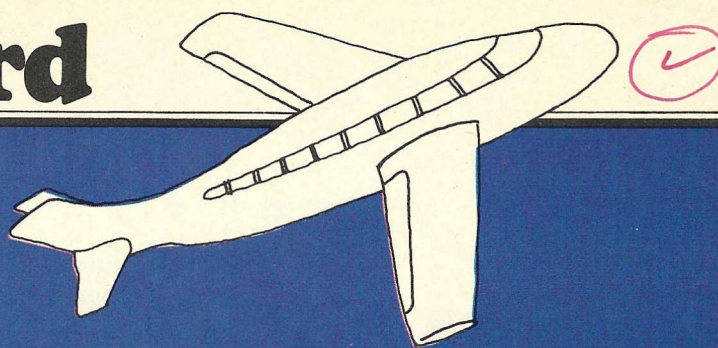


# The Last Word



## Jamie Buckingham

Most church people are professional listeners. But they seldom hear. Tapes, sermons, conference messages, all pour through their ears. But since we hear only what we want to hear, very little of the actual truth is ever applied.

My friend, Peter Lord, tells of a visitor in his home who could identify the sound of 200 different species of crickets. He had trained himself to hear what the rest of us miss.

The Bible is full of stories of men who heard. And those who didn't hear. Jesus often closed his remarks with the sad expression, "Those who have ears to hear, let them hear."

Very few seeds fall into fertile ground.

But while preaching is for proclamation, discipleship is for application. If a person does not give expression to the impression, the hearing becomes like faith without works—dead.

I sat down the other day with an engineer who had recently entered the Kingdom. He was having a hard time as he slowly realized that Kingdom people do not operate on the same principles as worldly people. Not only was he having to reevaluate his life style, he was also having to learn to listen to a new voice.

And that's difficult.

You see, those in the Kingdom receive directions from a different source than those in the world. And for that reason they must keep their spiritual ear always tuned for the voice of God.

Recently Bernie May picked me up in Melbourne, Florida, and flew me to Charlotte, North Carolina, in a private plane. We climbed up to 9000 feet, set the autopilot and sat there talking to each other in the cockpit. The radio was constantly crackling to life as the air traffic controller carried on conversations with other planes in the area. Bernie seemed oblivious to all the radio chatter. Yet every once in a while he would interrupt his conversation with me, reach out for the mike and identify himself. He had tuned out all other radio conversation except his own call letters. "Bellanca seven four romeo." The instant those words came through the speaker his trained ear picked them up and he was answering.

So many of us miss God because we are not tuned to hear his voice. We're listening to our stomach growl, our bank account wheeze, or the applause of some large crowd. Like Elijah, we need to be reminded that God usually speaks in still, small voices—not the roar of the crowd, even if it's shouting "AMEN!"

There are some things you can't do in a hurry. Grow is one of them. Neither can you listen in a hurry. It takes time and patience to learn to hear. And even more time to learn to act upon what we have heard—to give expression to the impression.

A couple of weeks ago I was on my way home from a conference, and had to change planes in Atlanta. I had been gone for four days and was weary—ready to get home and crawl into my own bed.

I was to be on the last flight into

Melbourne that day, arriving home at 9:30 p.m. When I reached the Eastern Airlines gate in Atlanta, I realized I had been given the last seat on the plane, even though there were a number of others still waiting. I thanked God for his goodness in providing a seat for his weary servant and started to board the plane. But as I left the ticket desk, I heard one of the standby passengers pleading with the agent.

"I must be in Melbourne by 10:00 p.m." he said. "I am a surgeon and have been called back from my vacation for an emergency operation tonight."

"I'm sorry, doctor," the agent said. "Every seat is taken."

"Give the doctor your seat," I heard deep in my heart. The voice was so familiar and precise.

I argued with God. "Lord, there are 142 others on this plane, and I'll bet none of them has been out serving you. If I miss this flight I'll have to spend the night in Atlanta. Why me?"

"Because you are the only one on this plane who will listen to me. That's why you!"

"Well, since you put it that way," I mumbled. And I turned around and gave the doctor my seat.

Some say it pays to serve Jesus. Well, that's not always true. Sometimes it costs to serve him. That time it cost me a night away from my family.

On the other hand, I learned a fresh lesson about obedience. And the tuition wasn't nearly as high as it used to be. So, maybe the ledger is positive after all.

α