

A 6-WEEK, NO-HOMEWORK BIBLE STUDY

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Jesus: Listening for His Voice

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A Study of Mark 7-13



Kay Arthur & David Arthur

4minute
BIBLE STUDIES

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Listening for
His Voice

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PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL



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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This small-group study is for people who are interested in learning for themselves more about what the Bible says on various subjects, but who have only limited time to meet together. It's ideal, for example, for a lunch group at work, an early morning men's group, a young mothers' group meeting in a home, a Sunday-school class, or even family devotions. (It's also ideal for small groups that typically have longer meeting times—such as evening groups or Saturday morning groups—but want to devote only a portion of their time together to actual study, while reserving the rest for prayer, fellowship, or other activities.)

This book is designed so that all the group's participants will complete each lesson's study activities *at the same time*. Discussing your insights drawn from what God says about the subject reveals exciting, life-impacting truths.

Although it's a group study, you'll need a facilitator to lead the study and keep the discussion moving. If *you* are your group's facilitator, the leader, here are some helpful points for making your job easier:

- Go through the lesson and mark the text before you lead the group. This will give you increased familiarity with the material and will enable you to facilitate the group with greater ease. It may be easier for you to lead the group through the instructions for marking if you, as a leader, choose a specific color for each symbol you mark.
- As you lead the group, start at the beginning of the text and simply read it aloud in the order it appears in the lesson, including the Insight boxes that appear throughout. Work through the lesson together, observing and discussing what you

learn. As you read the Scripture verses, have the group say aloud the word they are marking in the text.

- The discussion questions are there simply to help you cover the material. As the class moves into the discussion, many times you will find that they will cover the questions on their own. Remember, the discussion questions are there to guide the group through the topic, not to squelch discussion.
- Remember how important it is for people to verbalize their answers and discoveries. This greatly strengthens their personal understanding of each week's lesson. Try to ensure that everyone has plenty of opportunity to contribute to each week's discussions.
- Keep the discussion moving. This may mean spending more time on some parts of the study than on others. If necessary, you should feel free to spread out a lesson over more than one session. However, remember that you don't want to slow the pace too much. It's much better to leave everyone wanting more than to have people dropping out because of declining interest.
- If the validity or accuracy of some of the answers seems questionable, you can gently and cheerfully remind the group to stay focused on the truth of the Scriptures. Your object is to learn what the Bible says, not to engage in human philosophy. Simply stick with the Scriptures and give God the opportunity to speak. His Word *is* truth (John 17:17)!

JESUS: LISTENING FOR HIS VOICE

One of the leading causes of both societal and personal demise is the absence of the knowledge and fear of God. To fear God is to discover who He says He is and then to live your life according to that knowledge—respecting, reverencing, trusting the God of all truth. To live in the fear of God is to live according to God’s precepts, by His rules, not ours! It is also to realize that consequences are inevitable when we don’t value His standards above our own.

In the first of our three studies in the gospel of Mark, *Jesus: Experiencing His Touch*, we considered what happened when Jesus touched people from all walks of life: fishermen, tax collectors, the lame, blind, sick, hungry, and even demon possessed. In each circumstance, the people Jesus came in contact with either believed and reaped the reward of faith, or they

resisted the truth and wanted to destroy the One who Mark clearly has told us is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of God and the Son of Man.

Although the touch of Jesus holds the power to heal and transform, only those who believed found their lives truly changed. As they aligned themselves with the One who is truth, they experienced not only miracles but a new and deeper understanding of God. And with that understanding came respect, trust, and a changed life.

Jesus said that man is to live by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4), so listening, hearing, and believing is imperative. As we study Mark chapters 7–13 in the weeks ahead, we will observe carefully not only what Jesus did, but also what He said. In doing so, may you experience for yourself the freedom and the power that come from knowing truth and living accordingly.

WEEK ONE

“Tradition!” In the Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, the main character, Tevye, tries to steer his daughters safely through the shaky ground of a changing world by clinging to tradition—doing things as they’d always been done, remaining faithful to the customs and beliefs of the generations that had gone before.

Have you ever seen the traditions of man make people blind and deaf to truth, prejudiced toward that which holds them captive—when if they would only listen, they could be set free from deception and its destructive consequences?

Let’s see what happened when the Son of Man encountered the criticism of the scribes and Pharisees because of tradition!

As you begin your study why don’t you ask God to give you ears to hear, to humbly listen to the One sent by God to rescue you from the lie of Satan, who said we can be like God and decide for ourselves what is good and what is evil!

OBSERVE

Leader: *Read Mark 7:1–8 aloud, and then read the Insight box on the next page, which gives further information on the scribes and Pharisees.*

MARK 7:1–8

¹ The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem,

² and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread

with impure hands,
that is, unwashed.

³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders;

⁴ and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)

⁵ The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of

INSIGHT

Scribes were skilled writers, often trained in the Word of God and thus considered experts in the Law and interpreting it. Known also as teachers of the Law, many scribes were of the sect of the Pharisees.

Pharisee means “separated one.”

Their lives were devoted to the Torah, the first five books of the Bible written by Moses and often referred to as the Law. Because of their devotion, they stressed separation from the strong influence of the classical Greek culture. As the religious (and often political) leaders of the people, they assumed the responsibility for interpreting how the Law was to be lived out in the culture of the times. In their thinking, obedience to the Law was the way to God. Consequently, the Pharisees became teachers of a twofold law: the written Law and oral tradition. The oral tradition was their interpretation of the written Law.

Leader: Read Mark 7:1–8 aloud again.

Have the group do the following:

- Mark with a big **P** all the references to **the Pharisees, scribes, and the Jews**, including pronouns.
- Mark every reference to **Jesus** with a cross: † In the same way, mark any synonyms and pronouns that refer to Jesus Christ. Since you'll be marking references to Jesus so often, you may prefer to use a particular color to mark the references to Him so they pop on the page.
- Put a tall box over all references to **tradition**, like this:

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure they are marking every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

DISCUSS

- Look at verses 1–2. What concern did the Pharisees raise?

the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?"

⁶ And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.

⁷ 'But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

⁸ "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

- According to verses 3–4, why did they view this as a problem?
- What did the Pharisees and the scribes ask Jesus in verse 5?
- What do you learn from marking the Pharisees and scribes in verses 6–8?
- What did Jesus call the Pharisees, and why? What did He identify as the real problem?

MARK 7:9–13

⁹ He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

¹⁰ “For Moses said, ‘Honor your father

OBSERVE

Leader: Read Mark 7:9–13 aloud. Have the group continue to mark the text as before:

- Mark all mentions of **Jesus**, including pronouns and synonyms.
- Beginning with **them** in verse 9, mark with a big **P** all the references to **the Pharisees, scribes, and the Jews**, including pronouns.
- Mark **tradition** with a tall box:

DISCUSS

- How did Jesus describe the Pharisees and scribes in verse 9?
- In verses 10–11 Jesus contrasted the Word of God (what Moses wrote) with the tradition of the Pharisees. What did Moses say?
- In verses 12–13, what did Jesus identify as the result of following their tradition?
- So what is the lesson for us today?
- Based on this exchange, should we assume all tradition is wrong? How could we answer that question from these words of Jesus? (Hint: Look again at verse 9.)

and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death';

¹¹ but you say, 'If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),'

¹² you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother;

¹³ thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that."

MARK 7:14–23

14 After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, “Listen to Me, all of you, and understand:

15 there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.

16 [“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”]




17 When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable.

18 And He said to them, “Are you so lacking in understand-

OBSERVE

The Pharisees were disturbed to see the disciples of Jesus eating without the ritual washing of their hands! Would this defile them—make them spiritually unclean, tainted? Let’s see what Jesus says.

Leader: Read Mark 7:14–23 aloud. Have the group...

- mark references to **hearing** and **listening** with an ear, like this:  We will do this throughout our study.
- put a heart over every reference to **the heart**: 
- mark **defile** with a slash, like this: 

DISCUSS

- Why did Jesus say tell the crowd, “Listen to Me”? What did He want the crowd to understand?

envy, slander, pride and foolishness.

23 “All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”

MARK 7:24–30

24 Jesus got up and went away from there to the region of Tyre. And when He had entered a house, He wanted no one to know of it; yet He could not escape notice.


25 But after hearing of Him, a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet.

26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of the

- In Jewish thinking, the mind and the heart are synonymous. The heart is like the command (control) center of a person. Therefore, when you look at the deeds mentioned in verses 21–23, what step(s) would an individual take to keep from doing these “evil things”?

OBSERVE

Leader: Read Mark 7:24–30 aloud and have the group do the following:

- Mark all references to **Jesus**, including pronouns.
- Mark every reference to **the woman** with a big **W**.
- Place an ear over each mention of **hearing**.
- Mark references to **unclean spirits** and **demons** with a pitchfork, like this: 

DISCUSS

- What insight do you gain from verse 24 about Jesus’ life?

- What did you learn about this woman? What key details are offered in the text?

Syrophoenician race.
And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter.
- Why do you think she approached Jesus with her request?

²⁷ And He was saying to her, “Let the children be satisfied first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”
- How did Jesus respond to her initially? Why do you think He said this?

²⁸ But she answered and said to Him, “Yes, Lord, but even the dogs under the table feed on the children’s crumbs.”
- How did the woman reply? What happened next?

²⁹ And He said to her, “Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter.”
- What truths about Jesus have you learned from His words so far in Mark 7? How can you align your life with these truths?

³⁰ And going back to her home, she found the child lying on the bed, the demon having left.

MARK 7:31–37

31 Again He went out from the region of Tyre, and came through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, within the region of Decapolis.

32 They brought to Him one who was deaf and spoke with difficulty, and they implored Him to lay His hand on him.

33 Jesus took him aside from the crowd, by himself, and put His fingers into his ears, and after spitting, He touched his tongue with the saliva;

34 and looking up to heaven with a deep sigh, He said to him, “Ephphatha!” that is, “Be opened!”

OBSERVE

Leader: Read Mark 7:31–37 aloud and have the group mark...

- each reference to **Jesus**, including pronouns, as they've done previously.
- **deaf** with an ear and a slash, like this:

d

DISCUSS

- How is the man described in verse 32?
- How did the man get to Jesus?
- Briefly describe what Jesus did to the deaf man.
- This is the first time in the gospel of Mark any mention is made of Jesus healing a deaf person who also had a speech impediment. As you think about it, how might Jesus' actions, as described in verse 33, have helped the deaf man, in the light of his affliction?

- What insight does this give you into the healings Jesus performed? Were they all accomplished in the same way?
 - What did the people who witnessed this miracle think about Jesus?
 - Don't you love hearing the stories of those who were helped by Jesus in various circumstances and various ways, or who were changed because of what they heard? What effect do these testimonies have in your life—and in the lives of others?
- 35** And his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was removed, and he began speaking plainly.
- 36** And He gave them orders not to tell anyone; but the more He ordered them, the more widely they continued to proclaim it.
- 37** They were utterly astonished, saying, "He has done all things well; He makes even the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

WRAP IT UP

Hundreds of years before Jesus confronted the Pharisees, the prophet Isaiah rightly accused God's people of putting tradition over truth. "This people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote" (Isaiah 29:13). Instead of listening to and living by the truth, they taught man-made precepts as if they were the very doctrines of God. By doing this, they exchanged the Word of God—the ultimate truth—for the word of man.

This is the passage Jesus quoted when He and the disciples were called out by the Pharisees for failing to wash prior to eating. In Mark 7:4, the Greek word translated as "wash" is literally "baptize." Pharisees had a tradition of baptizing everything—bodies, cups, pots, and vessels—thus sanctifying them, making them "holy." Some manuscripts include even furniture! "Cleanliness is next to godliness" must have been a motto of this Jewish sect. However, their obsession for being ritually clean caused the Pharisees to miss the point. It didn't matter how clean their bodies were, because their hearts were unclean before the Lord. Just like their fathers before them in Isaiah's time, their hearts were far from God. Uncircumcised. Hardened.

Words, beliefs, traditions shape what we are—but what if we've listened to the wrong words? Embraced beliefs that are not true? Held to traditions passed from generation to generation that are contrary to the Word of God?

What then? It's all vanity! Emptiness! Worthless.

Could it be, dear one, that we are so busy doing life and doing church that we don't take time to get alone with God and hear Him speak to our hearts through His Word?

Or, even if we are not physically deaf like the man Jesus healed, are we spiritually hard of hearing and unable to speak truth? Could it be that the blaring noise of life has deafened us to the still small voice of God?

Or are we deceived because we hear so much from the world and so little from God's Word?

Or could it be that our traditions of religion have kept us from a true relationship with our God? Have we added to or even taken away from what the Bible clearly teaches by following our own traditions?

As you've listened to and watched Jesus in Mark 7, what has God said to you?

"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 7:16).