

Learning to Listen to God's Word Series

Listen with Attentiveness (Heb. 2:1-4)

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At A Glance:

- I. Introduction
- II. God's Word Commands Our Attention
- III. The Dangers of Failure
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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Listen with Attentiveness

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: A Wandering Mind

1. As I was reading the Bible this past week, there was a day in which I was struggling to stay focused—this doesn't happen often anymore. It was one of those rare occasions when my mind was distracted and filled with so many other thoughts that I had to keep intentionally redirecting my attention back to what I was reading. Earlier in my Christian life, getting distracted was a much bigger problem and happened more frequently. Thankfully, as I've grown spiritually, this has become much easier.
2. I don't know how many times my mind wandered, but reading four chapters of the Bible was a bigger struggle than it normally is. My daily Bible reading took longer that day because I had to keep going back and rereading the words I had read but passed over without thinking about them as my mind checked out. I read one paragraph three times before my mind stayed engaged.
3. No matter how much we love the word of God and are interested in it, there will be times when we struggle to stay focused. It can happen when we are extra busy, when we are tired, when a major life event is happening, when we are confronted with a difficult situation, or when we are concerned about a circumstance we are facing. It is easy to get distracted while interacting with the word of God. It is this constant challenge that we need to overcome to become good listeners of God's word.

B. Anyone who has been exposed to the teachings of Jesus have been warned to be careful how they listen and respond to the word of God. The way we interact with the word of God will either cause us to get stuck and make no further spiritual progress or consistently move forward in the spiritual life. The basic habits of connecting with the word of God, such as hearing, reading, studying, meditating, and memorizing, will only be fruitful in our lives if the Holy Spirit is working in us. God's word will not be active in our lives if we attempt to learn and understand it without God's help. As we practice these habits, disciples should do so with a prayerful and dependent attitude toward God and an increasing openness that trusts the truthfulness and wisdom of God, while also letting go of trust in our own thinking. All this shapes us to be a good listener of the word of God.

C. As we continue to journey toward greater spiritual health, we also need to learn to approach the word of God with attentiveness according to Hebrews 2:1-4. Simply going through the motions of spending time in God's word is not enough to produce forward movement with God. Our time with Scripture must be actively participated in with an engaged mind. Setting our mind on the things above while learning from the word of God is a critical skill for every disciple to develop (Col. 3:1). Without this skill, our time with the Bible will be ineffective.

II. God's Word Commands Our Attention

A. The book of Hebrews is written to a group of disciples who are starting to lose their passion for Jesus at least in part because of the persecution they are experiencing. Other people are putting pressure on these disciples to stop following Jesus. There is a real and ongoing

temptation for the people of God to abandon Jesus altogether, which is why the author of Hebrews warns these disciples several times about the danger of walking away from God. Hebrews is a recorded sermon offered to encourage disciples to remain faithful to Jesus because of how wonderful He is.

B. Here is how the people of God should be listening to the word of God:

¹ For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*. ² For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every violation and act of disobedience received a just punishment, ³ how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, ⁴ God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders, and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. (Heb. 2:1-4)

C. Because Jesus is the Son of God and superior to and holding a higher position than the angels, disciples should react to the word of God in a specific way (“For this reason”, v. 1).¹ Our response should be to carefully focus our mental energy on the word of God (“we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard”, v. 1). Giving the word of God our attention involves not only turning our attention to God, but also includes the idea of following and putting the word of God into practice, which verse 2 clearly indicates.² To give attention to the word of God is to hold firmly to the particular beliefs, as taught by Jesus, and continue to believe in them.³ This is something these disciples are currently doing to an extent.⁴

D. A fascinating example of a person’s attention in action can be found in Peter and John going to the temple to pray (Ac. 3:1-10). As the two apostles are entering the temple, a crippled man was sitting at the temple as a beggar—someone who would ask those going to worship God for financial help. As Peter and John responded to the man asking for a gift, the man focused his attention on them (“he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them”, v. 5). The description of this man beautifully captures the essence of the term “attention”. The mental focus of the man turned its direction toward Peter and John with passion and energy because he was expecting a financial gift from them—like a kid on Christmas. There is a fixed concentration set on a particular object of focus. While this beggar didn’t receive a financial gift, he received something far more valuable.

E. Disciples should be highly motivated to focus as much of their mental capacities and focused attention toward the word of God as they are capable of. Jesus, the greatest messenger for

¹ Douglas J. Moo, [Hebrews](#), ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 60.

² Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, [Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament](#) (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990–), 170, William Arndt et al., [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 880.

³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 371.

⁴ J. Harold Greenlee, [An Exegetical Summary of Hebrews](#), 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 41.

God, is the supreme and final revelation of God’s salvation, which means that God’s people must pay careful attention to that revelation.⁵ As D.A. Carson wisely points out:

We are dealing with God’s thoughts: we are obligated to take the greatest pains to understand them truly and to explain them clearly.⁶

- F. Our daughter Abi just finished her last volleyball tournament for the year. She and the rest of her teammates are coached to take a ready position before the ball is served. It is interesting to watch how all the girls react to the ball once the person serving hits the volleyball. You can observe the intense focus on the girl’s faces, especially those who realize the ball is coming to them. Their eyes get big and are locked in on the ball that is in the air. Once the ball is heading in their direction, they look at nothing else. No distractions get in the way. Every movement they make is in response to the ball. This is what it means to give our attention to the word of God.
- G. Whatever amount of attention we are giving to the word of God, we can always give more (“pay much closer attention”, v. 1). It is assumed that these disciples are already paying attention to the word of God, but they are being encouraged to do even better. They are also being warned that they might not be doing enough—perhaps only giving minimal or shallow attention to the word of God. They are commanded to give even more focus and energy to the word of God than they are currently doing. The attention being directed toward the message of God should be developed to a greater degree.⁷
- H. Everyone who is part of the people of God by following Jesus will have to protect and guard against the temptation of growing careless and lazy with the word of God. This spiritual danger was expressed in the first century, and it is just as relevant for us today. We will all have days when we don’t feel like and lack motivation for reading the word of God. But we must press on and persevere. Perhaps you’ve even felt this dynamic working in your own soul. While we all go through seasons of life when our passion and energy for the word of God wanes at times, this should not be the case in the long run and become the normal pattern of our Christian life. When we start to lose our enthusiasm for the word of God, we should take that as an alarm bell for our soul and draw near to God, asking His Spirit to move and change our hearts to desire His word the way we should. We can evaluate our lifestyle and habits to determine if our lack of interest in the word of God is part of a larger life picture that is disconnected from God and healthy spiritual habits. Recognizing a lack of desire or interest in the word of God as a spiritual concern is important to maintain our spiritual health.

III. The Dangers of Failure

- A. Why is it so important to pay careful attention to the word of God? First and foremost, because of the significance of who the messenger is who communicated this message: Jesus the Son of God is superior to the messengers of the old message given by angels. But also, it is important to pay attention to this message because failure to do so creates significant spiritual problems

⁵ Douglas J. Moo, [Hebrews](#), ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 61.

⁶ D. A. Carson, [Exegetical Fallacies](#), 2nd ed. (Carlisle, U.K.; Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster; Baker Books, 1996), 15.

⁷ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 2:1 “much closer”

in our lives. Two harmful outcomes are the natural consequence in the lives of those who neglect the word of God. Before we identify the problems that are created in the lives of those who refuse to pay attention to the word of God, we must understand the spiritual condition of those who are not focusing their attention on the word of God.

- B. Contrasted from the disciples who are focusing their mental energy on the word of God are those who:

³ how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard (Heb. 2:3)

- C. Every person will either be giving the word of God their attention, or they will be neglecting God and the good work He wants to do in their life through His word (“if we neglect”, v. 3). Neglecting the message of God is to not feel concern or interest in the word of God; this type of person does not care about the Bible.⁸ The word of God isn’t valuable to them. It is likely these people think the Bible is irrelevant and they are not missing out on anything good by their neglect. The word of God doesn’t contribute anything positive to their experience of life. To neglect the word of God is simply to not be interested in it—and this attitude is very spiritually dangerous (in some cases catastrophic). To neglect the word of God is to not think about it (disregard), and therefore not respond appropriately to the message of God.⁹ It is to refuse to take an interest in and busy oneself about the word of God—in a careless way.¹⁰ Neglecting the word of God involves refusing to exert oneself in directing their attention toward the Bible. Reading and studying the Bible is just too much work in their opinion.

- D. The first spiritual problem encountered by those who ignore the word of God is:

¹ For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*. (Heb. 2:1)

- E. The more we neglect the holy habits God instructs us to develop in our lives, the more the chances increase that we will walk away from God (“so that we do not drift away from it”, v. 1).¹¹ Abandoning God is the first significant spiritual danger faced by those who neglect the word of God. That could be church attendance to hear the word of God being communicated, or it could be failing to read the Bible for ourselves in a personal way. In either case, the more a person is not concerned with and ignores the word of God, the more likely it becomes they will wander away from God. This abandonment of God is the natural outcome of neglecting the word of God. There are many people who once attended church and read their Bible who have nothing to do with God today. This predictable pattern can be observed everywhere. Apparently, although these disciples were paying a bit of attention to the word of God, some of them are in real danger of drifting away from God due to their neglect of His word, whether in mental focus or failing to act on what God says in His word.

⁸ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 2:3 “neglect”

⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 355.

¹⁰ Ceslas Spicq and James D. Ernest, [Theological Lexicon of the New Testament](#) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 87.

¹¹ It is possible but not certain that the author is using a nautical (boating) metaphor in the use of his language here. Douglas J. Moo, [Hebrews](#), ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 63.

- F. The process of drifting away means to disbelieve gradually or slowly.¹² Drifting is gradually giving up what they believe.¹³ Moving away from God is a slow burn that happens in small increments over time. Walking away from God doesn't happen overnight in an instant, large jump. It is a natural process that happens almost automatically according to the inertia created by our unhealthy spiritual habits. Interestingly, the individual is passive in this process. In other words, the person is not doing anything actively; they are sitting back, failing to give attention to the word of God, and they are carried away from God. Their abandonment of God just happens to them—it is not something they pursue or decisively create. They might wake up one day thinking God isn't real and Christianity is not important.
- G. This spiritual problem of drifting away is not only identified, but also celebrated, in the modern culture as deconstruction.¹⁴ In deconstruction, individuals who started to intellectually question their faith and Christianity tell their story of walking away from traditional Christianity and are highly regarded for doing so. That which the author of Hebrews warns against and condemns is celebrated in our culture. Those who will be rightfully punished by God are viewed as a hero from the world's perspective. They have "grown" intellectually and have come to see the light of the foolishness of organized religion. Drifting away from God is running rampant in the modern church in our country.
- H. The second significant spiritual problem that is created by a lack of interest in the word of God is:

² For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every violation and act of disobedience received a just punishment, ³ how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, (Heb. 2:2-3)

- I. It is right for God to punish individuals who neglect His word ("every violation and act of disobedience received a just punishment, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?", vv. 2-3). The word of God is legally binding and relevant for each person's life who has heard from and is aware of the message of God ("For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable", v. 2).¹⁵ There are many examples of God punishing individuals and groups who disregarded the message He communicated through angels to Moses at Mt. Sinai (called the Law—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). Since God punished others in their neglect of a less significant message, God is sure to punish anyone who disregards the superior message of Jesus. The author of Hebrews is using a logical argument moving from the lesser to the greater (*a fortiori*).
- J. Those who ignore and neglect the word of God will automatically violate the word of God in their actions as an unavoidable consequence. This natural outcome occurs because we do not

¹² Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 2:1 "drift away"

¹³ J. Harold Greenlee, *An Exegetical Summary of Hebrews*, 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 43.

¹⁴ Alisa Childers, Tim Barnett, and Carl R. Trueman, *The Deconstruction of Christianity: What It Is, Why It's Destructive, and How to Respond* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Elevate, 2024).

¹⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *Hebrews*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 63, William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, vol. 47A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1991), 35.

naturally live as God wants us to. The emphasis here is on an intentional unwillingness to listen to the word and commandments of God—a deliberate rejection of the will of God.¹⁶ Our human perspective often views our lack of concern and interest in the word of God as morally neutral—we don’t think we are doing anything wrong if we don’t spend time with the Bible. However, that is not an accurate perspective. Those who think this way fail to understand who God is and what He’s done for us. They fail to understand the reality of their relationship with God and how poorly we treat Him.

- K. One of the reasons it is just and right for God to punish those who ignore His word is the fact that God is responding to us the exact same way we are responding to Him. If we neglect God, He will rightly neglect us. We get this principle working itself out in another text of Hebrews:
- ⁹ Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers On the day I took them by the hand To bring them out of the land of Egypt; For they did not continue in My covenant, And I did not care about them, says the Lord. (Heb. 8:9)¹⁷
- L. Notice how the people neglected their relationship with God and ignored how they were supposed to be acting within that relationship, and God responded by giving them what they deserved—neglect in return (“For they did not continue in My covenant, And I did not care about them”, v. 9). Essentially, the people of Israel did not care about God, so God responded by acting in a way that was deserved “not caring about” them. Of course, even here, we see that God had already cared for and loved them (“I took them by the hand To bring them out of the land of Egypt”, v. 9). God loves, pursues, and cares for everyone to an extent, but when His love and kind actions are rejected and ignored, God responds appropriately to the people who act that way toward Him. There is no injustice or wrongdoing in the way God relates to and treats people (Rm. 9:14, Zeph. 3:5).
- M. While we treat our evil attitude toward God and His word casually, God does not.¹⁸ He reacts to our lack of concern for His word appropriately. The author of Hebrews informs us how seriously God takes our neglect of Him and His word. He spells out exactly what the punishment is for those who have this attitude toward the word of God, expanding on the same argument that is offered in Heb. 2:1-4:¹⁹
- ²⁸ Anyone who has ignored the Law of Moses is put to death without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses*. ²⁹ How much more severe punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge His people.” ³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb. 10:28-31)

¹⁶ William L. Lane, [Hebrews 1–8](#), vol. 47A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1991), 38, J. Harold Greenlee, [An Exegetical Summary of Hebrews](#), 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 45.

¹⁷ See also Romans 1:28-32

¹⁸ Hebrews 3:12

¹⁹ Douglas J. Moo, [Hebrews](#), ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 64.

- N. While we think it is no big deal if we ignore and neglect the word of God, God sees our behavior as it really is and says it rightly deserves a severe punishment (“How much more severe punishment do you think he will serve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God”, v. 29). Those who neglect the word of God not only show no concern or interest in the Bible, they also disrespect Jesus who gave His life to bring us this message, and we insult the Spirit of God who communicated that same message. This is what happens when we don’t show interest in the word of God. We disregard and disrespect God Himself! Our lack of interest in the word of God is a rejection of God. That is a very serious offense that deserves a severe punishment that is worse than physical death. Think of an extremely rebellious child and their constant adversarial attitude toward a loving parent who cares for them and provides everything that child needs. This is what the author of Hebrews is claiming our attitude and actions toward God are like when we are not concerned with His word.
- O. Some people’s disinterest in the word of God is going to cost them the death of their soul through eternal separation from God (Mt. 7:23, 2 Thess. 1:9). This will be a natural extension and outcome of the way they lived throughout their life. If anyone thinks they can sit safely with God while at the same time hardly, if ever, opening their Bible to read it, they are seriously mistaken and there will be significant negative consequences for doing so, both in this life and in eternity. Those who do this will not be able to avoid the punishment that is coming to them from Jesus the Judge.
- P. The purpose of all this is not to condemn but to correct—convinced that God’s people will pursue the things regarding their salvation (Heb. 6:9). Even though the author of Hebrews is using very strong language to confront and correct spiritually dangerous attitudes (character) and behavior (conduct) happening in the lives of the disciples, He is doing it with a heart and motivation of love and edification—doing what is good for the people of God. This is not harsh, it is honest.
- Q. Disciples can interact with the word of God in an attentive manner by developing two specific habits. First, we give proper attention to the word of God when we read and study it regularly. We determine to inject time in the word of God into our regular schedule. Then, we develop discipline and self-control to maintain and act on this determination. Over time, spending time in God’s word becomes normal and natural so we don’t even need to think about it—we just do it out of routine. Second, we give proper attention to the word of God when we intentionally focus our mental energy on the word of God as we are reading and studying it. We don’t allow our minds to wander to other topics. If our mind does start to move away from the truth of God’s word, we catch ourselves and redirect our focus once again back to the word of God. By doing this, we develop another healthy habit regarding the attention we give to the word of God. Disciples who work on and develop these habits will have a much greater opportunity to become spiritually healthy.

V. Conclusion

- A. Disciples are warned and commanded to be careful about the type of attention they are giving to the word of God. If we aren't interested or focused on the word of God, we will fall into destructive spiritual problems that can devastate our lives. We should be constantly trying to devote more time, energy, and attention to the word of God in an ever-increasing way.
- B. Disciples can be both motivated and encouraged to increase the time, effort, and responsiveness they are devoting to the word of God by realizing the wonderful benefits God promises to those who pay attention to His word:

²⁰ One who pays attention to the word will find good, And blessed is one who trusts in the Lord. (Pr. 16:20)