction. "Walk this way." It doesn't say when you're sitting on your butt, wondering. The way we see this in the natural world is that

A moving vehicle is easier to steer than a stationary one.

If you're moving, you'll hear further direction. I've even experienced this with GPS.

I've heard other people talk about it. The GPS voice will say "head northeast on such and such a street." I don't have a clue which way is northeast." But if I pick a direction and start going, Gretchen (that's what I call my GPS voice) will tell me to either keep going or make a u-turn. So don't be afraid to move.

Gretchen gives me the first instruction. If I don't move, I don't get any more directions. God does the same thing.

COACH: At this point, you'll need to lead the group in scripture SOAKing.

There are also instructions for you to practice this through this next week, remembering that the scripture is alive and therefore you should expect to hear God speak through it.

I hope you will do that because next week, we look forward to hearing from everyone what you believe God's been saying to you. That's when the real fun begins!

2. Ask relevant questions, for instance...
 - a. Is it b i b l i c a l?
 - b. Is it for n o w?
3. LEAN INTO o b e d i e n c e (a c t i o n).
 - a. Test the i c e. Do a "risk/reward" analysis. If this is God... If this isn't God... Looking FOR a s t e p of obedience... NOT looking for e x c u s e s to do n o t h i n g.
 - b. A m o v i n g vehicle is easier to steer than s t a t i o n a r y one. "When you walk..." Isaiah 30:21.



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