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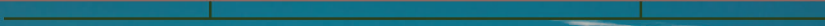
CHARLES F. STANLEY BIBLE STUDY SERIES



LISTENING TO GOD



LEARN TO HEAR HIM THROUGH HIS WORD



CHARLES F. STANLEY

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THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

LISTENING TO GOD
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INTRODUCTION

PREPARING TO HEAR FROM GOD

God spoke to His prophets in Old Testament times, giving them specific messages for themselves and for His people as a whole. Many Christians in modern times, however, believe that God no longer speaks to His people as He once did. But this is not the case! God is still speaking to His people—to all His people, not just those who are specially selected as His spokespersons. He speaks through our times of prayer, through counsel from wise Christians, and most importantly, through His Word, the Bible.

The Bible is God's foremost method of communication with us today. It is the wellspring from which new insights and eternal wisdom come to us. It is the reference to which we must return continually to check out messages that we believe are from God.

This book can be used by you alone or by several people in a small-group study. At various times, you will be asked to relate to the material in one of the following four ways.

First, what new insights have you gained? Make notes about the insights you have. You may want to record them in your Bible or in a separate journal. As you reflect on your insights, you are likely to see how God has moved in your life.

Second, have you ever had a similar experience? You approach the Bible from your own unique background . . . your own particular set of understandings about the world that you bring with you when you open God's Word. For this reason, it is important to consider how

your experiences are shaping your understanding and allow yourself to be open to the truth that God reveals.

Third, how do you feel about the material? While you should not depend solely on your emotions as a gauge for your faith, it is important for you to be aware of your feelings as you study a passage of Scripture and have the freedom to express your emotions to God. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit will use your emotions to compel you to look at your life in a different or challenging way.

Fourth, in what way do you feel challenged to respond or to act? God's Word may inspire you or challenge you to take a particular action. Take this challenge seriously and find ways to move into it. If God reveals a particular need that He wants you to address, take that as His "marching orders." God will empower you to do something with the challenge that He has just given you.

Start your Bible study sessions in prayer. Ask God to give you spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear. As you conclude your study, ask the Lord to seal what you have learned so you will not forget it. Ask Him to help you grow into the fullness of the nature and character of Christ Jesus. Again, keep the Bible at the center of your study. A genuine Bible study stays focused on God's Word and promotes a growing faith and a closer walk with the Holy Spirit in each person who participates.

Again, I caution you to keep the Bible at the center of your study. A genuine Bible study stays focused on God's Word and promotes a growing faith and a closer walk with the Holy Spirit in each person who participates.

LESSON 1



GOD HAS SOMETHING TO SAY TO US

IN THIS LESSON

Learning: Does God still speak to people today?

Growing: What is the purpose of prayer
and reading the Bible?

One of the most important lessons we can learn is how to listen to God. In this complex, nothing is more urgent, necessary, or more rewarding than hearing what God has to say, both as individuals and as members of the body of Christ. After all, if we want to develop a relationship with another person, we have to converse with that person in some manner. This means both talking *and* listening.

Most of us do better with the talking part. In my own life, I remember a time when I was too occupied doing the Lord's work

to pay close attention to God’s voice. I was preaching six times a week, taping two television programs, traveling across the nation, writing a book, pastoring the church, and administrating a large church staff and broadcast ministry, among other daily duties. In the midst of it all, I spent time *talking* to God—often about the needs I was facing in my personal life and ministry—but not much time *listening* to God. I ended up in the hospital for a week and out of circulation for three months. The net result for each of us, if we don’t learn how to listen to God, is that we will make unwise and costly mistakes.

You may ask, “Does God really speak to us today?” The Bible assures us that He does. The book of Hebrews opens this way “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds” (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Our God is not a speechless God. He is alive and active in our world today. He speaks! The primary goal of any communicator is not to speak well but to be heard. God speaks in a way we can hear Him, receive His message, and understand what He wants us to do.

1. The author of Hebrews states that “in these last days,” God has “spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:2). What does the author mean by these statements?

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2. How does God speak to people today? How has He spoken to you in the past?

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GOD'S PERSONAL WORD

God speaks in both general and absolute terms to all people, and He speaks to each one of us personally. We can hardly comprehend that possibility with our finite minds. God is an infinite God, and He is capable of communicating with each one of us, right where we are. He can speak to us in the midst of our circumstances or crises—in personal, direct, and explicit terms.

This may be the most important concept that we can ever grasp when it comes to learning how to listen to God. When God speaks, He is speaking directly to us. Everything in the Bible applies to our lives in some way. Every message based on the Word of God has truth embedded within it that is for our lives. There is no such thing as a chapter in the Bible, a sermon based on God's Word, or a book that expounds and explains God's Word that is not for us.

Now, the question is whether we truly consider the Bible this way—as God's communication with us—and value it in this manner. I always laugh when I hear people say their Bible is still like new, because what they just did is confess they are not reading it and applying it to their situation. If we don't ever open up the Bible and read it—get it all broken in and marked up—it's going to be difficult to lead a godly life. When we truly begin to understand the benefits and the value of the Bible, it doesn't stay looking like new for very long.

How you and I handle something depends on the value we place on it. For example, no one who likes to go fishing would ever purchase

a high-end rod and just hang it up as a decoration on their wall. No, they would take it out, learn all they could about how it works, and take it with them on their next trip out to catch fish. When they returned home, they wouldn't take the rod and just toss it over into the corner somewhere. Rather, they would clean it, wipe it down, polish it, and oil it up a bit to make sure it's ready for the next trip.

The same is true of God's Word. If we don't consider it as being valuable to us, we will lay it up on a shelf somewhere, or maybe bring it to church, or just ignore it until it's covered with dust. But if we view God's Word as "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit" (Hebrews 4:12), we will understand it is not like any other book. There is no book to match the Bible because it represents the very mind of God put into print. As we open its pages, we learn to know the ways of God, comprehend His character, and hear His voice speaking into our lives.

- 3.** "He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God" (John 8:47). Why is it important to open up God's Word to have a vibrant relationship with Him?

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- 4.** What value would you say you place on God's Word? Is reading the Bible a part of your everyday life? Or is it just something you bring to church on Sunday? Explain.

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GOD'S GUIDING VOICE

In Psalm 119:105, we read, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” When we want to discover God’s direction for our lives, one of the simplest things we can do is get into the Word of God. Whenever we are struggling to make a decision, one of the first things we do is call our friends. We share our situation and our problems with them, and we ask for them to give us advice. However, when we are looking for direction, the best place to go first is to the Word of God. Our friends may be able to give us good advice, but the Word of God will always give us the *correct* advice—and it is absolutely complete.

God is so willing to communicate His will to us today. He has provided His Word, the Bible, as a lamp to light our way in this life. People often say the Bible is a “mystery book.” They complain it’s filled with stories from a long time ago that are so unfamiliar to them. They have trouble comprehending how it can guide their lives. But the truth is that when we go to God and ask Him for clarity, He will reveal some verses that communicate His will to us.

As the psalmist notes, “Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way” (Psalm 119:104). We become wise by getting into the Scripture, asking God to guide us as we read, listening for His direction, and then acting on that instruction. As we read the Bible and allow it to transform our minds, we begin to think the way God thinks. The Bible is a highly personal book, and each of us must take God’s Word personally!

Of course, this is not to say that God has an *exclusive* word for a person. God doesn’t deal in secrets. He won’t reveal truth to one person and deny it to another. Be on guard if you hear somebody say, “God told me something, but He told me that I can’t tell anybody else,” or, “God had a word that’s just for me and not for you.” God doesn’t play favorites. He doesn’t speak to one child and totally ignore His other children. His word of correction to you may be so personal that you don’t want to share it with others, but God’s word of

correction is an absolute that applies to all people. The same goes for God's promises, provisions, and insights.

- 5.** “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). When are some times that you sought God’s wisdom by engaging in His Word? What happened as a result?

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- 6.** How has God has personally guided you through His Word?

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GOD’S COMFORTING VOICE

In Psalm 119:28, the psalmist writes, “My soul melts from heaviness; strengthen me according to Your word.” When we are grieved in our spirit and are hurting, we are reminded in the Bible that God loves us, cares for us, and is personally interested in us. As God communicates this truth to us through the pages of Scripture, our grief turns to a sense of peace and joy, and we find the strength to persevere. Such is the power of the Word of God.

When we read of God’s love for us, and understand His power, and comprehend the way He works in our lives, our sadness turns to joy because we realize God is living inside of us. It is for this very reason that Paul could write, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will

say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). No matter what we are facing, when we have a relationship with Christ we find that somehow we have a deep sense of abiding joy. It is a joy that is unspeakable and indescribable . . . a joy that is beyond anything we can muster within ourselves or manufacture by anything we can do. It is not “mind over matter.” It is the gift of God.

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). God’s voice comforts us in even the stormiest times of life—moments when the bottom drops out, the sides cave in, the top falls in, and we wonder where our friends have gone. It’s like a stream of peace that runs at a deeper level than our lives. We can’t put our finger on it—but we can sense it is there. It is a peace that surpasses all human understanding and guards our hearts and our minds (see Philippians 4:7).

- 7.** “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Isaiah 26:3). How does reading God’s Word keep your mind “stayed” on God? How does this result in trusting God . . . and greater peace in your life?

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- 8.** How has God comforted you through His Word and brought you greater peace?

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GOD'S PURPOSEFUL VOICE

God doesn't speak frivolously. He doesn't joke around. God means what He says and will do what He says. As we read in Numbers 23:19:

God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

God is serious about His relationship with you. He doesn't speak to you in idle terms. He expects you to respond to His voice, heed His Word, and act on it.

Can you remember last Sunday's sermon? Can you recall what you read in God's Word yesterday? You will be able to remember if you are listening for what God has to say to you and if you take seriously the idea that God wants you to do something in response to His Word. As James writes, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (1:22).

God speaks for your benefit. He wants you to listen to Him and respond to His words. Sometimes He will challenge you to change your thinking or to release certain feelings and opinions that you have been harboring. Sometimes He will command you to change certain aspects of your behavior. Sometimes He will just want to encourage you so that you might live your life with greater joy and strength—and greater peace. Always, however, God's Word is for your transformation. It is intended to change you in some way.

As you go through this study, approach God's Word seriously and listen for what He is saying to you. Listening to God is not a casual pastime or a "let's try it and see if you like it" activity. Listening to God is the most important thing you can do for your eternal future.

9. "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the LORD's counsel—that will stand" (Proverbs 19:21). When are some times

that God has changed your plans? How did He make you aware that He was guiding you in a different direction?

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10. How could you strengthen your relationship with God today to improve your communication?

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TODAY AND TOMORROW

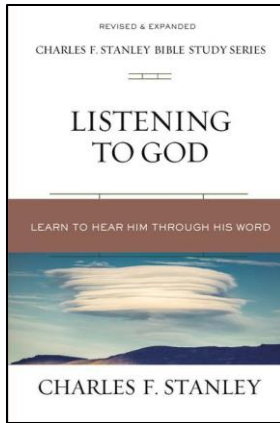
Today: God speaks today—and He wants to speak to me.

Tomorrow: I will spend time this week listening to God, reading His Word, and speaking to Him.

CLOSING PRAYER

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God, thank You that You speak to us today. We praise and bless You for being so gracious, loving, kind, and willing to hear us. Today, we pray for those who have never received Christ—and never listened for Your voice. We pray the Holy Spirit would speak to their hearts the simple truth of the gospel and they would be aware of Your presence in a real way. In Your name we pray. Amen.



LISTENING TO GOD

by Charles F. Stanley

Does God speak to us today?

Although most of us can talk with ease to our best friend, many of us aren't so good at being quiet and hearing what our friend has to say. So it is with God. For true communication to happen with Him, we must learn to listen through understanding His Word. In *Listening to God*, Dr. Charles Stanley presents a sound way to explore God's Word and hear His truths. He reveals how we can identify with passages of Scripture, reflect on their meaning, and then develop practical steps to apply what we have learned.

The **Charles F. Stanley Bible Study Series** is a unique approach to Bible study, incorporating biblical truth, personal insights, emotional responses, and a call to action. Each study draws on Dr. Stanley's many years of teaching the guiding principles found in God's Word, showing how we can apply them in practical ways to every situation we face. This edition of the series has been completely revised and updated, and includes two brand-new lessons from Dr. Stanley.

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