WP-19 FAITH IN PRACTICE

Hearing vs. Understanding: Spiritual Discernment

STATEMENT

Hearing Scripture and understanding it are different things. Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned, and Scripture shows that understanding comes to those who seek it deliberately, while the natural mind, however intelligent, misses it.

Read time **4 min** Sources & resources **4** Series **Faith in Practice** Author **Lee Gregory**

01 ABSTRACT

Jesus often said, “Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand,” to crowds of people who all had ears. He was pointing to a deeper level of hearing. Two people can read the same verse; one walks away with a Bible verse, the other with a changed life. This paper examines what Scripture says about that difference and how to move from hearing to understanding.

02 THE NATURAL MIND CANNOT GET THERE

“People who aren’t spiritual can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Paul told the Corinthians that “the message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction” (1:18) and quoted Isaiah 29:14: God will destroy the wisdom of the wise. The Corinthians were dividing into camps over Paul, Apollos and Peter, arguing surface issues with human logic instead of pursuing the deeper truth (1:10–13).

03 EVEN DISCIPLES DIDN’T RECOGNIZE JESUS

After the resurrection, people who knew Jesus well repeatedly failed to recognize Him until their understanding was opened. Mary Magdalene thought He was the gardener (John 20:14–16). The two disciples on the road to Emmaus walked and talked with Him for miles: “God kept them from recognizing him” until He broke bread with them (Luke 24:16, 31). At the Sea of Galilee, the disciples “couldn’t see who he was” from the boat (John 21:4). The same pattern appears in 2 Kings 6:17, when Elisha prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes and let him see,” and his servant saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire.

Recognition required more than eyesight. It required spiritual sight. Notice, too, that “they reasoned” together while Jesus walked beside them unrecognized (Luke 24:15).

04 HOW UNDERSTANDING COMES

- **Seek it deliberately.** “Keep on seeking, and you will find” (Matthew 7:7).
- **Pay attention to what you hear.** “The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given” (Mark 4:24).
- **Stay in the Word.** “Faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ” (Romans 10:17). Read, listen to teaching, and pray in the Spirit (WP-14).
- **Set your mind on the Spirit.** “Letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your

mind leads to life and peace" (Romans 8:6).

05 A SIMPLE GAUGE

Galatians 5:22–23 works as a "Spirit meter": love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Its opposite is a "carnal meter": selfishness, depression, anxiety, impatience, unkindness, faithlessness, agitation and lack of self-control. Our own perception often produces grief; God's perspective produces joy. Mary went from weeping to joy the moment she recognized Him.

06 SCRIPTURAL SUPPORT

OBSERVATION	DATA & SOURCE	CONFIDENCE
Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned	1 Corinthians 2:14; 1:18–25. 1 Corinthians 2 ↗	HIGH
Hearing vs. understanding	Matthew 13:19, 23: the good soil is the one who "hears and understands."	HIGH
Followers failed to recognize the risen Jesus	John 20:14; Luke 24:16, 31; John 21:4.	HIGH
Eyes opened by God	2 Kings 6:17; Luke 24:31, 45 ("he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures").	HIGH
The measure you give returns	Mark 4:24–25.	HIGH
Most post-resurrection appearances were to followers	The Gospel appearances are to disciples. The notable exceptions are James, Jesus' skeptical brother, and Paul, a persecutor, both of whom became believers through them (1 Corinthians 15:7–8).	HIGH

High = directly measured, or stated plainly in the text. **Moderate** = well-supported, with recognized debate. **Interpretive** = consistent with the text, but depends on how the passage is read.

07 OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

OBJECTION

This makes faith anti-intellectual.

RESPONSE

No. Paul reasoned in synagogues and marketplaces (Acts 17:17), and this library is built on evidence. The point is that intellect alone is not enough; spiritual truth also requires an open heart.

OBJECTION

Why would God hide understanding from anyone?

RESPONSE

Jesus said understanding is given to those who listen and withheld from those who refuse (Mark 4:11–12, 24–25). Seeking is the condition, and anyone can seek.

08 CONCLUSION

Reading Scripture is not the same as understanding it. Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned, and even Jesus' closest followers needed their eyes opened to recognize Him. Understanding comes to those who seek it deliberately, listen closely, stay in the Word and set their minds on the Spirit.

> *"Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." Matthew 11:15*

09 FURTHER RESOURCES

SCRIPTURE **Luke 24: the road to Emmaus** New Living Translation
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2024%3A13-35&version=NLT

SCRIPTURE **1 Corinthians 1–2: the wisdom of God** New Living Translation
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%201-2&version=NLT

SCRIPTURE **Mark 4: the sower and the measure** New Living Translation
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark%204&version=NLT