

Attentiveness

vs. Distraction

Attentiveness is giving a “hearing heart” to the people or projects that need our concentration.

Definition

Qashab, the root word of the only Hebrew word rendered *attentive* [*qashshab*], describes the attentiveness a son should give to his father’s instruction. It means “to prick up the ears, hearken.” The word *azan* is translated *give ear* and means “to broaden out the ear.” The word *shama* describes our attentiveness to God and means “to hear intelligently.”

The Greek word for *attentive* is *ekkremamai*, which means “to hang upon the lips of a speaker, i.e. to listen closely.” This is the word used to describe the attentiveness of the crowds who listened to Jesus teach. (See Luke 19:48.)

What Is Attentiveness?

Attentiveness is an attitude of readiness to do what is true and right. An attentive person maintains good eye contact, sits up straight, is not distracted, takes notes, and clarifies information that is given.

Attentiveness involves more than just listening with the ears—it involves a “listening heart.” When Solomon was given the opportunity by God to ask for whatever he wanted, he wisely asked for a listening heart. In his prayer, the Hebrew word translated *understanding* can also be rendered *hearing*. “Give . . . thy servant an understanding [*shama*]

heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad” (I Kings 3:9). God gave Solomon his request, and because he asked for a listening heart, God also promised him wisdom, riches, and honor. (See I Kings 3:10–13.)

Attentiveness Pleases God

The ear is one of the first organs to develop in the womb, and hearing is one of the last senses to cease as death approaches. It is therefore appropriate to develop attentiveness, because many other character qualities are dependent on it. Without attentiveness, we will not even hear the commands of Scripture or the instructions of parents or authorities.

- “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels” (Proverbs 1:5).
- “If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee” (Exodus 15:26).
- “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).



By considering the opposite of our natural inclinations, we prepare to hear the voice of God.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” —Isaiah 55:9

“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” —Proverbs 16:25



Those who listen best learn most.

“Attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings.” —Proverbs 4:20

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” —John 10:27

How Attentive Are You . . .

1. To the voice of God and the direction of the Holy Spirit?

God speaks to us through the Scriptures and the prophets of old: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16). "As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets" (Luke 1:70).

God brings our attention to verses that have significance in our lives. These important *rhemas* build faith and bring true success. (See Matthew 4:4, Romans 10:17, John 15:7.)

If we have been too busy for God's Word, then we have been too busy! Set a time and a place that you can use for private appointments with the Lord in His Word.

Personal Evaluation

How attentive are you to the voice of God?

- Do you spend time each day reading God's Word?
- Do you search out the meanings of key words in your reading?
- Do you ask how you can apply the Scriptures to your daily life?
- Do you turn Scripture into personal prayers?
- Do you give attention to verses that have special meaning and application to your life?
- Do you take time to listen to God speak to you as you pray?

2. To the instructions of your father and mother?

If you have not been attentive to your parents, consider the following Scriptures.

- "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (Proverbs 1:8).
- "Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:2-3).
- "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it" (Proverbs 30:17).
- "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old" (Proverbs 23:22).

Attentiveness to parents (or any other authority) begins by understanding that God communicates His will to us through those He places over us. When the children of Israel murmured against Moses, God said, "Your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD" (Exodus 16:8).

Attentiveness springs from an obedient spirit—a prior commitment and desire to do what authorities ask us to do unless it violates Scripture or is not wise. In such cases we should wisely appeal their requests, maintaining a higher commitment to never do evil.

The **white-tailed deer** constantly listens to what takes place around it. It has extremely acute hearing. Even while grazing, it remains attentive to its surroundings and is on the lookout for danger.



When have attentive listeners saved the lives of great leaders?

- A loyal subject saved the life of a king. (See Esther 6.)
- A lad saved the life of a great apostle. (See Acts 23.)

Both of these listeners received rewards from which we still benefit.

We hear the voice of God more clearly when we are on our faces crying out for wisdom than when we are on our feet, asking for help.

"Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge."

—Proverbs 22:17





Attentiveness begins by asking God for a “hearing heart.”

Listening is more than hearing words. It is also discerning facial expressions, tonal patterns, body language, and most of all, listening to the spirit of a person.



The Latin root of *attentiveness* is *attendere*, meaning “to stretch,” as a horse turns its ears forward. A horse indicates its attentiveness by the position of its ears.

“Whoever would understand what he hears must hasten to put into practice what he has heard.” —Saint Gregory

We can be attentive to parents by offering them respectful and undivided attention. We do this by sitting up straight or standing when they talk, looking at them rather than at other things, nodding when we understand, and asking polite questions if we do not understand.

Giving such honor brings the rewards of God, including a wise example for our own children.

“Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. For I was my father’s son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth” (Proverbs 4:1–5).

Personal Evaluation

How attentive are you to your parents?

- Would your parents say you have an obedient spirit when they give you instructions?
- When your parents call for you, do you stop what you are doing and go to them quickly?
- When your parents give directions, do you make sure you understand them?
- Do you confirm instruction with the Word of God?
- When making decisions, do you ask yourself what your parents would say?

3. To the counsel of wise advisors?

By walking with wise men, we will be wise. (See Proverbs 13:20.) One effective way to walk with the wise is to read the biographies of great men and women of faith. As Charles Jones stated, “You will be five years from now what you are today except for two things: the books you read and the friends you make.”

We should get wisdom as cheaply as we can. Others have paid a high price for it through lessons learned “the hard way” and will usually share their experience if we ask them. “Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end” (Proverbs 19:20). “In multitude of counsellors there is safety” (Proverbs 24:6).

When gathering counsel, we must always confirm it in Scripture and make sure that there are no cautions from the Spirit of God that our consciences override.

Personal Evaluation

How attentive are you to wise counselors?

- Do you surround yourself with wise and mature counselors?
- Do you ask wise people for counsel and for their insight on lessons they have learned?
- Do you regularly read about great Christians?
- Do you carefully search out a matter before making a decision?