

BOOK 2

LISTENING GOD

TO

THROUGH READING HIS WORD

MAN OF THE WORD MANUAL • SPRING 2024

LISTENING
TO
GOD

THROUGH READING HIS WORD

*"A voice came out of the cloud, 'This is
My beloved Son, **listen to Him!**'"*

—Mark 9:7

Mount Calvary Baptist Church

MAN OF THE WORD

Spring 2024

Context

This manual is second in a four-part series for Man of the Word on listening. It springs from a desire to listen to God more effectively. With your notes in this and the next two manuals, you could develop your own personal biblical theology of listening. Ideally, this will draw you closer to Christ and involve you more deeply in what He is saying to us (Heb 1:1-2).

Fall 2023 Listening for God-like Character (*a study of Titus 2:2, 6-10*)

Spring 2024 Listening to God through Reading His Word

Fall 2024 Listening to God through Preaching of His Word

Spring 2025 Listening to God through Others in the Church

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Edited by Steven Frakes, MOW manual coordinator.

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SPRING 2024 INTRODUCTION

“The LORD...called as at other times...And Samuel said, ‘Speak, for Your servant is listening.’” —1 Samuel 3:10

We are grateful to Pastors Mark Minnick, Jerid Jones, and elder Chris Baker for their encouragement, leadership, and vision for the men of Mount Calvary Baptist Church. We also are thankful for the men who have shared their personal example articles for our growth and encouragement, and for the volunteers in the breakfast crew, who rise early and leave late to provide us with a morning meal and fellowship.

THEME: LISTENING TO GOD THROUGH READING

Our theme for this and the next two MOW cycles is Listening to God. This cycle we will have a special discipleship focus on *preparing* to listen and listening to God when *reading His Word*. We’ll consider the importance for us as men to listen more carefully and effectively. We’ll seek to understand how our entire walk with God depends on listening to Him speak to us through His Word.

Unlike some other MOW cycles, what the Bible says about our subject this time is perhaps unfamiliar. The weekly studies, therefore, are more discipleship and application oriented. They follow a deliberate pattern: laying out the relevant Scriptures, identifying their meaning, and encouraging application.^a

Listening is vital yet often ignored in our spiritual walks—it is the root of many of our issues! For most of us, listening is not a strong point! History bears testimony to how many marriages do not rise to God’s gospel standards because the husband is overly occupied with performing tasks, when his wife is desperately hoping that they can spend more time really communicating. And then there are our roles as fathers and grandfathers—children have perhaps an even greater need for this same focused attention.

In Old Testament times, God spoke to His people through the prophets (Deu 18:18-19). Today, God is still speaking to His people. But today He speaks through prayer, reading of His Word, and preaching of His Word (Mat 13:23)—all through the enabling of His Spirit (John 14:26).

The importance of truly listening to God cannot be overemphasized. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) said, “Our love for God *begins* with listening to His Word.”^b Our purpose, then, is to become more skillful in hearing God speak to us through our reading of the Scriptures. We will lay a foundation for this by understanding listening’s presuppositions, preparations, attitudes, benefits, and principles.

Your written notes in this manual are for your own personal benefit, which can serve as your reference for listening to God in the years to come. Please give some time to careful personal responses when asked to write them.

MOW MANUAL

In this manual, each week’s resources consist of the following.

- Testimonies – from the men of MCBC related to their own real-life experience in listening to God through His Word
- Study the Scriptures – key passages and wisdom from writers of prior centuries for understanding biblical listening
- Prayer Partner ideas to encourage and grow our prayer lives
- Family/Personal Worship highlights to support effective devotions
- Family/Personal Worship Questions (grouped at the end of the manual) to revitalize household worship, with simple questions linked to M’Cheyne’s Reading Plan

^a In developing this series, we first surveyed the Scriptures dealing with listening or hearing. Then we identified a topic and sub-topic for each verse. We then grouped the verses by topic, building an outline that forms the structure for this study.

^b Cited at https://www.azquotes.com/author/1638-Dietrich_Bonhoeffer/tag/listening, accessed 8/17/2023).

Notice that there is no separate book to read during this cycle. Instead, we invite you to invest that time in the study and application of the ten aspects for listening to God, your family/personal worship, and your prayer partner.

Don't let these materials become daunting. Let whatever you do be a delight. If you can't stay current with every component, choose the ones that you can use consistently and stick with them.

GOALS

- To understand and apply the Lord's teaching on hearing Him speak as we read His Word for meaningful spiritual growth
- To walk in a richer, more effective prayer life through experiencing Christ-honoring prayer with a MOW prayer partner
- To continue to transform family/personal worship to make it more interesting, experiencing a vital response to the Scriptures

METHODS

- Saturday Meetings: prayer, breakfast, fellowship, and instruction: January 27, March 2, April 6 (7-9 AM)
- Prayer Partners
- Family/Personal Worship emphasis
- Ten weekly discipleship studies: January 28 – April 6

OFFICERS

The current Man of the Word officers are serving a two-year term from summer 2023 through spring 2025. We hope you will get to know us and become even more involved in the MOW service projects and discipleship. Please keep our service in your prayers.

President	Ken Still	<i>kstill@bellsouth.net</i>
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Manual coordinator	Steven Frakes	<i>countlessmercies@gmail.com</i>

PRAYER PARTNERS

Prayer Partners are an important part of MOW; they are essential to receive the desired spiritual benefits during these ten MOW weeks. Each fall and spring cycle, every participant is encouraged to find another man to pray with regularly during that cycle. This can consist of some Wednesday evenings and informal times weekly—by video, phone, or in person. If you need to find a prayer partner, contact Jesse Keck (*jaekeck@gmail.com*) this week and he will match you with another.

My Prayer Partner (name, phone number, email):

Prayed together (*dates*): _____

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP

This MOW cycle we are again encouraging the daily practice of family/personal worship. Many have a normal pattern of a quiet time for personal devotions in the morning. Family/personal worship can fall after dinner in the evening: gather the entire family around to hear you read the Word, ask one or a few questions, and offer your own observation/instruction/application. If your household consists of only you and your wife, this practice will be a great encouragement to her. If you are single, then this practice is still important for your personal spiritual growth (and we try to communicate this with “family/*personal* worship”). See the “Family Worship during this MOW cycle” section for some best practices.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

There are many ways to listen, just as there are many ways to speak. As examples, consider that one can listen to sounds of all kinds: voices, music, machinery, and nature (wind rustling leaves, dogs barking, cows mooing). Or consider that someone has even said “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Or consider that in 2010 the U.S. Supreme Court in *Citizens United v Federal Election Commission* concluded that political spending is a form of free *speech* that’s protected under the First Amendment. Political spending is certainly something that politicians listen to!

We listen in many different ways. Our Man of the Word manuals for Fall 2023 through Spring 2025 are highlighting some of these ways as they apply to building a spiritual house. *Listening to God through Reading His Word* is the emphasis for this cycle of our men’s ministries. The theme for the Fall of 2023 was *Listening for God-Like Character*. We plan *Listening to God through Preaching of His Word* in Fall of 2024, and *Listening to God through Others in the Church* in the Spring of 2025.

One aspect of the type of listening we will be considering is the aspect of heeding what we’ve heard. Heeding what God is speaking requires us to hear with insight, not just the words themselves, but what God intended those words to mean to us. This will bring about encouragement, confidence, wisdom, great faith, self-denial, humility, esteeming others above ourselves, and many other personal improvements. We read the Bible, but do we realize that our Lord is speaking to us personally, and do we obey His “voice”? We sing to one another a scriptural admonition to “Abide in Me,” but do we pull up the roots that go deep in our own way and replant them in Christ? What will it take to build up our spiritual house if not obedience?

Brothers, as we go through these studies on listening to God, it will be my prayer for all of us that we do something with what God is saying, regardless of what means He uses to say it.

May God bless you and your family. —*Ken Still*

LISTENING TO GOD

Why this two-year MOW emphasis on listening? Because we desire to see Christian men draw deeply from their relationship with God the eternal life they possess in their salvation; and to see them live victoriously as happy, encouraged, and productive Christians. Christian men struggle to live consistently this way because of something like the difference between possessing a sword and defending your life with a sword. These are entirely different things. If you are attacked by a sword-wielding warrior, using your sword masterfully to save your life is essential. Simply having a sword is not sufficient.

Like skill in using a sword, listening to God also has gradations in ability. Some listen to God at a low level, like possessing a sword; they listen but have little skill in knowing what to do with what they hear. Others listen masterfully. They pick up the sword and use it skillfully. They are warriors; they carry their sword with them because they know they will need to use it. Profitable listening demands training, confidence in the skill, and intentional use.

Soldiers of Jesus Christ are listeners. As we listen to our Commander, He supplies our whole being with His grace, His peace, His joy, His hope, His counsel, and His life. Theologian David Wells captures the intimacy of hearing God in Scripture:

In the biblical spirituality, we are summoned by the Word of God; we stand before the God of that Word. He speaks. If this introduces the solemn note of accountability, it also introduces the grounds of hope...We are not adrift upon an infinite ocean. We are in fact spoken to, confronted, called to account not by ourselves, but by God from His Word. He draws near through His Word, whose speech is His own. Through the hearing of His law and the believing of His promise, He lifts the fallen, instructs the bewildered, fills the hungry, and dispenses the sweet fragrance of His grace through Christ.^c

In conclusion, listening should always be our chief focus—not just for these cycles of men’s ministry—because by listening we flourish in relationship with God. Sanctified listening is how disciples of Jesus Christ receive daily life (Isa 50:4; John 10:27).
—*Pastor Jones*

PRAYER PARTNERS during this MOW cycle

Brethren, all of us desire to make our prayers more meaningful and effective with God. Prayer partners can encourage us in this. They will have an impact on our personal walk with Christ and in our families. To this end, we offer the following best practices for prayer partners. Please get a prayer partner this cycle, discuss these with him, and incorporate what is useful into your regular prayer habits.

- Have a first meeting with your partner over a meal or coffee to get to know each other better, and to share longer term needs.
- Younger men seek out the older to benefit from mentoring.
- Pray on Wednesday evening together about once a month, and pray weekly in person or by phone or video.
- Near the end of the cycle, pray in person to cap off the partner experience.
- When the weather permits, meet at one of your homes or a park for prayer—the outdoors often stimulates deeper prayer.
- Pray the Scriptures back to God. Turn a verse into a prayer by adjusting some words.^d Use it with your prayer partner for mutual encouragement. For example, “Lord, help me to flee from evil, to make no provision for the flesh, to abstain from fleshly lusts.”
- Personalize Scripture verses in prayer: insert your own name for appropriate pronouns. Do this with your prayer partner for mutual encouragement.^e
- Keep a chart for a visual aid to accountability with your prayer partner: week #, date, called?, prayed together?, prayed privately for the partner’s requests?
- Try “conversational prayer.” Rather than each praying once for half your time, instead each prays for one item, and the other responds on that item (as appropriate) and/or then mentions another, going back and forth in shorter prayers.

“CONTINUE IN PRAYER”

Admonition for prayer in the new year — Colossians 4:2

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

It is interesting to remark how large a portion of Sacred Writ is occupied with the subject of prayer, either in furnishing examples, enforcing precepts, or pronouncing promises.

We scarcely open the Bible before we read, “Then began men to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gen 4:26); and just as we are about to close the volume, the “Amen” of an earnest supplication meets our ear (Rev 22:21). Instances are plentiful.

^c David F. Wells, *The Courage to Be Protestant* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans; 2008), 191-2.

^d For assistance in this, an extensive list of appropriate verses is at the church website under the Resources tab, “Praying for Evangelism.”

^e For example: “God...has blessed ____ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose ____ in Him before the foundation of the world, that ____ would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined ____ to adoption as [a] son...to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on ____ in the Beloved” (Eph 1:3-6).

Here we find a wrestling Jacob, there a Daniel who prayed three times a day, and a David who with all his heart called upon his God. On the mountain, we see Elijah; in the dungeon, Paul and Silas. We have multitudes of commands and myriads of promises. What does this teach us but the sacred importance and necessity of prayer?

We may be certain that whatever God has made prominent in His Word, He intended to be conspicuous in our lives. If He has *said* much about prayer, it is because He knows we have much need of it. So deep are our necessities that until we are in heaven we must not cease to pray. Do you lack nothing? Then I fear you do not know your poverty. Have you no mercy to ask of God? Then may the Lord's mercy show you your misery! A prayerless soul is a Christless soul. Prayer is the lisping of the believing infant, the shout of the fighting believer, the requiem of the dying saint falling asleep in Jesus. It is the breath, the watchword, the comfort, the strength, the honor of a Christian.

If you are a child of God, you will seek your Father's face and live in your Father's love. Pray that this year you may be holy, humble, zealous, and patient. Have closer communion with Christ, and enter more often into the banqueting-house of His love. Pray that you may be an example and a blessing to others and that you may live more to the glory of your Master. The motto for this year must be, "Continue in prayer" (Col 4:2).¹ ❧

FAMILY WORSHIP during this MOW cycle

We encourage all men to practice family/personal devotions daily in their homes. MCBC recommends using a daily reading plan; one from Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843) is available in the church's bookstore and website. For the ten-week period during this MOW cycle, M'Cheyne's plan reads through Mark, Luke, and John. We have developed **MOW questions** for your daily use for each of these chapters, which are provided at the end of this manual.

If you desire to improve spiritual effectiveness in your family/personal worship, we offer the following **best practices**. Please try these and incorporate what is useful into your regular routine.

- Use the MOW family worship questions at the back of this manual.
- For those who are just starting to have family worship, keep it very simple: read a chapter and then ask one or two questions.
- If you need to be more consistent, keep a chart for visual accountability: week #, day of week, had your quiet time, chapter read, had family worship. Ask your wife and/or your prayer partner to hold you accountable by asking you about it.
- If you get behind, don't give up or feel pressure. Rather, pick up with the current day.
- Read the chapter from Mark, Luke, or John in your own morning quiet time, and pick out one or a few questions from the MOW questions (at the back of this manual) to ask that evening.
- If you have children, fit the level of your questions to the level of their understanding.
- Fit the duration of your family worship to the ages of your children. Young children will need only 30 minutes or less.
- Use just one question for young children, and share it at the beginning so they can listen for it as you read.
- For younger children, stop reading after the verse that has a MOW question for it. Ask the question, and then reread the last verse if appropriate.
- Mix it up: on some occasions, take a walk or go to a park.
- Use object lessons to illustrate the spiritual truth of your devotional. If it is a place, consider conducting your family worship there.
- Ask open-ended questions as much as possible, those that cannot be answered with yes/no: who, what, where, when, why, and how.
- Aim for the hearts of the children, not just their minds. Help them see that they are dealing with a personal and holy God, not just a set of facts.
- Rotate the reading of a few verses each among family members.
- Sing a hymn to start with, pray at the end.

- Ask those who play instruments to accompany the singing.
- Have older teens take a turn in leading family worship, guiding the reading, asking the questions, leading the discussion.
- Occasionally, consider having older teens prepare and lead a devotional on their own favorite passages.
- After reading, ask family members to share a verse or section that stood out to them.

WEEK 1 JANUARY 28 – FEBRUARY 3 PREREQUISITES FOR LISTENING TO GOD

“O sirs, as you grow in your salvation, be more devoted to reading the Scripture than you have ever done before; be often in applying these Scriptures upon your hearts:

‘These words...shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates’ (Deu 6:6-9).

‘Go and read from the scroll...the words of the LORD to the people in the LORD’S house...Read them to all the people of Judah who come from their cities. Perhaps their supplication will come before the LORD, and everyone will turn from his evil way’ (Jer 36:6-7).

‘Search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me’ (John 5:39).

“In these Scriptures God requires all sorts of people—both men, women, children, and strangers, both learned and unlearned—to read the Scriptures, and to search after the heavenly treasures that are laid up in them as men search for gold and silver in the ore. And Paul charges Timothy that he should give attention to reading:

‘Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching’ (1Ti 4:13).’”

—Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)³

“PREREQUISITES FOR LISTENING TO GOD” by Ben Davis

As a teenager, my dad and some other dads took me and a couple of friends for a hike at Raven Cliff Falls. We’d been there before, hiking to an overlook. But this time we were planning to descend into the valley and climb to the rim on the other side of the river. The hike would take all day.

After arriving, we struck out to the overlook, where the dads started photographing the scene. Since I’d already been there, I was ready to go. So, I started down the cutbacks into the valley. About thirty feet down, I turned back to see if my behavior was acceptable. My dad saw me and waved to me. It was all I needed, I started running further into the valley. One of the other boys joined my jaunt down the trail.

When we reached the bottom of the valley, we reached a fork in the path. My friend asked, “which way?” I’d seen a map, but it was a vague memory. Despite my uncertainty, I chose a direction. A direction that would lead us wandering through the valley for hours. We were lost.

Needless to say, we made it out with the help of some other hikers and a ranger. But my choices ruined the day for everyone. My trouble started at the rim, just below the overlook. I took an ambiguous non-verbal and took it to mean exactly what I hoped. My personal story was that dad had given me permission. But I wasn’t listening to him like he was my dad. I was in a hurry and didn’t seek his true intention. He was calling me to return, not go forward.

Hear My Voice. Christ distinguished between His true disciples by their response to His words. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27). They hear and they follow Him.

Remember that fruitless people hear the Word (Mat 13:1-9, 18-23). Even those with stony ground in their heart hear the Word. The difference is in the response. Christ’s true disciples carefully listen, internalizing His speech until it turns into action.

Presuppositions. The response of Christ emerges from a set presupposition about the speech of God. We believe, without requiring proof, that God speaks and that His Word has the power of authority. When we view the Scriptures through this frame, we give it the attention and weight it deserves.

When I ran down the valley, I was not giving my dad's communication much attention or weight. If I had, I would have asked him about going down the trail before leaving the overlook. Having failed to do that, I ought to have sought clarity about his thinking instead of assuming permission.

God Fearing. Christ's true disciples not only presuppose He speaks and has authority; we also have a pair of interrelated emotional responses: we both love Him and fear Him. "My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." These emotions, born out of our presuppositions, draw us to our Lord and goad us on to faithful following of His Word. This is the fear of the Lord. ❧

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES: PREREQUISITES TO LISTENING

A. "My sheep hear My voice" by A. W. Pink

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."—John 10:27

"Observe diligently the three things which are here predicated of the sheep. *First*, they hear Christ's voice. Now, to hear His voice means far more than to be acquainted with His words as they are recorded in Scripture, and more even than believing they are His words. When it was said unto Israel, 'the Lord will not hear you in that day' (1Sa 8:18), it signified that He would not heed their requests or grant their petitions. When God complained, 'I spoke, but you did not hear' (Isa 65:12), it was not that they were physically deaf but that their hearts were steeled against Him, as the remainder of the verse indicates: 'And you did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight.'

"When God says, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; *listen to Him!*' (Mat 17:5), He is requiring something more of us than that we simply listen respectfully and believingly to what He says: He is demanding that we submit ourselves unreservedly to His authority, that we respond promptly to His orders, that we obey Him. In Proverbs 8:33, 'hearing' is contrasted with refusing;^f and in Hebrews 3:15, we read 'Today if you hear his voice, *do not harden* your hearts.' When Christ declares of His flock, 'My sheep hear My voice,' He signifies that they *heed* it—they are not intractable but responsive, doing what He bids.

"*Second*, He declares, 'and I know them,' that is, with a knowledge of approval. *Third*, 'and they follow Me': not the bent of the flesh, not the solicitations of Satan, not the ways of the world, but the example which Christ has left them (1Pe 2:21). Of this it is said, they 'follow the Lamb wherever He goes' (Rev 14:4). But in order to follow Christ, self has to be denied and the cross taken up (Mat 16:24). Only those who thus 'hear' are 'known' of Christ, and those who 'follow' Him shall 'never perish.'"

—A. W. Pink (1886-1952)⁴

In this A. W. Pink quotation, what helpful insights would you like to remember about listening?

B. Presuppositions regarding Listening

God commands us to listen to Him. And this listening must not be careless or casual. God is serious about wanting us to hear Him clearly. But while we are not *of* this world, we are nevertheless *in* this world—with all of its distractions and corrupting influences. Listening well to anyone is hard work; hearing from God Himself requires a serious, deliberate commitment to listen effectively.

Right away, we are confronted with some *presuppositions*, fundamental truths everywhere in Scripture that form the basis for our understanding—truths that we may be taking for granted. Yet we dare not presume that our listening is on solid ground when it may not be. We begin our study in this MOW cycle with these fundamentals that undergird our becoming excellent listeners.

^f *hearing...refusing* – That is, not hearing what God is saying is equated with refusing Him.

As we search the Scriptures to understand listening, we ask you to review each group of verses and the corresponding presupposition, which reflects what the verses say about listening to God. See how the verses speak to that presuppositional truth. Then we'll ask you to select one presupposition that stands out to you.

"Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the LORD speaks." (Isa 1:2)

"Give ear and hear my voice, Listen and hear my words." (Isa 28:23)

"Hear the word of the LORD, O scoffers who rule this people." (Isa 28:14)

"Draw near, O nations, to hear; and listen, O peoples! Let the earth and all it contains hear, and the world and all that springs from it." (Isa 34:1)

Presupposition 1: God commands all men everywhere to hear Him. All men, including ourselves, are responsible to do so.

"Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word." (John 8:43)

"He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God." (John 8:47)

"Go to this people and say, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; and you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; For the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.'" (Acts 28:26-27)

2. Unbelievers cannot truly hear from God until He gives them a new heart by His Spirit through His Word (see also Mark 4:1-12).

"My ears You have opened...I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart." (Psa 40:6,8)

"Then the eyes of those who see will not be blinded, And the ears of those who hear will listen." (Isa 32:3)

3. God opens our ears so that we are able to hear and understand Him. Because He has done this, we are responsible to listen.

"So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as it is today." (Deu 6:24)

"Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel...I am God, your God." (Psa 50:7)

"A voice came out of the cloud, 'This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!'" (Mark 9:7)

4: As a believer, God commands me to listen to and obey Him for my eternal good. He expects me to listen to Him when He speaks.

"Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them." (Luke 10:23-24)

"The God of our fathers has appointed you...to hear an utterance from His mouth." (Acts 22:14)

5. Being invited and enabled to hear God's Word is a blessed privilege not to be treated casually.

"It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear." (Isa 65:24)

"Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know." (Jer 33:3)

"At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued." (Dan 9:23)

6. Understand that God continually hears us: The issue in our listening is always our hearing Him.

"Only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:42)

"Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (John 8:37)

7. God declares that truly listening to Him is the one thing necessary above all our tasks, projects, and plans!

Of the above seven presuppositions, which one stands out to you that you want to be more aware of as you grow in listening to God speak through reading His Word? Why?

C. Prerequisites to Listening

"I heard something like...the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns."
(Rev 19:6)

"The LORD will cause His voice of authority to be heard." (Isa 30:30)

Prerequisite 1. Because the Lord God Almighty reigns over all, we must submit to His authority over us.

"They rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me." (Eze 20:8)

"There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God." (Rom 3:11)

2. The willingness to listen to God is a gift from Him to be treasured.

"There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel against the LORD." (Pro 21:30)

"They who have not heard shall understand." (Rom 15:21)

3. We cannot thwart God's purposes by refusing to listen.

"Hear this, all peoples; Give ear, all inhabitants of the world, Both low and high, Rich and poor together." (Psa 49:1-2)

"The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands." (Psa 19:1)

4. All the world is responsible to listen to God's general revelation and His call to repent and believe.

"Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." (Eph 5:18)

"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom." (Col 3:16)

5. In order to hear what God is saying to us, we must be filled with His Spirit, i.e., no unconfessed sin, seeking to do His will, loving Him first.

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord' (Eph 6:4). This exhortation is preceded by instruction to 'be filled with the Spirit' (5:18), while the parallel exhortation in Colossians 3:21 is preceded by the exhortation to 'let the Word of Christ richly dwell in you' (3:16), showing that we cannot possibly discharge our duties unless we are filled with the Spirit and the Word."—A. W. Pink⁵

Which of these five prerequisites do you want to apply more consistently when you seek to hear God speak through His Word?

PRAYER PARTNERS THIS WEEK

This week, try to set a regular time for weekly prayer together with your prayer partner by video, phone, or in person. Discuss what presuppositions you both have about listening. Also share your thoughts about the article on prerequisites by Ben Davis.

"When you go to prayer, be convinced of your absolute need of the Holy Spirit. Look for Him...and lay yourselves open to His influences to revive that conviction at every occasion of prayer—and keep it throughout." —Andrew Murray (1828-1917)⁶

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP THIS WEEK

Consider using the MOW questions at the end of this manual in your family/personal worship this week as a tryout to see if they are helpful. Notice this week's suggestions for object lessons: military medals, a wedding, a boat, and a crowded place. Object lessons illustrate a spiritual truth and help it lodge in memory!

WEEK 2 February 4-10 THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING TO GOD

“He who listens to me shall live securely, and will be at ease from the dread of evil.” —Proverbs 1:33

“Like God’s own child, Reader, are you listening to Him? Then you are under His cover. You have already found your place of safety where no evil can reach you—dwelling not only safely but assured of safety, quiet even from fear of evil. As Noah in the ark, in conscious security while the world was perishing around him (Gen 7:11-16). As David, fearless in imminent danger because he realized a refuge in his God. Yes, even the coming day of distress and anguish brings with it no fear of evil. ‘The day is coming, burning like a furnace’ (Mal 4:1). You shall see the world on fire and feel you have lost, and can lose, nothing. The ‘day of darkness and gloominess’ will be to you a day of unclouded sunshine, even the entrance into everlasting joy (Luke 21:28; 2Pe 3:10-13).”

—Charles Bridges (1794-1869)⁷

“THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING TO GOD” by Randy Smith

Who are you listening to from day to day, hour to hour? Obviously, we cannot, nor should we, be listening to everyone who is clamoring for our attention. What factors do we consider in deciding to whom we will listen? Some of those factors include time constraints, the importance of the person speaking, the relevance or truthfulness of what is being said, personal benefit (if I listen), detriment (if I don’t listen), etc.

Years ago, when our family was in Papua New Guinea for our first assignment, a situation came up that illustrates listening. We had only been there for a couple of months when I received a letter from the provincial governor asking me to come to his capital the next day to meet with him. As I recall, there was nothing impressive about the handwritten note. No information was given concerning the time or the purpose of the meeting. I don’t remember all of my thoughts at that time, but various questions probably went through my mind: was this note even from the governor? did I have time to do this? what could he want to see *me* about? is it really that important? how will this benefit me/our missionary team? and what if I don’t go? In the end, I went—despite it being a long, sun-up to sun-down trip, with nearly eight hours of that time spent driving. Why did I listen to the governor and go? Because I considered him to be important and, therefore, listening to his words (fulfilling his request) was important as well.

It turned out that the governor just wanted to talk about the government-owned bulldozer, which had been put under the control of the missionary team for a few months to be used for maintenance of the bush road. At that point, it had been broken down for a few weeks and he wanted to get an update. In retrospect, the meeting didn’t really seem that important, but I know that going and showing respect for his position was the right thing to do.

If we deem it important, based on various factors, to listen to another man, it is infinitely more important for us to listen to God. God’s importance (consider all His attributes) is unparalleled. God is unique. Therefore, what He says to us is of unsurpassed importance. Not making time for Him is to our own hurt. Not listening to Him is to our detriment. What He is saying to us is only truth and completely relevant. Listening to Him will result in great benefit and blessing. We can’t not listen to Him!

In Luke 10, Mary was sitting at Jesus’ feet, listening to His words. Martha was distracted with all her preparations and protested, asking the Lord to tell Mary to help her serve. Jesus rebukes Martha, pointing out that she was worried and bothered about many things when only one thing was necessary, the thing that Mary had chosen to do: listening to the words of Jesus. How we need to regularly shut out the distractions of this world and sit at Jesus’ feet, listening to His words!

There are some people in this world that we do need to be listening to, but to most we don’t need to be listening...especially if doing so is at the expense of listening to God. Brethren, we need to understand how and when God is speaking to us, acknowledge that listening to Him is of the greatest importance, and do so in faith and obedience. ☞

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES: THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

A. Full Meaning of “Hear”

The Scriptures mention listening and hearing far more than we may realize. The Hebrew and Greek words are translated many ways depending on the context; these reveal the fuller meanings God intended.

“Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.” (1Ti 4:13)

“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.” (Heb 2:1)

“Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, But he who regards reproof will be honored.” (Pro 13:18)

“Make your ear attentive to wisdom.” (Pro 2:2)

“Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, And apply your mind to my knowledge; For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you.” (Pro 22:17-18a)

“Apply your heart to discipline and your ears to words of knowledge.” (Pro 23:12)

“Take hold of instruction, guard her – for she is your life” (Pro 4:13)

“Hear this, all peoples; Give ear, all inhabitants of the world, Both low and high, Rich and poor together.” (Psa 49:1-2)

“And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” (Mark 4:20)

“But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.” (Jam 1:22-25)

“Let these words sink into your ears.” (Luke 9:44)

“Now therefore, my sons, listen to me, And pay attention to the words of my mouth.” (Pro 7:24)

“Heed instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD. But he who sins against me injures himself; All those who hate me love death.” (Pro 8:33-36)

“The one who despises the word will be in debt to it, But the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded.” (Pro 13:13)

Which of these aspects of “hearing God” do you want to practice more consistently as you listen to God speak through His Word?

B. Christ: Our Great Example for Listening

In His public ministry on this earth, our Lord Jesus Christ perfectly demonstrated God-given listening: to others with compassion and focused attention, and to God His Father with submission and understanding. We want to notice especially how He listened to God so that we may follow in His steps.

“My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me.” (John 8:16)

“I have many things to speak and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.” (John 8:26)

“I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.” (John 8:28)

“The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.” (John 14:10)

“The word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.” (John 14:24)

“So that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me.” (John 14:31)

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” (John 15:10)

Of the preceding verses, which ones do you want to claim as your own in following Christ’s example?

C. Listening Empowers the Christian Life

“Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.” (Jam 1:22)

1. Listening positions us to obey and be blessed.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.” (Rev 3:20)

“He answered and said to them, ‘My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.’” (Luke 8:21)

2. Hearing the Word and then doing it create entrance to intimate fellowship with God.

“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear...Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it will be measured to you; and more will be given you besides.” (Mark 4:23-24)

“Take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.” (Luke 8:18)

3. Listening enables spiritual growth. Our going deeper with the Lord depends upon carefully hearing His Word, even in familiar passages.

“Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you; O Israel, if you would listen to Me!” (Psa 81:8)

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev 2 and 3)

4. If we will commit to listen carefully, then God has promised to speak to us.

“Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel said, ‘Speak, for Your servant is listening.’” (1Sa 3:10)

5. If we will commit to listen carefully, then we have positioned ourselves to hear from God.

“Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” (Gal 5:16)

“Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Gal 5:24)

6. Walking by the Spirit fuels our listening to God.

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, And do not return there without watering the earth And making it bear and sprout, And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.” (Isa 55:10-11)

7. God’s Word accomplishes the purposes for which He sent it. Therefore, we must listen to know His purposes.

Which of these truths most empowers you to listen to God effectively?

PRAYER PARTNERS THIS WEEK

Meet with your prayer partner in person or by phone. Discuss what it means to “hear” God’s voice when you are reading the Scriptures, Christ’s example, and how the Christian life depends upon this. Discuss the article on “The Importance of Listening” by Randy Smith.

“If your weak prayers be once mingled with the glorious and heavenly prayer of Jesus Christ, the weakness will soon vanish, and your prayer will find acceptance with God.”—*Isaac Ambrose* (1604-1664)⁸

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP THIS WEEK

This week’s family worship questions (at the back of this manual) include some aimed at youth, some aimed at teens, and some for everyone. Object lessons this week include listening to a crowd, visiting a cemetery, meeting an amputee, two tablets of the Law, stacks of money, and security officers!

“If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice truth.”

—1 John 1:6

“Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”—Galatians 5:16

“When we are chastened, we sometimes think we are learning nothing. Sorrow overwhelms us. Disaster stuns us. We become confused, nervous, agitated, or perhaps insensible. We seem to derive no profit. Yet [when we repent,] before long we begin to feel the blessed results. Maturity of judgment, patience in listening to the voice of God, a keener appetite for His Word, a quicker discernment of its meaning—these are soon realized as the gracious results of chastening. The mind has undergone a most thorough discipline and has, moreover, made wondrous progress in the knowledge of divine truth through the teaching of the Holy Ghost.”

—Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)⁹

“RESULTS OF NOT LISTENING TO GOD” by Chris Baker

Editor’s note: In their responses to the Word of God, we can group people into four categories. 1) Those who truly hear what God is saying, are born again, believe, and grow spiritually (with struggles and occasional setbacks). 2) Those who are truly saved, but who go through longer periods when they are not listening to God. 3) Those who seem to hear the Word, and assemble with the Lord’s people, and perhaps even pray and seem to grow, but who have never been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, do not have new hearts, and thus are not saved and have only a false profession; when confronted with sin, they may fall away completely. 4) Those who hear the Word and reject it. Distinguishing between categories 2-3 can be a challenge for Christians. One key is that those who truly believe (1-2) repent from their sins when they hear God’s voice and are convicted, while false professors (3) may give only a legal repentance, i.e., they only regret getting caught in their sins and the consequences.

“Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.”—Hebrews 12:6

“Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard.”—Proverbs 3:15 (KJV)

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.”—Galatians 6:7

The principle of sowing and reaping is always at work—for good or ill. The following example is one of the sad stories I have experienced. One young lady I had counseled is a tragic example of why we need to listen to the Lord in His Word and through church leadership.

Sometime after high school she, as a Christian, went to a Christian college. After this training she joined a solid biblical church. After a while she quit coming to worship and was dealt with by the church leadership. Failure to be with God’s people, which would help strengthen her in the faith and her walk, resulted in making poor choices. Sometime later she had an abortion.

She later married a lost divorced man. She was treated very poorly and disrespected by that family. She has had financial management difficulties for years. In her 70s today, she lives alone and is still working full-time. She cannot afford to retire.

Though she currently seems to be working hard to please the Lord, she could have enjoyed the Lord’s blessings all along the way by being humble enough to take spiritual counsel and love the Lord first instead of herself.

Truly listening to the Lord is an act of humility, and humility is the oil that makes the Christian life run with joy. This does not mean that all the circumstances in life work out the way we would have them to work out, but it does mean that there can be joy that God gives regardless of those circumstances. ☞

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES: RESULTS OF NOT LISTENING

A. God Acts When We Do Not Listen to Him

When we are listening to God, we are in fellowship with Him. But when the world, the flesh, or the devil causes us to drift or turn away, we do not hear God when He speaks to us through His Word—exactly because we are not listening to

Him. God then pours out His grace on us to bring chastening, conviction of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and restoration to communion with Him. How does God act to regain our attention?

“For [our fathers] disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.” (Heb 12:10)

“[The Spirit], when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin.” (John 8:46)

1. Conviction is God’s primary method to cause us to begin listening to Him again when we have stopped.

“During that night the king could not sleep, so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king.” (Est 6:1)

“In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; My soul refused to be comforted. When I remember God, then I am disturbed; When I sigh, then my spirit grows faint.” (Psa 77:2-3)

2. God will remove our peace in order to restore us to listening to Him. This shows itself when we are unable to sleep, concentrate, or rest easily. It shows itself when our minds wander or we become easily tempted, envious, or discontented.

“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.” (Pro 12:15)

“He who chastens the nations, will He not rebuke, Even He who teaches man knowledge?” (Psa 94:10)

“It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man than for one to listen to the song of fools.” (Ecc 7:5)

3. God will send true Christians to correct us when we have strayed.

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.” (Heb 12:5-6)

“My people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: and they walked in their own counsels.” (Psa 81:11)

“So He said, ‘Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD.’ And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing.” (1Ki 19:11-12)

4. God brings difficulties, trials, and afflictions to get our attention when we have ceased to listen to Him.

“My life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing; My strength has failed because of my iniquity, and my body has wasted away.” (Psa 31:10)

“My soul is greatly dismayed; But You, O LORD—how long? Return, O LORD, rescue my soul.” (Psa 6:3-4)

5. Our prayers often will go unanswered when we are not listening to God. We dare not pray casually if we are not carefully listening for God’s answer.

Which of these acts of God are you experiencing now or in the past? To which ones do you need to give attention as you listen to God speak through His Word?

B. Severe Consequences of Not Listening to God

“You bore with them for many years, and admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets, Yet they would not give ear. Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.” (Neh 9:30)

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness...their foolish heart was darkened...they became fools...Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity.” (Rom 1:18,21,22,24)

Consequence 1. God will ultimately abandon us when we continue in not listening to Him.

“You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, Because I knew that you would deal very treacherously; And you have been called a rebel from birth.” (Isa 48:8)

2. Danger: God can close our ears so that we cannot hear Him, which is a place of great danger.

“Because I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention; And you neglected all my counsel and did not want my reproof.” (Pro 1:24-25)

“A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.” (Pro 29:1)

3. Not to hear God when He speaks is to actively refuse Him and not to regard Him. This opens us to great danger beyond remedy.

“My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, To walk in their own devices. Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!” (Psa 81:10-13)

“For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.” (Heb 2:1)

“The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (2Ti 4:3)

4. Rebellion and apostasy begin when we neglect hearing God speak.

“And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, ‘Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear?’” (Mark 8:17-18)

5. Not hearing leads to lack of perceiving, lack of understanding, a hardened heart, and not remembering!

“He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.” (Pro 28:9)

“But My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices.” (Psa 81:11-12)

6. If you turn away from listening to God’s Word, God may refuse your prayers; they even can become an abomination to Him.

Have you experienced any of these consequences from not listening? Write down the one(s) that you want especially to avoid in the future.

PRAYER PARTNERS THIS WEEK

Discuss with your prayer partner your personal experience with God’s responses to your lack of listening in the past, and the severe consequences you may have experienced. Discuss the article on “Results of Not Listening” by Chris Baker.

“If prayer does not constantly endeavor the ruin of sin, then sin will ruin prayer, and utterly alienate the soul from it.”

—John Owen (1616-1683)¹⁰

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP THIS WEEK

Even if you are not using M’Cheyne’s reading schedule, consider reading from Mark, Luke, and John during the coming eight weeks in order to use the MOW family worship questions (at the end of this manual). The object lesson this week is the tearing of an old bed sheet, perhaps the lesson in this whole series the children will remember most.

"Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me." —Hebrews 3:15

"The advice that I would give you is that you especially take heed of this dangerous case of a hardened heart. In the name of God, see that you run not into this miserable state—or if you be in it, O that I could awaken you, so that you might speedily be brought out of it. Take the counsel of the Holy Spirit: 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.' I say *today*, because He may not bear with you till tomorrow, 'Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth' (Pro 27:1)." —Richard Baxter (1615-1691)¹¹

"REMOVING OBSTACLES TO LISTENING" by David Lowry

"Not again! Why can't they just stay asleep? How am I supposed to get anything out of my Bible reading when I can't concentrate?" When my kids were very young, they would wake up early during my devotional time. A more rational (and less sleep-deprived) father would have recognized that most toddlers have the mentality of a pre-electric-light civilization, and that sun-up means kids-up. But this writer had not yet discovered the deep connection between his kids' circadian rhythm and the Copernican heliocentric model.

Naturally, as a deeply sanctified father, I immediately took this complaint to the Lord: "Lord, You want me to listen to You, yet You keep putting the sun outside my children's window and waking them up." (Please forgive the disturbing lack of understanding that this circumstance was a direct fulfillment of the Noahic covenant; this was in the pre-catechism days). Deep down, I considered my lack of spiritual nourishment to be God's fault: He created the circumstance that kept me from concentrating on His words.

As the situations continued, this "frustration"—our preferred euphemism for sinful anger—hindered my hearing what He had to say to me and my communion with Him. Certainly, circumstances outside of our control can create distractions that keep us from scriptural nourishment. But my reaction, one of blaming God and growing increasingly more angry, ensured that the Spirit would keep His promise: "The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (Jam 1:20, ESV).

So what is a truly godly father to do? If I were to "receive with meekness the implanted word," I would have to "put away...wickedness." In short, *repent*. I had to confess and forsake my anger and accept by faith that these children, for which my wife and I had prayed, were part of God's plan for sanctifying me. I finally did so.

The solution to the surface problem turned out to be surprisingly quite simple. We ordered a kid's alarm clock that would light up at the appropriate time instead of going off with a blaring noise. If the kids were asleep, it wouldn't wake them up, but if they were awake, they knew exactly when they were allowed to get up. After a morning or two of training them on the procedure, they had it down pat.

Were there ever any more disturbances from the kids during my time in God's Word? Of course! Only parents expecting their first child would think otherwise. Seasoned parents know challenges like the one I've described are consistent throughout the child rearing years. But God taught me an important scriptural law that I'm still learning: Every person must remove obstacles to listening (for me, to become slow to anger) if he expects to be able to hear what God has to say. ✨

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES: REMOVING OBSTACLES

A. Common Obstacles

"If we are living in the allowed indulgence of one known sin, we have an obstacle to hearing from God. 'For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard' (Heb 2:2-3).

"If we are building upon any other foundation than Christ and Him crucified, we have an obstacle that must be removed before we can hear from God. 'For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ' (1Co 3:11).

“If we are preferring an earthly object, of whatever kind, to Christ; if we are seeking our delight in any created things, we have an obstacle that blocks our hearing from God.”—*T. S. B. Reade* (1776-1841)¹²

B. Removing Obstacles to Hearing

Before we can have steady growth in effective listening, we are wise to remove the obstacles that impede progress. What are some of these obstacles?

“And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, ‘Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember.’” (Mark 8:17-18)

“In humility receive the word.” (Jam 1:21)

1. A hardened heart will block effectively hearing almost everything. The solution is a teachable heart.

“Concerning Him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.” (Heb 5:11-12)

“Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.” (1Ti 5:21)

2. We can become dull of hearing, which makes it extremely difficult to hear the Word clearly. The solution is a keen ear to hear and learn.

“Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them.’ But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.” (Mat 13:13-16)

“But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears from hearing.” (Zec 7:11)

3. When we do not hear, sometimes it is because we have become dull and closed our ears. The solution is to commit to hear: to unstop our ears and decide to focus on hearing.

“Many plans are in a man’s heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.” (Pro 19:21)

“Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.” (Ecc 7:29)

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.” (Pro 3:5-6)

4. Our independent desires and plans tend to resist God’s Word. Therefore, submit these to God before expecting to listen well.

“Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way; He who hates reproof will die.” (Pro 15:10)

“A poor yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction.” (Ecc 4:13)

5. He who hates reproof will die eternally. The solution is to treat reproof as coming from the Lord Himself for your eternal good.

“The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Rom 8:7-8)

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom 12:2)

6. A lack of listening to God often reflects a mind that is set on the world. The solution is to renew our minds to think like Christ thinks (Phi 2:5-8).

Which of these obstacles have prevented you from hearing the voice of God? Write down the one(s) that you want to work to overcome.

C. Blessed Consequences of Removed Obstacles

When we remove obstacles in listening to God, we are able to hear His voice better and receive His intended blessings.

“And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” (Mark 4:20)

1. When we truly hear God, we will bring forth much fruit.

“With many such parables He was speaking the word to them [enabling deeper communication], so far as they were able to hear it [indicating growing in listening skill].” (Mark 4:33)

2. Growing in listening skill leads to deeper communication with God.

“Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reproof to a listening ear.” (Pro 25:12)

3. Wise reproof is extremely valuable when we listen.

“Heed instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD. But he who sins against me injures himself; All those who hate me love death.” (Pro 8:33-36)

4. We obtain favor from God.

“But he who listens to me shall live securely [spiritually] and will be at ease from the dread of evil.” (Pro 1:33)

5. We dwell safely from fear of evil.

“If only you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your well-being would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.” (Isa 48:18)

6. We may have all around well-being and spiritual prosperity.

“Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live.” (Isa 55:2-3)

7. Being a good listener is of high value in this life, and essential preparation for the next.

Have you experienced any of these blessings from listening to God? Write down the one(s) that has been a special encouragement to you.

PRAYER PARTNERS THIS WEEK

Discuss with your prayer partner some of the obstacles you have faced against hearing the voice of God while reading the Scriptures. Share your experience with removing these obstacles and the results. Discuss the article on “Removing Obstacles” by David Lowry.

“We cannot bring our hearts into a right frame for prayer without the Spirit’s assistance. Our inability to do so is the reason why [prayer seems so awkward].”
—Thomas Ridgley (1667-1734)¹³

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP THIS WEEK

Object lessons this week in the family worship questions (at the back of the manual) include a secluded place, old and new garments, good and bad fruit, a building's foundation, an emergency room, a community garden, and a new-born nursery. Fathers, use these to better engage the minds of your children in something they may remember for a long time.

WEEK 5 February 25 – March 2 PREPARING TO LISTEN TO GOD

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”—Deuteronomy 6:4-5

“A Christian has indeed a promptness to obey, and a ready compliance of his will to the will of God—which is the special fruit of the Spirit of grace. The will of a confirmed Christian is set in motion as soon as he knows the will of God. He does not wait for other reasons to act; God’s will *is* his reason. This is the habit of submission and obedience; it makes him say, ‘Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening’; and ‘Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?’ And ‘Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God’ (1Sa 3:10; Acts 9:6 KJV; Psa 143:10).”
—Richard Baxter (1615-1691)¹⁴

“PREPARING TO LISTEN TO GOD” by Steve Bixby

- Job 33:12 You have commanded *the morning* since the world began.
- Psalms 5:3 *In the morning* O Lord you hear my voice; *in the morning* I lay my request before you and wait expectantly.
- Psalms 30:5 Rejoicing comes *in the morning*.
- Psalms 59:16 I will sing of your strength *in the morning*.
- Psalms 88:13 O Lord, I cry to you for help; *in the morning* my prayer comes before you.
- Psalms 90:14 Satisfy us *in the morning* with your unfailing love.
- Psalms 92:2 O most High; I declare your lovingkindness *in the morning*.
- Psalms 130:6 My soul waits for the Lord more than the watchman for *the morning*.
- Isaiah 50:4 He awakens me *morning by morning*. He awakens my ear to listen as a disciple.
- Isaiah 58:8 **THEN** your light will break out **like the dawn!!**

For well over half of my years, I lived a “hit and miss” sort of life, a defeated lifestyle. I would get up, take a shower, rush off to work, come home, and have family worship. Feeling guilty I would read a few verses, mumble a prayer, and fall into bed. This went on for years. I had no victory over my thought life. I became a slave to lying.

I would lie to my wife, my friends, my supervisor at work—everyone. Time after time I would cry out to God—but no relief, no victory. I became cynical and hardened.

I believe it was the last Sunday of our second year at MCBC that Pastor Minnick pleaded with us to get up in the morning and spend time with God. That night I went home, threw myself across my bed, and with tears of anguish and desperation I wept my way back to the foot of the cross. Morning after morning I would get up at 5:00 AM, take my shower, go into my secret place, and shut the door. I could feel God’s gentle knocking at my heart’s door. I would out loud invite Him to come in—and He did come in every morning, and we dined together (Rev 3:20).

That first year was extremely painful. As we dined together through His Word, He would reveal to me the deep hardened root of my sins. That year, I don’t remember how many people I had to go to and ask for forgiveness. But thank God, Isaiah 58:8 became a living reality: “Then your light will break out like the dawn and your recovery will speedily spring forth.” So,

Number 1. Get up early *in the morning*. Make that non-negotiable.

Number 2. Go into your secret place, shut the door, and open your heart’s door.

Number 3. I would suggest reading a devotional like Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening*^g before opening the Word.

One year I read through "Valley of Vision."^h These prayers are so powerfully convicting, I could not sit at my desk. I had to fall on my knees and out loud pray them back to God. I have done this for years now and truly "the joy of the Lord [has become my] strength" (Neh 8:10).

I met God in the morning when the day was at its best,
And His presence came like sunrise, like a glory in my breast.
All day long His presence lingered, All day long He stayed with me,
And we sailed in perfect calmness, O're a very troubled sea.
Other ships were blown and battered, Other ships were sore distressed,
But the winds which seemed to drive them, Brought to me a peace and rest.
Then I thought of other mornings with a keen remorse of mind,
When I too had loosed the moorings, with His presence left behind.
So I think I know the secret learned from many a troubled way,
You *must seek Him in the morning*, If you want Him through the day.

—Author unknown ❧

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES: PREPARING TO LISTEN

Hearing God's truth simply will not happen unless our hearts and minds are prepared. There is both an active physical preparation and an inner mindset required for effective listening.

A. Actively Preparing to Hear

"Hear this, all peoples; Give ear, all inhabitants of the world, Both low and high, Rich and poor together." (Psa 49:1-2)

Preparation 1. Realize that all *must* listen to God.

"Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." (1Sa 3:10)

2. We must assume a ready inner posture for involved listening and then give undivided attention.

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Luke 8:8)

"Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding." (Pro 2:2)

3. We must purposely and intentionally decide to listen.

"I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And I find knowledge and discretion." (Pro 8:12)

"By me kings reign, And rulers decree justice." (Pro 18:15)

4. We must be diligent in seeking to hear. Our prudence in this enables us to hear what God is teaching.

"Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.'" (John 6:68)

"Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart." (Luke 2:19)

"Only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:42)

5. We must value the Word of God in order to hear it purposely (and not casually).

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak...He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you." (John 16:13-15)

6. We must call and totally depend upon the Holy Spirit.

Those who effectively listen "hear the Word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance." (Luke 8:15)

7. Our hearts must be prepared to be "honest and good." We must examine ourselves so that there is no self-deception.

^g Available in the MCBC bookstore.

^h Both paperback and bonded leather editions are available in the MCBC bookstore.

“Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil.” (Ecc 5:1)

8. We must guard our steps and draw near for the purpose of listening, otherwise it is foolishness.

“The hearing ear and the seeing eye, The LORD has made both of them.” (Pro 20:12)

9. The Lord has given us hearing for His good purposes. Not to hear Him is to reject His purpose in speaking.

“To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.” (Luke 8:10)

10. Realize that the very ability to hear is a gift of God.

“He delivers the afflicted in their affliction, and opens their ear in time of oppression.” (Job 36:15)

11. God actively opens our ears so that can hear Him when there is a special need for us to do so.

“With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it.” (Mark 4:33)

“So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given” (Luke 8:18)

12. God speaks to us at the level that we are prepared to hear.

“Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days. Many plans are in a man’s heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.” (Pro 19:20-21)

13. Listening starts with a teachable heart.

Which of these preparations to hear do you most need to cultivate?

B. Attitudes while Listening

“Revive me according to Your lovingkindness, So that I may keep the testimony of Your mouth.” — Psalm 119:88

“This title given to the directory of our duty—‘the testimony of God’s mouth’ (Psa 119:88)—adds strength to our obligations. Thus let every word we read or hear be regarded as coming directly from the ‘mouth of God.’ What reverence, what implicit submission does it demand! May it ever find us in the posture of attention, humility, and faith, each one of us ready to say, ‘Speak, for Your servant is listening!’”
—Charles Bridges (1794-1869)¹⁵

“But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.” (Isa 66:2)

“...seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word.” (Luke 10:39)

Attitude 1: Humility; pride will hinder our hearing what God says to us.

“Take hold of instruction, guard her – for she is your life.” (Pro 4:13)

“Now therefore, O sons, listen to me, for blessed are they who keep my ways. Heed instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it.” (Pro 8:32-33)

2. We must sincerely desire to hear and understand God’s Word.

“Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD.” (Pro 8:34-35)

3. We must be watching daily, anticipating God’s speaking to us.

“He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” (Psa 25:4-5a)

4. We must seek and maintain both inner and outer purity.

“Listen, for I will speak noble things; And the opening of my lips will reveal right things.” (Pro 8:6)

5. We must seek the noble and right things that Christ speaks.

“When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God.” (1Th 2:13)

“We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us.” (2Co 5:20)

6. When we read the Word of God, we must consider it as the words of Christ written directly to us.

“The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.” (Exo 34:6-7)

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” (Gal 5:22-23)

7. We must see God’s character in its fullness.

If we have had many heart-wrenchingly difficult experiences in our lives, we may tend to see Him as harsh, demanding, uncaring, distant, intolerant, and even angry. We need to see Him as gentle, caring, nearby, patient, and loving (and holy and just). Only then will we be able to hear without distortion what He is saying to us.

“Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19)

“Only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:42)

8. We must value what we hear.

Which of these attitudes do you most want to cultivate to improve your listening?

PRAYER PARTNERS THIS WEEK

Share with your prayer partner your own experience with both good and poor attitudes in prayer. Discuss the article on “Preparing to Listen” by Steve Bixby.

“Christ does not teach you to pray, ‘Lord, give me enough to serve me for two or three years,’ but ‘this day our daily bread.’ This is to teach us that we must live upon God in a dependent condition every day.” —*Jeremiah Burroughs* (1599-1646)¹⁶

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP THIS WEEK

Object lessons this week (in the questions at the back) include a bank with a large safe, and chickens with chicks. Worth investigating?

WEEK 6

March 3-9

RESULTS OF LISTENING TO GOD

“Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me.” —Hebrews 3:15

“1. The Word [i.e., God’s voice] is said to speak. The Scripture is not a dumb and silent letter, as some have blasphemed. It has a voice in it—the voice of God Himself. And speaking is frequently ascribed to it (John 7:42; 19:37; Rom 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; Gal 4:30; Jam 4:5). If we hear not the voice of God in it continually, it is because of our unbelief (Heb 3:7,15).

“2. The word that was spoken so long before by [David] to the church in his generation (Psa 95:7), is said to be spoken to these Hebrews. For the Holy Ghost is always present in the words of Scripture and speaks in it equally and alike to the church in all ages. In it He speaks as directly to us as if we were the first and only person to whom He ever spoke. This should teach us with what reverence we ought to attend to the Scripture, namely, as to the way and means in which God Himself speaks directly to us.”
—*John Owen* (1616-1683)¹⁷

“RESULTS OF LISTENING TO GOD” by Terry Brown

*“For promotion cometh neither from the east, Nor from the west, nor from the south.
But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another.” —Psalm 75:6-7 (KJV)*

When I started my first job after college, there was much discussion among colleagues about career paths and how to go about getting promoted. Promotions were dependent on performance reviews or appraisals by your manager, so that was always an important event each year. Yet, because of having this verse written in the front of the New Testament that I carried to work each day, I never worried about the review. Although I never received the highest rating, I never contested the results of the performance review, even though I believe there was one time when I should have. I also never asked for a raise because I trusted that God was the ultimate judge and He would provide for our needs.

Early on in my career, I had an opportunity to attend a special twelve-week school in New York that was designed to prepare me for advancement in the technical or managerial area. The problem was that you could only return home for one trip during the twelve weeks. Having four young children under the age of 6, I knew that I could not do that and stay true to supporting the needs of my wife and family (1Ti 5:8), so I never attended the school. Although this was not the way my manager thought was best, God always met our needs in an environment of providing for five children in a Christian school and a single income family. We never lacked, although we did have to be wise in how we spent our finances and used our resources.

“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.” —Mark 10:18 (KJV)

Because of these verses (Mark 10:18; Mat 19:17; Luke 18:19), I avoid using the common exclamation of “Oh my Goodness.” Jesus says no one is good except God—and I know myself well enough to know that within me dwells no good thing (Rom 7:18). I know that I often see the abbreviation OMG in social media posts where people think that avoids the issue; but any way you interpret the abbreviation, it is still the wrong use of God’s name. Even the expression “For goodness sake” is questionable in my view, as it is ambiguous about whose goodness you are talking about. I believe it is best for me to follow Jesus’ admonition to let my Yea be Yea and my Nay be Nay (Mat 13:29) and to keep my words few (Ecc 5:2-3b, 7; Pro 10:19). ↪

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES: RESULTS OF LISTENING

God has multiple purposes for our reading the Scriptures, which He is able to harmonize for our eternal good. These purposes work together for Christ-honoring results in our lives when we truly hear what He is saying through His Word. They motivate us toward whole-hearted communion with our Lord.

“Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully.” (Deu 5:1)

“Be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly.” (Deu 6:3)

Result 1. Obedience: We must hear the Word, so that we may learn and practice it.

“Hear the Word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.” (Luke 8:15)

“And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” (Mark 4:20)

2. Fruit: We must hear and receive the Word; then there will be spiritual fruit.

“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” (Rom 10:17)

The “gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.” (1Th 1:5)

“How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14)

3. Faith: It comes thru truly hearing what God is saying in His Word.

“A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.” (Pro 1:5)

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2Ti 3:16-17)

4. Learning: Hearing enables us to profit from God’s teaching and leads to wisdom.

“Through insolence comes nothing but strife, But wisdom is with those who receive counsel.” (Pro 13:10)

“Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days. Many plans are in a man’s heart, But the counsel of the LORD will stand.” (Pro 19:20-21)

“A false witness will perish, But the man who listens to the truth will speak forever.” (Pro 21:28)

5. Wisdom: When we truly hear the Word, we grow in wisdom. Hearing and wisdom go together.

“Listen to me, for blessed are they who keep my ways. Heed instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it.” (Pro 8:32-33)

“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.” (Luke 11:28)

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.” (Rev 1:3)

“Heed instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD.” (Pro 8:33-35)

“Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways! I would quickly subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their adversaries...But I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.” (Psa 81:13-16)

6. Blessing: Heed instruction and be wise, don’t neglect it; then you will be blessed.

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.” (Rev 3:20)

“My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.” (Luke 8:21)

7. Fellowship: When we hear Christ’s voice and open the door of our hearts to Him, He communes with us in close family relationship.

“He who listens to me shall live securely and will be at ease from the dread of evil.” (Pro 1:33)

8. Security: Hearing God brings a quiet from fear of evil.

“Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, but he who regards reproof will be honored.” (Pro 13:18)

9. Honor: To hear and receive reproof leads to honor.

“If you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; Then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God.” (Pro 2:1-5)

10. Spiritual Fear of God: We must listen for wisdom, then we will discover the fear and knowledge of God.

Which of these results will be most valuable to you personally as you improve your listening to God’s Word?

PRAYER PARTNERS THIS WEEK

Discuss with your prayer partner the amazing results of hearing what God is saying to us when we read the Scriptures. Share your thoughts from the article on “Results of Listening to God” by Terry Brown.

“He who has an inflamed love for God will certainly find out a corner to enjoy sweet communion with Him. True lovers will find corners to enjoy one another in.” —*Thomas Brooks* (1608-1680)¹⁸

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP THIS WEEK

Using the family worship questions at the back, object lessons for this week are a farmers’ or open-air market, and a loaf of bread. Visiting a place that portrays an object lesson can be a powerful memory for children.

“Forever blessed is he that has a hearing heart and ear while Christ has a calling voice.” —*Richard Baxter* (1615-1691)¹⁹

“LISTENING ACTIVELY” by Evan Duke

The story of Abraham preparing to sacrifice his only son Isaac in Genesis 22 is one of the most powerful examples in the Bible of how to listen actively. I am not sure of everything going through Abraham’s mind during that journey, while he fashioned the altar, while he bound Isaac, or even when he was getting ready to sacrifice his son, but I can imagine he was likely asking God how this command reconciled with His promise pertaining to Isaac (Gen 17:21; 21:12). What we do see recorded is Abraham’s firm belief God would provide. When Isaac asked his father about what they would sacrifice, Abraham responded that God would give them what they needed. He didn’t know how, but Abraham was prepared to obey God completely until the Angel of the LORD intervened and a different sacrifice was provided for them.

For me, this story illustrates two aspects of listening actively to God. *First*, I need to be following His commands at all times. *Second*, I need to be ready to listen in case He decides to intervene. The second part might seem much easier to do, especially if I think that the path that God has laid out for me contradicts promises in His Word. However, think of the story of Peter being released from prison and the praying church not realizing that their petitions had been answered (Acts 12:15). Even something that seems to be straightforward can be difficult for me to do.

Listening is an art, and listening actively requires me to have a complete focus on God at all times. Just like a student listening to a lecture by a college professor needs to give their teacher the chance to fully explain everything, I need to make sure that I allow God to fully respond to my requests. In February of 2022, I was quite sick most of the month. My wife and I were praying for me to get better, but every week it felt like I would take one step forward then two steps backward. We couldn’t understand why God didn’t seem to be answering our requests until the day that I went in for a CT scan that resulted first in my hospitalization, then stage 3 cancer diagnosis, then subsequent surgery and chemotherapy treatments. God was going to answer our prayer, but we didn’t realize the magnitude of the situation and the steps that would be involved to get there. This could only be accomplished according to *His* plan and in *His* timing. His timing was perfect, right down to finishing chemotherapy two weeks before our son John was born.

For one reason or another, God might take a long time to respond, or His answer might take years to work out (as Thomas Goodwin noted in his work on prayerⁱ). He might respond even as we are praying, or we might pray and get an answer a few hours later. If we are listening actively to God and seeking to obey Him, much like in the manner of Abraham or Isaac, the length of time will be irrelevant because we are focused instead on obeying and listening to the One who ultimately matters. ↪

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES: LISTENING ACTIVELY

A. Even Better Bible Reading in 2024

By Pastor Minnick (*from his two messages delivered 12/17/2023*)

Four Foundational Facts for Reading My Bible Rightly in 2024

1. Reading my Bible rightly is to be listening to God’s voice.

In the Bible, 850 times God says: “Thus says the Lord...”, and it is for us today as well as then. “Just as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today if you hear His voice...’” (Heb 3:7). When we read the Word of God, we hear the voice of God. He is speaking to us today.

2. Reading my Bible rightly will be to worship and bow down.

“And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice,” then “Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God” (Psa 95:7, 6). When we hear His voice in His Word, it constrains us to worship. It gives warmth to our spirits. It acknowledges that His Word is supreme.

ⁱ Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), *The Return of Prayers* (London: [by M. Flesher] for R. Dawlman, and L. Fawne, at the sign of the Brazen Serpent in Paul’s Church-yard, 1636). Pastor Minnick preached a 13-part series on this from 8/14 to 12/18/2019 on Wednesday evenings.

3. Reading my Bible rightly is to bless God for His sovereign rule.

“The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all...In all places of His dominion; Bless the LORD, O my soul!” (Psa 103:19, 22). Hearing God’s voice in His Word puts us in our right position: kneeling in our spirits before Him. He is a father to His children. And He works all things together for their good (Rom 8:28). We can therefore trust Him implicitly in everything.

4. Reading my Bible rightly is to respond to Him rightly.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). “His name is called The Word of God” (Rev 19:13). God and His Word are virtually the same. We cannot separate them. When I read my Bible, I am believing God. My relationship to my Bible reflects my relationship to God.

“And Mary said, ‘Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word’” (Luke 1:38). This is the most important response to the voice of God.

The benefits of the land are given in Deuteronomy 11:10-12. And 11:13 gives the condition for blessing: “It shall come about, *if you listen obediently* to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul.” You cannot separate God’s commands from His Person. Our heart-felt obedience to His commands indicates our love for Him. When we are reverent towards His Word, we are reverent to Him. To respond rightly to my Bible in 2024 is to respond rightly to Him—my Bible is truly God’s voice to me. “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isa 66:2). To tremble at God’s Word is to have the utmost respect for it, to seek it out and highly value it. “Let your heart therefore be *wholly devoted* to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day” (1Ki 8:61).

Suggested Practices for Reading My Bible Rightly in 2024

1. *Read your Bible; your life will change.* God will give you a love for it and you will know it. Ask Him to give you that love for His Word.

2. *Stop saying, “But I’m not a reader.”* You’ll value it more when it is an effort—it can be a chief way that you show your love for Him. Like the widow casting in her two mites, you may be casting in all you have to read a chapter a day. This is great faith.

3. *Read every day.* You are going to hear the voice of the Lord when you open your Bible and read.

4. *Read in the morning.* We need light for the path we will walk that day. During the course of each day, riches, the cares of life, and worldly pleasures choke the Word. During the night, these tentacles wither. Reading in the morning continues to shrink them to their proper proportions.

5. *Read as much as you can.* There are many valid providences that may limit your time in the Word, yet you can read what you can. The Word is like manna in the wilderness: they had to labor to get it, and it was always good for only the allotted daily time. It could not be stored.

6. *Read all the Bible.* The people had to walk from Dan to Beersheba to claim all the land. The entirety of the Bible is necessary to learn the entirety of God’s revelation about Himself. Avoid setting aside the “hard parts.”

7. *Read by a plan.* This will allow you to check off your progress for your own accountability. The church recommends Robert Murray M’Cheyne’s Daily Bible Reading Plan, available in the bookstore.

8. *Read lovingly as well as dutifully.* Reading the Word is the single most enjoyable thing you can do. “Your word is very pure, Therefore Your servant loves it” (Psa 119:140).

9. *Pray and read for understanding.* Ask the Holy Spirit to illumine your mind. “Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law” (Psa 119:18).

10. *Read with a child-like faith.* Allow no doubts. “I esteem right all Your precepts concerning everything, I hate every false way” (Psa 119:128).

11. *Find something to memorize.* “For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, that they may be ready on your lips” (Pro 22:18). Memorized Scripture is always available when you need it. Catch something daily that you can carry with you.

Which of these “sanctified suggestions” for better reading in 2024 do you want to apply to your Bible reading this year?

B. Active Listening in the Scriptures

Listening can easily become passive. When we drift into passive listening, our minds wander and we miss most of what has been said. We may be “listening,” but we are not hearing what the speaker or author is actually attempting to communicate to us. Biblical listening is active. It is involved. Let us examine the Scriptures to see what our God expects of us when we listen to Him.

“For the ear tests words as the palate tastes food.” (Job 34:3)

1. Active listening involves processing the words we receive, that is, measuring them, thinking about their impact, understanding their meaning in context.

“He opens their ear to instruction.” (Job 36:10a)

2. As we read and hear the Word, realize that it is God Himself who is opening our ears to hear. Truly hearing from God is a sacred process.

“Yield now...receive instruction from His mouth and establish His words in your heart.” (Job 22:21-22)

3. We must receive God’s words, embrace them as vital truth for our lives, and renew our minds with them.

“Listen closely to the thunder of His voice, and the rumbling that goes out from His mouth.” (Job 37:2)

“We have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place.” (2Pe 1:19)

4. Reading and listening closely involves giving our undivided attention to what we are hearing, preventing our minds from wandering.

“For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,’ declares the LORD. ‘But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.” (Isa 66:2)

“The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me.” (Luke 10:16)

5. We must read and listen in godly fear: submitted, expectant, reverent, sober—never casually or without humble preparation.

“My soul, wait in silence for God only, For my hope [i.e., my expectation] is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be shaken.” (Psa 62:5-6)

“Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noonday.” (Psa 37:5-6)

6. Read and listen expecting to receive something important for your spiritual walk with God.

“Cease striving [i.e., be still] and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” (Psa 46:10)

“Those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.” (Isa 40:31)

7. Read and listen seriously and without resistance to the truth.

“Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for Him.” (Psa 37:7)

8. For a while, we may not hear God speaking to us; but that does not mean He is not present and speaking. When He seems silent, we should redouble our desires and practice of reading and praying, and wait patiently for Him.

“You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul...You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that...[you will be] careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do...to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him.” (Deu 11:18-22)

9. Writing truth reinforces truth. Many find that taking notes is transformational. Highlight important or repeated words, phrases, contrasts, and comparisons. Underline. Write cross-references in the margins. Use “reference chains” (noting next to a verse the following reference in a series, and note by that one the next reference, and by the last one the first reference).

Which of these aspects of active listening do you want better to apply to your own listening?

PRAYER PARTNERS THIS WEEK

Discuss with your prayer partner your own experience in active listening, and your answer to the above question. Share your thoughts from the article on “Listening Actively” by Evan Duke. Discuss Pastor Minnick’s charge to the congregation for “even better Bible reading in 2024.”

“When you are seeking to excite or exercise any grace, send up a fervent request to God to show His love and power upon your dead and sluggish heart.”
—Richard Baxter (1615-1691)²⁰

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP THIS WEEK

This week, consider visiting a sheep farm, a mall, and/or the church’s newborn nursery for object lessons during a family worship outing. Also use a flashlight and good/bad vegetables to illustrate some of the learning points in the questions at the back. Object lessons can last a lifetime in the memories of children.

WEEK 8 March 17-23 LISTENING TO GOD WHEN READING - 1

“Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully.”—Deuteronomy 5:1

“Hearing the Word is nothing without the Spirit’s gracious presence and influence. Unless the Lord Himself gives the hearing ear, we shall not hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Rev 2:11, 29).” —Robert Hawker (1753-1827)²¹

“ALMIGHTY GOD, as nothing necessary for salvation is lacking in Your holy Scriptures, grant that we may carefully and diligently study them to make progress in the fear of Your name, relying on the grace You offer to us in Christ. Grant that we may derive real fruit from the reading and hearing of Your Word, turning everything to edification so that Your name may be truly glorified in us. Amen.”
—John Calvin (1509-1564)²²

“LISTENING TO GOD WHEN READING THE WORD” by Patrick D. McGary

For me, the biggest thing in discerning what God wants me to do next is taking aside time to delve into a book or passage deeply. When we were living in Minnesota, one Saturday afternoon in 2007 I had an extra two hours or so at a coffee shop waiting for my wife to pick me up. I was a year away from completing a graduate degree, and felt there were three different paths I could take when finished. I had my Bible and a journal (which I nearly always keep with me for such unexpected occasions). I had felt a stall in my spiritual progress for some time, and I was praying for God to show me the next thing He wanted me to do. When reading my Bible in the life of Jesus, I came across a passage that rebuked me: “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Mat 7:20 KJV). I tended to think about spiritual fruit in our actions based on Paul’s later teaching in Galatians on the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). However, the surrounding words in Matthew seemed to indicate that the fruit being inspected was what these teachers’ students or disciples became. Did I have any disciples? Were these fruits people rather than the personal fruit of the Spirit?

Something came to my mind as I truly read this verse in context. Four months earlier, a visitor came forward during an invitation on Easter Sunday. I’d never seen this tender young man before, and on that day I personally had the privilege to lead him to Christ. I did take some half-hearted steps to contact him for discipleship; however, it did not culminate in

a meeting. Suddenly, as I read, I realized the importance of what Jesus was teaching. I knew that until I took this next step to start actually discipling this young man, I wouldn't be taking any other steps forward. That desire to know God's will about a decision a year away was dependent on my obeying what I now knew I must do right then. I made haste to dig up his contact information and schedule a meeting with him. He was eager to meet. We started meeting weekly, going over the story of the Bible.

We also reviewed a practical Bible study process. The one I have found most useful is an acronym. I had first heard it as looking for SPECKS: Sins to confess, Promises to claim, Examples to follow (or avoid), Commands to obey, and Knowledge to retain. The discipleship meetings with the young man refreshed my soul.

After hearing what God was clearly saying to me from the passage I was reading, I finally was ready for more growth. It was after this that an opportunity to teach at BJU resurfaced. Because of the above experience, it was the prospect of discipling college students that really persuaded me to invest my life teaching student believers to be a light for the gospel in their workplace. ↪

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES: LISTENING WHEN READING

A. Understand the Big Picture

Context is one of the most important aspects of biblical truth. It must shape our interpretation of what we read, just as the times and events for any historical figure help us “hear” what they meant by their words.

Also, we gain insight when we understand the differences in the **types of literature** contained in the Bible. For example, we hear God's voice differently when we are reading history versus poetry. The Bible contains many types of literature: narrative history, poetry, prophecy, Gospels, epistles, and apocalyptic writings.¹ The author's style, purpose for writing, and pace are very different in each of these. So, as we read, we need to remember the type of literature we are reading and “hear” accordingly.

B. Understand the Author's Purpose

Understand the author's purpose for writing. Each of the prophets had a specific time in history with specific adversaries, and a specific condition in the nation of Israel. Each of Paul's letters was written to deal with specific situations in the churches. Each of the Gospel writers had a target audience in view. They each had a purpose in their human mind, perfectly guided by the Holy Spirit as they penned their books of the Bible, which helps us to hear their words as they meant them.

C. Use Practical Methods

Obstacles: As we read the Scriptures, let us understand and maintain a keen awareness of the many obstacles to hearing the Word speak to us as we read: a) a wandering mind, b) a lack of sleep, c) busyness, d) a lack of forgiveness, e) unconfessed sin, f) a lack of prayer, g) distractions, h) interruptions, i) an unsundered heart. Each of these are in Satan's arsenal to steal the Word from our hearts before it takes root. The answer for each of us is to take a sober inventory of our attitudes, preparations, and sincere desires. If we truly want to hear what God is saying to us, we will remove these obstacles before we begin—and keep watch that they do not return as we read.

Style and content: Read and listen with focus, paying attention to every word. We should notice transitions from one point to another, comparisons and contrasts between words and thoughts, key points, major topics and sub-topics. Notice both nouns and verbs when they are repeated multiple times within a chapter or passage. Ask yourself observation questions:

- Why is the author saying it this way?
- What is the new topic he is transitioning to?
- What is his point in the comparison or contrast?

¹ For additional teaching on orienting our reading for the Bible's different types of literature, see these helpful resources: *New Testament Exegesis*, Gordon Fee (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), and *Old Testament Exegesis*, Douglas Stuart (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1980).

- What are the key points in the development of his message?

To **bolster hearing God's Word when you read**, which of the above insights will you work on? Please note especially a wandering mind as a foremost obstacle to effectively hearing God speak. These methods are very practical. To have any expectation of applying them, you will need to make some time to review and follow-up these practices.

D. Reading the Scriptures, by Richard Greenham (1535-1594)²³

Before Reading the Word

1. *Diligence*: Keep a steady pace, be regular in your reading.

2. *Wisdom*:

- a) Read according to a regular plan (don't skip around).
- b) Read more on the Lord's Day.
- c) Read the Bible before any other book.
- d) Read to become well-grounded in the core doctrines.

3. *Preparation*:

- a) Maintain a godly reverence as you approach the Scripture.
- b) Keep a teachable mindset.
- c) Rely totally on the Holy Spirit—have faith that God will speak to you through His Word.

Immediately after Reading

4. *Conversation*: Seek to encourage others with what you have read; seek to clarify what you have yet to understand.

5. *Faith*: Trust God with what you have read and look to apply it by faith.

6. *Practice*: Put into practice what you have read, in repentance from sin and greater faith in obedience.

At All Times

7. *Prayer*: We are in complete dependence on our Lord. Therefore, we must express thanksgiving for His gifts and ask for His help even before we begin to read, as well as after.

Which of these seven aspects of reading the Scriptures do you want to work to improve in your own listening to the Word?

PRAYER PARTNERS THIS WEEK

Discuss with your prayer partner how well you believe you understand what God is saying when you read the Word. How much of the author's intended meaning gets through to your mind? And share your thoughts from the article on "Listening to God when Reading" by Patrick McGary.

"The first rule of right prayer is to have our heart and mind framed as becomes those who are entering into conversation with God."
—John Calvin (1509-1564)²⁴

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP THIS WEEK

Family worship object lessons illustrate the truths of Scripture and create a memory “peg” to help everyone remember them. This week’s objects include a perfume bottle, and a towel and wash basin.

WEEK 9 March 24-30

LISTENING TO GOD WHEN READING - 2

“My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding... Then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God.” —Proverbs 2:1-5

“‘Receive [God’s] words’; ‘make your ear attentive to them’—Let them be the seed cast into ‘the good ground’ of ‘an honest and good heart’—a heart prepared of God (Luke 8:15; Pro 16:1). Read the book of God as one who ‘sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word’ (Luke 10:39 KJV). Like the Bereans, ‘receive it with all readiness’ (Acts 17:11); like the Thessalonians, with reverential faith, acknowledging its supreme authority (1Th 2:13). ‘Treasure my commandments within you’—carry them about with you as your choicest treasure, for greater security (Col 3:16; Mat 13:44); as your [purse or wallet], always at hand for present use (Pro 4:20-21; 7:3; Job 22:22). Let your heart be the hiding-place for the treasure (Luke 2:19,51; Psa 119:11); Satan can never snatch it from there.”

—Charles Bridges (1794-1869)²⁵

“LISTENING TO GOD WHEN READING” by Allen Collins

Before I knew the Lord, He protected me in many ways. Perhaps in heaven I will learn more about the grace that was extended to me even then. One example of His grace was giving me the willingness to be separated from my friends when they said they were all heading out to the bar. I was able to respond that I would see them later. I was not listening to the Lord so much as He was putting some guardrails up that benefitted me tremendously.

There were other areas in which I did not respond as well and needed His great forgiveness and mercy. How thankful I am that He heard my cry.

“I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; many will see and fear and will trust in the LORD” (Psa 40:1-3).

Before I listened to God, He was working in my life to make me a listener. It was through a year-long study of *The Gospel of John* that I came to be a listener. I came to believe that this Bible was indeed the Word of God. As God’s Word, it was His communication to me. When I read it, I needed to listen and I needed to obey. Therefore, I needed to listen with understanding.

As grandparents, we have loved watching our young grandchildren learn to walk and now run. The Lord took me by the hand as a new believer. He helped me take little steps by implanting in me a love for His Word. The thrill of discovery was on nearly every page as all was new at first. And as I read, God was speaking to me through His Word!

As I grew, little by little, the Lord would figuratively let go of my hand that I might learn to walk, not as a toddler, but as a man. Trials entered my life, those crooks in the lot that we cannot straighten by ourselves. Would I listen to God? Would I go my own way to try to avoid or remove the trial?

There were times when I sought a way out while blaming God for a lack of care. Yet He did care; I just needed to slow down and listen. I needed to bow before Him again and seek His forgiveness. I needed to hear His reply. And I found His reply in His Word as I read and as I heard it preached and taught.

As I write this, my wife and I are going through a time of testing regarding her leukemia, and trying to help our son with difficulties from his muscular dystrophy, and caring for my parents in their 90s, who have been hostile toward God and our faith. Any one of these could almost fully occupy our time. We are sustained and comforted and encouraged because we have listened to God through His Word. He will not forsake His Word, so we may have confidence in it

through Him. O, the blessedness of listening to God! “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him” (Pro 30:5, ESV). ☞

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES: LISTENING WHEN READING

Directions for Profitably Reading the Holy Scriptures

by Richard Baxter (1615-1691)²⁶

The diversity of men’s temperaments and understandings is so exceedingly great that anything pleasing to some will be disliked and contested by others. In the Scriptures, there are many things hard to understand, which the unlearned and unstable uphold to their own destruction (2Pe 3:16). The Word is to some the savor of death (Mark 4:24; 2Co 2:16); you therefore must be careful in reading it. As Christ says, “Take care how you listen” (Luke 8:18); so I say, Take care how you read!

Direction 1: Open the Bible with holy reverence.

Do not bring an evil heart of unbelief (Heb 3:12); it is the very book of God written by the Holy Ghost. Remember that the doctrine of the New Testament was revealed by the Son of God, who was purposely sent from heaven to be the light of the world. He was sent to make known to men the will of God and the matters of their salvation. Consider well: If God should send a book or letter to you by an angel, how reverently would you receive it? How carefully would you read it and regard it above all the books in the world! How much more so should you approach that book which is written by the Holy Ghost and records the doctrine of Christ Himself, whose authority is greater than all the angels! Read it not therefore as a common book, with a common and unreverent heart; but in the godly fear and love of God.

Direction 2: Read with a full resolution to obey whatever it commands.

Remember, it is the very Law of God that you must live by and be judged by at the last. Therefore, obey even though your own flesh, men, and devils contradict it.

Let there be no secret exceptions in your heart to balk at any of its precepts or principles. Do not let your flesh turn from obedience to the parts it accounts as difficult, or the thing to be forsaken that it accounts as dear.

Direction 3: Read the Bible with love and great delight.

Remember that it is the covenant between you and the Lord, with the most full and gracious promises. All your comforts and all your hopes of pardon and everlasting life are built upon it!

Value it a thousand-fold more than you would the letters of your dearest friend, or the deeds by which you hold your lands, or anything else of concern to you. If the Law was sweeter to David than honey, and better than thousands of gold and silver, and was his delight and meditation all the day, what should the sweet and precious gospel be to us!

Direction 4: Come not to your reading with arrogance as a judge, but with humility as a learner.

Remember that it is a doctrine of unseen things and of the greatest mysteries. If anything seems difficult or improbable to you, suspect your own unfinished understanding and not the sacred Word of God. If a learner in any art or science will suspect his teacher and his books whenever he meets something that seems unlikely to him, his pride would keep him in ignorance, and his folly likely would be incurable.

Direction 5: The Scriptures must be plain enough for the simple, and yet have content to exercise the highest intellects.

Remember that the Bible is a universal law and doctrine, written for the beginner and the curious as well as for the advanced scholar.

Direction 6: Do not bring to your reading a carnal mind that savors only fleshly things.

The carnal mind can be enslaved to sins that the Scripture condemns, because it is enmity against [i.e., hostile toward, NASB] God, and neither is nor can be subject to His Law (Rom 8:7-8). The things of God are not discerned by the mere natural man, for they are foolishness to him, and they must be spiritually discerned (2Co 2:14). Enmity is an ill expositor...

Direction 7: Use the analogy of faith to understand difficult passages.

Compare one place of Scripture with another, and expound the darkest by the help of the plainest, and the fewer or unusual expressions by the more frequent and ordinary, and the more doubtful points by those which are most certain—and not on the contrary (see Rom 12:6)!

Direction 8: Presume not on the strength of your own understanding, but humbly pray to God for light.

Before and after you read the Scripture, pray earnestly that the Spirit, who wrote it, may expound it to you, keep you from unbelief and error, and lead you into the truth (1Co 2:10, 12; 12:8-10).

Direction 9: Read some of the best commentaries or expositors.

They are better acquainted with the phrase of Scripture than you are, and therefore they may help to clear your understanding...Make use of your guides if you would not err. But do this only after you have read and pondered the Scriptures for yourself.

Direction 10: Discuss perplexities with your pastor.

When you are stalled by any difficulty that mystifies you, note it down, and bring it to your pastor for his help. Or if the minister of the place be unable, go to someone that God has furnished for such work. And if, after all, some things remain still difficult, remember your imperfection, wait on God for further light, and with thanksgiving make use of all the rest of Scripture that is more clear. ↪

Which of these ten directions will help you listen better to what God is saying as you read the Word?

PRAYER PARTNERS THIS WEEK

Share with your prayer partner your thoughts from the preceding ten directions for profitably reading the Word. How can you better put them into practice? And discuss the article on “Listening to God when Reading the Word” by Allen Collins.

“[Our] spirits are constantly decaying, and if not daily renewed by proper nourishment, we perish. The vessels that are always leaking must stand constantly under the conduit to get what they lose.” —George Swinnock (1627-1673)²⁷

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP THIS WEEK

This week’s object lessons include comparing your child and yourself, a globe, and a “castle keep.” You may have to refer to some online images for the last one!

WEEK 10

March 31 – April 6

MEDITATION WITH GOD

“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.” —Joshua 1:8

“I will meditate on Your statutes.” —Psalm 119:48

“His delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.” —Psalm 1:2

“Meditation is a pure and rational conversation with God; it is the flower and height of sanctified reason.” —Thomas Manton (1620-1677)²⁸

“MEDITATION WITH GOD” by Andy Martin

As we all would agree, fellowship with our great God is so sweet. We all value those times and likely have some fellowship with our Lord quite regularly. Furthermore, there are times when our fellowship with our Lord surpasses other times. We all experience this as God moves during our quiet times, perhaps differently on certain days than He does on others. Many times, I have found that a more undistracted time lends itself to that sweeter fellowship. Saturday mornings are my most undistracted time with the Lord. On Saturdays, I am rarely time limited by a work schedule or preparation to be in the Lord’s house. While my mind does shift to the next event occasionally, it is mostly focused on my quiet time with the Lord.

Last summer, I experienced a special sweet time with our great God. Unfortunately, I do not remember the specific passages from that Saturday morning. I had been reading the Proverb for the day all summer, reading the New Testament one chapter per day, and spending my lunch hour during the week listening to Colossians every day for the month of June. During this particular day, my devotional time expanded to a couple of hours. As the Lord blessed, I found myself noting things in my Bible and talking to the Lord as I read. During these times of fellowship, I write notes near verses that may simply say, “Lord, help me” or “Lord, teach me.” There is a wonderful blessing in praying to our God while you are reading His Word. This action is sweet fellowship.

As I reflect on that particular day and some others, I realize God is the One who does the work. It is absolutely not me nor any spiritual strength of my own. May I hasten to give our great God the glory! Psalm 145:3, “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable” (ESV). Furthermore, The Lord allows situations in our lives that draw us to Him. Many of these situations are difficult, but our loving Lord is graciously prodding us toward Him. Though unpleasant, these difficulties create a hunger in us that enhances a sweet fellowship with our God. God disciplines us through His Word. As we have been graciously taught on Wednesday evenings by Pastor Newton, Psalm 86 is a prayer to disciple us; we are also disciplined through the entirety of Scripture. What a blessing as we know God will teach us and, during that teaching, we enjoy sweet fellowship with Him. May we apply Psalm 86:11 and be taught His way and walk in His truth: “Teach me Your way, O Lord, that I may walk in Your truth; and unite my heart to fear Your name” (Psa 86:11 ESV). ↪

STUDY THE SCRIPTURES: MEDITATION²⁹

A. Understanding Meditation

Meditation is a deep and earnest consideration of some point of Christian instruction. It is a steadfast bending of the mind to some spiritual matter, discoursing on it with ourselves until we bring it to some profitable result.

—*Isaac Ambrose* (1604-1664)³⁰

Meditation is a holy exercise of the mind in which we remember the truths of God, seriously ponder them, and then apply them to ourselves.

—*Thomas Watson* (1620-1686)³¹

Meditation is

1. *The soul’s secluding itself.* The world spoils meditation. When a Christian goes to meditate, he must lock and bolt the door against the world!

2. *By a serious and solemn thinking upon God.* The Hebrew word “to meditate” signifies to recollect and gather together the thoughts *with intensity*. Meditation is not a superficial work. “My heart is steadfast, O God” (Psa 108:1). One must fix his thoughts upon the object.

3. *So that the heart is raised to holy affections.* Meditation heals the soul of its deadness and worldliness.

—*Thomas Watson* (c.1620-1686)³²

Meditation is not important merely because it is a required duty. It is also *necessary* because, without it, all graces wither. *Faith* is ready to starve unless it is fed with continual meditation on the promises. *Hope* is often shallow; it does not arise to a fullness of expectation until by meditation we take a deliberate view of our blessings and privileges. *Love* to God is nourished by constant and deliberate thoughts of Him, and then love is always deeper.

—*Thomas Manton* (1620-1677)³³

Meditation is

- *a serious application of the mind* for understanding. We must hold fast what we have heard until we have thoroughly digested it, or little strength will be gained from it.

- *about some sacred subject*. There is abundant matter for our meditation: the nature or attributes of God, the states and offices of Christ, the threefold state of man (lost sinner, saint, and glorification), the vanity of the creature, the sinfulness of sin (its nature, causes, properties, effects), the love and fulness of the blessed Savior, and the divine Word (Exo 15:11; Psa 1:1; 119:148; Pro 6:22; 1Ti 4:13). “I will meditate on all Your work and muse on Your deeds” (Psa 77:12).

- *that which warms and quickens the affections*.

- *the accurate dealing with sin*.

- *your resolutions being strengthened*, both against evil and for the good. The Christian must not only pray his good thoughts *but practice them*. He must not lock them up in his mind *but lay them out in his life*. The Spirit of God is the principal cause of this, the holy Scriptures its instrument.

I confess that this duty of meditation is hard; but experience teaches that the resulting benefits make abundant compensations for our pains. The Christian who is wholly unaccustomed to this duty may find it difficult at first, but afterwards both easy and fruitful.

—George Swinnock (1627-1673)³⁴

Which definition of meditation stands out to you? Also write the key phrase(s) that you want to remember.

B. Subject Matter for Meditation

Meditate on

- *God's Word*: a) the God who made you; b) the vileness of your nature; c) the multitude of your imperfections; d) the dangers of sin; e) the Savior who bought you; f) the heaven that He bought for you.

—Isaac Ambrose (1604-1664)³⁵

Meditate on

- *Your evidences for heaven*: a) your heart being thoroughly convinced of sin; b) your willingness to take Christ upon His own terms as sovereign King; c) your willingness to renounce those sins that your flesh naturally runs to; d) the indwelling presence of the Spirit. Has He made you of another spirit: meek, merciful, humble? Has He left the imprint of His own holiness upon you?

- *The uncertainty of all earthly comforts*, to help us to hold them loosely. This would a) keep us from being so deceived by the world; b) much moderate our affections to earthly comforts; c) make us look after a certainty instead: receiving more of the grace of God!

- *Eternal life*. “This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life” (1Jo 2:25). The meditation of eternal life makes us labor more for a spiritual life, and comforts us regarding the shortness of natural life.

—Thomas Watson (1620-1686)³⁶

If you were to meditate sometime soon, what subject and passage of Scripture would you choose to meditate on?

C. How to Meditate

Place for meditation. We must purposely separate ourselves from all company and go apart in order to perform this exercise more thoroughly for kindling our love to God. We judge solitary places most fit for meditation. We find Jesus meditating alone in the mount, John the Baptist in the desert, David on his bed, Daniel in his house, Isaac in the field. But many sequester themselves from the visible company of men, yet carry “the world” within them. Both these societies are enemies to meditation.
—*Isaac Ambrose* (1604-1664)³⁷

Disciplined meditation is the art of thinking of some chosen spiritual subject in an orderly, disciplined way. Its purpose is to rouse the heart and soul to feel the good or evil of the subject—to experience a sense of love, delight, and humility. Disciplined meditation is an art that must be learned in the following ways.

1. *Choose a time that is free from all worldly concerns.* The best time is when the natural strength of your spirit is most free and active. Do not trust to chance opportunities. Let the time itself be a free-will offering to God taken from the top of the heap. Let it be the best time possible.

2. *Take time to prepare your mind for spiritual thoughts.* Do not rush into heavenly thoughts without first preparing your heart and mind (Ecc 5:1-2). Make every effort to understand the heavenly nature of the things you intend to meditate on, so that you may approach God with due reverence and fear, and heavenly matters with a holy respect.

3. *Do not come to meditate only out of a sense of duty.* When spiritual things have excited the mind and heart, then the soul comes to this duty with earnest desires to have the same experience repeated. Make every effort to enjoy spiritual things and your meditations on them will be sweet.

4. *Cry to God for help.* Confess your need for more light on spiritual things to remove the darkness from your mind. Confess your weakness and inability to stop your thoughts wandering when you should be thinking of holy things. Pray that God will strengthen your mind. If your meditations only make you see and feel your darkness and weakness of mind, causing you to cry to God for more grace and spiritual strength, then your thoughts have done a good work, though not what you had planned.

5. *It is good and helpful to choose a specific subject to meditate on.* Some have already been mentioned. Subjects may also be taken out of some spiritual experience we have just had, or some warning we have received from God, or something that reading or hearing the Word of God has brought to our minds.

6. *Do not be discouraged when, after all your efforts, you find you accomplish little.* To give up because we are not immediately successful is a fruit of pride and unbelief. If we get nothing out of meditation but a renewed sense of our own vileness and unworthiness, we are still the gainers. Those who conscientiously persist in this duty shall grow more enlightened daily, more wise, and more experienced in spiritual things, until they are able to meditate on them with ease and success.
—*John Owen* (1616-1683)³⁸

Personalized meditation. The Scriptures are a revelation of God’s will *for me*. I must read them as addressed to me *personally*. As I begin to meditate upon this, I take *each word or expression* separately and then ask questions of each: who, what, where, when, why, how, how often, how much?

- a) Take a single verse of Scripture at the beginning of the day.
- b) Write it out on a slip of paper.
- c) Carry it with you wherever you go.
- d) Refresh your memory as opportunity occurs by re-reading it.
- e) Pray over it and ask God to give you a blessing out of this verse,
to reveal to you its beauty and preciousness.
- f) Ponder each word separately.
- g) Ask questions of the verse to discover its deeper meaning.

Suppose you are meditating on Psalm 34:7: “*The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.*” Ask such questions as these: Why “*the angel*”? Who is it? “*Encamps*”: note the perfect tense (continuous); what is suggested by this figure? “*Around*”: what is meant by this? “*Those who fear Him*”: am I one of them? “*And rescues them*”: from what? Find answers from other Scriptures that speak of rescue or deliverance.

Here the grand result is in view. God's Word is given us to feed upon, and this feeding is for the purpose of translating the Scriptures into the terms of daily living. The principles and precepts of the Bible must be incorporated into my life. The Word has not been assimilated until it has become the regulator of my walk and the dynamo of my service.

—*Arthur W. Pink* (1886-1952)³⁹

What do you want to remember most about *how* to meditate? Will you put it into practice? If so, when?

D. Benefits of Meditation

Meditation is the reason why

- people do not become hardened, but instead *repent* of their sins
- the *promises* of God affect our hearts as we taste their sweetness
- the *threatenings* of God make deep impressions upon our hearts
- the *mercies* of God do more good in us
- *afflictions* do their perfect work in us and we are the better
- the *providences* of God make His desired impression upon us
- we avoid judging other men, but *examine our own hearts*
- people consider life's shortness and *positively prepare for death*
- we come *prepared to the Lord's Table*. —*Edmund Calamy* (1600-1666)⁴⁰

If the Word is in our hearts, Christ is near us. If we at any time turn to converse with the Word in us by meditation, we shall find Him ready to receive us into communion with Himself. By the light of the knowledge of Christ that we have by the Word, *unexpected thoughts of Him will come to mind continually*.—*John Owen* (1616-1683)⁴¹

He that has in his heart an understanding of the gospel will desire to know more of Christ; he will not be content with his present degree of knowledge. He will hear and read the Word, and pray and meditate in order to come to a *more perfect knowledge* of the Son of God. —*John Gill* (1697-1771)⁴²

It is only by the constant exercise of minds on spiritual things, by the diligent study of the Word, by daily meditation on it, by the exercise of faith in it, by earnestly asking the Spirit for light—that we acquire the all-important *discernment* to distinguish between good and evil, truth and error. —*A. W. Pink* (1886-1952)⁴³

Meditation:

- makes *the Word profitable* to us. It works upon the conscience.
- quickens *the affections*. Meditating on the transcendent beauties of Christ makes our love to Christ flame forth.
- has a transforming power to *stamp the impression of divine truths* upon our hearts.
- produces *reformation*. "I considered my ways, and turned my feet to Your testimonies" (Psa 119:59).

—*Thomas Watson* (1620-1686)⁴⁴

Meditation:

- *furnishes the mind with rest*. It is the couch of the soul. The time that a man spends in necessary rest, he never reckons to be wasted because he is refreshing and renovating himself for further exertion.
- is the instrument by which *the raw material of knowledge is converted to the best uses* of what the soul has acquired. It makes the soul so that it can use things when they come into the mind. —*Charles Spurgeon* (1834-1892)⁴⁵

What benefits of meditation are most meaningful to you? Together with meditation being a command, do these motivate you enough to meditate on God’s Word? If so, would you set a time and place now? If not, what would it take to convince you to do so?

PRAYER PARTNERS THIS WEEK

This week, use your time with your prayer partner to challenge each other to meditate on God’s Word. Share your past experiences with meditation; consider making a fresh start if appropriate. Also discuss the article by Andy Martin describing his own experience with an extended, meditative quiet time.

“Meditation and prayer are twin sisters, and both are equally necessary to Christian life. I think meditation must exist where there is prayer, and prayer is sure to exist where there is meditation.” —Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)⁴⁶

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP THIS WEEK

Some exercise and a football practice area comprise this week’s object lessons. If you have family with you, try to finish our MOW cycle strong by doing at least one of these with them!

SPRING 2024 CONCLUSION

*“A voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is My beloved Son, **listen to Him!**’” —Mark 9:7*

Men of Mount Calvary, Men of the Word, we have heard from God in these last ten weeks—and we are listening to Him! We trust in fresh ways and with better understanding of what God expects when He speaks to us through His Word. While each of us is in a different place spiritually, we each are aiming to hear God better when He speaks to us. For *your own* insight, take stock of where you stand as a listener by rating yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 = poor, 10 = excellent.

- In tune with the prerequisites for hearing Him
- Motivated by the importance of listening to Him
- Wary of the terrible consequences when we do not listen
- Vigilant against letting our hearts become hardened
- Prepared to listen with right attitudes for truly hearing
- Joyful in anticipation of the blessed results of listening
- Committed to listening actively
- Skilled in hearing Him speak when we read His Word
- Learning to practice regularly the art of meditation
- Encouraged through praying with our prayer partners
- Rejoicing in effective family/personal worship

Total A total of 60 or more is good (continue working to improve), 40 to 59 may need work, and less than 40 may require focused attention (i.e., seek counsel).

Circle the items that need work. Write some initial steps you might take (perhaps including asking someone to hold you accountable, reading more on listening, starting to meditate, or rereading these weekly studies):

May our gracious God lead us into greater consistency until we meet again this fall, when we will continue to grow in appreciation for HEARING GOD SPEAK TO US THROUGH HIS WORD. Amen! ✨

FAMILY/PERSONAL WORSHIP QUESTIONS

Family/Personal worship is a key focus for every faithful Christian man. We encourage every one of us toward spiritual success in this important ministry. The following questions are of course optional; they are offered in support of your efforts should you desire to use them. Even if you are not using the M'Cheyne Reading Plan, you may want to read these chapters in Mark, Luke, and John during this cycle. Almost all the questions are based on those readings. When you use them personally or with your family, hopefully they will help to reduce pressure and assist you in better engaging the Word as God intends. If you need to make it as simple as possible, then use just these three simple steps: read the chapter (or part of it), ask a question, and discuss.

These daily reading sections include M'Cheyne's schedule and our MOW questions for your family worship. There are also age-related questions that can be used with younger children and teens.

Because our readings take us through the life of Jesus Christ in three important Gospels, we have opted not to choose arbitrarily only one scene in a chapter for our question. Instead, we offer questions for almost every episode in the life of Christ. But these questions are too many for a meaningful family worship time. Therefore, you will want to read the chapter beforehand and **choose just one or a few questions** for your family worship focus—only those that seem most relevant to your family and that fit into the time available. If you want to use more of these questions, set up a separate Bible study time.

Note: The verse references after a question are for fathers to use in prompting discussion (not read with the initial question to the family).

Week 1 January 28 – February 3

There are more questions than appropriate for a typical family worship session. Therefore, choose one or two that are related to the episodes in the chapter that may be of the most interest to your household.

1/28 Sunday Gen 29 Mat 28 Est 5 Acts 28

1. Mat 28:1-10 The angel had a message of factual information for the women. He also sought to convince them. How did he do each?
2. 28:11-15 The guards knew the truth about what had happened (vs. 4). How could they be persuaded to lie?
3. 28:16-20 When Jesus gave the Great Commission to “Go...and make disciples of all the nations,” He started with “therefore.” What does the “therefore” refer to? (28:18)

Fathers: If your family has a military history, discuss who served, their ranks, and their “authority.” Show their medals if you have them. In the military, commands on the battlefield are absolute. Discuss how this illustrates Jesus’ absolute authority.

1/29 Monday Gen 30 Mark 1 Est 6 Rom 1

1. Mark 1:1-8 *Teens:* Mark begins his Gospel with quotations from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Why?
2. 1:1-8 What message was John preaching? Why is this important?
3. 1:9-13 Why did God speak and the Holy Spirit descend visibly at Jesus’ baptism?
4. 1:14-22 What was the message in Jesus’ preaching?
5. What attitude would you have had if you had been there listening to Him then? How is it different today?
6. 1:23-28 *Youth:* How did the demons know who Jesus was?
7. 1:29-39 Why was it so important for Jesus to have time for private prayer? What does this say about our own need for it?
8. 1:40-45 *Youth:* What special procedure did Jesus follow in order to heal the leper?

1/30 Tuesday Gen 31 Mark 2 Est 7 Rom 2

1. Mark 2:1-12 Why was it considered blasphemy to forgive sins?
2. Do you think the scribes listened to His explanation?
3. 2:13-17 *Teens:* Explain the analogy: a physician healing the sick (not the healthy), and Jesus healing sinners (not the self-righteous).
4. 2:18-28 *Teens:* How do attendants with a bridegroom explain Jesus’ disciples not fasting while with Him?

Fathers: If you have attended a wedding in the last year, ask the children if they remember how much joy there was. Such occasions are times for celebration, not for sober fasting!

1/31 Wed. Gen 32 Mark 3 Est 8 Rom 3

1. Mark 3:1-12 This is still early in Jesus' ministry. Why did the Pharisees turn against Him so soon?
2. 3:13-21 Why did Jesus appoint twelve apostles?
3. 3:22-30 *Teens:* What is the sin against the Holy Spirit? Why do you think the penalty is so severe?
Fathers: Most conservative commentators consider this sin to be "attributing the work of God to Satan." Consider introducing the family to commentaries and reading about verse 29 from Matthew Henry, John Gill, or John Calvin. These are available in many Bible software programs, including Logos.com and OnlineBible.net.
4. 3:31-35 Who are Jesus' mother and brothers? (3:35) Why is it so important for believers to remember this always?

2/1 Thurs. Gen 33 Mark 4 Est 9-10 Rom 4

1. Mark 4:1-20 Why did Jesus often teach in parables? (4:11-12)^k
2. 4:21-34 *Teens:* How can we "take care" as we listen? (4:24) What will be the result if we do this well?
3. 4:35-41 Have you ever tried to sleep in a small boat? In a small boat in a storm? What does this tell us about Jesus?
Fathers: Consider taking the family out on a boat (or just observe some from a shore) and notice how uncomfortable trying to sleep would be. Discuss how dangerous storms at sea can be.

2/2 Friday Gen 34 Mark 5 Job 1 Rom 5

1. Mark 5:1-20 Why was to be "clothed and in his right mind" one of the first things that happened to the demoniac when he was delivered?
2. *Teens:* How important is it to avoid completely any involvement with demonic powers?
3. 5:21-34 In the midst of a crowd, how did Jesus know that someone specially had touched His garments? (5:30)
Fathers: Discuss the amazing facts of Jesus' repeated miracles and how these demonstrate the awesome power of God in Him.
Consider going to a very crowded place and notice how often you brush against others as you go along.
4. 5:35-43 How did Jesus demonstrate tender compassion to the girl in the midst of this miracle?
Fathers: He included her mother and father in the room, He took her by the hand, and He addressed her directly.

2/3 Saturday Gen 35-36 Mark 6 Job 2 Rom 6

1. Mark 6:1-6 Why did folks from a prophet's hometown tend to fail to honor him as due? Why do we need especially to guard against this in the family?
2. 6:7-13 What is the message that the twelve preached? How is this consistent with John the Baptist's and Jesus' messages? (1:4, 15)
3. *Teens:* Why is repentance so important?
4. 6:14-29 How did Herod show himself to be both very foolish and very wicked? (6:26)
5. 6:30-44 Jesus knew what He was about to do. Yet He began by telling His twelve disciples, "You give them something to eat!" Why?
Fathers: Jesus often asked questions to make people think and draw them into spiritual understanding. This is an important skill for all of us in teaching our families.
6. 6:45-52 How does a hardened heart continually underestimate Jesus' power and one's need for Him?
7. 6:53-56 *Youth:* How extensive was Jesus' healing ministry?

Week 2 February 4-10

Each day, there are more questions than appropriate for a typical family worship session. Therefore, choose one or two that are related to the episodes in the chapter that may be of the most interest to your household.

2/4 Sunday Gen 37 Mark 7 Job 3 Rom 7

1. Mark 7:9-13 Why was giving a gift to God instead of to parents such a grievous sin?

^k A more complete question regarding the four soils comes on February 22 in Luke 8.

2. 7:14-23 “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear” (7:16). What did Jesus mean when He said this to the crowd around Him? How is this important preparation for hearing from God?
3. *Teens*: Compare what comes out of man’s heart to what goes into it. Why is the former so much more serious?
4. 7:24-30 How did the Syrophenician woman express great faith?
Fathers: If you have a pet, drop some crumbs from your dinner table and let the family see afresh the eager eating of them.

2/5 Monday Gen 38 Mark 8 Job 4 Rom 8

1. 8:1-9 If you were confronted with a large, tired, hungry, restless crowd, what would you be tempted to do? How did Jesus respond? (8:2) Compare His response to your own. How can you be more like Jesus?
2. *Youth*: How many loaves and fish were there at the beginning? (8:5,7) How many were left over at the end? What does this say about Jesus’ power? What does this say about His deity?
3. 8:10-21 How can a person have ears and be able to hear some one’s voice, but yet not hear what they are saying? (8:18) Does this ever happen to you? If so, what can you do about it?
Fathers: Consider going to a crowded place, sitting quietly, and listening. Point out how you can hear noises and people talking, but often cannot distinguish the words well enough to tell what people are saying. Discuss what it would take to be able to hear their words (answer: remove the background noise, get closer, make eye contact, observe facial expressions, etc.). What else would be needed to understand what their words meant?
4. 8:27-33 Jesus asked, “Who do people say that I am?” and “Who do you say that I am?” (8:27, 29) How would you answer these questions?
Fathers: Help your younger children understand all the possibilities. (8:28)
5. *Teens*: What was so shocking about Jesus’ teaching in 8:31? Peter wanted to save Jesus’ life. Why was this an error?
6. 8:34-38 What are the three conditions for being a disciple of Jesus? (8:34) What are the consequences for not doing these? (8:35)
7. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and yet forfeit his own soul? (8:36)
Fathers: An object lesson would be to visit a cemetery. Discuss all the possessions these people had while they were alive.
8. Why should 8:38 make everyone without Christ tremble?

2/6 Tuesday Gen 39 Mark 9 Job 5 Rom 9

1. 9:2-9 Why is this event called the “transfiguration”? What happened there? Why is it significant? Why does Jesus’ apparel shine?
2. 9:15-29 What do we learn about faith in verses 22-24?
Fathers: “All things are possible to him who believes” is a good memory verse for the family.
3. *Teens*: Why do so many have unbelief? Why do we all need help with our unbelief?
4. 9:30-32 How is verse 31 proof of Jesus’ deity?
Fathers: Not only does Jesus predict the future, but He foretells His own resurrection from the dead!
Teens: Why was it necessary for Jesus to die, then to rise again?
6. 9:33-37 *Teens*: How does one get to be greatest in the world’s eyes? Why is Christ’s way so different?
7. 9:38-50 Jesus spoke figuratively of cutting off hands, feet, and eyes. What does this say about how much we should hate sin?
Fathers: Emphasize how this was a figurative teaching! If you know an amputee, consider visiting them and asking them to share how their loss of a limb has impacted their lives.

2/7 Wed. Gen 40 Mark 10 Job 6 Rom 10

1. 10:1-12 Who instituted marriage? When did He do it? (See Gen 2:18, 21-24)
2. 10:13-16 What is it to receive something like a child? (*Isn’t it amazing that we can come into God’s kingdom like that!*)
3. 10:17-27 Why did Jesus ask the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions? What promise for us is here? Why is it wonderful?
4. 10:28-31 In verse 31, Jesus gives the “first/last” principle. What is it and what does it mean for us? How might it apply in brother/sister activities in your family?
5. 10:32-34 Why is Jesus’ death (and resurrection) the most important event in history?

6. 10:35-45 How do verses 42-45 explain the first/last principle?
7. 10:46-52 Jesus said the blind man had faith. How did the blind man demonstrate this?

2/8 Thurs. Gen 41 Mark 11 Job 7 Rom 11

1. 11:1-11 Why is Jesus' sitting on a colt an important fact of history?
Fathers: Zechariah 9:9 is a Messianic prophecy. Jesus' fulfilling this (and many other Old Testament prophecies) shows that He in fact is the promised Messiah.
2. 11:15-19 *Youth:* How were the people and religious leaders making the Temple court into a "robbers' den"?
Teens: Why were the chief priests and scribes afraid of Jesus? (*The quotation in 11:17 is from Isaiah 56:7.*)
3. 11:20-24, 12-14 What is the condition Jesus gives here for God to answer our prayers? (11:23-24)
Fathers: Believing prayer will be answered by Jesus. One possible interpretation: Drying up of the fig tree is a lesser miracle, and moving of a mountain is a greater miracle. Jesus is telling us that He will, in answer to prayer, do both small things (like answers to many of our daily needs) and great things (like the saving of a soul, perhaps the greatest miracle of all).
4. 11:25-26 Why does Jesus make forgiveness so extremely important?
Do you need to forgive others in the family?
Do you need to ask forgiveness of others for what you have done?
5. 11:27-33 Why did Jesus know better than to answer the Pharisees' question?
Fathers: Sometimes people are not teachable; they are not trying to learn anything. They only want to prove you wrong or back you into a corner. They will not listen to your answer.

2/9 Friday Gen 42 Mark 12 Job 8 Rom 12

1. 12:1-12 In the parable of the vineyard owner, who is represented by each of the following: a) the owner? b) the vineyard workers? c) the slaves sent to demand payment? d) the owner's son?
2. 12:13-17 Why is Jesus' answer about the poll-tax brilliant? How much of His answer applies to us today?
3. 12:18-27 What do we learn about God and heaven in this passage?
4. 12:28-34 What two things are represented by the two answers, "Love God" and "Love your neighbor"?
Fathers: The representations are summaries of the two tables of the Law: commandments 1-4 toward God, and commandments 5-10 toward our fellow men (Exo 20). Show portrayals of the two tablets of the Law to illustrate.
Teens: What is the "kingdom of God"?
Fathers: The "kingdom of God" here refers to "the gospel state...[where] the followers of Christ embrace the doctrines and submit to the ordinances of the gospel." The scribe "preferred those things that related to the perfections of God...and the good of his neighbor before the ceremonies of the Law."—John Gill (1697-1771)
5. 12:35-40 Why does Jesus tell us to "beware" of false religious leaders? Who would be their counterparts today?
Fathers: This passage is in answer to all the attempts to trick Jesus into breaking God's Law so that they could accuse Him.
6. 12:41-44 How was the widow's penny more than the rich people's large sums? What does this tell us about God's values?
Fathers: Consider putting on a table a penny on one side, and a large stack of quarters or dollar bills on another. Discuss what makes one more valuable than the other.

2/10 Saturday Gen 43 Mark 13 Job 9 Rom 13

1. 13:1-13 In verse 2, Jesus prophesied the destruction of the Temple. When was this fulfilled? What does this show about Jesus' deity?
2. Verse 10 refers to the Great Commission. How important are gospel missions? Who do you know that is involved in missions?
3. In the end times, why will people hate Christians? (13:13)
4. 13:14-23 What is a "false Christ"? Do they exist today?
5. 13:24-37 What marks Christ's return to the earth? (13:26) We are admonished to "take heed" and "be on the alert." What does it look like to live your life "on the alert"?
Fathers: Consider visiting an airport or other place where there is police security. Observe how they are vigilant in constantly surveilling the crowd to notice anything unusual, and how they avoid letting themselves be distracted.

Week 3 February 11-17

Choose just one or a few questions for episodes of interest to your household.

2/11 Sunday Gen 44 Mark 14 Job 10 Rom 14

1. Mark 14:1-9 *Youth:* There were two motivations for the perfume: selling it for a lot of money or using it to honor Jesus. Which was the better choice? Which would you choose?
2. 14:10-21 “One of you will betray Me.” How could anyone betray Jesus?
Fathers: Ask your children about bullying. Have they ever experienced it? How did it feel? How does bullying feel like betrayal?
3. 14:22-26a *Teens:* “This is My body...This is My blood...” What is the meaning of the Lord’s Supper? How was Jesus’ blood “poured out for many”? Who are the “many”?
4. 14:26b-41 Peter did not think he would ever deny Jesus. Why was this foolish? Are you capable of denying Jesus?
5. 14:42-52 When Jesus was arrested, does it surprise you that “They all left Him and fled” (14:50)? Why or why not?
6. 14:53-65 The high priest asked, “Are you the Christ?” and Jesus answered, “I am.” What does His answer remind you of? (Exo 3:14)
7. 14:66-72 *Teens:* Peter denied that he knew Jesus three times! Jesus calls us also to deny someone. Who? What does denying that person look like?
Fathers: See Mark 8:34. Disciples of Jesus must deny their fleshly desires and all that they were before Christ gave them new hearts.

2/12 Monday Gen 45 Mark 15 Job 11 Rom 15

1. 15:1-14 Why did Jesus not answer Pilate or the charges made against Him? (see Isa 53:7)
2. 15:15-21 The soldiers mocked Jesus. When someone mocks another, what does it reveal about their heart? Why is this a grievous sin?
3. 15:22-32 *Youth:* In these verses, who was mocking Jesus? Is it ever right to mock someone? Why?
4. 15:33-41 What is the significance of the veil being torn open?
Fathers: Consider the object lesson of taking an old sheet or pillowcase. Hold it up to show how it makes a barrier. Then tear it in two (from the top to the bottom), to make the visual impression for unlimited access.¹

2/13 Tuesday Gen 46 Mark 16 Job 12 Rom 16

1. 16:1-8 *Youth:* Why do we worship God on Sunday?
2. 16:9-13 Why did the apostles refuse to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead? (See 16:14)
3. 16:14-18 Why do we call verse 15 the “Great Commission”? What does it mean?

2/14 Wed. Gen 47 Luke 1:1-38 Job 13 1Co 1

1. Luke 1:1-4 What was Luke’s purpose in writing his Gospel?
2. 1:5-25 Why was Zacharias unable to speak during Elizabeth’s pregnancy?
Fathers: Note that even this is a great miracle.
3. 1:26-38 *Teens:* Zacharias and Mary both questioned how the promised births would be possible. What made the difference in the angel’s response between them?
Fathers: Mary accepted that what the angel said would be done (1:45), but asked how it would be done. Zacharias doubted that it could be done.

2/15 Thurs. Gen 48 Luke 1:39-80 Job 14 1Co 2

1. 1:39-45 *Youth:* Why did the baby in the womb leap for joy?
2. 1:46-55 This passage is called “The Magnificat.” Which verse in this passage stands out to you and why?
Fathers: “Magnificat” means to magnify. It is the first word of verse 46 in The Vulgate (late 4th-century Latin translation of the Bible).
3. 1:56-80 See verse 76. Mark 1:2-3 also tells us that this baby, John, would fulfill prophesy (Mal 3:1; Isa 40:3) and be God’s messenger for the Messiah’s coming. Why is prophesy so important in the Bible?

¹ The veil separated the Holy of Holies (with the mercy seat), from the Holy Place (where the priests burned incense). The rent veil gave all believers direct access to God’s presence through the shed blood of Christ (Heb 4:16).

4. What will be the Messiah's purpose in coming? (1:77-79)

2/16 Friday Gen 49 Luke 2 Job 15 1Co 3

1. Luke 2:1-7 How did God use a pagan emperor to fulfill the prophecy (Micah 5:2) that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem? Does God direct the rulers of the earth today? (Pro 21:1)
2. 2:8-20 *Teens:* What are the circumstances in which future kings are normally born in this world? How does Jesus' birth stand in contrast? (*Try to name at least five ways.*)
3. 2:21-35 What are the main points of Simeon's prophecy?
4. 2:36-41 How did Simeon and Anna know that the baby Jesus was so special?
5. 2:42-52 At the age of twelve, Jesus amazed the religious teachers with His understanding of God's Word. Why is understanding God's Word worth much effort?

2/17 Saturday Gen 50 Luke 3 Job 16-17 1Co 4

1. 3:1-14 What message did John preach?
2. 3:15-20 See verse 17. Who is the wheat and who is the chaff?
3. 3:21-22 Which Persons of the Trinity are present at Jesus' baptism?
4. 3:23-38 In the genealogy, which names do you recognize? Describe each of them.

Week 4 February 18-24

Choose just one or a few questions for episodes of interest to your household.

2/18 Sunday Exo 1 Luke 4 Job 18 1Co 5

1. Luke 4:1-13 *Youth:* With all the resources of heaven at His command, what did Jesus choose to use to combat Satan's temptations?
2. *Teens:* Of the three areas of temptation (physical needs, pride/status/peer pressure, safety/security), which do you most struggle with? How can you use the Word to help?
3. 4:14-30 Why was what Jesus said in verse 21 so significant?
4. 4:31-37 *Teens:* Jesus had by now, early in His ministry, healed many diseases, restored physical impairments, and now cast out demons. Who do these acts demonstrate Him to be?
5. 4:38-44 Why did Jesus leave and go "to a secluded place"?
Fathers: Consider taking the family to a secluded place for an extended time of family prayer. Describe to them the importance of doing this individually as Jesus did.

2/19 Monday Exo 2 Luke 5 Job 19 1Co 6

1. 5:1-11 Why did Simon say, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man"?
2. 5:12-16 Why do you think Jesus touched the man with leprosy?
3. 5:17-26 How did the paralytic and his bearers show their faith? (5:20)
4. 5:27-32 Why did the Pharisees and scribes not like Jesus healing on the Sabbath or meeting with sinners? What was Jesus' answer to them? (5:31-32)
5. 5:33-39 Explain the parable of the garment. Explain the parable of the wineskins.
Fathers: Consider an object lesson comparing an actual old garment (stretched and worn) and a stiff new one.

2/20 Tuesday Exo 3 Luke 6 Job 20 1Co 7

1. 6:1-5 How had the Pharisees corrupted the Sabbath?
Fathers: The Pharisees claimed that taking a handful of grain on the Sabbath was not lawful. This reflected their own traditions, not the Law of God. They had added hundreds of rules for sabbath-keeping that were not intended by God. The Sabbath is for man, not man for the Sabbath.
2. 6:6-11 The Pharisees had drifted so far from God's heart of compassion that they could not even answer Jesus' question, "Is it lawful to do good...on the Sabbath?" Is it lawful to do good then? (Mat 12:11; Luke 13:14-16)
3. 6:12-16 What did Jesus do before choosing the twelve apostles? Why were His choices of these men so important?
4. 6:17-26 *Youth:* What people will be blessed? Who will have woe?

5. 6:27-38 Summarize the many commands in verses 27-36.
How is this different from the world's way of doing things?
6. 6:39-45 How are each of us like a tree that bears fruit? Summarize Jesus' teaching in verses 39-45.
Fathers: Consider an object lesson with good and bad fruit. Show how one is attractive and useful, and the other ugly and to be discarded.
7. 6:46-49 Why is it important to act on Jesus' words, and not just listen to and try to understand them?
Fathers: Consider an object lesson to visit a structure without a good foundation. Also point out the difference between just hearing the words and actually comprehending the meaning of them, which is a prerequisite for acting upon them rightly.

2/21 Wed. Exo 4 Luke 7 Job 21 1Co 8

1. 7:1-10 How is submission to authority connected to faith?
2. 7:11-17 What is the most amazing here: raising someone from the dead, or that Jesus "had compassion" on the widow?
3. 7:18-26 "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them." Why are these infallible proofs that Jesus was the Messiah? (7:22)
Fathers: See Isaiah 35:5-6, 29:18, and 61:1. Consider visiting a hospital emergency room briefly to illustrate what a great impact Jesus' healing ministry must have had in the first century. (Imagine everyone in the ER to be healed and the people leaving in amazement.)
4. 7:27-35 *Teens:* How is the least believer in Jesus greater than John the Baptist? (7:28)
Fathers: Consider that believers have the church, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the Word of God!
5. 7:36-50 Why does one who is forgiven little, love less than one who is forgiven much? (7:47)
Teens: Do you consider yourself forgiven little or much? Why?

2/22 Thurs. Exo 5 Luke 8 Job 22 1Co 9

1. 8:1-15 There are four soils: a) beside the road, b) rocky soil, c) thorns, d) good soil. Describe what happens to the seed sown upon each. Which one best describes your own situation?
Fathers: Consider visiting a community garden and finding areas representing each of the four soils.
2. 8:16-21 *Teens:* The principle of accountability is oft repeated in Scripture. Why should it motivate us to do good? (8:17)
3. 8:22-25 Why was it a lack of faith for the disciples to be afraid when in danger?
They asked, "Who then is this?" How would you answer?
4. 8:26-39 Why were the Gerasenes afraid when the demon possessed man was now in his right mind?
Is this rational? What alternative did they have?
5. 8:40-48 *Youth:* How did the woman exercise faith in Jesus? Can you exercise faith in this way?
6. 8:49-56 Why is the fact that Jairus' daughter actually "had died" an important part of this account?

2/23 Friday Exo 6 Luke 9 Job 23 1Co 10

1. 9:1-10 *Teens:* What principle of faith did Jesus teach His disciples by instructing them to take no money on their journey?
2. 9:11-17 Jesus instructed the people to sit down "in groups of about fifty." What does this tell us about God's character?
3. 9:18-27 *Teens:* What is it to "deny yourself"? What is it to "take up your cross daily"?
How do some people demonstrate "being ashamed of Jesus"?
Fathers: Notice the principle of accountability again in 9:26.
4. 9:28-36 God spoke to Peter, James, and John from out of the cloud.
Youth: What was His message?
Teens: Why did He give it?
5. 9:37-42 How was casting out a demon different from healing a disease?
Fathers: Casting out demons always involved direct interaction with Satan and His evil forces, which required even greater power and authority for Jesus.
6. 9:43-50 Why is "Am I possibly the greatest?" always a terrible question to ask? Who does Jesus say is great? How is this different from the world's thinking?

7. 9:51-62 How does Jesus respond to excuses for making a commitment?

Youth: Do you ever make excuses for doing chores?

2/24 Saturday Exo 7 Luke 10 Job 24 1Co 11

1. 10:1-12 What must it be like for a lamb to be in the midst of wolves? (10:3)

2. 10:13-16 *Teens:* Jesus said, “The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me.” What responsibilities/privileges does this bring to each believing family? How important is it to listen to Jesus?

3. 10:17-24 Does it surprise you that believers are termed *infants* (10:21)? What is the significance of this?

Fathers: Consider visiting a nursery, or someone in the church who has a new-born baby. Discuss how helpless newborns are.

4. 10:25-37 A neighbor is one who shows mercy to those in need (10:37). To whom have you been a neighbor lately?

5. 10:38-42 What is the “one thing necessary”?

For each person in the family: Do you tend to be a Martha or a Mary? How can you come to a better balance?

Fathers: Be sure and explain that both personality types are needed, but that the one thing needful must never be neglected, especially when it does not come naturally.

Week 5 February 25 – March 2

Choose just one or a few questions for episodes of interest to your household.

2/25 Sunday Exo 8 Luke 11 Job 25-26 1Co 12

1. Luke 11:1-4 Which request in the Lord’s Prayer stands out as most important to you?

2. 11:5-13 Jesus said, “Because of his persistence he will...give him as much as he needs.” What is it to be persistent in prayer? Are you? How can you be more so?

3. 11:14-26 Can a person be neutral toward Jesus Christ (11:23)? Why?

4. 11:27-36 What does it mean to have a “clear” eye? How can the “light in you” be darkness? (11:33-36)

Fathers: The conscience and the inner motives are in view here.

5. 11:37-54 Why was Jesus so vehement in denouncing the Pharisees and lawyers?

2/26 Monday Exo 9 Luke 12 Job 27 1Co 13

1. 12:1-7 Whom do you fear the most: those who might do you physical harm, or the Lord God Almighty? Explain.

2. 12:8-12 *Teens:* How does the Holy Spirit teach us what we ought to say?

3. 12:13-21 How does greed creep into our lives? To what degree do you think greed has crept into your life?

4. 12:22-34 *Youth:* Why should we not worry? Where is your treasure? (12:34)

Fathers: Consider going to a main bank office and observe their large safe. Discuss how people misguidedly amass possessions and money to give them a sense of security.

5. 12:35-40 Why are we always to be ready to greet Jesus?

6. 12:41-48 Jesus said, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be required.” Have you been given much? How much will be required of you?

7. 12:49-59 *Teens:* Jesus said, “Why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?” Why is it so important that we judge ourselves for our own sin, confess it, and repent of it?

2/27 Tuesday Exo 10 Luke 13 Job 28 1Co 14

1. 13:1-9 What does it mean to repent? Why is it so important?

2. 13:10-17 Is the Sabbath made for man, or man for the Sabbath?

3. 13:18-22 What is the kingdom of God like?

4. 13:23-30 How can some be so deceived, thinking they know the Lord when in fact they do not?

5. 13:31-35 *Youth:* Describe how a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. *Fathers:* Consider visiting someone with chickens and chicks.

2/28 Wed. Exo 11,12:1-21 Luke 14 Job 29 1Co 15

1. 14:1-14 Why is it so important to reach out to those in need who cannot repay you? To what degree does your family do this?
2. 14:15-24 Do you tend to make excuses to avoid doing something you do not want to do? Why is this a grievous mistake?
3. 14:26-35 What are some conditions for discipleship mentioned in this passage? How can we practically apply them to ourselves?

2/29 Thursday <<no readings on this leap year day >>

Fathers: You may want to listen again to our pastor's new year's message on this special day and discuss its main points with the family. Also consider a new family tradition: take off leap year day and go on a family outing. Discuss what you were doing four years ago, and anticipate what the ages, interests, and responsibilities of each person might be four years from now. Discuss how to prepare for these year by year.

3/1 Friday Exo 12:22-51 Luke 15 Job 30 1Co 16

1. 15:1-10 *Youth:* What is the connection between the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin?
2. 15:11-24 What condition in the prodigal son was necessary for his forgiveness and restoration?
3. 15:25-32 Describe the attitude of the elder brother. Have you ever had this same attitude toward God?

3/2 Saturday Exo 13 Luke 16 Job 31 2Co 1

1. 16:1-13 Why is the godly use of money so important?
2. 16:14-18 "That which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God." Give some examples of what is highly esteemed among men. If these things are detestable in God's sight, what should be our response to them?
3. 16:19-24 Is hell a real place? What bearing should this have on our lives?
4. 16:25-31 "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead." Does this surprise you? What impact should this have on our lives?

Week 6 March 3-9

3/3 Sunday Exo 14 Luke 17 Job 32 2Co 2

1. Luke 17:1-4 Why is causing a little one to stumble so serious an offense?
Why is repentance so important? Why is forgiving another so important?
2. 17:5-10 As willing slaves of Christ (Eph 6:6), why is it so important to remember our place before the living Christ?
3. 17:11-19 Where are the nine? Why is gratitude for what we are given so important? Name some of the things you have been given. Are you truly grateful for them?
4. 17:20-30 What will it be like on the day when the Son of Man returns?
5. 17:31-37 "Remember Lot's wife." What lesson does Jesus want us to learn from her (Gen 19:24-26)?

3/4 Monday Exo 15 Luke 18 Job 33 2Co 3

1. 18:1-8 What promise does Jesus give here to His people? Have you claimed that promise?
2. 18:9-14 Describe the inner attitudes of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Which do you more resemble?
3. 18:15-17 What is it to "receive the kingdom of God like a child"?
4. 18:18-27 Why did the ruler not follow Jesus? Do you have that same attitude sometimes?
5. 18:28-31 *Teens:* Verse 29 is hyperbole. What is Jesus' meaning?
Fathers: "Hyperbole" is a figure of speech in which exaggeration is used for emphasis or effect, as in "I could sleep for a year" or "This book weighs a ton."
5. 18:31-34 What do we learn about Jesus when He could predict His manner of death and His resurrection?
What should be our response?
6. 18:35-43 What should we do when we have a need and Jesus is near?

3/5 Tuesday Exo 16 Luke 19 Job 34 2Co 4

1. 19:1-10 What did Zaccheus do that evidenced his having a new heart? Why did Jesus come to earth?

Fathers: Verse 10 is worth memorizing as a family.

2. 19:11-27 Here we have illustrated the principle of accountability.

Why does God hold us accountable for His gifts to us? Knowing this is true, what should be our response?

Fathers: A pound or mina is 100 days wages for a day laborer. Consider helping the family understand how someone can turn one dollar into ten through diligent labor. A possible object lesson: Go to a street or farmers market, notice how some are selling things they have made, and others are selling produce (which they may have bought at wholesale). In both cases, if they take the money from sales and make/buy proportionally more of their product, they will have more to sell tomorrow than they had today. And the cycle repeats itself until one has become ten.

3. 19:28-40 How did these events fulfill prophecy?

Fathers: See Zechariah 9:9 and Psalm 118:22-27.

4. 19:41-48 Why did Jesus drive out of the Temple those who were selling things?

Fathers: Consider going to an open-air market and notice all the vendors selling their wares. Imagine how dishonoring to God it would be to do this in the church.

3/6 Wed. Exo 17 Luke 20 Job 35 2Co 5

1. 20:1-8 Why did Jesus *not* answer the Pharisees question about His authority?

Fathers: He knew their hearts!

2. 20:9-19 In the parable, who is represented by: a) the vineyard owner? b) the vine-growers who rented it? c) the slaves sent by the owner? d) the “beloved son”?

3. 20:20-26 What is it to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s?

What is it to render to God the things that are God’s?

4. 20:27-38 How did Jesus show that the dead are raised to life?

5. 20:39-44 *Teens:* Is Christ David’s son or David’s Lord?

6. 20:45-47 Name some of the sins of the scribes. Why should we avoid these?

3/7 Thur. Exo 18 Luke 21 Job 36 2Co 6

1. 21:1-4 How did the widow give more than the rich people? Why is this commended?

Fathers: The key is in heart attitude, not the amount.

2. 21:5-19 What will persecution lead to? (21:13) Why is this worth persecution?

3. 21:20-28 What are some signs of Jesus’ second coming?

4. 21:29-33 What promise does Jesus give us in verse 33? Why is this so important for His people?

5. 21:34-38 What commands does Jesus give here? How can we obey these commands practically?

3/8 Friday Exo 19 Luke 22 Job 37 2Co 7

1. 22:1-6 Why did Judas do what he did?

2. 22:7-13 What is unusual about the way Jesus prepared for the Last Supper?

3. 22:14-20 What did Jesus say the bread and the wine represented?

Fathers: Consider an object lesson with actual bread. You could break up the bread to show how this leaves it marred and unusable (1Co 11:24 KJV).

4. 22:21-27 *Teens:* What is meant by “servant leadership”? Where do we see this displayed today?

Fathers: Servant leadership is prominently displayed in biblical churches and families (see 1Ki 12:7).

5. 22:28-34 How well did Peter understand his own heart? (22:33)

6. 22:35-46 “Yet not My will, but Yours be done.” Why is this one of the greatest prayers ever prayed?

7. 22:47-53 How did Jesus show compassion even during His betrayal and arrest?

8. 22:54-62 *Youth:* How do you suppose Peter felt when the rooster crowed?

Teens: How does one recover from such a feeling?

9. 22:63-71 In other Gospels, Jesus’ profession to be the Son of God was called blasphemy. Why?

3/9 Saturday Exo 20 Luke 23 Job 38 2Co 8

1. 23:1-12 Why did Herod and Pilate become friends?

2. 23:13-25 Pilate “found in Him no guilt.” Why then did he sentence Jesus to death?

3. 23:26-31 *Teens:* Why would Jesus say to weep for yourselves and your children instead of Himself?
4. 23:32-43 What do we learn about Jesus' love and compassion in verses 34 and 43?
What good works or merit did the thief on the cross bring for his salvation?
What does this teach you about your own case?
5. 23:44-49 How did God the Father testify to Jesus' divine sacrifice?
6. 23:50-56 Why is it important that "no one had ever lain" in Jesus' tomb?

Week 7 March 10-16

3/10 Sunday Exo 21 Luke 24 Job 39 2Co 9

1. Luke 24:1-12 Jesus is "the living One" who would "the third day rise again." How does this prove His deity? What should be our response?
2. 24:13-35 "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us?" Have you ever had a similar experience with God's Word? If not, how might you move toward such an experience?
Fathers: See the week 10 study on Meditation for assistance in going deeper with the Lord in His Word. May His Word burn in our hearts!
3. 24:36-49 How does Jesus "open our minds to understand the Scriptures"?
4. 24:50-53 What was the disciples' response to Christ's ascension?

3/11 Monday Exo 22 John 1 Job 40 2Co 10

1. John 1:1-5 What do we learn about Jesus in these verses?
2. 1:6-14 Describe what someone who is "full of grace and truth" would be like. Have you ever known someone like that?
3. 1:15-28 What was John's mission?
3. 1:29-36 How was Jesus the "Lamb of God"?
Fathers: Mention the paschal lamb and the meaning of the Passover (Exo 12; Acts 8:32; 1Pe 1:19; Rev 5:6). If you can locate a sheep farm, visit them during shearing time to witness how sheep become silent when under duress.
4. 1:37-42 Why did Andrew think he had found the Messiah?
5. 1:43-51 Why did Nathanael think he had found the Messiah?

3/12 Tuesday Exo 23 John 2 Job 41 2Co 11

1. 2:1-11 What effect did the miracle at Cana have on Jesus' disciples? What effect should it have upon us?
2. 2:12-22 Cleansing the merchants from the Temple was bold, decisive, and brave. How could one person succeed in it?
Fathers: Consider going to a mall or a busy outdoor market. Imagine it to be similar to the Temple court's merchandising. Then imagine trying to clear it by yourself with a whip. God's power was working through Jesus!
3. 2:23-25 *Teens:* When the people responded positively, why did Jesus not entrust Himself to them?

3/13 Wed. Exo 24 John 3 Job 42 2Co 12

1. 3:1-12 What does it mean to be "born again"?
Fathers: Consider visiting a newborn nursery (at church?) and discuss the parallels between physical and spiritual birth.
2. 3:13-21 Contrast how believers and unbelievers respond to Jesus' Light. What motivates each of them?
Fathers: Consider using a flashlight in your darkened room. If the bright light were shined directly into your eyes (like conviction of sin), discuss how you might want it to stop. Yet, when you are trying to navigate life's difficulties in a dark world, you might seek the "Light."
3. 3:22-36 What facts does John share with us about Jesus?

3/14 Thur. Exo 25 John 4 Pro 1 2Co 13

4. 4:1-26 What is it to worship the Father "in spirit and truth"?
2. 4:27-42 Why did many more Samaritans believe Jesus? (4:41)
3. 4:43-54 *Teens:* On some occasions, Jesus went to heal someone in person. But He did not on this occasion. Why the difference?

3/15 Friday Exo 26 John 5 Pro 2 Gal 1

1. 5:1-16 Why were the Jews more interested in the man's carrying his pallet than his miraculous healing?
2. 5:17-30 What does Jesus tell us here about His relationship with God the Father?
3. 5:31-47 In what way does Moses accuse the unbelieving Jews?

3/16 Saturday Exo 27 John 6 Pro 3 Gal 2

1. 6:1-14 Why did Jesus begin this great miracle by asking a simple question (6:5)?
2. 6:15-21 How are "It is I" among the most comforting words anyone could hope to hear?
3. 6:22-27 Contrast "the food which perishes" with "the food which endures to eternal life" (6:27).
Fathers: Consider putting out two plates: one with your family's favorite foods, and one with some old rotting fruits/vegetables.
4. 6:28-59 *Teens:* Describe this "bread of life."
5. 6:60-71 For obtaining eternal life, how much do our talents, education, and experience help us? Why?

Week 8 March 17-23

3/17 Sunday Exo 28 John 7 Pro 4 Gal 3

1. John 7:1-13 Why did some say Jesus was "a good man" and others say that He "leads the people astray"?
2. 7:14-36 Jesus said, "He who sent Me is true...I am from Him."
Who sent Jesus? How did the crowd remain ignorant of this?
Fathers: See 8:54 for Jesus' clear statement.
3. 7:37-53 Describe the various reactions to Jesus. (*Seven of them: 7:40, 41, 42, 44, 46, 47-48, 51*)

3/18 Monday Exo 29 John 8 Pro 5 Gal 4

1. 8:1-11 Why did no one condemn the woman caught in adultery?
2. 8:12-20 Why is Jesus' testimony true?
3. 8:21-30 What is it to be "of this world"? (8:23) In which verse of this passage does Jesus give the gospel? (8:24)
4. 8:31-37 "The truth will make you free." What is this truth? Describe this freedom.
5. 8:38-45 What does Jesus teach us here about the devil? (8:44)
6. 8:46-50 Why did they not hear the words of God? (8:47)
7. 8:51-59 Why was the crowd ready to stone Jesus?
Fathers: See 8:31. These are Jews who had professed belief in Jesus.

3/19 Tuesday Exo 30 John 9 Pro 6 Gal 5

1. 9:1-7 In what ways is Jesus the "Light of the world"?
2. 9:8-34 Summarize the spiritual truths that the man born blind proclaimed.
3. 9:35-41 What did Jesus mean when He said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind"? (9:39)
Fathers: Consider playing "blind man's bluff." Discuss the practical limitations that blindness brings.

3/20 Wed. Exo 31 John 10 Pro 7 Gal 6

1. 10:1-10 What does Jesus teach us about His sheep in these verses?
2. 10:11-21 What is the difference between a hired hand and an owner of the sheep?
3. 10:22-33 What does Jesus teach us about His sheep in these verses?
4. 10:34-42 How important are miracles in testifying that Jesus is the Son of God?

3/21 Thur. Exo 32 John 11 Pro 8 Eph 1

1. 11:1-16 Why were the disciples surprised that Jesus would return to Judea? (11:9, 16)
2. 11:17-32 How did Martha express her faith?
3. 11:33-44 Why might some say this is the greatest miracle performed by Jesus during His life on earth?
4. 11:45-57 What was the motive of the Pharisees in their unbelief?

3/22 Friday Exo 33 John 12 Pro 9 Eph 2

1. 12:1-11 Why was the perfume not sold and the money given to the poor?
Fathers: Open some perfume for this family worship session.
2. 12:12-26 “He who loves his life loses it.” In what ways do people *love* their lives in this world? Why is it unwise to do so?
3. 12:27-36 Even as He entered Jerusalem, how did Jesus proclaim the gospel?
4. 12:37-43 Why is loving the approval of men such a fatal error?
5. 12:44-50 In what ways did Jesus submit His will to His Father’s?

3/23 Saturday Exo 34 John 13 Pro 10 Eph 3

1. 13:1-17 What lessons did Jesus teach when He washed the disciples’ feet?
Fathers: A wonderful object lesson would be for you to wash the family’s feet, and then a few days later give others the opportunity to wash each other’s feet. Discuss humility.
2. 13:18-30 Why is Judas’ betrayal such an evil deed?
3. 13:31-38 What is it to love one another in the way that Jesus has loved us?
Fathers: Spend some time on this one! Try to help each person give some practical examples of showing agape love in everyday family life.

Week 9 March 24-30

3/24 Sunday Exo 35 John 14 Pro 11 Eph 4

1. John 14:1-11 *Teens:* “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” How is this possible?
Fathers: You might ask each child to list the ways that they are like you.
2. 14:12-17 What does Jesus tell us about “the Spirit of truth”?
Fathers: See also 14:26.
3. 14:18-27 How do we demonstrate that we love Jesus?
4. 14:28-31 How did Jesus demonstrate that He loves the Father?

3/25 Monday Exo 36 John 15 Pro 12 Eph 5

1. 15:1-8 What is it to “abide” in Jesus?
Fathers: “Abide” means to remain with, to continue to be present with, not to depart in difficulty.
2. 15:9-17 At that significant moment, Jesus commanded us to “love one another.” How can we fulfill this command practically in our relationships?
3. 15:18-27 Why does the world hate Christians? How do you see this manifested?

3/26 Tuesday Exo 37 John 16 Pro 13 Eph 6

1. 16:1-6 Why should we not be surprised when we are persecuted and rejected by the world?
2. 16:7-15 What demonstrates for us how important it is for the “Helper” to come to us (16:7)?
Teens: What will the Helper do when He comes?
3. 16:16-22 What has turned our grief into joy?
4. 16:23-28 What is it in prayer to ask in Jesus’ name? What is the outcome when we do this?
5. 16:29-33 How does Jesus’ overcoming the world give us courage?

Fathers: Consider using a globe to identify countries where there are active wars going on. Discuss how Jesus “overcomes” these.

3/27 Wed. Exo 38 John 17 Pro 14 Phi 1

1. 17:1-5 According to Jesus in this passage, what is eternal life?
2. 17:6-16 Jesus asks the Father to “keep them in Your name.” How does God do this? What is the result?
Fathers: Consider visiting (or showing pictures of) a “castle keep,” the inner section of a castle with additional fortification to which all would retreat if the castle walls were breached.
3. 17:17-26 Jesus asks that we “may all be one.” To what end? (17:21, 23)

3/28 Thur. Exo 39 John 18 Pro 15 Phi 2

1. 18:1-12 How did Jesus show His authority even during His arrest?
2. 18:13-27 Does it surprise you that the bold Peter was afraid of a slave-girl? What made him so?
5. 18:28-40 Today many claim to have their own “truth.” Each person, they say, can have their own version of what is true to them personally. There are no absolutes, they say; everything is relative. Contrast Jesus’ statements with this.
Fathers: Try to understand to what degree your teens have heard the worldview that “there are no absolutes.”

3/29 Friday Exo 40 John 19 Pro 16 Phi 3

1. 19:1-15 *Teens:* Explain Jesus’ view of authority.
2. 19:16-30 At the cross, how did Jesus demonstrate love and compassion toward His mother?
3. 19:31-42 Why is the fulfillment of Scripture in verses 24, 36, and 37 important?

3/30 Saturday Lev 1 John 20 Pro 17 Phi 4

1. 20:1-10 What do we learn about John when he writes this account but never mentions his own name?
2. 20:11-18 How does Jesus demonstrate tenderness in this scene?
3. 20:19-25 Jesus here establishes the authority of church leaders for church discipline. Why is this so important?
4. 20:26-29 Who was Jesus referring to when He said, “Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed”?
5. 20:30-31 Why did John write this Gospel?

Week 10 March 31 – April 6

3/31 Sunday Lev 2-3 John 21 Pro 18 Col 1

1. John 21:1-14 How did John know it was Jesus on the shore?
2. 21:15-19 In what way does Jesus’ questioning of Peter represent tender compassion and lovingkindness?
3. 21:20-25 *Youth:* About how many good works did Jesus do during His earthly ministry?

4/1 Monday Lev 4 Psa 1-2 Pro 19 Col 2

1. Psalm 1 Describe the progression in “walk,” “stand,” and “sit.” How does this happen in real life with people who are bad influences?
Fathers: Do these three with your children: walk, stand, sit. Show how each of the three positions brings increasing familiarity with someone, and also increasing difficulty to part with them.
2. Psalm 2 What warnings does God give to the wicked?
3. *Teens:* How does Psalm 2 describe the world system that we live in?

4/2 Tuesday Lev 5 Psa 3-4 Pro 20 Col 3

1. Psalm 3 Why is the psalmist not afraid?
2. Psalm 4 Why is the psalmist glad?

4/3 Wed. Lev 6 Psa 5-6 Pro 21 Col 4

1. Psalm 5 Describe God’s attitudes and actions toward the wicked.
2. Psalm 6 *Youth:* Why will the psalmist’s enemies turn back?

4/4 Thur. Lev 7 Psa 7-8 Pro 22 1Th 1

1. Psalm 7 What will become of the wicked and those who do not repent?
2. Psalm 8 Describe some of the blessings God has bestowed on man.

4/5 Friday Lev 8 Psa 9 Pro 23 1Th 2

1. Psalm 9:1-10 Why do God’s enemies stumble?
Fathers: Consider visiting a football practice area. Notice the various training exercises designed to cause the players to stumble. Discuss who puts stumbling blocks in the paths of people and why.
2. 9:11-20 Why should we sing praises?

1. Psalm 10:1-11 Describe the wicked. What groups are like this today?
2. 10:12-18 Why can the unjustly afflicted look to the Lord with confidence?



APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 ABOUT MAN OF THE WORD

The leadership of Mount Calvary Baptist Church created Man of the Word in obedience to the command of 2 Timothy 2:2: “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to *faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*”

WHAT IS MOW?

The purpose of the Man of the Word ministry is to unite the men of MCBC in supplementing the ministry of the church and developing their spiritual lives.

MOW started in 1993 for both adults and young men. MOW’s main activity is a ten-week training program twice a year that includes prayer, fellowship, and discipleship from the Word. In addition, there are special service projects and outings.

MOW MEETINGS

Currently, there are six MOW meetings each year consisting of

- Spring monthly meetings: late January, March, and April
- Fall monthly meetings: September, October, and November

In addition, there is an overnight fall outing to which all men and boys are invited: in odd years at the Wilds, in even years at a member’s home or nearby campground.

The current format of the monthly meetings is

- 7:00 AM Prayer: men gather in the auditorium in small groups
- 8:00 AM Breakfast: prepared by MOW volunteers
- 8:30 AM Meeting: singing, announcements, committee reports, and encouragement/training
- 9:00 AM Conclusion

MOW GOVERNANCE

MOW is designed to be self-governing among the men of MCBC, with pastoral and elder oversight. It operates under the Constitution of MCBC and its elders, who set down its rules and policies. Currently, Pastor Jerid Jones is the coordinating pastor and Chris Baker the coordinating elder. The MOW Constitution governs its functions (available for download from the church website).

The six MOW officers are elected for a two-year term by a simple majority of the members present at a meeting in the spring of odd years. The officers’ duties are

- President: organize meetings, oversee all aspects of ministry
- Vice-President: assist the president as needed, especially with the outings
- Secretary/Treasurer: receive and distribute funds

- Food coordinator: organize volunteers that set up, prepare, serve, and clean at the monthly breakfasts and outings
- Projects coordinator: for volunteers and service projects in the church and community
- Manual coordinator: plan and prepare the training/discipleship material for each fall and spring cycle.

The officers' two-year term begins after the last MOW meeting in the spring of odd years. Thus, the officer team actively governs a fall and spring cycle for each of two twelve-month periods.

An Advisory Committee nominates officer candidates with the consent of the officers of MOW, to be approved by the Elder Board of MCBC. The Advisory Committee consists of the MCBC pastors and the president and vice-president of MOW.

An offering is taken at each meeting to defray the cost of food. In addition, the church contributes quarterly to the MOW ministry to fund its special projects and an annual outing.

APPENDIX 2 MCBC ELDERS AND DEACONS

We provide this list for your reference. These are the men who serve our congregation untiringly twelve months every year. Let us pray for them regularly.

Pastors/Elders

Mark Minnick	Senior Pastor
Eric Newton	Associate Pastor; Education, Outreach, Bookstore
Jeff Rush	Youth and Children's Ministries
Jerid Jones	Administration, Man of the Word, Master Planning

Elders

Bruce Arnold	Seniors Ministry
Chris Baker	Man of the Word
Doug Becker	President of Elders, Missions Committee
David Boyd	
Brian Collins	Church Clerk, Communion, Missions Committee
Ed Freeman	Hispanic Ministry, Missions Committee
Paul Keck	Calvary Lighthouse Mission
Dick Kelly	Master Planning Committee
Gene Merkle	
Gary Santiago	Seniors Ministry, Teen ministry (serving under Pastor Rush), Master Planning Committee
Michael West	Vice President of Elders, Finance Committee
Jim Wiginton	College and Career

Deacons

The scriptural office of deacon is simply one who serves. Deacons serve the congregation sacrificially in many ways as appointed by the elders.

Paul Baker	Benson Quattlebaum
Al Ellison	David Rogers
Anthony Griffith	Josh Rush
Stephen Lemp	Michael Schaedel
David Lowry	Phil Sterr
Jake Nicholson	Stephen Stokes

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