



"When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen."
—Ernest Hemingway

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Listen Carefully (Part One)

Challenging his wife with a riddle, the man began, "You're the engineer of a train. There are 36 people on board. At the first stop, ten get off and two get on. At the next stop, no one gets off, but five get on. At the third stop, four get off and two get on. Now for the question: What is the name of the engineer?"

"How should I know?" snapped the wife.

"See, you never listen! Right at the start I said, 'You are the engineer of a train.'"

This little story shows how we often fail to listen carefully. Just as we fail to listen carefully to other people, so we frequently fail to listen carefully to the Lord.

Is it not true that a key to life and good relationships is effective communication? For effective communication to occur, both parties need to be effective listeners. This is just one of the reasons we must take the study

of the Bible very seriously. We need to learn and remember that we are here to listen to [God](#) through His Word and the human instruments He has chosen to communicate with us.

This principle of listening runs throughout the Bible:

- Forms of "hear" are found 687 times, and many of these have to do with hearing God's Word. Forms of "listen" are found 149 times, and again, the majority of these passages in some way deal with listening to God.
- The specific command to "hear the word(s) of the LORD [or *Lord*]" occurs 34 times in the New King James Version (NKJV).
- The words "hear [or *listen*], O Israel" are found seven times in the NKJV. A number of similar expressions like "incline your ear," "give ear," or "pay [or *give*] attention" call God's people to listen intently to Him.
- In the New Testament, Jesus advises, "Take heed *what* you hear" ([Mark 4:24](#), emphasis ours throughout), and "Therefore take heed *how* you hear" ([Luke 8:18](#)). The New International Version renders His command as we should "consider carefully" what and how we "listen."
- In [Mark 4:9](#), 23 and [Luke 8:8](#), the Lord warns, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"
- The phrase, "Today, if you will hear His voice," is found three times in Hebrews ([Hebrews 3:7](#), 15; 4:7) and once in [Psalm 95:7](#).
- Seven times, once in each of the [letters to the seven churches](#) in Revelation 2 and 3, the resurrected Christ urges His people, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

There can be no doubt that a large part of our Christian responsibility is to listen. We have been equipped with "ears to hear" by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, which allows us to comprehend spiritual things, even "the deep things of God" (see [I Corinthians 2:9-16](#)). Ultimately, the words that we hear from Christ enable us to have eternal life, as He says in [John 6:63](#), "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."

Remember the story of Christ's transfiguration? Because they are dazzled by the glory of Christ's change and the disciples reaction to it, most people do not realize that one of its main purposes involves listening:

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, [Moses](#) and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. *Hear Him!*" And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. ([Matthew 17:1-6](#))

Like a preview of God's command in the transfiguration, Moses writes in [Deuteronomy 18:15](#), "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear." It is wonderfully significant that a title of the Son of God is the Greek term *logos*, which refers to a form of communication. The word means "speech, word, saying, discourse." As the Logos, [Jesus Christ](#) is the living Word of God to man, and God charges us emphatically, "Hear Him!"

The point is simple: God has much to say to us, a great deal to teach us, and because He is the all-wise and sovereign God, it is imperative for us to listen carefully. But, we are ever so prone to be distracted and drawn away with other things, even with good things. Too easily, we can resemble Martha, who was distracted by so many things, rather than Mary, who sat at the feet of the Savior to listen raptly to His Word.

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."

And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." ([Luke 10:38-42](#))

Jesus gently corrects Martha's complaining attitude by telling her that, while her service is admirable, Mary's listening was better. [Hearing the words of the Lord](#) is a higher priority and has greater longevity, since a service is effectual for just a short while but God's instruction is eternal. Jesus promises that Mary's choice to listen to Him would not be taken from her.

We will look deeper into the importance of listening carefully in Part Two.

- Clyde Finklea

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Listen To The Lamb's Voice](#)

by Mark Schindler

The movie Ben-Hur seems to capture the essence of the history and flavor of the time and ministry of Jesus Christ. After a one-time friend of Judah Ben-Hur, Messala, betrays the Ben Hur family because they did not support the Roman occupation, Judah Ben-Hur is transformed from a galley slave (bent on revenge toward the tribune Messala) to an adopted son of Quintus Arrius. His hatred becomes augmented against Messala as he learns that he had consigned his mother and sister to a leper colony. Judah Ben-Hur had become so consumed with hatred for Messala that his sister had remarked that he had become Messala. When Judah Ben-Hur helps his mother and sister escape from the valley of the lepers, seeking the young rabbi Jesus Christ, he discovers that Jesus is on His way to be crucified. When Judah Ben-Hur sees the forgiveness exemplified by Jesus and hears His voice "Father forgive them for they know not what they do," seemingly demanding that he relinquish his sword of vengeance and desire for bloodshed, he

indeed lets go of his anger and his deep-seated hatred. Miraculously, his mother and sister are healed as he is transformed from bitterness to compassion, while the blood of Christ spills to the ground. By letting go of anger and hatred, assuming the stance of forgiveness and compassion, we take on the yoke of Jesus Christ.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Halloween

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

In recent years, Halloween has become the second-most popular holiday on the calendar—even to the point that some churches sponsor parties on it! Many nominal Christians shrug off its pagan and occultic features as "just good, clean fun for the kids." Richard Ritenbaugh shows that this night of ghouls not only lacks any biblical foundation, but the Bible warns us against participating in such activities.

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