

A husband challenged his wife with a riddle, the man began, “You’re the engineer of a train. There are 36 people on board. At the first stop, 10 get off and 2 get on. At the next stop, no one gets off, but 5 get on. At the third stop, 4 get off and 2 get on. Now for the question: What is the name of the engineer?” “How should I know?” retorted his wife. “See, you never listen! Right at the start I said, ‘You’re the engineer of a train.’”

That little story shows how we often fail to listen carefully. What couple has not had the experience of one of them mumbling “Uh huh,” while the other partner is talking, but their mind is a million miles away?

How well do you listen? It’s noteworthy, while we have classes on communication and speech, have you heard of a class on listening? We don’t teach people how to listen, but does talking matter if no one is listening?

If there’s any area where we reveal our lack of listening skills, it’s in the spiritual. In too many churches the worship service, music and preaching fall on deaf ears. That’s demonstrated by conversations which take place almost immediately after the benediction. And if at Sunday dinner, you required everyone to share one spiritual truth from the service before they could take their first bite, dinner would probably grow very cold.

Have you heard the story about three friends who decided to go deer hunting together? A lawyer, a doctor and a preacher went deer hunting. As they were walking, along came a big buck. All three of them shot simultaneously. Immediately the buck dropped to the ground. All three rushed up to see how big it was, but they couldn’t figure out whose shot had actually killed the deer, and a heated debate ensued.

A few minutes later a game warden came by and asked what the problem was. The doctor told him they were arguing about who shot the buck. The game warden took one look at the buck and quickly said with incredible confidence, “The preacher shot the buck!” They all wondered how he knew that so quickly. The officer said, “Easy. The bullet went in one ear and out the other.”

It’s a far too common experience for a preacher, but it illustrates a far more serious challenge all of us face: *Do we really hear God’s Word?* Or, does His truth go in one ear and out the other? Do we hear God’s Word so it changes our lives, in that we really obey it? If not, we’re not listening.

When it comes to God speaking, the type of listener you are is indicative of your spiritual condition. While listening to people has temporal value, listening to God has eternal ramifications. God always speaks clearly, but if we’re not listening carefully, we miss His best and His will for our lives. When it comes to God’s Word, there are out of this world blessings when it comes to listening, **The Blessing of Listening.**

Jesus talks about this in Luke 8:16-21 (p. 865). Listening to God reveals what family you belong to. Jesus shares a proverb about light and insights about eternal family membership based on our listening skills. How good of a listener are you when God is talking? How can we know if we’re a good listener?

1. Those who are listening to God’s Word let their light shine. Are you a light bulb Nazi? I am. It drives me nuts when a bulb is out, even if other bulbs in the same fixture are still working. I’ve got to change the bulb.

Light is important to us. This short parable (vss. 16-18) is called *The Parable of the Revealed Light* because it talks about the light every true believer in Jesus has.

Jesus switches metaphors. If you were here last Sunday, you’ll recall Jesus sharing the Parable of the sower or soils, vss. 4-15, He compared the Christian life to farming. Now He switches from fruit to light, comparing the Christian life to one who gives off light, a shining and illuminating life.

It’s a common picture throughout Scripture, especially from the lips of Jesus. You become a Christian by the Word of God entering your life. You begin to be fruitful with heavenly fruit in a barren world; you shine as His light in a dark world. The metaphor builds on what the parable of the sower, new lives in Christ are the ones that matter. You get one shot at life. There’s no re-run. It’s not a dress rehearsal. You might be allotted 70 years. Our brief lifetime is our only opportunity to make our lives matter. We must make them count for Jesus Christ. We must produce fruit. We must shine.

That’s the challenge of Jesus’ words. Real believers bear fruit for Christ! True believers shine for Jesus! Are you shining? Are you doing that where God has placed you? Your life has significance if you’re living for the only One who matters. But why light? Why this metaphor? Because...

a. God is light. 1 John 1:5 says, “*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*” Not only is God light in Himself, but God is the source of all light. Psalm 27:1 opens with “*The Lord is my light and my salvation.*”

What does that mean? God is light and manifests Himself as light? He’s the light for the believer, but we don’t comprehend this until we come to Christ. Jesus called Himself the light of the world (John 8:12). God is light and conveys His light to us. Jesus Christ is the very light of God incarnate. Putting it all together, it’s a fairly simple thought. God is light, He grants His light to us and it’s conveyed to us through the Lord Jesus.

Can you imagine how dark this world would be if Jesus had never come? This world is dark, cruel and harsh. That's because Satan is the god of this world. Though Jesus hasn't yet assumed His throne and isn't ruling physically today, His influence is profound. Think of the hospitals, orphanages, schools and rescue missions founded to commemorate the light of Jesus coming. The Gospel has been lighting this dark world for over 2000 years. What would it be like without the light of Jesus?

Light is the promise of hope and joy. Darkness is the threat of despair and misery. God is light, Jesus is light and in Him is no darkness at all. When Jesus comes into our life, not only are we fruitful as the parable of sower illustrates, we become His light in a dark world (Matthew 5:14).

b. Hidden light is useless. In Jesus' day, lamps were made out of clay. They were simple, with a reservoir for the oil and a nozzle on which the flax wick would rest. Household lamps were small enough to be carried in the palm of your hand. The lamp Jesus was probably most familiar with was known as the "Herodian" lamp, (**picture**) made of light-brown clay.

"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" The point is simple. When it's dark enough to light a lamp, you put it up high enough to illuminate everything around it. You put it on a shelf in your home or on a lampstand in the center of the room, allowing it to illuminate the entire room.

As fruit must be tasted to fulfill its purpose, light must be seen to fulfill its purpose. It's not that we flaunt our Christianity, though it's not an issue most struggle with. The problem is we frequently hide our light. The world is very dark and there's an instinctive fear of being different. It's hiding Jesus in our lives which we cover up so He's not seen in us or in a dark world.

I loved raising our children but I don't miss toys strewn across the floor. There's nothing like walking barefoot in a dark room and stepping on a Lego. While the toy shouldn't have been left out, wasn't it foolish to not turn on a light when they're so readily available? The way to use a lamp is to simply turn it on so it can illuminate the entire room. It's dumb to have a light and not use it. Light is meant to be used, not hidden.

God gave us His Word to shed light on how we should live, so we don't grope around in the darkness, whacking our shins on obstacles Scripture warns us about. Many people want to know the will of God for their lives. *Who should I marry? What should I do with my life?* God's Word reveals principles for each of these crucial questions so you don't whack your shins on the wrong ways of the world. Everything we need to know to live a godly life is contained in the Bible. Vital principles for right living are revealed to us in God's Word of truth. It's why Jesus commands us to take His light into *two major spheres* of our lives: **work** and **leisure**.

You don't cover the light in your business. *"Covers it with a jar."* A jar was a work tool. You made products to sell and you would put your goods in jars. Or, working in the home, you'd store things in jars. But you wouldn't put a jar over a lamp. That would be silly.

It's easy to let your light shine at church or in a Bible study. It's harder to let your light shine where you work or with your family. Shouldn't the Christian be the one lost co-workers respect and admire? Shouldn't he be one of the hardest workers? The most ethical? Shouldn't her attitude, language be different from those who live in darkness? The power of God's light is seen when it shines where it's very dark.

You don't cover the light in your leisure. *"Puts it under a bed."* A bed symbolizes leisure. In Jesus' day, there weren't a lot of choices for leisure. Your leisure time was taking a nap or catching some extra z's.

Does our light shine in our down time? Shouldn't a Christian be different in their leisure? Shouldn't our approach to entertainment be unusual? What about sports? Is winning really the only thing...or is honoring Jesus the only thing? What do lost people say they're going to do once they get off work? For most, it's head to the nearest bar.

I have friends who talk so much about getting blitzed, who seem to live for hitting the bar, I almost wonder if should call AA's anonymous tip line on them. How can Jesus' light shine if you're getting blitzed? How does Jesus' light shine when we tell sordid jokes? How does Jesus' light shine at Potawatomi or some other casino? Shouldn't our leisure be different?

I don't want to belabor this, but I do want you to think about this. Jesus is light. We're to be light. Have you ever noticed how dark it typically is when a lost world is enjoying "leisure?" They don't want the lights on.

William Manchester, in his book, *A World Lit Only by Fire*, (**picture**) describes what it would have been like to have lived in medieval Europe without the daily conveniences we take for granted. Your life was completely controlled by the rising and setting of the sun. After the sun went down, there was no electricity to turn on a street light or to supply light to your home. The only light you had was from the fire, or candles, or some sort of a lamp.

Put yourself in that world and Jesus' illustration makes perfect sense. When a light is lit in a room, it's not going to be hidden. The very purpose of light is to illuminate the room so people can see who'd otherwise be completely surrounded by blinding darkness. You and I are to be Jesus' light in this dark world. We're to shine for Him in our **work** and **leisure**.

c. Light is either a blessing or a warning. *“For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”* Most interpret the first phrase with a negative twist, *“For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest...”* While it’s true, there’s another wonderful side. Some of the greatest acts of love and kindness, some of the most generous gifts – are anonymous. And God sees it all. My understanding of the Bema Seat, is that those are part of the gold, silver and precious stones of our lives which will endure for all eternity. Others may not know but God doesn’t miss a single thing we do to bring honor to Him.

The inherent warning of God’s light is there are no secrets, *“nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”* All of us have been brokenhearted, perhaps scandalized when someone we admired, who we thought was the model Christian – but one day the dark secrets of their life came to light. Eventually, the truth always comes out. In a universe governed by an all-seeing and all-knowing God, nothing is hidden forever. As British pastor, Michael Wilcock (**picture**) writes, *“It is impossible anyway permanently to hide where one stands in relation to the gospel. What is hidden will come out sooner or later—that is, it will if it is really there. The danger is...that the man who thinks he has received the gospel, and keeps it hidden and never lets the fact be known, may find one of these days, when he comes to look for the reality of the gospel within him, that it is not in fact there—and never was.”*

This spiritual reality weighs heavy on a pastor’s heart who loves his people, that there are some who sit under his ministry week after week, who he spends time with, has meals with, visited in their homes **but** they never really knew Jesus. The very thought breaks his heart...I know it breaks mine.

We can’t hide from God’s light. As His light in a dark world, Jesus wants us to be a blessing. Are you? Am I?

Dr. Alexander Papaderos (**picture**), the famous Greek philosopher, would teach an ethics class for two weeks on the island of Crete each summer. One summer just as he was getting ready to close the class, in those last few minutes, he asked, “Are there any questions before we go?” Just as he was getting ready to say, “OK, you’re dismissed,” a little man in the back of the room, a rather timid looking man, carefully raised his hand and said, “Dr. Papaderos,” “Yes” “I have a question” “Yes, what is it?” He said, “I’d like to know, what is the meaning of life?”

Dr. Papaderos quieted the group and said to the class, “You know, if you don’t mind I’d like to answer that question.” He reached into his back pocket and took out his wallet. Out of his wallet, he took a little mirror about the size of a fifty-cent piece, honed down on the edges, kind of sparkling. Then he told this tale, he said, “When I was a child, I began to realize that I could have so much fun with that mirror. I would simply catch the glint of the sun and shine that mirror into an otherwise darkened place. As I grew older I began to learn that this is no child’s toy. This is really a metaphor for my life. Now I am not the light—I am not the source of the light. I am simply a broken mirror fragment. But if I allow the sun to shine on my mirror fragment, it is amazing what light I can bring into darkness.” Then he said, “Ladies and Gentlemen, that is the meaning of life.”

Each of us is little more than a mirror fragment. We’re not the Light. Nor are we the source of the Light. We’re merely a broken mirror fragment. But when we permit the Son, the Son of God, to hit our mirror fragment and then bounce His light off into the life of a darkened heart, there can be change, there can be illumination and we become His light for a darkened world.

2. Those who are listening to God’s Word will be rewarded. God doesn’t value the things we value. The things which captivate us aren’t even on His radar. He’s not impressed by appearance or beauty. Ability, intelligence, talent mean zip to God. What counts with God? What catches His attention – and this is a consistent thread throughout Scripture – God values good stewardship. He values faithfulness. It’s what verse 18 is saying, *“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.”*

This is *use it or lose it*, or better – *do it or lose it*. How do we demonstrate we’re really listening? We apply God’s Word. It changes our lives. Then, God gives us more. The more you use the abilities He’s given, the more abilities He gives you. The more you contemplate the Gospel, the more you share it, the richer it comes and the more understanding of it you have.

The other day I was having my devotions. I’d read a particular passage countless times, but all of a sudden God gave me new light. I’ve been studying this Book for decades. As I study, as I seek to be a faithful “listener,” the Lord opens my eyes more and more. He does that for anyone who seeks to be a faithful listener.

Do know the number one reason most Christians get so little out of church? They don’t prepare for it. They’ll stay up too late. They’re tired. They don’t ask God to work in their heart. They rush in, rush out, then they think, “I didn’t get anything out of that.” Well, they didn’t put anything into it...why should they be surprised?

Preaching, Bible study is not about getting more information. It’s about growth. It’s about application. You should leave every Sunday, every Bible study with at least one thing – one area you’re going to change and grow spiritually, and be more like Jesus. It’s what it means to be faithful hearer.

But if we're not faithful listeners, what Jesus says next is a frightening warning, *"from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away."* If we're not engaged, God takes away what we already have. Hearing isn't really hearing and is worthless when it doesn't result in doing.

Has God impressed you that you must forgive? Then do it! Has God impressed you that there's an attitude which must be changed? Then do it! Has God impressed you there's a sinful habit which needs to be forsaken? Then do it! Has God impressed you there's someone you need to share the Gospel with? Do it! Has God impressed you that you need to serve Him? Do it! Use it or lose it.

If I could get you to make just one change in your life, one which can radically change your life – it would be this. Spend time in God's Word every day. Don't spend seconds or minutes, spend some real time. Do it every day for a month? You'll be amazed. In fact, I challenge you to do it and then share how God used that true hearing to change your life.

Being in the Word should be like feasting on top grade Prime Rib. Only a fool gobbles it down. You take time to let the juices flow. Too many Christians have instant breakfast devotions, if they have them at all. We must take time to salivate on what the text means and how it applies to our lives.

Dr. Carl Sharsmith (**picture**) was a ranger-naturalist who spent over 50 summers as a guide in Yosemite National Park. He loved its spectacular beauty. He was continually discovering a new facet of Yosemite to revel in. One afternoon a woman stopped him and asked him, "I've only got an hour to spend at Yosemite," she declared. "What should I do? Where should I go?" Dr. Carl Sharsmith was shocked. Finally, the old ranger found a voice to reply. "Ah, lady, only an hour." He repeated it slowly. "I suppose that if I had only an hour to spend at Yosemite, I'd just walk over there by the river and sit down and cry."

Just as there's enough in Yosemite to spend a lifetime of summers exploring, there is more than enough in the Bible to spend your lifetime digging out and meditating on. If we don't understand it, we must ask God to open our minds to its meaning. Then we must obey it and do what it says! Because **those who are listening to God's Word will be rewarded.**

3. Those who are listening to God's Word will have the right priorities. Most of us agree with all of this...so far. We know it's important to let our light shine. It's important we listen to God's Word. But what Jesus says next was shocking then. It's more shocking today, verses 19-21, *"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.' But He answered them, 'My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.'"*

For those of you familiar with Catholic dogma, this repudiates the Roman Catholic teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity. These are Jesus' half-brothers, the biological children of Joseph and Mary. The belief Mary remained a virgin after giving birth to Jesus contradicts what the New Testament records and the teaching of the apostolic era. That false notion didn't appear until the 2nd century in apocryphal literature.

Please understand, Jesus is very concerned about His family. Apparently, Joseph died before Jesus began His ministry. As the oldest, He took care of Mary and His younger siblings until other siblings could step up. One of Jesus' last acts from the Cross was to make sure His mother was provided for even when He was dying. So it's not an abandonment of family.

The first commandment of the Ten Commandments is: *"You shall have no other gods before Me."* That includes my family. It includes my spouse, my children, and all my relatives. Our commitment to family must not supplant God. Too often there's an idolatrous prioritizing of my family over God.

I wonder if it's because our culture has become so anti-family or maybe because of the redefining of marriage and the family. Perhaps, we cling to it because of the continual disintegration of family in Western Civilization. The bottom line is many Christians are idolaters. The family has become an idol.

But God will not be #2. Read Genesis 22 where God tested His friend, Abraham, commanding him to sacrifice Isaac. It was obvious Jacob's idol was Joseph so God snatched Joseph away to Egypt.

I love my wife. I love my three children but they must not come before Jesus. My son, Aaron, is in Thailand this morning with a friend. It would be tempting for us to say, "Aaron, why don't you stay in the States where it's safe?" But Aaron is not mine. He's seeking to do God's will for his life and I need to stay out of the way...and so do you.

Family has become an idol when we rationalize not spending time in the Word or with the Lord because we have "family obligations." Family has become an idol when we can't be with spiritual family because we must always be with our biological family. Family has become an idol when we can't give because we need that money for our family. Family has become an idol when we won't be honest with our children, particularly our adult children about their spiritual condition, for fear they might cut us off or hold the grandchildren hostage from us.

This is tempting for everyone. I've seen pastors who are neglectful to their calling because their family has become an idol. Or, they'll rationalize away what God's Word says because of sinful behavior by one of their children. It's what Eli did in 1 Samuel and it cost him and the people of God dearly.

This scene teaches us then both a minor lesson and a major lesson. ***The minor lesson is that our calling in the family of God sometimes has to take precedence over the claims of our earthly family.*** It means church family, community is a vital part of an obedient Christian life.

The major lesson is that true members of God's family are those who are doers of God's Word, not just hearers. Jesus said, "My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and **do it.**" It's a Nike moment! ***Just do it!*** It's not enough to hear God's Word or know God's Word, we must obey it. Those who are truly in God's family obey His Word.

It's the thesis of the book of James. James 1:22 says, "***Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.***"

It brings us to a crossroads of decision. Are you a member of the family of God? Because if you are – you will both hear and **do** the Word of God. Obedience demonstrates we are truly members of God's family. This is not optional. It's familial. It's a solemn thing to hear the Word of God. It's dangerous to hear it and not do it!

Conclusion: Are you listening? Do you listen to the voice of God? Becoming a child of God begins with listening. When we listen and obey, there will be a family resemblance. **Those who listen to God's Word let their light shine, they'll be rewarded and they have the right priorities.**

Wonderfully, membership in the family of God is open and available to everyone who comes to Jesus Christ in faith. Have you come?

We can be as close to Jesus as His own mother and brothers. It's said that blood is thicker than water, but we are tied to the family of God by the blood of Jesus which He shed on the Cross for us. We're kept in the family of God by the person and work of the Holy Spirit, a bond more secure than any family line or blood.

Children desire to be like their Dad. If someone is part of God's family, they want to like their Heavenly Father. They hear and obey His Word. There's a family resemblance. Do you have that? Are you truly hearing God's Word?

What we're sharing this morning isn't new? Nearly every home in America has a Bible...most several. Because of the Gideons, we know every hotel room has one. It's not enough to have the Word or even to hear the Word – you must be a doer of the Word.

Recently, I finished a book about dangers and tragedies at Yellowstone National Park. The book opens with a devastating story.

On July 20, 1981, 24-year-old David Kirwan from La Canada, California and his friend, 25-year-old Ronald Ratliff and Ratliff's dog, Moosie, a great Dane, parked their truck about 1:00 pm in Yellowstone's Fountain Paint Pot (**picture**) parking lot, so they could get out and take a closer look at the hot springs. Somehow Moosie escaped from the truck, ran towards nearby Celestine Pool (a thermal spring with water temperature over 200°). Moosie jumped in and began yelping.

Kirwan and Ratliff rushed over to the pool to aid the dog. It was apparent David Kirwan was going to jump into the hot spring after the dog. Several people tried to warn him off by yelling at him not to jump in. But he shouted "Like ___ I won't!" Then, he took two steps into the pool and dove head-first into the boiling spring. He swam out to the dog and attempted to take it to shore and then he disappeared underwater, let go of the dog and attempted to climb out of the pool. His friend, Ronald Ratliff, helped pull Kirwan out of the boiling spring (resulting in second-degree burns to his own feet). He and another visitor led Kirwan to the sidewalk as he muttered, "That was stupid. How bad am I? That was a stupid thing I did."

It was very bad. Kirwan was blind and sustained 3rd degree burns to his whole body, 100% of it, including his head. He died the following morning. Moosie didn't survive, either.

Later, as they were investigating the tragedy, in the men's truck, park rangers discovered the park's warning literature and pamphlets about the terrible dangers of the hot springs. Neither David Kirwan nor Ronald Ratliff had read any of them.

Please don't miss this! Too often, that's how God's Word is for us. We own a Bible. At church many hear it. Sometimes we read it, but it does us no good unless we do it...unless we truly hear it, apply it and obey it.

Are you listening to God's Word? If you are, you'll be doing it and it will show in your life. But to have it and not do it, is to be as foolish as David Kirwan or Ronald Ratliff at Yellowstone's hot springs. It's a deadly tragedy!

