

SQUIRREL! (THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEARING GOD AND LISTENING TO GOD)



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by [Kim Butts](#)

My poor husband! I can sometimes be one of those “squirrel” people – you know the ones. You may be having a conversation and in the middle, the person to whom you are talking or who is talking to you gets suddenly and radically distracted by something completely off topic. Dave can be talking and out of

the blue, I will point at something, change the subject, or otherwise divert the conversation. This is always completely unintentional, but frustrating just the same. I can even do it to myself! I will be talking to another person and all of a sudden, my mind gets hijacked by something I see...or by an interrupting sound. Worse yet, I sometimes can't even remember what I was talking about when my attention comes back around to the person I was originally talking to!

So, when contemplating the difference between hearing God and listening to Him, I fully understand the distinction between the two. Unless one is deaf or hearing impaired, hearing is simply an automatic sensory activity. We don't need to actively "do" anything to hear. Sound happens. What we choose to do with what we hear involves the activity of listening. I know this about myself as well...when I don't pay attention to what someone is saying to me, I will have to ask them to repeat it or just try to fake that I was listening instead of hearing "blah, blah, blah" while my mind was elsewhere!

Listening involves attentiveness...it is attaching meaning to what we have heard. It is also intentionally acting upon what is heard by responding appropriately. Because this is sometimes a struggle for me, depending upon the situation, I have to work at and practice the spiritual discipline of listening well. Prayer often involves active listening because there are times when prayer is relational conversation. There are also times when just being in His presence and "being" is enough. This has been called "keeping company with God." I love those times of intimacy – just knowing that He is with me and I am with Him.

But picking up the voice of God when He speaks to my heart is a completely different prayer experience. I wonder how often I have heard God speak, but because I wasn't fully and actively listening, I've either not obeyed or have missed a blessing. So often, God spoke and still speaks to people who didn't and/or don't want to listen. Scripture is filled with

examples.

In order to become a better listener in conversational prayer, I must practice truly listening to what I hear and gaining understanding. The disciplines of silence and solitude are very helpful and necessary for my transformational growth in listening to God. If I don't spend time nurturing my soul in this way, I can easily be the person James admonishes: "Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like" (James 1:22-24 MSG).

God is very clear about Who we are to listen to: "While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, 'This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him'" (Matthew 17:5)! And Jesus, by example, practiced getting away from the noise and the crowds to hear God in silent, solitary places. How much more should we?

In biblical times, people heard from God but didn't always listen to Him, which means they did not obey. For me it comes down to paying "close attention" to what is heard from Jesus: "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." Then he added, "Pay close attention to what you hear. The closer you listen, the more understanding you will be given—and you will receive even more. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what little understanding they have will be taken away from them." (Mark 4:23-25 NLT). What a powerful promise and warning! One who demonstrated listening for understanding in Scripture was Mary of Bethany "...who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word" (Luke 10:39).

It's easy to listen to the wrong voices in our culture today. Amidst all of the distractions, hearing the voice of Jesus is sometimes very difficult; however, it can be discerned more easily through practicing the disciplines that our Lord engaged in. One of my deepest desires is to get into a much better rhythm of silence and solitude in order to "listen to Him."

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Biography

Kim serves as the Executive Director of Harvest Prayer Ministries which she co-founded in 1993 with her late husband, Dave (1953-2022). Her ministry involves teaching/training and consulting as well as writing and developing resources. She is content coordinator for HPM's teaching platform, PrayerU.com

and also compiles and edits HPM's free daily devotional, [Connection!](#) as well as [Prayer Tip Tuesday](#).

Kim has written multiple books and has published articles in a variety of magazines and publications. She is a member of America's National Prayer Committee and serves as President of Gospel Revivals, Inc. (Herald of His Coming).

Kim has a BA in Psychology and a Masters degree in Spiritual Formation and Leadership.

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