

# Town Criers: Listening, Hearing, and Doing

Bible Study • Leader Guide

*Please provide a copy of this study and a Bible for each participant.*

## Town Criers

It's a bygone image: a town crier standing in the middle of a dusty road and ringing a bell or banging a drum. "Hear Ye! Hear Ye!" Maybe this was an announcement of a birth or a death or a tax increase. Maybe it was alarming news of a fire or the threat of invaders. Most often, the crier shared news to which the people in that little town needed to listen and respond. "Stop! Listen to this! Now, go do something with what I've told you! Bring a meal to the new mother. Comfort the grieving family. Grab your buckets and line up to put out that fire! Pay your taxes!"

Today, we have town criers everywhere, every day. We just don't call them that. Tap that icon on your phone. Turn on your tablet. Say, "Alexa, what's the news today?" Click on your cable news station. "Fire! Taxes! Accidents!" We may hear. We may weep. We may turn it off. Often, we don't respond at all. We go about our day as if we didn't hear.

**Share with your group or reflect: What town criers do you listen to each day? Which town criers do you turn off? Why? Which town criers do you listen to and then respond? Why?**

**Answers will vary. Consider the people who share news you might need to hear in your life: newscasters, local newspaper, church bulletin, family members sharing news of family, and neighbors. You might "turn off" news you don't want to hear, words with which you disagree, or words that are simply gossip. We listen to people we trust. We often listen to our spouse, a pastor, or a weather person!**

## God: The First Town Crier

Read Genesis 1:1–5.

**Who is the first to speak in the universe?**

**God**

**What are His first words?**

**Let there be light.**

God is obviously much more than a typical town crier. His Word is not like any words a human being might speak. When God speaks, things happen. Wait a minute. Let's rephrase that. When God speaks, atoms, protons, cells, rainbows, chipmunks, peaches, and aspen trees are created out of absolutely nothing. Language specialists call this "performative." God's Word isn't simply a pronouncement, a town cry. It's action.

**What two words are repeated over and over in the creation of the universe? (Genesis 1:3–31.)**

**"God said" and "God saw that it was good."**

**Now let's jump ahead a couple of chapters to where God first talks to Adam. Read Genesis 2:16. What two commands did He give?**

**You may eat from every tree in the garden. You may not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or you will die.**

God's commands are clear, and unlike a typical town crier, they are given with perfect love. God wants what is best for His creation! Read Genesis 2:7–24.

**What three gifts does God give to Adam which reveal His love?**

**He breathes life into Adam, through the Holy Spirit! He gives him a beautiful creation. He gives him a companion, Eve. Adam is present with God the Father and Jesus Christ, the Word. The Triune God is present with Adam at the beginning.**

## **Satan: The Evil Town Crier**

Read Genesis 3:1–5.

**What message is this town crier sharing with Eve?**

**Did God actually say? (Some translations omit the words "actually" or "really.")**

Yes, Eve listened to and obeyed the wrong voice which was tempting her to doubt God. This town crier was essentially saying, "There's no fire. Take what you deserve. Take whatever you want. It's yours." Eve ate the fruit and shared it with Adam. They sank their teeth into the fruit, and sin entered the perfect creation. The lie this evil town crier had proclaimed was uncovered in the blink of an eye. Read Genesis 3:7. Stay tuned. The loving Town Crier is soon to share His salvation plan.

## **Prophets: Town Criers**

Read 2 Samuel 11:1–5, 14–15.

**Who was the town crier David heard and obeyed? What were the consequences of this disobedience?**

**Remember, David was a man who loved God. See 1 Samuel 13:14. Even David listened to the wrong town criers at times. In this instance, he listened to his own sinful desire. After all, the woman was beautiful. He longed for her. After she became pregnant, David began plotting to kill her husband, piling sin upon sin.**

What a mess. For more than nine months, David continued life as a king, doing kingly things and perhaps thinking he was getting away with murder. He married Bathsheba who bore him a son (who would later die). David had plenty of time to confess his sins to the Lord, but this didn't happen right away.

Read Hebrews 1:1.

**Who did God send as His town criers? Prophets.**

**We read here about the prophets who spoke for God. Nathan was one such prophet who called people to listen, to hear, and to do what the Lord commanded. There were other false prophets, but Nathan was God's prophet.**

Read 2 Samuel 12:1–15.

**How is Nathan like a town crier?**

**Nathan points to David's sin. He calls "fire!" to warn David.**

This was David's big "aha" moment.

**Recognizing that he had been listening to the wrong town crier, namely his own sinful self, and realizing that he had not been hearing and obeying the Lord God, what does David do?**

**He repents. "I have sinned," but the baby dies anyway. There is a consequence for sin.**

## **More Misleading Town Criers**

Like Eve, we've all listened to a misguided town crier. They are not always clearly marked by snakeskin. Maybe it is an acquaintance who wants to gossip. "Did you hear ... ?" Or maybe it is the newest home-remodeling show or your Instagram feed or Pinterest pictures. Aren't you longing for that new couch? Or sometimes it is our own thoughts that cry loudly, "I'll never be good enough. I'm too fat. I am lost. I'm a failure." Fill in the blank. Too often, like Eve, we listen to people or messages or words that we should ignore. Sin and Satan disguise themselves as the town crier we should listen to and obey.

The Bible points us to many town criers we will hear. Read Matthew 7:15, Mark 7:21–22, and 1 Peter 5:8.

### Who are these town criers?

**False prophets (Matthew 7:15); Our own sinful hearts (Mark 7:21–22); Satan prowling like a lion to devour us! (1 Peter 5:8).**

## God Defeated Satan from the Start

All this prowling, thieving, and deceit! It sounds like we don't stand a chance against the adversary. But wait. God has already cursed the serpent. He has already defeated Satan. Good News! Let's return to one beautiful and very important verse.

Read Genesis 3:15. According to *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2009, pages 18 and 20), this verse is often called the “protovangelium,” meaning the first promise of the Gospel because it “points to Christ and His defeat of Satan on the cross” (page 20). Dr. Luther and others have indicated that Adam and Eve heard this promise, and although it was mysterious, they heard the hope and the victory that would one day come through their offspring, through the Messiah. But did Adam and Eve really hear?

Read Deuteronomy 6:4. The Hebrew word that begins this verse is “shema” which means “listen” or “hear.” According to *The Lutheran Study Bible* (Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 2009, page 287), many Jews today still say this verse, known as the Shema, during their daily prayers. What is important to note is that hearing and listening go hand-in-hand with obeying.

Go back one more verse and read Deuteronomy 6:3.

### What are the two things God is commanding?

**Hear and do!**

### If the people hear and do what the Lord commands, what will be the result?

**Things will go well, they will multiply, and they will live in the Promised Land! They will be blessed!**

## Do We Hear and Obey?

Some well-meaning people may say, “I wish God would just talk to me clearly, like He did with Moses or Abraham or Adam!” If you are honest, maybe you have said that, too. “Why doesn't God just tell me what to do?” Guess what? God does talk to us clearly. We have His Word, the Holy Scriptures, and many of us are blessed to live in places where we can have at least one Bible. We are

blessed to live in places where we can go to church and hear God's Word preached often, but how well do we hear? Sadly, sometimes the reason we do not hear well is because we hear it so often.

**Spend a moment to reflect honestly on how you might hear but not really pay attention. Share with your group or journal your thoughts.**

**Answers will vary. Maybe it's when we have heard the reading from Matthew so many times, we tune it out, or we have said the Lord's Prayer so many times, we repeat the words and don't really pay attention to what we are praying.**

Aren't we often like Eve or King David? We make a mess and then go on living in our little garden of earthly delights, our little kingdoms. The Town Crier cries, and we cover our ears.

Read Hebrews 1:2.

**Who is the Town Crier in "these last days?" His Son. How does knowing this town crier give us hope?**

**When we know and trust the Town Crier who has given us Good News — our messes are forgiven!**

**Read the following passages and discuss the results of hearing this Town Crier: John 10:27, Luke 8:4–18, Matthew 4:19, and John 5:24.**

**We are like sheep. When we hear the Shepherd's call, we follow Him. The Shepherd's call is a beautiful voice! Jesus is a beautiful Town Crier! (John 10:27.) When we hear and follow our Shepherd, we will bear fruit! (Luke 8:4–18.) We will become "fishers of men" as we overflow with the joy of knowing our Savior. We want others to know and trust Him for eternal life, too. (Matthew 4:19.) Most importantly, when we hear and believe, we will have eternal life! (John 5:24.)**

## The Helper

Now read John 14:26.

**Who is the Helper?**

**Remember, we aren't alone in all this fishing, hearing, and following. Not at all. After all, God has sent His Holy Spirit into the world since the creation. This is God's way of working through the persons of the Trinity for us.**

Trust the Town Crier who loves you.

As you close your study, meditate on the following passages to give thanks for the Triune God, the three-in-one Town Crier who has given us eternal life. Read Psalm 51, 1 John 1:1–9, and Ephesians 2:8.

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, I confess I don't always hear and follow Your Word. Forgive me, renew me, and give me the strength to be the town crier who rings the bell and proclaims Christ. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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