

Session 1

READING AS CONVERSATION

*Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17;
Mark 4:22-24*

Memory Verse

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

– HEBREWS 4:12, CSB



Reading as Conversation

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God's Word is living, active, and practical for daily life. We should recognize the importance of Scripture and be committed to knowing it and obeying it.

There are leadership courses taught on it. Marriage counselors refer to it often and anyone who wants to have healthy relationships needs to know how to do it well. Listening is a skill that some people do very well, but most people could do much better.

Because communication is vital in any relationship, there are some things we can be intentional about to improve our skills in this area. Communicating involves both talking and listening and we all need to be challenged about how well we listen. Too many people spend more time thinking about what they want to say next than they do really listening to what the other person has to say. Just as this can be an issue in our interpersonal relationships, it can also affect our relationship with the Lord.



Who is the best listener you know? What makes them a good listener?



Do you ever struggle to listen to the Lord? What makes this difficult?

Session Summary

God uses His Word to speak to His people, and it is the wise believer who knows God's Word, listens to His Word, and obeys His Word. Scripture has been given to guide people to be in relationship with the Lord. It is full of instructions, warnings, and advice for daily living.

God's Word is written and available to anyone who seeks to know it. For those who desire to live a godly life, Scripture is clear and practical. Every person must decide how he or she will approach God's Word and how it will be received.

1. God's Word Speaks (Hebrews 4:12)

One of the primary ways God speaks is through Scripture. Though the words were written thousands of years ago, Hebrews makes it clear that every word still matters and is relevant today. In describing the Word as "living and effective" the writer of Hebrews stressed how applicable it still is. Think about how Scripture is living to you. Think about a time you read something in the Bible and immediately saw how it related to a specific situation you were facing this year. The Bible contains timeless truths that apply in every age.

God's Word is not just living, it is also effective. The word translated as "effective" carries the implication of being active or powerful. This should be an encouragement to believers that when we dedicate ourselves to knowing and obeying the Word of God, we are investing ourselves in something that matters. When we take God's Word in and apply it to every area of our lives, it will equip us to live victorious lives in the battles we continually face.



How have you seen the reality that God's Word is living and effective in your life?

The illustration of Scripture as a sword gives a visual that speaks volumes. A two-edged sword is one that is sharp on both sides. It can cut in any and every direction. That is exactly what the Word of God does for believers. It slices to the heart of the matter in the things we face and in our own hearts. Have ever felt like a sermon was written and

preached precisely for you even though it was taught to many other people at the same time? This helps us understand what it means to say Scripture cuts and opens you up to the truth. This is so valuable, as we are in constant need of wisdom and discernment. We live in a world with many competing voices shouting that they know the truth about what we should be doing. But God's Word is the absolute truth, and the Lord speaks to us directly through it.

? Describe a time when a sermon or teaching from the Bible seemed like it was written exactly for you.

The double-edged sword of God's Word also has a fine sharp tip that pierces with precision into our hearts and minds. God's Word can get into very difficult, deep places. The division between bone and marrow or soul and spirit describe areas that are nearly inseparable. Not just any tool can facilitate that kind of division but the Scriptures can. The Bible is God's way of speaking into the deepest parts of us so we can know His heart and how He wants us to live.

? Application: What is situation you are facing where you need the Word to cut through the surface about and reveal truth?

2. God's Word is Profitable (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

How is it possible that words can be living, effective, and profitable to those who hear and live it? This passage tells us all Scripture is God breathed. This means it was inspired by Almighty God, and He gave it directly to be recorded and used by those who seek Him. This describes more than just being inspired or motivated to write something. There are many who have written and developed things that feel inspired or even anointed, but Paul stressed to Timothy that Scripture is different because it came directly from God. This is true for every Word of Scripture, not just select parts. That is what sets it apart as the primary Word we need and why it is considered so profitable.

These verses list several specific ways Scripture profits the person who studies and applies it. The first is by teaching. God's Word is truth and teaches us what we need to know about God as well about mankind and the whole world. In a world that constantly promotes human wisdom and false teachings about both god and man, we need to be focused on truth and how it applies to our lives. When you aren't sure who or what to believe, you can have confidence that Scripture alone is infallible and inerrant.

? What are some lies that the world teaches about God or people? How does the Bible speak to these same things? Why is it crucial we listen to God through His Word? How do we practice this?

Since no one is perfect aside from Jesus, we all need correction at times. It is easy to let wrong thinking or a bad attitude slip into your life. Sometimes sin seems less dangerous than it is, and we justify our behavior, but the truth is we all need to recognize when we are choosing the wrong things. When we refuse to acknowledge our need to hear God's voice and follow His guidance, we give in to our selfish nature that draws us toward arrogance and pride. God's Word is our great measuring stick that shows us the truth we need to realize where we fall short and guides us back on the right path.

? How has Scripture shown you where you need to make a change recently? How did you respond?

Most of us appreciate when someone points out an issue and offers a solution to fix the problem more than if they just point out the issue with no suggested solution. That is exactly what the Word of God does when it reveals where we go wrong but teaches us how to live in righteousness too. Righteousness is the goal for any Christ follower. The phrase "training in righteousness" reinforces that this is a process. Training is about conscious effort over time to see a desired result. None of us reads the Bible one time and automatically starts living the way it describes. This process takes time and intentionality based on the Word of God.

The good news is that Scripture makes clear the goal for our lives. According to these verses in 2 Timothy, the end goal is for every believer to be complete and equipped for the life God has for them. When we listen rightly, God's Word does a work in our lives that only He can. When you know and obey the Word you will reap the benefits that Scripture describes including being complete as a Christian and equipped for the life that God has for you. Part of Paul's emphasis on being complete and equipped was to remind us that God's plans are bigger and more eternal than our own. When we surrender our plans to God's, He can do far greater with our lives than we could ever imagine.



Application: How is God using Scripture to equip you for His purposes? How are you seeking to listen to Him through His Word regularly?

3. God's Word Requires a Response (Mark 4:21-24)

In the book of Mark, Jesus taught a parable that helps us understand our responsibility when it comes to the Word of God. The Word is truth and therefore reveals and exposes truth to all people. Our job is to not to hide the light but to help others see it for themselves. If you know the truth and believe the truth, you have the responsibility to do something with it. God did not give us the truth so that we would keep it for ourselves but so we could share it with the world. The goal in our sharing is that others would experience the same truth we have.

If you've ever had a conversation with someone who is distracted and not paying close attention, you know there is a difference between hearing and really listening. It is possible to hear sounds coming from someone's mouth without receiving or understanding anything they said. That is what Jesus stressed when He instructed, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen." Once we hear the Word of God, we are then responsible for how we handle that Word or what we do with it.



How would you describe the difference between hearing and really listening?

One of the things to recognize about God's Word is that you always have a choice in how to respond to it. You get to decide if you will choose to believe what it says more than what the world says. While you get to choose how you will respond, God's Word always requires a response. There is no room for excuses or shifting responsibility to someone else. God's Word requires and deserves a response from every person who has the opportunity of hearing or reading it.



How have you responded to God's Word to this point in your life? How is God speaking to you about that today?

Jesus told us we are accountable for what we know and how we respond. That is why it matters who we listen to and who we put ourselves under to learn from. We want to be taught by those who take into consideration the whole counsel of God's Word and not those who pick and choose the parts they will teach and believe. Scripture tells us God will respond to us in the same measure as we respond to Him. Jesus made it clear that we will receive more understanding of God's truth as we respond to and steward what we have already received. Do you cherish the Word of God as you should? Do you find it life giving and satisfying or are you uninterested and going through the motions when it comes to hearing it?

The good news is that when you hear the Word of God and receive it with joy and thanksgiving, God will continue to feed you from His Word to enable you to grow and thrive in righteousness. Developing godly habits in relation to knowing and living out Scripture will reap rewards that are immeasurable.



Application: What godly habit about receiving and listening to God's Word do you need to commit to develop in your own life?

Conclusion

God's Word is His conversation with His people. We need to be intentional about how we communicate with the Lord and that includes the way we respond to what He says to us through Scripture. Because everything in the Bible is God-breathed and inspired by Him, it all carries ultimate weight and should be valued. We need to know what the Lord has to say to us, and His Word is the primary way He speaks.

The Word is living and effective, and it applies to our daily lives. Those who learn the Word and obey it will experience benefits that come from this godly practice. The truth of the Word leads to correction when you are in the wrong. It also offers course correction so that you know how to change to pursue righteousness. Because it is a process to become the person God designed us to be, this training in righteousness is ongoing, and we can develop godly habits to keep us on task until we become complete and equipped through His power.

Now is the time to start on those godly habits. Why not continue the conversation the Lord started with you? You can begin conversing with others about what you have learned this week in the Word. Choose to live differently as you put the truth in to practice in your own life. Memorize the Word so that it is hidden in your heart and never apart from you. There are many ways you can choose to respond to God's Word. The key to be intentional and get started.



What has God revealed to you about your need to further listen to Him through His Word?



Who will you talk to about God's Word this week? How does listening to God's Word enable you to speak to others about Him?



What new habit will you commit to in order to listen to God's Word regularly? What action do you need to take today?



FOR NEXT WEEK

Reading For Intent

Main Passages

- John 5:39-40

Session Outline

1. The Word Proves True (John 5:37-42)
2. The Word Must Be Treated Correctly (2 Timothy 2:14-17; Revelation 22:18-19)
3. The Word Keeps Us from Sin (1 John 2:3-6)

Memorize

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

- Hebrews 4:12, CSB