

A Spirituality of Listening:

Living What We Hear

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"God comes to us in Jesus through the Spirit. God has spoken; God still speaks. Human spirituality is ongoing responsiveness and interaction with what is revealed."

Does God still speak to us?

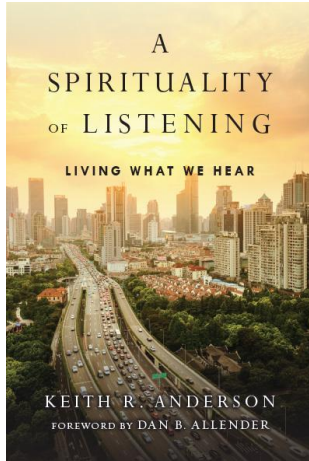
Is it possible to hear God's voice today, or does God no longer speak to people? Keith R. Anderson contends that if we believe God is still active in the world, then he most certainly does speak to us – the problem is we have forgotten how to listen.

A Spirituality of Listening helps us re-learn centuries-old practices of knowing God – practices Jesus also engaged in – that open our ears to God's voice. The key to hearing God, Anderson says, is recognizing that spirituality is found in listening to the ordinary details of our days.

Anderson's writing prompts readers to spiritual growth by considering the details that shaped Jesus' spirituality and guides listeners to God's voice at the places God has always spoken.

Anderson responds to questions including

- Does God still speak to people today?
- Why can we not hear God speak?
- How did Jesus learn to hear and listen to God?
- What are the practices of listening encountered in the Bible from creation to Jesus? How can we apply those today?
- How can we hear God in ordinary, day-to-day life events? Isn't it best to listen in solitude?
- What does it mean that life is found in the details?
- Why does listening open us to seeing ordinary life as extraordinary?
- What makes ten-step guides or how-to formulas ineffective for hearing God?
- Why do we have to be intentional about listening for God?
- How can we learn to speak with God rather than for or about him?
- What makes listening such an important aspect of spirituality?
- Is everyone able to hear God, or is listening reserved for the "spiritual elite"?
- Does listening lead to action and change in our life?



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Recovering God's Voice, Learning to Listen

Biblical spirituality says there is still a source that reveals the voice of the living God. It asserts that God is not done with the business of revelation and creation but instead continues to have something to say and something yet to be accomplished in the very culture that isn't sure if God is done speaking. We have muted, muffled and, in some cases, silenced the voice of God because we have forgotten to listen in the ways and places where God's voice has always been heard. I hope to recover a way of practicing spirituality that has been silenced for some because we have lost our listening; we need to re-create another way of listening. And I confess, I am not only a product of a culture that silenced the thunder of God's voice; I have myself done it for others. I don't sit in any seat outside looking in from a comfortable perch; I have helped to foster practices and a culture of silence.

In an earlier time of my life, there was a question that blared its answer on radio, TV, magazines, pulpits and talk shows across North America. Started as a question in academia, it soon was asked on street corners and in libraries, coffee shops and offices: "Is God dead?" Philosophers, theologians and curious on-lookers concluded yes. I listened in on the conversations too, and I wondered: Did God pass away in the night, or over the centuries as humankind outgrew our need for an all-powerful deity? Did God die because we found new technologies, medications and innovations to replace God as creator, healer and redeemer? It never seemed to me to be a question about God as much as about people. . . .

Even in Seattle, a city nourished by what I call REI spirituality, a coalition of environmentalism, social consciousness and tolerance for all differences, I still find a hunger for something that isn't filled by our care of Mother Earth or the poor or certain other marginalized peoples. Perhaps the question in our day is no longer "Is God dead?" but "Where can God's voice be heard?" Most people aren't really fooled by the notion that humanity is all that exists, that humanity is the final answer to the questions asked across the centuries. I find that most people are hungry for something more, something deeper, something beyond. In my experience most people believe that God is alive, but they wonder if God has lost his voice. Sermons speak of almost everything except a continuing conversation with a living God. Books, articles, blogs and social media are full of the continuing search for the Spirit that has been our human quest from the beginning; we readily speak *about* God or *for* God when it seems our longing is to speak *with* God.

Where can God's voice be heard today? Some say God's voice can only be heard in the Bible, where the history of what God said is recorded, as if God cut off all communication after the early second century. Others believe God can only be heard in human-to-human relationships, as if the transcendent God of the ages can no longer speak for God's own self.

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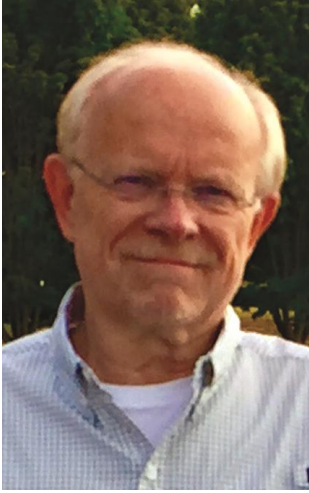
For some there is a notion that God can only be heard through educated and certified voices trained in special ways that authorize their words, as if God's voice must be filtered through certain people. And some say that God can only be heard through rituals, liturgies or gatherings where particular forms contain the voice of God, as if God's exclusive concern is with religion, worship, sermons, praise choruses and hymns.

You can tell that I'm not buying any of this because there was One who showed us another way to listen. His name was Yeshua, or Jesus as he is known to most of us. Early followers made outrageous claims that he not only spoke *for* God but he knew God and even *was* God wrapped up in a human body, which certainly complicates things. The entire weight of the Bible tilts the story to him. It says that Jesus knew something we need:

He was in the world,
the world was there through him,
and yet the world didn't even notice.
He came to his own people,
but they didn't want him.
But whoever did want him,
who believed he was who he claimed
and would do what he said,
He made to be their true selves,
their child-of-God selves. (John 1:10-12 *The Message*)

Jesus is the pattern or archetype of spirituality as it shapes people into our "child-of-God selves." A teacher named Paul said, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. . . . For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:15, 19). Listening for the voice of God is not simply waiting for an audible voice; it is also spending time in the presence of the teacher, Jesus, whose teaching speaks loud enough for all of us to hear.

— Taken from chapter one, "Resonance"



Keith R. Anderson, author of
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“A Fiercely Humble, Kind and Generous Man”

Keith R. Anderson (DMin, George Fox Evangelical Seminary) is president of The Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. He is also professor of practical theology. *A Spirituality of Listening* is his sixth book, following the titles *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Those Giving and Receiving Direction*, *Friendships That Run Deep*, *Does God Believe In You? Developing Spiritual Self-Confidence*, *Is This The One?* and *What They Don't Always Teach You at a Christian College*.

“Keith Anderson is a fiercely humble, kind and generous man who will help you receive the blessing of attunement,” says Dan B. Allender, author of *To Be Told*. “I am Keith’s debtor for a lifetime of listening and now I am thankful that you get to listen to the beauty of his words and life. You too will never be the same.”

Anderson previously served as dean of spiritual formation and vocation at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, and as dean of spiritual formation and campus pastor at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was director of Vocare, a program for theological exploration of vocation funded by a \$2 million grant from the Lilly Endowment, and has been the Senior Fellow for Spiritual Formation for the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities since 2000. His parish ministry experience includes serving urban parishes in Washington State, Michigan and Minnesota.