



# **I'm Not Listening: Four Studies on Not Listening to God**

## **Participant Guide**

### **Adam and Eve - Not Listening to God's Command**

#### **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we praise You for being a God who instructs and leads us through the Holy Spirit in the way we should go. Our sinful hearts often make it difficult to follow your commands and guidance. We pray You will bless our time together during this study. May we focus on Your Word and the wisdom You teach us. Help us listen to You both this day and every day after. Amen.

#### **Opening Discussion**

Think of a time when you received specific instructions, but you disobeyed the instructions. If you're comfortable, explain why you disobeyed. What motivated you not to listen? Did you regret the decision to disobey? Why or why not?

Failure to listen to instructions or commands happens for many reasons. One reason is that we want to determine our life course. When the rules, commands, or instructions of someone in authority interfere with that, it can create an unruly heart within us. This study will look at one such example of that and what resulted. Despite our sinful attempts to wrestle control away from God and become independent of Him, God's plan ENDURED and included our salvation as part of the plan.

#### **Bible Study**

##### **Read Genesis 2:15-17**

1. What command does God give Adam regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?
2. Why do you think it was there if God did not want Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and E
3. God is very clear about the consequences of disobedience. What is it?

##### **Read Genesis 3:1-13**

1. What made the serpent so crafty? How was he so convincing in tempting Adam and Eve to stop listening to God's command?
2. What's wrong with having our eyes opened and being like God, knowing good and evil? When did Adam and Eve first realize they made a terrible mistake?
3. Notice the reactions of Adam and Eve in verses 12 and 13. How did they respond to what happened? Does this type of reaction still occur today?

##### **Read Genesis 3:14-19**

1. What are the consequences of Adam and Eve's choice?
2. Verse 15 is the first promise of a savior. Who is it?
3. God's plan for salvation would ENDURE despite Adam and Eve's failure to listen to His command. Jesus Christ fulfilled this plan. Where else in the Old Testament is this prophecy of a coming Messiah to save humankind made? Read the following verses:
  - Genesis 22:18
  - Deuteronomy 18:15
  - Isaiah 53:12
  - Psalm 49:15
  - Psalm 68:18
  - Daniel 7:13-14

## **Read Genesis 3:21-24**

1. How did God show His grace to Adam and Eve despite their sin?
2. God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden in verse 23. How was this an act of God's mercy? Read Romans 6:23 and James 1:14-15.

This study shows how God gave a clear and easy command to Adam. We see how Satan manipulated the situation by creating doubt in Adam and Eve about what God indeed said. Their first mistake was listening to a voice that was not God's declaring what God was doing. Let's take some time to discuss listening to the right voice.

1. What are the voices in your life that compete for your attention?
2. How do you show discernment when determining which voices to listen to? How do you know which ones to trust?
3. Read Mark 9:7, John 10:27, and Hebrews 4:12-16. Who should we listen to when enduring this life? Who benefits from listening to the Word of God?
4. What can you do to better hear and listen to Jesus daily?

## **Discussion Wrap Up**

Let's go back to the beginning of this study and the time when you failed to listen to an explicit command or instruction and regretted it. It may have seemed obvious that you made a wrong decision or that it would have been better to listen to what the person told you. Adam and Eve likely felt that way as they attempted to hide from God due to their shame of not listening. Their single action introduced sin and death into the world, a consequence we see every day.

God, in His infinite mercy, however, did not abandon Adam and Eve to their sin. He continued to care for and provide for them. He remained their God and even promised to send Jesus, the Messiah, to put an end to the curse of Satan forever. God forgave Adam and Eve, just like He forgives you and me when we fail to listen to Him. He provides for us daily, just as He did for Adam and Eve. Martin Luther beautifully emphasizes this point in his explanation of *The First Article of Luther's Small Catechism*, writing, "He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me."

Jesus came to fulfill what no man could. He lived a perfect life, was tempted in every way, yet did not sin, as we read in Hebrews 4:15. He then exchanged His perfection for our sinful ruin by dying on a criminal's cross. In His death and resurrection, we received the hope of being with Him in a paradise like Adam and Eve knew before The Fall. It's because of God's "fatherly, divine goodness and mercy" that we should listen to Him and His Word.

We know there are many voices in our world competing for our attention. God has given us the Holy Spirit to help sift through all the voices to hear His that our faith would grow (Romans 10:17). God has blessed us with a community of believers in our churches, youth groups, and Sunday schools where we hear the Word with brothers and sisters in and ENDURE whatever life may bring. We strengthen one another as we build each other up in the Word (1 Thessalonians 5:11) until Christ returns.

## **Closing Prayer**

Gracious and Loving Father, we praise You for making a way for us to spend eternity with You and Jesus. We thank you for sending Jesus to die for our sins on the cross. We are lost and hopeless in our sins without Jesus. May we forever listen for your voice calling us out of the wilderness where sin can easily tangle and trap us. Grant us discernment as the many voices in our lives compete for our attention. Guard us with your grace and mercy until that great day when Jesus returns to bring us all home. Amen.



# **I'm Not Listening: Four Studies on Not Listening to God**

## **Participant Guide**

### **Cain - Not Listening to God's Warning**

#### **Opening Prayer**

Merciful God, we give thanks and praise to You for being a patient God. We do not always listen to the warnings you provide us, even when Satan is knocking at our doorstep to lead us away from you. We humbly ask You to watch over us and protect us from the evil one that He would have no power over us. Guide our discussion during this study as we examine what can happen when we fail to heed your warning. It's in Your Most Holy Name we pray. Amen.

#### **Opening Discussion**

Warnings are relatively easy to find. Almost everything comes with a warning label, sticker, sign, or posting to warn people of possible hazards. We see them on toys, beverages, highways, and buildings' walls. Sometimes, we find them on things that common sense suggests are obvious. For example, did you know the contents of a coffee cup can be extremely hot? It's true.

Take a few minutes and name some standard warnings you're familiar with or have seen recently.

Not all warnings are found in print or on a sign. Some warnings appear during extreme and dangerous weather situations like tornadoes, hurricanes, wildfires, or blizzards. Others can come from people looking out for our well-being. They may warn us about our attitude (like a parent disciplining their child), our behavior or actions (like a friend gently correcting another friend for having a condescending tone), or about a potential consequence from a decision we're considering (like a pastor warning a church member about the consequences of the member's immorality). This study will focus on the latter scenario.

#### **Bible Study**

##### **Read Genesis 4:1-7**

1. What was so different about the offerings brought by Cain and Abel (read Hebrews 11:4 for a hint)?
2. God was pleased with Abel's offering but not with Cain's offering. How did Cain react?
3. What warning does God give Cain? What does this tell us about God and caring for His people?

##### **Read Genesis 4:8-12**

1. What sin does Cain commit against his brother, Abel? What is especially evil about this sin?
2. How does Cain react when God asks where his brother is?
3. What was the consequence of Cain not listening to God's warning?

##### **Read Genesis 4:13-16**

1. What was Cain concerned about after receiving the curse? What does this tell us about Cain?
2. How does God show grace to Cain before he leaves God's presence?
3. How did God's plan for salvation ENDURE despite the earth being full of Cain's descendants?

This story may be a challenging one for most of us to relate to since most of us have never murdered anyone. It can be tempting to brush past this story, but Jesus had a different take on what it means to "murder" that we

should study. Read Matthew 5:21-22 and discuss how Jesus' definition of murder is different from what people often assume is meant by murder.

John echoed a similar sentiment in one of his letters. Read 1 John 3:15-17. These verses teach us that anyone who hates another person or shows anger or insults toward them is not acting as a disciple of Christ. These do not come from Him. What does come from Christ, however, is love, care, compassion, and brotherly affection. Verse 16 says we can understand love because Jesus gave up his life as an offering for our sake. We, like Cain, received a unique mark that set us apart as one of God's own.

1. What particular "mark" do Christians receive today to identify them as one of God's children (read 1 Peter 3:21 for a hint)?
2. What does our baptism grant us according to Romans 6:3-4?
3. How does knowing you are a baptized child of God help you ENDURE hardships and difficulties in life?
4. Read Hebrews 12:24. How does the blood of Christ "speak a better word" than the blood of Abel? How are Jesus and Abel like each other?
5. How might Cain have avoided murdering Abel if he had listened to God's warning? What can you do to hear God's warning better when tempted to sin?

### **Discussion Wrap Up**

There are plenty of warning signs all around us. Some are more urgent than others, but they exist to protect us and keep us safe. That's especially true when the trusted and supportive adults in our lives warn us of possible danger. It's not limited to physical danger alone; it could relate to a choice we want to make, a party we desperately want to attend, or the relationship we long to have with someone. God has put people in our lives to speak His truth, and it's not always easy to hear.

Cain found himself in a desperate situation. His anger and jealousy toward his brother stirred up wicked desires in his heart. God knew this and warned Cain that sin was ready to pounce on him like a lion on its prey. Instead of listening to God and asking for help, Cain ignored God's warning and killed his brother out of hatred.

While none of us have likely murdered anyone, Jesus taught that if we so much as get angry at another person, we've killed them in our hearts. It begs the question: who hasn't gotten angry or felt hatred toward someone? The answer is no one except Jesus! Jesus came because no one could do what was required to save humanity and restore the right relationship with God.

Jesus lived a perfect life and demonstrated the great love of God by dying on the cross. His blood covered all our sins and restored our relationship with the Father. Abel's blood cried out for justice; Jesus' blood answered that cry and brought reconciliation between God and His children. We are washed clean in baptism and risen to a new life in Christ. Our identity becomes a chosen and beloved child of God redeemed through the death and resurrection of Christ.

### **Closing Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us this time to spend in the Word. Help us listen when You give us warnings about sin seeking to devour us as it did to Cain. We praise You because Your plan for salvation ENDURED despite Your children refusing to listen to Your warnings. Grant that we never turn a deaf ear to You or the Word. Your love is never ending, and we thank You for showing how deep Your love goes through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We have been given a new name in baptism. The gift of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and our baptism help us ENDURE until you call us home. May we share this hope with everyone we meet this week. Amen.



# **I'm Not Listening: Four Studies on Not Listening to God**

## **Participant Guide**

### **The Israelite Spies - Not Listening to God's Promise**

#### **Opening Prayer**

Almighty Father, open our hearts and minds to hear from Your Word. We often struggle to listen and trust the promises You speak to us. We sometimes act impatiently and indifferently and even outright reject Your gracious plan. Lead us in our study and grant us faith like Caleb and Joshua, who trusted Your promise and boldly declared Your wondrous and mighty works to their fellow Israelites. May we live like them and not as grumbling people who despise Your promises and grace. Amen.

#### **Opening Discussion**

Review the list below and vote which of the two is better. Determine which of the two has the majority of the votes. Those in the majority must try and persuade the others in the group to join their side.

- Chocolate or vanilla
- Country music or pop music
- Coffee or soda
- Marvel or DC
- Spring break or winter break
- Movie at the theater or streaming

1. What was this experience like for those of you who were in the minority? What about those who were in the majority? How did it feel having someone tell you to vote differently?
2. What are some other examples of peer pressure that you've had to face?

#### **Bible Study**

##### **Read Numbers 13:1-3, 21-33**

1. What indication do the spies get that the land God has promised them is excellent and bountiful?
2. What report do the spies give Moses and their fellow Israelites regarding the land?
3. What does Caleb recommend they do in verse 30? What do we learn about Caleb in this verse?
4. What was wrong with the report the ten unfaithful spies delivered?

##### **Read Numbers 14:1-10**

1. How did the people react to the report of the ten spies who did not want to take possession of the land?
2. How does Joshua try to rally the people? What promises and positive outlook does he remind the people of in verses 7-9? What's their reaction to his effort to reassure them?

##### **Read Numbers 14:11-19**

1. In what way does Moses intercede for the Israelites?

##### **Read Numbers 14:20-35**

1. God is quick to forgive the sins of the Israelites for their lack of faith, but there are consequences. What are some consequences of not listening to God's promise to take the land of Canaan He has prepared for them?

Peer pressure resulted in the death of ten men, the rejection of a vast nation of people to see the Promised Land, and a 40-year timeout spent wandering in a desert. Despite all God had done for the Israelites, they preferred listening to ten men who were afraid rather than to Joshua and Caleb, who, in faithful obedience to God, tried reminding them of their unique identity as the people of God. They knew no nation, fortification, wall, or land was too big for God to bring down with His mighty outstretched hand.

God would continue to raise faithful servants like Joshua and Caleb. Moses, too, proved to be a loyal servant as he reminded God of his steadfast love. He also reminded God of the promise to be the God who would deliver the Israelites from their enemies. Let's explore how God's plan ENDURED through faithful servants despite rebellious people with calloused hearts.

1. Read 1 Samuel 17:41-47. Once again, God's people are faced with an intimidating enemy and cower in fear until David arrives. How does David demonstrate faithfulness against Goliath and the Philistines?
2. Read Jonah 4:1-3. How does Jonah echo what Moses said about God's character? Can Jonah's frustration stop God's plan?
3. Read Hebrews 7:25 and Romans 8:33-34. What role does Jesus hold on our behalf that is similar to Moses speaking on behalf of the Israelites?
4. Read Matthew 24:30-31. How does this scene of Jesus coming in glory relate to the culmination of God's plan? Can anyone prevent it from happening?

### **Discussion Wrap Up**

Hopefully, the experience we began the lesson with was enjoyable. It ultimately doesn't matter who likes what type of ice cream flavor or who prefers one genre of music over another. There are times, however, when peer pressure is more serious. Friends or classmates may pressure you into doing something wrong to fit in, be accepted, earn a friendship or relationship, or avoid humiliation. We must pause and understand the potential consequences of falling prey to peer pressure.

The Israelites could have benefited from that wisdom when they received the report from the spies who returned from scouting the Promised Land. Instead of listening to the voice of God instructing them to take possession of the land (as He did through Joshua and Caleb), they rebelled and wished they had died in Egypt. Great were there trespasses against God. He punished them with justice yet preserved a way for His people to enter the Promised Land after Moses interceded on their behalf.

We'll probably never get asked to conquer a land full of people, but God does call us to be His witnesses on the earth. That includes your schools, homes, jobs, relationships, neighborhoods, extracurricular activities, etc. There will undoubtedly be pressure to keep our faith in ourselves and out of other people's business. Will we listen to them and be afraid like the ten spies were, or will we find a gentle and loving way to share the Gospel with a world desperate for purpose and hope, just as Joshua and Caleb did?

### **Closing Prayer**

Lord God, we are grateful for the patience You show us. Forgive us for when we have acted in fear and shame of Your Word. Please continue showing us your steadfast love just as You did to your people of old. Strengthen us, enrich us with Your Gospel, and lead us to those in our daily lives who are desperate for Your love, truth, and peace. Grant us the courage to stand against those who would destroy us and remind us of your promise to be with us always. Amen.



# **I'm Not Listening: Four Studies on Not Listening to God**

## **Participant Guide**

### **Jonah - Not Listening to God's Plan**

#### **Opening Prayer**

Loving Father, thank You for blessing us with another day. We know You have made plans for us to walk in. Our understanding is often limited, but You have told us to trust You and to walk in faith. You know the plans You have for us, and they are for our good. Guide our discussion during this lesson and help us learn from Jonah's example. We don't have to comprehend every aspect of your plan; we must obey and follow your lead. Amen.

#### **Opening Discussion**

Today's lesson focuses on the reluctant prophet named Jonah. He receives a clear directive from God to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and preach against it. The Assyrians were longtime enemies of Israel. That's a significant reason why Jonah does not want to go. We'll see later in the lesson that what prevented Jonah from listening to God's plan had more to do with God's character than the Assyrians. Before we dive into the lesson, let's do an activity. The Bible Study leader will give you instructions. Once you've finished the activity, do the following discussion questions.

1. For the leaders: what was your experience when the followers didn't obey you? What emotions were you feeling? How would your attitude be different if this happened in a real-life scenario?
2. Leaders may have to deal with people who refuse to follow their lead. Sometimes, the followers do the exact opposite of what the leader says! Why do you think this happens?

It can be frustrating when a leader works diligently to be fair, respectful, and inclusive of all the team members just to have problems and conflicts arise. It disrupts the unity and mission of the team, whether it's a team of ten or two. Blatant disregard for a leader rarely leads to team success. It often brings harm and disruption to the plan and usually to the people involved.

Jonah was one of the minor prophets called by God for a particular plan. His mission was to preach against a pagan nation that had been mortal enemies of the Israelites. Unfortunately, Jonah did not listen to God and opted for his plan instead.

#### **Bible Study**

##### **Read Jonah 1:1-5, 11-17**

1. How do we know Jonah did not want to follow God's plan?
2. What's ironic about Jonah refusing to preach against a pagan nation yet ending up on a boat with pagan sailors?
3. Contrast the sailors' attitude toward Jonah with Jonah's attitude toward the Ninevites (and pagans in general). What's the significant difference?

God sends a fish to rescue Jonah after he's thrown overboard. Jonah has plenty of time to reflect while spending three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish. He prays to God and tells Him he will make good on his vows. The fish returns Jonah to land so Jonah can try again.

### **Read Jonah 3:1-10**

1. Does Jonah follow God's plan this second time? What evidence does the reading show that he may still harbor bitterness and reluctance to deliver God's message?
2. How did the Ninevites respond to the message? How do we know they believed the message?
3. How did God respond to the Ninevites' repentance?

### **Read Jonah 4:1-10**

1. Why was Jonah so against God's plan? What led him to react with anger toward Nineveh's repentance?
2. How does God show compassion to Jonah in this reading despite Jonah's negative attitude?
3. When a worm eats the vine, Jonah again gets angry and says it would be better for him to die. How did God use this object lesson of the vine to help Jonah understand the bigger picture?

Jonah did not want to listen to God's plan for sparing Nineveh. He and his fellow Israelites were skilled at praying for God's mercy and forgiveness on their nation, yet routinely asked God to destroy and enact His wrath on their enemies rather than asking for their hearts to turn from evil and wickedness. God calls Jonah out for having a heart hardened by hate and anger.

We learn some amazing things about God's love in the book of Jonah, but it shouldn't surprise us as we see it throughout the Old Testament. Let's look at a few key verses that tell us God's plan and desire for everyone.

1. Read Ezekiel 33:11. What does God desire the wicked to do?
2. Read Psalm 36:5-6. How deep does the love of God go? Who does the psalmist say God saves?
3. Read Micah 7:19. What does this verse say God will do with our sins?
4. Read Lamentations 3:22-24. How can this verse offer hope to us when we sin and struggle to listen to God's plan for our lives?

### **Discussion Wrap Up**

God called upon Jonah to deliver a message he desperately did not want to give. He refused to listen and be part of God's plan to bring salvation to one of Israel's greatest enemies. Ironically, in his attempt to flee from God, he winds up bearing witness to the mercy of God before he's thrown into the sea. His sacrifice brought the sailors peace. Later, he delivered God's message to the Ninevites, which led to their repentance and turning from evil. They, too, experienced peace. That was part of Jonah's reluctance to go. He understood God was merciful and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. His hatred for the Ninevites outweighed his willingness to go where God led and be part of His salvific work among the pagan nations.

Obedying God's plan is hard sometimes. It can be confusing, scary, or the opposite of what we want to do. We must recognize when those thoughts creep into our minds. If we don't take our fears and concerns to God and allow Him to reassure us that His plan is best, we risk making life harder for ourselves. Notice how God's plan was unhindered despite Jonah going in the opposite direction. Jonah didn't have to spend three days in the belly of a fish; that was a consequence of his choice not to listen to God. One of the great things about this story is that God not only forgives the Ninevites but also forgives Jonah and still uses Him as part of His gracious plan.

We're going to make mistakes and missteps in our faith journey. Some we'll make on purpose, and others will be more innocent. The good news is that Jesus has already paid for those mistakes with His precious, innocent life on the cross. We don't have to spend three days in hopeless darkness because Jesus did that for us. He rose from the grave and ascended to heaven, where He intercedes on our behalf with the Father. It may



be challenging to listen to God's plan for our life, but we can trust He has our good in mind and that His ways are best. God gives us our gifts through the Holy Spirit, and He knows the best way to use those gifts to bring the Gospel to all the ends of the earth. What an honor and privilege for us to be His beloved children and co-heirs with Christ for eternity (Romans 8:17)!

### **Closing Prayer**

Merciful Father, You are the God of the universe. You have created everything and know everything about us, from the hairs on our heads to the smallest cells in our bodies. We thank You for calling us to be partakers of sharing Your Gospel with a world in need of Your love and truth. Please strengthen us and give us courage when we fear or doubt the plan You have for us. We trust Your ways are higher than ours, and Your plan has our good in mind. May we forever walk in them and obey where Your voice calls us. Amen.