

OPEN THE EARS OF MY HEART

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The most common verse in the Bible is, "He who has ears, let him hear." And of the fifteen times that we find that sentence in the New Testament, not one of them is a wife bawling out her husband!

We are not being exhorted to hear with our physical ears but with ears of the heart. We sing the popular worship song, "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord." What are we saying? A lot more than we may realize. We are acknowledging that physical eyes see physical things, like border collies and birch trees and zucchini. Spiritual eyes see spiritual things, like wounded hearts and things that don't exist yet, and heaven. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," the invisible One, the One who inhabits eternity.

We are not asking for an upgrade in our physical vision. We are asking God to enable us to go deeper. Physical reality echoes spiritual reality. We want to see those things truly worth seeing. Sometimes our physical eyes prevent spiritual perception. John speaks of the "lust of the eyes," which means more than sexual attraction. We can become so attuned to the physical that we forget that what counts cannot be seen by the two oblong things under our forehead. So let us pray, "Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord."

Balaam cursed his donkey for not moving forward. An angel was blocking the animal's way, and the donkey could see what Balaam could not (Numbers 22). Elisha's servant was terrified by the Aramean army that surrounded their city. Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see" (2 Kings 6:17), and the servant saw a greater militia with chariots of fire rather than iron. Though we cannot see the spiritual world with natural eyes, it impacts us continually.

Solveig sees this world on a regular basis. God has opened the eyes of this special ed daughter of a pastor in Norway to see angels as a normal course of life. So when the team she was traveling with could not find their way, they decided to test her out: "Solveig, do you know how to get there?" She responded, "Yes. Go down to the end of this street. Now turn this way...now turn to the left. Keep going. There is the building." Angels were directing her at every turn, and she saw an angel on top of the building they were looking for. I met Solveig and can attest to her spiritual vision. I asked her if she saw angels with her physical eyes or with spiritual eyes. She answered, "Sometimes one, sometimes the other." We may not receive the perception of Solveig, but can pray for God to touch our eyes. Paul wrote, "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened..." (Ephesians 1:18). Salvation and sanctification are both related to seeing and hearing (Acts 26:17,18). Jesus said, "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life..." (John 5:24). . Jesus spoke to Saul on the way to Damascus and said, "I am sending you to them (the Gentiles) to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light..."

Spiritual beings (God, angels, demons) can see, but they don't have physical eyes. They can hear, but they don't have physical ears. So it should not surprise us that God can speak to us or that an angel could converse with us.

Physical problems impact our ability to see and hear. I was traveling in Scandinavia once when I experienced a continual echo inside my head. A doctor found large glob of earwax that was blocking the sound passage. In like manner, spiritual problems impact our ability to see and hear with the heart. The disciples could not see the harvest fields in Samaria because they hated Samaritans. "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35). On another occasion, Jesus asked them, "Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?" (Mark 8:17,18). The Pharisees asked Jesus, "Are we blind too?" Jesus said, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains'" (John 9:41). Paul quoted Isaiah in speaking about the blindness of the Jews: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.' For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them" (Acts 28:26,27).

So is seeing believing? Thomas thought so, but Jesus proved him wrong. Believing is seeing. Solveig believes, and she sees what most people will never see, and she hears what most people will never hear. Some people can hear better than others. When it comes to spiritual hearing, children hear better than adults (and I mean children of all ages), the obedient hear better than the disobedient, and the desperate hear much better than the indifferent.

When is it hardest to hear?

When God isn't talking. It is impossible to hear God if He is not speaking. Maybe He isn't speaking because we are doing fine with what He has given us and we don't need further direction at the moment. Or maybe He is not speaking because we haven't yet carried out what He already spoke to us.

When God is talking and we're not listening. The person who says, "God never speaks to me," has not yet learned to detect the voice of God. We can all learn to recognize His voice if we are willing, just as Eli instructed young Samuel to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." We cannot teach others a technique for hearing God, but we can encourage them to listen as Samuel did with the assurance that they will certainly hear. But if we are lazy or indifferent, we will experience the same problem husbands and wives face when one is not trying. We need to truly listen for communication to take place. Isaiah wrote, "The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back" (Isaiah 50:4,5). The Laodicean church, however, was rebellious. It had serious eye and ear problems. The people thought they didn't need anything, but Jesus told them, "You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17). He counseled them to buy salve to

put on their eyes. And he said, "...If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (20).

When obstructions keep us from hearing. One kind of blockage is wrong messages that we have heard. The inability to filter out lies will keep us from hearing the truth. If God is speaking a message of affirmation ("You are worth my time...You are uniquely gifted...You play on my first string"), we may miss it if we believe the message that started being played when we were growing up: "You don't have what it takes." We need the truth to break through the lies we have embraced. If we find it hard to pray, "Dear Father," because our earthly dad did not properly represent God, we need healing from a father wound to hear the words of hope. We sometimes hear what we expect to hear or what we have always heard. When God's message of love begins to break through, we may think that it is too good to be true. What are some wrong messages we might be listening to that could keep us from hearing God accurately?

"There is a reason for everything." There isn't a reason for everything, at least not a good one. Sometimes the devil has his sinister way.

"God is teaching you a lesson." If we lose a child, someone might say this to us to try and comfort us. We can't figure out the lesson, and we don't feel like worshipping the monster who robbed us of the child we loved.

"God is punishing you." We did something we are ashamed of when we were a teen, and we know that God is still getting even with us, a thought that we wouldn't ascribe to even an average dad.

"God did that, and you will probably never know why." Life is a mystery, but God is good and He is merciful.

"If you want this, it is probably not God's will." I want the best for my children and that includes fullness of joy. God is infinitely greater and kinder than I am.

So how is your hearing? The psalmist prayed, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18). Jesus healed the blind and the deaf, and He can heal our eyes and ears. How about praying with me? "Open the ears of my heart, Lord."