

I Have Ears

LEARNING TO HEAR FROM GOD

Shawn Stutz

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by Shawn Stutz

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PREFACE

This is really more than a book to me.

This is the story of how I came to fully appreciate
Jesus' invitation of "Come follow me."

These are not new words,
but they are words that have brought new life to me.

This is my adventure, both epic and irrelevant.
It may not be your journey,
but it may remind you of your journey.

The events in this story really happened,
and they could really happen to you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a book is not easy. Don't get me wrong, there is great joy and fulfillment in the process of recording, for others, the truths and insights gleaned in a lifetime. However, it can also be a daunting task. With that said, I would be remiss not to mention those brothers and sisters in Christ that have encouraged me and blessed me along the way.

Before I share about people, I would like to first thank my great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He has not only seen me through the tragedies and triumphs of my life, but He has given me the ability to share of His great grace toward me in words and story. Without a doubt, the power of the gospel of redemption has not been without great effect on my life.

I would like to thank my beautiful wife for always standing beside me in this adventure. Michelle, your words of encouragement have breathed more belief and confidence in me than you will ever know.

In the same vein, I would like to thank my kiddos, Kaitlyn and Elijah, for celebrating with me all the little successes I experienced during the writing process. This is a book I hope you take to heart, simply because it's the one thing I want you to know more than anything else: God wants to speak to your heart because He loves you immensely.

Additionally, I would like to express a great deal of gratitude to those that have supported this campaign with not only finances but with great amounts of prayer. Your blessings will never be forgotten. I only hope these words serve as a great big *thank you* as you read them.

Scott Elliott thank you for creating the cover art for the book. I love the cover! Doug Daniel, many thanks for your help with the second edition cover. Without you both I would have been left to make my own cover in *paint*. Please do not laugh. That is exactly what would have happened.

As this is the second edition of the book, I would like to thank the reader. Many have read the initial book, with its flaws, and not noticed anything. To you I say God bless you. The rest of you, who found what I call grammar goofs and typing joys, thank you as well. Your keen eyes and tough honesty have made this a better book.

If I can, I'd like to state how much re-releasing the book has emboldened me about the book's message and content. The rereading and revisionary processes have made me realize all the more that this work is most definitely the message of my heart and will remain that for the rest of my life.

Finally, I would like to extend a special thank you to Jon Byron, Chuck Miller, Alan Fadling, Paul Jensen, Craig Babb, and all of my Journey Generations and Leadership Institute family. The fellowship of the saints experienced in those environments, as well as the depth of wisdom discovered, cannot be overstated as one of the greatest contributors to my own personal discipleship. A mere thank you is not enough.

I pray that you enjoy this book, and even more so I pray you enjoy the Lord who so changed my life and invited me to share this transformation story with others.

~ Shawn Stutz

INTRODUCTION

I Have Ears

He who has ears to hear, let him be listening and let him consider and perceive and comprehend by hearing. ~ Matthew 11:15 AMP

I often visit my local coffee-shop bookstore. I like to call it my “second office.” There is a little nook in the back with enough chairs to provide the privacy needed for me to truly concentrate. It’s in the Art/Interior Design/You-Name-It for Dummies section. There, among the pages of thousands of other authors is where many of these pages were birthed. Along with other bookstore junkies, the curiosity magazine hunter, and the occasional socially awkward shopper, I sit and allow the classical music overhead to feed my creativity. The dull roar of espresso machines, the stocking of shelves, and the murmur of conversations all fade away as I disappear into my own world of thought.

Thankfully I have learned to selectively tune out the mother correcting her children, the guy chatting up business on his cell phone, and even the clicking of my computer keys. It’s amazing how much actual noise is going on around me and all I hear, or choose to hear, is my own inner voice (which sounds much more radio-friendly than my own).

Hearing truly is a powerful sense. Though I have nearly mastered the art of selective listening while at my “second office,” I found myself distractingly captivated one day. Taking up most of the outdoor seating of the bookstore was a group of people who were gesturing strongly with their hands. I, being at a distance on the other side of a pane glass window began to imagine the worst. *There is about to be a fight*, was all I could think. My fear over the scene before me quickly shifted to personal embarrassment. Although I didn’t make the connection at first, I soon realized the people outside the glass were deaf.

A World on Mute

Deafness and the Deaf Community intrigue me. I once stumbled on a website promoting an upcoming Deaf Community convention. *What would that be like for the hearing person?* I wondered. I imagined a convention hall of silence minus the shuffling of feet, a commercial air conditioning fan, and the rustling of program guide pages. I'm sure that's a bit hyper-stereotypical, but either way, this convention's website highlighted my extreme auditory dependence.

Growing up in Ohio, my family would often make the trek to my hometown of Buffalo, New York to visit my grandmothers. Of course, we did the normal kid stuff; we complained about the smell, groaned after eating sugar-free candy, and explored the attic full of ancient stuff. My cousin Keith would occasionally be there. Keith is deaf.

I remember the strange feeling of not knowing how to act around him, and the times I would be reminded he could not hear me talking. That's difficult for a kid. Eye contact and attentiveness in conversation are hard enough for an adult. Imagine a kid trying to master that art and not knowing what to do once eye contact was made. I did not know sign language. I felt helpless. *Why couldn't he hear?* I thought. *He has ears.*

Just like moments with my cousin, the time spent watching the deaf community at my second office stuck out to me. I sat in my wooden chair imagining what it would be like to be outside with them, to be non-hearing. I wouldn't have heard the impatient car honks from the lunch hour traffic swooshing by quickly. I would not notice the concrete scratching noise caused by metal chairs being slid into their circle of conversation. That inviting voice and quipish conversation with the friendly barista would be reduced to basic pointing and courteous head nods. The courteous "pardon me" to pass by someone might go unnoticed or be mistakenly perceived as rudeness. The miscellaneous noise of music, cell phones, and kids crying would be non-existent. It would be a world on mute.

***“God gave us
two ears and one
mouth, so we can
hear twice as
much as we say.”
- Anonymous***

Deliberate, Get-to-the-Point Listening

My thoughts were whirling. I tried to figure out what this group was saying to each other. I somehow thought I could interpret the flurry of hand motions. However, the pace and similarity of the motions had me clueless. For whatever reason, I imagined their conversation was loftier than the basic pleasantries or random musings that my friends and I would have. I am not so sure why I felt that way. It is just that each word seemed so much more deliberate, more of a “get-to-the-point” kind of communication. True attentiveness to the vocabulary of motion appeared to be more demanding than just mumbling about work and the weather.

A few more minutes went by when it struck me, they too have ears. They have ears and can’t hear, but there is so much listening still happening. It’s not the same type of listening I am accustomed to, but it is listening nonetheless.

***Listening is hearing
plus understanding
plus remembering.***

It may be naivety, but it seems that losing the intricate ability to process sound into language would enhance one’s true ability to listen. The deaf must stay tuned to the people they are conversing with. If not, life and relationships would soon

be reduced to a series of waving hands and quiet space. The language of the listening deaf is one that is unique to their community alone. No other people group on the planet is dependent on reading lips and significant hand signals alone. This concept translates onto every continent too. Love may be the universal language; however, sign language cannot be too far behind.

In the summer of 2000, I spent ten days in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil listening to the beautiful language of Portuguese all around me. Even though I was only slightly versed in High School Spanish and Mexican restaurant menu, I was able to gain enough understanding of the sounds I heard, in context, to follow the flow of worship songs, taxi-cab bartering, and basic chit-chat. However, take me to a convention of the Deaf and I’d be clueless. I need noise, vocal patterns, and inflection to stand a chance at understanding. Even then I would struggle to listen well, and I have ears that work.

A Little Close to Home

I wonder if today's church suffers from a similar problem? She has ears, but has the art of listening been lost? Don't get me wrong, she can hear. She can hear very well. She has heard the loud bellows of the traditionalists and the "sound theology" monitors. The endless diatribe of fabulous fads, wonder strategies, and life-changing programs regularly contribute to the noise. Rock-star pastors and lower-tier wannabe's jockey for their turn at the microphone in a way that would cause the apostle Paul to write a letter or two. One cannot forget the yelping of televangelists shouting promises of health and wealth in exchange for enough faith. I have a feeling Paul, in one of those new letters, would pen a few beating and shipwreck stories for today's contemporaries to ponder.

Plus the church can't escape the plethora of conferences designed for modern church innovators, all of which are clamoring for our attention. Church program strategists and para-church justice-based platforms join the conversation along with their social media entourage. Add in the minor chord of "music-style worship-wars" to the constant crescendo of the church soundtrack and it's easy to see why believers today struggle to hear the voice of God.

How can one hear the still, small voice of the Creator in the midst of a raging subculture sound barrage?

On top of that, we have the lies of the evil one; perpetually strong, delivered to us daily in uniquely enticing packages. It is no wonder so many miss the whisper of our Divine Lover. The crowd is just too loud. The carnival of Christianity has almost joined in the carnality of culture and slowly drowned out the voice of our Great God.

We, the church, have ears. We just have not learned to hear Him speak. All too often our hearts and souls are deaf. Unlike those born without the ability to hear, the church can be awakened. The voice of the Lord can speak to the soul deaf and bring miraculous new life, and that in itself is truly good news.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

So what is one to do?

What should be the response of the church?

*How does the bride hear the wooing of her lover
through the shouting of other suitors?*

These are great questions. In fact, I would say these are the biggest questions for the church right now. Without a return to the much-needed practice of divine listening, congregations around the country will dry up at alarming rates.

Now to be fully clear about the drying of congregations, church attendance won't fully reflect this phenomenon. No, many a Christian is contented enough with the formula of religion and the entertaining production of weekend worship. Their numb hearts prickle awake following a rousing attack on immorality or an emotional musical number. But by Tuesday morning the dry thirst of the soul returns, a thirst that cannot be quenched by man. Many are compelled back to the building for a midweek dose of Messiah-like medicine. Others may tough it out until the weekend. Then it is smile at the door where greeted and make your way to the seat defeated.

The cycle is never-ending. If you don't believe me, ask the majority of your local congregation where they felt the Lord's presence this week—and don't count Bible studies and ministry events as an answer. Ask them, *"What was the last thing you know, for sure, the Lord spoke to you?"* Ask about their perceived feelings of intimacy with Christ—and don't allow the *quantity* of quiet times to satisfy that question. Then probe into people's Scripture reading moments. Will they articulate truths that deepen one's relationship with the divine or will the consensus be that they simply checked a box?

No, churches won't slack off too much in attendance, but people will dry up on the inside. They are hungry for intimacy with Christ yet are nearly starving in the consumer model of today's church. Believers will use the church as Advil to make the pains of the world subside. Pastors will keep offering events, challenge for will-

powered commitments, and count filled seats instead of vibrantly disciplined souls as success. All the while, God will keep speaking.

*The Church, Christ's Bride,
She has ears, but is She listening?*

The reason I'm compelled to write this story is because both the unintentional and the volitional soul deafness I have described are part of my spiritual journey. I would venture to say it is a part of your journey, too. You and I, along with every other human on the planet, whether any of us knows it or not, crave for the Creator to speak to our hearts. My hope is that these pages will serve as both an encouragement and a strong invitation to you. Throughout your reading adventure, you will hear my story, and I'm almost certain you will see your story in the midst.

Through learning to listen to the heavenly Father, my life has been revolutionized on three major levels: personally, communally, and vocationally. Each of these three components will be unpacked in the pages ahead, along with practical points of application that will invite active listeners into to greater levels of intimacy with Jesus.

Above all, I hope you begin to sense the voice of the Lord with greater and greater clarity. I truly hope you will be able to read between the lines of my story and see how God is wooing you into His greater story. Without a doubt, I can attest to the fact that learning to know and follow the voice of the Great Shepherd has been more than worth it. Let's get started, or in the words of Jesus, "*He who has ears, let him hear*" (Mark 4:9).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shawn Stutz is passionate about the Kingdom of God and hearing his God and King speak. He has been actively honing the skill of learning to listen for the voice of the Lord for thirty-plus years. Each and every day still opens up new possibilities and new adventures spurred on by God's voice. He would argue that the scriptures are never more alive than when you truly know the God who spoke them into existence is speaking directly to your heart.

After sixteen years in full-time ministry, at churches large and small throughout the country, Shawn has entered marketplace ministry as a bi-vocational pastor, trainer, and author. Having seen ministry from many angles has given Shawn the ability to speak truth and encouragement to the body of Christ. Because of his church staff experiences, he also has a great joy ministering to pastors, those that shepherd the flock day in and day out.

He and his wife Michelle, and their two children, Kaitlyn and Elijah, live in beautiful East Tennessee with their two dogs.

For more information about how to implement the listening tools of this book into your individual life and ministry practice, please contact the Shawn Stutz Training Group. Shawn is also available to lead interactive *"I Have Ears"* seminars and weekends for church staffs, ministry leadership groups, and even whole congregations.

Shawn strongly desires that the body of Christ be known for its daily listening and responding to God. To speak with Shawn directly or order books for your congregation or small groups ministry, please contact:

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