**Let Us Listen to God Together**

**2 Timothy 4:1-8 (ESV)**

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In the month of January we take time aside from our regular series to think about sort of, central disciplines, aspects of the Christian life. And the month of January this year, we’re going to talk about how vital these disciplines or aspects of the Christian life are, that we do them together. God has created a Church and all these disciplines He intends not just for us personally, individually, in our private lives, but also together as a church family.

So 2 Timothy 4:1-8. This is likely the very last word that the Apostle Paul is going to write. It may be a matter of weeks, perhaps even days that the Apostle Paul would die and go before his Lord. And so what he writes here is of utmost importance. And this is what he says to young Timothy, a pastor.

***1*** *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:* ***2****preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.* ***3****For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,* ***4****and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.* ***5****As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.* ***6****For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.* ***7****I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* ***8****Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

May God encourage us through His Word!

When I was a little boy, I spent a cold day with my grandpa, running errands. One of those errands was to feed the cattle on his farm. We opened the gate and my grandpa filled the trough with corn and then he let out a loud sound that seemed magical to me. “Sooie!” As soon as he shouted this call, the cattle started lumbering toward us where they gathered around this trough to eat together. We then hopped in the car and drove to our next errand, which was to conduct some business at the Trivoli bank.

On the way there I was absolutely lost in my thoughts of how cool that sound my grandpa made, was. Now my family can attest that when my mind begins grinding on some thought I am like the absent-minded professor. I absolutely completely forget where I am and what I’m doing. So as we entered the bank, I was lost in the marvel of that call and I was wondering all the while whether I could make a similar sound. Well, inside the bank full of farmers, out of nowhere, this shy little boy decided to try. “Sooie!” I shouted at the top of my lungs. Suddenly the noisy bank became deafeningly silent. Everyone turned and stared at me. And then spontaneously they all busted out in loud laughter. I don’t think I’ve ever been more embarrassed in all my life.

To this day, I remember three images that still press upon my mind about that day. I remember vividly the call my grandpa made to those cattle. I remember the embarrassing display that I made at the bank. And then I do remember the cattle lumbering toward that trough to eat together. It’s this last image that I want to rest our attention upon this morning. Even for cattle, eating is often a community event.

This past Christmas, undoubtedly many of you ate many meals with friends and family. Eating a meal by ourselves is tasty and nutritious, but there is an added dimension, isn’t there, when we eat meals together. The meal is not merely about the food. It’s about conversation, it’s about fellowship, it’s about deepening relationship, it’s about processing opinions and thoughts, it’s about sharing hopes, it’s about sharing heartaches. So much good can happen around a meal with friends and family. If you are raising a young family, I hope that you make a habit of eating meals together. As your children grow older you will have to work harder to make community meals in your family happen, because busy schedules often get in the way. But the effort is worth it.

The title of this message is “Let Us Listen to God Together.” Since Jesus compares the Word of God to daily bread, we might as well entitle this message “Let Us Eat Spiritual Food Together.” Let’s have a community meal. This morning I hope to convince you of the vital importance for us to listen to God together with other believers, and to do so often. Not infrequently! The case that I hope to prove this morning is not only that God intends for us to listen to Him individually in our personal walk with Him, but that God calls us to listen to Him together in community.

Listening to God privately is like eating meals privately. Most of us do it often. It’s nutritious, it’s tasty. But it’s not the same as eating together with family and friends. It is really important to our Heavenly Father that we relate to each other deeply and spiritually and well in the family of God, in the church. It’s really, really, really important to our Heavenly Father.

Unfortunately, some of the church’s own members make light of the community aspect of their relationship with God. God’s own children sometimes say things like, “I love Jesus, but I hate organized religion.” Or “I choose not to be part of a local church. There are just hypocrites there.” Or “The church has treated me poorly. I may attend on Sundays, but I don’t want to get too involved with the people or the work.”

To be sure, the local church is rarely what she should be, but our Heavenly Father grieves to hear His children denigrate His own family so. This is no small sin. You see, the local church is not man’s idea. It’s God’s precious creation. So when we reject commitment to the local church, we are rejecting the very work and the very design and intention of God Himself. Consider carefully that Jesus said,

**Matthew 16:18** I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Consider also the motivation of Jesus’ atoning work.

**Ephesians 5:25-27** Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

He loved her and He gave Himself up for her. Consider the Father’s glorious intention for the Son following the Son’s resurrection.

**Ephesians 1:22-23** And he [the Father] put all things under his [the Son’s] feet and gave him [the Son] as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Consider the Father’s purpose for which He created the church.

**Ephesians 3:21** To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Notice how God loves the church. Notice how God honors His Son by giving Him authority over the church. Notice how God connects His glory, His eternal glory, to the corporate life of His children in the church. You see, the church is God’s redeemed people joined together for the purpose of glorifying Jesus. When we are made alive with God through faith in Jesus, we are joined together with other believers in a unified family called the church. So the Christian life is not to be lived in isolation from other believers. The church is God’s family. He is our Father and we are brothers and sisters in His family. We are adopted together for that one purpose of bringing Him glory.

In order to glorify God, one of the commitments God calls us to make is simply to gather together to listen to our Father talk to us. To listen to His instruction. To listen to His correction, His rebuke, His encouragement. Someone says, “Where does God say that we ought to gather together to listen to Him speak to us?” Well, many places, but one of those is set before us in 2 Timothy 4. I would encourage you to open your Bibles there. God instructs a young pastor on how to lead God’s family in a healthy way. If you are taking notes, we begin with some thoughts about the Bible. This is the instrument that God uses to speak to His people.

**I. The Word is the Voice of God.**

The Bible itself makes this very bold claim. The Bible describes itself as the very Word of God.

**Hebrews 4:12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

This Book is God’s very Word and it is living and it’s active. In other words, God’s voice doesn’t come to us in a dead way or in a past tense way, but in a living and active way. That’s to say that God is still speaking personally to us. And God uses His Word to speak in this fresh way to His people. His Word is His very Voice.In this way, God makes His voice available to all His children and He protects us against Satan’s ploy to trick us into listening to some other voice. This is what he did with Adam and Eve from the very beginning, and he continues that all along to cause us or to tempt us to listen to some other voice other than God’s. So God wrote a Book to establish His message in a concrete form that could not be altered or confused. This is not to suggest that an angel from heaven delivered the Bible to us. That’s not how God gave us this Book. God used human authors through a process called “inspiration” to give us His very Word. But nonetheless, the Bible asserts that

**1. The Word is authored by God Himself**

Just a few verses prior to the passage we’re going to look at this morning, God says:

**2 Timothy 3:16-17** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Peter also is going to speak to this very idea that God authors this Book.

**2 Peter 1:19-21** And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke *from God* as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

He says, “Everybody needs to pay attention when God speaks.” No portion of God’s Word comes from man’s own interpretation. Man didn’t decide “I’m going to write what God says to His people today.” Man didn’t decide this. It didn’t originate with man. God uniquely uses the apostles and prophets to write His very Word to us. Sinful, redeemed men, these apostles, were set apart by God to be the channels through which God perfectly recorded His message so that all mankind could know and hear the active, living Voice of God. This is the testimony of the Bible all through its pages. So the Bible is not the words of really, really good and godly men. But the Bible is the very Word of God. God spoke it into being and still continues to speak to us through it. As such, the Bible is God’s perfect communication to us about Himself, about His plan of salvation and about His sovereign purposes. What a gift God’s Word is!

One clear way the Bible makes this claim of divine authorship for itself is the way the New Testament quotes from the Old Testament. Often the writing quoted from the Old Testament is spoken of not as written by the human author but as written by God Himself. So for instance in Hebrews chapter 3,

**Hebrews 3:7-8** Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness,

Notice a couple things about this. First, he’s quoting from Psalm 95 and he is going to attribute the authorship of Psalm 95 not to the Psalmist, but to the Holy Spirit. And then note that “the Holy Spirit *says*.” It’s present tense. It’s not “*said*.” It’s not a word that was spoken in the past, but it’s a word that is continuing to be spoken to the church, to God’s people.

Hebrews 3 affirms that God is actively speaking to the New Testament church and that He is speaking by the Holy Spirit through Psalm 95.We don’t know for sure who *humanly* authored Psalm 95, but we do know absolutely and with utmost certainty who *divinely* authored Psalm 95. So the question the Holy Spirit is asking is, “Are you listening to Me?” Today, if you hear His voice, don’t harden your hearts. “Are you listening to Me?” How important is it for us as believers to listen to God through the written Word. The apostle John says that listening to God through the written Word is one of the means by which we measure whether we are truly God’s children, whether we know God or not.

**1 John 4:5-6** They [He is speaking of those who have the spirit of the antichrist.] are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We [the apostles] are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us [the apostles]; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

There’s a lot of other voices claiming to be Christ, claiming to be God, and they’re going to speak. But they’re not of God. They’re from the world. And the world listens to all those other voices. John is speaking as an apostle, one through whom the Holy Spirit moved to write sacred Scripture. If you know God, you’re going to listen to the apostles. How do we listen to the apostles? Through the record that the apostles gave to us. Whoever is not from God doesn’t pay attention to the writing of the apostles. People who pay close attention to what the apostles wrote underneath the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these are those who attend to the Spirit of truth. Those who set aside the apostles’ teaching, the apostles’ writing of sacred Scripture, are people who are of the spirit of error.

I press this truth to our hearts because so many, even in the church, clamor to hear the voice of God outside of biblical revelation. Friends, God has given us a living and active word that is sufficient for our every need. God is speaking to us today through His Son. God does break through our natural world with His voice to lead us, encourage us, provide for us, correct us, rebuke us and instruct us. And God speaks through this living and active Book that He wrote for us! Isn’t that awesome?!

I love an article John Piper wrote almost 10 years ago entitled, “The Morning I Heard the Voice of God.” I’ll read an excerpt for you because I thought it was so profound.

*Let me tell you about a most wonderful experience I had early Monday morning, March 19, 2007, . . . . God actually spoke to me. There is no doubt that it was God. I heard the words in my head . . . I know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God still speaks today.*

*I couldn’t sleep for some reason. . . . It was about five thirty in the morning . . . . In his mercy, God moved me out of bed. . . . In the main room below, it was totally quiet. . . . I sat down on a couch in the corner to pray.*

*As I prayed and mused, suddenly it happened. God said, “Come and see what I have done.” There was not the slightest doubt in my mind that these were the very words of God. In this very moment. At this very place in the twenty-first century, . . . God was speaking to me with absolute authority and self-evidencing reality. I paused to let this sink in. There was a sweetness about it. Time seemed to matter little. God was near. He had me in his sights. He had something to say to me. . . .*

Piper goes on to write in more detail about that experience. At the end, he writes this:

*If you would like to hear the very same words I heard on the couch in northern Minnesota, read* [*Psalm 66:5–7*](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2066.5%E2%80%937)*. That is where I heard them. O, how precious is the Bible. It is the very word of God. . . .*

*It is a great wonder that God still speaks today through the Bible with greater force and greater glory and greater assurance and greater sweetness and greater hope and greater guidance and greater transforming power and greater Christ-exalting truth than can be heard through any voice in any human soul on the planet from outside the Bible.*

He goes on to say…

*The great need of our time is for people to experience the living reality of God by hearing his word personally and transformingly in Scripture. Something is incredibly wrong when the words we hear outside Scripture are more powerful and more affecting to us than the inspired word of God. Let us cry with the psalmist, “Incline my heart to your word” (*[*Psalm 119:36*](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20119.36)*). “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law” (*[*Psalm 119:18*](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%20119.18)*).*

Amen and Amen!

The Word is authored by God Himself.

**2. The Word is vital to the life of Christ’s church.**

May Jesus’ words ring in our hearts over and over again as He said

**Matthew 4:4** But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

If we individually or as a church are to have life, it is because we live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. We as individuals will die without a healthy diet of the Word of God. And we as a church will perish without a healthy diet of the Word of God together.

**II. The Church is a Listening Family**

***1*** *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:* ***2****preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.* ***3****For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,* ***4****and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

This is what he says to this elder, this pastor, this young man who is shepherding this church.

God designs His precious family so that as we are adopted into His family, we would have deep, spiritual relationship with one another for the sake of His glory. Deep, spiritual relationship with each other gains its life primarily from listening to God as a community, together as a people. This is why God commands a young pastor named Timothy to “Preach the Word in season and out of season.” Timothy is not merely to hear God’s Word for himself, but he is to proclaim it. He is to share it. He is to be a megaphone of God’s Word to this church. While Timothy is given a special responsibility as a pastor or elder of a local church, this call to share God’s Word is not confined to pastors only. While not all of us are pastors or elders, all of us are given the privilege to share God’s Word with others.

God’s family is most healthy when it is frequent and when it is one of the leading characteristics of us as a family, to simply sit and say, “Let’s listen to what Father says to us.” Where does God indicate that others besides pastors should read or share or teach the Word of God to others in the family? I want to just give you two examples. There are many, but I’m just going to give you two.

First, He says that all parents are to do this.

**Deuteronomy 6:6-7** And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

So if you’re a parent, God says one of your roles as part of this community of faith is to teach your children, to share with your children the Word of God.

Secondly, in Ephesians 5 He says husbands are to share the Word with their wives.

**Ephesians 5:25-26** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

So if we love our wife like Jesus loves the church, one of the things we’ll do is we’ll share God’s Word. We’ll listen together to what God has to say to us.

It is right for us to emphasize the godly discipline of personal time with the Lord, of setting aside moments in our morning or in our evening to listen to His Voice through the Word. But it is also right, and this is where we often miss it. It is also right to emphasize the godly discipline of corporate time with the Lord,of setting aside moments in our day, not just this one hour on Sunday, but in our day, to listen to God’s Voice together as a Christian community. Here in 2 Timothy 4, God’s emphasis is upon our listening to God together in community as he commands Pastor Timothy, “Preach the Word!” Now, Paul made this point clear earlier, in the first letter to Timothy, as well. He writes this,

**1 Timothy 4:13** Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

All through Scripture, we see God’s people gathered together to listen to God in community through the reading and the teaching of the Word. In fact, the community became defined by the book that they listened to together. This was true of Old Testament as well as New Testament times. I want to read to you just one example from Nehemiah 8. Listen to this.

**Nehemiah 8:2-3** “So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

It says that Ezra stood on this wooden platform that was made for this very purpose of listening to God together, reading it aloud. And then Nehemiah records 26 different men who stood beside Ezra and read the book with him to the people of God. And these 26 men, it says

**Nehemiah 8:7b-8** …helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”

So that’s one Old Testament example of this. At the beginning of the church, we discover that God’s people met day by day together and one of the things that they did when they met day by day together is that they were devoted to the apostle’s teaching (Acts 2:42). They loved to listen to the truth God taught them by His Spirit through the Apostles. They understood that the apostles were not just simply teaching their own opinions, their own thoughts, but they were speaking from God to them.

**1. The purpose for listening to God together.**

Now, what’s the purpose of listening together? Two purposes stand out to me. The first one is mentioned in this text.

Purpose #1: To prepare us for a future day when we stand before the Lord.

***1*** *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:*

He’s envisioning the future day. He knows he doesn’t have very long on this earth. And he’s realizing, “I know Jesus promised to come again. I know that His kingdom is going to be advanced on this earth, and I’m keeping that day in view. And as I have that day in view I say ‘Timothy, preach the Word.’ We need to hear more from God together. We need to be prepared for that day. We need to be equipped for that day.” And then he says of himself,

***6****For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.* ***7****I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* ***8****Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

And that’s why he says “Preach the Word, Timothy, so that we as a people together would love the appearing of the Lord.” We need to be reminded of these eternal verities. We need to be reminded of who God is and what He said to us, and what His plan of grace and of His love for us. We need to be warned against sin in our lives and be warned to righteousness and to His eternal kingdom that Jesus is going to bring. And the only way any of that happens is if we listen together to the voice of God.

Purpose #2: To invite God’s blessing upon our present lives.

Revelation says it very explicitly.

**Revelation 1:3** Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

I don’t think this is just for Revelation. I think this is true of any portion of Scripture. The idea is that when the Word of God is read, it’s just not a book that is being read. It’s not bedtime reading like we would read the stories of Narnia. But we’re hearing God Himself speak to us as we listen to His Word read. There’s a blessing that comes along with that. God designed us to listen to Him in community. We cannot receive all the blessing and joy God intends for us from just simply private reading and meditation upon His Word alone.

God’s exhortation to Timothy is not, “Read the Word in your devotional time and tell everyone in the church to do the same!” It could have been that. If that’s all that God intended was that individually we’d have in our own individual life with God, we listed to Him through His Word, He could have just said, “Hey everyone! Go home and make sure you read your Bible’s on your own.” Now of course, they didn’t have copies of God’s Word at the time like we do. But yet it could have been something very individualistic. But he didn’t. He says, “Timothy, My people, as they are gathered together, it’s important that they hear Me together, hear My voice together. So preach the Word.”

**2. The expectations from listening together.**

What should we expect from listening to God together? Well, there are three expectations that are listed.

***2****preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

Timothy was simply called to declare God’s message, that God had spoken to His people and that God would now continue to speak in a living and active way wherever the Word of God was read and proclaimed. And he says you can expect three things to happen. That there would be reproof, that there would be rebuke, and there would be exhortation.

Expectation #1: We expect God to teach us sound doctrine.

The term “reprove” envisions people who believe wrong ideas about God and need instruction. Reproof carries the idea of correcting false ideas, false doctrine. At the end of this verse the text reads “with teaching.” Reproof and teaching are two sides of the same coin. In 2 Timothy 3:16, God teaches that He wrote the Bible for teaching and reproof. Those are the first two descriptions. Again, the one is positive; the other is to correct negative or false ideas.

So we when we listen to God together we should expect our minds to learn some things about God--about His workings, about His righteousness, about His nature, about His glory, about His rule, about His redemption. When we seek answers to the questions, “What do we together believe about life, about what is true, about what is right, about what is moral? What do we together believe about God and about His kingdom and about our future?” Don’t listen to other sources. Don’t go to the world’s philosophers. Don’t look into your own emotions and your own opinions. Go to the Book! Listen to what God says.

Expectation #2: We expect God to rebuke our sin.

The word “rebuke” envisions people who are sinning against God and need to be confronted. Let me ask you: Is that you? And if you say no, then you’re really gone astray. Because every one of us needs rebuked every day. There is some way that we are not conformed to the image of Jesus. And so when we listen to God’s Word together, we expect God Himself to rebuke our sin. Rebuke points to a confrontation with personal or corporate sin. Rebuke is not so much to inform our minds as to awaken our consciences.

Expectation #3: We expect God to strengthen our faith.

The word “exhort” envisions people whose faith as been under attack. There are trials in this life that are weighing them down. These people are disheartened and they need spiritual and emotional support. So exhortation carries the idea of encouragement.

When we listen to God together, we should expect God to teach us sound doctrine, to rebuke our sin and to strengthen our faith. So now we ask the question: How might we listen to God together so that we would gain the most from His voice?

**3. The attitudes for listening together.**

There are some attitudes that are vital for us to carry together as we listen to God together, both on Sunday morning together, but then any time the Word of God is opened in our community.

***3****For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,* ***4****and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

The time is coming when people won’t want to hear God’s Word because they don’t want to be taught. They’re fine with their own opinions about God and about righteousness and about heaven and about hell and about salvation and about worship and about life. They’re fine with their own opinions. They’re not going to endure sound teaching because that sound teaching corrects and brings a rebuke to their own personal opinions.

So briefly, this list I’m going to recite very quickly. If you want to write it down, you’ll have to look on the website.

Ten Applications to promote healthy listening together:

1. Keep Christ the center of your listening.

How do you listen well as a church? We envision Christ as truly present with us and we are sitting at His feet every time the Word of God is opened, whether it’s in private, whether it’s around the Supper table, or whether it’s here. We want to envision Christ Jesus as present, truly present with us. And He has something to say to us.

2. Refuse the demand to be entertained.

I’m going to take a few moments to share this story. I was talking in separate conversations both with our youth pastor, Josh, and then with my son, Alexander. Alexander and Keira are now part of a youth ministry in Dayton, Ohio, where they’ve joined a church. And I’m so thankful for that. But they were both talking to me about what makes a successful youth ministry. And they were bemoaning how hard it is because the youth ministries that seem to attract everybody are not youth ministries where the Word of God is opened. It’s not prominent. There’s a lot of fun. There’s a lot of games. There’s a lot of social interaction. All that is good in and of itself, except if it is so strong that it pushes away the center of why the church exists.

So we were talking about how important it is to reject this call, this motivation that we want to feel significant, and if we’re going to feel significant then we have to have a lot of kids here. And if we’re going to have a lot of kids here, we have to reduce the amount of time we listen to God. Now again, we also recognize that you have to do some things that are fun and some things that are social. That’s what teenagers are. But the focus still has to be on the Word. And if people are rejecting a ministry because the Word is taught and there is sound doctrine that is presented and there is rebuke and there is reproof and there is correction in righteousness and all these things, and there’s exhortation to spiritual life, if that’s the reason why a ministry is rejected, then so be it. They need to stay faithful to God. Because that’s the only thing that’s going to bring life.

My son, Alexander, texted me on a Wednesday night when they were having youth ministry. And he didn’t tell his youth pastor our conversation, but he shared with me that the youth pastor…listen to this. He’s going over and teaching Leviticus to the teenagers on the proper order of worship. And this is what he started out…again this youth pastor had no idea of our conversation. He said to the teenagers, “If you came here tonight to be entertained, sorry to disappoint you.” And that’s what has to happen.

By the way, Parents, it’s not enough for your kids to be in church and like being in church. It’s not enough! And sometimes parents say, “I don’t care where my kids go as long as they are in church and like being there.” No, that’s not enough! The question is: What are they hearing while they’re there? Because if they aren’t hearing God’s Word while they’re in youth ministry, guess what? Nothing good is happening spiritually. Everything starts right here. That’s how we listen to God’s Word. We refuse the demand to be entertained. That’s not why we’re here together. We’re a people of faith, established for God’s glory.

3. Judge teaching by the Word of God, not by our own tastes and preferences.

4. Long to have our minds informed of the truth of God.

5. Long to have our sins rebuked.

You know, as we walk in admonishment, this is what we expect. We’re not offended when that happens, when it’s pressed personally against us. We say, “That’s what I need!”

6. Long to have our faith strengthened.

That we would desire God above all.

7. Be eager to make application.

Make applications together. So we’re not just leaving here individually listening, but we’re leaving here talking about it with one another.

8. Be patient with others; be hard on yourself.

9. Resist the urge to listen to other voices.

10. Let us be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

**4. The occasions for listening together.**

So if God calls us to listen together, when should we listen to God’s voice through His Word together? And the answer to that is this: More often than we currently do. I’m convinced that we have lost a center of listening to God as the warp and woof of our relationship with each other. Often we think of specific times like Sunday morning that is dedicated for that purpose. But if we think of the Word like that, then I believe even Sunday morning will lose its life. Because then we’re coming to an event. We’re not coming to hear. And so the more we open up the Word together, whether it’s around the supper table or whether it’s at breakfast with a friend, or whether it’s gathering together with other believers at lunch time at work, or wherever it is, we’re saying that we’re looking for opportunities to open up God’s Word together. Here Paul says, “Preach the Word in season and out of season.” When it is convenient, and when it is not.

Opportunities for us to open up God’s Word: When people ask questions about life. When we experience extreme trials together, to share a Word that God has for us. When we need direction from God and we’re saying, “I have a big decision to make.” And we’re gathering around. We’re praying and we open up God’s Word together. We’re saying, “Does God have anything to say about that?” When we are sanctifying one another. When we are discipling our children. When we are under Satanic attack we need to hear a Word from God. When we’re discouraged by suffering and by trials we need to hear a Word of God.

So here’s the question: Who will be the bold one to suggest we open up God’s Word and read it together and listen to God? Who in that circle, wherever that circle is, whether it’s out as you’re having coffee out in the fellowship area or whether it’s at the work place or whether it’s in your home. Who will be the bold one to just simply say, “Could I share a verse of Scripture with you, a passage I’ve been reading? It has meant so much to me and God has been communicating some really sweet words to me and truths to me. Could I share that with you?” You might say, “Well, how do I do something like this?” Perhaps you just simply walk in the room and you shout “Sooie!” I know it’s going to be embarrassing. Rarely will you feel comfortable, especially the first time you do it. But just say, “Would you guys mind? We’re all Christians here. We all love the Lord. We all have God as our Father. Would you mind if we just take some time out of our Christmas party, out of our birthday party, out of whatever party we’re having, just to listen to what God has to say to us? God has something to say to us together, to enrich us.”

Let me tell you a last story and then I’ll close. My son, Jackson, had about four or five friends from out of town come and visit. So our house was this big array of activity. And on New Year’s Eve, they went over to a friend who comes to this church. This family is in the church. So, it’s New Year’s Eve. What do young men do on New Year’s Eve? Well, this father of this family said, “Hey, guys! Let’s spend some time together around the Word.” And he opened up the Word and they just had this evidently awesome conversation.

Afterwards, I asked one of the young men who was with Jackson, “Hey! Tell me about your New Year’s Eve. What did you guys do?”

“We had the most awesome time, Mr. Boerckel. It was one of the greatest times of my life! This dad gathered us around and he opened up the Bible and he began to share with us, and it was one of the most awesome times together.”

And I’m thinking: Why doesn’t the church of Jesus experience more of that? And I want to let you know that you can be a catalyst for the glory of God in His church.