

Learning to Listen to God's Word Series

How We Listen Matters (Lk. 8:18)

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At A Glance:

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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.

How We Listen Matters

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Are you a good listener quiz¹

1. Everyone wants to be listened to when they talk. Being listened to is a form of love and care. When we are ignored by others, we can feel less valuable and alone. Being heard and understood fosters healthy relationships.
2. While we all innately understand the desire to be heard, we don't always realize our need to learn how to listen so that we can hear others. While we want to be listened to, so too do other people want us to listen to them. The way we listen to others is something we can control. How others listen to us is something we can't control.
3. It is good for us to think about how good of a listener we are. When we listen well to others, other people will have a greater tendency to listen to us as well.
4. To help us think about how good of a listener we are, the following questions can be offered:
 - a. When someone shares a problem with you, how do you usually respond?
 - b. During a conversation, what do you focus on the most?
 - c. How do you handle long or emotional conversations?
 - d. When someone disagrees with you, how do you react?
 - e. If a friend is upset, what do you do?
 - f. How often do you ask follow-up questions when someone is speaking?
 - g. What do you do when you do not understand what someone is saying?

B. Good listening does not come naturally to us. We need to learn how to become a good listener. It takes intentional effort and concentration to become a person who habitually listens well when others are talking. Just like learning to listen to others, we also need to learn how to listen to what God says in His word. This critical skill plays a significant role in our spiritual health and development.

C. A significant part of living the Christian life involves hearing and being taught from the word of God. Most disciples listen to the word of God being communicated to them on a regular basis. Continual contact with the word of God is a major element of spiritual growth. Even though disciples regularly participate in hearing the word of God taught to them, very rarely are they instructed how to listen to the word of God. It is good for disciples to learn how to interact with and respond to sermons, Bible studies, and classes in which the Bible is being taught. God instructs us how to listen to what He has to say to us. Jesus emphasizes this point in Luke 8:18.

D. Here at Community Alliance Church, we use what we call the Four E's to visualize and explain the progression of spiritual growth that happens in the Christian life. Every person's journey with Jesus begins when they first encounter Jesus and begin learning about Him; we call this the Expose stage. After a person commits their life to following Jesus' teachings, they have a spiritual need to learn what Jesus taught. This is the Educate phase of the Christian life. Once a

¹ <https://www.marriage.com/quizzes/are-you-a-good-listener-quiz>

person knows what Jesus wants them to do, they need to be trained to do what they know Jesus requires—the Equip season of following Jesus. Lastly, when a person is experienced in effectively living the way Jesus recommends, a person will be positioned to be able to help others live for Jesus too. The Christian life develops to the Engage stage when a person actively participates in spiritually investing into others. This is an overall summary of how the Christian life plays out according to Jesus. This next sermon series is directed at the Equip stage of discipleship.

II. Jesus Warning: Be Careful How You Listen

- A. Why do some people who attend church seem to grow and develop while others who have been attending church for a long time seem to remain the same? The reason: just because a person is in an environment where the word of God is being communicated does not mean they will be moving forward with Jesus. Spiritual growth must be pursued intentionally; it doesn't just happen automatically. Knowing how to listen to the word of God in a way that is productive and beneficial to us is a learned skill that needs to be developed. Both Jesus and the Bible teach us what a healthy response to the word of God looks like and how we can respond in ways that move us forward toward spiritual maturity.
- B. After preaching a sermon about how the word of God works in people's lives using a parable (Lk. 8:4-15), Jesus gives a warning about how each of us should interact with and respond to the word of God—including the message and words of Jesus. In a conversation with His disciples in which Jesus is explaining elements of the sermon He preached, Jesus says:

¹⁸ So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him *more* will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him.
(Lk. 8:18)
- C. Jesus begins with a warning that we should be paying attention to how we listen to the word of God ("So take care how you listen", v. 18). According to Jesus, not all listening to the word of God is good listening. Jesus is encouraging those who are listening to Him speak to be conscious of the quality of how they are listening to what He is saying. Good listening is diligently being on the lookout to make sure we are hearing with good intentions.² Good listeners of the word of God consider and take note of how well they are listening.³ They monitor their responsiveness to the actions God tells them to do. If the word of God is not having the impact it is intended to have on a person, the person who is practicing good listening will take notice and make adjustments.
- D. The point Jesus is making is further explained in two other texts. The first makes the following similar point:

² For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also *did*; but the word they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united with those who listened with faith. (Heb. 4:2)
- E. Not everyone who hears the word of God or knows the Bible well benefits from the word of God. Why? Because there is a spiritual barrier that needs to be overcome. Notice the intended

² Logos Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Luke 8:18 "care" and "listen"

³ Richard C. Blight, [An Exegetical Summary of Luke 1–11](#), 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 349.

outcome of hearing God’s word: it is God’s purpose for His word to have a positive impact on us and our lives (“the word they heard did not benefit them” v, 2). God’s word is a good gift that is designed to be beneficial for us by giving us help and aid.⁴ But not everyone who hears the word of God benefits from it.

- F. Only those who listen to the word of God with an attitude of trust in God and what He says can benefit (“those who listened with faith”, v. 2). To have faith in the word of God means to have strong confidence in and reliance on the truthfulness of what God says.⁵ If a person rejects, disagrees with, ignores, neglects, or doesn’t act on the truth and wisdom God communicates through His word, that person will not experience the benefits that are brought into a person’s life by acting obediently to the word of God. The Bible is not a magical book that benefits people or fixes their problems automatically. There must be an appropriate response to what is being learned from the word of God in order to benefit from it.
- G. The second passage that further expands on the point Jesus is making about the importance of how a person listens to the word of God continues:

¹³ For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of *mere* men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which also is at work in you who believe.
(1 Thess. 2:13)

- H. The bottom line is that God and His word need to be at work in a person’s life if they are going to benefit from the word of God (“at work in you who believe”, v. 13). This work the word of God does in a person is the same work that the Holy Spirit accomplishes. The word and the Spirit work together toward the same goal—to be transformed to be like Jesus through sanctification (Jn. 17:17, 1 Pet. 1:2). A person left to themselves will not be able to understand the spiritual message and significance contained in the word of God (1 Cor. 2:14). The word of God is a spiritual message, and every person needs the Holy Spirit in them to properly understand and appreciate that spiritual message. Merely hearing the word of God communicated and taught is not enough by itself to move people forward to be like Jesus. God’s word will never work for you if it doesn’t work in you.
- I. When a person accepts the Bible for what it is, God and His word become the highest source of authority and credibility in our life (“accepted it...as what is really is, the word of God” v. 13). The Bible is not merely a book written by human beings; it is a divine message from God, communicated through human authors (“not as the word of mere men”, v. 13). God works in us and our lives through His word. While it is okay to debate and discuss the best way to understand the word of God, once we are convinced that we know what the word of God is saying, we don’t have the freedom to disagree or disobey what it says. If God says it, we have the responsibility to do it. God is always right, and He has the right to tell us how to live our lives. Humble obedience is the response of those who accept the Bible as the word of God, not merely the word of men.

III. Being a Good Listener

⁴ Logos Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 4:2 “benefit”

⁵ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Hebrews 4:2 “faith”

- A. The reason Jesus is encouraging people to pay attention to how they are listening to Him, and more broadly to the word of God (Lk. 8:11), is because different types of listening produce very different results in our life. One is good, and the other one is not. Jesus divides how people listen to the word of God into two types of results. The first result is found in the lives of those who listen to the word of God in a healthy way. People who listen to God’s word the way God intends are constantly learning and growing (“for however has, to him more will be given”, v. 18). People who listen carefully to the word of God with the help of the Holy Spirit will continually be gaining more insight and ability to obey what they hear from God’s word. There is continual personal growth. Piece by piece, these good listeners are regularly adding to their understanding and implementation of the word of God. There is progress, transformation, and development happening in their life.
- B. Being a good listener toward the word of God as being explained here by Jesus can be summarized in the statement that is found elsewhere, as a person is described as, “constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which you have been following” (1 Tim. 4:6). But the question is, “How do I become a good listener to the word of God?”. Jesus tells us in other places of His sermon. A few verses earlier, in verse 15, Jesus describes the person who listens to the word of God in a healthy and productive way:
- ¹⁵ But the *seed* in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word with a good and virtuous heart, and hold it firmly, and produce fruit with perseverance. (Lk. 8:15)
- C. There are four features of a healthy response to the word of God. First, a good listener listens with a certain type of heart attitude (“hear the word with a good and virtuous heart”, v. 15). The most important factor in being a good listener when it comes to the word of God is the internal attitude of our heart. Jesus tells us some people have a morally excellent internal disposition toward the word of God.⁶ At the deepest levels of their personhood, these people respond positively to the word of God and receive it with acceptance and openness. They don’t resist, reject, or get angry at what God is saying through the Bible. God finds their attitude toward Him and His word beautiful.
- D. Another feature of good listening is that a person accepts what God’s word says (“and hold it firmly”, v. 15). Good listeners are committed to the accuracy, goodness, and value of God’s word. This is why they are interested in and pay close attention to what God has to say, and they respond in conformity.⁷ Good listeners take heed to what they hear, and they don’t dismiss what God says through His word. God’s word is taken seriously and is treated as a weighty matter.
- E. A third feature of good listening is productivity—God’s word is doing something in a person (“and produce fruit”, v. 15). To produce fruit regarding the word of God means to generate actions and consequences that are natural to the person who is obeying God.⁸ Healthy listening leads to responses that are aligned with what God says. One of the main ways Jesus talked

⁶ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Luke 8:15 “good and virtuous heart”

⁷ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Luke 8:15 “hold it firmly”

⁸ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Luke 8:15 “produce fruit”

about fruit was to put what is heard from God’s word into practice. Good listeners who listen to the word of God in a productive way live what they learn. They don’t just receive the word of God as information to know or as a purely intellectual pursuit; they do something with the information they have:

²¹ But He answered and said to them, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do *it*.” (Lk. 8:21)

- F. The fourth element of a healthy response to the word of God is to have regular and continual contact and interaction with the word of God (“with perseverance”, v. 15). To persevere means to have steadfast endurance with the power to withstand hardship or stress.⁹ Good listeners to the word of God have the inner fortitude necessary to stay obedient and faithful to the word of God, even when it is difficult to do so. They don’t give up. Good listeners keep going. Jesus further explained what He meant by this in John 8:31-32. Good listeners of the word of God stay continually connected to the Bible. The longer a person stays connected to the word of God, the more God will work in their life and transform them.
- G. Anyone can learn to become a good listener toward the word of God by having the right heart attitude, by trusting in and being committed to the truthfulness of the word of God, by hearing and then acting on what is learned, and by persevering in their contact with the word of God and continuing to put it into practice in their life. This is how Jesus describes a good listener of God’s word who will always be given more insight and understanding from God.

IV. Being a Bad Listener

- A. The second type of result is experienced in those who are poor listeners regarding the word of God. Returning to our main text of Luke 8:18, bad listeners don’t make progress and may even think they understand or are living by the word of God when they are not (“whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken away from him”, v. 18). Jesus is using a proverb from the financial world to explain how profit and loss work in the spiritual realm.¹⁰ Good listeners make progress; bad listeners do not, no matter how much contact they have with the word of God.
- B. Luke adds an important qualification that the other gospel writer who recorded this saying of Jesus does not.¹¹ Luke helps us understand this proverb by making a clarification (“even what he thinks he has”, v. 18). These people think they have spiritual insight, or possibly a spiritual benefit from God, but they are mistaken. They do not possess what they think they possess. It is likely that Jesus is exclusively talking about knowledge about God and having spiritual understanding, since that is what He was focusing on throughout this conversation with His disciples:

⁹ Now His disciples *began* asking Him what this parable meant. ¹⁰ And He said, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest *they are told* in parables, so that while seeing they may not see, and while hearing they may not understand. (Lk. 8:9-10)

⁹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Luke 8:15 “perseverance”

¹⁰ Richard C. Blight, [An Exegetical Summary of Luke 1–11](#), 2nd ed. (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), 350.

¹¹ Matthew 13:12

- C. Some people think they understand a lot more about spiritual things than they do. Those who are poor listeners tend to think they have a good knowledge and understanding of God when they do not. These types of people will not make spiritual progress. Bad listeners of the word of God do not grow spiritually. Some people make confident assertions about topics they aren't informed about; this happens with the word of God as well (1 Tim. 1:7).
- D. A descriptive example of what bad listeners to the word of God look like is found in 2 Timothy:
 - ⁷ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, worthless in regard to the faith. ⁹ But they will not make further progress; for their foolishness will be obvious to all, just as was that also of Jannes and Jambres. (2 Tim. 3:7-9)
- E. Notice a distinguishing feature of a person who is a bad listener when it comes to the word of God: they keep hearing and learning, but they don't grow in their knowledge and understanding ("always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth", v. 7). No matter how many years or how many sermons, Bible studies, or classes they attend, there is no progress or personal forward movement ("they will not make further progress", v. 9). The problem is not a lack of exposure or contact with the word of God. The problem is a lack of progress in insight and understanding. Bad listeners can spend plenty of time hearing, reading, and talking about the word of God, but they do not change because they are not listening to the word of God the right way.
- F. What kind of a listener are you when it comes to the word of God? Does your life demonstrate the qualities of a good listener? Is the experience of your Christian life more like bad listeners of the word of God? Do you notice forward movement in your spiritual growth?
- G. To help us become better listeners of the word of God, be encouraged to read Psalm 119 once every week throughout the rest of this sermon series. This Psalm showcases a list of positive attitudes toward the word of God. Psalm 119 teaches us many benefits that come from the word of God. Psalm 119 is a masters-level course in becoming a good listener regarding the word of God. It can instruct us the proper way to approach the word of God in a way that will benefit us.

V. Conclusion

- A. Jesus warned us to pay attention to the way we listen to the word of God. Every one of us will fall into one of two categories. We will either be a good listener and experience personal transformation and growth in a beneficial way, or we will be a poor listener who thinks we understand that which we do not and we will fail to make forward progress. How we listen to the word of God makes all the difference in the success or failure of our Christian life.
- B. Read Psalm 119 once a week throughout this sermon series—for the next 8 weeks. Doing this will help increase our desire and appreciate for the word of God and it will teach us how to become a good listener. Only good listeners of the word of God make progress in the Christian life.