

LESSON 4

Listening to God

On the strange, slow work of learning to read the Bible like someone is talking to you

God speaks to you through his Word — and he isn't testing you on the parts you don't get yet.

WATCH BEFORE YOU BEGIN



Scan to watch the Lesson 4 teaching video – a 12-minute companion to this lesson.

CORE SCRIPTURES

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes...

—Psalm 19:7-8

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:16-17

The Voice You Were Expecting

NOBODY WARNS YOU THAT THE BIBLE IS GOING TO FEEL LIKE A STRANGER'S MAIL AT FIRST.

You opened it expecting to hear something. Maybe a verse that lit up. Maybe a quiet sense that God was speaking to you specifically. And what you got was...reading. Names you can't pronounce. Sentences that didn't go where you thought they were going. A long stretch about somebody's tent.

If that was your first try, welcome. You're not alone, and you're not behind.

FIGURE 4.1 Two Pictures of God Speaking

WHAT YOU EXPECTED	WHAT GOD DID
<p>Inner Whisper</p> <p>"A nudge. A voice in my head."</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interior, private • For sensitive types • Easy to second-guess 	<p>Breathed Out a Book</p> <p>"All Scripture is breathed out by God."</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public, plain, preserved • For anyone who opens it • Calibrates other voices
<p>He didn't hide it. He put it in a book.</p> <p><small>Lesson 4 · 2 Timothy 3:16</small></p>	

Most new Christians come in with a particular picture of what *hearing from God* is supposed to feel like. We expect something interior. A nudge. A whisper. A specific sentence that drops into our head right when we need it. Some of that, in some form, may eventually show up. But here's the part the picture leaves out: God already spoke. The most reliable way he is speaking to you right now is the same way he has been speaking for thousands of years. He didn't hide it. He didn't bury it. He didn't wait for

you to be spiritually advanced before he made it available.

He put it in a book.

The Bible isn't a leftover plan for people who can't get the inner voice working. It's the main one. It's the way he has chosen to address his people, plainly and publicly, so that anyone who shows up can hear. The other voices in the Christian life — your conscience, the counsel of older believers, the slow shaping of your desires — those matter. But every one of those has to be checked against this one. The Bible is the voice that calibrates the other voices.

That's good news. It means you don't have to be especially spiritual or sensitive to start hearing him. You just have to open the book.

DISCUSSION: *Before this lesson, what did you expect "hearing from God" to feel like? Where do you think that picture came from?*

What the Bible Is

Paul writes something in 2 Timothy that is easy to skim past. *All Scripture is breathed out by God.*

Focus on that phrase. *Breathed out.* Not "approved by God." Not "inspired the way a great poem is inspired." *Breathed out.* The picture is closer than that. When you exhale, what comes out is yours, from the inside, carrying you with it. That's the picture Paul is using. The words on the page are God's breath, preserved.

That changes what the Bible is. It's not a self-help book. It's not a how-to manual. It's not a magic 8-ball you crack open and shake until a verse falls out for your problem. It's a person speaking. The same God who rescued you in Lesson 1 — the same one you've been learning to talk to in Lesson 3 — is the one whose breath carried these words onto the page.

So, when you read the Bible, you aren't really researching God. You're being addressed by him.

That's a different approach. Researchers come to a text looking for information. They want to extract, organize, and move on. People being addressed come differently. They listen. They ask what the speaker means. They take what's said personally because it's directed at them.

You don't have to be a scholar to read the Bible this way. You just have to remember whose voice it is.

DISCUSSION: Have you tended to come to the Bible looking for something — information, a verse for a problem, a quick lift? What would change if you came expecting to be addressed by God himself?

Why It Doesn't Always Click

Now, the honest part.

You're going to open the Bible some weeks and feel nothing. You'll read a chapter and not remember what it said. You'll get bogged down in a section that seems to go on forever about laws or genealogies or temple measurements. You'll close the book and wonder if you did something wrong.

You didn't.

Here's what most new Christians don't know: this happens to people who have been reading the Bible for forty years. The dryness, the confusion, the *nothing-happened-today* feeling — that's not evidence that God has stopped speaking. It's evidence that you're a normal human reading the Bible at a normal pace.

Listening is a skill you grow into. Most of the growth happens quietly. Look at how Psalm 19 describes what Scripture does: *reviving the soul...making wise the simple...rejoicing the heart...enlightening the eyes*. Those are slow effects. A soul gets revived over time. Wisdom shows up after a thousand small encounters with the truth, not after one. The eyes get clearer the longer you keep them open. The Psalm isn't promising fireworks every time you read. It's describing what regular contact with God's voice does over a life.

Reading isn't research. It's listening.

There is another piece worth knowing. The same Spirit who breathed out the Scripture is the one who helps you understand it. You aren't trying to crack a locked book by sheer effort. The God who is

speaking is also the one quietly helping you hear. You don't have to manufacture insight. You have to keep showing up and let him do what he does.

FIGURE 4.2 What Scripture Does

ALL SCRIPTURE IS BREATHED OUT BY GOD

- 1** REVIVES THE SOUL
"The law of the LORD is perfect..."
 Tired faith finds breath here.
- 2** MAKES WISE THE SIMPLE
"The testimony of the LORD is sure..."
 You don't have to be advanced. Just present.
- 3** REJOICES THE HEART
"The precepts of the LORD are right..."
 What's true ends up feeling like good news.
- 4** ENLIGHTENS THE EYES
"The commandment of the LORD is pure..."
 You start to see what was always there.

Slow effects. Daily rain on dry ground.

Lesson 4 · Psalm 19:7-8 · 2 Timothy 3:16

So, the dry days don't mean what you fear they mean. They are part of the rhythm. Some days, the words land like a punch. Most days they don't. Both kinds of days count.

DISCUSSION: *What's been your honest experience opening the Bible so far — confusing, dry, alive, intimidating, all of the above? What have you been telling yourself that experience means about you?*

What Listening Looks Like

Here's the practical part. There is no secret method. No special position. No formal program you have to learn before you're qualified. Three simple things.

First — show up regularly. Short and steady beats heroic and rare. Ten minutes a day for six months will form you more than a four-hour binge on Saturday once a month. That's how relationships work, including this one. You learn the voice of someone you talk to often. You don't learn someone's voice after visiting them twice a year.

If you don't know where to start, start in one of the Gospels. Mark is short and direct. Luke is warm and detailed. John is reflective. Read a chapter a day. Don't worry about the whole Bible yet. You don't have to read it all this year. You just have to start somewhere; a person is already reading with you.

Second — read things more than once. A lot of what the Bible says is said by accumulation. The first time through a passage, you get the surface. The second time, you notice something you missed. The third time, a sentence you skimmed before suddenly opens up. That's not because you got smarter. It's because you're getting more familiar. Familiarity is what turns listening into understanding.

Third — do something with what you read. This is the part most people quietly skip, and James calls it out: *Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.* (James 1:22–24)

FIGURE 4.3 Three Habits of Listening

How a beginner actually grows into hearing God's voice.

SHOW UP	RE-READ	DO
<p>1</p> <p>Regularly</p> <p>Short and steady beats heroic and rare. Ten minutes a day forms you more than a four-hour Saturday once a month.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>More Than Once</p> <p>Familiarity is what turns listening into understanding. The third pass opens up what you skimmed on the first.</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Something With It</p> <p>What you don't act on, you forget. Hearers who are willing to be doers tend to keep hearing more.</p>

JAMES 1:22 *"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only."*

Lesson 4 · James 1:22-24

This passage is worth some of your time. James isn't saying obedience earns you anything. He is saying that if you don't act on what you read, you will forget it. The Word doesn't stay in a person who treats it only as information. It stays in the person who lets it shape them. You don't have to obey perfectly. You just have to be honestly trying. Hearers who are willing to be doers tend to keep hearing more. Hearers who never intend to do anything tend to drift.

So, when you read something convicting, don't argue it away. When you read something that calls you toward a specific action, take one small step toward it that week. That keeps the line of communication open.

DISCUSSION: *James says the person who hears but doesn't act forgets what he saw. What's one thing you've recently read — or heard taught — that you haven't done anything with yet?*

The Voice That Talks Back

Here's what you don't notice while you're showing up: you're being formed.

It's slow. You won't see it on Tuesday. But over months, something starts to happen. A verse you read in March surfaces unexpectedly in October, exactly when you need it. A sentence you didn't think was about you turns out to be about you. The way you think about anger, or money, or your own failures, starts to shift in ways you didn't engineer. Your prayers begin to change without you trying to.

That's the voice talking back. Not a new voice replacing the old one. The same voice you've been spending time with, becoming familiar enough that it starts to sound like itself.

This is how relationships work. Spend enough time around someone, and you start to know what they would say in a situation before they say it. You think with them. Their concerns become your concerns. Their voice gets internalized. With Scripture, the same thing happens, only slower and deeper, because you're being formed by the breath of God himself.

The new Christians who quietly give up on Bible reading usually do so because they expected something fast. They didn't get fireworks in week three, so they assumed nothing was happening. But this isn't fireworks. It's daily rain on dry ground. You don't see the difference today. You see it in what grows over the course of a year.

You're allowed to be a beginner here. You're allowed not to know what a "Pauline epistle" is. You're allowed to skip parts you can't track yet and come back later. You're allowed to use a study Bible, ask older Christians for help, and admit out loud when you don't get something. None of that disqualifies you. All of it counts as listening.

The point isn't to master the Bible. The point is to let the Bible, the breath of the God who rescued you, keep speaking until his voice becomes the most familiar voice in your life.

That takes a while. It's worth it.

DISCUSSION: Is there a passage — even one verse — that has "talked back" to you so far? Surfaced when you needed it, or stuck with you longer than you expected? What was it doing in that moment?

DON'T FORGET

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