

The Art of Listening

A New Life of Spirit Led Ministry to Others

Hearing what people say is one thing. Really listening is something else entirely. What turns listening into an art form is learning how to juggle listening to others and listening for the Lord at the same time. Listen well enough to others and you will more easily hear from the Lord. These simple rules and visual images will help put you on track, but only practice makes perfect.

And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Mark 4:9 ESV

A Lost Art

Sometime in the last century we lost the art of letter writing. Once widespread and flourishing, writing long, thoughtful letters by hand kept people intimately in touch over great distances, but the telephone and air travel supplanted it. Something similar seems to be happening to story tellers and good listeners. Where are the raconteurs who could hold you spell bound with a simple tale lovingly told? Where are the caring souls who set their lives aside to really give a good listen to yours? It seems as if both are being crowded out by the pressured pace of modern life, for both of these art forms require a gracious supply of time in which to thrive.



This cultural deficit actually makes our task as Christian ministers much easier. So many people are weighted down or stressed up with the burdens they are carrying. Often their attempts to find a caring soul have been brushed off by people too busy to give them the time of day. Others they encountered were so filled with their own cares they didn't dare open themselves to feeling the weight of another's concern. And then there were false friends who heard them out, but failed to keep the confidence. In such a cultural climate finding a good listener is a rare treasure indeed! Yet, listening is the easiest point of access for those who desire to enter into [The Care of Souls](#) which is the essence of Christian ministry.

The beautiful thing about becoming a good listener is a) that you can start right away and b) you can easily do a lot of good and very little harm. The deeper you go into Christian ministry the more training you will need and the more danger there will be of inadvertently causing damage. If you want to counsel people, or exercise a gift of prophecy, or minister inner healing and deliverance, you'll have to strap yourself in for the long haul. Seeking to help people at the level of their deepest need requires training and teamwork. But if you want to relieve people by listening well, all you need is one good ear. If you have two, so much the better!



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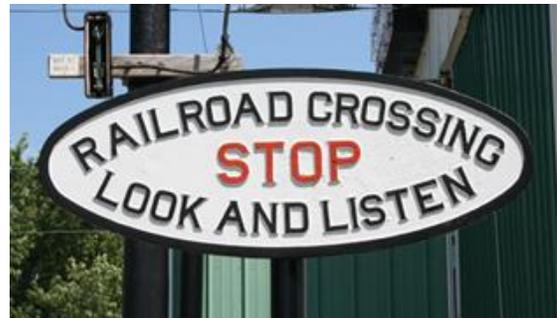
Ears to Hear Him

Listening is also important because our life with God is predicated upon listening carefully. In fact, our ability to listen to others will increase dramatically as we learn how to give ear to the Lord. He speaks His word to us in a variety of ways. We listen for what He may be saying to us through scripture, through the words of others, through books, through conscience and through the way the Spirit guides our circumstances. That's a lot of listening! But that is not all.

There is an art to listening to the Lord. If you stay busy, you hear very little. The more you slow down, the more you notice that He just might be trying to get your attention about something. Then, if you really settle down and get quiet, you just might (finally) be in the right position to hear what He is saying. Imagine a darkened, windswept, rain-splattered pond. If an acorn were to drop on the surface you'd hardly notice. However, let that same pond be utterly still on a sunny day and anything dropped on the surface will be immediately heard and its effects seen across the whole expanse of quiet water. Learn to be that quiet pond on the inside and you will hear so much better from the Lord. How will we ever understand our lives or our world, if we don't pause to really hear Him when He speaks?

And he called the people to him and said to them, "Hear and understand." Matthew 15:10 ESV

All of this training at listening to the Lord comes in handy when listening to people. With them also it is not just a simple matter of recognizing and understanding words. The way they speak, their choice of words, their inflections, pauses and points of emphasis all give insight into their inner conversation—the thoughts of their heart. Body language and facial expressions also send a message, sometimes more loudly than anything they may actually be saying. If a person looks really down and discouraged and you hear it in their voice, but they tell you "all's well," what are you going to listen to as truth?



Just as we need to be quiet to hear from the Lord, so too we need to be quiet to listen well to others. Being unquiet on the inside always gets in the way of good listening. Haven't we all seen people at parties who can't wait for the other person to finish speaking, so they can jump in? Many people, when introduced to someone new, are so anxious what to say that they don't hear and remember the person's name. Or, perhaps something you heard triggered a very distracting thought. By the time you came to the end of it, you looked up and realized the other person was still speaking to you! These are just a few examples to show the need for emptying out as soon as you turn your attention to someone who wants to open up to you.

Stop, Look and Listen

We have to be ready to give our complete attention at a moment's notice. Years ago we had railroad signs in this country which said, "Railroad Crossing: Stop, Look and Listen." If you don't want to wreck the other person's train of thought, let this bygone phrase remind you of the



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dangers of not coming to a full stop! Then, let the whole phrase provide a framework for excellent listening.

1) STOP!

As soon as you see that someone wants to open up to you, or has a legitimate need to talk, stop what you're doing. This should be obvious, but the devil is in the details. If you look at your watch, or fidget, or show the slightest sign of irritation or impatience, you may lose your moment with them. Come to a full stop and *stay* stopped. Set the stuff in you aside. Don't start thinking of other things you could be doing, unless of course, you should be doing them. In that case it is better to listen well to the first few sentences, explain that you have to go, but would really like to hear more later. Honesty like this will save you from resentment and them from embarrassment.

Inconvenience, on the other hand, can conceal the call of the Lord. Moses famously turned aside upon seeing the burning bush—it wasn't his plan. Had he not noticed and stopped, he could easily have missed out on joining the Lord in a very heroic part of the Rescue. If you don't know it yet, you may as well brace yourself for finding it out soon: The Lord takes a rather cavalier attitude towards our agendas. He prefers His plans to ours! Imagine. This means that your burning bush moments with others may come at seemingly inopportune times. Take time to tune in to the Lord. Lift the interruption immediately up to Him. If you can't honorably set it aside, set your agenda aside instead. He'll help you with that later.

2) LOOK!

Above all, look them in the eyes. Look with your heart of love and acceptance that Jesus gives you. Look to see how important this moment is to them. Just don't overwhelm them by too intense a gaze—people in need often feel insecure and wilt if you look into them too deeply or too long. Then, as you have opportunity, take in the whole aspect of the person to see what that might tell you as you begin listening to them. Are they in a pain or a panic? Do they seem distressed and disheveled? Do they look like they need an immediate response from you to calm them down? How badly do they seem to be in need? Will someone else have to be called in, or does this seem like something you (with the Lord's help) can handle?

While you're looking, look around. Is this a good place for the person to open up? Will it afford them enough privacy? Do they seem on the brink of tears? In that case is there a quieter corner or more convenient place for the conversation? If you are feeling self-conscious or awkward about being approached, try not to let it show. Above all, never worry how the situation will look to others. Deal with those feelings immediately by looking up to the Lord and seeing or sensing if you have a green light from Him to go forward in this location. That's all that matters. Very likely you will get the go ahead, since the burning bush moment is already a sign of His Providence in choosing the time and place. If not, suggest a better location and move there.



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3) LISTEN!

James tells us to be quick to listen, slow to speak. That's our guide. Affirm their feelings, not necessarily their opinions. Wait patiently for your time to speak—don't interrupt. Be willing to count your own words as small things compared to what the Lord will be speaking to them, simply by you listening well. The image here is of a full pitcher of water. They are filled to the brim with all kinds of thoughts and feelings. If they don't tell someone they will overflow!

Your job is to let them pour what's inside them out upon your listening ears. It hardly matters where they begin. Their heart will secretly direct their conversation to the points that really matter. That's where you want to focus your innermost attention: on whatever it is that their heart is seeking to express. Don't strain. Just listen to them and to the Lord. If some insight needs to come to you, it will. Once that comes out into the open, your own heart will help you give the right response when it's your turn to speak. If you can find nothing significant to share, don't reproach yourself. Keep listening! Turning on the lights for you and your friend is the Lord's job. We are wisest when we wait on Him to do just that.

Sometimes Less Is More

In the meantime, remember that we weep with those who weep and laugh with those who laugh. Both are healing. Just go with the flow at first, responding to them as Jesus does with you. Set aside any judgments that may arise against their situation or their behavior. Ask questions if need be to keep the flow going: "What hurts? How did that make you feel?" Be a spiritual sponge! Absorb what they are sharing, taking it to your own heart and holding it up to the Lord in prayer. Be directive or assertive only if they seem to be straying off focus or dodging something. Good listening creates a bond of trust. You have to earn the right to speak.

As they empty out, this give you the opportunity to pour in some encouragement or the wisdom gained from a similar experience. Just don't be in a hurry to do that. The quarry is dove like. If you don't quietly wait for your moment, you may startle them into taking flight. The primary comfort is not your words, but your love. That is shown incredibly well by listening well. It is rightly said that a burden shared is half lifted—and you don't even have to do any of the lifting. The Lord will lift their spirit through the principle of fellowship.

Heavenly Hospitality

Good listening is a way of showing hospitality to others. You are welcoming them into your presence and treating their conversation with the respect a guest of your house deserves. God will use your caring and listening to bring much comfort and restoration, even if you have no inspired insight to give. Just by talking out loud people are helped, even to the point of discovering the answer for themselves. Just know your limits. Avoid sharing about unhealed, wounded areas in your life and getting in too deep into theirs. Follow these simple guidelines and you will not only do others a great deal of good, you will be making friends for eternity as you go along!

More to Explore

[Inner Healing and Deliverance](#) Basic Discipleship enables us to prune the bad fruit off of our spiritual tree by calling on Jesus in any moment of need. Inner Healing and Deliverance are needed to pull out our deeply buried "root" issues.

[Giving Talks](#) There is one rule that governs all talks: make sure you have something to say! We can't help you with that, but we can supply the coaching for how to know when you've got it (something to say) and what to do with it when you do.

[Leading Prayer Ministry](#) This is only one of many ways of doing prayer ministry, but it has been highly effective. The great thing in the care of souls, as in medical practice, is to make sure you do more good than harm. This "method" has led to many happy outcomes.

Free Downloads

[pdf Doing Ministry in the Spirit \(eBook\)](#)

Scriptures on Listening

And Joshua said to the people of Israel, "Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God." Joshua 3:9 ESV

Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! I would soon subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes. Psalms 81:13-14 ESV

And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." Mark 4:9 ESV

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires. James 1:19-20
ESV

About the Author: [Steve Evans](#)

For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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