



ATTENTIVENESS: SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

Practice Lab Week #3 Listening Prayer Guide

Overview:

In listening prayer, we take time to quietly rest in God's presence and listen for anything He might want to say to us. We remind ourselves that prayer is more than just talking *at* God, or talking *to* God; it is "listening to the voice of the one who calls us beloved" (Henri Nouwen, *Life of The Beloved*). We begin by opening our hearts to God and inviting Him to set the agenda for prayer. Our role is not to make anything "happen" in this time, but to remain open to what God might want to reveal to us – perhaps through scripture, a song, an impression, a word or phrase, an image. We then respond to what we have heard, and return once more to quietly waiting and resting in His presence. As we practice listening prayer, we gradually learn to recognize God's voice and to trust that He will speak and guide us in His own perfect timing.

Prayer Guide - Listening Prayer:

There are many ways to practice listening prayer. This is simply one way, adapted from *Practicing the Way*. As you spend this time in prayer, remember that God is near - He is closer than the very breath you breathe. He desires to be close to you and remind you of His love for you.

1. Slow down and get comfortable

Find a comfortable position. Set aside anything that is in your hands, and slow down your mind and heart. As you enter into silence, consider God's invitation in Psalm 46:10 - "*Be still and know that I am God.*" Ask Jesus to silence all other voices and noise, external and internal, so that you can only hear the voice of the Father. Ask Him to quiet any of the distracting thoughts in your mind. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Consider using a breath prayer here, if you'd like, to help you focus your attention on God.

(Example) Inhale: ***Be still*** Exhale: ***And know you are God***

2. Begin with God's question: "What are you doing here, _____?"

Sit with this question for a moment, and allow yourself to be truly honest. Freely share your response to this question with the Lord without trying to edit it. Avoid the temptation for an "easy" answer. God wants to take you deeper. You are safe with Him.

3. Invite God to search your heart

Ask the Father to bring to mind anything you don't feel forgiven for. If there is anything, imagine taking it to the cross and leaving it there. Then ask the Father if there is anyone you need to forgive. If there is, imagine releasing this person and any offenses.

4. Invite God to speak to you

Invite God to bring to mind what He wants to address. Rest in knowing that the goal of the Father in listening prayer is always to strengthen, encourage, and comfort. If the Holy Spirit does show us where something is off in our life, He calls us to repentance – not in shame, but to bring us to a place where we can experience more of His love and refreshing in our lives.

Consider using Samuel's prayer to the Lord as you open your heart to hear from Him: ***"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."*** (1 Samuel 3:10).

Take some time to explore the following questions with Him. Consider writing down, in a journal, or perhaps on a notecard, what He reveals to you.

***Is there anything I believe about myself that is not true?
What does the Father want to replace this false belief with?
Are there any other other things that the Father wants to speak to me about?***

5. Respond and rest in His presence

When the Holy Spirit brings something to mind, ask some follow up questions:

***What do you want me to know about this, Lord?
Is there anything else?***

Don't be afraid to wait longer here and to simply rest in the Lord's presence. The waiting can be painful or uncomfortable, especially in facing ourselves, but God is here. He is present and at work in our waiting. Take comfort in knowing that in silence and solitude with the Lord, "all of who we are - the good, the bad and the ugly - will be handled with love and gentleness" (*Invitation to Solitude and Silence*, p. 96).

If you are uncertain if what you are hearing or sensing is from the Lord, check to see if it aligns with scripture. God never speaks in conflict with His Word. Jot down what you heard in a journal, so that you can reflect back and share and seek confirmation in community with other believers.

If you don't hear anything, that is okay. Perhaps you can ask God if there is a verse in scripture that He wants to bring to mind. Press in and wait for the Lord. As you do, rest in knowing that "*the Lord is near to all who call on him; to all who call on him in truth.*" (Psalm 145:18).

6. Close in gratitude

Thank God for His presence with you, and His deep love for you. Thank Him for the ways He may have spoken to you during this time. Finally, spend a moment or two resting in God's love, before closing with a breath prayer. Consider using the same breath prayer you used above, or perhaps the following from Matthew 11:28-30:

Inhale: ***Humble and gentle One*** Exhale: ***You are rest for my soul***