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# Chapter 4

## How to Grow Pt 1 | Listen

**“Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord! And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. Keep these words in your heart that I am telling you today. Do your best to teach them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as something special to see on your hand and on your forehead. Write them beside the door of your house and on your gates.**  
**-Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

This Old Testament passage is known as the *Shema*. *Shema* is a unique word that doesn't have a good English equivalent. In the English version of the Bible, translators use “hear” or “listen” to communicate the meaning of *shema*. **When that word is used, it's like a note to say, “Listen up! Something important is about to be said.”**

The translation seems straightforward. However, there is a double meaning to *shema*.

Interestingly, there is no Hebrew word for “obey.” When a biblical author used *Shema*, it didn't mean just ‘to listen’ or ‘to hear,’ but also ‘to do.’ There is an expectation that if you hear God say something, there is no other thought but to act on what is heard.

### **When you hear, you do.**

The application of this principle isn't exact in this case, but I want you to consider it throughout this chapter and the next. This chapter will cover learning or studying your Word, and the next session will focus on actively using your Word. However, I don't want you to separate them in your mind.

Your growth this year will be impacted equally by learning and doing.

### **How to “Hear” Your Word This Year**

Let me start by reminding you that the Word of the Year works because you intentionally work through these and other steps regularly. Simply desiring growth will not cause it unless you take

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the steps necessary to achieve it. Over the year of participating in the Word of the Year project, I've found four ways to learn or hear from my word:

- Study
- Prayer
- Meditation
- Contemplation

These four ways, collectively, represent what is classically known as Lectio Divina, which is an ancient way of studying the scriptures. For the Word of the Year project, you are going to use this template of Lectio Divina to grow from your Word this year. Let me explain each of these in more detail so you can envision how to implement them in your year.

If, after reading this, you would like to learn more about Lectio Divina, this free resource from 24-7 Prayer is a great place to start: <https://www.24-7prayer.com/podcast/introducing-lectio-divina/>

## Study

This is what you think it is. **To learn more about your Word, I want you to find books, podcasts, YouTube videos, lectures, newspaper and magazine articles, or any other learning resources you can gather to give you more information about your Word.**

Depending on your Word, this may be easier or harder. In 2025, my Word was KNOWLEDGE, which is a pretty easy word to apply to this point. Because it's such a broad term, any study I do will add to my knowledge. However, a quick search on Amazon, YouTube, or Apple Podcasts for the theme of your Word will return a host of options.

From a spiritual perspective, a good place to start is the Bible. I won't go into depth on the power of Scripture. I hope it is a practice you maintain in your daily life. If not, I encourage you to implement this in your study. Here is what God's Word has to say about God's Word:

**"For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires." -Hebrews 4:12 NLT**

**"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." -2 Timothy 3:16-17**

So, how do you pair regular Scripture reading with your Word of the Year?

An easy starting point is the [YouVersion Bible App](#). If you search the available Bible Studies, you may find several (if not dozens) of Bible Studies surrounding your Word. In the search function,

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simply type in your Word and see what comes back. This is often how I begin my study process, because I don't want to study my Word in isolation, but to study my Word in the Word of God.

Another good study tool is an online commentary or lexicon (try [www.biblehub.com](http://www.biblehub.com) to begin). You can look up your Word and find all the places it appears in Scripture and the different ways it has been translated in Greek and Hebrew. This is one way I was able to glean more out of PEACE in 2023.

## Prayer

As you spend time praying - whether this is a specific time and place or if it is occasional and random - add your Word to your list. Ask God to direct and guide you through your day so that you will hear and see your Word.

One of our church members shared with me that her word for 2023 was "hospitality". As she prayed about her Word, she felt God speaking to her to have regular evenings inviting different people over to her home for a meal and conversation. This revelation transformed her year as various people visited her home over the year. She told me it was a GREAT year!

Prayer is a key to learning from your Word this year, but don't put too much pressure on yourself with this. Some of us are more comfortable with prayer than others, so your Word this year may actually open up a door to God you didn't expect. **Make having regular conversations with God a core part of your Word of the Year routine.**

One of the things I've found is how closely prayer and meditation are linked, so it would only be natural that meditation is the next part of learning from this practice of the Lectio Divina.

## Meditation

The term meditation has a wide range of possible meanings. It can mean emptying your mind, chanting, or even writing or speaking in depth on a particular topic. However, that isn't what I mean by encouraging meditation on your Word.

I mean, thinking deeply about your Word of the Year.

In her book, *The Age of Innocence*, Edith Wharton writes about New York City high society in the 1870s and portrays the main character, Newland Archer, as retreating to his study to read and think deeply. Deep thinking is a lost art in our culture. Technology fights for our attention. **Your ability to be quiet and to think deeply about one idea is an invaluable skill.**

A great way to begin a time of meditation is to start with a few minutes of silence. You might focus on the hum of a nearby appliance, the birds chirping outside your window, or the sound of workers around the corner. After coming to a quiet place in your heart and mind, begin to process

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your Word mentally. Think about it in relation to what you've studied and prayed about. How does God speak to you about applying this Word to your daily life?

As you study and learn about your Word, meditate on what it means for you in your life. Think deeply about how you can apply this Word in ways you haven't before.

## Contemplation

Until recently, I lumped meditation and contemplation together into one category. Technically, you can. However, I came across a definition that helped me categorize a practice I never had a name for. **In the ancient Christian world, contemplation meant seeing God in the culture and creation around us.** The Book of Acts contains a great example of contemplation.

In this story, Paul arrives alone in Athens. With time to kill, he wanders around the city and notices an unusual shrine, which he describes to the people when asked to address some of the thought leaders in the town. This is how he begins:

**“Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: ‘To an Unknown God.’ This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I’m telling you about.” -Acts 17:22-23**

I want you to do the same thing for this practice with your Word. Where do you see it in the world around you?

In 2011, when my Word was FREEDOM, I remember stumbling upon a [YouTube video of BMX biker Danny MacAskill](#) riding in the wide-open vistas of Scotland. This video became a vision of freedom for me. It helped me imagine how I would feel when I became free from some of the things that imprisoned me.

My Word was CONTENT in 2024 (as in living a contented life, not creating more content). My wife and I were visiting my son in Los Angeles when we visited a local flea market. There, I stumbled upon the booth of an artist who had perfectly sketched that vision of content vs. content. I purchased the print, and it now hangs in my office.



Contemplation isn't something you plan on – that is meditation. **Contemplation means having your inner eyes and ears open, so you need to be ready to capture the moment when it happens.** It could be scrolling through Instagram on your phone, walking around your neighborhood, window-shopping with your spouse, or watching TV on a Tuesday night.

Contemplation means having your inner eyes and ears open as you read fiction and non-fiction, as you watch videos, shows, and movies, as you listen to podcasts and lectures, as you chat with friends and family, and even as I drive down the road or walk through my neighborhood.

## Chapter 4 Homework | Practice Studying

For your homework, I have two things for you to do:

1. Choose one of the four learning practices (study, prayer, meditation, contemplation) to focus on for one week.  
If you already are practicing one or two of these, push yourself to add another.
2. Set aside 5 minutes each day to practice this in your life. Ideally, you will build on this, growing it from 5 to 10 to 20 or more minutes each day, but start small to grow bigger.

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## About Andy



My name is Andy Bondurant. In over 25 years of professional and volunteer ministry experience in the urban, suburban, international, and domestic worlds, and now as a pastor at a local church in Kansas, I have found that most people make connecting to God too complicated. Most people don't believe they can personally connect to Jesus.

Understanding the God of the Bible is easier than you might think, and I want to show you how.

You can find a new article about once or twice a week, where I'll show you how to connect with and understand God. If you don't want to miss one of these, sign up for updates, and I'll send you a free eBook devotional that will help you draw closer to God in just 30 days.

<https://andybondurant.substack.com/>