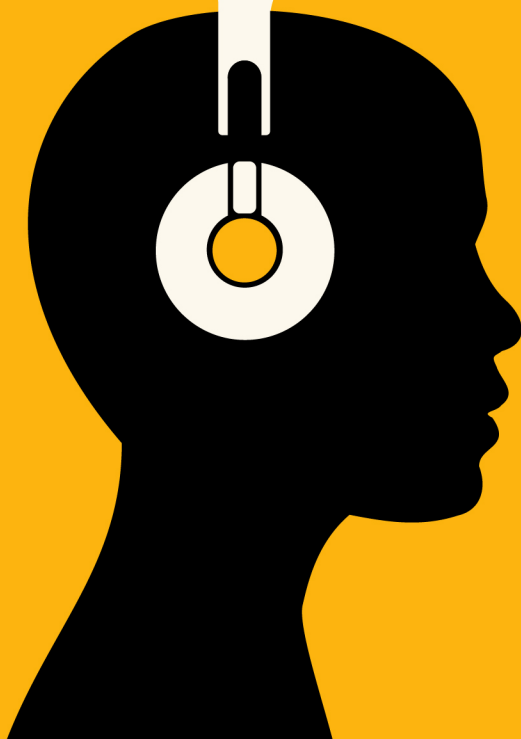


A SPIRITUAL LIFE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT RESOURCE

Listening Prayer

BEING FULLY PRESENT TO GOD



Henri Nouwen

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THE REAL 'WORK' OF PRAYER IS
TO BECOME SILENT AND LISTEN TO
THE VOICE THAT SAYS GOOD THINGS
ABOUT ME...TO GENTLY PUSH ASIDE
AND SILENCE THE MANY VOICES
THAT QUESTION MY GOODNESS
AND TO TRUST THAT I WILL HEAR
THE VOICE OF BLESSING - THAT
DEMANDS REAL EFFORT.

Listening Prayer

BEING FULLY PRESENT TO GOD

Prayer is often practiced as a way for us to communicate with God, with the dialogue mainly coming from spoken words. We finish the prayer with “Amen” and then move on to the next task. How often do we start and end the conversation without ever listening for God’s response? Or how often do we pray but expect the answer to be what we want? When we do not receive the answer, we assume God didn’t answer our prayer...or did He?

If the response you expect is to hear a booming voice from a mountain top answering your prayer then you may feel depleted when that does not happen. Or suppose the anticipation for answered prayer is to come in the form of a neon light flashing with the answer, it might be a miracle if it happens, but again the chances are slim. To listen to God is to acknowledge that what you hear will come from a song, a bird chirping, a word from a friend, an unexpected card in the mail, or the breeze from the ocean. God responds to us in many ways.

So, how do you engage in listening prayer so that you can listen to God in prayer- by quieting the inner and outer noises that distract us from being fully present to God. It seems easy enough, but most people would say that silence or sitting in silence is challenging, let alone hearing from God. So, here are a few ideas to begin practicing listening prayer.

‘To begin:

- Find a quiet and comfortable environment to begin this practice. Where do you find yourself most at rest?
- Show up agenda-free—no need to have a list of requests, petitions, ideas, or topics for God. Just show up.
- As you get comfortable in your space, take in any noticing’s that connect you to possibly hearing from God. Is it a sound, sight, or smell that gives you the feeling of peace and rest? God can connect with us through anyone or anything. Don’t dismiss your inner stirrings if something connects for you.
- Don’t interrupt the stirrings. Recognize that this is a way of listening prayer and that God is speaking to you. When you become interrupted, recognize it and then bring yourself back to the presence of God.
- Remember: disruptions and a wandering mind are expected. Bringing yourself back into prayer is what God delights in. He just wants to spend the time with you. So don’t be discouraged when your mind wanders. This is what God’s unfailing love looks like.

‘To engage a little deeper:

- Begin by following the steps above.
- Bring your Bible or a worship playlist to listen to.
- If you are familiar with the practice of Lectio Divina, read Scripture to see what God reveals to you. It is a form of listening prayer- as you listen for a word or phrase to speak to you.
- Do you have a favorite worship album or playlist? As you listen to the words of the music, what captures your heart as you listen? Let the words rest in you and see what God reveals to you.

Don't turn away from the process because you don't think God is speaking to you. As mentioned above, show up agenda-free. The desire for abiding time with God is our part in showing up, listening, seeking, and intentionally dismissing our inner dialogue that can be distracting. The more we practice listening, the more aware we will become of God's communication with us.

Reflections:

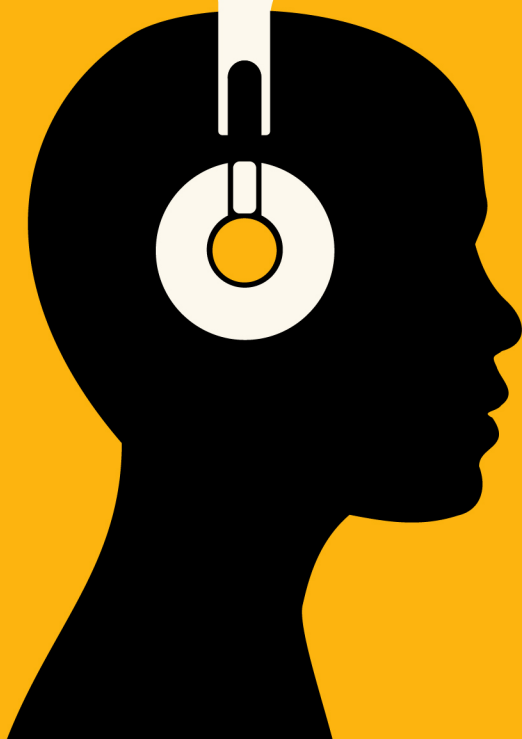
1. Are you easily distracted when someone is talking to you? Do you interrupt the conversation, and why?
 - If so, you may hear what someone is saying but are not listening. Listening requires complete attention to the speaker and acknowledging the conversation not necessarily with words but with eye contact, body language, and thoughtful response when needed. Consider whether you answered yes to the above questions and if you interact in your prayer time similarly.
2. When you struggle to hear from God, what is your response? What does that inner dialogue say?
 - Try not to pass judgment for not hearing from God. Instead, focus on imagining Jesus smiling at you because you want to spend time in His presence.
3. Open your Bible to a selected Scripture verse. As you read it, pray over it. Does a word or phrase stir something inside you? How are you responding to that stirring?
 - Take your time with this process. How is this word or phrase impacting you in the present moment? Read it over several times. God is speaking to you through these stirrings, and this is where you lean in and listen.

•Book Suggestions

Armchair Mystic by Mark Thibodeaux

The Listening Life by Adam McHugh

Hearing God by Dallas Willard



Adam McHugh, The Listening Life

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THE BEGINNING OF DISCIPLESHIP IS LISTENING. AT THE SOUND OF JESUS' VOICE, HIS FOLLOWERS DROPPED THEIR NETS AND FOLLOWED HIM. OF COURSE, DISCIPLESHIP MUST INVOLVE MORE THAN ONE EPISODE OF LISTENING; IT IS AN ONGOING JOURNEY OF LISTENING. DISCIPLES ARE WALKING LISTENERS. IF WE THINK THAT DISCIPLESHIP IS LACKING IN TODAY'S CHURCH, THEN PERHAPS WE SHOULD PLACE AN EMPHASIS ON PEOPLE LEARNING HOW TO LISTEN.



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