

Learning to Listen to God's Word Series

Listen Consistently (John 8:31-32)

By
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At A Glance:

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- II. Consistency is Required
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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 Consistently

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: I Quit

1. In the book that changed my life more than another other (except for the Bible of course), *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible*, Howard and William Hendricks share Wendy's story.¹ Wendy, a copywriter for an ad agency, went through a season where she put a lot of energy and effort into studying the Bible. However, she lamented about being a student of the Bible: "I tried, but it just didn't work out."
2. Wendy explained her experience. After hearing someone at a seminar say that it is impossible to know God apart from His word, Wendy made up her mind to get into the Bible for herself because she wanted to get closer to God. She went out and bought several books about the Bible.
3. After coming home from work every night, Wendy would spend an hour or more reading and trying to understand the Bible using the resource books she had purchased. She quickly realized she didn't know Greek or Hebrew, so some of the books she was using didn't make sense to her.
4. She also noticed that when she read one commentary, the author would say something about the text from the Bible she was studying, then read another commentary by a different author who would say something different from the first one. She couldn't figure out how either author came up with the meaning of the Bible they did. Trying to study the Bible got so confusing that Wendy quit.

B. Even when we have the right motivation and desire to spend time with the word of God, we can run into challenges. Sometimes these challenges become so significant that we give up spending time in the word of God for ourselves. While understandable, this response has tragic consequences for our spiritual health.

C. It is this exact type of situation Jesus addresses in John 8:31-32. In this passage, Jesus instructs new disciples what they will need to do to live a healthy Christian life. Jesus also knows that what He tells them to do is not easy, and not everyone will be willing to do it. Yet, despite the challenges, the course laid out by Jesus is necessary for spiritual health.

II. Consistency Is Required

A. Good listeners respond to the word of God by implementing good habits regarding the Bible, they recognize and act with dependence on the Holy Spirit to understanding the spiritual message of the word of God, their posture is open and accepting toward what God has to say, and they trust God more than their own thinking. As good listeners encounter the word of God, they engage their mind and focus their attention on the content and message. They intentionally concentrate on the truth and principles that help them move forward in the

¹ Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, [*Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible*](#) (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 15–16.

Christian life and increase their ability to understand the more complex elements of the word of God. The seventh and final good listener response to the word of God will be communicated in this final message of the series.

- B. Good listeners of the word of God have frequent, regular, consistent, ongoing contact with the word of God:
- ³¹ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly My disciples; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (Jn. 8:31-32)
- C. Jesus is giving instruction about discipleship and what it means to follow Him to new disciples (“to those Jews who had believed Him”, v. 31). Jesus is directing His statement toward the subgroup of Jews at the temple were part of a larger group who was listening to Him (Jn. 8:1). Those who accepted Jesus as the person He claimed to be, the Light of the World (Jn. 8:12), and the person He consistently presented Himself as (Jn. 8:25), are now being given instructions about what it means to follow Jesus whom they just believed in. The first step in discipleship is to realize and acknowledge the identity of Jesus as He communicated His self-understanding. Those who follow Jesus will live in spiritual light—with a beneficial knowledge and understanding of God.
- D. Jesus continues by explaining what the Christian life has in store for these new disciples as He points the path forward (“If you continue in My word”, v. 31).² Jesus describes a genuine and healthy Christian life as a person who stays in the same state, condition, and activity as they are in when they first believe in Him (Heb. 3:14).³ These disciples are paying attention to the words of Jesus and are responding to them in a proper way. Having consistent contact with the word of God is a high priority for genuine disciples. The word of God is the source of every true disciple’s spiritual life (Mt. 4:4). Those who have the Holy Spirit in them are nourished by the message communicated by the Spirit—the word of God.
- E. Observe the conditional nature of Jesus’ statement: if these disciples continue doing what they are doing, they will be on the right track in the Christian life. Jesus knows not everyone who claims to be a Christian and have a relationship with Him will demonstrate the authenticity of that claim in their lifestyle. Jesus explained elsewhere that some people “believe” in Him, yet fail to develop a healthy spiritual life (Mt. 13:20-22). Spiritual shallowness and immaturity, difficulties and challenges, mistreatment from others, anxiety about our survival and needs, and the distraction of the pursuit of money can all derail the life of discipleship in the lives of those who receive the word of God with joy—at least at first.
- F. Continuing in the word of Jesus is to maintain an active, continuing personal obedience to the will of God revealed in His word.⁴ The word of God becomes our life’s highest authority, and we make it the rule we follow in life.⁵ The words of Jesus tell us how we ought to think, what we

² Luke 8:15

³ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on John 8:31 “continue”

⁴ Gordon J. Keddie, [A Study Commentary on John: John 1–12](#), vol. 1, EP Study Commentary (Darlington, England; Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press, 2001), 341.

⁵ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, [Exposition of the Gospel According to John](#), vol. 2, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 52.

ought to value and prioritize, and how we ought to act. Who we are and what we do is grounded in and built around the word of God.

- G. The second major phase in the discipleship process is staying connected to the word of God for the purpose of learning how to obey everything Jesus taught and commanded (Mt. 28:19-20). Trusting the truth claims of Jesus, believing in Him is only the beginning of the spiritual life. To think that accepting a true view of Jesus is the totality of everything God requires of a person is a significant mistake. Jesus tells these new disciples that more is required and expected of them. To be a genuine disciple of Jesus, there needs to be more than a claim to believe in Jesus.
- H. A clear and brilliant summary that explains how God wants His people to respond to His word describing what it means to continue in the word of God says:
- ¹² Assemble the people, the men, the women, the children, and the stranger who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to follow all the words of this Law. (Dt. 31:12)
- I. Continual contact with the word of God can happen on a corporate level when God's people come together ("Assemble the people, the men, the women, the children, and the stranger who is in your town", v. 12). The people of God should get together for the purpose of worshipping, serving, and learning about God (Heb. 10:24-25). Public meetings of the church can and should be one of the ways disciples continue in the word of God. Staying connected to the words of Jesus on a private personal level is also essential to a healthy Christian life.⁶ Whatever form it takes, true disciples find different ways to regularly connect with the word of God. Forty six percent of professing Christians haven't been to church in the last six months!
- J. When the people of God gather, one of the purposes is to hear the word of God being communicated ("so that they may hear", v. 12). Disciples listen and pay attention to the words of God.⁷ A regular and ongoing part of the life of the church ought to be focused on and centered around the word of God (1 Tim. 4:1-2, 4:13). The word of God is the source of our spiritual life, and we need to have constant contact with it (Mt. 4:4). Our exposure to the word of God brings our attention to what God has to say so that we can become familiar with the content of God's message.
- K. Disciples also gain knowledge and skills through the word of God ("and learn", v. 12).⁸ The word of God transforms our convictions through education. Individuals who respond to God in a healthy way go beyond simply paying attention to the word of God, they internally interact with and respond to the content that they are in contact with. They pay attention for a purpose: to grow in knowledge and ability regarding the way of life that honors God. The people of God are changed and transformed by the word of God.
- L. The word of God not only educates, but it also shapes our character ("and fear the Lord your God", v. 12). Attitudes that please God are produced through a healthy response to the word of God. The primary attitude developed is a realization of the weightiness of God, along with a

⁶ Contact with the word of God and following Jesus is frequently described as a "daily" activity as in Acts 17:11, 19:9, Proverbs 8:33-34, Jeremiah 7:25, Luke 9:23, 19:47, 22:53, Joshua 1:8, Deuteronomy 6:6-9, 17:19.

⁷ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Deuteronomy 31:12 "they may hear"

⁸ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Deuteronomy 31:12 "learn"

respect for Him—this is what it means to “fear” God. To fear God is to regard with feelings of respect and reverence—to be in awe of.⁹ It is to have a high opinion of God. Always connected to this attitude is a corresponding desire to please God with who we are and everything we do. Those who learn from the word of God grow a sense of honor and admiration for God recognizing His authority in their life. While we typically think of fear as a negative emotion, that is not the case in Scripture—this attitude of fear is good, healthy, and beneficial when it is properly understood.

- M. To continue in the word of God also requires us to be transformed in our conduct and actions (“and be careful to follow all the words of this Law”, v. 12). The people of God are to conform our actions and practices to the word of God.¹⁰ We do what God says to do by carrying out and performing specific actions and the courses of action required and promoted in the word of God.¹¹ This practical response is done with everything God says, not just the truths and actions that are appealing to us. We implement and obey all that God says in His word.
- N. Going back to our primary text, Jesus explains the spiritual implications of those who continue in His word (“then you are truly My disciples”, v. 31). Our real spiritual condition and relationship with Jesus is demonstrated and revealed by how we interact with and respond to the word of God. Jesus could have put emphasis on a lot of different spiritual activities, but He chose our attachment to the word of God. Only those who consistently stay connected to the word of God are disciples of Jesus. Anyone who thinks they are attached to Jesus but do not regularly participate in the activities related to the word of God described above are not a disciple of Jesus—they have deceived themselves. Continuing to draw spiritual life from the word of God is an evidence and result of being genuinely connected to Jesus. A connection to Jesus can’t be earned or secured through forcing yourself to spend time with the word of God.
- O. If we are going to respond to the word of God in a way that is pleasing to God, we continue in Jesus’ words by hearing, learning, fearing, and following them. As we have contact with the word of God, we expand our understanding of God and His message as we develop God honoring attitudes and desires that result in actions that align obediently with what God says. Doing all this consistently is how disciples continue in the words of Jesus.
- P. Jesus isn’t after an emotional experience of Him or a claim of allegiance toward Him. What people say they believe about Jesus can be fake, and Jesus knows this. The demonstration of the genuineness of our connection to Jesus will be expressed in our regular and consistent lifestyle. How we act on a regular basis is what Jesus cares about. If our passionate worship of God on Sunday does not translate to an ongoing spiritual nourishment of our soul on the word of God throughout the rest of the week, Jesus isn’t impressed. Jesus is far more concerned with the long-term trajectory of our life than on a one-time experience of asking Jesus to forgive us of everything we’ve done wrong. A lifestyle of growth and obedience is what Jesus desires.
- Q. Jesus warns these new disciples who has just professed belief in Him that they better not wander off but stick with Him for the long haul. Jesus is far less excited about a profession of

⁹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Deuteronomy 31:12 “fear”

¹⁰ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Deuteronomy 31:12 “be careful”

¹¹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Deuteronomy 31:12 “follow”

faith than we are. While professions of faith—claims to have come to a point of belief in Jesus—are good, they also need to be demonstrated as being genuine over time with consistency and faithfulness toward the word of God.¹² Jesus isn't satisfied with this group of new believers; He warns them to prove the genuineness of their faith by acting in harmony with His word over time. Jesus isn't interested in decisions, He desires devotion.

- R. Jesus doesn't want casual armchair cheerleaders who give lip service to Him and His teachings. Jesus wants people whose lives are being changed by the truth of God's word.¹³ Giving mental assent and verbal affirmation of the word of God is not enough. Disciples must be active participants with the word of God on a personal level. In short, their contact with the word of God must lead to transformation of life. Learning from God's word and actively seeking to be changed by it is a high priority for genuine disciples of Jesus. Temporary excitement for Jesus will eventually fade. What remains is what matters most.
- S. If you are regularly and consistently spending time in God's word and you are being changed by God as a result, you should be confident that you are a true disciple of Jesus. You have proved and demonstrated your genuine association with Jesus. Assurance of your spiritual condition should be strong. A genuine love for and delight in the word of God is one of the strongest indicators that a person is connected to Jesus as a true disciple (Jer. 15:16).

III. Stay Connected to Jesus

- A. Staying connected to Jesus through His word requires significant time and effort. It takes work. Space being made for regular, even daily, time with the word of God means we will not be able to do other activities that are appealing to us. Why do genuine disciples of Jesus continue to put so much effort into having contact with the word of God and respond positively to it? The answer to this question is that wonderful blessings are experienced in our lives as a result of remaining connected to the word of God. Like enjoying the benefits of physical exercise, godliness produces enjoyable and worthwhile outcomes in our lives.
- B. If disciples remain connected to the words of Jesus and persevere in them, specific results are guaranteed:
 - ³² and you will know the truth, (Jn. 8:32)
- C. A knowledge of what is true is made possible through the habit of staying connected to the word of God for an extended period ("and you will know the truth", v. 32). Knowing truth is not limited to academic prowess or our intellectual ability. Smarter people don't have greater access to truth. Young children who are connected to Jesus will know truth that is unfamiliar to the most brilliant college professor who is disconnected from Jesus (Lk. 10:21). Our willingness to accept and obey the word of God determines how much truth we know and understand. God revealing Himself to us is not a matter of intelligence, but obedience. Disobeying God by sinning blinds us, while repentance and faithfulness open our eyes.
- D. The source of this knowledge and truth is actively participating in a process of learning from Jesus (Mt. 11:29). By turning our attention toward Jesus, we begin leaning truth about God. Jesus, as our Teacher, models and explains how disciples live before God. As we listen to the

¹² There is genuine and extravagant rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who truly repents (Lk. 15:3-7).

¹³ Andrew Knowles, [The Bible Guide](#), 1st Augsburg books ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 515.

word of Jesus and see His teachings perfectly modeled in His lifestyle when we follow His example, we learn much about God. Like Mary, we sit as Jesus' feet eagerly learning what He has to say when there are many other activities we could be doing (Lk. 10:39-42).

- E. The truth Jesus is talking about is also experiential and practical.¹⁴ Jesus told people to go and learn what His teachings meant in the normal activities of everyday life (Mt. 9:13). Disciples must accept and act on what Jesus taught to learn the truth of it (Jn. 7:17). Knowing the truth does have a mental element to it that relates to the teachings of Jesus (2 Jn. 9). Knowing the truth does involve mental activity, but it is not limited to mental activity. Knowledge is gained by putting truth to work in our actions.
- F. At its core, this knowledge of truth is relational. Jesus Himself is the truth (Jn. 14:6) who sets disciples free (Jn. 8:36). The truth being referred to here is truth about who Jesus is (the person) and what He has done (the work), along with what He can do in the life of those who trust Him.¹⁵ This knowledge comes from being connected to Jesus.
- G. Jesus made this point crystal clear, the word of God is the means of connected with Him:
³⁹ You examine the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is those *very Scriptures* that testify about Me; ⁴⁰ and *yet* you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. (Jn. 5:39-40)
- H. To know the truth requires a commitment to the person of truth—Jesus Himself.¹⁶ Knowing truth is not merely an intellectual exercise of studying the word of God and becoming knowledgeable about what it says. Knowing truth is a matter of maintaining a personal connection to Jesus.¹⁷
- I. Jesus explains in more detail what He means using the same idea of remaining connected to Him later in this same gospel:
¹ I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself but must remain in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you remain in Me. (Jn. 15:1-4)
- J. There is a very close and inseparable connection between the words of Jesus and Jesus Himself (“the word which I have spoken to you. Remain in Me”, vv. 3-4). Jesus repeated this connection between Himself and His word many times (Jn. 15:7, 15:10, 15:20, 5:38, 8:37, 12:48, 14:23). The way to stay connected to Jesus is to continue in His word. Our love for Jesus is expressed in our response to His word. The word of God is the means disciples use to connect with God Himself. By hearing from, learning about, and implementing the words of Jesus, we grow in a true knowledge of Jesus.

¹⁴ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on John 8:32 “you will know”, Gordon J. Keddie, [A Study Commentary on John: John 1–12](#), vol. 1, EP Study Commentary (Darlington, England; Auburn, MA: Evangelical Press, 2001), 341.

¹⁵ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Jn 8:32.

¹⁶ Josh Moody, [John 1–12 for You](#), ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2017), 144.

¹⁷ C. K. Barrett, [Gospel according to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text](#), Second Edition (London: SPCK, 1978), 345.

wrong, which is demonstrated by our habit of doing wrong (Jn. 8:34). Jesus isn't talking about political, financial, or personal autonomy freedom—all of which we highly seek after and emphasize. Jesus is speaking about a type of freedom that is far more valuable. It is a moral freedom. The point Jesus clarifies is that any person who does a moral wrong is under the powerful influence of the wrong they do—they are oppressed like a slave. Our inner compulsion to do wrong is more powerful than our ability to resist. The power of Jesus provides us with the ability to overcome our morally broken nature.

- E. Throughout the Bible, freedom is described in moral terms. Jesus tells this group of Jews at the temple that everyone who commits an act of sin is a slave to sin. Humanity is oppressed and dominated by our own immoral impulses and desires. We are under the powerful influence of ourselves that motivates us and leads to doing that which is harmful to ourselves and those around us. By nature, we are unable to stop doing what is wrong. This spiritual and moral oppression is what Jesus rescues us from. True freedom is only experienced by those who are empowered by God to be able to do the good they want to do (Rm. 7:14-19). This type of moral freedom is what Jesus is referring to, which was misunderstood by most of those who heard Him.
- F. There is a practical and personal impact Jesus has on the lives of those who stay connected to Him and His words: growth in sanctification by experiencing freedom from sin.¹⁹ Every person who has the Holy Spirit in them who also spends time with the word of God will be morally transformed by the power of God. This is a natural and normal effect of the influence of Jesus in our lives. Jesus guarantees the strength He provides will enable the moral freedom He promises (Jn. 8:36). Freedom from sin is a real experience that is not only possible, it is the natural outcome of obeying Jesus. Freedom does happen in the lives of those who stay connected to the word of God consistently.
- G. The moral freedom Jesus provides doesn't mean we won't ever do wrong and we will be morally perfect, but it does mean we will be constantly progressing in our ability to do good and avoid doing wrong. Our nature will be improving so that doing good becomes increasingly natural to us. Doing what God wants gets easier over time. Jesus changes our character through the work of the Holy Spirit in us through our ongoing contact with His word.
- H. Are there any specific patterns of doing wrong that you seem to be unable to stop? Have you noticed any moral improvement in your life because of how you are pursuing Jesus? There should be an observable transformation of our heart's desires and our character because of the influence Jesus is having on us. For each year we spend following Jesus, we should be growing to become more like Him. If moral progression and greater freedom from sin is not happening in our lives, it probably means we are failing to live the Christian life the way we should be. If we are moving forward, we should evaluate what we are doing wrong and figure out how to fix it. Overcoming sinful tendencies and growing in our moral freedom is a promised and guaranteed outcome for disciples who are following Jesus the way they should be.

¹⁹ Josh Moody, [John 1–12 for You](#), ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2017), 144.

V. Conclusion

- A. Jesus provides us with a snapshot of a healthy Christian life as He provides basic instruction to these new disciples who had just believed in Him. True disciples who are genuinely connected to Jesus will consistently remain attached to Jesus through His word. The word of God is the source of their spiritual life. Disciples' spiritual needs and hunger motivate a continued attachment to the word of God. Without this spiritual dynamic in a person's life, a person only claims to be attached to Jesus, but they are not.
- B. When we stay connected to the word of God, wonderful benefits are experienced, including an intimate and personal relationship with Jesus along with a growing moral freedom. The healthier our relationship with Jesus is and the more connected to the word of God we become, the greater the spiritual benefits we experience:

⁷ The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. (Ps. 19:7-8)