Small Group Guide
Christian Discernment: True North
Hearing God and Being Formed into His Image

Overview

This sermon explores what it means to be formed into the image and likeness of God, using the metaphor of compass navigation. True north represents Yahweh himself — the destination being the kingdom of God. Magnetic north represents the many voices, systems, and distractions that pull us away from hearing God clearly. The central argument is that the greatest commandment begins not with loving God, but with hearing God, because genuine love flows from genuine hearing.

Key Takeaways

- The foremost commandment is to hear — Shema — before it is to love. Love that is not rooted in hearing becomes mere human effort.
- We are always being formed — by what we hear, what we see, our circumstances, our relationships, and our culture. The question is what we are being formed into.
- True north is Yahweh himself. Magnetic north represents anything — including good religious systems, political affiliations, or theological frameworks — that pulls us away from hearing God directly.
- The Hebrew name Yahweh, understood through its four letters, reveals God as the source of power, breath, the one who bonds heaven and earth, and the open heaven made available to us.
- The church exists so that we are formed into the image and likeness of Christ. Service, giving, and worship find their proper motivation only when they flow from hearing and love.
- Stillness is not passive. It is an intentional act of crushing the noise so that we can perceive God clearly.

Opening Questions

Getting into the Discussion

- When you hear the phrase "you are always being formed," what is your initial reaction? What are some of the things in your daily life that you think are forming you most right now?
- The sermon used the compass metaphor of true north versus magnetic north. Before getting into the theological content, what in your own experience has functioned as "magnetic north" — something that seemed to point you toward God but actually pulled you slightly off course?

Discussion Questions
Going Deeper — Engaging with the Sermon Content
Pastor Paul drew a connection between the image on Caesar's coin and the image of God stamped on every human being. In Genesis 1:26-27, God declares his intention to make humanity in his image — representing his authority, ownership, and status.

1. The pastor made the distinction that the foremost commandment is to hear, not to love — because love without hearing becomes a work. How does that reframe the way you have thought about your relationship with God? Does it challenge or confirm anything you have believed?
2. The Hebrew word Shema is described as meaning to consume or destroy everything that creates chaos so that you can see and hear clearly. What are the specific sources of noise in your life right now — whether from politics, finances, relationships, church culture, or personal pain — that make it difficult to hear God?
3. The pastor described the scribe in Mark 12 as someone who heard Jesus through all the surrounding noise and argumentation. What do you think made the difference for that scribe? What allowed him to adjust his "bezel" toward true north while others in the same room did not?
4. The sermon states that being a Republican does not make someone a Christian, and being a Democrat does not make someone a kingdom-minded believer. How do you personally navigate the tension between holding political or cultural convictions and keeping your primary identity rooted in the kingdom of God?
5. The pastor described prayer not primarily as presenting an agenda to God, but as sitting still, contemplating Yahweh, and learning to hear. How does

that description compare to how you currently practice prayer? What would it look like practically to shift your prayer life in that direction?

6. The sermon references Romans 8:29, where Paul writes that those God foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. How does it change the way you interpret difficult seasons of life when you view them through the lens of formation rather than just trial or punishment?

Reflection Questions for Personal Honesty

These questions are designed for quieter, more personal reflection. Groups may choose to share responses or simply sit with them individually.

- What is one area of your life where magnetic north has had more influence on you recently than true north?
- When was the last time you were genuinely still before God — not speaking, not asking, just listening? What was that like?
- Is there a pain, circumstance, or distraction in your life right now that is making it hard to hear God? What would it look like to bring that to God not just for relief, but so that the distraction would be removed and you could hear him more clearly?

Practical Applications

This Week, Try One or More of the Following:

1. Set aside five to ten minutes each day for intentional stillness. Do not bring a list of requests. Simply sit quietly, acknowledge the presence of God, and practice the posture of hearing. If your mind wanders, gently return to the name of Yahweh and what it means.
2. Identify one source of magnetic north in your life — a news source, a social media habit, a theological debate, a political concern — and deliberately reduce your exposure to it for one week. Pay attention to what changes in your inner life.
3. Read through Mark 12:13-34 slowly and in one sitting. Notice every place where noise, argumentation, or competing agendas appear. Then notice the moment the scribe shifts. Journal about what you observe.

4. Take the four letters of Yahweh — the power of God, the breath of God, the one who bonds heaven and earth, and the open heaven — and spend time meditating on each one across four separate days. Let each one shape your prayer for that day.
5. If you are in a season of pain or difficulty, try reframing your prayer this week. Rather than asking only for relief, ask God to heal you so that you can hear him. Notice whether that shift in motivation changes anything about how you pray or how you wait.

Closing Thought for the Group
Pastor Paul closed his sermon with these words:

"The invitation, the royal directive and invitation is that we hear so that we can be formed in the image and likeness of God so that that same union between Jesus and the Father we actually live in and experience so that magnetic north doesn't have as much of a pull on us as it used to."

Close your time together by praying as a group — not with a long list of requests, but with a simple, shared posture of hearing. You might pray the Shema together, or simply sit in silence for two or three minutes before closing with a brief word of gratitude.

For Further Study

- Deuteronomy 6:4-9 — The Shema in its original context, where Israel is commanded to hear, internalize, and pass on the knowledge of Yahweh
- Mark 12:13-34 — The full passage the sermon is drawn from
- Romans 8:28-30 — The passage about being conformed to the image of Christ
- Galatians 4:19 — Paul's description of laboring until Christ is formed in his readers
- Consider exploring the concept of Theosis in early church theology, particularly in the writings of Athanasius, as a framework for understanding what it means to be formed into the image and likeness of God