

Listening to God

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

LESSON 1

PREPARING TO HEAR FROM GOD

Experiences

We come to God's Word from unique backgrounds. Therefore, each of us has a unique perspective toward what is read. The person who has been raised in the church from childhood, and who is thoroughly familiar with Bible stories, may have a different understanding of a passage from that of a person who is new in the faith or is a beginner in Bible study. In a group, this difference of familiarity with the Bible can sometimes create problems. People with a long history of regularly reading God's Word may lose patience with beginners, and beginners may feel overwhelmed or lost.

We do have in common, however, our life experiences. We can point to times in which we have found the Bible to be very applicable to our lives, sometimes in a confirming, encouraging way, and sometimes in a convicting, challenging way. We have experiences about which we can say, "I know that truth in the Bible is real because of what happened to me."

Our experiences do not make the Bible true, of course. The Bible is truth, period. Nevertheless, as we share our experiences and how they relate to God's Word, we find that God's Word applies to our lives in more ways than we ever thought. We begin to see how God's Word speaks to each person and to each type of experience or situation that a man or woman will have.

Sharing experiences in your journey of faith is important for your spiritual growth. Even if you are doing this study on your own, I encourage you to converse with others about your faith experiences.

Emotional Response

Just as each of us has unique experiences in life, each of us has unique emotional responses to God's Word. No emotional response is more valid than another. You may be frightened or perplexed by—or feel great joy or relief at—what you read. Another person may have a very different response.

Face your emotions honestly. Learn to share your emotions with others. This does not mean in any way that your emotions give validity to the Scriptures or that you should trust your emotions as being the gauge of your faith. Your faith is based on what God says, not what you feel. At the same time, you need to recognize that the Bible has an emotional impact on you. You cannot read the Word of God with an open heart and mind and not have an emotional response to it. Sometimes you may be moved to tears by what you read; at other times you may feel great elation, conviction, hope, love, longing, surprise, or a host of other emotions.

I am asking you to recognize that the Scriptures allow us to have an emotional response to them. God created us with emotions. He knows that we feel certain ways

toward Him, toward others, and toward His Word. When we identify how we feel about what God says to us, we often can begin to overcome the inertia that keeps us from actually living out God's Word in our lives and start doing what God tells us to do—with joy and thanksgiving, and with humbleness of spirit.

For example, if we face up to the fact that we are scared to do something we believe God is asking us to do, and if we begin to explore why we are scared, very often we come to deeper insights into ourselves, and—as we continue to dig into God's Word—we find that God has given us provision and offered us help so that we can work through the fear.

In very few instances have I found it helpful to the strengthening and deepening of my faith to hear a person's opinion about biblical passages. Scholarly commentaries certainly have their place in teaching us the context and background of certain passages. But a person's opinion is of little significance when we study the Bible. It is what God says to us that is truly significant. And God often speaks to us in the language of the heart—the unspoken language of our intuition, our emotions, and our innermost desires and longings. When we share our feelings with one another, we grow closer together as the body of Christ; sharing our opinions with one another rarely creates this type of community or unity of spirit in Christ Jesus.

Challenges

As we read God's Word, we nearly always come to what I call a “gulp point.” Something we read challenges us to change something in our lives, to gulp and say, “Wow! That really hit me. I need to do something about that.” Sometimes it's a conviction about sin in our lives. Sometimes it's a correction in the way we have been taught or the way in which we act toward others. Sometimes it's a clear call to engage in a new discipline or area of ministry. I know with certainty in my life that God never ceases to challenge me just beyond my ability so that I must always rely upon Him to work in me and through me. God is never content with the status quo—He always wants us to grow more like His Son, Jesus Christ.

I believe we need to pinpoint, as best we can, the areas in which we believe God is challenging us, stretching us, causing us to believe for more. When we say to ourselves, “This is what I believe God wants me to do next,” we are identifying the next step upward to a higher plane in our faith walk. The person who isn't challenged to take a next step upward very likely isn't growing and also isn't going with the gospel into areas where God's Word isn't readily heard or understood.

Ultimately, God desires to get His Word into us, and us into His Word, so we can take His Word into the world, live it out, and be witnesses of His Word in all that we say and do. The truth of what God says to us becomes very real and virtually unforgettable when we do His Word, not merely read or study it. Therefore, it isn't enough to clarify our insights, recall our experiences, or identify our emotions. We must apply what we learn. The Bible challenges us to be doers of His Word and not hearers only ([James 1:22](#)).

If you don't have somebody to talk to about your insights, experiences, emotions, and challenges, I encourage you to find somebody. Perhaps you can start a Bible study using this book in your home. Perhaps you can talk to your pastor about organizing Bible study groups in your church. There is much to be learned on your own. There is much more to be learned as you become part of a small group that desires to grow in the Lord.

Keep the Bible Central

You may use the teaching you hold in your hands as a personal study or as part of a small group study. In either situation, I caution you to keep the Bible at the center of all you do. Don't let a Bible study group turn into a support group. Those types of groups have their time and place, but it is as we gather around God's Word—as if we were gathering around a banquet table for a spiritually nutritious meal—that we truly grow in the Lord and become all that He created and designed us to be.

If you are doing a personal Bible study, you must be diligent in keeping your focus on God's Word. Self-analysis is not the goal of this study. Growing up into the fullness of the stature of Christ Jesus is the goal.

Prayer

Finally, I encourage you to begin and end your Bible study times in prayer. Ask God to give you spiritual eyes to see what He wants you to see and spiritual ears to hear what He wants you to hear. Ask Him to give you new insights, to recall to your memory experiences that relate to what you read, and to help you identify your emotional responses. Ask Him to reveal to you what He desires for you to be, say, and do.

As you conclude your time of study, ask the Lord to seal what you have learned in your heart so that you will never forget it. Ask Him to transform you more into the likeness of Jesus Christ as you meditate on what you have studied. And above all, ask Him to give you the courage to become, say, and do what He has challenged you to become, say, and do!

And now consider these questions:

- *What new insights into listening to God do you hope to gain from this study?*

- *In what areas have you struggled in attempting to hear God's voice?*

- *How do you feel about the prospect of God's speaking to you?*

- *Are you open to being challenged to listen more to what God may say to you?*
