

The Way to Listen and Live

Luke 8:4-21

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for December 5, 2021

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Summary: Most people can relate to the experience of being listened to, but not really heard. Listening to the words and comprehending the meaning are two very different things. Did you know that Jesus also was heard without being understood? And so, as He gives a sermon to His largest audience during His earthly ministry, He continually returns to the same theme: “Do you really hear me?”

I was sent this by someone in my congregation many years ago; they evidently thought it was funny.

Three friends decided to go deer hunting one beautiful November afternoon: a lawyer, a doctor, and a pastor. As they were walking in the woods, suddenly a large buck came along. It froze and all three men simultaneously raised their rifles and fired. Immediately the buck dropped to the ground and all three men ran over to it. Sure enough, it was dead. Trouble was, they couldn't determine whose shot had killed the deer and each of them were convinced they had brought it down.

After a few minutes, a game warden came by, and they introduced themselves to him and told him what had happened and then asked him to help them decided

who the winner was. The officer said, “Sure, let me take a look.” He bent down and after just a few seconds stood back up and said, “The preacher shot this buck.” “The preacher?” they said, “How can you be so sure?” The officer said, “Easy; the bullet went in one ear and out the other.”

P. J. Alindogan, The Potter's Jar blog, “Hearing” (3/4/12)

Very funny.

Well, it is a legitimate problem. Not in here, of course, you guys hang onto every word, amen?

This is a problem of human nature when exposed to the truth of God's Word—and we all have the same problem. We can appear to be listening without actually hearing.

I was talking to a young mother not too long ago and her little girl was looking up at her the whole time, saying, “Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy.” And I remembered thinking, she’s developed the ability to tune out “Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy, Mommy” until the 35th time—I counted.

My wife will ask, “Honey you got a minute to take out the trash?” and I’ll say, “Sure!” and then have absolutely no recollection of that conversation. It’s taken 40 years to develop that kind of skill.

We all can listen and never hear a thing.



Can you remember a time when someone heard what you said but wasn't really listening? How did that make you feel?

If you're a mom, or a husband, or a preacher or Bible study leader and you've found yourself asking the question, “Are you really listening to me?” did you know that you are doing the very same thing Jesus did to His audience one afternoon?

Because the main issue—as we're about to discover—was that His audience was listening to Him, but He knew that most of them didn't hear a word He said.

Let me show you where: Luke's gospel chapter 8.

While you're turning to Luke's account, Mark's Gospel informs us that the crowd

was so great that Jesus once again got into a boat and pushed a few feet offshore as the crowd pressed toward Him (**Mark 4:1**).

Many Bible scholars believe this will be the largest audience Jesus will ever address here at the seashore.

In His message, the main idea differentiates between hearing and really listening.

Nine different times you're going to read the word for hear or hearing; you might circle them in your Bible as I have. Notice at the end of **verse 8: He who has ears to hear, let him hear** (twice there) down to the end of His message in **verse 21: My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word.**

Now you'll notice here in **verse 4** that Jesus delivers to them a parable. Luke writes:

And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable,...

Luke 8:4

This is the third time Jesus uses this method of preaching with the use of a parable.

A parable is a natural story delivering a spiritual principle.

Or you could think of it this way: a parable is a package with truth tucked inside.

One more way to understand a parable is this way: a parable is a lesson that leads us to a lifestyle.

And that's exactly where Jesus is taking His audience then—and you and me, today.

In fact, I think you could entitle Jesus' message, "The Way to Really Listen and Really Live".

Now let's listen to His parable, beginning with verse 5:

"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold." As he said these things, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Luke 8:5-8

The verb "to hear" in the original language is in the imperfect tense which indicates that Jesus is repeating this expression as He delivered this parable.

You could translate it a little more obviously by recording, "***And as He was said these things, He would call out...***"

In other words, it's likely that after each soil is described, Jesus pauses and says, "Are you hearing what I'm saying? Are you really listening, or is this going in one ear and out the other?" And for most of this crowd it was.

Now in this parable, Jesus tells a story about four different kinds of soils, which refers to four different ways of listening.

The Foot Path

Again, verse 5, the middle part:

"And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it."

Luke 8:5b

A common field in this day was planted by a farmer wearing a sack around his waist or from his shoulder; he'd dig into the bag and pull out a handful of seed and scatter it as he walked his field.

Now his field would have been divided into plots with pathways running in between. And over time, all the foot-traffic hardened the soil.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13* (Victor Books, 1989), p. 86

And the carts and the hoofs of working mules and oxen would pack this ground as hard as cement, and eventually the seed would simply bounce on top of this foot path.

The Rocky Place

Notice verse 6:

*“And some fell on the rock,
and as it grew up, it
withered away, because it
had no moisture.”*

Luke 8:6

This isn't a field with many rocks, but a base of rock several inches under the soil that wasn't plowed up. The soil was too shallow for the seed to develop deep enough roots to handle the heat of the sun.

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume One* (Baker Academic, 1994), p. 724

The Briar Patch

*“And some fell among
thorns, and the thorns grew
up with it and choked it.”*

Luke 8:7

In other words, there was just too much competition.

The Fertile Plot

*“And some fell into good
soil and grew and yielded a
hundredfold.”*

Luke 8:8a

The Lord's audience would have immediately identified:

- with losing seed to the birds along the **Foot Path**;

- with wilting plants in the **Rocky Place**;
- with the growth of thorns and weeds in the **Briar Patch**;
- and with the bounty of the **Fertile Plot**.

Now Jesus' disciples ask Him what the parable really means; they know the parables of Jesus have a point—what is it?



Which of the four paths are you on? What about your friends and family members who come to mind? Anyone not on The Fertile Path should become your mission field.

So, Jesus responds to them here in **verse 10**:

*“To you it has been given to
know the secrets of the
kingdom of God, but for
others they are in parables,
so that ‘seeing they may not
see, and hearing they may
not understand.’”*

Luke 8:10b

Jesus is quoting from **Isaiah chapter 6** where the people under Isaiah's preaching didn't hear the truth, not because they couldn't, but because they wouldn't.

They didn't see with spiritual understanding, not because they weren't able, but because they weren't interested.

What they wanted was another sign, another miraculous happy meal with leftovers, another powerful demonstration they could take home and tell others they had seen Jesus perform.

But because the disciples wanted to understand, Jesus essentially gives them four different ways to listen. He begins to unwrap the package here in **verse 11**:

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.”

Luke 8:11-12

In other words, these people are *listening without believing*.

Now at first glance, it might look like it's all the devil's fault; but Jesus is pulling back the curtain on the unseen battle waging against the truth—represented here as the seeds of gospel.

These people don't want to believe, and their hearts are hardened, but they don't understand that the devil is doing everything he can to help them stay that way.

I've talked to hundreds of people like this over the years who mouth what they think

is original thought, or a wise opinion, but it's nothing more than old lies of the Father of lies—the devil:

- God will not judge anybody.
- Everybody is going to heaven their own way.
- The Bible is only one holy book among many.
- Jesus never said He was God.
- Science has disproven creation and resurrection.
- Christianity is out-of-date and needs to change with the times.
- There's no such thing as sin.
- The church is full of hypocrites.
- What's right for one person doesn't mean it is right for everyone.

They are firing those arguments, but what they don't know is that according to Jesus' parable, the devil is providing the ammunition.

The devil is doing everything to keep them from seeing; he's trying to keep the shades down on the minds of unbelievers, the apostle Paul writes, to keep them from **seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4)**.

You need to understand that if you're listening to me today and you do not believe the gospel, you are not the only one involved in your unbelief.

There is a kingdom of darkness manipulating, influencing, educating, conditioning, suppressing, twisting, diluting, denying the truth.

This is why the Bible describes our battle is ***against the spiritual forces of evil in this present darkness (Ephesians 6:12)***; and it is why salvation is described in the Bible as someone ***delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13)***.

Now with that, Jesus begins to explain the second way to listen—we're calling this the Rocky Place.

These people are *listening without understanding*.

Jesus says in verse 13:

“And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.”

Luke 8:13

It was great at first. They might have even joined the church. But then the excitement wore off and the thrill wasn't as thrilling, and Christianity started looking more like spiritual disciplines than financial promotion.

Some people probably told them that Jesus would fix their medical records and fill up their bank account. Somebody

might have told them that God had a wonderful plan for their life.

But then it stopped feeling so wonderful.

Jesus says here, ***testing came***; the hot sun beat down on them with trials, disappointments, pressures, and troubles.

Their business failed; marriage problems arose; good friends moved away; a demotion instead of a promotion arrived on a pink slip; their health got worse; their investments tumbled; and their difficulties multiplied.

And when they realized that Jesus wasn't turning out to be the tooth fairy—that they had believed an imitation of Christianity and not the real item—they walked away.

They didn't lose their salvation; they never believed in the real Savior to begin with.

They were listening without understanding.

Jesus now describes what we're calling The Briar Patch.

These people are *listening without maturing*.



As a Christian, how can you make sure you are on The Fertile Path and not The Briar Path? What are the signs of spiritual maturity?

It's possible that these last two soils represent believers.

If you look closely, the first two soils are clearly described as unbelievers; they don't believe and aren't saved (v. 12) and then they believe for a while but soon leave it all behind (v. 13).

But these last two are contrasted with each other: the **Briar Patch person**—here at the end of **verse 14**—has fruit, but it doesn't mature while the **Fertile Plot person** has fruit—same Greek word—but their fruit is maturing.

And that's the key difference.

Now back to verse 14, and I know I'm going fast, but I'm wanting to keep this same theme of listening—the primary theme—throughout the Lord's preaching here:

Now verse 14:

“And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.”

Luke 8:14

Cares are responsibilities; riches and possessions and pleasures are ordinary delights; none of these are cast here in a negative or sinful light in and of themselves.

The only negative thing about them is that they compete with bringing spiritual fruit to maturity.

This echoes Paul's command, by the way, to submit to the Spirit and thus bear the fruit developed and matured by the ***Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).***

But these people in the Briar Patch are distracted; they're chasing so many good things that the better things never get their attention.

John Piper writes on this point in the parable that responsibilities and riches and pleasures are not poisons; they are not presented here as vices; these are your meat and potatoes and coffee and gardening and reading and decorating and traveling and investing and TV-watching and Internet-surfing and shopping and exercising and collecting and playing and talking. But all of them can become substitutes for the worship of God.

Adapted from John Piper, *A Hunger for God* (Crossway, 1997), p. 148

In other words, the Briar Patch can become the believer's life that becomes so crowded with things that the things of God get crowded out.

Adapted from William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 100

So, they're effectively saying to God, “I'm listening, but you need to hurry because I don't have much time.”

And that kind of distracted life is now contrasted with the fourth and final way to listen; we're calling this The Fertile Plot.

These are individuals who are *listening without demanding*.

Verse 15 reads:

“As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.”

Luke 8:15

No demands; just open, willing, trusting hearts.

This was the attitude in the hearts of a couple who called me from another city up north. They had been led to Christ by a retired couple in our church living in their apartment complex. They went on to disciple this young couple and they began attending here before moving away to take a teaching position at a university.

They have endured over a year of cancer treatments for their two-year-old son. Three weeks ago, we talked, and they had been given the news that they had around one week left with their little boy before he passed away.

They didn't grow bitter; they were clinging to the Word of God. To what the Bible told them about God: that God was faithful; that God was in control; that God knew what He was doing even though He wasn't giving them an explanation.

Just a couple of days ago, they called again. A new experimental drug was unexpectedly offered, and it was surprisingly bringing some positive results; the faintest glimmer of hope, but no guarantees, no promises, no miracle cure; just a few more days or weeks, or perhaps remission.

He told me over the phone, “We are clinging to the Word of God”—and he said this: “God is teaching us patience and trust.”

And then I began studying this verse.

Their hearts are fertile soil and the fruit of faith and trust and patience is growing more than they can imagine.

Now Luke doesn't break in the narrative between verses 15 and 16 probably because Jesus didn't.

Charles R. Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 199

He's described growing Christians as listeners who mature, and now He describes Christians as lamps who are lit.

Adapted from R.C.H. Lenski, [The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel](#) (Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), p. 453

Notice **verse 16:**

“No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to

*light. Take care then how
you hear, for to the one
who has, more will be
given, and from the one
who has not, even what he
thinks that he has will be
taken away.”*

Luke 8:16-18

So, the Christian here is someone truly hearing the word and proving it by shining the light. We're no longer in the dark; we're in the light. But we don't just sit around and admire our light, we shine it! We show it!

J.C. Ryle challenged my thinking when he wrote on this text that the highest form of selfishness is that of a Christian who is content to go to heaven alone. No candle which God lights was ever meant to burn for itself.

Adapted from J.C. Ryle, Ryle's *Expository Thoughts: Luke* (Evangelical Press, 1879; reprint, 1985), p. 125

We share the light with others.

Again, there is no break between **verses 18 and 19**. The conjunction ties it together. In fact, I believe it gives us the final statement of this theme; this main idea of truly listening to the word of God—notice **verse 19**:

*Then his mother and his
brothers came to him, but
they could not reach him
because of the crowd. And
he was told, “Your mother
and your brothers are
standing outside, desiring
to see you.”*

Luke 8:19-20

Let me interject here that in Mark's Gospel, we're told that they have come to try and take Jesus away privately—quietly—because they think He's lost His mind.

His half-brothers, born to Mary and Joseph after Jesus' virgin birth, are named in other gospel accounts. One of them is **James**, who later becomes the pastor/teacher in the church at Jerusalem, who also writes the Book of James. Another half-brother is **Jude**, who writes that little letter just before the Book of Revelation.

None of them believe the claims of Jesus until after His resurrection. And we're told here by Luke that Mary is with them. So, this isn't hostile; this is born out of concern that Jesus has possibly gone off His rocker; He needs a little vacation; He needs some home-cooked food.

Which tells us that Mary's own understanding of Jesus is developing as well. Joseph has more than likely already passed away by this point.

Now, don't misunderstand: Jesus doesn't renounce His family ties here; He's just pointing to the reality of a larger family with a relationship that is on an even higher plane, one author writes.

Lewis Foster, *Luke* (Standard Publishing, 1986), p. 137

Notice verse 21:

*But he answered them, “My
mother and my brothers are*

*those who hear the word of
God and do it.”*

Luke 8:21

They are my family. They're my kind of people.

This is the family of God (**John 1:12**). This is the household of faith (**Galatians 6:10**). This is Paul the apostle telling us all to ***treat older men in the church as fathers, and older women as mothers and younger men as brothers and***

younger women as sisters (1 Timothy 5:2).

So those who truly hear the word of God, it isn't just going in one ear and out the other. How do you know?

They're developing the fruit of the Spirit; they're shining the light of the gospel; they're rejoicing that they are members of the family of God.

This is the right way to listen. This is the right way to live.

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