

We exist to bring glory to God. Bearing spiritual fruit does that and keeping His words is part of what accomplishes that. (Cf. John 15:1-17; Eph 3:21; Jude 25.) Various pictures, e.g., the vine and the branches, the parable of the soils, and a tree planted by water, show the importance of the Word of God in bearing fruit. God speaks to us in His Word. He gives all that we need to accomplish the good works He intends for us (2 Tim 3:16-17) and He uses His Word to accomplish His purposes in us. Truly listening to God means hearing what He has said in His Word and obeying it. I would suggest four steps in the process toward true listening.

1. **Read or hear the Word**

- a. *Two primary avenues through which believers are exposed to what the Bible says:* the public reading of the Bible and personal reading or listening to the Bible.
- b. *Examples in the Bible:* the king of Israel who was to write out the law books for himself, keep a copy for himself and read it regularly (Deuteronomy 17:18-20), Timothy who was to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13), the blessing in Revelation to the one who read and those who heard and kept the words (Revelation 1:3).

*Practical help:* have a plan so as to read regularly and systematically. (Cf., e.g., <http://www.bibleplan.org/>.)

2. **Understand the sense**

- a. *Two primary avenues through which believers learn the sense of Scripture:* teaching ministries and personal Bible study.
- b. *Examples in the Bible:* those who take the prophecy of Revelation to heart must understand it (Revelation 1:3), Ezra and the Levites explained the sense of the Law to the returned exiles (Nehemiah 7:73b-8:3, 7-8), Timothy was exhorted to teaching and preaching (1 Timothy 4:13) and to handle the word of truth correctly, i.e., cut a path through the sometimes difficult terrain of understanding the Bible, so that he and others could make better sense of it (2 Timothy 2:15), the Bereans were considered “more noble” because they “received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” (Acts 17:11 NIV)

*Practical help:* check if you are understanding by summarizing what you read and/or explaining it to someone else. Regularly get good teaching on what the Bible says. Gather tools to help, like a reference Bible or study Bible and a Bible dictionary.

3. **Comprehend the connection to life**

Once we understand the sense or meaning of the text, we need to see the connection to life, which answers the question “so what?” This step must follow the first two.

- a. *Two primary avenues to learn the connection to life:* teaching and/or exhortation and study with prayerful meditation on the word (Psalm 1).
- b. *Examples in the Bible:* parents are to talk about God’s Word and its application in every life context (Deuteronomy 6:6-9), believers in the church are to instruct and admonish one another in all wisdom (truth applied to life) as a result of the word of Christ dwelling in them (Colossians 3:16).

*Practical help:* pray, asking God’s help to see how we should put His Word into action. Read and study the Bible with the intent of finding what we should be doing. (E.g., ask if there is there a sin to confess, a praise or reason to thank God, a command to obey.) Interact with others. Memorize meaning passages of Scripture then reflect on them and talk about them.

4. **Obey the Word**

The previous steps must be followed up by actual obedience. Seeing the application is not the same as doing it. Until we’ve done it, we haven’t really kept God’s Word.

- a. We are commanded to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:22). Reading the Bible may give us something to check off our list of good Christian activities, but it is not enough. Even understanding the Bible is not sufficient. Peter’s charge concerning our understanding of the future (prophecy) is appropriate here: what kind of people ought we to be? “You ought to live holy and godly lives.” (2 Peter 3:11)
- b. We are warned concerning the consequences for being doers or mere hearers. A house built on sand will not withstand a storm like one build on rock. In Matthew 7:21-27 Jesus said that those who hear His words and put them into practice have a good foundation to weather the coming storm. Those who hear His words and do not do them are like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

*Practical help:* Developing the practice of asking yourself, how you have recently obeyed Jesus. Accept some sort of accountability towards others. Be willing to ask and be asked what we have learned this week and how we have put it into practice. You may want to meet regularly with one or two others for this express purpose. Two or three together can strengthen one another, encourage one another, and rejoice together (cf. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

To bring forth spiritual fruit we must truly listen to what God says in His Word, the Bible. The Bible equips us for all good works. We must hear His Word, understand the sense, make the right connect to life and then obey. To ignore what God says is foolish and self-deceptive. Keeping His Word is an expression of our relationship to Him. It is part of fulfilling His purposes for us. And only in keeping His Word – being true listeners – will our joy be complete (John 15:11).