

ARE YOU LISTENING?

Are you a good listener like the famous RCA Dog above (adapted from [Francis Barraud's 1898 painting](#))? Are you too listening for your "Master's voice?"

Listen to what Pr 18:13 says about listening. Here are 3 translations:

- The one who gives an answer before he listens— that is his folly and his shame. -- NET
- If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. -- ESV
- What a shame, what folly, to give advice before listening to the facts! - NLT

A few thoughts on Proverbs 18:13 and the lost art of listening -

- As Howard Hendricks says, "Marriage is sometimes the dialogue of the deaf."
- The **Harvard Business Review** says 65 percent of an executive's time should be spent listening.
- So much more so in our most intimate relationships.
- When I'm thinking about an answer while others are talking—I'm not listening.
- "He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame" (Proverbs 18:13).

A wise old owl sat in an oak,
The more he heard, the less he spoke;
The less he spoke, the more he heard;
Why aren't we all like that wise old bird?

ILLUSTRATION: To illustrate the high cost of poor listening, Diana Bonet, listening consultant and author of *The Business of Listening*, offers this example: A \$100,000 error was caused by a dispatcher who routed a fleet of drivers to deliver building materials to the wrong state. The dispatcher heard the city (Portland), but quit listening before he heard the state (Maine). The result: eight trucks, 3,000 miles away in Portland, Oregon.

I cried, and from His holy hill
He bowed a listening ear;
I called my Father, and my God,
And He subdued my fear.
—Isaac Watts

Proverbs 18:13 A Way Of Loving

In her book **Listening To Others (Hearing their Hearts)**, Joyce Huggett relates her experiences of listening so that we can respond with wisdom those who are suffering or in difficult situations. She says they often raved about all she had done for them. "On many occasions," she writes, "I had not 'done' anything. I had 'just listened.' I quickly came to the conclusion that 'just listening' was indeed an effective way of helping others."

This was the help that Job's wordy, preachy friends failed to give him. While it is true that they sat with him for 7 days in silence, "for they saw that his grief was very great" (Job 2:13), they didn't listen when Job started talking. He complained that they were "miserable comforters" (Job 16:2) and was so distraught that he even accused God of not listening. He cried out, "Oh, that I had one to hear me!" (Job 31:35).

Listening says, "What matters to you matters to me." Sometimes people do want advice. But often they just want to be listened to by someone who loves and cares about them.

What does active listening accomplish?

- Listening is a way of loving others.
- It says, "I want to understand and know you."
- It comforts the brokenhearted, builds relationships, and encourages faith in God.
- Listening is also a means of learning the facts.
- Solomon, in Proverbs 18:13, warned that it is folly to answer a matter before hearing it.

- Most of all, listening to others should reflect our attentiveness toward God and His Word. God has so much He wants to teach us and tell us.

Listening is hard work, and it takes time. It takes time to listen long enough to hear the other person's true heart, so that if we do speak, we speak with gentle wisdom. Oh, Lord, give us a loving heart and a listening ear. Amen

As you take a moment of stillness today and give Him a listening ear, you'll be better able to listen to the hurting people around you.

A caring heart, a listening ear,
A thoughtful word, a loving tear
Will help to lift the heavy load
Of hurting people on life's road.
--DJD

You can win more friends with your ears than with your mouth.
Eloquent silence often is better than eloquent speech

Sounds of Silence - The lips of the righteous nourish many. Proverbs 10:21

A fishing buddy of mine observed, "Shallow streams make the most noise," a delightful turn on the old adage, "Still waters run deep." He meant, of course, that people who make the most noise tend to have little of substance to say.

The flip side of that problem is that we don't listen well either. I'm reminded of the line in the old Simon and Garfunkel song "Sounds of Silence" about folks hearing without listening. Oh, they hear the words, but they fail to silence their own thoughts and truly listen. It would be good if we all learned to be silent and still.

There is "a time to be silent and a time to speak" (Eccl. 3:7). Good silence is a listening silence, a humble silence. It leads to right hearing, right understanding, and right speaking. "The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters," the proverb says, "but one who has insight draws them out" (Prov. 20:5). It takes a lot of hard listening to get all the way to the bottom.

And while we listen to others, we should also be listening to God and hearing what He has to say. I think of Jesus, scribbling with His finger in the dust while the Pharisees railed on the woman caught in adultery (see John 8:1-11). What was He doing? May I suggest that He could have been simply listening for His Father's voice and asking, "What shall we say to this crowd and this dear woman?" His response is still being heard around the world. By David H. Roper

Father, today may Your Spirit remind us to seek the quiet so that we may listen first to Your voice and then understand the hearts of others. Teach us when to speak and when to be quiet.

Well-timed silence can be more eloquent than words.

Learning to Listen - Renè Descarte, the sixteenth-century philosopher, said, "I think, therefore I am." Sarah, our granddaughter, says, "You are, therefore I talk." Silence has never been golden to Sarah. Some years ago I was sitting in our family room trying to read a Time magazine while, at the same time, Sarah was trying to carry on a conversation with me. To my shame I was paying little attention, responding to her comments with an occasional grunt. Finally in exasperation she crawled into my lap and got in my face. "Papa," she shouted, "are you listening to me?" "Sarah," I confessed, putting down my magazine, "I haven't been listening well. Forgive me. I'll listen to you now." My commitment to Sarah is one that I want to keep on other occasions as well. It's one of the gifts "of what remains" that I can give to others—to talk less and listen better. As Frasier Crane would say, "I'm listening"—or, to be more honest, I'm trying to learn how to listen. I want to listen well so that when I finish a conversation, others will walk away knowing there's at least one person in this care-less world who has some inkling of what they're doing, thinking, and feeling. I want to hear the hushed undertones of their hearts. I want them to know that I care. Listening, however, doesn't come easy for me. For years I was paid to talk; I was a "word monger" to borrow Augustine's apt description of a teacher. It comes as a revelation to me that I can do more with my ears now than I can with my mouth. In her book *Listening to Others*, Joyce Huggett relates her experiences of listening to suffering people. She says they often talk about all she's done for them. "On many occasions," she writes, "I have not 'done' anything. I have 'just listened.' I quickly came to the conclusion that 'just listening' was indeed an effective way of helping others." This was the help Job's wordy, would-be friends failed to give him. They were "miserable comforters," he complained. "Oh, that I had someone to hear me!" Job is not alone in his longing. All human beings want to be heard, and listening is one of the best ways in the world to love others. Listening says, "You matter to me." (Job 16:2; 31:35)

Kenneth Grahame's Badger in *The Wind in the Willows* knew how to do it.

He sat in his arm-chair at the head of the table, and nodded gravely at intervals as the animals told their story; and he did not seem surprised or shocked at anything, and he never said, "I told you so," or, "Just what I always said," or remarked that they ought to have done so-and-so, or ought not to have done something else. The Mole began to feel very friendly towards him.

Listening is a lost art these days. We don't listen well and we aren't used to being listened to. Most of our words simply disappear into the air. I have a friend who, when he goes to noisy parties and people ask how he's doing, on occasion has replied quietly, "My business went belly-up this week, the bank foreclosed on my house, my wife left me, and I have terminal cancer." "Wonderful!" one man murmured, as he pumped my friend's hand and moved on. I keep wondering if I've done something similar to others.

Some years ago I came across the following advice about listening—which I'm still in the process of learning and applying:

- When I'm thinking about an answer while others are talking—I'm not listening.
- When I give unsolicited advice—I'm not listening. (Unsolicited advice always sounds like criticism.)
- When I suggest they shouldn't feel the way they do—I'm not listening.
- When I apply a quick fix to their problem—I'm not listening.
- When I fail to acknowledge their feelings—I'm not listening.
- When I fidget, glance at my watch, and appear to be rushed—I'm not listening.
- When I fail to maintain eye contact—I'm not listening.
- When I don't ask follow-up questions—I'm not listening.
- When I top their story with a bigger, better story of my own—I'm not listening.
- When they share a difficult experience and I counter with one of my own—I'm not listening.

Listening is hard work, and most of us are unwilling to put in the time—and time is the operative word. Listening means setting aside our own timetable and tendency to hurry on to our next destination. It means settling into a relaxed, unhurried, leisurely pace. "Only in the ambiance of leisure," Eugene Peterson writes, "do persons know they are listened to with absolute seriousness, treated with dignity and importance." In leisure we regard others' interests as more important than ours (Php 2:3). In leisure we say, "You are more significant than anything I have to do right now. You are the only one who counts, the one for whom I am willing to forgo my other obligations, appointments, and meetings. I have time for you." In leisure, we listen long enough to hear the other person's true heart so that if we do speak, we speak with wisdom. A leisurely pace, a listening ear, a loving heart. May you and I, by God's grace, acquire them. (From David Roper's book [Teach Us to Number Our Days](#))

Listen to Francis Havergal's hymn that relates to Listening:

[Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,](#)

Waiting for Thy gracious word,
Longing for Thy voice that cheereth
Master, let it now be heard.
I am list'ning, Lord, for Thee;
What hast Thou to say to me?

Often through my heart is pealing
Many another voice than Thine,
Many an unwilling echo stealing
From the walls of this Thy shrine.
Let Thy longed-for accents fall;
Master, speak! and silence all.

Master, speak! though least and lowest,
Let me not unheard depart;
Master, speak! for oh, Thou knowest
All the yearning of my heart.
Knowest all its truest need;
Speak! and make me blest indeed.

Master, speak! and make me ready,
When Thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady,
Still to follow every word

I am listening, Lord, for Thee:
Master, speak, oh, speak to me!

Speak to me by name, O Master,
Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock
In the shadow of the Rock!

Pastor Ray Pritchard's advice on Listening - Psychologists talk about "active listening." That means listening all the way through to the end of a statement. Which is not what most of us do. The reason we don't hear what the other person is saying is because we are too busy thinking about what we are going to say back to them. Proverbs 18:13 says, "He who answers before listening—that is his folly and shame." Active listening means you focus on the other person, you listen to the whole statement, you let the meaning of it sink in, then you restate it in your own words.

Here are some tips for active listening:

- Lean toward the person while they are talking to you.
- Look directly at them (instead of letting your eyes wander) while they are speaking.
- Listen with your eyes and ears. Look for non-verbal cues like crossed arms and legs, looking into space, clenched fists, fingers drumming on the table, wide gestures, the forced grin. Those cues usually indicate some level of stress.
- Don't interrupt. Period. Just don't do it. Don't finish someone else's sentences either.
- Ask clarifying questions. "Could you repeat that? How long have you been feeling that way? What else about that really bothers you? How often do you feel frustrated about the way I act?"
- Don't plan your response while you are listening to them talk.
- When they are finished, say something like, "Let me see if I can put that in my own words."

You'll know you've been a successful listener when you can put their thoughts in your words to their satisfaction. After all, the bottom line on listening is not that you think you heard, but that they think you heard.

By the way, did you know that listening is good for your health? Dr. James J. Lynch, a researcher at the University of Maryland, says that "while we speak with words, we also speak with every fiber of our being." He discovered that blood pressure and heart rate rise rapidly whenever people talk. It also falls rapidly when people listen. For people with a history of hypertension, talking often raises the blood pressure into the danger zone. It happens, he says, because they tend to talk intensely and breathlessly, interrupting and speaking over other people. "They frequently fail to listen; they are on guard, defensive. So their pressure stays up." Here is his conclusion:

How can we enjoy conversation yet keep blood pressure down? By listening more, by breathing regularly while talking, by alternating between talking and paying attention to what the other person is saying. (Readers Digest, 4/86, p. 124)

A tribute was once paid to a great linguist that he could be silent in seven languages. It's a wonderful and rare gift. More of us need to use it. Communication begins with listening more.

Tuning In

When he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. —John 10:4

I don't know if this is true in every marriage, but for some reason I have a tendency to tune out everything around me and concentrate on my own thoughts. This is especially frustrating to my wife, Martie, when she is talking to me about something important. When she notices the distant look in my eyes, she often says, "Have you heard anything I've said?"

Listening is an important part of any relationship, especially in our relationship with Christ. If we belong to Him, we have the privilege of communing with Him through His Word and the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We know we are paying attention to the true Shepherd when His voice leads us to righteousness, love, grace, and all that is consistent with His character and will. As Jesus made clear when He identified Himself as the "good Shepherd" in John 10, those who diligently listen to Him become devoted followers of Him (v.4) who are becoming transformed into His likeness.

Just as listening attentively to your spouse or a friend communicates value and worth, paying close attention to the voice of Jesus is

one way to affirm His importance in your life. So, let's cast aside the distractions of life, tune in to His voice, and pray for the grace to do what He says. By Joe Stowell

I would be prayerful through each busy moment;
I would be constantly in touch with God;
I would be tuned to hear His slightest whisper;
I would have faith to keep the path Christ trod.
—Walter

Listening to Jesus is the first step to following Him.

Lord, help us to obey Your Word,
To heed Your still small voice;
And may we not be swayed by men,
But make Your will our choice.
—D. De Haan

Hampton Keathley III - Preparing to Truly Hear God's Word

- (Appendix 3 from recommended resource - [ABCs for Christian Growth--Laying the Foundation](#))

“So listen carefully” Luke 8:18-note

Introduction

We might begin by asking the question, What exactly is the Bible? Most Christians would answer that it is God's Holy Word, His special instrument of communication to man. And they would be right. Then we need to ask another question. If we believe the Bible is God's Word and special means of communication, do we take the Bible seriously? Do we have a holy reverence for Scripture and the time we assemble together to worship and study this Word from God?

Are we like the one God esteems or looks for in Isaiah 66:2? “I show special favor to the humble and contrite, who respect what I have to say.” Or as the KJV reads, “but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”

God is looking for people who have a holy reverence for the Word and His plan for learning and applying it. This means truly hearing God's voice in the Word. God is the master communicator and biblical history is not only the story of redemption but it is also the story of communication and revelation from God. He encodes and transmits, and we are to decode and receive.

Isn't it true that one of the keys to life and good relationships is effective communication? And for effective communication to occur, there must be effective listening. This is just one of the reasons we must take the study of the Bible very seriously, whether privately or corporately. This is true not only in Bible study, but in our prayer life and in all aspects of corporate worship. Why? So we might truly listen to God through the various aspects of a worship service, and especially our time in the Word.

We need to listen to God even though He has chosen to use human instruments to communicate with us. It would be well for each of us to take to heart Paul's praise to the believers in 1 Thessalonians 2:13: “And so we too constantly thank God that when you received God's message that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human message, but as it truly is, God's message, which is at work among you who believe.”

The process looks something like this:

- COMMUNICATION: Listening to God
- COMPREHENSION: Understanding what God says
- CONFIDENCE: Trusting in what God says
- CHANGE: Being transformed by what God says

Without this process of communication, there simply cannot be any real spiritual change in the life of man. Because of this, God is deeply concerned about how well we hear when we are listening.

The Importance Scripture Places on Listening to God

Have you ever noticed how often the Bible emphasizes the idea of listening? It is a concept that is repeated over and over in a variety of ways. This is obviously not without purpose.

Illustrations:

(1) The specific clause “**hear the Word of the Lord**” occurs 32 times in the NIV and 28 times in the NASB.

NASB Occurrences = 1 Ki. 22:19; 2 Ki. 20:16; 2 Chr. 18:18; Isa. 1:10; Isa. 28:14; Isa. 39:5; Isa. 66:5; Jer. 2:4; Jer. 7:2; Jer. 9:20; Jer. 19:3; Jer. 21:11; Jer. 22:2; Jer. 22:29; Jer. 29:20; Jer. 31:10; Jer. 34:4; Jer. 44:24; Jer. 44:26; Ezek. 16:35; Ezek. 20:47; Ezek. 25:3; Ezek. 34:7; Ezek. 34:9; Ezek. 36:1; Ezek. 36:4; Ezek. 37:4; Amos 7:16; Acts 13:44

(2) The words “**hear**” or “**listen O Israel**” are found six times in the NIV and the NASB. “**Listen**” is found 331 times and the majority of these passages in some way deal with listening to the Lord. “**Hear**” is found 347 times, and again many of these also have to do with hearing God’s Word.

(3) We also find a number of comments like “**incline your ear**,” (2 Ki. 19:16; Ps. 10:17; Ps. 17:6; Ps. 31:2; Ps. 45:10; Ps. 71:2; Ps. 86:1; Ps. 88:2; Ps. 102:2; Prov. 4:20; Prov. 5:1; Prov. 22:17; Isa. 37:17; Isa. 55:3; Dan. 9:18) “give ear” (Ex. 15:26; Num. 23:18; Deut. 1:45; Deut. 32:1; Jdg. 5:3; Neh. 9:30; Ps. 5:1; Ps. 17:1; Ps. 39:12; Ps. 49:1; Ps. 54:2; Ps. 55:1; Ps. 80:1; Ps. 84:8; Ps. 86:6; Ps. 140:6; Ps. 141:1; Ps. 143:1; Isa. 1:10; Isa. 8:9; Isa. 28:23; Isa. 32:9; Isa. 42:23; Isa. 51:4) or “pay attention” (Jdg. 13:13; 1 Sam. 4:20; 1 Sam. 25:25; Job 23:6; Job 24:12; Job 33:31; Prov. 7:24; Prov. 27:23; Isa. 5:12; Isa. 10:30; Isa. 49:1; Isa. 51:4; Zech. 7:11; 1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Pet. 1:19) or give attention” (Ps. 45:10; Prov. 4:1; Prov. 4:20; Prov. 5:1; Ezek. 40:4; 1 Tim. 4:13) and similar expressions used in various ways to call man, and especially God’s people, to listen intently to God.

(4) In the New Testament, the Lord warns us to consider carefully what you hear (Mark 4:24) and how you hear (Luke 8:18).

(5) The words “today, if you hear his voice,” are found three times in Hebrews and once in the Old Testament (Heb. 3:7, 15; 4:7; Ps. 95:7).

(6) Seven times, once in each of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 we read “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev. 2:7; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 2:17; Rev. 2:29; Rev. 3:6; Rev. 3:13; Rev. 3:22; Rev. 13:9, cf other uses of “let him hear” = Ezek. 3:27; Matt. 11:15; Matt. 13:9; Matt. 13:43; Mk. 4:9; Mk. 4:23; Mk. 7:16; Lk. 8:8; Lk. 14:35)

(7) In Mark 4:9 the Lord warned, “Whoever has ears to hear had better listen!” and again in Mk 4:23 He said “If anyone has ears to hear, he had better listen!”

(8) And is it not significant that one of the titles of the Son of God is the Greek term **logos** which refers to some form of communication? It means “speech, word, saying, discourse.” As the Logos, Jesus Christ is the living Word of God to man. Of Him Moses wrote in Dt 18:15, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you—from your fellow Israelites; **you must listen to Him.**” (cf Dt 11:28, Jer 17:27, Mal 2:2 “If you do not listen,” Luke 16:31-note = “But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’”)

(9) But not only is there the call to listen carefully to the Lord, there is the warning about listening to the wrong voices or influences in the world in numerous passages in both the Old and New Testaments. (cf Jer 23:16, 27:9, 14, 16, 17, Jer 29:8)

The Point is Simple. God has much to say to us and because He is the all-wise and sovereign God and because of our finite humanity as well as our fallenness, it is imperative for us to listen carefully. But, as fallen people, even as fallen people now redeemed, we are ever so prone to be distracted and drawn away with other things, even with good things.

We can too easily be like Martha, who was distracted by so many things, rather than Mary who sat at the feet of the Savior to hear His Word (Luke 10:38-42-note).

As portrayed in the parable of the sower, the soils, and the seed, we can be like the thorny ground, full of thorns and thistles which represent the cares of the world and which choke the Word and cause it to become unfruitful in our lives (Mark 4:18-19).

Why do you suppose God created man with two eyes and two ears, but with only one mouth? That in itself ought to be a visual object lesson worth a thousand words.

Listen to these words from Proverbs 20:12: **“The ear that hears and the eye that sees—the Lord has made them both.”** You know, I find it significant and interesting that **Solomon says nothing about the mouth.** The Lord made that too, yet it seems Solomon purposely didn't mention the mouth. He only mentions that which is a source or means of receiving instruction from the Lord.

The fact is we are all too quick to reveal our minds and too slow to listen. James reminds us of this very fact: “Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters! Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.” (James 1:19-[note](#)).

With this in mind, we might note Proverbs 18:2, **“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding but only in disclosing what is on his mind.”** Compare also Proverbs 22:17-19.

Incline (KJV = “bow down”!!! in the imperative = command) your ear and **hear** (command) the words of the wise, And apply your mind to my knowledge; 18 For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, That they may be ready on your lips. 19 So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have taught you today, even you.

The lesson is obvious: We are to listen so we can learn to trust the Lord. To fail to listen shows our determination to pursue life through our own resources and foolishness

The Instruction of Scripture on Listening to God

How God communicates should teach us something about how we should listen. So how does God communicate, and how should we listen? What do we need to do to be prepared to listen attentively and effectively?

GOD COMMUNICATES THROUGH THE BIBLE

The Bible is our index or guide for all the other ways God communicates. If we are going to listen to God and discern His voice in the other avenues He uses, we must be listening to His Word, the Bible. Of course, God communicates His Word in many ways: through those who teach it formally and informally as in counseling, in personal exhortation and encouragement, through song or music, through books, tapes, film, etc. However, the primary method God has chosen, and that which is foundational to all the other ways God communicates in the church age, is the local assembly when the church is assembled together for the hearing of the Word. Other things are involved, prayer, singing, praise, the Lord's table, but at the center is the proclamation of the Word (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 4:11, 13; 2 Tim. 4:1-4).

GOD COMMUNICATES THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the resident teacher whom the Father has sent through the Son to indwell every New Testament believer as God's special anointing to teach and make the truths of the Word understood and real to the hearts and minds of believers. One of His primary ministries today is that of communicating the Word—the completed canon of Scripture.

Since the cessation of the temporary, foundational, and miraculous gifts, He does not give special or new revelation, but He works through the Word which is our index for belief and practice.

To be able to listen to God, to comprehend truth, to worship the Lord, and to be transformed by the Word through faith in God, God has given us the Holy Spirit. He is God's special agent who takes the things of Christ and teaches them to us whether we receive them by personal study or through the human instruments who teach us the Word.

GOD COMMUNICATES THROUGH EVENTS

Through special times of worship (singing, praise, prayer, teaching, ordinances)

Through blessings that reveal His love and grace.

Through trials and irritations that become tools to get our attention and build character as we learn to rest in the promises and principles of Scripture.

GOD COMMUNICATES THROUGH PEOPLE

The Bible is full of illustrations of how God uses people to communicate His love, mercy, and grace. This comes in many forms: sometimes in the form of encouragement, sometimes in the form of godly example, and sometimes even in the form of rebuke. Note these passages to illustrate the point: 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Proverbs 27:5-6, 17; John 13:34-45; Malachi 3:16; Ephesians 5:19-20; 1 Timothy 5:1-2; Ephesians 6:4; Galatians 6:1-3; 1 Peter 3:1-2, 7).

Our primary focus in this short study is on how God communicates to us through the Word and the Holy Spirit especially in relation to our times of worship together.

What does this mean in terms of how we listen to God? As already pointed out, listening to God must involve God's Word and the Holy Spirit working together in the mind and heart of the believer. Even when God uses people and circumstances, we must always consider what God is saying to us in the light of His infallible Word.

God never contradicts His Word. We must learn to examine everything in the light of the Holy Scripture. Further, this means we need to recognize that since the Spirit communicates to us through the Word of God, we need to expose ourselves to the Word privately and corporately as often as we can.

But listening to God also means something else. Listening to God—really hearing what He is seeking to say—demands **spiritual preparation and active participation** on the part of the listener. In order to listen to God, one must be prepared to listen. Listening to the Lord is a spiritual matter.

But any kind of learning involves preparation and active participation or concentration. Because of this, God is very concerned about **how** we listen and worship. He is concerned about our **mental attitudes** and our **spiritual state** when we worship corporately or sit down privately with the Bible.

The problem is that we can simply go through the motions of religious activity and deceive ourselves as James warns us in James 1. We can play church and do a kind of 'nod to God' routine putting in our appearance physically while we are in essence absent spiritually. The result is we don't even come close to truly hearing the voice of God because we have removed our hearts from Him. We have become passive listeners because we aren't really prepared physically, mentally, and spiritually to hear the Word of the Lord.

Church attendance is often simply a part of our plan to pursue life on our own terms. We attend church not to meet with God or listen in order to know, love, and serve Him, but to feel good, to have an experience, to hear beautiful music, to hear an eloquent speaker, to see people or even to be seen by people. We attend church to soothe our consciences and maybe earn a little of God's favor. In this case, our religious activity is a kind of insurance policy—a protection we think. But we are dead wrong if we think this way because such reasons do not line up with what God says to us in His Word (read carefully Ecc. 5:1-2; Isa. 29:1,13; Eze. 33:30-32).

So, the key question is, what can we do to prepare our hearts so we are in a position where we can hear what the Lord is seeking to communicate to us, i.e., understand the message and respond with faith and obedience whether the message comes through a hymn, or a testimony, or through the teaching of the Word?

What Is Needed to Effectively Listen to God

WE NEED SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

As has already been stated, God's communication through the Word always involves the teaching/convicting ministry of God the Holy Spirit. This is evident in a number of passages but we will illustrate the point from Ephesians 3:16-19 and 1 Corinthians 2:9-3:3.

That God communicates the Word through the ministry of the Spirit means we must be properly adjusted to or in right relationship to this divine teacher who indwells us. This is a relationship where, believing that He is present, we consciously depend on Him for insight to God's Word (understanding and personal application).

But as we can see from 1 Corinthians 3, carnal believers, those who are not dealing with sin in their lives, cannot and will not effectively listen or hear God's message. Carnal believers are apathetic and simply cannot understand and respond to the things of God while in that condition.

Why is that? Because known sin in the life, things like wrong attitudes (envy, jealousy, resentment, pride, unbelief, self-centeredness), self-protective ways of living, indifference or apathy to God, preoccupation with other things, and other forms of sin grieve the Spirit's person (Eph. 4:30) and undoubtedly stifle or quench much of His ministry like teaching and making the things of Christ real (1 Thess. 5:19). His ministry is changed from leading and teaching the believer to that of convicting him of his condition. The Lord Jesus put it this way in Mark 4:19, "but worldly cares, the seductiveness of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it produces nothing."

Martha gives us a classic illustration of this. Though in the very presence of the Lord Jesus, Martha (in contrast to Mary) had no ears to hear what the Savior was saying because she was distracted and drawn away by other concerns (Luke 10:38-41).

Another illustration can be seen in the disciples when the Lord fed the five thousand (Mark 6:30-52). They had failed to truly listen to what the Lord was teaching them through the events of the day because they too were occupied with other things, like with who was the greatest. The result is seen in the Lord's rebuke in verse 52, "because they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened."

AN OPEN HEART

There needs to be a heart open to personal soul-searching examination for the purpose of seeing our motives, our sources of trust or the things we depend on for our security, i.e., the condition of our lives as they really are. This needs to be done prior to personal study or a worship service in order to prepare our hearts for hearing God. And then it needs to be maintained as other things (or thoughts) distract or hinder our listening while studying or praying, or during a worship service (Ps. 119:18; 139:23-24; 1 Cor. 11:28f).

Often this is simply not done. People arrive at church harried and upset because of something that happened at home or on the way to church. People get caught up chatting with friends and then sit down and never give any thought to their need to secure a spiritual focus and to be sure they are controlled by the Spirit.

The purpose for examination and self-revelation is honest to God confession in a spirit of repentance. While people can't see our hearts, God can and He rejects worship that is not in spirit and truth, where the heart is kept from Him (Isa. 29:13).

Regarding confession, we are talking about a confession which seeks to go to the root causes of sin in our lives, especially our stubborn determination to run our own lives and live by our own devices for peace, security, and significance (Jer. 2:13; 17:5; Ps. 66:18; Pro. 28:13-14; 1 John 1:9; Ps. 51:5f; Jam. 4:6-10).

Both James 1:19-25 and 1 Peter 2:1-2 teach us that before there can be a proper response to the Word that leads to true spiritual deliverance through an active faith, a response where we are quick to listen, receive, and hunger as a newborn babe for the pure milk of the Word, we must honestly deal with sin. In James 1:23, "receiving the word implanted" is dependent on "putting aside all filthiness ...". In 1 Peter 2:2, the command to "And yearn like newborn infants for pure, spiritual milk" is dependent on "get(ting) rid of all evil and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander."

How do we deal with sin? By personal examination and honest confession of sin. Then we will be free to listen to God's Word and depend on the Holy Spirit to give deliverance over sin.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

In our TV generation we have become passive listeners. I think the term is "couch potatoes." We have become mentally lazy. We have forgotten how to think and stay actively involved in the listening process. Active listening means concentrating, searching, probing, questioning, thinking, interacting, responding and applying.

God doesn't want pious, passive spectators. He wants actively involved listeners. We aren't receivers who turn ourselves on, tune ourselves in, and relax. Active involved listening is spoken of frequently in Scripture.²⁴³

Note the following passage:

James 1:22-27 But be sure you live out the message and do not merely listen to it and so deceive yourselves. 23 For if someone merely listens to the message and does not live it out, he is like someone who gazes at his own face in a mirror. 24 For he gazes at himself and then goes out and immediately forgets what sort of person he was. 25 But the one who peers into the perfect law of liberty and fixes his attention there, and does not become a forgetful listener but one who lives it out—he will be blessed in what he does. 26 If someone thinks he is religious yet does not bridle his tongue, and so deceives his heart, his religion is futile. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their misfortune and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Having challenged us to deal with any sin so we can truly receive (hear) the Word, James then warns us about the difference between superficial and substantial listening. He is warning us against unprepared, passive, and uninvolved listening. James is teaching us we need the kind of active listening that is diligent to understand and respond to God's Word in order that its truth touch the heart so that it begins to bring change—not by our own strength, but by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God through faith. Compare 1 Corinthians 2:15.

The words "peers into" in James 1:25 represent a different word for "looking" than the one used previously in this section (James 1:23-24). This is the Greek word *parakupto* which refers to a very intent and concentrated look. Literally *parakupto* means "to stoop down in order to have a close look." It is used in John 20:5 and 11 of the investigation of the empty tomb by the disciples, and in 1

Peter 1:12 of the angels intense interest and study of the person and work of the Savior. So parakupto suggests keen interest, close attention, and active investigation.

In 1 Timothy 4 Paul told Timothy to “take pains” and “be absorbed” in these things, a reference to the previous commands regarding his ministry in teaching, being an example of Christlike character, and using his gift (1 Ti 4:11-14). One simply cannot “take pains” and “be absorbed” and remain a passive listener. “Take pains” is the Greek word [meletao](#) which means “cultivate, think meditate, attend to carefully.” “Be absorbed” is literally, “in these be,” and connotes the idea of “be totally enveloped, absorbed,” “give yourself totally to them.”

But note the next verse: “Be conscientious about how you live...” Bible study or hearing the Word is to be aimed at personal application for changed living from the inside out.

Passive, uninvolved listening to God is inadequate and judged by God as futile religiosity. Believers are always to be on the alert, probing for meaning and application. Lethargic, half-hearted listening just doesn’t cut it with God nor can it result in spiritual deliverance. In practical terms what does this entail?

What does this mean in terms of my listening to God? When I read and study the Word, I must put everything else aside and concentrate on what He is saying to me. I must give Him my undivided attention. I should do this on a regular basis, for that is the only way I can develop my listening skills. I should do this in a place where I have minimal distractions. I should read and meditate out loud and take notes and ask questions, for these are the kinds of things that make me an active participant.

I should observe carefully to whom God is speaking, what He is saying and why He says it. I should interpret accurately what God means I should apply these truths personally and practically in my own life.²⁴⁴

Finally, to round out our preparation, there are two more things we need so we can listen carefully.

BIBLICAL PARTICIPATION

The nobility of the Bereans refers to the fact that the Berean Jews (in contrast to Jews in Thessalonica) were teachable and open, though not gullible. They listened attentively as active participants, but they tested Paul’s teaching against the Scriptures as their index for truth—always a noble and biblical attitude. Their authority for what was truth was the Word. They sought to set aside or block out their prejudice so God’s Word could speak for itself. The result was many came to trust in the Savior.

When we attend church, God wants us to be like the Bereans—good listeners and teachable—and also biblically active participants who search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so.

Mark 7:7-13 stresses the ever present problem of prejudice and background whether religious or secular which we all bring to church and to our background. This passage shows how our background, tradition, experiences, prejudices, etc., can nullify the power and truth of the Word in our lives.

Second Timothy 3:15 teaches again the value of active participation in the words “be diligent” or “study” (KJV). But to that it adds the importance of applying sound principles of Bible study so we are truly listening to God and not the ideas of man that are so often based on man’s tradition or human experience, including our own (cf. 2 Pet. 1:17-21). We need to be precise in our hermeneutics so we truly hear what God is saying.

Why did the apostle say this? Because Timothy was faced with false teachers who were neither diligent nor accurately handling the Word. That leads to hearing man’s voice and not God’s. When we apply poor methods of Bible study and poor methods of listening, we can end up hearing man’s voice rather than God’s. There is simply no place in God’s plan for lethargic, passive listening, or listening carelessly.

PHYSICAL PREPARATION

In Luke 22:7-14, we find that the Lord sent Peter and John to make preparations for the Passover meal that they might observe it according to its meaning and significance. The word “prepare” is used three times in these verses (vss. 9, 12, 13). The Lord saw to it that everything needed was properly prepared so He could observe the Passover with His disciples.

Truly listening to God involves physical as well as spiritual preparation. Certainly without spiritual preparation, the best physical preparation in the world accomplishes little. But we often fail to see the need to be physically prepared to listen to God. Physical preparation should be seen as a part of the spiritual preparation needed to listen to God.

- Noise, people moving around, poor lighting, and other physical conditions can be distracters which hinder our ability to concentrate.
- Being physically tired from failing to get enough sleep the night before can create a major hindrance to good listening.

- Those who have a part in the worship service as song leader, pianist, organist, ushers, the speaker, etc., can call attention to themselves through a lack of preparation and thus hinder people from listening to God.
- Preparation needs to start at home on Saturday night by getting to bed early, getting the kids clothes ready, and by even planning breakfast. For many families, getting to church becomes a frantic, harried experience with mom and dad looking for socks and shoes, and trying to feed the family. In such circumstances, who is prepared to listen?
- Preparation can include something as simple as seeing to it that the children go to the bathroom before the service.

The bottom line is that listening to God is no small issue. If we are not prepared to listen so we can respond with our hearts, let's face it, we are simply playing church and we are withholding our hearts from the Lord. Our religious activities then become an exercise in futility and deception (James 1:22).

243 Grant Howard, *The Trauma of Transparency*, Multnomah Press, Portland, 1979, p. 91.

244 Howard, p. 92.

- **Hampton Keathley III - I highly recommend his excellent book which is available free of charge at Bible.org, the world's largest Christian website - [ABCs for Christian Growth--Laying the Foundation](#)**

What a Savior! how He loves,
 Ev'ry hour His mercy proves;
 Listen, for He speaks to thee:
 "Take thy cross, and follow Me!"

Listen To His Promptings Acts 16:6-10

After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. —Acts 16:7

On Friday, my day of rest as a pastor, the Holy Spirit prompted me to call a young single mother in our faith community to see if her car had been repaired. I had some reservations about making the call, but I obeyed. Little did I know that my obedience would help save her life. She said later: "Friday at work I was planning on taking my life; but in a time of need, I believe God was there for me. He had Pastor Williams call me, and just by listening to his voice, I knew that God loved me."

The apostle Paul must have had reservations when the Holy Spirit prompted him and his team not to go into the provinces of Asia and Bithynia. Instead, they felt the Spirit's call to go into Macedonia to preach the good news. In each situation, they obeyed the Spirit's promptings. As a result, Paul and his team were instrumental in giving birth to a new faith community in Philippi (Acts 16:11-15). As believers in Christ who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:22), our desire should be to please Him. May we not grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) by ignoring His gentle promptings. When we obey Him, we might be used by God to lead someone to Christ, to disciple new believers—or even to help save somebody's life. By Marvin Williams

Holy Spirit, we would hear
 Your inner promptings, soft and clear;
 And help us know Your still, small voice
 So we may make God's will our choice.
 —D. De Haan

Make the right choice: Obey the Spirit's voice

She's Worth Listening To Ephesians 5:22-33

We don't normally think of writer C. S. Lewis as a humorist, but he made me smile with this line: "Husbands were made to be talked to. It helps them concentrate their minds on what they're reading."

But what's funny in an obviously tongue-in-cheek remark is not funny in real life. That's why those of us who are husbands need to realize how rude and insensitive we are when we show more interest in the newspaper than we do our own spouses. If we are guilty of reading or watching TV when we should be zeroing in on what our best friend and lifelong companion is saying, we need listening lessons, beginning with these suggestions:

- Look at your wife when she talks to you.
- Respond when she makes a statement.
- Participate eagerly in conversations with her.

- Show by your attitude that your other interests can wait.

Actually, these basic listening principles apply to all relationships. It's one of the best ways we can demonstrate that we care about the welfare of others. If a husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church-- and that's what he's commanded to do in Ephesians 5:25--he will spend time focusing on what she has to say. It will show her she's worth listening to. --J D Branon

Thinking It Through - What distracts you from listening to your spouse? When could you take time to listen today?

A big part of loving is listening.

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! —2 Corinthians 9:15

Having trouble selecting that perfect gift for someone? A friend shared with me a few suggestions:

- The gift of listening. No interrupting, no planning your response. Just listening.
- The gift of affection. Being generous with appropriate hugs, kisses, and pats on the back.
- The gift of laughter. Sharing funny stories and jokes. Your gift will say, "I love to laugh with you."
- The gift of a written note. Expressing in a brief, handwritten note your appreciation or affection.
- The gift of a compliment. Sincerely saying, "You look great today" or "You are special" can bring a smile.

(from Cindy Hess Kasper)

"I Did Not Know It" Genesis 28:10-16

As Jacob did in Genesis 28, I like to remind myself each morning when I awaken that God is here, "in this place," present with me (v.16). As I spend time with Him each morning, reading His Word and responding in prayer, it reinforces my sense of His presence—that He is near. Although we do not see Him, Peter reminds us that we can love Him and rejoice in His love for us with "inexpressible," glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8).

We take the Lord's presence with us all through the day, blending work and play with prayer. He is our teacher, our philosopher, our companion—our gentle, kind, and very best friend.

God is with us wherever we go. He is in the commonplace, whether we know it or not. "Surely the Lord is in this place," Jacob said of a most unlikely spot, "and I did not know it" (Gen. 28:16). We may not realize He is close by. We may feel lonely and sad. Our day may seem bleak and dreary without a visible ray of hope—yet He is present.

Amid all the clamor and din of this visible and audible world, listen carefully for God's quiet voice. Listen to Him in the Bible. Talk to Him frequently in prayer. Look for Him in your circumstances. Seek Him. He is with you wherever you go!

Oh, how oft I wake and find
I have been forgetting Thee!
I am never from Thy mind;
Thou it is that wakest me.
—MacDonald

Our greatest privilege is to enjoy God's presence.

Bill Hybels - God Wants to Speak to You - How does God speak to us? One way is through his Word. As we read it and meditate on it, he applies it to our lives. A familiar verse jumps off the page at us just when we need it. It seems to take on new meaning to fit our circumstances. The verse has not changed; it has always been part of God's Word. But the Holy Spirit gives it to us when it will help us the most. **Another** way God speaks to us is through people. "I provide for you," he says, as a neighbor shows up with a casserole we had no time to cook or money to buy. "I care for you," he says, through the arms of a friend who understands our grief and seeks to console us. "I guide you," he says, through a counselor who points us to the path God has chosen for us. A **third** way God speaks to us is through direct leadings of the Holy Spirit. This third Person of the Godhead is ready, willing and able to communicate with us. According to Scripture, He leads, rebukes, affirms, comforts and assures Christ's followers. A lot of Christians, however, don't expect God to speak to them. By their actions you would expect that Jesus packed up and went back to heaven forty days after his resurrection and hasn't been heard from since. Though this attitude is common, it does not fit the picture of God

painted throughout Scripture....It makes no sense to believe that God lost his voice at the end of the first century. If the essence of Christianity is a personal relationship between the almighty God and individual human beings, it stands to reason that God still speaks to believers today. You can't build a relationship on one-way speeches. You need frequent, sustained, intimate contact between two persons, both of whom speak and both of whom listen. A two-way conversation between a mortal human being and the infinite God would certainly be supernatural—but what's so surprising about that? The normal Christian life has a supernatural dimension. As the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:7, "We live by faith, not by sight." Listening to God speak to us through his Holy Spirit is not only normal; it is essential. Paul wrote, "You... are controlled—by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9). He told believers to "live by the Spirit," to be "led by the Spirit," to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5). Once a person turns his or her life over to Jesus Christ, it is no longer business as usual. Life no longer consists only of that which can be seen or smelled or felt or figured out by human logic. It includes walking by faith, and that means opening oneself to the miraculous ministry of the Holy Spirit.

And yet some of us are reluctant to open ourselves to God's leadings We may know Christians who claim to be doing this, but their approach makes us uncomfortable. They have performed a kind of intellectual lobotomy on themselves, and they expect the Holy Spirit to choose their socks in the morning and their restaurant for dinner. They claim to experience a leading an hour, a vision a day, a miracle a week. I'm concerned that these people are so heavenly minded that they are of little earthly use. What they try to pawn off as divine leading is really a very human form of irresponsibility. I once met such a heavenly minded pastor. He was shocked to learn how much time I spend preparing each message I give. Ordinarily I put in from ten to twenty hours reading, studying, praying and writing out three drafts of each sermon. This pastor exclaimed, "You go to all that trouble? I just walk into my pulpit and expect a miracle." I was tempted to ask him if his congregation saw his sermons as miracles. Don't get me wrong. As I explained in the chapter on mountain-moving prayer, I've seen God work life-changing miracles in the pulpit—even my pulpit! But I think it's wrong for you to put your hands in your pockets and your brains in a drawer, jump off the pinnacle and expect God to catch you because you're already on the way down. **However, some people go to the other extreme when it comes to listening for God's voice. In reaction to obvious misinterpretations and abuses of the Holy Spirit's ministry, many Christians run in the opposite direction and become anti-supernaturalists.** To these modern rationalists, the Holy Spirit's promptings seem to go against human nature and conventional thought patterns. Accustomed to walking by sight, steering their own ships and making unilateral decisions, they are squeamish about letting the Holy Spirit begin His supernatural ministry in their lives. They wish the package were a little neater. They would like His ministry to be quantified and described. The Holy Spirit seems elusive and mysterious, and that unnerves them. So when they sense a leading that might be from the Holy Spirit, they resist it. They analyze it and conclude, "It isn't logical; therefore, I won't pay attention to it." They question the Spirit's guidings, rebukes and attempts to comfort. Other people want to obey the Holy Spirit, but they're just not sure how they'd know when he was really speaking. Are they hearing their own desires or God's still, small voice? Not wanting to go off the deep end, they avoid the water altogether. All these reactions are understandable. In fact, I've often had them myself. But the results of automatically resisting supernatural leadings are usually unfortunate. People who cut themselves off from God's direction find their religious experience becoming cerebral, predictable, boring and—often—past tense.....

Hearing the Holy Spirit's leadings is vitally important to a healthy Christian life. The Spirit nudges us to accept God's offer of salvation, assures us that we are members of God's eternal family, encourages us to grow and guides us along the path God has chosen for us. But often when the Spirit tries to get through to us, he gets a busy signal. What changes do we need to make so that when God speaks to us through his Spirit, we will be able to hear Him?

The Discipline of Stillness

People who are really interested in hearing from God must pay a price: they must discipline themselves to be still before God. This is not an easy task, but it is essential. Psalm 46:10 says, "**Be still, and know that I am God.**" Jesus developed the discipline of stillness before God in spite of his extremely busy life. Crowds followed him wherever he went. Daily he preached and taught and healed. It was hard for him to find time alone to pray, and he had to get up long before dawn to do it. "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed" (Mark 1:35). Times of stillness and solitude were important to Jesus. In those times of seclusion, he not only poured out his heart to the Father, he earnestly listened to him as well. He needed his Father's comfort, direction, affirmation and assurance. Because of the continual leadings he received from the Father, there was purpose to his steps. The people around him saw his confidence and certainty, and they were amazed "because he taught them as one who had authority" (Mark 1:22). If Jesus were the only person mentioned in Scripture who took time to listen to the Lord, we would have a strong example to follow. But he is not alone. King David, author of many of the psalms, "went in and sat before the LORD." The prophet Isaiah, before taking on an immensely difficult commission from God, listened to God in his temple (Isaiah 6). The apostle Peter "went up on the roof to pray" at lunch time, and God talked to him there (Acts 10:9-20). Scripture is full of accounts of people who took time to hear what God had to say to them.

Strength from Solitude

God's power is available to us when we come to him in solitude, when we learn how to focus and center our hearts and be quiet

before him. When we learn the discipline of stillness before God, we find that his leadings come through. That is why I have made the commitment to spend from half an hour to an hour every single morning in a secluded place with the Lord. I don't do this to earn merit badges from God. I do it because I grew very tired of leading an unexamined life. I used to try to pray and receive God's leadings on the run. But it became obvious to me that the pace of my life outstripped my capacity to analyze it. It exhausted me to be constantly doing and rarely reflecting on what I did. At the end of a day I would wonder if my work had any meaning at all. **So I developed my own disciplined approach to stillness before God.** It is the only spiritual discipline I have ever really stuck with, and I am not tempted to abandon it because it has made my life so much richer.

After I reflect on the previous day and write out my prayers, my spirit is quiet and receptive. That is when I write an L for listen on a piece of paper and circle it. Then I sit quietly and simply say, "Now, Lord, I invite you to speak to me by your Holy Spirit." The moments with God that follow are the ones that really matter. This is where authentic Christianity comes from. Not from prayers on the run, not at Christian concerts or conferences, not when I'm flying around here and there, even if I'm engaged in ministry. No one can become an authentic Christian on a steady diet of activity. Power comes out of stillness; strength comes out of solitude. Decisions that change the entire course of your life come out of the holy of holies, your times of stillness before God. I like my way of quieting my mind and preparing myself to hear God speak; it works well for me. But I know it won't work for everyone. Some people can't stand writing anything, let alone journals and prayers. They may prefer to talk quietly to God. Some are good at meditating without writing or saying a word. Some "come before him with joyful songs" (Psalm 100:2). The important thing is not to follow a particular method but to find a way that works for you. Custom-design an approach that will still your racing mind and body, soften your heart and enable you to hear God's still, small voice. Then, when you are centered and focused on God, invite him to speak to you.

Questions for God

I have several questions I regularly ask God. What's the next step in developing my character? I almost always hear from God when I ask that question, because there's always an edge he is trying to knock off my life. What's the next step in my family—with Lynne and the kids? I get a lot of direction from God in this area too. My wife is unbelievably supportive of me, and God says, "You'd better return that. Try to serve her as enthusiastically as she serves you. What's the next step in my ministry? I have no idea how people in ministry survive without listening to God. Most of my creative ideas for messages and programs and new directions come from my morning time with him. Depending on your situation, you might ask:

- "What's the next step in my vocation?"
- "What direction should my dating relationship go?"
- "What should I do for my children?"
- "How should I further my education?"
- "How should I plan my giving?"

Whatever you ask the Lord, you will be amazed at the way he leads. Once you are quiet and tender before him, waiting to hear him speak, he will bring a verse to mind or will guide you through your thoughts and feelings. As you build the discipline of stillness into your life, you will find these quiet moments in God's presence becoming incredibly precious to you.

Answers from God

Suppose that right after reading this chapter you put down the book and quiet your spirit before God. You wait until you are focused on him, and then you say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:9). In the solitude and stillness, what might God say to you? To some seekers God might say, "You've been reading Christian books and going to Christian meetings long enough. Now it's time you became a Christian. Come to me, repent of your sin and enter into a faith-oriented relationship "with me." To those who have already made that commitment he might say, "Return to me. You've been stumbling and bumbling around. It's been a long, dry summer. Let's get reacquainted! Let's have fellowship again!" To people facing trials he might offer words of comfort: "I'm right here. I know your name, and I know your pain. I'm going to give you strength, so trust me." To others, faithful through hardships, he might say, "I am so pleased with you! I'm glad you are being faithful even though life is difficult for you. Keep it up!" And to still others, this message might come: "Follow my leading and take a risk. Try this new direction. Face this new challenge. Walk with me toward new horizons." The message will be suited to the person's individual need, but the central truth is certain: we serve a God who has spoken in history, who still speaks today and who wants to speak to us.

When God Is Silent

But what if no message comes through? Sometimes when I wait quietly for God to speak, I sense total silence from heaven. It's as if no one's home. I have felt very silly in those times. Did I ask the wrong question? Was I foolish to expect answers? Was God really listening? After thinking about it, I've concluded that I don't need to feel upset if sometimes God chooses to remain silent. He's a living Being, not an answering machine, and he speaks when he has something to say. Sometimes I ask my wife, "Is there anything you want to tell me that we haven't had time to sit down and talk about?" My question gives Lynne the opportunity to tell me anything she wants, but it doesn't force her to talk. Sometimes she says, "No, nothing in particular." And that's fine. More often than not,

though, she does have a message for me—and so does God, when I invite him to speak.

Tuned In to God's Voice

I know that God continues to speak to his people today, and I am convinced that there are two reasons we don't hear his voice more often. The most obvious reason is that we don't listen for it. We don't schedule times of stillness that make communication possible. Be honest with yourself. When do you turn off the TV, the radio, the CD player and listen to nothing louder than the refrigerator's hum? When do you turn off the sound track of your mind and come away from the numbers, machines, words, schemes or whatever it is that occupies your waking thoughts? When do you make yourself quiet and available to God? When do you formally invite him to speak to you? Do you build the discipline of solitude right into your schedule? Try it! Like any new practice, it will feel awkward at first. Gradually it will become more natural, and eventually you will feel off balance if you don't make time for solitude every day. In addition to carving out blocks of time to listen to God, do you keep your ears tuned to him each day? A friend of mine has a company car equipped with an AM-FM radio, a CD player, a phone and a mobile communication unit which he monitors at a very low decibel level when he's in the car. Often we've been riding together, talking and listening to music, when all of a sudden he'll reach down, pick up the microphone and say, "I'm here, what's up?" With all the other noise in the car, I never hear the mobile unit's signal. But he has tuned his ear to it. He is able to carry on a conversation and listen to music without ever losing his awareness that a call may come over that unit. **It is possible to develop a similar sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's still, small voice** It is possible to be aware throughout the day, even while going about your daily work, of God's gentle promptings. That's what it means to "live by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16).

Moment by Moment

These on-the-spot promptings are not a substitute for unhurried quiet time with God. In fact, they tend to come to me only when I regularly make time for stillness and solitude. But when they come, they're wonderful. You're driving to a sales call, and almost out of nowhere you sense God by his Holy Spirit saying, "Aren't you glad you're my child? Aren't you glad you have a home in heaven? Aren't you glad I'm with you right now? Don't you feel safe and secure in my presence?" When you process a communication like that, the whole world seems to evaporate; your car becomes a sanctuary, and it's just you and the Lord enjoying each other. How people live without moments like that, I don't know.

Listen and Obey

The other reason we may not hear God's voice is that we don't plan to do anything about it. God speaks, we listen and nod and say, "How interesting!" But if we don't follow up on the Holy Spirit's leadings, he may see no reason to continue speaking. The next chapter is all about discerning God's voice and choosing to obey. People who make opportunities for the Holy Spirit to speak to them know that the Christian life is a continual adventure. It is full of surprises, thrills, challenges and mysteries. If you open your mind and heart to God's leadings, you will be amazed at what he will do. He is attempting to communicate with you more often than you know. You have no idea how much richer and fuller, how much more exciting and more effective your life will be once you make the decision to be still, to be aware and to obey God's leadings.

- (From Bill Hybels' book which I highly recommend - [Too Busy Not to Pray: Slowing Down to Be with God](#)).

Mandy Just Listened

They sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him. --Job 2:13

Marty had gotten an unexpected "thank you" for service to the company—a terse note that concluded, "Your position has been terminated." After Marty had spent months fruitlessly searching for a job, his frustration finally got to him. Angrily, he screamed at God, "Why did You do this to me? Don't You care?" He continued his tirade until he noticed his dog Mandy cowering by a chair. Composing himself, he said, "Come here, pup. You should be glad you're a dog. At least you can't get fired from being man's best friend." As he poured out his woes and talked to Mandy, his bitterness disappeared.

David Biebel, the author who told the story, wrote: "You might think the relief came from all the things he said to God, and certainly that was part of it. But Mandy played a big part too. . . . [She] didn't argue or offer solutions or advice. She just listened, wagging her tail and licking her master's hand."

When Job's three friends saw his misery, they just sat with him, wept, and said nothing for 7 days. But then they abandoned the wisdom of their silence. Sometimes we need to just "weep with those who weep" (Ro. 12:15). Our listening ear may be what they need, so they can hear what God is saying to them. - Dennis J. De Haan

When our friends encounter suffering,
We can help them if we're near;
Some may need a word of comfort,

Others just a listening ear.

-Sper

Listening may be the most important thing you do today.

ARE YOU LISTENING? - "Speak, for Your servant hears."-- 1 Samuel 3:10

One of the happiest memories of my childhood is that of my mother reading Bible stories to me at bedtime. Many of them made a great impression on me, especially the incident in the life of Samuel described in 1 Samuel 3. I can still hear my mother reciting the young boy's response to the call of God: "Speak, for Your servant hears" (1 Sa 3:10).

We need to be like Samuel, willing to pause in the midst of life's turmoil to hear the voice of the Lord. And we have this opportunity if we prayerfully read and study the Bible regularly. You see, God's Spirit communicates to us through the Word.

Thomas a' Kempis (1379-1471) summed it up well when he wrote:

"Blessed indeed are those ears which listen not for the voice sounding without, but for the truth teaching inwardly. Blessed are the eyes that shut to outward things but intent on things inward. Blessed are they who are glad to have time to spare for God, and who shake off all worldly hindrances. Consider these things, O my soul, and hear what the Lord your God speaks."

How long has it been since you've asked the Lord to make your heart receptive to His Word? He wants to hear you say, "Speak, Lord, I'm listening." -- R W De Haan

Speak, Lord, in the stillness,
While I wait on Thee;
Hushed my heart to listen
In expectancy.

God speaks to those who take time to listen.

Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood the importance of listening to one another. He wrote,

"The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love for God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brothers is learning to listen to them. It is [because of] God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear. So it is his work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him." (Life Together)

Listening was a key element in solving a problem between two ethnic groups in the infant church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7). One group thought that its widows were being discriminated against in the distribution of food. So the apostles wisely listened to their complaint, worked out an acceptable solution, and settled the dispute. Listening to others is important today because churches are becoming increasingly diverse. We come from broad ethnic and racial backgrounds and are at different levels of maturity. But if we show our love by listening, our common faith in Christ can bind us together. When we are driven to express our views or vent our feelings, we fail to hear what others are trying to say. If, on the other hand, we follow Paul's admonition and esteem others better than our-selves (Philippians 2:3), we will improve our listening skills and reach a much higher level of love for one another.—D C Egner

Lord, when I am more interested in being heard than in hearing, I am in danger of causing division and strife in Your family and in mine. May I learn to hear what others are feeling as well as what they are saying. And may I respond in love to their true need not just their spoken one.

Jim Wilson - A Listening Heart Acts 16:14-15-note

In these two verses, Dr. Luke, the author of Acts, summarizes a life changing event in three sentences. In Acts 16:14, Lydia, a business woman from Thyatira, responded to the Gospel, in verse 15, she and her family were baptized and she initiated Christian fellowship with Paul and his companions. All cut and dry, right? Not so fast. There are a couple of questions I have as I read the text.

First, is it possible to worship God without knowing Him? Lydia, was known for two things, what she did at work (she sold expensive purple fabric) and what she did on the Sabbath day (she worshiped God). Yet, it is clear from the text that she hadn't responded to the gospel yet. How can that be? Why would she want to worship if she didn't know Him?

A good friend of mine recently told me about an incident that happened to him that explains why a person can worship, and yet still not know God. It all began before the plane took off. Roger Williams III was sitting in the window seat and was looking forward to thumbing through a magazine on a short flight from Sacramento to attend a National Youth Ministry Conference in San Diego, California. He'd fastened his seat belt, made sure his chair was in the full upright position, his tray table was locked and that his luggage was properly stowed when two well-dressed Ally McBeal look-a-likes sat down next to him.

Their conversation competed for attention with his magazine. They talked about the club scene-what they enjoyed drinking, who they were "dating," their intimate relationships with men, both single and married. Then it turned into a gripe session.

"Why do guys have such a hard time committing?" One asked. "And why don't they ever leave their wives like they promise to?" Another complained.

They talked about work for a while, and about the time Williams was tuning out, one of them said, "But you know, if it wasn't for church, my life would really be hell." By now, Williams was only pretending to read his magazine, they had his full attention. "Wow, you go to church too. I know exactly how you feel. If it wasn't for church, I don't know where I'd be." "Yeah, I know what you mean," the other lady said, "if I miss more than two weeks of church everything in my life goes nuts."

The plane started its descent into San Diego and everything got quiet, and Williams sat still—stunned by what he'd just heard. He concluded that worship, to these ladies, was just a "religious fix."

It is possible you know, to build up an immunity to the Gospel. Like a vaccine or inoculation, some people get just enough religion to insure that they go to hell.

But it is also true that we learn to have faith in the company of believers. Lydia was where she needed to be, in the company of those who worshiped God. In that environment, she listened to Paul, and God spoke to her.

The second question I want to explore, is this: is it possible to worship God without really listening? Acts 16:14, states she "was listening."

Listening I fear it is a lost art. The April 2000 Reader's Digest, included an article entitled "Lend an ear" by Roberta Israeloff. This article hit me right between the eyes and convicted me about some of my poor listening habits. I've read the article a half a dozen times by now-I just can't stop thinking about it, specifically I can't stop processing the introduction.

Roberta begins the article by sharing a recent phone conversation she had with her mother-in-law. Her in-laws were returning to New York after wintering in Florida when they ran into one car problem after another. Three times the car broke down, once on a bridge in the middle of rush hour. Right as Roberta was going to tell her own worst "break down" story, her mother-in-law had to hang up because someone was at her door, but before she said goodbye she said this to her daughter-in-law. "Thank you for listening, but thank you most of all for not telling me your worst car story." (p. 71).

How many times has that happened to you? You really need to talk to someone and you really need for them to listen. Maybe it is about a problem with your parents, or with a teacher, and before you finish your story, your friend interrupts and says, "Yeah, my parents did the same thing to me," and then they start their story. Inside you want to scream and say, wait a minute, I need to talk, I don't want your advise, I just want your ear. But instead, you patiently wait as they talk about ancient history while you are thinking about current events. Or maybe you've just discovered a lump, or you've noticed your jeans are getting tighter, or you feel a wall building between you and your husband. And you really need to talk to someone, so you give a friend a call. But they interrupt your story with their story. How many times have you done the same thing? Instead of really listening, you interrupt the speaker to talk about what is on your mind or tell a similar experience.

Is it possible to be listening to someone talk without really hearing what they are saying? Not only is it possible, it happens all the time. We miss the chance to "bear one another's burdens" or rub souls with each other because we aren't really listening.

Are you listening? No really, are you listening? Or are you thinking about what you will do after church? I'll not ask for a show of hands because I don't want to embarrass you, or me for that matter.

Are you listening right now, or are you evaluating? Are you trying to hear a word from the Lord right now, or are you grading the preacher?

Is it possible to worship without listening? Yes, I fear it is. It is also possible to listen to the preacher and soak up every word he says without listening to the Lord.

Lydia was listening, and when she was, God spoke to her. Here's how Luke put it, "and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Paul spoke to her through her ears, but the Lord spoke to her through her heart.

Why was Lydia's life changed? If you say because she listened with her ears until God spoke to her in her heart, you'd be right, but you'd be only partially right. There was another element. Look at Acts 16:9-10:

"And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a certain man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." (Acts 16:9-10-note).

Paul was listening too. In a dream, God spoke to Paul and told him to go to Macedonia to preach. Though Paul had other plans, he dropped what he was doing and went on a witnessing detour and he went to a place beside the river hoping to find some people praying and when he did, he shared the gospel. And Lydia was saved, and her household.

Today you've worshiped God, but I have a question for you, do you know Him? If not, why not come to know Him today?

Today, I've spoken and you've listened to me, but I have another question for you, did you hear God speak? With your heart, I mean, did you listen to Him. If not, why not commit yourself to come back next week with an open ear, an open mind, and an open heart.

Finally, are you, like Paul, willing to speak to others about Christ? Are you ready to respond to God's call? If so, why not begin praying right now for someone who you can share your faith with? (See [Jim Wilson - Fresh Sermons](#))

Hebrews 3:7-8 Are You Listening?

"Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7-8).

One summer an annoyed senior citizen from Richmond Heights, Missouri, hung up on President Reagan. He did it not just once but half a dozen times. The elderly gentleman didn't knowingly refuse to talk to the Chief Executive; he just didn't believe that the President was calling him. He was sure it was a prank. But the Southwestern Bell operator and a neighbor finally convinced him it was for real. As a result, the man had the privilege of chatting with Mr. Reagan for about fifteen minutes.

Many centuries ago a young Israelite named Samuel also received a call from a surprising source. He didn't realize who was calling, even when it was repeated. It came from one greater than a president. At first Samuel was perplexed, but when Eli told him God was trying to get through to him, he listened.

We Christians sometimes have the same response when God speaks to us. Deep down in our awareness we may have a thought or conviction that we cannot understand. At first, we may not recognize it as God's voice. Then, when we're convinced it's Him, we're surprised that He would want to speak to us. But God is personal. He wants us to know Him. He has spoken through His written Word, the Bible, and through the living Word, Christ. In addition, He indwells us in the person of the Holy Spirit who enables us to "hear His voice."

God is always trying to get through to us. That means we must always be listening. —M. R. De Haan II

There are two kinds of Christians—those who wait on the Lord and those who keep the Lord waiting.

[This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears](#)

All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.

This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought

Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas;

His hand the wonders wrought.

- Maltbie D. Babcock,

Gregory Brown - Practice the Art of Listening

In conjunction with speaking only words that edify, Scripture also gives us further teaching about healthy communication. James, the brother of Jesus, said, "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19).

In order for a person to only speak edifying words, they must master the art of listening. Here are a few tips to aid in becoming a better listener. One should:

1. Practice listening to what your spouse is saying.

It has often been said that God gave us two ears and one mouth so that we would listen twice as much as we talk. This is a wise principle in communication. We must practice listening. Something that will help with this is practicing "active listening." We do this by repeating what our spouse said in order to get confirmation. For instance, one could say, "This is what I hear you saying, you feel

neglected when I watch TV all night. Is that correct?" By repeating, you get to clarify your spouse's words and intentions. You also show him or her that you are trying to understand, which is important in communication.

2. Practice listening to what your spouse is not saying.

Many times, there is more communicated by what a person is not saying than what is actually said. Communication is between 60 to 90% nonverbal. Sometimes, just the fact that a spouse is quiet may say a great deal. It may say he is not feeling well or he has more to talk about. This is something a good spouse will learn to discern. Study your spouse's body language and tendencies in order to enhance communication.

3. Practice listening to the Holy Spirit.

God wants to give us wisdom to minister to the uniqueness of our spouse. He knows our spouse in a greater way than we do. Therefore, we should practice praying, even sometimes during conversations, so we can hear what God wants us to hear and say what he wants us to say (cf. Neh 2:4-5). James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

4. Practice speaking less.

Of course, in order for a person to clearly listen to his spouse and God at the same time, he must learn how to talk less. Solomon said this in Proverbs, "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking" (10:19, NKJV). In many relationships, people talk way too much and, therefore, listen way too little, which leads to constant arguments. James said we should be quick to listen and "SLOW TO SPEAK."

- From Gregory Brown's book which is available online - [Bible Teacher's Guide: Building Foundations For A Godly Marriage: A Pre-Marriage, Marriage Counseling Study](#) - this excerpt from [Foundation Four: Communication in Marriage - scroll down](#)

Adrian Rogers - "Samuel responded, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:10)

Do you have a [quiet time](#)? If God speaks with a quiet voice, you need to have a quiet time and place to hear it. If you're around a lot of furor and hubbub and noise, and somebody is whispering, you're not going to hear it. That's the reason you need to have a quiet time, so that you can pray, "Lord, what is it You really want me to do?" Our prayer needs to be listening as well as talking. Have you had a conversation with someone who does all the talking? Sometimes our prayer is, "Listen, Lord, Your servant is speaking," not "Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening!"

Rick Renner on Listening - I've learned that I must discipline myself to listen to what people are saying to me. Otherwise, they'll think I'm listening when, in reality, I'm about a million miles away in my thoughts. Just because I'm looking into their eyes doesn't mean I'm really listening. If I'm going to hear what they're communicating, I have to push everything else out of my mind and deliberately focus on what they're saying. This is a matter of discipline that I've had to work at developing in my life. I made a decision years ago that if a person believes he has something important enough to say to me, the least I can do is give him the courtesy of listening. Even if I don't agree with what he's saying or want to do what he's asking, I should respect him enough to hear him out. To pretend I'm listening when I'm not is simply rude. Through the years I've had to train myself to be a listener. To make sure I've really heard the point being made to me, I often stop and repeat the conversation to the person speaking to me. I ask the person:

- "Is this what you're trying to tell me?"
- "Is this the point you're making to me today?"
- "Is this what you want me to get from this conversation?"
- "Is this what you want me to do after we're done talking?"
- "Is this how I need to respond?"
- "Is there anything else I need to know about this?"

If I've missed anything important in the conversation or misunderstood what that person was attempting to tell me, I discover it by asking these kinds of questions. At the same time, the person speaking to me is assured that he has had my complete and total attention. When my conversation with that person is finished, I should understand exactly what he was communicating because I focused on him and listened to what he was telling me.

Those who cultivate and develop the skill of listening make good team players because they're better able to understand other people's opinions and positions. These people have a good foundation for success because listening is the first step of communication.

If you realize that you need to become a better listener, I urge you to make the decision to cultivate and develop this discipline in your life. You can be a first-place runner when it comes to listening to others. Remember, listening is the first step of communication, and communication is a prerequisite for success in your dealings with both God and man!

So make it a top priority to become a superb listener. Learn how to digest the information other people are trying so desperately to

communicate to you!

MY PRAYER FOR TODAY - Lord, it is true that I need to learn how to be a better listener. Forgive me for the times I've inconvenienced others and messed up their plans because I didn't carefully listen to the instructions that everyone else obviously understood. I recognize that this is a flaw in my life. Starting today, I want to discipline myself to become a top-notch listener. For me to do this, I know I'll have to break the habit of thinking about other things when people are trying to talk to me. So I'm turning to You to help me silence my mind, listen to others, digest what they are saying, and become a better team player! I pray this in Jesus' name!

MY CONFESSION FOR TODAY - I confess that I am quick to hear what others are trying to tell me, and I don't interrupt them when they are speaking. I am a first-place runner when it comes to listening to others. Because God's Spirit is helping me, I am getting better and better in this area of my life. As a result, I am an effective team player, and others enjoy working with me. I declare this by faith in Jesus' name!

QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO CONSIDER

1. Have you ever tried to talk to someone who you knew wasn't really listening to you? How did it make you feel? Did you think that person really cared about what you were saying to him or her?
2. Are you a good listener? Are you able to remember what others have told you? If your answer is no, what are you going to do to develop better listening skills?
3. Can you think of someone at work, at church, or in your family who constantly makes mistakes because he doesn't clearly listen to the instructions that are given to him? What kind of inconvenience does this create for everyone? ([Sparkling Gems from the Greek](#))

Dr. Paul Brand in his book *Fearfully and Wonderfully* writes: "When I ask patients and their families, 'Who helped you in your suffering?' I hear a strange, imprecise answer. The person described rarely has smooth answers and a winsome, effervescent personality. It is someone quiet, understanding, **who listens more than talks**, who does not judge or even offer much advice. 'A sense of patience.' 'Someone there when I needed him.' A hand to hold. An understanding, bewildered hug. A shared lump in the throat." Sometimes, in trying so hard to say the right thing, we forget that the language of feeling speaks much louder than our words. There are times when the best thing we can do is "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15).

[He is coming, O my spirit.](#)

With His everlasting peace,
With His blessedness immortal and complete;
He is coming, O my spirit,
And His coming brings release,
I listen for the coming of His feet.

Better Than Words

READ: Job 13:1-19

Oh, that you would be silent, and it would be your wisdom. --Job 13:5

When we are with people who are grieving or suffering, we may feel a need to fill the awkwardness of the occasion with words. Not to say something, we fear, is to let them down. We may even find ourselves avoiding the bereaved because we're afraid we won't know what to say.

Author Joe Bayly, who lost three sons through death, described two examples of comfort he had received during his deepest grief: "Someone came and talked to me of God's dealings, of why it happened, of hope beyond the grave. He talked constantly [and] said things I knew were true. I was unmoved, except to wish he'd go away. He finally did.

"Another came and sat beside me. He didn't talk. He didn't ask leading questions. He just sat beside me for an hour and more, listened when I said something, answered briefly, prayed simply, [and] left. I was moved. I was comforted. I hated to see him go."

Job experienced similar emotions. In his grief, he too had craved silent support from his friends. He cried out, "Oh, that you would be silent, and it would be your wisdom!" (Job 13:5) Instead, he was worn down by their many words.

The next time you're with people who are grieving, allow your presence to be their comfort. - Joanie Yoder

Words of insight, gems of guidance
Help when someone's in a test;

But when comfort is what's needed,
Silent presence may be best.
--Sper

A well-timed silence is more eloquent than words.

Friends Listen - Job 13:5-6 says "O that you would be completely silent, And that it would become your wisdom! Please hear my argument And listen to the contentions of my lips."

It is about 9 in the evening. My wife Ginny and I are sitting in our living room. I'm reading a book. Suddenly she says, "Honey, I want to talk with you for a few minutes." She begins to talk-then she abruptly asks, "Are you listening?"

I'm tempted to reply, "Of course I am. I'm only 2 feet away from you." But actually my mind is still on what I'm reading. I need to close the book and give my full attention to what Ginny is saying. She deserves that from me.

Job too was frustrated because his friends weren't paying attention to what he was saying to them. He sensed that while he was talking they were planning their next response. They were bent on trying to convince him that his suffering was punishment for sin in his life. They were not listening to the deep cry of Job's heart.

Many of us are poor listeners too. Teenagers can be frustrated because their parents always have a quick answer, when actually they just want someone to listen to their struggles and accept them. One teen said, "Sometimes I would just like to talk until I know what I want to say."

Deep relationships are built on acceptance, understanding, and being a good listener.- Herbert Vander Lugt

When our friends encounter suffering,
We can help them if we're near;
Some may need a word of comfort,
Others just a listening ear.
-Sper

Listening may be the most loving thing you do today.

Ray Pritchard on Literally Listening to God! - The best Bible reading plan is the one that works for you. That said, I'd like to mention my favorite Bible reading plan, which happens to be the one I'm currently using. It's really about Bible listening, which right away sets it apart.

A Bible listening plan is one where instead of simply (or only) reading the biblical text, you actually listen to it at the same time. I've been using this method for a year now, and I think it's the most beneficial Bible reading I've ever done.

To make it work right, you'll need a smartphone (iPhone or Android) or an iPad (or some other tablet computer). It will work on a laptop, but it works much better on a portable computer system.

Start by downloading two apps: YouVersion and Bible.is. Both are free. I use YouVersion for reading the text and Bible.is for listening to the text being read. Bible.is offers you various choices, including dramatized versions of several popular translations.

I've been listening to the dramatized version of the New Revised Standard Version (although you could listen to dramatized versions of the ESV and the KJV). Personally I like the dramatized versions because they add background music, different voices for the different speakers, and various sound effects. Then I read along using the YouVersion app, usually in the ESV. By listening to one version and reading in another, I'm forced to pay more attention to the text and to think about the places where the translations are not the same.

Listening to the Bible slows me down. If the dramatized version takes 7 minutes to go through a chapter, then that's how long I sit and listen and read along at the same time. This year I've been through quite a bit of the Bible this way, and I have found it fascinating and spiritually profitable to do some "Bible listening" along with my Bible reading.

To be clear about it, I haven't gone through the whole Bible in one year, but that was never my goal. I do a chapter or two a day and find it invigorating to slow down and listen to the Bible and to think about why verses are phrased a certain way.

Listening may be the most important thing you do today.

Keri Kent in [God's Whisper in a Mother's Chaos](#) writes - In a world with so much noise I don't always know what to listen to. But I am learning that developing a listening heart requires that I stop listening to certain things: stop listening to television or the radio as "background noise." Stop listening to what advertisers and my peers tell me I need to have, need to hear, need to know. **The paradox of developing a listening heart** is that it requires silence. Think about it. If my kids are peppering me with questions and won't stop talking enough for me to answer, I often have to begin with "Shhh! Listen." As I try to hear God's whisper, I sense him saying, "Shhh! Listen." I began to spend time in silence. When the children were small and both napped, I would sit on the couch and try to do nothing except be still and silent. Instead of watching television or reading a magazine or even praying a monologue of requests for God, I would try to quiet down and listen to his side of the conversation....

James 1:19 exhorts us to "be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." Of course, when we do the first two, the third is likely to become much easier. What does it mean to be "quick to listen"? When I converse with others, do I really try to listen and understand them, or do I simply use the time they are blabbing on to think about what I will say next? Do I hear only one part of what they say and then zone out so I can compose a sermon of advice on that part while they finish talking? As I began to get intentional about listening to God, I began trying to listen to people. When I found myself in adult conversation (a rarity I ought to appreciate a bit more than I do), I actually listened in attentive silence. As a result, I found a new perspective on the relative unimportance of my words in relation to what someone else had to say, or what God had to say to me through them. It was remarkable. I wondered, what if I tried really listening to others—say, my husband—in this way? Active listening begins with the ability to engage emotionally without speaking. To communicate care and attention through our expression and body language more than our advice giving is not easy. But the more I listen, the better developed my listening skills become. If I become good at listening to people, I can begin to better listen to God. I can become a listener. How can I do this? It begins with the basics: closing my mouth. The discipline of silence is one I can practice both in solitude and with other people. As the Bible says, be slow to speak. But that is not enough. It also says, be "quick to listen." I think that means being attentive, not just to stop talking but to engage fully in listening. The next time you have a conversation, try paying attention. Really paying attention with your whole self. Face the person. Look into their eyes. Don't interrupt. Don't allow yourself to zone out or think about what wisdom you will bestow on them. The simple technique of "reflecting" what a person says by repeating or paraphrasing it transforms conversations. We become better listeners, and those we speak with open up more willingly. As they share more of themselves, we learn about them and from them. We also minister to them. We move toward God and bring them along with us. Approach conversation gently, as an opportunity to learn about someone else, to allow God to touch you through that person. Mirror back what you've been told by using phrases like "I hear you saying..." Draw someone out by asking, "What happened next?" instead of jumping in to offer unsolicited advice. When I first began to make these simple efforts, they felt a bit awkward. But I found that if I persisted, I was rewarded not only with better listening skills but closer friendships. When I practiced this gentle listening, I not only extended grace to someone else, I often unexpectedly found my own soul nourished. Listening like this will, not surprisingly, encourage the person to speak, perhaps to tell you more than you expect or desire to know. It will test your patience. Don't be afraid when the other person bares more of her soul than modesty suggests she ought. Accept that. Tell yourself, and tell her, it's okay. Feelings, and the discussion of feelings, are valid. Your ability to hear this person without judgment will allow both of you to hear God's whisper more clearly.

Listening to God - As I thought about developing a listening heart, I realized that to do so I would have to table my own agenda. That's hard. If you are at home all day with little children, you become hungry for conversation with someone other than your kids. Focusing on their needs makes you long for someone to focus on yours. If you work outside the home, you may feel exhausted from juggling the needs of your clients, your boss and your coworkers all day, and then coming home to a needy family. You don't have time to listen to anyone else. But a listening heart focuses on another, whether that other is a child, a friend, a client or God himself. When we focus on another, God speaks to us. There's many times when my kids will be talking and talking and talking and I'll say, "uh huh, uh huh." And then my daughter will stop and say, "Mom! You're not listening!" Unfortunately, sometimes she's right. God most often speaks to us through people. Of course, he uses other methods to communicate as well. Sometimes he uses the Bible to speak to us: a verse seems to jump off the page because it applies so directly to our situation. He also uses inner promptings or leadings that we may feel intuitively (**Ed: "Led by the Spirit" Gal 5:18, "Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives." Gal 5:25NLT**): we know what is morally right, or what we ought to do, and his Spirit seems to push on our soul to make the right choice. Sometimes He uses the natural world to remind us of His creative power: a spectacular sunset, a rainbow, a waterfall, a mountain. But most often He uses the people around us to guide us and teach us. So I need to pay attention to what others tell me. Who do you spend most of your time with? Your kids? Your boss and coworkers? God uses people of all ages and walks of life to communicate with us. God is always talking to me through my kids, since that is who I spend most of my time with. His favorite topic when using them: trust....As I have worked to cultivate my ability to listen, I have found that my relationship with God is greatly influenced not only by who but also by what I choose to listen to. When I feel like I can't sit down to pray because little ones would be climbing into my lap, I can put on a worship music tape. Then I can turn the distraction into a chance to cuddle my kids and sing to them about Jesus. If I choose to make the effort to go to church and listen to godly teachers reveal truth to me, it is easier to converse with God the next day than if I had chosen to do something other than go to church. But I need to be careful here: too often when I'm listening in church, I'm thinking, So-and-so ought to be here to hear this, instead of

worrying about the ever-growing log in my own eye! Thinking about what others could learn if they went to church, instead of focusing on what I should learn, is a type of pride that is a far greater sin than sporadic church attendance. What I need to be concerned with is what God is saying to me, not what he could say to someone else if they were here! **Sometimes who or what I listen to can influence my behavior and my connection with God in a negative way.** If I am standing around the playground with some other moms, and they begin to gossip about someone who is not there, I feel uncomfortable. That's because I face a choice: join in, stand there and listen, or walk away. Although the second choice, to listen but not say anything, seems like a "better" choice, it really is not. Unfortunately it's the one I often make. I don't want to slander anyone, but I don't want to confront the gossip mongers and risk becoming the topic of their next session. Yet if I stay and listen to their negative discussion, my connection with God is certainly not enhanced! As I work to develop a listening heart, I see that God has a lot to say to me. He's gentle and good and powerful. I knew, because he had brought me through some trials, that he was faithful. I am learning to listen to him. But sometimes there are internal issues that block my ability to hear him. The next step in my journey was to begin to work on those issues, the biggest of which is guilt.