

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



Listening to God

KEY PASSAGES: Mark 4:1-3, 23-24, 7:14 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Psalm 32:8 | Proverbs 3:5-6 | John 3:3

► SUMMARY

It's very comforting to know that God loves us enough to make a plan for each of our lives.

In fact, He designed it before we were ever born. Nothing about our lives is an accident. Although God's plan is the best possible path, it's not always the easiest. We may have to climb a few mountains and walk through some dark valleys, but if we follow His instructions, we'll discover the rewards of living according to His will. That's why it's important to ask the Lord to reveal His plan to us and be ready and willing to listen for His directions.

► SERMON POINTS

Since God has a plan, we can be certain that He wants to guide us into it (Ps. 32:8).

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "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." To acknowledge the Lord means we consider what He says, recognize His great power, trust His guidance, and follow His instructions. He's continually seeking to guide us, but if we're not listening, we'll miss His instructions and go the wrong way.

When Jesus speaks, He wants us to listen.

- **Mark 4:1-3.** As He taught a large crowd, Jesus called for their attention by saying, "Listen to this!"
- **Mark 4:23-24.** Christ also announced, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear," and cautioned them saying, "Take care what you listen to." It's not only important to hear, but it's critical to be discerning in our listening.

- **Mark 7:14.** At another time, Jesus called out, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand." His goal is that we comprehend what He says.
- **John 3:3.** When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." The phrase, "Truly, truly, I say to you" is used 25 times by Christ in the book of John. It was His way of emphasizing that what He was saying was authoritative truth that deserved full attention.

How does God speak to us today?

We know that the Lord spoke to people in the Bible, but He also wants to speak personally to each of His children today. This means we must be attentive because no one else can listen for us.

- **God's primary way of speaking to us is through His Word.** The Bible is not just an old book, but the inerrant, authoritative Word of God and the only source of truth. When we read it, we're hearing directly from the Lord. All other methods of listening to God must be checked and compared with the scriptures to determine if we are accurately hearing Him.
- **He also speaks to us through prayer.** Prayer is our way of communicating with God by talking to Him, but it's also a time to be still and listen for His guidance. Instead of simply running through our list of requests and moving on to the day's duties and activities, we need to learn to be still for a while to see if He has anything to say to our hearts.
- **The Lord may speak through our circumstances.** When a situation is painful, we must remember that hearing from God is more important than our comfort and pleasure. He uses difficulties and suffering to grab our attention. In every event, God has something to teach us.

Instead of focusing on why the situation has happened, our first question should be, “Lord, what do you want to say to me?”

■ **Sometimes God speaks to us through other people.**

It may come in the form of affirmation, confirmation, encouragement, or even reproof or warning. And the Lord may use anyone He chooses to deliver His message—even someone we may not like. No matter the source, we should thoughtfully and prayerfully consider whatever is said.

How can we identify God’s voice?

When we are seeking to hear from the Lord, we must make sure that it’s His voice we are hearing and not our own thoughts or someone else’s ideas.

- **God’s voice is always consistent with His Word.** Any message must agree with what the Lord has already said in scripture.
- **His voice is quiet.** God speaks to our hearts through His Holy Spirit in an inaudible but compelling way.
- **The Lord speaks clearly.** If we’ll tune our hearts to Him by setting aside time to read His Word and listen for His Spirit to speak, He will give us clear guidance.

How does the Lord get our attention?

- **Sometimes He uses a sense of restlessness.** Perhaps we have already planned a course of action but then develop an uneasy feeling about it. If we’ll pray and ask God for specific guidance, He might lead us in an unexpected direction.
- **At other times God may get our attention with a gentle whisper.** Although His voice is soft and inaudible, it rings so loud and clear in our spirit that we know we’re hearing from Him.

Why don’t we listen to God?

- **We may not believe that the Lord speaks today.** If that’s the case, we won’t be listening for His voice. But

those who tune in to Him everyday realize that He speaks personally to our spirits if we’re listening.

- **We might be afraid of what He will say.** What if God asks of us something we don’t want to do? This attitude displays a lack of trust and a failure to understand that His plan for our lives is always the best option.
- **We could be angry with the Lord.** If we’ve blamed Him for something that happened in the past, we may not be interested in hearing anything He has to say.
- **We could have a rebellious spirit.** If we’re refusing to give up a particular sin in our lives, we won’t want to hear the Spirit’s convicting voice.

What are the consequences of not listening to God?

We know that the Lord spoke to people in the Bible, but He also wants to speak personally to each of His children today. This means we must be attentive because no one else can listen for us.

- **We won’t receive His guidance** and will miss out on His plan for our lives.
- **We’ll listen to the wrong voices,** be deceived, make costly decisions, and forfeit God’s best.
- **Others will suffer.** An unwillingness to listen to the Lord affects not only us but our loved ones and associates.

► RESPONSE

- Have you ever felt a conviction regarding a particular sin? If so, you have heard God’s voice. How else have you sensed Him communicating with you?
- As you’ve read the Bible, has a passage ever spoken to a situation you were facing? What did the Lord say to you through His Word? How has Scripture given you guidance, comfort, or insight regarding a circumstance in your life?
- What do you need to do to increase your sensitivity to God’s voice?

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