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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Quick to Hear

James 1:19

Prayer: *Father, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for your glory which we celebrate this day. I thank you for the gift of your word which we again have the privilege of opening and looking into. And so I pray again as we do just that, that you would accompany us, may your Holy Spirit guide us, open our eyes, especially our ears this day, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, I pray that because our text this morning is taken from *James 1:19-20*, which says: *Know this, my beloved brothers: Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*

So first question is what does it mean to be quick to hear? I mean it's a fact that sound travels faster in warmer weather but that doesn't mean that we hear any quicker in summer than we do in winter, does it? I mean, what does God mean by telling us to be quick to hear?

And again, the next question that people might ask is hearing what?

I mean, is it the word of God that James is speaking of here or is he just speaking about listening in general? Well, I believe it's both.

As the firstfruits of his creatures, our concern should always be with bearing fruit for God's glory. You see, God is in the process of growing in us the fruits of the Spirit, the very essence of who Jesus Christ was. We are to be living testimonies of the loveliness of Jesus Christ. And so every single life experience that we have has a point. In Greek they call it a "telos", an end, and that end is to grow love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, gentleness, and self-control in us. Galatians 5 tells us that those are the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and the process starts with us developing ears to hear God's spirit in everything that we hear.

So James admonitions us in our text this morning to be -- quote -- "*quick to hear.*" And yet even that ability to hear, whether it's God's word or any other type of communication, that's something that comes out of God's gifting us with a supernatural ability to hear his gospel in the first place. And whether it's listening directly to God's word by reading scripture or hearing a sermon or whether James is referring to a simple ability to listen as well, they both go back to an understanding that James is addressing

believers here who have already heard the word of truth. And hearing is not something that you just do with your ears and your brain, it's something you do with your head, your hands, and your feet.

So there's basically three different kinds of hearing that we're going to look at this morning, three different ways of hearing God and his word. There's natural hearing, there's supernatural hearing, and finally there's sanctified hearing.

Now the first type of hearing is natural hearing. It's the way the vast majority of those in Jesus' day as well as in our day, it's the way they heard the gospel. Soundwaves hit their eardrums and their brains interpreted those waves as words but that's where it stopped.

Jesus spoke to thousands and thousands and yet after his death, it was apparent that only a small fraction of those folks actually heard in a true spiritual sense what he was saying. They were the ones who represented genuine believers.

I mean, on the day of Pentecost instead of the thousands who actually heard Jesus, there was 120 that had gathered as his church. So obviously the vast majority of those who heard Jesus

while he was alive heard him naturally and therefore ineffectually. People naturally heard the words but they really had no idea what those words meant.

When Jesus gave the parable of the sower and the soils, he spoke about four different soils and the fate of the seeds that landed on each different soil, and he described them in terms of hearing. Speaking of the pathway soil, he said this in *Matthew 13*, he said: *When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.*

Now all three of the useless soils prove to consist of a word spoken which was never effectually heard. The seed sown on the wayside soil was immediately eaten by birds, I mean it was misunderstood as soon as it was spoken. It was a case of natural hearing and it went no further than that.

The thorny and the rocky soils, in those soils the seed initially found a hearing, but then the cares of this world and persecution caused it to fall away. See, the vast majority of those who come under the hearing of the gospel without actually hearing it fall into the category of natural or ineffectual hearing.

Well there's a second category, that's those who supernaturally and effectively hear God's word and they do so because they've received a supernatural ability that not everyone receives.

I pointed this out before that only after Jesus had delivered the parable of the sower and the soils did he reveal to the disciples that the ability to supernaturally hear him, that was a gift from God. Jesus had both frustrated and astounded his disciples by telling the crowd a story that they could in no way understand. I mean this huge crowd has gathered and Jesus spoke to them and he completely mystified them. He gave no explanation whatsoever of what he was getting at. He simply stated what appeared to be a brief lesson in agriculture and then he ended the whole thing by saying: *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear,"* and the ears that Jesus was referring to were supernatural ears.

You know, at this point in Jesus' ministry he was attracting huge crowds and this crowd in particular was so large that he actually had to address them from a boat. And what he said to the crowd quite literally made no sense at all, because Jesus never put it in context. And you can sense the frustration of the disciples in their private conversation that they had with Jesus afterwards.

Matthew 13:10 says: Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why

do you speak to them in parables?"

Well, I don't think the disciples were actually looking for an explanation to that question, I think they were just experiencing and expressing the deep frustration because this was a pattern they saw in Jesus. Jesus had just left the crowd hungry for an explanation of a story he had told that was so cryptic that not even his disciples had the faintest idea what he was talking about. Hence the question to him, *"Why do you speak in parables?"* Well, Jesus' answer shows the ability to effectually hear the gospel is a gift, a supernatural gift from God.

Listen to how Jesus answered the disciples' frustration by what he said in *Matthew 13:13*. He said: *"This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'* But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and

did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

Jesus is explaining to them that the ability to hear the gospel in the first place, that's a gift from God. And you've got to understand, practically speaking, those words have huge implications for us.

I spent the first ten years of my Christian life trying to hone my persuasive skills so that I could effectively persuade people's wills. I never realized that much of the time I would spend sharing the gospel would be essentially a dialogue of the death. I mean, folks don't hear the gospel naturally because they cannot. Spiritually they are both deaf and blind.

Listen to what God says in *2 Corinthians 4:4*. He says: *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Well when the implications of that truth fully hit me, I realized how easy it is to get sidetracked into thinking that it's my job to dress the gospel up in its Sunday best and to persuade people as much as I could. I was mistaken. Understand, I still think it's extremely important to thoroughly understand the gospel. I also

think it's incredibly important to present it to the very best of your ability.

Peter says: *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

But understand this, the supernatural ability to hear the gospel, that comes directly from God. We call that "God's effectual call." And you know what that understanding does? Number one, it frees me from trying to sugarcoat the gospel. It frees me up to simply speak the truth in love and it frees me up to present the gospel completely, and that is to present the love of God as flowing directly from the justice and the holiness and the mercy of God. That's far different than the way I was taught to present the gospel.

My original understanding of the gospel was strictly one of only the good news: God loved you and had a perfect plan for your life. That's true but it's only half the gospel. As I've said many, many times, the good news without any of the bad news is not the good news, it's the nice news. And the nice news tried to say that God really doesn't care what you do as long as you accept his free offer of eternal salvation. And the problem with the nice news is

it's not really nice and it isn't really news and it isn't really true. The gospel is not God's free offer of a one-way ticket to paradise. It is a command to accept His Lordship in every aspect of your life.

I mean God has given us the task of being his ambassadors. We are the ones who've been entrusted with the truth of the gospel. We've been given no authority whatsoever to alter those truths in order to make the gospel a little more palatable.

2 Corinthians 5:20 says: We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

So what God expects from you and me is a willingness to share the whole truth of who he is and what he has done for us. People need to know that every last one of us is a hopeless sinner completely unable on any level whatsoever to save ourselves, that God is perfect, that God is holy and we are not and that our only hope can be found in the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross.

We proclaim that God sent his Son to live the life that we were supposed to live and that he lived that life flawlessly and then that he died the death we all deserved and through that death he

made full payment for our sins, and we access that payment by faith in him as Lord and Savior. That's the good news that we get to share.

And understand when we proclaim the gospel accurately, we unleash it. It's got a power all in itself. We allow this power to do the work that God intends for it. We are, as Paul says, to be the aroma of Christ in all that we do; and to some who respond to the gospel, that aroma is going to be the sweet smell of life itself. To others who reject it, that same aroma will be the stench of death, but either way the justice or the mercy of God is going to be glorified. It's always about the glory of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 says this, it says: But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When God calls us through his gospel, he gives us the ability to hear that gospel. So we actually have three categories of hearing here. First we have natural or ineffectual hearing which is the way the vast majority of the world hears the gospel. The words go

in and they do absolutely nothing. Secondly we have supernatural or effectual hearing which is by God's grace, it allows the words not just to enter but also take root and to produce firstfruits for his glory.

And that leads to my third way of hearing which I would call "sanctified hearing." And whether it's referring to God -- the word of God specifically or to any other type of communication in general, this is the type of hearing that James is referring to in our text this morning when he says: *Know this, my beloved brothers: Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*

And what is unique about this type of hearing, what distinguishes it from all the other types is that there's a volitional quality to this form of hearing. You've got to understand, that was not the case with supernatural hearing. We didn't just begin to hear the gospel effectively because we suddenly decided that that's what we wanted. No, we heard because God worked in such a way that the gospel suddenly began to make sense when it never made sense before. Outside of that work of God, the gospel remains foolishness.

Again, *1 Corinthians 1:18: For the message of the cross is*

foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. And that power begins to change us from the moment we become children of the kingdom and we call that change "sanctification."

How does that happen? I mean, does God turn us into some kind of mindless zombies as we're taken over by the Holy Spirit? Well the answer is absolutely not. I mean, from the day you were first saved, God began a process and again, we call that process "sanctification." It happens simultaneously with justification, which declares that on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross the just demands of the law have been fully met. On the basis of what Christ did, God declares to the universe that you and I have been justified, that our bill has been paid in full.

Justification is a one-shot deal. But sanctification, sanctification is a lifelong process. In fact we call it progressive sanctification because in the life of a believer, it moves progressively, inch by inch, foot by foot, mile by mile we're in the process of being shaped and molded into the image of God's own Son.

Wayne Grudem defines sanctification as: "A progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ

in our actual lives. According to John Frame, 'We can think of sanctification as the outworking of the new life given in regeneration.' It involves the gradual, incremental and (S)piritual work of both putting to death the remains of 'indwelling sin' as well as putting on the likeness of Christ."

It's very important to understand the progressive nature of sanctification and how critical the art of hearing is to it. You know, when you were an infant you actually learned to listen to the voice of your parents when they told you, "That stove is hot" or "These peas are good for you" or "You shouldn't hit your little sister."

You know, when you enter the kingdom of God at salvation, a similar spiritual process of growing begins and it also involves learning to hear, but this time it's God's Holy Spirit speaking and not our parents.

And the reason why sanctified hearing differs greatly from supernatural hearing is while we had no role whatsoever in acquiring the supernatural hearing that led to salvation, I mean, God did that by the free exercise of his grace, we now find we have a huge role to play in our sanctification. To put it bluntly, our free will choices will determine the extent of our sanctification.

And to the extent that you learn how to listen well to God will be the extent that you grow in your sanctification.

Let me just repeat that. To the extent that you learn how to listen well to God will be the extent that you grow in your sanctification. And that's why James says: *Know this, my beloved brothers: Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*

Kevin DeYoung raised an interesting question about sanctification about holiness. He raised this question this way. He said, "Who sanctifies you? Do you do it or does God do it?" His answer was also interesting. His answer was: "Yup." He used such words as *strive, toil and effort* to point out that sanctification doesn't just drop out of heaven on our heads. It's something that we have a role in producing or not.

Philippians 2 says: *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* Well if you look at it in terms of percentages, that's 200 percent. It's a hundred percent God and a hundred percent us.

You see, if we belong to him we work out externally what God has

already worked in internally, and the place where that starts is our ears. *Proverbs 22* says: *Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge.* *Mark 4:23* says: *"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."* And he said to them, *"Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you."* *Hebrews 3:7* says: *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness.*

Incline your ear, pay attention to what you hear, do not harden your hearts, God is appealing to the only truly free people who exist in this world. You know, we use the distinction of adding the letter D to the words "free will" because it changes free will to the idea of freed with a D, freed will. Because there's no such thing as a genuinely free will outside of Christ.

Galatians 5 says: *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.*

So why does God now refer to believers as free? Well it's because before you were saved you were literally a slave, you were enslaved to sin. I mean, you thought you had the freedom to do whatever you

wanted but your freedom itself was chained and it was chained to your fallen nature. All you had was the illusion of freedom.

You know I like to give this example. I've given it numerous times about a bird that I once had. It was a parakeet who hated my guts, I hated his guts; it was mutual. This thing would not only squawk at me every time I tried to clean the cage, it would bite me at every chance that it had. So occasionally when I would stick my hand in the cage to try to remove him -- this is, again, a process that took about 15 minutes, but he was very adept at avoiding my hand. If I went north, he went south; if I went south, he went north. And wherever I went, he darted in the opposite direction. You can make the case that the parakeet was free to make his choices. He didn't like me and he certainly didn't like the choices that I was offering, and so from his perspective, every time he jumped away, he was exercising his freedom to choose. However if you just pan back even a little bit, even a slightly bigger picture of what was going on would prove that the freedom that he thought that he had was circumscribed by a cage that he was in, and it was the cage that enabled me to eventually capture him because it limited how far he could fly from me.

In the same sense we have free wills because we have the ability to make conscious choices and decisions that feel as if they're free

choices. I can stay, I can go, I can say, "yes," I can say, "no." It feels a lot like freedom because it's a form of freedom; but it's a freedom that, as Jonathan Edwards would say, it's a freedom without liberty. We are free to make moral choices but the choices that we make, they're as limited as my parakeet. What we don't realize is that those choices and decisions that feel to us like freedom are also bound by a cage known as original sin. We're not nearly as free as we think we are.

I did this experiment a few years ago but it's an exercise that is worth repeating. This is group exercise for all of us. I would like you all to do me a favor; would you all right now just raise your right hand? Okay. Now you can put them down.

I want you to notice the absolute authority that your mind had over your physical flesh. I asked you to do a simple command and you just instructed your brain to instruct your muscles to raise your right arm and to flawlessly exercise those required muscles. You raised your hand. Now unless there's some kind of medical condition, none of you experienced some kind of form of rebellion in that the muscles in your arms telling your brain, "No, we're not going to do that." That just didn't happen. Each of you raised your right arm and then you lowered it.

So now I'd like to give you a second command to tell yourself. It's as simple as the first. The command is this: For the next 24 hours, I would like you all to decide to be absolutely sinless. I'm simply changing a muscle command to a moral command, and all I'm asking is that you voluntarily cease from all sin for the next 24 hours. I mean now you and I both know there's a part of you that says even as I'm asking this, that's ridiculous, that's not doable. And it's because even as born again believers we all know we still have the spirit of Adam within us. That spirit is at war with the Spirit of God and that rebellious spirit makes it virtually impossible for us to control even 24 hours of sinlessness. I said it before, you have the freedom to make decisions, but before you met Christ you didn't have the liberty to consistently make the right decisions.

Now that exercise that we just did, may I suggest to you that even as Christians it seems to suggest we don't have any liberty. I suggest to you it proves just the opposite. You see, we're the only ones who have the ability to realize that we are freed slaves still engaged in a lifelong battle with our old natures. And remember what I asked for, I asked for sinlessness. You got to understand, even God doesn't ask for that.

1 John 1:9, he says: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and

just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

I mean, consider the apostle Paul's struggle with sin. He says: *For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do -- this I keep on doing.*

Sound familiar? This is something every one of us struggles with. And may I suggest to you that the struggle Paul engaged in, the struggle we all engage in is actually a wonderful, glorious struggle.

Paul goes on to say in *Romans 7*: *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.*

See, the difference between our struggle and the struggle the whole

world is still engaged in is that our eyes and our ears have been opened and theirs are still shut tight. The whole world is enslaved to sin and the evil one and it doesn't even know it. We've been freed from that slavery and we're learning slowly but surely just what that freedom entails, the liberty that it gives us. And so we struggle to reconcile the freedom that we've been given with the new rules and the new roles we have as citizens of God's kingdom.

Listen to how Paul puts this, this is a lengthy paragraph but it's worth listening very carefully to. He said: *Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey -- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things*

result in death! But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The essence of what Paul is telling us is found in verse 17: *But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. That pattern of teaching is sanctification and it comes through hearing. James places a heavy emphasis on the act of hearing by introducing it with this phrase. He says, imperatively "know this." He says: Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*

And again that question can be raised, folks say, okay, quick to hear what? Well simple answer that I would give would be quick to hear what God is trying to tell me through every single means of communication that he uses. First and foremost would be his word but it would also include every other form of communication there is. God causes all things to work together for good, and he further tells us exactly what that good is. It's not health, it's not wealth, it's not prosperity, it is in fact sanctification. And God's telling us he's going to use every single aspect of our lives

to grow, shape and mold us into the image of his Son which is exactly what sanctification is.

In Romans 8:28, he says: And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

What that means is that God can and will use every opportunity to grow in us the fruit of the Spirit as his firstfruits of creation. Being "quick to hear" means having developed an ability to hear God when he speaks to you. And I don't think I'm exaggerating when I tell you your ability to hear is going to directly affect your whole sanctification to the rest of your life. And what's more, your capacity to hear is going to either expand or contract in proportion to your obedience to what it is you are hearing.

You see, the quicker we are to hear, that is the more willing we are to listen attentively with an intent to hear and obey, the more God is going to reveal to us.

Listen to how Jesus put it in *Mark 4*. He said: *If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.*" And he said to them, *"Pay attention to*

what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you."

Okay. Practically speaking, what does that mean? Well, practically speaking hearing means that we drop our defensiveness, that we perk up our spiritual ears and prepare to give God our full attention. And again, this is as much of an art as it is a science because this type of spiritual hearing, it doesn't come naturally to anyone.

Paul spoke at length that the struggle that exists in each of us of those two natures that are warring within us, the flesh and the spirit, and it's never more obvious when it comes to spiritual hearing.

The reason why spiritual hearing is an acquired skill or an art or a science and a discipline is because almost all spiritual hearing is centered on things -- and this is critical -- that we don't want to hear in the first place.

The reason why God insists over and over again -- quote -- "*pay attention to what you hear,*" "*incline your heart,*" "*harden not your heart*" is because our first response to hearing God's Holy Spirit speak is to defensively tune him out, speak over him or simply

ignore him.

God challenges me to grow in love, joy, and peace precisely when I'm tempted to be unloving, joyless, and quarrelsome. I mean the same is true with all of the fruits of the Spirit. The Spirit convicts and challenges me not in some theoretical theological setting but in my everyday life. That's where the spirit and that's where the fruit is grown.

Let me give you some very practical examples from my own life. You know, when I get into a fight with my wife and we both retire to our neutral corners -- you know how that goes, I'm sure -- the very last thing that I want to hear from the Holy Spirit is him questioning my motives or my intentions or my methods. But you know what? I hear him. I hear him speaking. And his intent is to create the very image of Christ in me and that image is forged and shaped not by the pleasant things in life but by life's struggles and life's difficulties.

I hear the Holy Spirit and usually I hear him through scripture but I also hear him asking me, "Tom, are you loving your wife as Christ loved the church?" And I can unmistakably hear him challenge my premises, my suppositions and my defenses and my arguments, and quite frankly it's the last thing on earth that I want to hear. I

hear him speaking about something when I'm saying something or thinking about saying something unkind or uncalled for, and I can literally hear God's spirit telling me, *"Put away anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth."* And sometimes I hear him and sometimes I just talk right over him.

Sometimes I turn on the television and I see something I know I'm supposed to be turning off, and I hear this voice in my head and it says: *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."*

I mean to be honest, I'm not saying I hear the scriptures quoted verbatim but I hear large chunks of scripture that I know is God's Holy Spirit speaking to me. I mean, Jesus did say: *"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."* And the Spirit of Christ bears that witness through the word of God. He applies those words to individual areas of my own sanctification and I know that in each of those areas, I have a choice. It's the volitional part of sanctification. I can listen and obey that voice or I can choose to ignore it altogether.

See, my salvation is not based on how good I am at the Christian life. If I was the most sanctified Christian who had ever lived, I would still be hopelessly lost because our righteousness is as filthy rags. My salvation is based on Christ's work and Christ's work alone, but my joy in this life and my preparation for the next is intimately tied to the decisions I make with regard to what I hear and how I hear it right now here today.

I think we all know it's relatively easy to push his voice aside, but there's a price to pay for that. Your spiritual ears become dull of hearing. Jesus said: *"For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear."*

I speak with many people who spiritually, I can tell they're completely deaf. When James says: *Know this, my beloved brothers: Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger,* he's imploring us to develop the skill of sanctified hearing because when you truly hear that way, you're not only actually growing the fruit of God's Holy Spirit into your spirit, you're also increasing your capacity to hear as well. *"With the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you."*

You know I know when my cat, when my cat used to -- cat's no longer

with us -- but when he was with us, I used to watch it, we'd hear another cat howling outside, she'd jump to the window, she'd cock her head and you could tell she was listening to pick up every single nuance and sound. I know dogs do the exact same thing. We would do well to model that behavior when it comes to hearing God's Holy Spirit speak, whether it's his word or prayer or worship or even simple conversation.

You see, we actually have to work at hearing him because his voice is usually the last thing we want to hear. He doesn't shout, he doesn't overwhelm and he doesn't demand that we stop and pay attention; but when we do, God is actually sanctifying us, changing us into the very image of his Son. Hence James' admonition, know this: *Know this, my beloved brothers: Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.* Let's pray.

Father, I pray that each and every one of us would become quick to hear. And we're not talking about pleasant things to hear. It's very easy to hear pleasant things; it's not easy to hear unpleasant things. And stress and strife and difficulty is where you are speaking to us usually at a shout but still we can push it away, still we can ignore it, still we can speak over it. You've given us that ability to where it's you and us together in partnership growing our sanctification. And so I pray you would give each and

every one of us the ability to be quick to hear when you're speaking and that you would grow us in that capacity. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.