



Bits & Pieces

... from Gerrit Gustafson

Careful Hearing. Diligent Doing.

Listen to hear; hear to obey.

Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly... (Deuteronomy 6:3)

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. (Matthew 7:24)

I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. (Matthew 13:13)

...humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (James 1:21-22)

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:27)

Like new-born babes who quickly learn the voice of their parents, so are those who become God's children - they learn the sound of his voice. To those with hearts committed to do his will, *God will speak through Scripture, the voice of those he sends, through nature itself, and by his Holy Spirit.* What follows is not just the mental storing of facts about who God is and what his Word says, but an abiding relationship with him of hearing and doing. The goal is not just to know about God, but to know God.

Disturbingly, to those who *listen without doing*, God promises deception. (see James 1:22 above)

Learning to hear and do, then, is one of the first lessons of the path, and one of the most important lessons for a lifetime of walking with God. (The classic book on this subject, which I highly recommend, is [Hearing God](#), by Dallas Willard.)

Words Have Layers

Both spoken and written words have layers. When Jesus spoke parables, he allowed for those who had no heart to obey to hear only the obvious layer. Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day, *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life* (John 5:39-40). And also, *His voice you have never heard.* (John 5:37) You would think that those who had their noses in the Scriptures would be assured of knowing what it was all about. Not so.

But those who are committed to doing what they hear will know. *If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know...* (John 7:17) They are listening for his spoken word in the written word; they are listening for the words behind the words. They are hungry for meaning, not just facts. A listening ear employs not only thoughts but imagination.

Lewis said it well: "Reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning."¹

"Hearing," in the Hebrew language, didn't refer to something that just happened in your ears, but rather in your heart where you perceive and understand. It means to "allow the words to sink in, provide understanding, and generate a response. In other words, in Hebrew, 'hearing' and 'doing' are basically the same thing."² According to Jesus, hearing and doing insure that our foundation is rock rather than sand (Mt. 7:24).

The two greatest commandments - to wholeheartedly love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves - are prefaced by "Hear, O Israel." (Matthew 12:29-31) Known as *the Shema*, this is God's preface to all commands: *hear with a willingness to do*. Only then are his commands not a burden.

This is what Jesus was teaching his disciples when he said, "whoever has ears, let them hear." (Matthew 13:9) He was training them to listen with hearts rather than with ears only.

Careful Hearing Requires Humility

This kind of listening requires humility. Genuine humility is resolutely choosing his will over ours - *not mine, but yours*. (Luke 22:42) Without such humility, we will inevitably superimpose our thoughts over his. So, as James says, *humbly accept the word that is planted in you*. (James 1:21) Our thoughts are not his thoughts (Is. 55:8). Don't think that every impression that comes to mind is God's voice. Our hearts are tricky (Jer. 17:9). They can deceive us.

We can be so sure we've heard God on a matter, and be so wrong. I know how this works because I have to wear hearing aids, and sometimes what I think I heard is very different from what was actually said. It can be very funny... and embarrassing! It's my regular reminder to walk humbly.

Nevertheless God does bring his thoughts to our minds. We learn to discern the difference between his thoughts and ours through experience. There is no other way. Hebrews 5:14 describes the "mature" as "those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice." We'll make mistakes as we're learning. Be teachable and humble. Learn from the mature.

As we learn to read Scripture with a listening heart, we must regularly remind ourselves that *the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart*. (Heb. 4:12) If we understand in this way, we don't just read his word, his word actually reads us, discerning our thoughts and intentions, piercing the depth of our being. This kind of prayerful reading of Scripture, called *lectio divina* by the

¹ From *Selected Literary Essays*

² Quoted from The Bible Project (<https://thebibleproject.com/blog/what-is-the-shema/>)

ancients, listens through the words themselves to the meaning of the words... and allows them to penetrate us deeply and change us!

Bring this same desire to hear into your conversations with others. Pay attention to the words of both friends and strangers - the Lord may have sent them to you. Did you fail to hear past the first layer of their words? What was behind the tone of what you just heard? Did you detect hopelessness, dejection? Did you miss God speaking to you through their words?

And, if you bring this same listening heart into your prayers - your conversations with God - you will not just be discharging an obligation to pray, you will be taking counsel with your Creator, Redeemer, and Friend who desires to share his secrets with those who fear him.³

Then, as we hear, we apply the meaning to our lives and to the circumstances in which we live, and we take action as he directs.

Listen to hear; hear to obey.

This is the practice of careful hearing and diligent doing. *By your grace, O Lord!*

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³ The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. (Psalm 25:14 - KJV)