

Pursuing God Through His Word:

The H.E.A.R. Journal Method

“When you open the Word of God, you open the mouth of God.”

PURSUING GOD THROUGH HIS WORD:

The H.E.A.R. Journal Method

One way to pursue God passionately is through reading the Bible. One of the ways God has chosen to reveal Himself to His creation is through the Bible (cf. 2 Peter 1:16–21). Tony Merida, pastor and professor, writes, “When you open the Word of God, you open the mouth of God.” If we want to get to know God more, we should strive to spend time reading His Word to hear from Him.

Reading the Bible is easier when there is a strategy to it. The HEAR Journal Method is a simple technique for reading and journaling through the Bible. Think of a HEAR Journal as being a record of your time with God as you study the Bible. Even if you have read the Bible before, you may be new to the practice of spiritual journaling. Writing down what you hear from God helps you remember what God teaches you.

HEAR stands for *Highlight, Explain, Apply and Respond*

H (Highlight) a verse that speaks to you.

E (Explain) as best you can what the verse means in its context.

A (Apply) that meaning to your life.

R (Respond) to what God is saying to you through an action step or a written prayer.

The HEAR Method is simple enough that anyone can jump in and start practicing it. This guide is intended to help you gain confidence using the HEAR Journal method as you pursue God passionately through His Word.

HIGHLIGHT



Read a passage of the Bible and select a verse that speaks to you

Highlighting is about learning how to listen as you read. Here are four practical tips to help you slow down and listen to God as you read.

1. Don't overthink it

Highlighting is not about finding the "right" verse. Instead, it is letting God speak to you out of what you are reading. One of the common mistakes we make in approaching the Bible is looking for an answer to a question instead of just letting the Bible speak. But as it has been said: We do not just read the Bible, the Bible reads us. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (CSB). That means you can have confidence that no matter what verse you choose, God has something to say to you through it. So don't overthink it! Just let the Word of God speak.

2. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to actually help us hear from the Word of God. So before you read, ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through His Word. Your prayer can be as simple as that: "Holy Spirit, speak to me through Your Word today." This can also help you to slow down and prepare yourself to listen.

3. Read slowly and reflectively

Read slowly and as you read, note what phrases speak to you. As a verse jumps out, ask yourself why. Like Hebrews 4:12, the Bible is not just speaking to our ears, it is speaking to our hearts. Sometimes you'll know pretty quickly what verse to highlight. Other times you may need to reread a section, further slowing down and even meditating on what is being said.

2. Capture it

After you have finished reading reflectively, choose your verse or verses and write them down in your journal. Write the letter H in your journal. Then write the reference of the Bible passage that stood out to you during your reading (book, chapter, verse number). Then write out the verse itself next to the reference. Writing the actual verse out will help you remember it, and when you read your journal later you won't have to look up the verse to remember what it said.



EXPLAIN

Briefly explain what is happening in this passage of the Bible

Something that can really interfere with highlighting a verse is not understanding what that verse is saying. Don't be discouraged. Even Peter said of some of Paul's letters were hard to understand (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). And if the apostle Peter felt that way, you and I are probably going to feel that way as well at some point on our Bible reading journey.

That is why the E (Explain) is so important. John Stott, a British pastor and author, described understanding the Bible as building a bridge between the world of the Bible and your life and your world. The E (Explain) is the first half of that bridge and the A (Apply) is the second half.

Here are 4 questions you can ask to help build that bridge. Think of these like looking at the Bible as if it were a photograph. You begin by looking at the big picture and then you focus on the details.

- Purpose = Why was this written?**

Every part of the Bible has a big picture, so start there. The easiest place to start is the purpose of the whole book you're reading. For example, if you were reading the book of Philippians, you would learn that Paul wrote Philippians from jail to Christians in the church at Philippi to help them hold to their faith in the midst of persecution. That was his purpose.

- **Context = How do your verses fit with the verses before and after them?**

Now that you understand the big picture, focus on where your verses fit in the book. Go back and reread the verses just before and after the verse you are wanting to highlight and ask yourself how your verse is connected to them.

Example: The verse Philippians 4:13 which states, “I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me” takes on new meaning in the context of Philippians 4:12 which reads, “I know how to make do with little, and I know how to make do with a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content— whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need” (CSB).

- **Comprehension = What does it say?**

Before you decide what a verse means, focus on what it says. Try restating the verse in your own words. If there are any words or phrases you don’t understand, look them up, especially if they seem important. For example, here is a paraphrase of Phil 4:12–13 above: I’ve learned how to manage when I have a little or a lot, because I have found the secret of contentment in all circumstances: knowing Jesus.

- **Interpretation = What does it mean?**

What’s the point? What was the author trying to say to his audience? Again, put this in your own words. This is your E (Explain), what you will actually write in your journal. So for Phil 4:12–13, I would write: Paul was telling the church at Philippi that he has discovered the secret of contentment. No matter the situation in Paul’s life, he realized that Christ was all he needed, and Christ was the one who strengthened him to persevere through difficult times.

Consider memorizing the following Mnemonic Device to help you recall some practical questions to utilize as you study the Bible: **God, Man, Christ, Know & Do.**

- **GOD:** What does this text teach me about God?
- **MAN:** What does this text teach me about fallen humanity that requires the grace of God?
- **CHRIST:** How does this text point to Christ?
- **KNOW:** What do I need to know?
- **DO:** What do I need to do?



APPLY

Write out a personal application of the Bible passage you highlighted

Now that you understand what the author was saying to his audience, you're ready to build the other half of the bridge and apply it. As you look at the verses you highlighted and your explanation consider the following questions to help you develop your personal application:

Why do you think these words resonated with you? What drew you to them?

- What is God trying to say to you through this passage?
- What is God saying about himself in this passage?
- What is God trying to say about you, your circumstances, or your spiritual condition?
- What is going on in your life that God might be trying to speak into?
- What is God teaching you, and how is it affecting your life?

In the Apply section of your journal, use 3–5 sentences to personally apply the verses you highlighted. As you write down your application, use this as an opportunity to talk to God. Share what's going on and how God is speaking to you. It is very natural for this part of your journaling to begin to flow into a time of prayer.



RESPOND

A call to action to put what you heard from God's Word into practice

Pursuing God passionately through His Word should ultimately culminate in obeying God's Word. In the story of the house built on the rock, Jesus challenges us to be doers of the Word and not just hearers: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24, CSB).

Another powerful passage that reinforces the need for action and obedience is James 1:22-25, "But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. 25 But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works—this person will be blessed in what he does" (CSB).

The Respond part of the HEAR Journal is where we move from reading the Bible to putting it into action. In this section of your journal, you are responding to what God is saying to you through His Word. Some days that might be a prayer, other days it might be something specific God is calling you to do. In this part of your journal, you can choose to either write a

one-sentence action step or a brief prayer to God in response to the truths you observed in the Bible passage you read.

Sometimes we can get stuck in determining our response. If you are having a hard time determining how to respond, think through these categories:

- Is There an Attribute of God to Remember?
- Is There a Promise to Claim?
- Is There a Truth to Believe?
- Is There a Sin to Confess?
- Is There a Command to Obey?
- Is There an Action to Take?

These aren't meant to be exhaustive, so don't feel constrained by them. One day you might need to confess a sin. Another day you might need to claim a promise. Another day you might need to act in a specific way. Let the Holy Spirit lead you in how He wants you to respond.

Practice the HEAR Journal Method

Let's practice. Grab a Bible and open it up to Philippians chapter 4. Go ahead and read verses 10 through 13. Grab a journal and write out the four steps of the HEAR Journal Method: Highlight, Explain, Apply and Respond. Follow the steps in this guide to help you write a HEAR Journal highlighting Philippians 4:13.

We know this is a new practice for many people. If you get stuck or need some help, please see the sample HEAR Journal entry provided for Philippians 4:13 on the next page of this guide.

H.E.A.R. *Journal*

Date:

Scripture Passage: *Philippians 4:10-13*

HIGHLIGHT

Philippians 4:13, “I am able to do all things through him who strengthens me.” (CSB)

EXPLAIN

Paul was telling the church at Philippi that he has discovered the secret of contentment. No matter the situation in Paul's life, he realized that Christ was all he needed, and Christ was the one who strengthened him to persevere through difficult times.

APPLY

In my life, I will experience many ups and downs. My contentment is not found in circumstances. Rather, it is based on my relationship with Jesus Christ. Only Jesus gives me the strength I need to be content in every circumstance of life.

RESPOND

Lord Jesus, please help me as I strive to be content in You. Through Your strength, I can make it through any situation I must face.

H.E.A.R. *Journal*

Date:

Scripture Passage:

HIGHLIGHT

EXPLAIN

APPLY

RESPOND

The HEAR Method: Transform Scripture into Action

STEP 1: HIGHLIGHT

What does this reveal about God's character?

Transformation Goal: Recognizing God's truth

- Identify key verses and speak them aloud

Visual tip: Look for repeated words, commands, promises, and contrasting ideas



STEP 2: EXPLAIN

What does this text mean in my own words?

Transformation Goal: Grasping the author's intent

- Record your observations (Who? What? Where? When? Why?)

Visual tip: Consider context and tone of the passage



STEP 3: APPLY

How should I change to align with this truth?

Transformation Goal: Personal connection to scripture

- Identify a specific "change project" in your life

Visual tip: Be specific, not general (e.g., "trust God with finances" not "trust God more")



STEP 4: RESPOND

What concrete step will I take today?

Transformation Goal: Taking actionable steps

- Pray scripture back to God and commit to one specific step



"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

STEP 1: HIGHLIGHT

What does this reveal about God's character?

Transformation Goal: Recognizing God's truth

- Identify key verses and speak them aloud

Visual tip: Look for repeated words, commands, promises, and contrasting ideas



STEP 2: EXPLAIN

What does this text mean in my own words?

Transformation Goal: Grasping the author's intent

- Record your observations (Who? What? Where? When? Why?)

Visual tip: Consider context and tone of the passage



STEP 3: APPLY

How should I change to align with this truth?

Transformation Goal: Personal connection to scripture

- Identify a specific "change project" in your life

Visual tip: Be specific, not general (e.g., "trust God with finances" not "trust God more")



STEP 4: RESPOND

What concrete step will I take today?

Transformation Goal: Taking actionable steps

- Pray scripture back to God and commit to one specific step



"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

STEP 1: HIGHLIGHT

What does this reveal about God's character?

Transformation Goal: Recognizing God's truth

- Identify key verses and speak them aloud

Visual tip: Look for repeated words, commands, promises, and contrasting ideas



STEP 2: EXPLAIN

What does this text mean in my own words?

Transformation Goal: Grasping the author's intent

- Record your observations (Who? What? Where? When? Why?)

Visual tip: Consider context and tone of the passage



STEP 3: EXPLAIN

How should I change to align with this truth?

Transformation Goal: Personal connection to scripture

- Identify a specific "change project" in your life

Visual tip: Be specific, not general (e.g., "trust God with finances" not "trust God more")



STEP 4: RESPOND

What concrete step will I take today?

Transformation Goal: Taking actionable steps

- Pray scripture back to God and commit to one specific step



"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22

"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." - James 1:22