



A Biblical Approach to
Listening

BY WENDY HILL

Listening is a gift from God. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 20:12, ‘Ears that hear and eyes that see—the LORD has made them both.’

It is worthwhile to examine what the Bible says about listening and apply its principles to the study of music.

GOD VALUES LISTENING HIGHLY

God told John, Peter and James on the mountain that Jesus was worth listening to. He said,

This is my Son whom I love. With Him I am well-pleased. Listen to Him.

Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7

Jesus also knew that listening is a very powerful learning skill—listening precedes understanding. In Matt 15:10 He said, ‘Listen and understand’.

Jesus emphasised listening and used it in His teaching. To understand the hidden messages of Jesus’ parables, we must listen with hearts as well as minds.

There are many examples where Jesus starts His teachings by saying, ‘Listen to me.’ He reminds us to listen because He knows how difficult it is to be still and listen to God with our hearts and minds. He knows how much easier we find it to listen to teachings from the external physical world than to the internal instructions from the Holy Spirit.

Solomon also knew the wisdom of listening to God:

Listen to advice and accept instruction and in the end you will be wise.

Proverbs 19:20

In order to progress, music students need to listen to and follow their teacher’s instructions. Listening to recordings is crucial. The more the pieces are heard, the more is learned and understood. Not just the notes are learned—musicality and subtleties of phrasing, dynamics, tone and expression are also absorbed. When young children learn to speak, they are very sensitive to the subtleties in voices. To play pieces musically, students need to listen with their hearts as well as their ears.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF LISTENING

It is possible to hear things and not understand. Jesus’ parable of the sower in Matthew 13 illustrates the different levels of listening. The chart opposite helps explain these levels in terms of studying music.

FIRST-TIME LISTENING

When listening to the quiet voice of God in our hearts it is surprising how quickly we hear His voice. We need to listen carefully and be free from distractions. The

The Parable of the Sower

THE PARABLE	JESUS' EXPLANATION	LEVELS OF LISTENING	PARENTS & STUDENTS
<p>The Path <i>Matthew 13:3-4</i> 'A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path and the birds came and ate it all up.'</p>	<p><i>Matthew 13:19</i> 'When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches it away.'</p>	<p>To some, music is there but not thought about.</p>	<p>Music is all around them but they show little interest. They assume it is too difficult to learn.</p>
<p>Rocky Places <i>Matthew 13:5-6</i> 'Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and they withered because they had no root.'</p>	<p><i>Matthew 13:20-21</i> 'What was sown on rocky places is the man who hears the Word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, he quickly falls away.'</p>	<p>People hear sounds all the time but as background and they think little about it.</p>	<p>Superficial level of motivation, enough to begin lessons. Reasons for learning are shallow—friends learn, status, music helps intelligence. Lessons are few and peter out.</p>
<p>Among Thorns <i>Matthew 13:7</i> 'Other seed fell among the thorns which grew up and choked the plants.'</p>	<p><i>Matthew 13:22</i> 'What was sown among the thorns is the man who hears the Word but worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it making it unfruitful.'</p>	<p>People become more interested in listening to and learning about music. But it is still not of great importance. Interest wanes & other interests distract.</p>	<p>People become enthused seeing others playing an instrument. These parents and students see some significance in music. Motivation is however short-lived and students do not persevere.</p>
<p>Good Soil <i>Matthew 13:8</i> 'Still other seed fell on good soil where it produced a crop, a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.'</p>	<p><i>Matthew 13:23</i> 'But what was sown on good soil is the man who hears the Word and understands it. He produces a crop yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.'</p>	<p>The deepest level of listening and understanding is with the heart. People make a long term commitment to studying music.</p>	<p>Students listen intently, are keen, learn quickly and love what they play. Music reaches their hearts and they are motivated to continue.</p>

Jesus understood well the levels that people listen at. How did He finish the parable?
By saying, 'He who has ears, let him hear'.

most important and influential time is when the thought is accepted or rejected. God's plans can proceed and materialise only when we accept and obey them.

When a student hears a piece for the first time, he instantly decides whether he likes it or not. The first listening experience precedes and affects the practice habits. Future playing, repetition and review of the piece merely confirm and polish the musical sounds first heard.

THE BENEFITS OF LISTENING

There are four major benefits of listening.

1. *Foundations become stronger.*

The more students listen to music, the stronger their basic aural skills become and the quicker they progress.

2. *Blessing increases.*

God has blessed us with the gift of music to bring great pleasure, comfort, refreshment and lift our souls. David played his harp to Saul to give him relief. JS Bach wrote 'Music is for the glory of God and for the refreshment of man.'

3. *Faith becomes stronger.*

Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.

Romans 10:17

It is not enough to just have a Bible and occasionally read it. Going to church and attending a Bible study add

greater depth and understanding, as well as making the Word of God more familiar to our hearts.

Likewise, it is not enough to just read music. Listening to a good recording improves depth, understanding and expression.

4. *Teaching becomes more effective.*

In the *Music for our Maker* course, the results of regular listening to the recording and following instructions are highly significant.

- Ears are trained to listen sensitively.
- The student memorises more easily and plays more musically.
- Progress is faster and new pieces are learned more often.
- Interest and motivation are maintained.
- Student, parent and teacher all enjoy lessons and are blessed as they carry out their specific roles and work together.
- The teacher does not have to repeat instructions or use lesson time for home tasks.
- Lessons continue for many years.
- The student is able and confident to share music with others and use it for God-honouring purposes.

— The student experiences success.

DANGERS AND CONSEQUENCES OF NOT LISTENING

There are many warnings in the Bible about not listening.

Stop listening to my instruction, my son,
and you will stray from words of
knowledge.

Proverbs 19:27

The Lord instructed Isaiah to

Go and tell this people: Be ever hearing
but never understanding, be ever
perceiving, make the heart of this people
calloused, make their eyes dull and close
their eyes. Otherwise they might see with
their eyes, hear with their ears, understand
with their hearts and turn and be healed.

Isaiah 6:9–10

It is so easy for ears not to hear, eyes not
to see, and hearts to be hardened and
unable to understand.

Parents often wonder why their children
do not seem to listen to them, and many
children feel the same way about their
parents. Communication fails when
listening skills are not put into practice.

In the *Music for our Maker* program the
consequences of not listening to the
recording and not following instructions
can be quite dramatic.

- The student relies on the eyes only to learn
- Without the desired musical sounds in the brain, fingers struggle to play them.

— There is less heart-playing, no memory
and little musicality.

— Progress is slowed, boredom and loss
of motivation set in.

— The teacher repeats the same
instructions week after week.

— The lesson time absorbs student and
parents' responsibilities such as
playing the CD or practicing.

— There is dissatisfaction with the
method and alternative methods are
considered as a 'quick fix'.

— Frustration develops to the point of
stopping lessons.

— Students are not willing to share music
with others or use it for God-
honouring purposes.

— Students feel a sense of failure.

GOOD LISTENING BEGINS EARLY

Even unborn babies can listen. In fact,
many expectant mothers now play music
for their unborn children.

As soon as the sound of your greeting
reached my ears, the baby in my womb
leaped for joy.

Luke 1:44

Younger siblings of older children having
music lessons have an advantage in
hearing the music for years before they
start formal lessons. Their listening skills
are very highly developed and all that

remains is to train the body to play the instrument. Progress is surprisingly fast in younger siblings.

AUTHORITY

Students are responsible for listening to those parents and teachers whom God has placed over them.

You will say, 'How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly.'

Proverbs 5:12–14

The Bible states very clearly that children are responsible for listening to and obeying their parents (Proverbs 1:8–9, Colossians 3:20).

Whatever we listen to, we need to carefully evaluate it against the authority of the Word of God.

GOD LISTENS TOO

God hears music played to Him for His glory. He wants music to be played and sung to Him.

It is good to praise the Lord and make music to Your Name O Most High.

Psalm 92:1

God also hears practices at home as well as lessons with the teacher. Whether practising or playing,

Do it with all your heart as working for the Lord and not for men.

Colossians 3:23

SIX STEPS IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

We have learned much about the importance of listening. Let's look at Moses' example which clearly illustrates the complete learning process using the six steps of the 'God said/God saw' principle.

More detail can be found in the booklet *Music Moses' Way* by the same author.

God designed man in such a way that we can learn through many areas—the sense organs in the body, the soul and the spirit. It was Moses' job to teach God's Laws to the Israelites in the Ten Commandments. Moses understood the learning process very well as shown in Deuteronomy 6:1–25. Moses' approach was similar to the six steps outlined earlier and his approach is applied in the *Music for our Maker* course.

1. *God was there in the beginning*

God is the Source of all knowledge including music. He gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

In music, the teacher has the *Music for our Maker* pieces to teach to students.

2. *Moses spoke*

These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe... so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God... and so that you may enjoy long life.

Deuteronomy 6:1–2

Recorded pieces are played regularly so that students can learn and progress over many years.

3. *The Israelites listened*

The people listened to the goals God had set for them.

In music, students listen to the recordings and aim to play the pieces themselves.

4. *Moses Emphasised Obedience*

Be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey just as the Lord, the God of your fathers promised you.

Deuteronomy 6:3

In music, instructions from both teacher and parent need to be followed carefully in the lesson and at home so that all may go well and students learn more pieces over time.

Obedience begins in the heart (spirit).

These commandments that I give you today are to be put on your hearts.

Deuteronomy 6:5–6

Jesus taught His disciples about listening and obedience. He said,

I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice [obeys]. He is like a man building a house who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When the flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it because it was well-built.

Luke 6:47–48

In music, the same principle of listening and obeying applies. One of the common frustrations of music teachers is when a student fails to put instructions into practice at home. Where obedience is missing, sin and rebellion come to the surface.

If the foundation of obedience is solid then progress follows.

Do what is right and good in the Lord's sight so it may go well with you.

Deuteronomy 6:18

In Deuteronomy 6:7 Moses told the Israelites to 'impress them (the Commandments) on your children.' It is parents' responsibility to teach their children about God and to reinforce teaching points coming from lessons with the teacher. Music teachers are simply assistants with skills parents may not have.

Parents are expected to attend lessons, participate in practices and be a part of the child's learning process because they are the main teacher six days per week.

Parents need to listen carefully to instructions and record teacher's instructions so they can confidently teach at home.

Moses told the parents to teach the Commandments at every possible opportunity.

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Deuteronomy 6:7–8

In music, children can listen to the recording at any time. The CD can be background music to other activities—in the mornings, during meals, at playtime or even whilst sleeping.

Musical terms and scriptures can be put on notice boards and seen around the house. Notice that the scripture above covers every place the child can be.

5. *Changes occur*

The rate of change and progress varies. People today are just the same as the Israelites, who God labelled ‘a stiffnecked people’. The principle of listening and obedience still applies. The more we listen and follow God’s instructions, the more we develop character, and grow in wisdom and maturity. The rewards and blessings are enormous.

In music it is exactly the same. The more the student listens and obeys music instructions, the more he learns skills, understands, grows, changes and progresses.

6. *The Commandments in visible form*

God gave Moses two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments as a visible reminder of what has been said on Mount

Sinai. The tablets were a witness to what had happened on the mountain.

In music, the books are the visible form of the pieces. Students also learn to read and write their own musical ideas in compositions. The desire then comes to share and communicate what has been gained through the six steps of the learning process.

CONCLUSION

Listening and obedience are the two middle steps in the learning process and if these break down so does learning.

Teacher and parent can dutifully carry out the first two steps by repeating instructions over and over (nagging). But there will be no learning if the student does not listen and follow instructions. The final steps will not be put into practice. However if the listening and obedience steps are followed, enormous rewards and blessings are obvious.

May you be abundantly blessed as you work through the *Music for our Maker* course. May you learn, grow and develop in music skills. May you use these skills to honour and glorify the One who gave us the gift of music and use them to bless others.



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