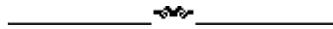


LISTENING & BECOMING

attending God and my true self



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4 Stages of Listening Prayer

Read

Scripture – the psalms, “The Bible’s Prayer Book”

Reflect

Notice what stirs, feels attractive—a word, picture, phrase or idea

Respond

Express what stirs—awe, thanks, anger, sorrow, worship—whatever’s real
speak, sing, journal, move, create art, poetry, etc.

Rest

Rest wordlessly with God; let your deepest self attend and enjoy God



Attending God in quiet – PSALMS & PROPHETS

You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek." Psalm 27:8

For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence... Psalm 62:5

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. Psalm 130:5,6

Be still before the Lord, wait patiently for him. Psalm 37:7

Jesus and prayer – THE GOSPELS

In the morning while it was still dark Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place and was praying there. Mark 1:35

But Jesus himself would often slip away to the wilderness to pray. Luke 5:16

It was at this time he went off to the mountain to pray and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. Luke 6:12

Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing...for the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. John 5:19,20

"Contemplata" Latin, meaning "to see"

An enhanced interior seeing—a seeing into God, ourselves and God's movement and activity around us. God appears more present, available, capable and up to good things.



Benefits of wordless resting, attending

Relief – *rest for the overactive mind*

It's a great relief to take a temporary vacation from the overactive mind's intense need to solve life—to figure everything out, to mentally debate with itself and others. Wordless prayer temporarily rests the hang-ups, frailties and pestering patterns of the mind. We relax like a secure child in a love more deeply anchored and certain than shifting thoughts or feelings.

Core identity firms up

In this place of gazing upon God and receiving God's loving gaze in return, we slowly start to comprehend who we really are. "Ah! I'm a child—a daughter, a son. I'm not a slave to the culture, to the voices of my past or my old way of doing life. I'm not a religious employee who has to carefully, exhaustingly work for God's approval. I'm a beloved child—life is safe, everything's ok, all is well."

Release

Resting with God develops a growing inner posture of release—release of debilitating fears, rigid opinions and anxious strategies; release of our need to control others and our environment in order to feel safe.

Yes!

Quietly attending God grows an interior spirit of *Yes!* A spirit of open-heartedness and welcome toward God, ourselves, others, new and life-giving ideas and experiences, people in pain, people we don't get.

Transformation

One of the surprising and delightful results of wordless prayer is a slow, gentle and steadily deepening experience of personal transformation as our spirits become home to God's regular presence. "*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*"
2nd Corinthians 3:17



Trauma and wordless attending

Where trauma goes

When we experience a trauma of some kind, especially in our childhood—abusive anger in the home, for example, or insecurity concerning money, shaming by adults, the loss of a parent, the awareness of some physical imperfection, a physically violating abuse—some of the unprocessed trauma deposits in our unconscious self, below the level of our awareness.

This unconscious part of us creates an often-distorted storyline about why we experienced the things we did: adult anger (I deserved it); shaming (I am shameful); the loss of a parent in death or divorce (it was my fault); physical imperfection (I'm inherently deformed); physically violating abuse (I'm worthy of it); the daily stresses of life (I'm alone and in danger), etc.

Out of these false beliefs our unconscious self offers survival strategies to help us get through life. But these strategies, created in shadow and as reactions against pain, often become imprisoning themselves.

Over time, we might become aware of our false beliefs and misshapen survival strategies, and try with the help of our mind and will to overcome them. But they are rooted so deeply out of reach in the dim recesses of our unconscious self that we find them difficult if not impossible to fully change.

Silent communion with God and healing

Wordless communion with God offers a dimension of healing from trauma that never exhausts its riches. Because silent, restful communion with God involves direct, spirit-to-Spirit union—opening our spirits, our core selves, again and again to God's company in welcoming immediate contact—God's Spirit has access to our deepest selves, even our unconscious selves, where God gradually softens, weakens and gently dismantles our imprisoning false beliefs and strategies.

These in turn have less and less power over us, while we begin to resemble more and more the One our spirits behold: *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another..."* (2nd Corinthian 3:18)



listening for God in Quiet

a way of wordless prayer

- find your habitual spot for prayer
- enjoy a psalm or other Scripture to ready your heart
- set a timer for 5 or 10 minutes (increase the time as you desire)
- place yourself in a position of relaxed attention
- let your deepest self welcome God, relax with God
release a need to feel God; just lovingly be with God
- keep things light, loose, have no expectations or demands - remain
- when finished be grateful for the time however it went; *know you were with God!*



3 Options for Practice

Attending God in Quiet

1 – Use the wordless prayer method above

Rest quietly, wordlessly and attentively with God. Just enjoy God.

2 – Picture a scene of yourself with God

Some possibilities:

- Be as Mary listening at Jesus' feet (Luke 10:38-42)
- Be as the Apostle John resting your head on Jesus' breast (John 13:23)
- Be as the beloved children on Jesus' lap (Mark 10:13-16)
- Rest with Jesus at the foot of the cross

Or any restful, quiet picture that allows your heart to wordlessly attend God

3 – Doodle a picture of yourself in a quiet place relaxing with God

While doodling just enjoy God and let God enjoy you.



Prayer Experience

Having had this short prayer experience, 1 or 2 things I find attractive or intriguing about this way of prayer are:

10 or 12 things I find challenging about it are...

Just be with God in all you feel...



Wandering Thoughts

during wordless prayer

- When the mind wanders, just return to your intention to be with God
 - If your mind wanders 1,000 times that's 1,000 opportunities to return to Jesus!

- Don't fight thoughts or try to have no thoughts
 - don't hassle yourself about wandering thoughts / expect them / simply return to God
 - let thoughts be in your head – let attentiveness to God be in your heart

- When attention drifts, say a word that signifies your intention to be with God
 - "Jesus," "abide," "welcome," (or any word that renews your intention to be with God)

- To further anchor your intention to be with God, maybe bring an image to mind
 - e.g. Mary at Jesus' feet in Luke 10, John on Jesus' breast in John 13, the children on Jesus' lap in Mark 10 - or any image that helps renew your intention to rest, remain, abide with God



Beyond healing

Wordless union with God results in broad and deep inner growth

- Hungry, overly needy human attachments are loosened and made less powerful
Like Jesus, you have discovered more satisfying food (John 4:32)
- Intuition and discernment become more alive
- Perceptiveness about systems increases—*cultural, family, political*
- Human power over you softens and lessens
- Courage and clarity about your path increases—your true self comes forward
- Compassion expands—the “urge to bless” strengthens
- A growing sense of safety and “home” emerges—of resting in the center of things

MORE LISTENING RESOURCES



Listening to My Life



what was today's high point?

When did I feel most alive, full, or engaged? When did I feel most at one with God? When was I aware of receiving or giving special love? For what moment of my day do I feel most grateful?

what was today's low point?

When did I feel most drained, detached, or empty? When did I feel most distant from God? When did I give or receive the least love? For what moment of my day do I feel least grateful?

how might God be present in this high or low?

Was God present though hidden in this high or low point? What is God speaking through this? How is God offering me care? Is God inviting me toward or away from anything? What hidden gift might exist here?

activity guide

Visit these questions daily. Do any patterns emerge? What might these patterns suggest about God's presence, care and guidance going forward? How might you respond?

activity guide for groups

small groups

Form a small group focused on noticing God's presence and activity in each other's lives. Open your group time with a brief reflective Scripture reading, then 10-15 minutes of listening for God using the questions on the other side. Go around the group to share responses. Ask open-ended questions that help unfold and celebrate God's movement and call in each other's lives. Notice ways to respond to God's invitations.

marriages, families, friendships

Adapt this for mealtimes, bedtimes and one-on-one settings. Regularly enjoy this way of noticing God together. Watch it strengthen your shared life in Christ, your joy, respect, listening, forgiveness and sense of new possibilities.

ministry teams

Follow the format under "small groups" above for reviewing ministry activities, programs, outreaches or meetings. How was God present in your activity in ways you might not have immediately noticed? Does a sense of God's absence signal anything? What might God be calling your team toward or away from?

listening through Scripture



read Select a story passage from the Bible, for example from the Gospels, Acts or Old Testament. Read the passage several times inviting God to be present. During this stage of the reading just enjoy the passage being aware of the big picture.

look Put yourself in the scene with the characters of the passage. What is the setting? What are the sights, smells, sounds, weather, time of day? What do the characters look like, even smell like? What are their longings, fears, needs or concerns?

listen Now, notice whether there is a word, phrase, character or picture from the passage that seems especially alive to you. What stirs and calls? Is God whispering any comfort, encouragement or conviction about the pains, joys or longing of your life? Might this be the Holy Spirit offering you something, inviting you toward something?

respond Notice, *“What’s one way I yearn to respond to God’s invitation in this passage?”*

activity guide for personal use

Use this way of Bible meditation to be with God in the same posture of worshipful listening that Mary showed in Luke 10:38-42. How does God speak? How will you respond?

activity guide for groups

small groups

Form a group using this reading approach. Open with personal reflection using the method. Then go around the group sharing what’s alive to you--insights, invitations, comfort, challenge. This way of reading together will grow trust, transparency, worship and love in the group.

marriages, families, friendships

Adapt this for mealtimes, bedtimes and one-to-one settings. Reading the Bible together like this strengthens joy, respectful listening, forgiveness and a sense of new possibilities together in Christ.

ministry teams

Ministry teams that practice this sort of Bible reading together will notice enhanced power, fruitfulness and trust within the team and in outreaches. Open planning meetings with a 15 minute abbreviated version. This will very often lead to unexpected power and connections between the Scripture and the ministry outreach.

tips: Follow Jesus entirely through one Gospel, selecting a story per chapter, one story per session. Or select just one character from the passage for all to reflect on. Visit the passage a few times, experiencing the passage from the perspective of a different character each time.

Behold the One Beholding You



the story is told

of a French cleric who heard that a congregation member, a peasant farmer, had an unusually deep prayer life. At first the cleric was miffed that someone in his congregation, no less a simple peasant, should be considered to pray more deeply than he! But he swallowed his pride and went to see the peasant. "Tell me," asked the cleric, "what is the method of your prayer life?" The peasant looked at the cleric with some bewilderment and responded, "There is no method. I look at Jesus, and Jesus looks at me."

Gazing into God

Take 5-20 minutes a few times a week to simply lean your deepest self quietly and attentively into God. There is a deep part within you that yearns to relax under God's care. Give that part of yourself room to let go of the rest of the world for a few minutes and just be with God with interest, openness, and ready attention. Let the Holy Spirit teach you this way of prayer.

NOTE: It can be helpful to recall the physical posture of Mary in Luke 10 as she listens at the feet of Jesus—gazing, attentive, interested, loving, quiet, surrendered, listening. Her interest is more in Jesus himself than in the things he says. Lean your inner self into God in this way. When stray thoughts come, don't worry. Each stray thought is an opportunity to lovingly return to God!

Gazing with God into my Life

At times a question, problem, or stuck spot arises in life. Instead of reflexively attacking the problem, strategizing, praying hard (and often worrying and freaking out) it can be really helpful to simply sit with God and be together calmly, patiently, and gently with your issue.

Take 5-20 minutes a few times a week to sit in company with God with your question or problem. Leave your assumptions, timetables and demands behind. While holding your issue loosely and lovingly, place your gentle attention in God. As the days pass notice changes in your perception of the situation, including a growing sense of new possibilities. Let the Holy Spirit teach you this way of prayer.

Prayers of Gazing

*You have said, "Seek my Face." My heart says to you,
"Your face Lord, do I seek!" Psalm 27:8*



Praying Scripture

Select a piece of Scripture, maybe starting with the psalms. (Move on to other passages later.) Notice which portions of the passage connect with your own longings, joys or fears. Join your inner intention with the Scripture and pray it as your own prayer. From time to time pause to let your spirit lean toward God in wordless, worshipful union.

Stepping into Scripture

Through God's gift of imagination step inside Scripture passages. Experience the story through the eyes of each participant. Be aware of the moments of the story that most touch you. Pause occasionally to let your deepest self gaze in union, fellowship and worshipful inquiry into God. Gospel passages are a good place to start.

Creation

God's face is shown in nature in beautiful and healing ways. He is uniquely present in his creation. While walking in nature, occasionally let your spirit lean wordlessly and worshipfully into God.

Your word

Think of one or two words that both express and request union with God at this time in your life (e.g. "I love you," "you're my home," or your own special words). Quietly speak these words aloud as you go about your daily routine.

Your art or hobby

Your art or hobby are creative gifts that intimately connect you with your Creator. They are lenses into God who shares in the joy you take in your art. Pause occasionally with your art or hobby to receive God's happy gaze.

Your pen

Many people find that when they put pen to paper their roaming thoughts get focused and God's words become more clear. As you journal from the heart, pause sometimes to let your spirit lean into and take comfort in God.

Community Listening



Listening for God in Conversations

During ordinary conversations quietly invite God to be present, asking God to help you listen beneath the surface of the conversation for his presence and for the hopes, dreams, pain, needs, and longings of the person you're speaking with. Repeatedly release your need to impress, convince, or correct. Instead, cock the ear of your heart continually in God's direction, inviting his thoughts and desires to find their way into the conversation.

Listening for God Before Meetings

Meetings that begin with a brief time of worshipful listening for God through Scripture find that an awareness of God's presence and guidance are increased during the meeting. A few minutes using the *Read, Look, Listen, Respond* method described on the Listening Card (tweak the method to fit your taste and group) tends to put God in the center of the discussion. It enhances listening and respect in the group, increases courage to take risks, makes profound things seem possible, and generally makes the work go more smoothly and be more fruitful.

Listening for God During Meetings

Pause quietly during meetings for a minute or two as needed to call back a prayerful "listening posture" that helps you be aware of God's presence and guidance in the meeting. During this brief break, encourage the group to release to God any opinions or personal preferences in the discussion that may have begun to be gripped too hard. Read a verse from the Psalms a couple of times that encourages looking to the Lord as the group gives God the lead in the conversation once again. Such worshipful listening tends to help the group reconnect with the Holy Spirit, avoid unproductive rabbit trails, and enjoy a more respectful and fruitful discussion.

Listening for God at the End of Meetings

Close meetings with a minute or two of group listening. A leader guides the group as follows:

- ◆ *Think back over the meeting today. Get a sense for the many things shared.* (brief pause)
- ◆ *If you could distill to a single word or phrase God's word to you as this meeting closes, what would that be?* (pause)
- ◆ *What would you like to say to God about that? Express your heart silently and transparently to God.* (pause)
- ◆ *What is God perhaps saying to you, in return?* (pause)
- ◆ *Receive and rest in God's word to you.* (pause)

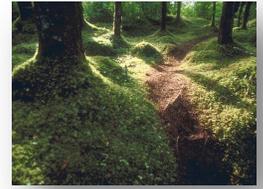
SPIRITUAL DIRECTION RELATIONSHIPS

Personal Spiritual Direction

Ask your pastor for resources for a one-to-one spiritual direction relationship with a Twin Cities spiritual director.

Group Spiritual Direction – see below

Group Spiritual Direction



Group Spiritual Direction is a small group that listens for, notices and affirms God's presence and activity in each other's lives. The group strengthens awareness and celebration of God. This leads to deeper joy, healing and courage to respond to God's work and call.

Meeting format

Four group members. Approximately 2 hours. One person facilitates, while 3 group members share per session. (Facilitation rotates among the members. The facilitator does not share.)

Open

The person facilitating offers a brief, reflective Scripture reading, repeating the reading 3 or 4 times for silent reflection (5-7 minutes). The final reading is followed by prayerful silence for about two minutes while the group members listen for God through the Scripture.

Sharing

Then, the first group member shares

- For up to 15 minutes, without interruption, the group member shares what they are experiencing in life right now. Joys, pains, questions, happiness, uncertainties. Whatever they would like to share with the group. The group member might or might not share how the opening reading intersects with what they are experiencing in life.
- After sharing, the listeners are given 2 minutes to ask "clarifying questions" – questions to clarify some point that the group member shared that might not be clear. The listeners don't make comments or suggestions to the person who shared. They simply ask clarifying questions. Limit this time to 2 minutes.
- Now, prayerful silence for two minutes as the listeners make themselves open to how the Holy Spirit was present in the group member's sharing.
- Then the group asks the presenter **reflective** questions, *not "leading" questions or "teaching" questions*—but open-ended questions to help the member discern God in their life, and unpack further thoughts and feelings - 15-30 min.
- This is followed by two minutes of prayerful silence.
- Finally, a brief prayer is offered by the listeners for the group member who shared. Usually just a silent prayer, or one person prays.

Brief break, and repeat for second and third presenters



RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT COMPASSIONATE NEARNESS WITH GOD, MYSELF & OTHERS

LISTENING

- ◆ *Open Mind, Open Heart*, Thomas Keating
- ◆ *Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, Ruth Haley-Barton
- ◆ *Sleeping with Bread*, Dennis Linn
- ◆ *Let Your Life Speak*, Parker Palmer
- ◆ *Soul Craving: An Invitation to the Feast*, Joel Warne
- ◆ *How to Eat Your Bible: God's Word as Food for Your Soul*, Joel Warne
- ◆ *Practicing the Presence of God*, Brother Lawrence
- ◆ *The Cloud of Unknowing*
- ◆ *A Testament of Devotion*, Thomas Kelly
- ◆ *The Way of a Pilgrim*

Wellbeing & Intimacy

- ◆ *Life of the Beloved*, Henri Nouwen
- ◆ *The Tree That Survived the Winter*, Mary Fahy
- ◆ *The Life Model: Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You*, James G. Friesen
- ◆ *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*, Madame Guyon
- ◆ *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Henri Nouwen
- ◆ *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Francis de Sales
- ◆ *Anthony DeMello, Writings*
- ◆ *A Tree Full of Angels*, Macrina Weiderkehr
- ◆ *Hinds Feet on High Places*, Hannah Hurnard
- ◆ *Twelve Steps to a New Day*, Ron Keller
- ◆ *Dark Night of the Soul*, Gerald May
- ◆ *The Critical Journey*, Guelich and Hagberg
- ◆ *Can You Drink The Cup?*, Henri Nouwen
- ◆ *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan

Journals

- ◆ *The Story of a Soul*, Theresa of Lisieux
- ◆ *The Genesee Diary*, Henri Nouwen
- ◆ *Journey to Daybreak*, Henri Nouwen
- ◆ *The Journal of John Wesley*
- ◆ The Journals of Thomas Merton
- ◆ *Confessions of St Augustine*