

The Voice of Jesus
Session #1: Study Guide
Introduction, Chapters 1-3

Introduction

Every Christian should be able to answer two questions:

- 1) What do you think Jesus is saying to you at this point in your life?
- 2) What indicators give you some measure of confidence that it is indeed Jesus speaking to you rather than someone or something else?

Where are you at right now in your spiritual experience in being able to answer these two questions?

Chapter 1 – Jesus and the Spirit

*“The life of God is found in knowing the voice of the Son – the voice of Jesus.
God has spoken to us through Jesus.”*

What were some of your impressions and thoughts about this chapter? Was anything specifically stirred in your heart by what you read?

What does it mean to “know the voice of Jesus”? How do we hear and know His voice? How are you doing in your ability to hear and know the voice of Jesus in your own spiritual life?

What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures (see also pp. 30-32)? What is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the community of Christ?

Explain some of the “Dynamic Tensions in Christian Discernment” (pp. 18ff).

- Divine Initiative and human response
- The context of our lives and the particularity of the voice of Jesus
- The voice of Jesus in prayer and in the world
- The individual and the community

Chapter 2 – Three Voices, One Tradition

What were some of your impressions and thoughts about this chapter? Was anything specifically stirred in your heart by what you read?

Why is it important that we “consult” and learn from others in Christian history that have pursued Christ? What are some key sources of Christian tradition (who has influenced you in your faith and in your spirituality)?

Which theologian/spiritual director of the three that Smith mentions (Ignatius Loyola, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards) do you most identify with and why?

What is the “common denominator” of the three (or as Smith puts it *Three Voices, One Tradition*)?

Chapter 3 – With Heart and Mind

What were some of your impressions and thoughts about this chapter? Was anything specifically stirred in your heart by what you read?

Do you take your emotions seriously enough? How has the evangelical world responded to “heart” and “mind”?

Can we truly learn faith (and even Christian faith, doctrine, and theology) without a “definite emotional content to this faith” (p. 57)?

How are you living out this statement: “to live in joy is to choose to live in the light of the resurrection as one’s fundamental disposition.”

The Voice of Jesus
Session #2: Study Guide
Chapters 4-8

For the next four chapters, we will be reading and discussing how we experience and hear the Voice of Jesus through the role of the Holy Spirit. And in the process, we will discover what our role is in this experience.

Chapter 4 – The Assurance of God’s Love

Read Romans 5:3-8. Why is it so vital in our lives and Christian experience to know that we are loved by the Father? What difference does this make in your own life, especially in the context of pain, hurts, and disappointments?

What do you think about this statement: “If we do not learn to live in the love of God, we will always be vulnerable to the opinions of others” (p. 79).

What is our role in experiencing the Father’s love (p. 85)?

If the two critical signs of our experience of the Father’s love are **humility** and **a love for others**, how are you doing?

Chapter 5 – The Spirit Convicts Us of Sin

Read John 16:12-15. What is the role of the Spirit in this passage? Why is it so important that the Spirit’s conviction of sin is in the context of God’s love for us?

How does sin “undercut our capacity to hear the voice of Jesus”?

What is the role of guilt in sin and confession (pp. 93-97)? When is guilt healthy? When is guilt unhealthy (false guilt)?

What is confession and what should be the “content” of our confession? Why is it important to confess our sins to one another?

Chapter 6 – The Spirit Illumines our Minds

“Central to the Spirit’s ministry is the reality that the Spirit transforms us into the image of Christ, specifically through the truth.” Explain this statement in your own words. What are some Scripture passages that you would use to support this statement?

What is meditation? What are some of the critical components that the author mentions in this chapter? How is meditation the “antidote” to our hectic lives?

How are you doing in your meditation upon God’s Word? Do you experience Christ when you read the Word or is your experience typically bland and dry (be honest)? How can the things learned in this chapter impact how you read and meditate upon God’s Word? What are some specific things you can (and will) incorporate into your time with the Lord in the Word?

Chapter 7 – The Spirit Guides Us in Times of Choice

What does it mean for us to “choose well”? How do we learn to choose well? Why is it so important for us to choose well? How do we choose well knowing that “the good often be the enemy of the best” (p. 130)?

How do we test and discern the emotions of consolation? How can we discern and test our motives? When is it okay (and even best) to not decide or choose?

How can you apply this to a decision you are facing right now?

Chapter 8 – The Character of our Prayers

Comment upon the four dimensions of the Spirit’s inner witness in your own spiritual journey. How have each of these impacted you and even possibly changed our relationship with Christ?

- The assurance that we are loved
- Convicting ministry regarding sin
- The illumination of our minds with truth
- Guidance in times of choice

How does prayer “form” us? How do we more deeply encounter Christ in and through our prayers?

How well do you do “silence”? What is the noise in your life and how can it be removed so that you can experience times of silence?

The Voice of Jesus
Session #3: Study Guide
Chapters 9-12

Chapter 9 – The Call of God: Vocational and Moral Discernment

How well does your current vocation suit your SHAPE (spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, experiences)? Be specific.

In your current vocation, have you “settled” and perhaps not taken enough risk (perhaps because of fear; see pp. 194-199)? Have you taken too much risk and not been realistic about yourself and/or the circumstances around you?

In your own spiritual life, do you tend to seek the counsel of others (community) or silence and solitude with God more? Is there a balance in “the voices”?

What is moral discernment? Why is it so necessary to develop moral discernment in our world?

What are some evils in our world (across the street and across the globe) that demand a response from followers of Christ? How are you personally responding to them?

Chapter 10 – Spiritual Direction, Pastoral Care, and Friendship

How do we balance interplay between us as individuals and our role in a community?

What is the focus of spiritual direction and how is it different from counseling or mentoring? What are some of the “roles” of spiritual directors in helping people to discern the voice of Jesus?

How can we be more present to one another in this process of communal discernment? Describe a specific example in your life right now?

Chapter 11 – Making Decisions Together: The Challenge of Communal Discernment

Read Acts 15:1-29. How did the leaders in the early church make a major decision (note especially vv. 25 & 28)?

What are the three types of decision-making models listed and explained on pp. 225-229? Do you tend to prefer one of these models? If so, why? What are some of the limitations of your preferred model?

How does “communal discernment” differ from the models above? What is the role of leadership and the community (especially those with the gift of discernment) in the communal discernment model? Where do you fit in with the model (leader, member of community, member with gift of discernment)?

Where are you on the “conflict meter” (1 = avoid conflict at ALL costs; 10 = seek conflict ALL the time)? How does your view of conflict help and/or hinder the communal discernment decision-making process?

Chapter 12 – Making Decisions Together: the Process of Communal Discernment

Comment upon any part of the communal discernment process that sparked interest in you:

- Strategic planning & appreciative inquiry
- Leading a small group towards decisions
- The role of the moderator
- Open discussion
- Prayer and silent reflection
- Discussion towards resolution
 - Questions of consequence
 - Questions of continuity
 - Questions of community
- The minority voice
- External confirmation