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# Practice of Listening

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# Practice of Listening

## **Abstract**

"Listening. We are always listening. Is this true? Or are we just hearing? Often times hearing and listening are confused but they are not the same thing."

Posting about listening and how we can improve it from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/the-practice-of-listening>

## **Keywords**

In All Things, listening, communication

## **Disciplines**

Christianity

## **Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

# The Practice of Listening

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 [all in allthings.org/the-practice-of-listening](https://allthings.org/the-practice-of-listening)

Kae Van Engen

Listening. We are always listening. Is this true? Or are we just hearing? Often times hearing and listening are confused but they are not the same thing: Hearing is physically receiving and taking in the message, whereas listening is “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages”.<sup>1</sup> Listening requires so much more than just hearing. If we truly listen, we can improve our relationships with others. James reminds us, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak” (James 1:19, NIV)

Can we recognize when we aren’t listening? If we cannot repeat or rephrase what we just heard, we were not listening. But if we can, were we really listening? And what is our response? Is it immediate, or after some thoughts? Often times we can repeat back what we heard; however true listening warrants a closer look.

Some things to consider...do we finish another person’s sentence because we know what they will say? Do we interrupt because what we have to say is more important? Is what we are doing more important than listening? Or, does our mind wander while someone is speaking? These are all important questions to ask, and if we answer any of these in the affirmative, we need to take a look at our listening.

*Listening is a habit*, one that has been developed over time. Perhaps our listening wasn’t encouraged, when our parents reminded us of certain things or a teacher repeated the instructions. And perhaps our listening has taken a back seat to the reading, writing and mathematics we learned in school. But listening is important. Listening should be seen as a gift. When we listen, we need to use our ears, our eyes, and our heart. It is something we must practice on a daily basis. “Listening is living—the quality of your listening is equal to the quality of your life.”<sup>2</sup>

*Listening is a behavior*. We need to recognize what people say and how they say it. Often times listening is recognizing what is not said, as well. Are we more concerned about finishing the task at hand, responding to the most recent text received or preparing the dinner meal, than we are about listening? Do we stop what we are doing to give 100% attention to the message being delivered? We should. Listening takes practice, and is hard work; and so important as we work to build God’s Kingdom. We need to take responsibility for our listening. Some suggestions include:

- We need to indicate through our leaned in body position, that nothing else is as important as what is being said
- We need to offer direct eye contact
- We need to respond with occasional “hmmm’s” and a nod of the head to indicate we are engaged in the conversation

*Listening is a skill*, a skill that needs daily practice. A couple tips to improve one’s listening

- Put away, or put down, what it is you are doing, so you can focus on the person speaking to you. If it isn’t a good time, find a mutually agreeable time to have a conversation
- Count to 3 before you respond, this allows the speaker to finish their thoughts, and you won’t interrupt
- Ask clarifying questions, what is it you would like more information about, what do you not understand? Seek understanding

- Take responsibility for the setting, stay focused, and don't allow the distractions around you to affect your listening
- Engage your eyes, your ears, your heart, as you listen

As one works to improve one's listening, recognize there will be mistakes along the way. However, the goal should be to recognize the changes one is making as one works to become a better listener. Listening is hard work, and it takes daily practice.

Imagine the joy in families, work settings, communities, our nation and our world, if we would all practice listening...what a difference we can make by offering this gift of love to those with whom we come into contact with today!<sup>3</sup>

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## Footnotes

1. [ILA, 1995](#) ↩
2. Bommelje, Rick. *Listening Pays: Achieve Significance through the Power of Listening*, 2013 ↩
3. If you want a book to enhance your listening, I strongly recommend *Listening Pays: Achieve Significance through the Power of Listening* by Rick Bommelje. ↩