

Learning to Listen to God's Word Series

Listen with Openness (Pr. 3:5-6)

By
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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Listen with Openness

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Only One God?

1. As I was trying to figure out what my own convictions were, after having grown up in the church, I knew a lot about what the Bible said. However, I hadn't yet accepted that information as my own personal convictions. While I knew what my parents believed and I knew what the people of my church believed, what did I believe?
2. I was familiar with the Bible's claim of God saying He is the only God that exists in Isaiah 45:21-22: "²¹ Declare and present your case; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this long ago? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me. ²² Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other."
3. However, I still wondered about all the other religions. Were they all false? Didn't other religions also claim to be the only true perspective? How can I know which one is correct? Where do I start? These thoughts launched me into a season of exploration in which I studied and learned about Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Mormonism.
4. Essentially, I did not have a very strong trust in the statement God made about Himself in Isaiah. While I tentatively accepted it, I had a lot of questions that needed to be answered. I only gently leaned toward relying on God's claim as being true.

B. Once again, it appears my personal experience of growing with Jesus is not regulated to just me. Every disciple begins the Christian life with a shallow, and sometimes even almost reluctant, trust in the word of God. The good news is that even a little trust goes a long way (Mt. 17:20). But as a person learns more about God and the reliability of His word, their trust grows substantially. We all start with a lot of questions, thoughts that are contrary to the claims of the Bible, and plenty of doubts wondering if the word of God got things right.

C. Using Jesus' warning to be careful about how we listen to the word of God in Luke 8:18, we're exploring what being a good listener to the word of God is. We've learned that we will not desire to learn from the word of God or be able to understand it without the help of the Holy Spirit. If we are going to develop healthy habits related to the word of God, we need to maintain a humble and dependent attitude on God knowing anything we learn about the spiritual message He communicates in His word is coming from Him. This leads naturally into another necessary element of being a good listener—learning to listen to the word of God with openness.

D. We can learn what the path toward openness is by understanding the three requirements found in Proverbs 3:5-6. Anyone who is open and receptive toward the truth of the word of God will be participating in the three necessary attitude adjustments highlighted in these famous verses. We need to learn to approach the word of God in a new way that is different from our natural dispositions regarding the word of God. These changes in attitude are difficult, but they can become a reality in our lives with the help of God.

II. Trust God and His Wisdom

- A. In our natural spiritual condition, there is a lack of openness to the word of God (1 Cor. 2:14). All growing and healthy disciples need to learn how to become open to accepting the message of God. A critical passage that tells us exactly how to become open points us toward the path forward:
- ⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. (Pr. 3:5-6)
- B. Do you want to learn how to be open to the wisdom of God found in the word of God? This text provides us with a three-step pathway toward openness. Anyone who belongs to Jesus and has the Holy Spirit working in them can put the three required action steps into practice. Each step applies to the direction of our attitudes and will.
- C. One of the most intelligent human beings to ever live, King Solomon, is the author of most of the book of Proverbs. He is writing to his son to help his son live a healthy, effective, and flourishing life. The wise life advice being offered includes a vivid description of a good attitude toward God and His word (“Trust in the Lord with all your heart”, v. 5). The first required step toward openness is an attitude of trust in God. We must realize that our attitude and response toward the word of God is directly connected to our relationship with and thoughts about God. If a person doesn’t trust God, they will not be open to what God says in His word (Jn. 12:48). If a person has a deep understanding of and trust in God, they will accept the truthfulness of God’s message found in the Bible (Jn. 5:24, 14:23).
- D. If a disciple is going to be open and responsive to the word of God, they must learn to trust God by learning about His character, His actions, His nature, and how reliable He is in everything He does. The more we understand about God, the greater the opportunity for our trust in God to grow. If we love God, we will keep His commandments. To trust God is to figuratively lay ourselves down before Him and rely on Him for all our support as we essentially throw ourselves completely at His mercy—admitting our powerlessness. Someone who trusts in God and His word relies on God for their sense of security.¹ We lie helplessly facedown before God.²
- E. Why should a person be motivated to trust themselves and everything they need to God? God Himself not only tells us why, but also explains examples of what happens when we don’t:
- ⁵ This is what the Lord says: “What injustice did your fathers find in Me, That they went far from Me, And walked after emptiness and became empty? ⁶ They did not say, ‘Where is the Lord Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, Through a land of deserts and of pits, Through a land of drought and of deep darkness, Through a land that no one crossed And where no person lived?’ ⁷ I brought you into the fruitful land To eat its fruit and its good things. But you came and defiled My land, And you made My inheritance an abomination. ⁸ The priests did not say, ‘Where is the Lord?’ And those who handle the Law did not know Me; The rulers also

¹ Bruce K. Waltke, [The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15](#), The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 243.

² Derek Kidner, [Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 17, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 61.

revolted against Me, And the prophets prophesied by Baal And walked after things that were of no benefit.” (Jer. 2:5-8)

- F. God has never done anyone any wrong (“What injustice did your fathers find in Me”, v. 5). Yet, people are quick to abandon Him and chase after courses of life that are empty and leave us unsatisfied (“they went far from Me, And walked after emptiness and became empty?”, v. 5 and “walked after things that were of no benefit”, v. 8). All these harmful lifestyles and pursuits happened because they did not trust God. Even the teachers of the Bible moved so far away from God that they didn’t know Him (“those who handle the Law did not know Me”, v. 8)! God’s plans were good and would lead to human flourishing, but people rejected Him and His word, which led them to ways of life that left them empty (“I brought you into the fruitful land To eat its fruit and its good things”, v. 7). Are you feeling empty? If so, could it have anything to do with an unhealthy lifestyle that is disconnected from God?
- G. A seminary professor told a story his father shared about crossing the Susquehanna River in the winter:
- His dad did not know how thick the ice was. So he was crawling along on all fours, gingerly feeling his way forward, when he heard some racket and clatter coming up behind him. He looked back, and here came a wagon pulled by four horses, and the driver was whipping them along at a pretty good clip right across the frozen river. The guy was a local. He knew how thick the ice was. Too many Christians are like the man down on all fours, creeping along, way too cautious. Their trust in the Lord is halfhearted. Then along comes a wholehearted Christian, and he changes the tone for everyone around.³
- H. Returning to our primary text in Proverbs, disciples need to develop a fully formed and robust attitude of trust in God because this attitude will determine how they respond to and interact with the word of God. Notice that this trust is carried out with every human capacity we possess (“with all your heart”, v. 5). The trust being described here is not a timid, hesitant, or weak attitude. It is an unwavering trust that can’t be broken. If a person does not have this kind of trust in God, they will never have a healthy response to the word of God. The totality of our inner being—mind, emotions, and will—have a strong confidence in God and His ability to guide our life to safety and security.⁴
- I. Do you have a deep personal conviction that God is guiding you, through His word, to a life of health, goodness, security, and flourishing? Don’t abandon the wisdom and ways of God, thinking there is greater satisfaction outside the way God instructs us to live. As those in the past have found out, when we abandon God, there is only emptiness to be found. God wants to bring people into a “good land” so that we may experience and enjoy the “good fruits” of life lived in connection with Him. Don’t be allured by the pleasures of sin. They will not deliver on their false promises to provide a greater satisfaction than a life of faithfulness lived before God. Are you convinced God is trustworthy and reliable?

³ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., [Preaching the Word: Proverbs—Wisdom That Works](#), ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 63.

⁴ John A. Kitchen, [Proverbs: A Mentor Commentary](#), Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2006), 76.

III. Do Not Trust Your Perspective and Thoughts

- A. The second required step we need to perform to develop an open posture toward the word of God is to cease relying on our own perspective and thinking (“And do not lean on your own understanding”, v. 5).⁵ Trust in God is contrasted as opposite of trust in self.⁶ All of us have a choice to make because we will do one or the other and are incapable of doing both. We will either trust God or trust ourselves when it gets down to the core of how we make our decisions. Unfortunately, we think we are significantly and dependably smart. Even smarter than God. We rely on our own personal experiences and thoughts as the most reliable guide to truth. This harmful tendency is difficult to break. When the word of God communicates a message that is contrary to the way we currently think, our natural reaction is to agree with our thoughts and take issue with the word of God. The author of Proverbs is warning us against this unhealthy response to the word of God.
- B. To lean on our own understanding is to put our full weight into relying on our own wisdom--like a person who is using crutches.⁷ The obvious problem is that our own thinking is an unreliable source of support. Our crutch is broken. The direction we “lean” is where we go when we need help and support in life. There is a natural human tendency, resulting from pride, that primarily or exclusively relies only on the self. Many refuse to receive help from anyone else. These people “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps”. This attitude of self-reliance is opposed to an attitude that relies on God and is humble enough to admit their need for outside support.
- C. People relate to the word of God in one of three major ways.⁸ We will either be a critic, a skeptic, or a disciple (learner/student). A person who approaches the word of God as a critic sets themselves up above the Bible as the authority over it. They view their perspective as an intellectually and morally superior position to the word of God. The word of God is viewed as an unreliable source from ancient people that needs to be assessed and evaluated according to our modern perspective. For the critic, the Bible is not the word of God. The critic approaches the Bible as the corrector and safeguard of truth over the word of God. It is assumed the Bible is merely a human book, written by less informed people, that needs to be fixed by a more accurate understanding of how the world works.
- D. The skeptic will accept the Bible as the word of God. They will view the word of God as an acceptable source to discover what is morally good, to gain wise life advice, and to learn about God and what He wants from us. However, the skeptic will pick and choose what to accept and what to reject from the word of God based on their own thinking. They will follow the Bible if

⁵ Trust your heart is the world’s message that we have screamed in our ear all the time but that is a harmful lie that we must reject (Pr. 28:26). Trusting in our own heart is foolish because our own hearts deceive us and it is spiritually sick (Jer. 17:9). Overcoming our natural tendency to trust and rely on our own perspective and thinking is a monumental challenge, but it must be overcome with God’s help if we are going to be spiritually healthy. God delights in us relying on, knowing, and understanding Him (Jer. 9:23-24). Human wisdom is self-centered (Jas. 3:15-18).

⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, [*The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15*](#), The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 244, Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#), vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 391.

⁷ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, [*Commentary on the Old Testament*](#), vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 62.

⁸ I have adapted this section based on Daniel M. Doriani, [*Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application*](#) (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 63-67.

the Bible agrees with them. If there is a truth or idea found in the word of God that disagrees with the person's perspective and thinking, the person will defer to their own thinking ahead of the word of God. The skeptic will act as if God's word is wrong because their experience is a more reliable guide than what God says. The skeptic has the final say as to what is true, not the word of God. The person who approaches the word of God this way will "argue" and "debate" with the word of God and will come out thinking they are on top.

- E. The person who submits to the word of God acts as if the Bible has full and final authority when it comes to truth. While they will work to discover what the word of God teaches, once an accurate understanding is arrived at, the disciples' responsibility is to do and carry out what God says to do. Their thoughts and ways of thinking are adjusted to conform to what the word of God teaches. The Bible is over and above their thoughts, feelings, and desires. This heart attitude and posture is what it means to not lean on your own understanding but defer to the wisdom and perspective of God contained in the word of God.
- F. Which description best explains your attitude and response to the word of God? Are you a critic, a skeptic or a disciple? Those who take a humble learning posture toward the word of God realize every person has a disease that impacts our soul called spiritual blindness that prevents us from being open to the word of God (2 Cor. 3:14-18). Only Jesus has the spiritual medicine that cures our spiritual blindness. It is impossible to have a knowledge of the truth without repentance (2 Tim. 2:25). Unless a person is willing to let go of their lifestyle that is being lived in opposition to God and humbly ask God to teach them how they ought to live in a way that is pleasing to God, that person will never be healed from their spiritual blindness. Continuing to willfully pursue and act on what God affirms is wrong will keep you confused and without understanding. A person must be willing to do the will of God for the purpose of knowing the truth of God and understanding the message of Jesus (Jn. 7:17).

IV. Live Faithfully with God in Everything

- A. Even if we don't understand why God says what He does in His word and aren't convinced what God is teaching is good, we should act in obedience to it ("In all your ways acknowledge Him, v. 6). God is encouraging us to do what He says, even if it doesn't make sense to us. If we trust that God is good and that He is leading us in a healthy direction, we can act as if what He says in His word is true and good for us, even when we don't comprehend it. This demonstrates a willingness to rely on God and His wisdom more than self-reliance and our own wisdom. Those who put the word of God into action in their lives each time they become aware of what God wants them to do will benefit from their faithfulness to God. Our trust and commitment to God is also exhaustive since it is in everything we do. Every action we do that is a result of not trusting in God is out of bounds. Those who do this will have intimate personal experience of what it means to live and act obediently to the word of God—personal participation in putting the word of God into action in our lives.⁹ We are walking with God in all areas of life.

⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, [*The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15*](#), The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 244.

- B. To acknowledge or to know God is much more than obeying or submitting to God. It means personal knowledge and intimate experience with a person's reality.¹⁰ It is to be aware of and have fellowship with God.¹¹ In other words, an individual who is living this way has personal acquaintance and fellowship with God Himself as a real experience. This person is going through life with God walking next to them in a practical and personal way. The disciple who acknowledges God holds Him in their mind and lives with an awareness and desire to please God with all they do.¹² This is a deep experiential knowledge of God drawn from personal experience.¹³
- C. Those who genuinely know God go through life actively trying to please Him in all areas of life and in all situations they face. They continually focus on putting the word of God into practice in their lives (Lk. 11:28, Mt. 7:24). They want to act as God wants them to act all the time. These disciples are constantly putting the word of God into practice in their daily activities. God is not left at church. He is brought into the home and into the workplace. This intentional focus on God leads to personal experience with God. This is how our relationship with God moves from abstract theory to a personal encounter. We do life with God walking with us.
- D. Being associated with Jesus means that we should be the best, hardest-working employees in our workplaces. When I entered the workforce, I realized Jesus was supposed to influence how I conducted myself while on the job (Col. 3:22-24). This was long before I was ever employed by a church. The truth of the word of God taught me I was working ultimately for Jesus and not whoever my employer or boss was. I had the responsibility to work using my best ability and effort. If I worked in this way, I would receive a reward from Jesus. Every job that I've had, I attempted to learn as much as I could about it, execute my work with as much excellence as I could produce, and work hard without wasting time. This has naturally led to continued employment, being valued by employers, and being rewarded with promotions and higher pay. I've experienced pleasing God in my work and have seen God enter my workplace with me. This is what Solomon is talking about.
- E. How often do you think about God and what He wants? How often do you make it your goal in life to do what God wants so that your life is pleasing to Him (2 Cor. 5:9-10)? Individuals who are developing a personal knowledge of God through intimate experience with Him will be capable of sharing stories of how God is working in their life. They will be able to share how they put God's words into action in their own unique life context and explain to others how God worked through their faithfulness. These disciples understand what it looks like to live the truth and principles of the word of God in the various situations they encounter. They know how to apply and implement the truth of God. Do you know how God wants you to think about, respond to, and act in every situation in your life?

¹⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, [The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15](#), The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 244.

¹¹ Derek Kidner, [Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 17, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 61.

¹² Michael Fox, [The Anchor Yale Bible: Proverbs 1-9](#), Anchor Yale Bible vol. 18 (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008).

¹³ John A. Kitchen, [Proverbs: A Mentor Commentary](#), Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2006), 77.

V. The Outcome of Openness

- A. If we are willing to follow these three action steps of trusting God, not trusting my own thoughts, and acting faithfully to the word of God, the life outcome that will be experienced is the highest quality of life possible in a broken world (“And He will make your paths straight.”, v. 6).¹⁴ Here is the promised reward for faithfulness.¹⁵ Those who live obediently to God’s will live the easiest, smoothest, and healthiest life possible because they will not be getting in their own way by making life harder than it needs to be. They will automatically live a moral and wise life, since that is what is promoted in the word of God. They will avoid heartaches and difficulties others experience because of their lack of obedience to the word of God. Faithfulness toward God’s word protects us from unnecessary hardships created by doing wrong (Col 3:25, 1 Pet. 4:15-16, 2 Pet. 2:13, 1 Tim. 6:10, Ac. 26:14, Ps. 32:10, Pr. 11:28). The more rebellious and disobedient a person lives their life, the more painful and difficult their life will become as a natural consequence. This is how God has structured His world, so that everyone will be encouraged to move toward that which is good. Like a runner who is running with good form that is natural and smooth, so life will be lived with good form.
- B. God will respond to us in a positive way, and He will decide what good gifts to give (“And He will”, v. 6). God may choose to make us financially prosperous. He might provide a wonderful spouse. He could decide to prevent us from having a major health crisis. These decisions are ultimately up to God. God doesn’t always promise or guarantee an easy and comfortable life, because He also disciplines and corrects us (Pr. 3:11-12). Sometimes the blessing of God doesn’t change our circumstances or prevent some difficulty, but He gives us the resources we need to face the challenges in life so they don’t seem as heavy as they might otherwise be. This is not the prosperity gospel; this is the goodness of God being extended to us according to the wisdom of God.
- C. God is watching over the lives of those who are faithful to Him (2 Chr. 16:9). The result of God being heavily involved in the lives of those who are faithful to Him is that God’s favor and blessings will be given to us. The course of life for those who trust in God will be straight—pointed in the right direction toward what is good and smooth.¹⁶ This beneficial quality of life will be visible from a bird’s-eye view, while it may not always seem like this is the case in the middle of specific situations.¹⁷ When we commit ourselves entirely to God in trusting obedience, finding our entire support in Him and striving in every avenue of life to know Him more intimately, He guarantees that the path before us will be clearer and smoother than otherwise it would have been—because God is walking with us.¹⁸ Simply put, life is much more difficult without God, His wisdom, and His help.

¹⁴ Pro. 2:13, 2:15, 3:17, 10:9

¹⁵ John A. Kitchen, [Proverbs: A Mentor Commentary](#), Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2006), 76.

¹⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, [The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15](#), The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 245.

¹⁷ Bruce K. Waltke, [The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1–15](#), The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 245.

¹⁸ John A. Kitchen, [Proverbs: A Mentor Commentary](#), Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 2006), 77.

- D. Do you think the truth of the word of God and the wisdom it contains produces beneficial outcomes in your life? Those who live obediently to the word of God experience much easier lives than those who don't. All you have to do is look around to discover this truth. Generally, people who do not live their life God's way experience pain, difficulty, conflict, and chaos on a regular basis. Those who follow God's healthy and wise plan for human flourishing find joy, peace, contentment, love, and order on a regular basis. The wisdom of God contained in the word of God works beneficial wonders in our lives.

VI. Conclusion

- A. The message of Proverbs 3:5-6 is brilliantly summed up this way:

From God alone comes true prosperity, true help. He knows the right way to the right ends. He knows what benefits us. He is able to free us from that which does us harm: therefore it is our duty and our safety to place our confidence wholly in Him, and to trust not to our own judgment.¹⁹

- B. Listen to how God beautifully describes the effect His word will have on our lives:

⁸ "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. ⁹ "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰ For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it produce and sprout, And providing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; ¹¹ So will My word be which goes out of My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the purpose* for which I sent it. ¹² For you will go out with joy And be led in peace; The mountains and the hills will break into shouts of joy before you, And all the trees of the field will clap *their* hands." (Isa. 55:8-12)

¹⁹ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, [Commentary on the Old Testament](#), vol. 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 62.