

COURSE 0 • 6 WEEKS

Does God Still Speak?

A gentle, Scripture-first inquiry for those who love Jesus and aren't sure He's still speaking

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Why this course exists

There are believers who love Jesus, honour the Bible, and have been taught their whole lives that the Spirit's gift of personal speech ended when the apostles died. Or that everything labelled "*God told me*" is suspect, perhaps even dangerous. They have good reasons for this. Their tradition has good reasons for this. And they are not the audience of *Hearing His Voice* (the next course in this series), which assumes from the first page that God still speaks.

This course is for the step before that one.

It is for those who have wondered, sometimes quietly, whether the Shepherd they trust might still be speaking, but who would never want to leave the sufficiency of Scripture behind to find out. It is for the cautious heart, the Reformed mind, the conservative-evangelical conscience. It is for the pastor whose congregation is mixed and who wants a shared text that honours both convictions.

We are not here to argue you out of anything. We are not here to win a debate. We are here to ask one honest question together, slowly, over six weeks, with our Bibles open and our defences down.

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (Hebrews 3:7-8)

The Spirit of God, in the inspired Word, says *today*. That is where this course begins.

What the group walks through

Six weeks of careful reading and honest conversation. Each week pairs a short participant reading with a 90-minute group session.

- 1 The Honest Question.** Naming what we are actually asking, and why it matters.
- 2 The God Who Has Always Spoken.** A speaking God is not a new doctrine. He always has been.
- 3 Pentecost and After.** What did the New Testament expect of believers?
- 4 Heard With Honour.** Where cessationism comes from, and what it gets right.
- 5 Sufficiency and Voice.** Why a sufficient Scripture does not mean a silent God.
- 6 An Honest Invitation.** What we do with the question now.

Each week combines pre-reading, a short Scripture anchor, conversation, and a quiet practice. Three honourable destinations are affirmed at the close of week six: settled cessationism,

openness to the next step, or the freedom to remain undecided.

Who this is for

Pastors of mixed-conviction congregations who want a careful shared resource.

Small groups in Reformed, Baptist, dispensational, and conservative-evangelical churches.

Believers from any tradition who have wondered whether God might still be speaking, but have not had a safe place to ask.

Anyone who loves both the closed canon and the living Christ, and wants to think about how those two convictions sit together.

This course is not for those who are already settled, in either direction, and would prefer not to be unsettled. That is honourable. Move on with our blessing.

Who this is not for

This course is not a campaign for charismatic experience. It does not teach prophecy. It does not assume any participant has ever sensed the Spirit speaking to them. It does not raise the stakes of the conversation. It only asks one question, with Scripture open, in the company of trusted people.

If you want a course that teaches you to recognise and steward what God says, that course is *Hearing His Voice* (Course 1 in this series). It is the natural next step for anyone who finishes this course and wants to keep walking.

How the course is structured

Participant reading (15 to 18 minutes before each session): everyone reads the week's material.

Group session (90 minutes): welcome, pre-read discussion, Scripture anchor, short teaching, quiet practice, close.

Between sessions: one short, gentle practice that reinforces the week's theme without forcing a posture.

The facilitator edition contains everything in the participant guide plus teaching notes, discussion prompts, common objections to be ready for, and pastoral cautions for each session.

A word to facilitators

If you are leading this course, your job is not to convert anyone. Your job is to hold a careful space where every conviction in the room is honoured, where Scripture is the loudest voice,

and where the question is allowed to do its own quiet work.

Read the facilitator notes for each week before you arrive. Pay particular attention to weeks four and five, which carry the most pastoral weight. Resist the urge to push for a decision in week six. Three paths are honourable. Bless every one of them.

How to use this guide

Pastors and facilitators: download the full facilitator edition. Read it through before week one.

Small group leaders: share the weekly link with participants as pre-read. Gather weekly.

Participants: read the week's material, come to the session, bring your honest questions.

The goal is simple. A group of believers, sitting with a question they have not always felt safe to ask, walking through Scripture together, and discovering where Jesus Christ is asking them to land.

SESSION 1

The Honest Question

Naming what we are actually asking, and why it matters

SCRIPTURE

Hebrews 3:7-8

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

10 minutes of honest journaling on three questions

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through at least once. Bring honest answers to the three questions at the end.

The question we are asking

There is one question this whole course is built around, and it is worth saying it plainly before we start.

Does God still speak today?

Not *did He speak*. On that, every Christian agrees. *Does He speak now*. Through Scripture, through other believers, through prayer, through the inner witness of His Spirit, in ways a 21st-century person could call hearing Him. That is the question.

Different parts of the church have answered that question differently. Honest, faithful Christians who love Jesus and the Bible have lived their entire lives on opposite sides of it. We are not pretending the disagreement is not there. We are also not pretending we can settle it in six weeks. We are simply going to sit with it, with our Bibles open, in the company of people we trust.

If you have been told for years that the question itself is dangerous, you are welcome here. If you have always assumed the answer is yes and have never been pressed on it, you are welcome here. If you do not know what you think, you are most welcome of all.

What we mean, and what we do not mean

Before we go further, we need to be careful with our words.

When this course says *God speaks today*, it does **not** mean any of the following:

That new Scripture is being given. The canon is closed. The 66 books we have are sufficient and final, and nothing said by anyone in any room anywhere has the same authority as those 66 books. This is not in question.

That every impression a believer has should be trusted. Many should not be. Some are us. Some are our tiredness. Some are the enemy. The New Testament itself instructs us to test what we hear.

That God speaks more clearly to spiritual elites. He does not. The whole counsel of the New Testament is the opposite. "*Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy*" (Joel 2:28,

quoted by Peter at Pentecost in Acts 2:17).

That we are required to label every thought "*the Lord said to me.*" Most of the time, that language is unhelpful and presumptuous, even when something real is going on.

What we do mean is something quieter. We mean the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit applying the truth of God to specific lives in specific moments. We mean the *low whisper* that came to Elijah in the cave (1 Kings 19:12). We mean the verse that suddenly seems to be addressed to *you* in your Bible reading. We mean the conviction in prayer. We mean the inner witness Paul writes about in Romans 8:16. We mean the Shepherd's voice that John 10:27 says His sheep know.

The historic Reformed tradition has a useful word for this. They call it *illumination*. It is not new revelation. It is the Spirit applying the already-revealed Word to a particular heart. It is, on every side of this debate, biblical. It is just that some traditions are more comfortable than others naming it as *God speaking*.

So when we ask "*does God still speak?*" we are not asking "*has the canon reopened?*" The canon is closed. We are asking whether the Shepherd whose voice the apostles knew is still speaking, in some way, to those who follow Him.

Why this question matters

It would be easy to treat this as an academic question, the kind that belongs in a seminary classroom and not in a small group on a Tuesday night. But the question shapes more than our doctrine.

It shapes how we pray. If we believe God hears but does not respond, prayer becomes monologue. If we believe He responds, but only ever through Scripture read silently, prayer becomes a Bible study with a closed door at the end. If we believe He responds in the inner witness of His Spirit, prayer becomes conversation, however quiet.

It shapes how we suffer. The believer who is sure God still speaks has a different posture in the dark than the believer who is sure He has gone quiet. Neither posture is unfaithful. But they are different.

It shapes how we read our own lives. If God has not spoken since the apostles, our lives are interpreted entirely from the outside, through the Scripture and the church. If He still speaks, even in the small ways named above, our lives are interpreted partly from the inside, by His Spirit's witness in us.

It shapes how we read each other. If God still speaks, when a believer says "*I think the Lord put this on my heart for you,*" we have to take it seriously and test it. If He does not, we can dismiss it without engagement. Both responses cost something.

This is not just a doctrine. It is a way of seeing the world.

The course's anchor

The verse this whole course rests on is Hebrews 3:7–8.

"Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.'"

Notice what is happening here. The writer to the Hebrews is quoting Psalm 95, written hundreds of years earlier. He attributes that quotation to the *Holy Spirit*, in the *present tense*, *says*. Not *said*. The Spirit is still speaking the words of the psalmist, addressed to the readers of Hebrews, addressed by the same Spirit to us.

And what does He say? *Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*

Today.

It is not a stretch to notice that this verse, on its own, asks something of every reader. It assumes the Spirit has a voice. It assumes that voice can be heard. It assumes hearing it is a present possibility, not just a memory of an apostolic past. It assumes the appropriate response to hearing it is a soft heart, not a hardened one.

This is the verse we will return to at the end of every week. Not as a proof-text. As a posture.

Who this course is for

If you are reading this and you love Jesus, honour the Bible, and have been formed by a tradition that taught you the gifts of the Spirit ceased, or that hearing-from-God language is suspect, this course was written for you. Not to dismantle what you have been given. To sit with you while you ask.

If you are reading this and you have always believed God still speaks but have never had to defend that belief, this course will sharpen you. Some of the cessationist concerns you will encounter in week four are wiser than you may have realised.

If you are a pastor reading this with your congregation in mind, this course was written with you in mind. It is built to be safe for the cautious, generous to the curious, and rigorous about Scripture. It is a course you can hand to your most Reformed elder and your most charismatic deacon and trust that both will be honoured.

Permission to leave

One last thing before we begin.

You are not committing to anything by reading week two. You are not signing up to change your mind. If at any point this course is asking too much of you, or feels like it is leading somewhere you do not want to go, you have full permission to step out. We mean it. The point of this course is honest attention, not a doctrinal scalp.

If you stay, we are glad. Bring your questions. Bring your conviction. Bring your suspicion if you have any. Scripture can hold all of it.

Before you come to the session

Bring honest answers to these three questions:

What were you taught about whether God still speaks today? Who taught you, and how confident were they?

When you read passages like John 10:27 ("*my sheep hear my voice*"), what have you understood that to mean for you personally?

What is it you are quietly hoping for, or quietly suspicious of, that brought you to this course?

You do not have to share all your answers. Bring at least one to the group.

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person in the room will have named what they were taught about whether God still speaks, what they hope for, and what they are suspicious of. Nothing more than that. Tonight is about laying down the question honestly, in a room where every conviction is welcome and no one is being recruited.

Before you arrive

Read the participant reading twice.

Read Hebrews 3:7–15 in full. Sit with the *today*.

Look around your group in your mind. Who is in the room? Who is the most cautious participant? Who is the most charismatic? Both of them must feel honoured tonight, or this course will not work.

Have pens, paper, and Bibles in the room. People hear themselves better with a pen in their hand.

Session outline (90 min)

1. Welcome and framing (15 min)

Begin by naming what this course is and is not. Use these exact phrases if it helps:

"This is not a campaign for any particular doctrine of the gifts."

"This is not a course that will end with everyone agreeing. It is a course that will end with everyone having thought."

"In this room, every conviction is welcome. Cessationist, continuationist, undecided, somewhere in between. We are not here to convert each other."

Set two ground rules:

1 No spiritual one-upmanship. Nobody gets points for sounding charismatic or sounding Reformed. We are sitting with a question together.

2 What is shared in this room stays in this room.

Pray simply. Ask the Holy Spirit to be the loudest voice in the room over six weeks.

2. Pre-read discussion (25 min)

Three questions. Let people answer slowly. Some will be brief. Some will need to be drawn out. Both are fine.

What were you taught about whether God still speaks today? Who taught you?

When you read passages like John 10:27, what have you always understood that to mean?

What brought you to this course? What are you quietly hoping for, or quietly suspicious of?

You will hear a wide range of answers. Some people will say *"I have always believed He speaks but I do not know why."* Others will say *"I was taught the gifts ceased and I have never been pressed on it."* Others will say *"I have had experiences I do not know what to do with."* All of these are good starting points.

Important: when someone shares a strong conviction, do not push back, even gently. Receive it. *"Thank you. That is helpful for the rest of us to hear."* Tonight is about getting the convictions in the room into the open, not about evaluating them.

3. Scripture anchor: Hebrews 3:7-15 (10 min)

Read the whole passage aloud. Then ask two questions:

The writer to the Hebrews quotes Psalm 95 and attributes it to the Holy Spirit, in the present tense, says. What does that suggest about how the Spirit relates to the Word?

The instruction is "today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." What does that assume the reader can do, and what does it warn against?

Make this point clearly: this verse is not a proof-text for either side of the debate. It is a posture. It assumes the Spirit speaks. It assumes hearing is possible. It assumes the responsibility is to keep our hearts soft.

4. Micro-teaching (15 min)

Three short points. Keep this tight.

We are asking one question. Does God still speak today, in some way, to those who follow Him. Not whether the canon is closed. Not whether new Scripture is being written. The narrower, more honest question.

We are using careful words. Revelation is closed. Illumination is open. The historic Reformed tradition has always taught the second, even where it has been cautious about the gifts.

We are honouring every conviction in the room. The course is built to be safe for cessationists and generous to those who already hear. Neither side will be shamed.

Do not turn this into a sermon. Fifteen minutes. The rest belongs to the practice.

5. Practice: honest journaling (20 min)

Set the room. Phones face down. Pens and paper for everyone. Read the instructions slowly:

"For the next ten minutes, write honestly to yourself, not to the group. Three questions. Take your time. There is no wrong answer. We will sit in silence together."

The three questions:

- 1 *What is the strongest reason I have to believe God still speaks today?*
- 2 *What is the strongest reason I have to be cautious about that claim?*
- 3 *What would change in my life if it turned out the answer is yes? What would change if it turned out the answer is no?*

Ten full minutes of silence. Resist the urge to cut it short. After ten minutes, invite anyone who would like to share one sentence from their journal to do so. Do not require it. Some people will share. Others will keep what they wrote private. Both are honourable.

6. Closing (5 min)

Recap: tonight we named the question and the conviction in the room. Next week we begin walking through Scripture together.

Between-sessions practice: read Hebrews 3:7–15 once a day this week. Sit with the *today*. Notice what comes up.

Read aloud one final time: *"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."*

Close in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to keep every heart in the room soft for six weeks.

What to watch for

The strongly cessationist participant. If someone in the room is firmly convinced the gifts ceased, do not argue. Honour the conviction. Make sure they feel that their position will be carefully heard in week four. Tell them so directly if it helps.

The strongly charismatic participant. If someone is eager to share dramatic experiences, gently keep the room grounded. Tonight is not for stories of how God spoke to me last Tuesday. Save that for later weeks. Tonight is for naming the question.

The participant with a wound. Some people in the room will have been hurt by false prophecy, manipulative leaders, or charismatic excess. Others will have been hurt by a tradition that told them God had gone silent on them personally. Both wounds are real. If you sense one is in the room, do not name it publicly. Make space afterwards.

The silent participant. Some will say nothing all evening. That is fine. They are listening. Do not pull them out.

Prayer prompts for the group

If you pray over the group at the end, pray these things:

That the Holy Spirit would be the loudest voice in this room over six weeks.

That every conviction would be honoured and every heart kept soft.

That whatever each person needs to hear, see, or settle, would be made plain.

Looking ahead

Next week is *The God Who Has Always Spoken*. We move from naming the question to looking at the Old Testament pattern. The aim of week two is to establish, with Scripture, that a speaking God is not a new doctrine. He always has been. Ask participants to come having read Joel 2:28–29 once at home, slowly, looking at how broad the promise is.

SESSION 2

The God Who Has Always Spoken

A speaking God is not a new doctrine. He always has been.

SCRIPTURE

Joel 2:28-29; 1 Kings 19:11-13

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

Lectio divina on Psalm 19

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through. Then read Joel 2:28–29 once at home, slowly. Notice how broad the promise is.

The first thing in Scripture is a voice

When the Bible begins, it does not begin with a vision or a feeling or a principle. It begins with a voice.

"And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." (Genesis 1:3)

That is a remarkable opening for a book. The God of the Bible is, from the very first sentence, a speaking God. Creation itself comes into being through speech. The relationship between God and the world He has made starts with His words and the world's response to them.

This is worth pausing on, because it sets a pattern that runs the whole way through Scripture. The God of Israel is not silent. He is not a watchmaker who sets the world spinning and walks away. He is not a distant principle to be deduced from creation alone. He speaks. He has always spoken. The question of whether He speaks today is, at minimum, a question that takes seriously the kind of God He has shown Himself to be from page one.

The Old Testament pattern

Across the Old Testament, the speech of God shapes everything. Consider how varied the modes are.

He speaks to **Adam and Eve** in the garden, walking with them in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8–9). The first crisis of human history is followed by a question from God, audible enough to hide from. He speaks to **Noah** with detailed instructions over what must have felt like decades of construction (Genesis 6:13). He speaks to **Abraham** in visions, in the heat of the day, through three travellers, in dreams, and in promises that take generations to come true (Genesis 12, 15, 17, 18).

He speaks to **Moses** at the burning bush, then face to face *as a man speaks with his friend* (Exodus 33:11). He speaks to **Samuel** as a boy in the temple (1 Samuel 3). He speaks to **David** through the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12). He speaks to **the prophets** in vision after vision, dream after dream, oracle after oracle. The whole prophetic literature, from Isaiah to Malachi, is the speech of God captured in writing.

And He speaks to **Elijah** in one of the most beautiful passages in the Old Testament. The prophet is exhausted, depressed, hiding in a cave. The Lord passes by. There is wind that tears the mountain apart, but the Lord is not in the wind. There is an earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake. There is fire, but the Lord is not in the fire. And after the fire, *a low whisper*. (1 Kings 19:11–12)

That is where God is found. Not in the spectacle. In the whisper.

The Old Testament's God is intimate. His preferred posture toward His people is closeness, not theatre. The big public moments matter, but the central reality of the Old Testament walk with God is the *low whisper*.

A prophecy that should stop us in our tracks

Somewhere in the middle of the Old Testament, a prophet named Joel writes something stunning. He is in a season of national disaster. Locusts have stripped the land. The harvest has failed. The people are mourning. And in that context, Joel records this promise from God:

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit." (Joel 2:28–29)

Read that slowly.

All flesh. Not the priests. Not the prophets. Not a spiritual elite. *All flesh*. *Sons and daughters*. Both genders. Equal access. *Old men and young men*. Every generation. *Even on the male and female servants*. Even on the people without standing or social power.

The Old Testament's God is not only a speaking God. He is, by the time we reach Joel, a God who promises to extend His speaking to *everyone* who belongs to Him. The trajectory in the Old Testament is not contraction. It is expansion. God's voice was once heard mainly through prophets. Joel says a day is coming when it will be heard by all of His people.

This is the verse Peter quotes at Pentecost. We will sit with that next week. For now, just notice what it claims.

What both sides of the debate agree on

This is the easy week. There is very little disagreement here.

Cessationists agree that God spoke through the prophets. Continuationists agree that God spoke through the prophets. Both sides receive the Old Testament as inspired and true. Both sides hear the *low whisper* in 1 Kings 19 as God's actual voice to Elijah. Both sides take Joel 2:28–29 seriously as a promise that something would change in the way God's people would experience His Spirit.

The disagreement is not about the Old Testament. It is about what happened next. Specifically, what happened at Pentecost, and what happened after the apostles died. Did the promise of

Joel 2 come into force at Pentecost and continue, or did it come into force at Pentecost and then ramp down as the canon was completed?

That is the conversation of weeks three and four. Tonight, we are just establishing the pattern. The God of the Bible has always been a speaking God. Whatever we conclude about today, we have to start from that ground.

A word about the *low whisper*

Before we close, sit with Elijah in the cave for a moment.

Elijah had just won a public victory over four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. Fire from heaven. Killing of the false prophets. National repentance. He should have been at the height of his ministry. Instead, the queen issued a death threat, and he fled into the desert. He sat under a juniper tree and asked God to take his life. He was completely undone.

In that condition, the Lord found him. Not with a rebuke. Not with a sermon. Not with a vision of glory. With food, sleep, more food, more sleep, and a journey to a cave on Mount Horeb. And then, after the wind and the earthquake and the fire, a low whisper.

The God of the Old Testament is not just a speaking God. He is a careful one. He knows when His people need spectacle and when they need stillness. He knows when His servants need a public miracle and when they need a quiet word at the back of a cave. He is intimate.

If the question this whole course is asking is *does God still speak*, it is worth asking it with Elijah's image in mind. The kind of speech God specialises in is the kind that meets a tired prophet in a cave. Not loud. Not impressive. Not for an audience. For one person, in the dark, at the end of himself.

If God still speaks today, that is probably what it sounds like.

Before you come to the session

Read Joel 2:28–29 once a day this week, slowly. Notice each phrase. *All flesh. Sons and daughters. Old men and young men. Even the servants.*

Bring two things to the group:

One sentence on what surprises you about the Old Testament's God of speech.

One question or hesitation that came up as you read.

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person will have walked through the breadth of the Old Testament's pattern of God's speech, sat with the Joel 2:28–29 promise in particular, and

practised lectio divina on Psalm 19. The goal of this week is to establish, with Scripture itself doing the work, that a speaking God has always been the God of the Bible. We are not yet pressing on what changed at Pentecost. Just laying the ground.

Before you arrive

Read the participant reading twice.

Read 1 Kings 19:1–18 and Joel 2:28–32 in full.

Read Psalm 19 once slowly. Make sure you can lead lectio divina without reading from a script.

If anyone in the group last week named themselves as firmly cessationist, plan in advance how you will honour them tonight. Probably by drawing them out on what they appreciate about the Old Testament's God of speech, which is uncontroversial ground.

Session outline (90 min)

1. Welcome and recap (10 min)

Open with prayer. Briefly recap last week: we named the question, we honoured every conviction, and we anchored ourselves in Hebrews 3:7–8. Tonight we are walking through Scripture together.

Re-state the ground rules briefly. No spiritual one-upmanship. What is shared stays in the room.

2. Pre-read discussion (20 min)

Two questions. Take them slowly.

What surprised you about the Old Testament's God of speech as you read this week?

What questions or hesitations came up as you sat with Joel 2:28-29?

Common honest answers will include:

"I had not noticed how broad the Joel promise is."

"I am surprised by how often God uses dreams."

"I wondered why the prophets get such a privileged role and most people do not."

"I am suspicious of how the modern church uses the word 'prophecy.'"

All of these are fine. Receive them. Do not correct.

3. Scripture anchor: 1 Kings 19:11–13 (15 min)

Read the whole passage from 1 Kings 19:9–18 aloud. Slowly. Then ask:

What is the state Elijah is in when this happens? (Burned out. Suicidal. Hiding. End of himself.)

What three things does the Lord NOT speak through? (Wind, earthquake, fire.)

What does He speak through? (A low whisper.)

What does this tell us about how God prefers to speak to His people?

Make this point clearly: the central reality of God's speech in Scripture is intimacy. Not theatre. The most famous Old Testament passage about hearing God specifically rules out the spectacular and points us to the whisper.

This matters for the whole course. Whatever we eventually conclude about today, the kind of speech we are looking for is probably quiet. Anyone hoping for a stadium experience is in the wrong book.

4. Micro-teaching (10 min)

Three short points.

The God of the Bible is, from page one, a speaking God. Genesis 1:3 sets the pattern. Creation itself comes through speech. Whatever else this God is, He is not silent.

The Old Testament pattern is varied and intimate. Dreams, visions, oracles, audible voices, internal convictions, speech through prophets and through circumstances. And, repeatedly, the *low whisper*.

The Old Testament trajectory is expansion, not contraction. Joel 2:28-29 is a remarkable promise. *All flesh. Sons and daughters. Even the servants.* God's speech, the Old Testament suggests, is going to be made wider, not narrower.

Do not yet press into what happens at Pentecost. That is next week.

5. Practice: lectio divina on Psalm 19 (25 min)

This practice is safe for cessationists. It has deep Reformation pedigree. Calvin himself spoke of meditating on the Word and listening for the Spirit's witness. It is not a new-age technique. It is an ancient Christian practice of slow, attentive reading.

Set the room. Phones face down. Bibles open to Psalm 19. Lights low if possible.

Explain briefly:

"We are going to read Psalm 19 four times together, slowly. Between each reading, a few minutes of silence. The first time, just listen to the whole psalm. The second time, notice if a particular word or phrase stays with you. The third time, sit with that word or phrase and ask what it might be saying to you. The fourth time, hold the whole psalm before God in prayer. There is no pressure to feel anything. We are practising attention."

Then do it.

Read 1. A volunteer reads Psalm 19 aloud, slowly. (3 min)

Silence. (2 min)

Read 2. A different voice reads. Each person notices a phrase that stays with them. (3 min)

Silence. (3 min)

Read 3. A third voice reads. Each person sits with their phrase. (3 min)

Silence. (3 min)

Read 4. Read together aloud as a group, or one final solo voice. Hold the psalm in prayer. (3 min)

Sharing. (5 min) Invite anyone who would like to share a word or phrase that stayed with them. Do not require it. Do not over-interpret what is shared.

6. Closing (10 min)

Recap: tonight we walked through the Old Testament pattern, sat with Joel 2:28-29, and practised slow attentive reading of one psalm.

Between-sessions practice: read one psalm a day this week, slowly, the same way. Notice what stays.

Read aloud: *"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh."*

Close in prayer.

What to watch for

The cessationist who is uncomfortable with lectio divina. Some Reformed participants associate this practice with charismatic excess or even Catholic mysticism. Reassure them that lectio divina is older than the Reformation, that the Reformers themselves practised slow meditation on Scripture, and that this is not the same thing as listening for new revelation. It is listening for the Spirit's application of the Word that is already revealed.

The participant who hears too much in the practice. Occasionally someone in lectio divina will share something extravagant. Honour the share without endorsing the interpretation. *"Thank you. Worth sitting with."* Do not amplify. Do not teach correction in the room. If needed, follow up afterwards.

The participant who hears nothing. Some will say *"nothing came to me."* That is also fine. Practice takes time. Lectio is not magic. *"The first few times, often nothing. Keep practising."*

The Joel 2 cynic. Some will push back: *"Yes, but that is a future-tense prophecy. It does not necessarily apply now."* That is exactly the right question to be asking. Tell them so. *"That is the question we are going to look at next week, when Peter quotes Joel at Pentecost."* Hold the tension; do not resolve it.

Prayer prompts for the group

That the Holy Spirit would teach the group to read Scripture slowly, attentively, prayerfully.

That Joel 2:28–29 would not be passed over too quickly.

That every participant's heart would stay soft this week.

Looking ahead

Next week is *Pentecost and After*. We move from the promise to the fulfilment, and we look at what the New Testament writers actually expected of believers. Ask participants to come having read Acts 2:14–21 and 1 Corinthians 14:1–3 once at home this week.

SESSION 3

Pentecost and After

What did the New Testament expect of believers?

SCRIPTURE

Acts 2:14-21; 1 Corinthians 14:1-3

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

Read Acts 2:14-21 aloud, slowly. Notice Peter's word 'this' in v.16.

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through. Read Acts 2:14–21 once at home, slowly. Read 1 Corinthians 14:1–3 once. Bring honest questions.

This is what was spoken

To understand the New Testament's expectation of believers, we have to start at Pentecost. Acts 2 is the hinge.

The room is full. The Spirit has just been poured out. The disciples are speaking in languages they did not know. The crowd is amazed and confused. Some of them mock. *"They are filled with new wine."*

And Peter stands up.

"Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.'" (Acts 2:14–18)

Read that slowly.

This is what was spoken. Peter takes the prophecy of Joel 2 and tells the crowd that it is being fulfilled, *now*, in the room. This is the moment. Joel was talking about *this*.

Two phrases in Peter's quotation are doing important work and worth pausing on.

In the last days

The phrase *in the last days* is one of the most important phrases in the New Testament for our question.

In modern popular Christianity, *the last days* often gets read as a few years just before Jesus returns. The seven-year tribulation. End-times charts. Books about the rapture. The phrase has been narrowed in recent decades to almost a calendar window.

But that is not how Peter or the writer to the Hebrews uses the phrase. For them, *the last days* is the entire age between the ascension of Jesus and His return. It is the church age. It is now.

The writer to the Hebrews opens his book with this conviction:

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." (Hebrews 1:1-2)

In these last days means the era we are living in. The era inaugurated by Jesus. The era of the Spirit poured out. The era of the church. Two thousand years and counting. The Spirit's outpouring, in Peter's framework, is not a one-day event in the upper room. It is the defining feature of the entire age that opens at Pentecost.

This matters because it tells us how Peter expected the Joel prophecy to function. Not as a fireworks display that flared once and went out. As a defining feature of an era.

Sons and daughters prophesying. Old men dreaming dreams. Young men seeing visions. Servants speaking by the Spirit. Peter expected this kind of thing to characterise the church for as long as the church was on earth.

That is the New Testament's first significant claim about today. The age of the Spirit's outpouring did not end with the apostles. It opens at Pentecost and continues until Christ returns.

What Paul actually told the Corinthians

If Acts 2 sets the era, the letters to the Corinthians show us what the era looked like in practice.

Paul writes to a church in a major Greek city that is doing many things badly. They are arguing. They are showing off. They are misusing the gifts of the Spirit. The whole letter is a series of corrections. By the time he gets to chapters 12, 13, and 14, he is dealing with their disorder around prophecy and tongues.

What is striking is what he does *not* tell them. He does not tell them to stop. He does not tell them prophecy is over. He does not tell them tongues are not for today. He tells them how to do it properly, in love, in order, for the building up of the church.

In fact, he says this:

"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." (1 Corinthians 14:1)

Read it again. *Earnestly desire*. The verb is strong. It is the same word used elsewhere for craving, longing, eagerly seeking. Paul tells the Corinthians to *want* prophecy. To *go after it*. Not to tolerate it if it appears. To pursue it.

And he gives a definition, in the next verses, of what this gift is for:

"The one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation." (1 Corinthians 14:3)

Three words. Upbuilding. Encouragement. Consolation. The New Testament's definition of prophecy is not predictive certainty about the future. It is not new doctrine. It is not infallible utterance. It is *upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation* spoken by one believer to another, sourced, somehow, in the Spirit's prompting.

That is much smaller than the popular caricature of prophecy. And it is much more useful.

What Paul told the Thessalonians

The same Paul, writing to a different church, says this:

"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5:19–22)

Five short instructions, all in a row, all on the same theme.

Do not quench the Spirit. Not all believers, says Paul, sin by being too open. Some sin by being too closed. There is such a thing as quenching the Spirit, and Paul warns against it.

Do not despise prophecies. Some Thessalonians, evidently, were already inclined to dismiss what others said the Spirit had given them. Paul tells them not to.

Test everything. But he is no naive enthusiast. Test it. The early church was never instructed to receive every claim of *"the Lord told me"* without examination. They were instructed to test.

Hold fast what is good. Whatever survives the test, keep. Whatever does not, let go.

Abstain from every form of evil. The whole exercise is anchored in moral seriousness.

What does this passage tell us about the New Testament church's experience of God's voice? It tells us that prophecy was a normal enough part of their life that some people were despising it and Paul had to correct them. It tells us testing was assumed. It tells us the goal was not free-for-all enthusiasm and not cessation, but *attentive discernment*.

That is a long way from how most modern conservative churches handle the question.

What both sides of the debate must agree on

If we are reading the New Testament honestly, both sides have to agree on at least the following.

The Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost in a way that fulfilled Joel 2.

Paul *expected* the Corinthian church to prophesy. He told them to pursue it.

The early church practised testing, not silencing. Paul instructed the Thessalonians to *not despise prophecies*.

The New Testament's definition of prophecy is upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation. Not new doctrine. Not infallible prediction.

The disagreement is not about any of this. The disagreement is about what happened *after* the apostles died. Did the gifts of the Spirit gradually withdraw as the canon was completed? Or did they continue, in a more ordinary, distributed form, throughout the church age that Peter said had begun?

That is the question of week four.

What we are doing this week

Tonight we are not arguing for or against cessationism. We are simply letting the New Testament tell us what its writers expected of the believers they were writing to. They expected prophecy. They expected testing. They expected the Spirit to be at work in ways that needed both encouragement and correction.

Whatever we eventually conclude about how that translates to today, we have to start from this honest reading of the text. The early church was not a Bible study with a closed door. It was a community in which the Spirit was actively speaking, often badly handled, frequently corrected, but never told to stop.

Hold this in your hand. We will weigh it more carefully next week.

Before you come to the session

Bring two things to the group.

One sentence on what surprised you in Acts 2 or 1 Corinthians 14:1–3 as you read this week.

One question that came up about how this might apply, or might not apply, to today.

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person will have walked carefully through Acts 2:14–21, 1 Corinthians 14:1–3, and 1 Thessalonians 5:19–22, and will have noticed for themselves what the New Testament writers actually expected of the believers they were writing to. The aim is not to argue cessationism either way. It is to let the texts say what they say. This is the most exegetically dense week. Move slowly.

Before you arrive

Read the participant reading three times.

Read Acts 2:1–21 in full.

Read 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 in full. Yes, all three. They sit together for a reason.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12–22 in full.

Sit with the verbs. *Earnestly desire. Do not despise. Test everything. Hold fast.* These verbs do the work tonight.

Session outline (90 min)

1. Welcome and recap (5 min)

Open with prayer. Briefly recap weeks one and two: we named the question and walked the Old Testament pattern. Tonight we read what the New Testament expected of the early church.

2. Pre-read discussion (15 min)

Two questions.

What surprised you in Acts 2 or 1 Corinthians 14:1-3 as you read this week?

What question came up about whether this applies to today?

The answers will start surfacing the cessationist questions. Receive them honestly. Do not push back yet. Most of these questions are exactly right and will be properly engaged in week four. Tonight, just notice them.

3. Scripture anchor: Acts 2:14-21 (15 min)

Read aloud, slowly. Then ask three questions:

What is Peter saying when he says "this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel"? Make sure the answer surfaces clearly: Peter is saying that the Joel prophecy is being fulfilled, now, in this room, in this moment. Not pointed forward to a future event. Now.

What does Peter mean by "the last days"? Help the group see this is not the seven-year tribulation. It is the era inaugurated at Pentecost and continuing until Christ returns. Reference Hebrews 1:1-2 if helpful.

If "the last days" is the entire church age, what does that imply about the duration of the Joel promise?

Let them sit with the implication. Do not draw it out for them. Let the text do the work.

4. Scripture anchor: 1 Corinthians 14:1-3 and 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 (15 min)

Read both passages aloud. Then walk through the verbs.

Earnestly desire (1 Cor 14:1). What does the verb assume? (That the gift exists. That it can be desired. That Paul thinks his readers ought to want it.)

Upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation (1 Cor 14:3). What does this definition rule in? What does it rule out? (Rules in: words that build people up. Rules out: predictive certainty, new doctrine, infallible utterance.)

Do not quench the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19). What posture does this rule out? (Reflexive suspicion of every claim of the Spirit's work. There is such a thing as quenching, and Paul warns against it.)

Do not despise prophecies (1 Thess 5:20). What posture does this rule out? (Dismissing what others claim God has given them.)

Test everything; hold fast what is good (1 Thess 5:21). What posture does this rule in? (Discernment. Not silencing. Not credulity. Testing.)

Make this point: the New Testament posture is not *closed*. It is also not *naïve*. It is *attentive and discerning*. That is the posture this whole course is built around.

5. Micro-teaching (10 min)

Three short points.

The era of the Spirit's outpouring is the church age. Peter is clear about this at Pentecost. *The last days* is now. The Spirit's outpouring on *all flesh* is the defining feature of this age, not a one-day event in the upper room.

The early church practised prophecy and testing together. Not one without the other. Paul never tells anyone to stop prophesying. He repeatedly tells them to test what is prophesied.

The disagreement is not about this. Cessationists and continuationists agree on what the New Testament says. They disagree on what happened after the apostles died. Hold the question. Next week we engage the cessationist case directly.

Do not go further than that tonight.

6. Practice: Acts 2:14–21 read aloud, slowly (15 min)

Set the room. Bibles open to Acts 2.

Have three different voices in the group read Acts 2:14–21 aloud, slowly, with about 30 seconds of silence between each reading. After all three readings, ask:

What word or phrase stayed with you as you heard it three times?

What does Peter want the crowd to know?

Let people share briefly. Do not turn this into discussion. Just hear what stayed.

7. Closing (15 min)

Recap: tonight we walked the New Testament texts honestly. We let the writers say what they said. Next week we engage the cessationist case directly and with respect.

Between-sessions practice: read 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 in one sitting this week. Yes, all three chapters. They were written together. Notice how chapter 13, on love, sits in the middle for a reason.

Read aloud as a closing benediction: *"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts."*

Close in prayer.

What to watch for

The discomfort of the room rising. This is the week where the texts start pressing against any easy cessationist position. Some participants will visibly shift in their seats. That is fine. Do not rescue them. The text is doing its work.

The cessationist objection raised mid-session. Someone will inevitably push back: *"Yes, but those gifts ceased."* Honour the objection. *"That is exactly the question we are sitting with. Next week is built for that conversation. Hold it for one more week."* Then move on.

The continuationist who wants to celebrate. The opposite risk. Someone in the room may treat tonight as a vindication. *"See, I told you."* Gently steer the room back. *"Tonight is not a victory lap. It is a careful read of the texts. Next week we honour the cessationist case with the same care."*

The participant trying to hold both. Some will say *"I have always believed both that Scripture is sufficient and that the Spirit still works."* That participant is ahead of the rest

of the room. Honour them. They are quietly holding the position the course will eventually land on.

Prayer prompts for the group

That the Holy Spirit would continue to teach the group from the Word itself, not from any one tradition's reading of it.

That every cessationist concern in the room would be carried gently into next week, when it will be honoured.

That every continuationist conviction in the room would be tested next week, when it will be examined.

Looking ahead

Next week is the most important week of the course: *Heard With Honour*. We engage the cessationist case directly. Ask participants to come ready to honour a tradition they may or may not share. We will read a short cessationist source kindly, and we will look at the two passages cessationists most rest on (1 Cor 13:8-12 and Eph 2:20). Tell them in advance that if they have ever been hurt by charismatic excess, false prophecy, or manipulative leaders, next week is for them.

SESSION 4

Heard With Honour

Where cessationism comes from, and what it gets right

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 13:8-12; Ephesians 2:20

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

Read a short cessationist source kindly. Notice what resonates.

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through. Read 1 Corinthians 13:8–12 and Ephesians 2:20 once at home. Bring an open heart. This is the most important week of the course.

The conviction we are honouring

For the last three weeks we have been listening to the New Testament. Tonight we are listening to a tradition. A serious, faithful, deeply biblical tradition that has shaped much of the modern church and that we are not going to flatter and dismiss. We are going to receive it.

The conviction is sometimes called *cessationism*. It is the belief that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, including prophecy, tongues, and supernatural healing, were given for the foundational work of the apostles and ceased, in some meaningful way, at the close of the apostolic age and the completion of the canon. The Holy Spirit is still active. He still convicts of sin, illuminates Scripture, comforts the afflicted, sanctifies the believer. But the dramatic gifts that mark the early chapters of Acts are no longer normative.

This is not a fringe position. It has been the standard view of large parts of the Reformed, Baptist, and conservative–evangelical world for centuries. It was articulated rigorously by figures like John Calvin (with his careful warnings against *enthusiasts*), Jonathan Edwards (in places), and especially B. B. Warfield in his 1918 book *Counterfeit Miracles*. In our own time, the conviction has been carefully defended by John MacArthur, Tom Schreiner, and many others.

If you grew up in a church that taught this, your teachers were not unfaithful. They were standing in a serious tradition with serious reasons. Tonight we are going to look at those reasons with honour.

Where the conviction comes from

Cessationism did not appear out of nowhere. It came from real pastoral concerns, faced over centuries.

John Calvin (1509–1564) wrote sharply against the *enthusiasts* of his day, by which he meant Anabaptist groups that claimed direct revelation from the Spirit, sometimes contradicting Scripture. Calvin saw, in the Reformation moment, how dangerous it was when subjective spiritual experience overrode the authority of the written Word. He insisted that the Spirit always speaks in agreement with Scripture and never independently of it. That conviction is right.

Anyone who has watched a charismatic leader claim "*the Lord told me*" in a way that contradicts the Bible has felt the weight of Calvin's warning.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), the great American theologian, lived through the First Great Awakening and saw both genuine moves of the Spirit and dangerous excesses. He did not become a cessationist in the modern sense, but he wrote carefully about how to discern true and false manifestations of the Spirit. His book *Religious Affections* remains one of the wisest pastoral treatments of the question ever written.

B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) is the modern foundational figure. In *Counterfeit Miracles* he made the rigorous case that the miraculous gifts were given specifically for the authentication of the apostles and the completion of revelation. Once that work was done, the gifts withdrew. Warfield was responding to a 19th-century rise of claims of healing and prophecy that he believed were either fraudulent or psychological. His concern was not against the Spirit's work. It was for the protection of the faithful from manipulation.

Modern voices like John MacArthur in *Strange Fire* (2013) and Tom Schreiner in *Spiritual Gifts: What They Are and Why They Matter* (2018) continue this case with careful exegesis. They do not dismiss the Holy Spirit. They argue that the Spirit's work today is through the illumination and application of Scripture, not through new revelations or prophetic utterances.

If you are reading this and thinking "*these are people I trust*," that is the right response. They are trustworthy.

The two passages cessationists rest on

There are two New Testament passages that carry the most weight in the cessationist case. Both deserve a careful, honest reading.

1 Corinthians 13:8-12

"Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."

The cessationist reading: Paul is describing a future moment when *the perfect* comes, at which point prophecy and tongues will cease. The cessationist identifies *the perfect* with the completed canon of Scripture. Once the New Testament was completed, the Bible became sufficient and the partial revelation through prophecy and tongues was no longer needed. Therefore, the gifts ceased.

The continuationist reading: *The perfect* is the return of Christ, when *we shall see face to face and know fully, even as we have been fully known*. That is not the canon. That is the eschaton. Until that day, prophecy and knowledge still operate *in part*, with all the imperfection that implies. The gifts continue, but in a partial form, until Christ returns.

Both readings are taken seriously by serious scholars. Honest readers can disagree. What is striking is that in either reading, prophecy and tongues are *temporary*. The question is when the temporary ends. Either at the canon's close, or at Christ's return. Almost no continuationist claims the gifts will continue forever. They are gifts for the in-between time.

Ephesians 2:20

"Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."

The cessationist reading: The apostles and the New Testament prophets were *foundational*. A foundation is laid once. After it is laid, it is not laid again. The role of the apostles and prophets in giving Scripture and establishing the church was unique to the founding generation. The church is no longer in the foundational era. We are in the building era. The foundation is finished.

The continuationist reading: The verse is true. The apostolic and prophetic foundation was uniquely foundational. But this does not necessarily mean every form of prophecy ceased. The same chapter goes on to describe the church as a *holy temple* still being *built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit* (Eph 2:21–22). The foundation is finished; the building is not. Continuationists distinguish between *foundational, canon-shaping prophecy* (which closed) and *ongoing, encouraging prophecy in the local church* (which continues, fits Paul's definition in 1 Cor 14:3, and is always tested).

Again, both readings are serious. Both are held by careful exegetes. The disagreement is not about whether Ephesians 2:20 is true. It is about what implications it carries.

What cessationism gets right

Now to the heart of this week. Whatever we eventually conclude, cessationism gets a great deal right, and we have to name it honestly.

It defends the sufficiency of Scripture. This is the most important thing. The 66 books of the canon are sufficient for salvation, holiness, doctrine, and life. Nothing said by anyone in any room anywhere has the same authority. The cessationist instinct to protect the canon is not over-cautious. It is faithful.

It refuses the closed canon's reopening. No alleged prophecy can add to Scripture. None. If a "*prophecy*" claims to give new doctrine, new commandments, or new infallible truth, it is wrong, regardless of how spiritual the deliverer feels. The cessationist guard at this door is right.

It is rigorous about testing. If the New Testament tells us to test what is prophesied, the cessationist tradition has been the most consistent in actually doing it. Where charismatic and Pentecostal traditions have sometimes celebrated whatever was claimed in the Spirit, cessationists have insisted that nothing is exempt from scrutiny.

It is suspicious of charlatans. History gives the cessationist plenty of evidence. Television healers asking for money. Self-appointed prophets making predictions that fail. *"The Lord told*

me you should marry me." TikTok prophets confidently announcing the next election or the next disaster. The cessationist's suspicion of these is not cynicism. It is wisdom. They have seen what happens when prophecy is detached from Scripture and accountability.

It protects vulnerable believers. This may be the most pastoral piece. Many people have been harmed by manipulative leaders who used spiritual gifts as a weapon. Wives told their husbands' abuse was "*God's purifying fire.*" Young women told they would marry a leader because "*the Lord said so.*" Donations extracted under prophetic pressure. The cessationist position has often been the wall that protected vulnerable believers from these abuses. We are not against that wall. We are walking alongside it.

It centres Christ. Cessationists, at their best, are passionate that nothing should compete with the centrality of Jesus Christ and the sufficiency of His Word. That is not a small thing. It is the whole thing.

A confession before we move on

Before we close, a confession.

This course will, in week five, suggest that a sufficient Scripture and an ongoing voice are not at odds. It will draw on Reformed continuationists like Wayne Grudem, Sam Storms, and D. A. Carson. It will ask whether illumination, the inner witness, and the *low whisper* might be honestly received without compromising the canon.

But before we go there, we want to say plainly: cessationism, as a tradition, has been a faithful guard at the door of the church. It is not the enemy. It is not the obstacle. It is, at its best, a careful brother in Christ saying *be slow, be careful, be sure that what you call God's voice is actually His.*

We agree. Wherever we land at the end of this course, we agree.

Before you come to the session

Bring two things to the group.

One thing in this week's reading that you appreciated about cessationism. Even if you do not share the position, find one thing to honour.

One question or hesitation that the cessationist case raises in you.

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person will have heard the cessationist case received with full honour, walked through 1 Corinthians 13:8–12 and Ephesians 2:20 carefully, and named at least one thing the cessationist tradition gets right. The aim of this week is **trust-building**, not argument. If your group leaves tonight feeling that the cessationist conviction has been

honoured, the rest of the course can do its work. If they leave feeling it has been flattered and dismissed, the course is dead.

This is the most important week. Slow down. Take time.

Before you arrive

Read the participant reading three times.

Read 1 Corinthians 13 in full.

Read Ephesians 2 in full.

If accessible, read at least the introduction to one of the following: Warfield's *Counterfeit Miracles*, MacArthur's *Strange Fire*, or Schreiner's *Spiritual Gifts*. You do not need to agree to read them. You need to be able to say honestly that you have heard the position from its best advocates.

If you yourself are a continuationist, sit with this question for a few minutes before you arrive: *what is the strongest argument against my position, and how have I taken it seriously?* If your honest answer is *I have not really*, tonight is for you too.

Session outline (90 min)

1. Welcome and framing (10 min)

Open with prayer. Then say something like:

"Tonight is the most important night of the course. We are going to hear out a tradition that many of us share, that some of us have been taught to be wary of, and that all of us need to honour. Cessationism is not a fringe position. It is a serious, faithful, deeply biblical conviction held by some of the wisest pastors and theologians in church history. We are not going to flatter it and dismiss it. We are going to receive it."

If you have someone in the room who is firmly cessationist, name them gently if it is appropriate. *"Sarah, tonight is in part for you. We want you to feel that your tradition has been heard."*

2. Pre-read discussion (25 min)

Two questions, taken slowly.

What did you appreciate about cessationism in this week's reading? Even if you do not share the position, what is one thing you find honourable in it?

What question or hesitation did the cessationist case raise in you?

The first question is critical. **Insist on it.** Even continuationists in the room must name something they appreciate. This forces the room into honour rather than dismissal.

Common honest answers:

"The defence of the sufficiency of Scripture is exactly right."

"The suspicion of charlatans is wisdom, not cynicism."

"The protection of vulnerable people from manipulative leaders is pastoral love."

"The rigour about testing is biblical."

If anyone tries to brush past this question with a quick *"well, they are wrong but I respect them,"* press them. *"Find one specific thing. Tell us what it is."*

3. Scripture anchor: 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 (15 min)

Read aloud, slowly. Then walk through both readings carefully.

What does the cessationist think "the perfect" is? (The completed canon of Scripture. Once it was finished, the partial revelation through prophecy ceased.)

What does the continuationist think "the perfect" is? (The return of Christ, when *we shall see face to face.*)

What can be said for each reading? (Both are textually serious. The cessationist reading has the strength that the canon's completion is a real historical event. The continuationist reading has the strength that *face to face* and *fully known* most naturally describe seeing Christ, not reading a complete Bible.)

Let the group sit with both readings honestly. Do not resolve. The point of this week is not to win this argument. It is to admit that the argument exists, and that both sides have good ground.

If a continuationist in the room jumps too quickly to dismiss the cessationist reading, slow them down. *"Read it again. Could the perfect be the canon? It could. Honour the reading even if you eventually disagree."*

4. Scripture anchor: Ephesians 2:20–22 (10 min)

Read aloud. Then ask:

What does it mean that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets"? (The apostolic and prophetic ministry of the founding generation was uniquely foundational.)

Does that necessarily mean every form of prophecy ended? (This is the live question. The cessationist says yes. The continuationist distinguishes foundational prophecy, which closed, from ongoing local prophecy as defined in 1 Cor 14:3, which continues. Both are honest readings.)

What does the rest of the chapter (v.21-22) tell us about the church's continued building? (The foundation is finished, but the building is not. The Spirit is still building.)

Again, do not resolve. Hold the tension.

5. Micro-teaching (10 min)

Three short points. Keep this very tight.

Cessationism is a serious tradition. It came from real pastoral concerns. Calvin against the enthusiasts. Edwards on discernment. Warfield on counterfeits. MacArthur on excess. These are not silly people. They are wise pastors trying to protect the church.

The two key passages can be read both ways. 1 Corinthians 13:8–12 and Ephesians 2:20 do not settle the debate. They contribute to it. Honest exegetes disagree.

What cessationism gets right is much. The sufficiency of Scripture. The closed canon. The rigour about testing. The suspicion of charlatans. The protection of vulnerable believers. The centring of Christ. We agree with all of it. The question is whether all of these are necessarily incompatible with an ongoing voice.

Do not preview week five. Let tonight close on cessationism heard.

6. Practice: read a cessationist source kindly (15 min)

Bring a printed excerpt to the session. Suggested options:

A few paragraphs from B. B. Warfield's *Counterfeit Miracles* introduction.

A short article from Ligonier Ministries on the cessation of the gifts.

A passage from John MacArthur's *Strange Fire*, choosing one of the more pastoral sections rather than the most polemical.

A short piece from Tom Schreiner's *Spiritual Gifts*.

Hand a copy to each person. Have them read it silently for five minutes, slowly, with a pen in hand. Mark anything that resonates. Mark anything they would push back on.

Then ask:

What in this resonated with you?

What would you want to push back on?

Important: in this practice, *you* (the facilitator) do not lead with your own pushback. Let the group do the work. Receive what is shared. If there is real disagreement, name it without resolving it. *"That is honest. We will sit with that into next week."*

7. Closing (5 min)

Recap: tonight we honoured a serious tradition. We named what cessationism gets right. We held the two key passages with both readings honestly. Next week we ask whether the sufficiency of Scripture and an ongoing voice are necessarily at odds.

Between-sessions practice: pray every day this week for any cessationist brother or sister whose conviction you do not fully share. Honour them in prayer. *"Lord, thank you for the people who guard the door of Scripture so carefully. Bless their faithfulness."*

Read aloud: *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."* (Ephesians 2:19)

Close in prayer. Bless every cessationist brother and sister in the church.

What to watch for

The cessationist who feels finally heard. If you have one in the room, you may see them visibly relax this week. Honour that. *"Thank you for trusting us with your tradition. We meant what we said. It has been heard."*

The continuationist who is impatient. Some in the room will be eager to move past this week to *the answer*. Slow them. *"This week is not a waiting room. It is the foundation of the rest of the course. If we do not honour cessationism here, we have nothing serious to say next week."*

The participant who has been wounded by charismatic excess. Tonight may bring up real pain. False prophecies that hurt. Manipulative leaders. Churches that demanded ecstatic experiences as proof of faith. Hold space. Do not rush to *"but the gifts are still real."* Let the wound be named.

The participant who is closer to cessationism than they realised. Some people, hearing the tradition properly for the first time, will say *"actually, I think I agree with most of this."* Honour that. Do not steer them. *"That is honest. Hold it."*

The participant who is closer to continuationism than they realised. Equally, someone may say *"I have always assumed I was cessationist, but reading 1 Cor 14:1 honestly, I am not sure."* Honour that too. *"Hold it. Next week is for you."*

Prayer prompts for the group

That every cessationist conviction in the room would be honoured in this week and forever.

That every wound from charismatic excess or manipulative spiritual leadership would be heard and named.

That the Holy Spirit, who is praised by both sides as the one who guides into all truth, would guide this group into all truth, however slowly.

Looking ahead

Next week is *Sufficiency and Voice*. We move from honouring the cessationist case to asking whether a sufficient Scripture is necessarily a silent God. We will look at Reformed forerunners (Edwards, Spurgeon, Owen, Calvin himself) who held the sufficiency of Scripture and also believed God still spoke in some way. Tell the group in advance that next week is the gentlest week. The work of week four is the hardest work. Week five is the breath afterwards.

SESSION 5

Sufficiency and Voice

Why a sufficient Scripture does not mean a silent God

SCRIPTURE

John 10:27; 2 Peter 1:19–21

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

A 'verse lighting up' exercise on a chapter of Scripture

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through. Read John 10:1–30 once at home, slowly. Bring an open Bible.

The doctrine, said properly

Last week we honoured the cessationist tradition and the great pastoral wisdom in it. Tonight we ask one careful question of that tradition.

The question is this: *does the sufficiency of Scripture necessarily mean that God has gone silent?*

It is worth saying first what *sufficiency* actually claims, properly stated. The historic Protestant doctrine, sometimes called *solā Scriptura*, holds that Scripture alone is the **infallible** rule of faith and practice. The 66 books are sufficient for salvation, holiness, doctrine, and life. They are God-breathed. They cannot be added to. They cannot be reduced. They are the canon, and the canon is closed.

This is the doctrine. It is non-negotiable for any historic Christian, Reformed or otherwise. It is what cessationists and continuationists both confess.

What it does *not* claim, even on the most careful Reformed reading, is that God has stopped speaking in any sense at all. It does not claim that the Spirit no longer applies the Word to specific lives in specific moments. It does not claim that prayer is monologue. It does not claim that nothing happens between sermons. It does not claim that the Shepherd whose sheep know His voice (John 10:27) has gone quiet on His own flock.

That distinction matters. Sufficiency is about Scripture's *authority*, not about God's *silence*.

Two words that change the conversation

There are two words that, once you have them, almost the whole debate makes more sense.

Revelation is what God did when He gave Scripture. It is binding. It is infallible. It is true for everyone, in every place, in every age. The 66 books are revelation. The canon is closed. No new revelation is being given.

Illumination is what the Spirit does when He applies the already-given Word to a particular heart, in a particular moment, in a particular life. Illumination is personal. It is fallible. It must be tested against Scripture. It does not bind anyone but the person it speaks to. And it has been confessed, in some form, by every serious Christian tradition, including the Reformed one.

Most of what cessationists worry about is the confusion of these two. When someone says "*the Lord told me*" in a way that adds to Scripture, contradicts Scripture, or claims authority over other believers, that is treating illumination like revelation. It is a category mistake, and a dangerous one.

Most of what continuationists actually practise is illumination, properly understood. A verse that comes alive in personal Bible reading. A conviction in prayer that aligns with Scripture. The inner witness Romans 8:16 names. A word of encouragement from another believer that lands somewhere true and is later confirmed. None of these claim canonical authority. None of these are new revelation. They are the Spirit applying the already-given Word.

If we can hold these two words apart, the conversation gets quieter quickly.

Reformed forerunners who held both

Here is something that may surprise readers from the Reformed tradition. The historic Reformed tradition has always taught that the Spirit speaks, in some way, today. The dispute has been about *how* and *what*. It has not been a wholesale denial that God's voice can be heard.

John Calvin wrote extensively about the *testimonium internum Spiritus Sancti*, the *internal testimony of the Holy Spirit*. In his *Institutes*, Calvin argued that the certainty we have that Scripture is the Word of God is not given by argument or by the church. It is given by the Spirit, who bears witness in the heart of the believer. That is, on any honest reading, an inner witness of the Spirit. Calvin would not have called it a charismatic experience. But he would not have denied that the Spirit speaks, in some form, to the believer's heart.

Jonathan Edwards, the careful theologian of the First Great Awakening, wrote a remarkable *Personal Narrative* of his own spiritual life. In it he describes moments of overwhelming sense of God's presence, particular Scriptures coming alive to him, convictions that shaped his life. He is not a wild enthusiast. He is one of the most rigorous theologians in American history. And he describes hearing from God, in the small ways named above, throughout his life. His treatise *Religious Affections* is the careful work of distinguishing true and false experiences of the Spirit. He never says God has gone silent. He insists on testing.

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892), the great Reformed Baptist preacher of London, recorded multiple specific instances of what he called "*personal preaching*". Mid-sermon, he would suddenly be drawn to specific people in his congregation he had never met, sometimes naming their hidden sins or particular needs. He spoke about these openly. They were not new doctrine. They were the Spirit's pastoral application of preached Scripture to specific hearts. Spurgeon was no charismatic. He was a Reformed Baptist of the strictest kind. And he believed, demonstrably, that God still spoke in this way.

John Owen (1616–1683), perhaps the greatest English Puritan theologian, wrote at length on the Spirit's ongoing work, including the Spirit's *illumination* of Scripture and the believer's *communion with God*. Owen would not have endorsed modern charismatic prophecy. But he insisted that the Christian life is *communion* with the triune God, including the Spirit's active, present, personal work in the believer.

This is not a fringe heritage. This is the centre of the Reformed tradition. The conviction that the Spirit still speaks, in carefully defined ways, to the believer is not a charismatic innovation. It is older than the Reformation, present in the Reformation itself, and continuous through the Puritan and post-Reformation tradition.

Reformed continuationists in our own time

Beyond the historic figures, there are serious modern Reformed thinkers who hold both the sufficiency of Scripture and the ongoing work of the Spirit in the gifts. They are not contradicting their tradition. They are drawing on the deepest part of it.

Wayne Grudem is one of the most careful systematic theologians of our generation. His book *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* makes the case that prophecy in the New Testament was a fallible, testable gift, distinct from the apostolic ministry that produced Scripture. On Grudem's reading, Paul never expected New Testament prophecy to be infallible (which is why he commanded testing). It was a Spirit-prompted word of upbuilding, encouragement, or consolation, given through ordinary believers, for the local church. That kind of prophecy, he argues, has continued.

Sam Storms, a Reformed theologian, formerly cessationist, walks the same ground in *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts* and *Practicing the Power*. His own story is worth knowing. He came to his current position not from charismatic background but from careful study of the texts.

D. A. Carson, perhaps the most respected biblical scholar of his generation, in *Showing the Spirit*, argues for what he calls *open but cautious* continuationism. The gifts continue, but with the discernment Paul required.

Jack Deere is the figure most worth knowing for cessationist participants. He was a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, the seminary most associated with classical dispensational cessationism. He taught the cessationist position to thousands of students. And then, through careful study of Scripture, he changed his mind. He wrote *Surprised by the Voice of God* about the journey. It is the canonical text for anyone walking the road this course is walking.

If you finish this course wanting to keep reading, those are the books to find.

What this looks like in practice

If sufficiency and voice are not at odds, what does it actually look like to practise hearing God's voice in a Reformed-friendly, Scripture-anchored, illumination-not-revelation way?

It looks quieter than the popular caricature. Most of the time, it looks like this:

Scripture coming alive. You are reading your Bible. A verse you have read a hundred times suddenly seems addressed to you. It speaks to your situation in a specific way. You write it down. You sit with it. You test it against the rest of Scripture. You let it shape your prayer. That is illumination. It has been the experience of every serious Christian for two thousand years.

Conviction in prayer. You are praying about a decision. A clear sense settles over you about what is right or wrong. You test it against Scripture. You bring it to trusted Christians. You walk slowly. The conviction may be the Spirit. It may be your conscience. It may be both. You do not need to label it dramatically. You just walk in it.

A word from another believer. A friend says *"I have been thinking about you. This Scripture came to mind for you."* You receive it. You test it. If it lines up, you keep it. If it does not, you set it aside without offence.

The inner witness. Romans 8:16 names something real. *"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."* That is a present-tense, ongoing reality. The Spirit's witness is not a doctrine. It is something He does.

None of this is new revelation. None of it is canon. None of it is binding on anyone but the person who receives it. All of it must be tested. All of it must be held loosely. None of it makes anyone special.

This is what continuationists, at their best, are practising. This is what the Reformed forerunners we just walked through described in their own lives.

The Doxa framework, in brief

Doxa, the app this course is part of, is built around exactly this distinction. Scripture is the plumbline. Whatever someone senses, whatever someone records, whatever someone says God has spoken, is held against the canon. Whatever survives the test is stewarded in love.

The framework is:

Hear what may be the Spirit's prompting.

Discern whether it is.

Test it against Scripture.

Record what survives the test.

Remember it when the road gets hard.

Trust the Shepherd whose voice it was.

That is not a charismatic agenda. It is a Reformed practice with the gifts left in.

Sufficiency and voice are not at odds

Here is the central claim of this week, in one sentence.

The sufficiency of Scripture is the very ground on which the Spirit's voice is tested.

You cannot test what you hear without a sufficient, infallible standard. Cessationists and continuationists agree completely on the standard. The cessationist insists, rightly, that no alleged voice can compete with the canon. The continuationist agrees, and adds that the canon is also where the testing happens. Without a sufficient Scripture, no continuationist could safely

receive any prompting at all. The doctrine of sufficiency is not the wall against ongoing voice. It is the courtroom in which ongoing voice is examined.

If we hold that, the two convictions can sit together more comfortably than the loudest voices of either side often suggest.

Before you come to the session

Bring two things to the group.

One Reformed forerunner from this reading whose example surprised you.

One personal experience of illumination, however small, that you would describe as the Spirit applying Scripture to your life. (No need to call it *prophecy*. Just an honest description of a moment.)

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person will have learned the distinction between *revelation* and *illumination*, walked through the Reformed forerunners who held both the sufficiency of Scripture and the ongoing work of the Spirit, and practised a *verse lighting up* exercise on a chapter of their own choosing. The aim is to show, with historical and theological care, that sufficiency and voice are not at odds. The tone this week should be lighter than week four. Last week was the hardest work. This week is the breath afterwards.

Before you arrive

Read the participant reading three times.

Read John 10:1-30 in full. Sit with v.27 in particular: "*my sheep hear my voice.*" (Present tense.)

Read 2 Peter 1:19-21 in full.

If you have not yet read it, find Wayne Grudem's *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. Read at least the introduction and chapter one. This is essential reading for anyone who will lead this course.

Have a chapter of Scripture ready for the practice. Suggested options: Psalm 1, Romans 8, Philippians 4, 1 John 1. Pick one.

Session outline (90 min)

1. Welcome and recap (10 min)

Open with prayer. Briefly recap last week: we honoured cessationism and named what it gets right. Tonight we ask one question of that tradition: does sufficiency necessarily mean silence?

Set a different tone tonight than last week. Last week was heavy lifting. Tonight is breath. "*This week is the gentlest week of the course. We are going to walk through some Reformed fore-*

runners you may not have known were on this road. And we are going to practise a quiet thing together at the end."

2. Pre-read discussion (20 min)

Two questions.

Which Reformed forerunner from this week's reading surprised you most? Why?

Could you describe a personal experience of illumination, however small, where Scripture seemed to come alive for you in a particular moment?

The first question gets the room into the historical landscape. Most participants will not have known that Calvin wrote about the *internal testimony* of the Spirit, that Spurgeon practised *personal preaching*, that Edwards described the inner witness in his *Personal Narrative*. This is genuinely surprising for many cessationist participants. Honour the surprise.

The second question shifts to personal experience. Be careful here. Some participants will have rich examples. Others will say *"I have never had anything like that."* Both are fine. **Do not compare. Do not rank. Do not amplify.** Some honest answers will be very small: *"there was a verse during my mother's funeral that seemed to be exactly what I needed."* That is more than enough. Honour it.

3. The two words: revelation and illumination (15 min)

This is the teaching centrepiece of the week. Take time on it. Say something like:

"There are two words that, once you have them, make most of this debate quieter. Revelation and illumination. Revelation is what God did when He gave Scripture. It is binding, infallible, true for everyone. The 66 books are revelation. The canon is closed. No new revelation is being given. Illumination is what the Spirit does when He applies the already-given Word to a particular heart in a particular moment. Illumination is personal. It is fallible. It must be tested against Scripture. And it has been confessed by every serious Christian tradition, including the Reformed one. Most cessationist concern is about the confusion of these two. Most continuationist practice, properly understood, is illumination, not revelation. If we keep them apart, the conversation gets quieter."

Then ask:

Has anyone in the room had this distinction made for them clearly before?

If we use these two words, where does the cessationist concern actually land? And where does the continuationist practice actually live?

Let the room do the work. Many participants will visibly relax once they hear this distinction. They have been carrying anxiety that any sense of God's voice means undermining the canon. The distinction releases that anxiety.

4. Scripture anchor: John 10:27 and 2 Peter 1:19-21 (10 min)

Read both passages aloud.

Jesus says "my sheep hear my voice." What tense is the verb? What does that imply about the sheep's experience of Jesus? (Present tense. Ongoing. Not past. Not future.)

2 Peter 1:19-21 talks about Scripture as "a lamp shining in a dark place." What does that metaphor imply about how Scripture functions? (Active. Living. Currently illuminating. Not just historical.)

The point: even in passages that are most often used to defend the sufficiency of Scripture, the language is present-tense and active. Scripture is not a closed library. It is a *lamp shining in a dark place*. And the Shepherd is currently being heard by His sheep.

5. Micro-teaching (10 min)

Three short points.

Sufficiency is about Scripture's authority, not God's silence. The 66 books are sufficient and final. That is the doctrine. It is not the same claim as "*God has stopped speaking.*"

Revelation and illumination are different things. Revelation closed with the canon. Illumination is what the Spirit does ongoingly with the closed canon. Both Reformed forerunners and modern Reformed continuationists hold both.

The Reformed tradition has always believed in some form of ongoing voice. Calvin's *internal testimony*. Edwards's *Personal Narrative*. Spurgeon's *personal preaching*. Owen on *communion with God*. These are not charismatic innovations. They are the historic Reformed faith.

6. Practice: a verse lighting up (20 min)

Set the room. Bibles open to a chapter you have chosen in advance (Psalm 1, Romans 8, Philippians 4, or 1 John 1 are good options). Say:

"For the next fifteen minutes, we are going to read this chapter slowly, twice. Between readings, sit in silence. Notice if any phrase or verse stays with you, seems to address you specifically, or you find yourself returning to. After the second reading, sit with whatever stayed. Test it. Ask: does this accord with the rest of Scripture? Is it consistent with the character of Christ? Is it kinder than my own thoughts usually are? If yes, hold it as a possible word of illumination. If no, set it aside."

Read 1. A volunteer reads the chapter aloud. (3 min)

Silence. Each person sits with the chapter. (3 min)

Read 2. A different voice reads. (3 min)

Silence. Each person sits with the verse or phrase that stayed with them. (5 min)

Sharing. Invite anyone who would like to share what stayed with them, and what they think it might be saying, to do so. (6 min)

Important: when people share, do not over-interpret. Receive without amplification. "*Thank you. Worth sitting with.*" Some people will share something small. Some will share something big. Some will share nothing. All are fine.

7. Closing (10 min)

Recap: tonight we made one careful distinction (revelation and illumination), walked through the Reformed forerunners who held both sufficiency and ongoing voice, and practised a quiet attention together. Next week is the close.

Between-sessions practice: every day this week, read a chapter of Scripture slowly. Notice what stays. Test it. Hold it. This is the practice the next course (*Hearing His Voice*) is built around, but you can begin it now without committing to anything.

Read aloud as a closing benediction: "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*" (John 10:27)

Close in prayer.

The cessationist who is now wrestling. This week may unsettle a participant who has been firmly cessationist. Honour the wrestling. Do not push. *"Take your time. The course ends with three honourable destinations. There is no pressure tonight."*

The participant amplifying their experience. Occasionally, the *verse lighting up* practice produces a dramatic share. *"God said to me clearly that I should..."* Receive without amplifying. Make sure the rest of the room does not feel they have failed if their own experience was quieter. Most are. The drama is not the point.

The participant who heard nothing. Some will say *"nothing came to me."* Honour it. *"That happens. Practice takes time. Do not force anything. The Shepherd is not absent because the moment was quiet."*

The newly continuationist convert. Some participants may want to celebrate that they now have language for what they have always felt. That is honourable. But do not let the room turn into a vindication. Keep it grounded. *"This is one careful step. The next course is built for the practice. We are still in week five of this course."*

The pastor in the room thinking about their congregation. Pastors may begin to think practically: *how could I introduce this carefully to my church?* That is the right question. Encourage them. The whole point of the course is to be safe for that conversation. *"Take it slowly. Honour your congregation. Do what week four taught us to do, and start with what cessationism gets right."*

Prayer prompts for the group

That the Spirit who bears witness with our spirit (Romans 8:16) would be heard quietly in every life in the room.

That the distinction between revelation and illumination would settle deeply.

That every cessationist conviction in the room would feel less anxious tonight, knowing that ongoing voice is not a threat to the canon.

Looking ahead

Next week is *An Honest Invitation*. We close. We walk through the testing framework in full, name the risks both ways, affirm three honourable destinations (settled cessationism, openness to the next course, or remaining undecided), and bridge gently into *Hearing His Voice* (Course 1) for any who want to take the next step. Tell the group in advance that no one will be pressured to a decision. The point of week six is to bless every honest path.

SESSION 6

An Honest Invitation

What we do with the question now

SCRIPTURE

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21; 1 Samuel 3:10

SESSION

90 min

PRACTICE

An honest prayer, and an honest decision about where each person walks from here

PARTICIPANT READING

Before the session

Read this through. Bring the journal entries from week one if you kept them. Bring honesty.

Where we have been

We started this course with a question. *Does God still speak today?*

In week one we named the question, with care, in the company of every conviction in the room. We honoured cessationists. We honoured continuationists. We honoured the undecided.

In week two we walked the Old Testament pattern. The God of the Bible has always been a speaking God. Genesis to Malachi. From *let there be light* to the *low whisper* on Mount Horeb to the promise of Joel 2:28 that the Spirit would be poured out on *all flesh*.

In week three we walked the New Testament. Pentecost. Peter's *this is what was spoken*. Paul's *earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy*. The Thessalonians' *do not despise prophecies, but test everything*. We saw what the New Testament writers actually expected of the believers they were writing to.

In week four we honoured the cessationist tradition. Calvin. Edwards. Warfield. MacArthur. Schreiner. We named what cessationism gets right and we agreed with all of it. The sufficiency of Scripture. The closed canon. The rigour about testing. The suspicion of charlatans. The protection of vulnerable believers. The centring of Christ.

In week five we made one careful distinction. Revelation closed with the canon. Illumination, the Spirit's ongoing application of the Word to particular hearts, has been confessed by the Reformed tradition for centuries. Calvin's *internal testimony*. Edwards's *Personal Narrative*. Spurgeon's *personal preaching*. Owen on *communion with God*. Sufficiency of Scripture and ongoing voice are not at odds. They are companions.

Tonight is the close.

The full testing framework

Before we walk to the close, we want to give you the full testing framework, in one place, written out plainly. This is the framework Doxa is built around. It is also the framework Paul gives the Thessalonians and the Corinthians. *Test everything. Hold fast what is good.*

Whatever you sense, in any week to come, however small, however dramatic, run it through these.

1. Scripture. Does it accord with the whole counsel of Scripture? Not just one verse pulled out. The whole. Does it agree with the character of Christ as the Bible reveals Him? If it does not, set it aside without offence. The canon is the plumbline. Anything that contradicts the canon is not from the God of the canon.

2. Spirit. Does it bear the fruit of the Spirit? *Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* (Galatians 5:22–23). The Holy Spirit's voice produces His fruit. If what you sense is producing pride, division, fear, manipulation, or self-importance, it is not Him.

3. Community. Does the gathered church confirm or caution? Bring it to trusted believers, especially mature ones who walk in sound doctrine. The New Testament does not give us a private hearing—God-on-our-own posture. It gives us a community that tests together.

4. Time. Does it endure or evaporate? Time is a quiet but reliable test. What seemed like a strong impression in the moment may fade in a week. What seemed quiet at first may grow stronger as you walk with it. Do not rush to act on something fresh. Sit with it.

5. Specificity. Is it the kind of word the New Testament calls prophecy? *Upbuilding, encouragement, and consolation* (1 Cor 14:3). Not predictive certainty about the future. Not new doctrine. Not infallible utterance. If what you sense is presenting itself as a guarantee of an outcome, be slow.

6. Fruit it produces in you. What does sitting with this word produce? Humility or pride? Worship or self-importance? A softer heart toward God, or a harder one toward others? The Spirit's voice softens. The enemy's voice hardens. Notice the direction.

If a sense survives all six tests, hold it as a possible word of illumination. Steward it carefully. It may be Him. Or it may not. Either way, you have honoured the process.

The risks both ways, honestly

It is worth naming, before we close, that this question carries real risks in both directions.

The continuationist risk is *hearing too much*. Becoming subjective. Mistaking impulse for the Spirit. Building a life on impressions that were never tested. Following a *"the Lord told me"* into a marriage, a job, a move, a divorce, a financial decision that the rest of life later shows was not Him. Falling for false prophets who confidently predicted what never happened. Losing the anchor of Scripture under the pressure of personal experience. This risk is real. The cessationist tradition has been wise to warn against it.

The cessationist risk is *hearing too little*. Treating Scripture as a closed library rather than a living word. Becoming purely intellectual in the Christian life. Dismissing the Spirit's ongoing work in others' lives because it does not fit the framework. Hardening over time into a defensive posture that finds it hard to receive a friend who says *"I have been thinking about you, and this Scripture came to mind for you."* Missing the Shepherd's voice not because He is silent but be-

cause we have stopped expecting it. This risk is also real. The continuationist tradition, at its best, has tried to name it.

Both risks are pastoral. Neither is a small concern. The careful believer will guard against both.

Three honourable destinations

This is the heart of the close. We promised at the start of this course that no one would be pushed toward a particular conclusion. We meant it. The course ends with three honourable destinations, and every one of them is genuinely honourable.

Destination 1: settled cessationism.

You may have walked through six weeks and concluded that, on the whole, your tradition is right. You believe Scripture is sufficient. You believe the gifts ceased. You believe the Spirit's work today is through Word and sacrament, illumination and conviction, but not through prophecy as the New Testament practised it. That is a faithful place to land. You are in the company of Calvin (mostly), Warfield, MacArthur, and many of the wisest pastors in church history. Continue to honour Scripture. Continue to trust the Spirit's work in you, however you frame it. Be slow to dismiss what you hear in others, even if it makes you uncomfortable. Bless the believers in your church who walk a different road. They are your brothers and sisters.

Destination 2: an open hand toward the next step.

You may have walked through six weeks and concluded that you would like to take the next step into the practice. You have come to think that sufficiency and voice are not at odds. You want to learn, gently, how to hear the Shepherd's voice with discernment. The next course in this series is *Hearing His Voice*. It assumes the question this course has been asking is settled. It does not assume any dramatic experience. It teaches the careful, ongoing practice of attentive listening, testing, and stewarding. It is the natural next step for anyone who finishes this course wanting to keep walking.

If you take that next course, take it with the framework of this course intact. You have been formed in honour for the cessationist tradition. Carry that into the next room. Be slow. Be testing. Be charitable. Be Christ-centred.

Destination 3: the freedom to remain undecided.

You may have walked through six weeks and still not be sure. That is also honourable. Not every question needs to be settled in six weeks. Some honest questions take a lifetime. *Does God still speak today?* may be one of those questions for you. If you are not ready to decide, do not decide. Stay open. Keep walking. Keep reading. Keep praying. The Shepherd is patient. He is not in a hurry to be agreed with. He is mostly interested in being followed.

All three destinations are honourable. All three honour Scripture. All three honour Christ. We will bless every one of them tonight.

A word about what this course was not

Before we close, we want to say plainly what this course was not.

It was not a campaign for any particular doctrine of the gifts. It was not an attempt to persuade you to a charismatic experience. It was not a sneaky path into church practices you do not endorse. It was not asking you to dismiss your tradition. It was not asking you to pretend you have settled something you have not.

What it was, was an inquiry. One honest question, walked carefully, in the company of Scripture, with people you trust. Whatever you take from it, take it with our blessing.

An honest prayer

Here is a prayer to close on. Pray it tonight, alone, after the session. Pray it in your own words, or these.

Lord Jesus, I have sat with this question for six weeks. If You are speaking, give me ears to hear You. If You are silent, give me grace to wait. Either way, You are good. Either way, You are the Shepherd. Either way, I am Yours. Speak, Lord, Your servant hears. Or be silent, Lord, Your servant trusts. Amen.

That prayer is the posture. Hearing or not hearing, the Shepherd is the Shepherd. The relationship is not contingent on whether you receive a personal word this week.

A final scripture

We end where Samuel ended.

"Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." (1 Samuel 3:10)

That is the posture. Not certainty. Not technique. Not insistence. Just the willingness to say, with the boy in the temple, *if You speak, I am here*. Whether that posture meets the speech of God this week or this year or this decade is between you and Him.

A word to the pastor

If you are a pastor finishing this course with a small group from your congregation, thank you for trusting us with them.

If your congregation is mixed, you will now have people ready to take the next step into the practice and people who are not. Honour both. Do not let either group despise the other. The cessationist who declined to go further has not failed. The continuationist who wants to go on has not crossed a line. They are walking the same Lord at different paces.

Bless every honest destination. That is your work tonight.

Before you come to the session

Bring three things to the group.

Where are you tonight? Settled cessationist, open to the next step, or honestly undecided? You do not have to defend it. Just name it.

One sentence on what this course gave you that you did not have six weeks ago.

One Scripture from the course you want to take with you into the next chapter.

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Aim of the session

By the end of the evening, every person in the room will have named where they are landing (settled cessationism, open to the next step, or honestly undecided), been blessed in that landing, and walked out with a clear sense of what to take from the course. The aim of this final week is to bless every honest destination. Not to push for a particular outcome. Not to recruit anyone into the next course. Bless. Then close.

Before you arrive

Read the participant reading three times.

Read 1 Samuel 3:1-21 in full. Sit with the boy in the temple.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22 in full.

Re-read your own notes from week one. Where was your group then? Where are they now? Notice the journey.

Pray over each member of the group by name.

If you are planning to recommend the next course (*Hearing His Voice*) to anyone, do not announce it from the front. Mention it once in the close. Let people self-select. The whole posture of week six is anti-pressure.

Session outline (90 min)

1. Welcome and the recap (15 min)

Open with prayer. Then walk the room through the six weeks, briefly. One sentence per week.

Week one, we named the question.

Week two, we walked the Old Testament pattern.

Week three, we walked the New Testament expectation.

Week four, we honoured the cessationist tradition.

Week five, we made the distinction between revelation and illumination.

Week six, tonight, we bless every honest destination.

Then say something like:

"Tonight is not a closing argument. It is a closing blessing. Three honourable destinations are on the table. Settled cessationism. An open hand toward the next step. The freedom to remain undecided. We will hear from each person tonight where they are. We will not rank the answers. We will bless each one."

2. Pre-read discussion (30 min)

Three questions. Take time.

Where are you tonight? Settled cessationist, open to the next step, or honestly undecided? You do not have to defend it. Just name it.

What did this course give you that you did not have six weeks ago?

What Scripture from the course do you want to take with you into the next chapter?

The first question is the most important. **Insist that every person answer it.** This is the only week of the course where you press for a clear naming. Not a defence. Not a justification. Just a sentence. *"I am settled cessationist."* *"I am open to the next step."* *"I am honestly undecided."* If anyone tries to deflect with *"I am still thinking,"* receive that as *honestly undecided,* and bless it.

After each person names where they are, the group offers a single sentence of blessing. Keep it brief. Examples:

For the settled cessationist: *"We bless your faithfulness to Scripture and your guard at the door of the canon."*

For the open-handed: *"We bless your courage to take the next step with care."*

For the undecided: *"We bless your honesty to wait."*

Do not let this turn into debate. Tonight is not for debate. Tonight is for blessing.

3. The full testing framework (10 min)

Walk through the six tests one more time, briefly. The participants have read them. You are reinforcing.

- 1 Scripture
- 2 Spirit (fruit)
- 3 Community
- 4 Time
- 5 Specificity (1 Cor 14:3 definition)
- 6 Fruit it produces in the receiver

Make this point: *whatever destination each person has chosen tonight, the testing framework is a gift to all three. The cessationist tests by Scripture. The open-handed tests by Scripture, Spirit, community, time, specificity, and fruit. The undecided tests by all of the above. The framework is not optional for anyone who walks with God. It is the New Testament's own posture.*

4. Scripture anchor: 1 Samuel 3:10 (10 min)

Read the whole passage from 1 Samuel 3:1-10 aloud. Slowly.

Then ask:

What does Samuel's answer assume about him? (That he is willing to listen. That God might still speak. That he does not need to control the conversation.)

What did Eli, the older mentor, do? (Helped Samuel recognise what he was hearing. Gave him the words.)

What is the posture of the boy in the temple? (Willingness. Not certainty. Not technique. Just *Speak, Lord, I am here.*)

Make the point: this is the posture every honest destination this course landed on. The cessationist also says "*Speak, Lord.*" They believe He speaks through Scripture preached and read. The open-handed also says "*Speak, Lord.*" They are willing to receive the Shepherd's voice in any form He gives it. The undecided also says "*Speak, Lord.*" They are waiting on Him to settle the question. All three postures honour the Shepherd.

5. Practice: an honest prayer (15 min)

Set the room. Quiet. Lights low if possible. Phones face down.

Read aloud the prayer from the participant reading:

"Lord Jesus, I have sat with this question for six weeks. If You are speaking, give me ears to hear You. If You are silent, give me grace to wait. Either way, You are good. Either way, You are the Shepherd. Either way, I am Yours. Speak, Lord, Your servant hears. Or be silent, Lord, Your servant trusts. Amen."

Then sit in silence for ten full minutes. Resist the urge to cut it short. This is a long silence. It is meant to be.

After ten minutes, invite the room to the closing.

6. Closing and blessing (10 min)

Speak something like:

"Tonight we close. We have walked six weeks together with one honest question, with our Bibles open, in the company of trusted people, in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Some of us are leaving this room as settled cessationists. Some of us are leaving open to the next step. Some of us are leaving still honestly undecided. All three are honourable. All three are walking with the Lord."

Mention the next course exactly once, gently:

"For those of you who are open to the next step, the course called Hearing His Voice is the natural one. It assumes the question we have been asking is settled. It teaches the careful, ongoing practice of attentive listening, testing, and stewarding. If you would like to walk into it, we will be glad to walk with you. If you would not, that is also honoured. No pressure either way."

Then close in prayer. Bless each person specifically, by name, where they are landing. Bless the cessationists. Bless the open-handed. Bless the undecided. Speak John 10:27 over the room: *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."*

End with this benediction:

"Speak, Lord, your servant hears. Or be silent, Lord, your servant trusts. Either way, may we follow the Shepherd."

What to watch for

The participant who is changing direction. Some people, in week six, will land somewhere they would not have predicted in week one. A firm cessationist becoming open-handed. A confident continuationist deciding to remain undecided. Honour the change. *"That took courage. We see it. We bless it."*

The participant who has been silent the whole course. The quiet one may need extra space tonight. Draw them out gently. *"You have been quiet through these six weeks. We would love to hear where you are landing, even briefly."* If they decline, honour that too.

The participant pressing the room to take the next step. Occasionally a continuationist will treat tonight as a recruitment meeting. *"Everyone should take the next course."* Gently re-anchor: *"Three destinations are honourable. Bless every one."*

The participant pressing the room to NOT take the next step. Equally, a strong cessationist may try to warn the open-handed away from *Hearing His Voice*. Honour the conviction without letting it dominate. *"Each person walks with the Lord at their own pace. We do not need to settle this for anyone but ourselves."*

The pastor in the room. If a pastor has brought a small group from their congregation, they will likely have done the most thinking about what this means for their church. Honour that. After the close, offer to debrief privately. They may want to think about how to walk a mixed congregation forward.

The tears. Some people will cry tonight. The course has done deep work. Let them cry. Hold space. Do not rush to comfort. Sometimes the Lord meets people in the silence after a hard journey.

After the session

This is unusual but worth it. Send a personal email to each participant within 48 hours of the close. Thank them by name for their honesty. Bless them in the destination they named. Offer to walk with them into whatever comes next. If they were open to the next course, send the link to *Hearing His Voice*. If they were settled cessationist, send no recommendation, just gratitude.

The pastoral care of this course does not end with the session. The relationships built over six weeks are part of the gift.

Prayer prompts for the group

That every honest destination would be blessed and held.

That the Holy Spirit would do whatever further work is needed in each life over the weeks and months ahead.

That the relationships built in this group would continue to bear fruit, regardless of where each person landed.

A word to you, the facilitator

This course asked a great deal of you. To honour every conviction. To resist your own temperament. To bless what you might have wanted to argue with. To slow down when you wanted to push.

Thank you. The Shepherd sees the careful work you have done over these six weeks. He has been the loudest voice in the room. He has done the work that no facilitator could do.

May He bless you with the same patience and honour for every person you walk with from here.

*"Wage the good warfare, holding
faith and a good conscience."*

1 TIMOTHY 1:18-19

