

Listening to God

Read [Psalm 46:1-10](#)

One of the most important lessons in life that you and I can learn is how to listen to God. In our complex and hectic lives, nothing is more urgent, nothing more necessary, and nothing more rewarding than hearing what God has to say to us—both as bodies of believers and as individual people.

If you are going to develop a relationship with another person, you have to converse with that person in some manner. That means both talking and listening. Most of us do better with the talking part.

Please listen to Charles Stanley's testimony about prayer and the aspect of listening: "In my ministry, there was a time when I was too occupied doing the Lord's work to pay close attention to God's voice. I was preaching six times a week, taping two television programs, traveling across the nation, writing a book, pastoring the church, and administrating a large church staff and broadcast ministry (among other daily duties). In the midst of it all, I spent time talking to God, very often about the needs that I was facing in my personal life and ministry, but not much time listening to God. I ended up in the hospital for a week and out of circulation for three months."

The net result for all of us if we don't learn how to listen to God is that we can make unwise and, ultimately, very costly mistakes.

You may ask, "Does God really speak to us today?" The Bible assures us that He does. The book of Hebrews opens this way: "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" ([Hebrews 1:1-2](#)).

Our God is not a speechless God. Our God is alive and active in our world. He speaks! Furthermore, He doesn't speak to us in veiled terms, riddles, or mysteries. He speaks to us plainly. The goal of any communicator is not to speak well but to be heard. God speaks in a way that we can hear Him, receive His message clearly, and understand with precision what He wants us to do.

A Highly Personal Word

God not only speaks in general and absolute terms to all people, but He speaks to each one of us personally. We can hardly comprehend that possibility with our finite minds. God is an infinite God, and He is capable of communicating with each one of us, right where we are—in the midst of our current circumstances or crises—in very personal, direct, and explicit terms.

This may be the most important concept you can ever grasp in learning how to listen to God. When God speaks, He is speaking to you. Everything in the Bible applies to your life in some way. Every message or communication that is based on the Word of God has truth embedded within it that is for you. There is no such thing as a chapter in the Bible, a sermon based on God's Word, or a book that expounds and explains God's Word that is not for you. Each of us must take God's Word personally!

Personal Does Not Mean Exclusive

This is not to say that God has an exclusive word for a person. God doesn't deal in secrets. He won't reveal truth to one person and deny it to another. Be on guard if you hear somebody say, "God told me something, but He told me I can't tell anybody else," or "God had a word that's just for me and not for you." God doesn't play favorites. He doesn't speak to one child and totally ignore His other children. His word of correction to you may be so personal that you don't want to share it with other people, but ultimately, God's word of correction is an absolute that applies to all people. The same goes for God's promises, provisions, and insights.

Always Important

God doesn't speak frivolously. He doesn't joke around. God means what He says. He will do what He says. God is serious about His relationship with you. He doesn't speak to you in idle terms. He expects you to respond to His voice, heed His Word, and act on it.

Can you remember last Sunday's sermon? Can you recall what you read in God's Word yesterday? You'll be able to remember if you were listening for what God had to say to you and if you take seriously the idea that God intends for you to do something in response to His Word.

God speaks for your benefit. He desires for you to listen to Him and then respond to His words. Sometimes He will challenge you to change your thinking or to release certain feelings and opinions that you have been harboring. Sometimes He will command you to change certain aspects of your behavior. Sometimes He desires to encourage you so that you might live your life with greater joy and strength. Always, however, God's Word is for your transformation. It is intended to change you in some way.

Approach God's Word seriously. Listening to God is not a casual pastime or a let's-try-it-and-see-if-you-like-it activity. Listening to God is the most important thing you can do in your life for your eternal sake.

LESSON 1

PREPARING TO HEAR FROM GOD

This teaching is for Bible study. As you engage in this study, refer to your Bible again and again—to mark specific words, underline phrases, or write in the margins. I believe God dearly loves to see Bibles that are marked with oil from our fingers, stained with tears from our eyes, and noted with dates and insights.

The Bible is God's foremost method of communication with us today. It is the wellspring from which new insights and eternal wisdom come to us. It is the reference to which we must return continually to check out messages that we believe are from God. I believe it is far more important for you to write what you learn from this study guide into the margins and end pages of your Bible than for you to write passages of the Bible into this handout.

Keys to Study

You will be asked at various points to identify with the material presented by answering one or more of these questions:

- What new insight have you gained?
- Have you ever had a similar experience?
- How do you feel about this?
- In what way are you challenged to act?

Insights

An insight is more than a fact or an idea. It is seeing something as if it is new to you. You may have read a particular verse many times. You may have studied it, analyzed it, and meditated on it until you think there is nothing else you can know about it. And then, God has a surprise for you! Suddenly, He reveals new meaning to you. That is a spiritual insight.

Insights are usually very personal—something in a verse or passage stands out to you because it relates to you in some way or applies to what you are experiencing right now in your life. Ask God to give you insights every time you open His Word to read it. I believe He'll answer that prayer.

I find that noting the insights is important in Bible study. When we are focused on identifying the insights God gives us, we tend to look and listen for them more diligently. And the more we look and listen for insights, the more God gives them to us.

The fact is, if you haven't gained new spiritual insights after reading several passages from God's Word, you haven't truly been engaged in the process of studying. From time to time in this study, you'll be asked to note what specific passages of the Bible say to you.