

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, May 28, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

**LISTEN**  **Up**

LEARNING TO LISTEN TO GOD

“The Problem with Listening”

*John 16:5-15*

*“The problems with listening is... well, listening!”*

Listening is a problem for many people. James seems to be speaking to this problem when he advises us in James 1:19 *“<sup>19</sup> My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” – James 1:19 (NIV)* It’s good advice, but not often taken. We usually do just the opposite. We don’t listen, we speak before we think, and get easily upset, offended and angered. That is perhaps 99.9% of marital problems. We call it communication problems, but it’s really listening problems! What is the problem most parents have with their children? The won’t listen! And what is the most common problem Christian face in really living our their Christian life victoriously? Listening! The problem with listening is... well, listening! *Listen as the following case studies are read and see if you can identify the real problem and perhaps offer some suggestion on what might be the cause and cure or help.*

**CASE STUDY 1:** Judy has been going through a really rough time lately. Her husband, Ben, of 15 years recently walked out on her and their 2 boy. Said he was feeling trapped and held back... they married too young before he got through running around... and he just wasn’t happy. So he left Judy and 2 young boys for a much younger woman and left his wife and children hurting and broken, scared and feeling alone and abandoned. Judy, had always been pretty strong in her faith. At first she turned to her pastor and church for counsel and encouragement, but it didn’t seem to stop the bleeding she was feeling. She felt many people were talking about her and Ben and even felt ostracized by some. So she started spending time more time in God’s Word, and more time in prayer, though she can’t hardly get through a passage of Scripture or a prayer without uncontrollable tears and crying. She is about at her wit end and Judy feels that the heavens are silent. It is as if God isn’t speaking right now. She cries out to Him but she has started to feel like God has abandoned her just like he husband did, and maybe all of this is her fault. She keeps listening for God’s voice in all of this chaos and confusion she is feeling, but she hears nothing but her own cries.

**CASE STUDY 2:** Brandon was raised in a good Christian home, taken to church at an early age. Both of his parents were believers and were very active in their church, and so was Brandon from a very early age. He accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior when we was 13 years old. Was active in their youth group and at one time thought God might be calling him to the ministry. He had been on may mission trip with his youth group and had even lead several of his high school friend to Christ. It was in High School that Brandon started letting his guard down. He would party with his friends occasionally, but “only to try to reach them” he would always say. He had a steady girlfriend and they had at times fooled around and gone a little too far, but all in all Brandon had always been a good kid and kept his life out of trouble. Since that time Brandon has struggled with many things in his life. Married at one time... it just didn’t work out and they divorced early in their marriage. He had been other relationships since, but noting permanent. And he doesn’t party anymore, but the drinking has continued in his life, sometimes alot. He still goes to church, but he doesn’t get much out of it. It all just seems pretty routine and irrelevant to his life, though he knows this is something he should do as a Christian. He rarely read his Bible anymore and hardly ever prays unless he gets in a bind. He believes in it, he just doesn’t get much out of it. Sometimes he feels like he is just going through the motions and wonders what happened to his life, but he feels like there is no answer and God doesn’t respond.

So what is the problem with listening, anyway? If God is still speaking, and He is, why is it that so often we can’t hear Him?

### **THE PROBLEM WITH LISTENING IS... HINDRANCES TO HEARING (John 16:5-15)**

Through the ages many sincere Christians have attempted to listen to God. Usually, after several painfully silent sessions, they cease their efforts, claiming that either that God doesn’t have anything to say to them or they just don’t know how to hear Him. We know we have a concerned Father who is more than willing to communicate, and we certainly want to hear Him. So what’s the problem? I believe the problem lies on our side, in that we have often accumulated (sometimes unknowingly) spiritual hindrances that prevent us from clearly hearing the Lord.

In John 16 Jesus is continuing to prepare His disciples (and followers) for what lies ahead for Him (and for them). The have come to know Jesus by this time... really know Him. The have known Him to be the way, the truth and the life (see John 14:6). They have seen Him life out before them a sinless and perfect life, and they have seen the truth in His words. They have seen him turn water into wine and multiply a little boys lunch to feed thousands. They have seen Him heal the sick, give sight to the blind, cast out demons, and raise the dead, walk on water and calm a storm by his words. Not only that, they have eaten with him, slept with him, watched his every step and heard his every word. They know Him, yet they don’t seem to “know” him. Listen to John 16:5-15,

<sup>5</sup> *‘But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’*  
<sup>6</sup> *But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.* <sup>7</sup> *Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.* <sup>8</sup> *And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:* <sup>9</sup> *of sin, because they do not believe in Me;*

<sup>10</sup> of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; <sup>11</sup> of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. <sup>12</sup> *'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.'* <sup>13</sup> However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. <sup>14</sup> He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup> All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.' – John 16:5-15 (NKJV)

This passage of Scripture is all about the work of the Holy Spirit, the coming of the Holy Spirit and Jesus preparing His disciples for such, yet in the middle of this discussion is a very clear understanding of some of Jesus closest followers... His disciples not really listening to what He was telling them, not hearing Him, not being able to really grasp it even though they knew Him. Verse 12 of the particular passage of Scripture has not only intrigued me for many years, it also raises some questions in my mind and personal walk. In verse 12 Jesus says to His disciples, <sup>12</sup> *'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.'* – John 16:12 (NKJV) What is Jesus saying? It probably has both positive and negative implications in some ways. A part of what He is telling his disciples in context is that He has a lot more to show them regarding the Holy Spirit, but that will come later, right now He is telling them just what they need to know. And this is certainly true in our lives. God is not going to reveal to us or show us more than we are capable or ready to handle at any given time (i.e. my own call experience in relation to this verse this verse). On the more negative side He may have been saying to them you are ready to hear anymore at this time, you aren't at a place in your walk and relationship with me to really hear more. In other words, they didn't know Him to the depth needed to hear Him any further.

What are the implications and truths that we may glean from this passage? Let me give you a few here. We may call these 5 Interferences to Hearing God that emerge from John 16.

### **5 Interferences to Hearing God Based on John 16:5-15:**

**1. We allow circumstances to cloud our hearing -** The circumstances, even those we may have no control over, always have the potential of clouding everything in our lives... our thinking processes, our ability to reason and make good decisions, and especially our ability to accurately hear. Think about it, when we are down and discouraged, grief-stricken, or even sick we are not at our best and things can really look skewed. When we are in the throes of deep struggles and heartaches, going through a particularly difficult trial that has us emotionally pent up, grieving so deeply that we can't think or focus on anything else... this type of circumstance can cause us not to hear well even those who love us and are trying to encourage us. That is essentially what is happening to the disciples in our passage in John 16. Jesus has been telling them... speaking to them about His purpose in coming and what He is about to go through. He has also been describing what many of them may potentially face. Listen to what He says to them in verse 5, <sup>5</sup> *'But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?'* <sup>6</sup> *'But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.'* Did you see it? Sorrow had filled their hearts and they were not hearing what He said. The same is true for us. The circumstances we find ourselves in can cloud our hearing of God's voice in our life if we are not careful, and sometimes even when we are "careful" those circumstance can make the heavens seem as brass.

2. **We think we know best for our lives** – We often think we know best for our lives. No one knows me better than ME. I know my likes and dislikes. I know what make me tick. I know what will make me happy. I know my gifts and strengths and I know my weaknesses. Not only that, no one has a right to tell me how to live my life. This is often the attitude, or perhaps better called “excuse,” for many who don’t want to give their lives to Christ, or who reject God’s Words speaking to their life. “No one, not even God, has a right to tell me how to live my life.” The truth is, nothing could be farther from the truth. God has a right to tell you how to live your life, especially if you are His... a Christian. You belong to Him. He has every right to tell you how you should and shouldn’t life, what you should and shouldn’t do. But even beyond this fundamental truth, He knows what is best for you and wants what is best for you. This is key! When we think we know better than God what is best for our lives, we stop listening to Him and His voice, His Word, and start only listening to our own voice... our self, and that is always... always dangerous. In our passage in **verse 7** Jesus told his disciples <sup>7</sup> *Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.* I like that phrase, “it is to your advantage.” In others words, Jesus was saying to them, although you don’t understand it and think you know best, I know best and even though this is all hard to hear (my death and departure from you) I know what is best (to your advantage). Always remember that God knows what is to your advantage so you should listen to Him.
3. **We don’t want to hear what he has to say (makes us too uncomfortable)** – Jesus told His disciples and followers in **verses 8-11**, <sup>8</sup> *And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: <sup>9</sup> of sin, because they do not believe in Me; <sup>10</sup> of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; <sup>11</sup> of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.* Do you get what Jesus was telling them? Sometimes the things God has to say to us, even though they may be for our good, are not easy to hear. When His words convict our hearts, cut to the quick, point our the error of our ways, or step on our toes it is not always pleasant. Often we find ourselves wincing at His Word to us, because it gets so personally convicting at times, and the truth is we often shut out His voice because we simply don’t want to hear what He is saying. It cuts too deeply and quite frankly we don’t want to give up the very thing that He may be speaking to. When this happens we just don’t... or won’t hear Him.
4. **We are not ready to hear what He has to say or who us** – There are times when we can’t hear God because we are not ready to hear God, or to put it more simply we are not a place in our life at that time when we will hear Him. That is perhaps the idea behind what Jesus said to His disciples in **verse 12** of our passage, <sup>12</sup> *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.* There may be many different reasons why we “cannot bear them now”... that is the words that Jesus would say to us. It could be what we said earlier... we are do not want to hear what He has to say. It simply makes us too uncomfortable so we shut off His voice and tune Him out. Or it could be that we are not at a place spiritually where we are ready to hear all that He has to tell us (i.e. my personal call experience in relation to this verse). Have you ever thought that is maybe God grace that He doesn’t tell us everything?
5. **We don’t know Him well enough to hear Him yet** – Verses 13 through 15 are pretty clear. God speaks to us through His Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer. He is God’s voice to us and we must learn to listen to the Spirit’s still small voice in our life. If that is not happening, it is not because God is not speaking or is silent... it is because we are not cultivating the kind of heart and life that knows Him intimately and walks closely with Him.

Listen to **verse 13-15** of our passage, <sup>13</sup> *However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.* <sup>14</sup> *He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.* <sup>15</sup> *All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.*

Dr. Charles Stanley, in his book “How to Listen to God,” gives us 10 contributing factors raise thick barriers to hearing the voice of God. As we understand what they are, I think it will heal us discern why, when we are honestly seeking to perceive what God is saying, we sometimes feel that we might as well be in a spiritually soundproof room, where only our voice reverberates.

### **10 Hindrances to Hearing God: (Dr. Charles Stanley)**

- 1. We don't know God (John 10:27)** – Jesus said in **John 10:27**, <sup>27</sup> *My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.* (NKJV) The truth and premise of what Jesus is saying is right on target. If we belong to Him we should listen and follow Him, but is that always the case. And if it is not (always the case), why isn't it? As Jesus said “I know them” (my sheep), but perhaps we don't always know Him! Oh, we may have accepted Him as Lord and Savior of our lives and we are saved believers, but we have never grown past that beginning stage of our Christian experience, where we really “know” Him and can clearly distinguish His voice from the many competing voice that vie for our attention.

*“We need to frankly face ourselves at this point. We are, perhaps orthodox evangelicals. We can state the gospel clearly, and can smell unsound doctrine a mile away. If anyone asks us how men may know God we can at once produce the right formula – that we come to know God through Jesus Christ the Lord. Yet the gaiety, goodness and unfetteredness of spirit which are the marks of those who have known God are rare among us – rarer, perhaps, than they are to some other Christian circles where, by comparison, evangelical truth is less clearly and fully known. Here, too, it would seem that the last may prove to be first, and the first last. A little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about Him.” – J.I. Packer, “Knowing God”*

- 1. What do you think J.I. Packer is saying with in this statement?*
- 2. Do you agree or disagree with his statement... particularly as it applies to “Christian circles” (orthodox evangelicals and those where “evangelical truth is less clearly and fully known”)?*
- 3. Is there a difference between “head knowledge” and “heart knowledge”?*
- 4. What, do you think, is the remedy for the problem J.I. Packer is describing? How?*

Many believers know Christ as Savior, but they have failed to press on to know His ways and character. If we know Him only as Savior, God cannot speak some things to us because we simply don't know the way He operates. The more we understand who God is, the more we will hear from Him. That is why it is so urgent that we study the Word of God daily. AS we do, we give Him fertile field in which to work and speak to our hearts. Some Christians know so little about God that they could ascribed to Him things He never said at all. They

have perhaps heard lots of conversations about God and maybe even been in on some of those conversations, they have maybe listened to lots of messages preached and maybe read lots of good Christian books about God, but they simply don't know God personally, therefore they can't hear his voice when he speaks... they don't really know His voice.

2. **A poor self-image** – How many times have we heard people say, “Why would God want to speak to me? I'm not a preacher or in full-time Christian service. Why in the world would He want to communicate with me?” The truth is, we are saved, we are sanctified, we are saints, we are children of the living God. Fathers just naturally want to speak to their children, fathers just naturally want their sons and their daughters to listen to them. Unfortunately, we often see ourselves as unworthy, and when we do, we wonder why a great, magnificent God would speak to us. God could scream in that case, and we could not hear him.
3. **A false sense of guilt** – There are two kinds of guilt. One is true guilt, that is, it stems from sin against God... we are responsible for it and we have to deal with it. The second is false guilt, which Satan places on us... this occurs when the devil accuses us of not living up to God's standards. Many people live countless years under such deceptive guilt. They never feel as if they can quite get God's acceptance... they think they never quite measure up and never quite please God... they believe they will never be all that God wants them to be. These people have a difficult time hearing God, because Satan is always accusing them, saying, “You think God will speak to you? Look what you have done in the past. Do you think He is going to overlook that?” Everything they hear is sifted through a preprogrammed pattern of guilty thinking.
4. **Business/busyness** – It is impossible to live in today's world without being busy. We all have schedules to meet, problems to solve, people to relate to on a continuing basis. So, when I refer to business (or busyness), I am not talking about shirking responsibilities on the job or in the home. Yet it is easy in the midst of all the clamoring voices of our society to miss the still, small voice of God. We must be careful to remain sensitive to His presence.
5. **Unbelief** – Many people do not fully believe that God speaks today. If we think we get direction only through Scripture, then we will miss out on much of what God has to share, because He will speak so often through His Spirit, circumstances, and other people. We must make absolutely certain that we are fully convinced and persuaded that God does speak to us personally about our families, our businesses, our finances, our hurts, our frustrations, our fears.
6. **God-directed anger** – Can you really hear someone else when you are angry, bitter, resentful, and hostile toward them? I don't think so. During my years of ministry, I have occasionally met people who were just plain mad at God... sometimes they didn't even see it in themselves. Perhaps a spouse died, or a child was killed, or their finances collapsed. No matter the event, they don't understand who God allowed it; so they become angry toward Him and they even lash out at others in their anger. When they pray, they seem to continually recall those bitter moments and express their anger. They want to blame God for their problems. They pray and suddenly discover their hostility gushing forth out of their mouths toward God. He will not retaliate. He understands our anger, and even allows it, but we must recognize that that anger in us hardens our heart toward His voice and we don't hear Him

7. **Harboring sin** – Harboring sin is different from committing a sin. Harboring a sin means knowing sin is present, knowing God has put His finger on it, and still not settling it. Harboring sin is like static on the radio. We may faintly hear God voice, but we can't make it out. As Isaiah warned in **Isaiah 59:2**, *“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”*
8. **A rebellious spirit** – A rebellious person may want to pray, but he does not want to hear. God will speak to the rebellious heart to repent of a sin, but if no change occurs, God will not speak on other subjects. Rebellion blocks God's penetrating voice. This is the problem with not responding to God invitation in a service. If God speaks and tells you to go forward, to recommit your life, or surrender your life, or join the church or whatever it may be... for us not to respond is rebellion and we are hindering the voice of God in our life. The next time you may not hear him. His voice may become less and less distinct in your life.
9. **Rejecting God's messengers** – God speaks through other people in our lives and sometimes we don't listen because we don't like the messenger that God is using. Maybe we don't like the way the preacher looks, or talks, or maybe he has annoying habits when he speaks, he speaks too long, or has too much of a “Texas draw.” Maybe God want to speak to you through the music, but you don't like the style. Maybe God wants to speak to you through a child or young person, but they are too young for you to learn anything from so you don't listen. Maybe God want to speak to you through a friend, but you aren't going to take that from your friend. Be careful you could be rejecting God's messengers and God's voice in your life.
10. **Untrained to listen** – Listening to God isn't something we come into this world automatically knowing how to do. WE have to train ourselves to listen. We are often hindered from hearing God because of our own inexperience. We must train ourselves and discipline ourselves to be good listeners for God's voice.

## THE PROBLEM WITH LISTENING IS... HOW TO HEAR

### 5 Tips for Training Yourself To Hear God

1. **We should ask questions** – If we are going to listen, we have to learn to be inquisitive. By mentally proposing such question as, “God, what are you trying to say to me?” we give God the opportunity to reply and reveal His answer. God always has the answer, but it us up to us sometimes to ask the right questions.
2. **We should anticipate God's speaking** – The Scriptures promise that God will speak, and we should take Him at His word and be eager to hear Him. The Bible says, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 132:8)*. That means that if God spoke in the past, He is and will still speak today.
3. **We should respond to what we hear** – If we make not response to what God says, we will never learn to hear. Responding to God is obeying His voice. When we obey we just open greater communication between us and God. When we rebel against His voice and do not respond we stifle His voice in our lives.
4. **We should be alert to confirming events** – Time after time God confirms His message. He speaks, we obey, and confirmation will quite frequently follow.
5. **We should ask God to speak to us** – Never be afraid to ask God to speak to you! He will!