

**Sermon Notes of
Assistant Pastor Celestine Olive's Sermon on March 15, 2015
"But Are You Listening?"**

[In today's sermon, Assistant Pastor Celestine Olive shows us how God, in His Word, is teaching us the value of "listening" especially to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.]

Notes:

Introduction:

- Do you think there is a difference between hearing and listening?
- If you said yes, then you're right – there is!
- Hearing is simply the act of perceiving sound by the ear. If you are not hearing-impaired, hearing simply happens.

- Listening, however, is something you consciously choose to do.
- Listening requires concentration so that your brain processes meaning from words and sentences.
- Listening leads to learning and learning leads to acting on what has been learned.

- We are in a constant state of "hearing" whether we're paying attention or not, because there are always sounds around us!
- For those who are hearing impaired, they too are in a constant state of "hearing," but their "hearing" occurs differently than ours depending more on sight thru body language, signing, reading lips, visuals, etc.

- There are sounds of ticking clocks, chirping birds, rustling bedcovers, snoring, electronics buzzing, street noises, washers and dryers humming, lawn mowers, motorcycles, garbage trucks, phones ringing, toilets flushing, alarms buzzing...
- Then there are the sounds of friends, teachers, coaches, parents, siblings, neighbors, church members, pastors, babies crying – it never stops.

- Just "hearing" creates all kinds of distractions.
- Here in this picture is a young man supposedly reading a book surrounded by widescreen TV, DVD, VCR, Cable, Remote, Fax machine, Answer machine, Internet, Speaker setup, Cell phone, and an AM/FM radio.
- Sounds familiar, doesn't it? That's just how we roll today!

God in His Word is teaching us the value of "listening:"

Proverbs 1:1, The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: 2) for gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight; 3) for receiving instruction in prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair; 4) for giving prudence to those who are simple, knowledge and discretion to the young – 5) let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance – 6) for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.

- The key phrase here is: “Let the wise listen.”

Quote from Karen Hellesvig-Gaskell:

- “The Difference between Hearing and Listening Skills,” (Feb. 18, 2015) by Karen Hellesvig-Gaskell, a broadcast journalist whose writings focus on parenting and health.

When a person responds to your words by saying “I hear you,” you may sometimes wonder if he is truly listening to you. Perhaps you find your mind wandering off when someone is sharing their thoughts with you.

“Hearing” and “listening” have quite different meanings. Hearing is a passive occurrence that requires no effort. Listening, on the other hand, is a conscious choice that demands your attention and concentration.

Everyone wants to be heard and understood, but at one time or another most people don't listen and fail to understand the meaning of another person's words. It's a fundamental human need to have your feelings acknowledged, whether or not someone agrees with you.

Honest to goodness listening creates an intimate connection and makes you feel cared about.

You can hear someone speak without listening to the words. Hearing defines only the physical measurement of the sound waves that are transmitted to the ear and into the brain where they are processed into audible information. Hearing occurs with or without your consent. The National Youth Council says hearing is such a passive quality, it occurs even while you sleep. When you merely hear someone's words but are not listening to what's being said, it can lead to misunderstandings, missed opportunities and resentments.

Quote from Seth S. Horowitz:

- An auditory neuroscientist at Brown University and the author of “The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind.”

Luckily, we can train our listening just as with any other skill. Listen to new music when jogging rather than familiar tunes. Listen to your dog's whines and barks: he is trying to tell you something isn't right. Listen to your significant other's voice — not only to the words, which after a few years may repeat, but to the sounds under them, the emotions carried in the harmonics. You may save yourself a couple of fights.

It Started With An iPhone (Humorous story):

- March was when my son celebrated his 15th birthday and I got him an iPhone. He just loved it. Who wouldn't?
- I celebrated my birthday in July and my wife made me very happy when she bought me an iPad.
- My daughter's birthday was in August so I got her an iPod Touch.

- September came by, so for my wife's birthday I bought her an iRon. It was around then that the fight started...
- What my wife failed to recognize is that the iRon can be integrated into the home network with the iWash, iCook and iClean. This unfortunately activated the iNag App.
- Which led me to the iHospital and iGet out Thursday.
- By the way, if any of that sounds familiar – a husband and wife failing to understand each other), be sure and sign up for our next Marriage Retreat!
- And whether you're married or single or teen or young child, we all need to be reminded of our listening skills so that we aren't just hearing sounds coming out of one another's mouths but we actually listen from the heart.

As parents we are continually asking our young people:

- “Did you hear what I said?”
- “Are you listening to me? What did I say?”
- “Do you have wax in your ears?”
- “Are you paying attention?”
- And on and on and on...

YouTube Video Clip:

- This video humorously shows a parent and child trying to get one another to listen to each other. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkxvlq25Kqw]

Another comment by Seth S. Horowitz:

But listening, really listening, is hard when potential distractions are leaping into your ears every fifty-thousandth of a second — and pathways in your brain are just waiting to interrupt your focus to warn you of any potential dangers.

Listening is a skill that we're in danger of losing in a world of digital distraction and information overload.

The Bible is our authority on both hearing and listening:

- It makes many very clear and serious observations about “listening,” especially in this passage when the Pharisees were questioning Jesus about His identity.

John 10:22, Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, 23) and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. 24) The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

25) Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, 26) but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. 27) My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

28) I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29) My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30) I and the Father are one."

Three Examples of Listening from the Bible:

1. Simeon.

Luke 2:25-35, Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26) It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. 27) Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28) Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29) "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. 30) For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31) which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: 32) a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." 33) The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

- Wishful thinking on Simeon's part? Or did he really listen to what the Spirit said and actually believed?
- Are there times when we hear the Spirit speak to us and we shut it out in "unbelief" or we're just not clear who's speaking to us?
- Celestine knows there are times when she struggles with this as well.
- Listening to the Holy Spirit takes faith.
- Faith takes courage.

2. Mary, mother of Jesus

Luke 1:28-38 (The Living Bible), Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Congratulations, favored lady! The Lord is with you!" 29) Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean.

30) "Don't be frightened, Mary," the angel told her, "for God has decided to wonderfully bless you! 31) Very soon now, you will become pregnant and have a baby boy, and you are to name him 'Jesus.' 32) He shall be very great and shall be called the Son of God. And the Lord God shall give him the throne of his ancestor David. 33) And he shall reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom shall never end!"

34) Mary asked the angel, "But how can I have a baby? I am a virgin." 35) The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of God shall overshadow you; so the baby born to you will be utterly holy – the Son of God. 36) Furthermore, six months ago your Aunt Elizabeth – 'the barren one,' they called her – became pregnant in her old age! 37) For every promise from God shall surely come true."

38) Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to do whatever he wants. May everything you said come true." And then the angel disappeared.

- Mary was very responsive to what the angel had told her.

3. Abraham and Sarah

Genesis 18:1, The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. 2) Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

3) He said, “If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. 4) Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. 5) Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant.” Very well,” they answered, “do as you say.”

6) So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. “Quick,” he said, “get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.” 7) Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. 8) He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

9) “Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him. “There, in the tent,” he said. 10) Then one of them said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.” Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him.

11) Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12) So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?”

13 Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ 14) Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” 15) Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.” But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

- Were Abraham and Sarah listening or just hearing?
- Would you have believed the prediction of Sarah bearing a son as a promise from God or a joke?
- Sarah thought it was a good joke!

Conclusion:

- The good news is that God’s faithfulness to us is a constant, even in the times we don’t listen.
- He knows we will have those times when we don’t seek wise counsel, we aren’t paying attention, and we are suffering consequences as a result of not waiting for Him.
- But would God prefer we spend more time and concentration on listening? – Of course! Just as a loving parent would want this for their own children.
- The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to deliver us from the viewpoints and values of this world, the flesh, and our adversary, Satan.

- He is renewing our minds to see things from God's point of view so that we can walk in newness of life.
- As we listen, we learn that through the tremendous power of Jesus dwelling in us, we can cope with life, we can live out the will of God in our lives, we can love with His love and be more than conquerors as mentioned in Romans 8:37.
- Here are a few more encouragements from Scripture regarding listening:

James 1:19, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry..."

- We often get angry because we really don't listen carefully to what is being said.

Proverbs 18:13, To answer before listening – that is folly and shame.

Proverbs 12:15, The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.

- The wise choose their advisors wisely, which too is a part of listening.
- Consider the source, their track record, their own personal relationships and their example as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

1 John 4:1, Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2) This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,

3) but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

4) You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. 5) They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.

6) We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

- God is always asks us – "Are you listening to Me?"
- Hopefully, we will answer, "Yes."

Closing Prayer