



Do you know anyone who is a bad listener? [Don't let your students name names!]

What does a bad listener act like? [Allow for some shout-out responses.]

How can you tell if they're not listening?

1. They interrupt you, or they respond so quickly that they couldn't possibly have been paying attention.
2. They're distracted. Looking at their phone, another person, or somewhere else.
3. They are close-minded or refuse to hear what you have to say, discounting what you say without considering it.

Are you a bad listener to your friends or family? What about God? Do you listen to Him?

Today, we are going to talk about two ways that we can focus our listening toward God. Both of these things are called spiritual disciplines.

## 1. Reading God's Word

Let's look at what the Bible says about itself:

### **2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV)**

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*

Let's focus on the word "God-breathed." Another word used here is "inspired." Scripture is very important. These are God's words to us, and they are useful!

However, sometimes we take God's Word for granted, so we don't read it. We get distracted or we put other things as a higher priority and neglect listening to God. Kind of like when you're trying to talk to someone, but they're too busy looking at Instagram or texting their mom.

Sometimes, we're also close-minded. We read the things we want to read, and leave other parts out. Certain parts of the Bible interest us or make us feel good, but there are many parts of the Bible that we don't find so interesting or that we really don't like because they're hard, challenging, or convicting.

**[Author Note:** For this illustration, get a Bible-sized book that you don't care about and put it in a Bible case. Plant this pretend Bible with one of your youth leaders. You'll also need a highlighter and a Sharpie or other black marker. Ask the group of students if you can borrow a Bible for an illustration. Then, take the planted fake Bible from your youth leader.]

For example:

**Genesis 1:1 (NIV)**

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

We like that verse! Some of us get really excited about studying creationism and science. We like watching videos about stars or just dwelling on the greatness of creation. I like that verse so much, and I think it should be highlighted in every Bible.

**[Author Note:** Turn to the beginning of the fake Bible. Highlight a random line as if you're highlighting Genesis 1:1.]

But what about these words of Jesus?

**Matthew 5:43–48 (NIV)**

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

Wow ... we don't like that verse, do we? This passage is calling us to reverse our thinking and love our enemies. It even says that if we only love

our neighbors (basically those who are near us and easy to love), then we're not any better than pagans, people who don't believe in God! In this passage, Jesus even tells us our goal is perfection. It's really easy to ignore this passage.

[**Author Note:** Take a Sharpie to mark up the fake Bible, like you're crossing the passage out.]

What about this one?

### **Philippians 4:13 (NIV)**

*I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.*

Certainly a favorite verse of athletes. Even though this verse is ripped out of context, by itself it makes me feel awesome. I can accomplish difficult goals because God is on my side, right?

[**Author Note:** Highlight that “verse” a few times.]

But what about this verse?

### **1 Thessalonians 4:3–8 (NIV)**

*It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.*

Talk about a challenging verse! Here we go being compared to pagans again! I need to control my body and avoid sexual immorality? I'm not to engage in lust? What about my favorite TV show, movie, or celebrity? And if I engage in such activity, I'm potentially rejecting God? This is too much ...

[**Author Note:** Rip that “page” out and throw it in the trash.]

We treat God’s Word like trash sometimes! Remember the verse? ALL Scripture is profitable! How often do you treat Scripture like trash?

**[Author Note: Reveal to the group that your “Bible” was a fake.]**

Do you neglect reading Scripture? I would argue that this is something that needs to change! Here are some tools to use:

YouVersion Bible App – Definitely the cleanest, easiest to use, and most up-to-date Bible app. This is a must-have for every portable device ... and it’s free!

ReadScripture – An app that has some great videos and reading plans that will help you read and understand the Bible.

A good ol’ study Bible – Apps are great, but having your own Bible is better, especially a good study Bible. This will go a long way to helping you understand Scripture. Plus, you can use a highlighter in it and make notes. I don’t recommend using a Sharpie or tearing pages out, though.

**[Author Note: If you have extra Bibles, preferably study Bibles, bring some to give away if a student needs one.]**

## **2. Prayer**

In addition to listening to God through His Word, communicating to God is very important, as well. Prayer is how a Christian talks to God, and therefore it is so important to the Christian life. Even Jesus made it a vital part of His ministry!

There are many times when the Gospels record Jesus going off by Himself to pray: Mark 1:12, Mark 1:35, Luke 6:12–13, Matthew 14:13, John 17 ... among others.

**[Author Note: You can read these passages out loud if you have time.]**