

featured articles

Healthy ears, healthy spirit

By April Barr

Accessories! Accessories! Accessories! Shoes, handbags, jewelry, and belts only name a few of the various choices. Many women will go to great lengths, searching long and hard, to find the perfect accessories that can transform an ordinary outfit into something spectacular! Purchasing the proper accessories for a new outfit or updating our wardrobe is often an exciting adventure.

In Dallas, where I live, one of the fashion hotspots is Sam Moon – a 15,000 square foot store (picture three and a half basketball courts!) filled with the latest handbags and accessories at wholesale prices. Some women will spend the whole day perusing the aisles. On a recent visit to Sam Moon's, I was in pursuit of earrings. The vast selection ranged from fashion to clip, crystal, hoops, and studs. While examining each colorful row, I discovered a pair of crown chandelier earrings. The purple and green crown rhinestones caught my attention. Since my Queen Esther's Court logo is a crown and the colors are purple and green, I knew these earrings were perfect for me. What a fabulous find!

Although I received several compliments on my crown earrings, I began noticing a slight discomfort in my earlobes. By the end of the day the pain had increased and my ears were itchy, red, and infected – I couldn't wait to take them off! Immediately, I began rubbing alcohol and ointment on my aching ears to bring relief. I wondered, "What caused my ears to negatively react? Why were my ears so sensitive?"

Our spiritual ears

As I waited for my tender ears to recover, I thought about how our spiritual ears are even more sensitive than our physical ears. We encounter a myriad of voices each day that vie for our attention. Because the voices we listen to determine the choices we make, it is essential to analyze these influences. Several questions came to mind as I thought about my spiritual ears:

What are some of the voices I encounter each day? Are they positive or negative?

What messages do I hear and believe? Are they truth or lies?

What words or music do I hear?

Whose advice or counsel do I request?

Throughout the Bible, several verses address what we hear and the benefits of listening to God. Below are three Scriptures from Proverbs, the book of wisdom, reiterating the value of listening. (NIV)

Proverbs 1:33 Whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.

Proverbs 4:20-23 Pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Proverbs 8:33-34 Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway.

God promises that we will have peace and wisdom when we commit to listening to and obeying his guidelines. No one will have a trouble-free life, yet when we are sensitive to God's voice, we will experience an abundant life of blessings.

A friend's powerful influence

Imagine me standing on a stool. Would it be easier for me to pull you up on the stool or for you to pull me off the stool? If you answered the latter, you are correct! Because of gravity, an individual will consistently fall down easier than being pulled up.

Think about the people you interact with each day. How do their words influence your soul? Do they encourage you or pull you down? Proverbs 27:17 says, "Iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another." You may have heard it said, "Show me your friends and I will show you your future." Do your friends increase your desire to know and hear God intimately? Or do they dull your desire to honor God with your life?

For instance, I know of a woman – let's call her Jamie – in her early 40s. She was married with children and enjoyed her family, friends, career, and beautiful neighborhood. However, she became bored in her marriage. Jamie's husband was not as romantic or as physically attractive as he was when they were dating.

After consistent focus on her "unfair, miserable" situation, Jamie believed the lie that she deserved better. When a married man began to show interest in Jamie, romancing her with flowers, cards, and dinners, she became involved in an extra-marital affair.

Jamie began telling her closest girl friends about her escapades, believing her actions were not harming her family. She was "just having fun." Jamie's affair seemed intriguing and harmless, yet within a few months each of her friends decided to become involved with men other than their husbands.

Jamie's choices had a negative influence on her friends. Her friends chose to listen to and participate in destructive situations. As the Bible declares in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Bad company corrupts good character." Because of Jamie's selfish desires, what she deemed "harmless" from her inner voice ended up devastating her life. She lost her marriage, deeply wounded her children, and damaged several families.

Hearing God

Of all the voices we listen to, God's is the most trustworthy. The Bible tells us that faith comes by hearing and hearing from the Word of God. (Romans 10:17) Do you hear God when he speaks? Do you listen as God communicates to you through the Bible, prayer, people, and circumstances?

Because we live in an active society, many times it is challenging to be still and listen. Nonetheless, God promises to lead, guide, and direct our lives if we take time to hear and listen to his voice. Each day I trust that the God of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding knows how to direct me better than my limited insight.

Examining my spiritual ears, similar to using Q-tips to clean my physical ears, will enhance my hearing from God! As we spend time with God, he teaches us how to be comfortable in his powerful, loving, and forgiving presence.

The chorus to one of my favorite praise songs proclaims about God: "What a wonderful Maker, what a wonderful Savior, how majestic your whispers, and how humble your love, with strength like no other, and heart of a father, how majestic your whispers, what a wonderful God!" I hope we will choose to examine our ears, making it a priority to hear and listen to the God who loves us.

How to choose the perfect accessories

With the right accessories, a basic black dress or even jeans and a T-shirt can become unique fashion statements. Contrary to popular belief, accessorizing well doesn't have to be expensive. When I buy accessories, I look for classic pieces that I can mix and match with several of my outfits. Also, I only buy pieces I really like; it's better to have one bag you really love than several purses you'll tire of in a few months. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you shop for accessories:

Accessory style: It is important that your accessories not compete with your clothing. If you're wearing a detailed outfit – with interesting textures, many colors, or lots of beads or crochet work – wear simple accessories, if you wear accessories at all. On the other hand, if your clothing is more basic, you might choose to make a statement with a bold piece of jewelry or daring handbag.

Jewelry: When you're looking for jewelry, consider your bone structure. I have a smaller bone structure, so I tend to wear smaller jewelry, like stud earrings instead of thick, large hoops. A woman with a larger bone structure can wear bigger pieces. For shoppers on a limited budget, I recommend nice costume jewelry. Since earrings are easy to misplace, some of my favorite earrings are cubic zirconium studs to complement my precious stones. They only cost a few dollars, and only a jeweler would know they're not diamonds!

Necklaces: Longer, layered necklaces are in style. Because they tend to have a more intricate look, they work best when paired with solid color shirts and jackets

Hair accessories: Whether your hair is short or long, you can wear one of this year's favorite looks: a scarf! Some women use actual scarves and tie them around their heads like a headband. Others buy headbands that look like scarves on top, but have elastic underneath the hair to hold them firmly in place.

Handbags: Good news for many of us who want to ensure we're prepared for anything – big purses are still in fashion! I recently bought an oversized, camel-colored purse to match a pair of camel boots I bought last year. Because they often match denim's camel-colored stitching, camel-colored bags and boots look great with blue jeans. With the black bag and boots that I have already, I'm set for the cooler months.

Shoes: Unless you have an Oprah-sized shoe closet, simple, classic shoes in basic colors are good choices. But even in the smallest of closets, you can find room for at least one fun pair of shoes. My fun shoes have multi-colored pink flowers on the toes. I often wear them with a solid pink skirt and black top, gaining several compliments! I've had them forever and make a special effort to keep them in good shape.

Belts: This year, I'm seeing a lot of women wear belts around their hips over long shirts. Often these are metal chain belts or leather belts, some tied with leather strands. Women who are curvier, though, might prefer to try another style – like wearing a sash tied around your waist.

When you do hit the stores to shop for accessories, remember to have an idea of what your wardrobe most needs. In the past, I have regrettably purchased accessories because they were great bargains or fashionable. When I go shopping, my goal is to choose accessories that work well with my body shape and sense of style. If they happen to be the latest fashion, great! If not, I make sure I'm choosing a classic style and color that will look great even a few years from now.

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About April Barr



Modeling and acting internationally and throughout the United States, April Barr has appeared in magazines like *Glamour*, *Vogue*, *Seventeen*, and *Modern Bride*. Recently, April has graced the three covers of *Becoming*, magazine formats of the Bible.

Throughout her experiences in the fashion industry, April has realized that true beauty is found only in a growing, vibrant, personal relationship with Jesus. April is the founder of Queen Esther's Court, her platform for encouraging and equipping women of all ages. As April inspires and challenges audiences throughout the country, she provides practical tips and insights from God's Word for developing internal character that creates true, lasting outer beauty. If you are interested in April speaking at your next event, please visit www.aprilbarr.com or call (888) 471-9927.