

# Learning to Listen to God's Word Series

## Listen Prayerfully and Dependently (1 Cor. 2:14)

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By  
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### At A Glance:

- I. Introduction
- II. The Struggle of our Natural Response
- III. The Solution of our Heart Attitudes
- IV. Listening Dependently to the Word of God
- V. Conclusion

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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.*

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# Listen Prayerfully and Dependently

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Confusion While Reading the Bible

1. When I first began to read the Bible on my own, it was a huge struggle. Although I stuck with it, it seemed to be counterproductive. As I've said before, my time in the word of God generated more questions than it answered. I often walked away from my time in the Bible more confused than when I started.
2. I was so spiritually hardened at the time that I thought the Bible was wrong. I didn't believe the Bible was "living and active" (Heb. 4:12) because I didn't experience the word of God this way. I elevated my experience above the truth of God. I later learned that there is nothing wrong with the word of God; the problem was me. I didn't experience the word of God the way I should because I needed to learn, grow, and interact with the Bible in healthier ways. The word of God did not fail, my engagement with the word of God had failed (Rm. 9:6).
3. On one particular occasion, I remember wondering how I should respond to what Jesus said in Luke 14:33. Jesus said no one can be His disciple unless they give up all their possessions. Did Jesus mean that? Is it wrong to own possessions and property? Should I never try to purchase my own house in the future? Does every disciple need to take a vow of poverty to follow Jesus? What did Jesus mean?
4. I knew I needed to read my Bible regularly to be spiritually healthy. However, when I spent time reading my Bible, I seemed to get increasingly confused. Amazingly, this confusion came after growing up in the church and being able to answer all the questions that might be asked in a Sunday school class. Paradoxically, I thought I knew the Bible well. I was deeply confused about spiritual topics.

B. My experience in the Christian life is not unique. As I've watched and helped people in their own journey with Jesus through working in the church, this early confusion is a natural and normal part of spiritual progress. Every disciple goes through this season of confusion with the word of God. Everyone struggles with confusion at the beginning. We all need to persevere through our first baby steps as we learn how to draw spiritual nourishment from the word of God. Be encouraged not to feel guilt, shame, or become self-critical as you experience this normal dynamic of the Christian life.

C. Why is the habit of reading and studying the word of God such a struggle at first? The reason is due to where we start. Paul describes humanity's natural posture toward the word of God in 1 Corinthians 2:14. All of us have a deep spiritual need when it comes to the word of God. If we are left to ourselves, we will not have a positive or productive connection to the word of God. We all need God's help and assistance to be able to understand the thoughts of God.

## II. The Struggle of Our Natural Response

A. So far in this series we've realized the warning given by Jesus about how important our response to the word of God is. If we are listening effectively to the word of God, there will be spiritual growth and continual improvement of understanding. If we listen poorly to the word of

God, there will not be any progress or understanding even if we think there is. Next, we looked at the basic habits and behaviors of good listening. These habits include regularly hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on the word of God.<sup>1</sup> These basic habits, when practiced consistently, will help us become a good listener of the word of God.

- B. Anyone who desires to become a good listener of the word of God must realize how deep our spiritual need is and face a significant problem head on. The spiritual struggle we face is our natural human tendency to respond to the word of God in ways that are unhealthy. Here is how the apostle Paul described the problem:

<sup>14</sup> But a natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor. 2:14)

- C. The significant spiritual struggle when encountering the word of God is the negative and dismissive tendencies of our natural response (“But a natural person does not...”, v. 14). Who is the natural person? A natural person is a person who is going through life under their own power and abilities without the Holy Spirit living in them.<sup>2</sup> Jesus made a clear distinction between His disciples who receive the Holy Spirit and people of the world who do not know or have the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16-17). Everyone who has spiritual life has the Holy Spirit living in them helping them learn from and understand the word of God. Those with the Spirit are the ones being addressed by Paul in this passage (1 Cor. 2:12). The Holy Spirit empowers every disciple to act on and live out what the word of God tells them to do (Jn. 3:21). It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that a person can have the perspective of and think like Jesus (1 Cor 2:16). One of the roles of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life is to reveal the thoughts of God to them through the word of God using spiritual ideas communicated through spiritual words (1 Cor. 2:10-13).

- D. William Barclay, a New Testament scholar, describes a natural person:

Such people live their lives as if there was nothing beyond physical life and there were no needs other than material needs; their values are all physical and material...Anyone who thinks that nothing is more important than the satisfaction of the sex urge cannot understand the meaning of chastity; anyone who ranks the amassing of material things as the supreme end of life cannot understand generosity; and anyone who never has a thought beyond this world cannot understand the things of God. To these people, the things of God appear mere foolishness.<sup>3</sup>

- E. If we operate on a natural normal human level, we will never understand the word of God. It will make no sense to us because it doesn’t speak to anything real or important—from our

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.navigators.org/resource/the-word-hand/?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=paid&utm\\_campaign=ewa\\_dsa&utm\\_term=&sf\\_ac=w04&gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaign\\_id=22048628630&gbraid=0AAAAADpg97jLwn7T7f2LvBuwX5PoRWEhg&gclid=CjwKCAjwhqfPBhBWEiwAZo196njf9E0DKCYgrXw7CboFnK6e2TEXTdhefy0yakiynDV-ARRsdofPhxoCSuoQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.navigators.org/resource/the-word-hand/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=paid&utm_campaign=ewa_dsa&utm_term=&sf_ac=w04&gad_source=1&gad_campaign_id=22048628630&gbraid=0AAAAADpg97jLwn7T7f2LvBuwX5PoRWEhg&gclid=CjwKCAjwhqfPBhBWEiwAZo196njf9E0DKCYgrXw7CboFnK6e2TEXTdhefy0yakiynDV-ARRsdofPhxoCSuoQAvD_BwE)

<sup>2</sup> Romans 8:7, Ephesians 2:13, Titus 3:3, 2 Peter 2:12, James 3:13-16

<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, [The Letters to the Corinthians](#), 3rd ed., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 34.

natural perspective. We naturally assume our life in this world is all that exists. The here and now is all that matters. Improving our situation is the best good that can happen to us. The reality is, we can't interact with the word of God based solely on our own abilities and expect to understand and benefit from that activity. God's word will be incompatible with what we think is true, how we think the world works, and what we think is important in life. Those who focus entirely on the things of this world and are friends of this world are hostile and enemies of God (Jas. 4:4).

- F. There are three components to this struggle that we need to be aware of. We can't fix problems that we don't know exist. The spiritual struggle everyone faces can be captured using three w's: will, wants, and wits. Three aspects of our makeup get in the way and prevent us from being able to interact with God's word in a healthy way. The first difficulty is our will ("does not accept the things of the Spirit of God", v. 14). In our natural spiritual condition, humanity is not open or willing accept what God says in His word. People choose to reject the word of God. Jesus taught this same truth (Jn. 8:47). It is not that people cannot receive the word of God coming through the Holy Spirit, but they willfully choose to reject it. All of us left to ourselves have a lack of willful responsiveness to the word of God. Our decision-making ability is hostile and set against the perspective and values communicated by God. Refusing to accept the things of the Spirit means that a person will not consider or hold as true the message of Jesus and the Bible.<sup>4</sup>
- G. The second component of this problem is our lack of desire for the word of God and our lack of valuing the importance of the word of God ("for they are foolishness to him", v. 14). This second component is not a problem of our will/decision-making ability, it is a problem of our desires. We have a defect in our wants. Naturally, human beings don't want what is good and what God says. Our default perspective on the word of God will be a negative one. The Bible will be viewed as a wildly mistaken or unfounded opinion or idea.<sup>5</sup> In our natural spiritual condition, we will think the Bible is stupid and obviously false. We will believe the Bible is irrelevant and unreliable. We don't want what the Spirit of God offers us. The things of God seem unappealing to us. We may even think the Bible doesn't work in the real world. As human beings, we lack the innate capacity to appreciate and receive the spiritual truths contained in the word of God.<sup>6</sup>
- H. The third component of the problem between us and the word of God is that we are incapable of comprehending the significance of the message of the Bible ("he cannot understand them", v. 14). We have an issue with our wits. A lack of understanding is the natural result of a rejection of the Spirit and message of God. At this point ignorance is culpable, not innocent. To understand the word of God is to get the meaning of what God is communicating through the Bible.<sup>7</sup> Anyone who does not have the Holy Spirit working in their life lacks the ability to

<sup>4</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Corinthians 2:14 "accept"

<sup>5</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Corinthians 2:14 "foolishness"

<sup>6</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, [1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 85.

<sup>7</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Corinthians 2:14 "understand"

understand, comprehend, or know God's thoughts<sup>8</sup>. They will not be able to discern the true nature of the word of God and identify it as true, good, beneficial, and beautiful.<sup>9</sup> No one can sit down with only their own abilities and resources and hope to understand the Bible. No one. Everyone needs the Holy Spirit to help them understand the meaning of the word of God. We may think we understand the meaning, but without the Spirit's work in us, it will be the wrong meaning and not the meaning God desires to communicate to us.

- I. Have you ever observed these spiritual dynamics (will, wants, wits) at work in a person who is dismissive of the word of God? Have you encountered people who think the Bible is too ridiculous to believe and find it boring because it doesn't deal with anything real? Has anyone ever reacted with revulsion to the truth of God's word? I've seen this pattern repeatedly in different people's lives. Those who reject the message of the Bible confirm and demonstrate the Bible's truth and accuracy in the way they respond to the word of God. God told us exactly how people who do not have the Holy Spirit in them will react to His word. He tells us how they choose to react to His word. He tells us how they think about His word. He tells us how unappealing His word is to them. And, if we are paying attention, we can see the truthfulness and accuracy of God's description of how some people respond to the word of God. If we are observant, we will recognize the description of these spiritual dynamics found in 1 Corinthians 2:14; they will play out right before our eyes.

### III. The Solution of Our Heart Attitudes

- A. Now that we realize and have a deeper understanding of the spiritual struggle between us and the word of God, what is the solution to this problem? How do we learn to overcome this spiritual barrier and become a good listener of the word of God? Yes, we will already assume we recognize our need to have the Holy Spirit in us. Having a real relationship with Jesus is a given. If someone hasn't committed their life to Jesus, that is the first step in being able to understand the word of God. Those who have the Spirit and are connected to Jesus can begin positive responses to the word of God through the godly attitudes of humility and continual dependence on the Spirit of God each time we have contact with the word of God. Developing an ongoing habit of dependence on God empowers us to overcome the spiritual struggle we face regarding the word of God.
- B. For those who have taken up the challenge of reading Psalm 119 once a week throughout this sermon series, you have encountered the godly heart attitudes that need to be developed toward the word of God. The first heart attitude is described this way:
 

<sup>36</sup> Incline my heart to Your testimonies, And not to *dishonest* gain. (Ps. 119:36)
- C. Praying and asking for God to give me the heart and desires to value His word more than money is a great place to start overcoming our natural unhealthy dispositions toward the word of God ("Incline my heart to Your testimonies", v. 36). As disciples, we need to learn to have a passion for and value the word of God. As Jesus said, the word of God is our source of life and essential spiritual food (Mt. 4:4). Our spiritual life is nourished, sustained, and deepened

<sup>8</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, [\*The First Letter to the Corinthians\*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 136.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Hodge, [\*An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians\*](#) (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1857), 43.

through our contact with the word of God. Neglecting the word of God leads to spiritual malnourishment and a lack of health.

- D. Asking God to incline our heart toward His word is to rely on God to make us receptive in attitude and convictions with a willingness to act on what God says in the Bible.<sup>10</sup> God needs to work in our hearts to soften us to being open and willing to receive what God tells us. Our hostility and opposition toward the ways of God needs to be removed, and we can't do that ourselves. Praying and asking God to change our attitudes and thoughts to be receptive to Him is very important.
- E. A second important God-centered heart attitude toward the word of God is communicated a little earlier in Psalm 119:
  - <sup>18</sup> Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your Law. (Ps. 119:18)
- F. As disciples, we can and should also be asking for God to help us have fruitful and productive times in His word in which we are observing and learning the wonderful truths being communicated in His message ("Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your Law", v. 18). Without the Spirit working in our minds, we will miss, gloss over, and fail to observe the richness of the word of God. Even while reading the word of God, we won't be able to see the treasures that are there to find. As disciples, we will not be able to spend fruitful and productive time in God's word in a way that impacts us unless the Spirit is involved in the process.
- G. We should also be asking God to give us the capacity of soul to observe and understand the tremendous spiritual truth contained in His word. Jesus did this with a few of His disciples after His resurrection (Lk. 24:25). The Holy Spirit gives those who belong to Him the supernatural ability to meaningfully interact with the word of God. God's word will be at work in us who believe (1 Thess. 2:13). We can draw out of the word of God that which is true, good, and beneficial.
- H. The solution to our negative and unhealthy approach to the word of God is for God to change our heart attitudes and our perspectives on His word. Are you actively asking and seeking God to change your attitude toward the Bible? How often do you pray asking God to work in you to be more open and effective concerning His word? When you come across a difficult truth or course of action that God is promoting in His word, do you ask God to empower you by His Spirit to receive and act on what He says?
- I. Everyone needs the Holy Spirit to be in them to be able to understand the spiritual message of the Bible and the thoughts of God. We will never be smart enough, on our own, to be able to respond positively to the word of God. We live with an insurmountable spiritual barrier between us and God. We can't overcome that barrier on our own because it is only taken out of the way by Jesus (2 Cor. 3:14-18). No amount of one person explaining the message of the Bible to another person, by itself, will be enough to help the person being taught understand the Bible. The Holy Spirit must be involved in the process of teaching the Bible and at work in the

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<sup>10</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 119:36 "incline"

life of the person being taught. If there is no Holy Spirit working in us when we have contact with the word of God, there is no true understanding of the word of God.

#### IV. Listening Dependently to the Word of God

- A. It is one thing to say we need to depend on God to work in us as we engage with the word of God, but it is another thing altogether to act in a dependent way. What can disciples do practically to express their dependence on the Holy Spirit as they interact with the word of God? Here are a few quick suggestions for how to put what we are learning into action in our lives. Follow these action steps to apply the truth of what has been communicated.
- B. Begin each time you sit down to hear, read, or study the word of God by praying and asking God to help you have a productive and fruitful time in His word. Ask God to open your eyes to see what you need to see to move forward in your Christian life. Seek God to remove any distractions and obstacles that might get in the way of your ability to focus on what God is communicating through His word. Seek for God's Spirit to make you open and responsive to what His word is going to reveal to you. As you are sitting waiting for the church service to start, say a quick prayer asking God to work in your mind, soul, and life.
- C. Be humble in your approach to the word of God. Try to come to the word of God as if it is the first time every time. Don't assume you already know the passage and everything there is to know about that text. Act as if you've never heard or read the passage before. Don't assume anything. Anticipate that God will teach you truth that you've never heard previously. Take a learning posture thinking there is always more to discover in the word of God. Try to look at the word of God with fresh eyes each time you hear, read, or study it.
- D. Get into the habit of studying the word of God, not just reading it. Don't assume you know all there is to know or see all there is to see just because you read and thought about the word of God. Go deeper. Get a few Bible study resources such as an exhaustive concordance, a Bible dictionary, a Bible handbook, or a one volume Bible commentary on the entire Bible. Search more thoroughly into the word of God using resources outside of yourself. Maybe start with doing one time of Bible study a week. Perhaps you could handle two or three times of doing personal study of the word of God a week. Participating in a regular habit of studying the Bible expresses the attitude that you need to be learning and deepening your understanding of the word of God.
- E. Another good habit is to share what you are learning and what you think about the word of God with others. Be open to feedback and correction. Let others ask questions of your understanding and interpretation of the word of God. Put your views to the test to see if they are true and accurate. Be exposed to other perspectives on the word of God to determine if your current view is the best view. Determine if the views of others are better and more convincing than yours.
- F. After you have spent time with the word of God, take some time to thank God for every new insight you have gained, knowing that you have learned everything from His Spirit. If I know anything about God and His thoughts, He is the One who has revealed it to me. Regularly acknowledging God's role in our learning process will help us maintain a proper posture and attitude toward God. It will prevent and kill spiritual pride. It will help us not think more highly

of ourselves than we ought to think because God is the person who gives us everything we have. It is God's goodness to us that leads to our growing understanding, not our own intelligence.

**V. Conclusion**

- A. The reason every person struggles to understand the word of God is because we are spiritually broken. God, in His grace, reaches into our lives and intervenes on our behalf so our thoughts and attitudes toward the Bible will change and become healthy. Our will, our wants, and our wits all get in the way and trip us up when trying to have productive and healthy experiences with the word of God.
- B. The solution that solves this major spiritual problem is an attitude of dependence and reliance on God, asking the Holy Spirit to change us so we can interact with the word of God in a healthy way. We need to regularly ask God to change our hearts so we will desire the wisdom and benefits that come to us through the word of God as we should. We need to frequently ask God to empower us to have the ability to observe the beneficial truths found in His word so that we don't miss them.