

# Ways to Listen in Prayer

*“God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer.” - Mother Teresa*

There is nothing more memorable, more meaningful, and more powerful than an encounter with God. Through meditative/contemplative prayer, you can experience the ultimate expression of your relationship with God—union with the Lord.

**Contemplative prayer** is being with God, empty-handed, waiting attentively for whatever He wants to say. It is the discipline of being still and knowing that He is God (Psalm 46:10). It is thoughtful, reflective prayer. Requires intentionality, active listening, focused attention and confident expectation God will speak.

The following exercises can guide us into hearing.

## An Exercise in Imaginative Prayer

To begin this exercise, imagine putting yourself in a passage of scripture. For this exercise we will use Exodus 33:7-11. You can either read the scripture or sometimes it is easier to just listen to the scripture being read to you through your smartphone or tablet. As a gesture of openness to God you might open your hands in your lap.

“Moses used to take the Tent and set it up outside the camp, some distance away. He called it the Tent of Meeting. Anyone who sought GOD would go to the Tent of Meeting outside the camp. When Moses would go to the Tent, all the people would stand at attention; each man would take his position at the entrance to his tent with his eyes on Moses until he entered the Tent. Whenever Moses entered the Tent, the Pillar of Cloud descended to the entrance to the Tent and GOD spoke with Moses. All the people would see the Pillar of Cloud at the entrance to the Tent, stand at attention, and then bow down in worship, each man at the entrance to his tent. And GOD spoke with Moses face-to-face, as neighbors speak to one another.”

- Imagine yourself walking towards the same tent that Moses met with God.
- What does it look like?
- Take a moment to take in any details that your mind is drawn to.
- How does the tent of God present itself to you?
- What emotions are you feeling as you approach the tent knowing God is there and you will see God face to face?
- When you enter the tent do you sit? Do you stand? Where is God in proximity to you?
- In the presence of God, what is on your heart to share with him? Take this time to tell God what is on your heart. Whether it is praise, a request or desire, take this time to be authentic with him.
- What is his response?
- As time draws near for you to leave, how do you feel?
- As you leave, what is God saying to you?

**Centering Prayer** is a method of silent prayer that prepares us to receive the gift of contemplative prayer, prayer in which we experience God’s immanent presence with us. Centering prayer is grounded in relationship with God, through Christ, and is a practice to nurture that relationship. Centering Prayer compliments and supports other modes of prayer—

verbal, mental or affective prayer. And facilitates resting in the Divine Presence. Centering Prayer offers a way to grow in intimacy with God, moving beyond conversation to communion.

### **An Exercise in Centering Prayer**

Choose a comfortable place, whether it is laying on the floor, sitting in your chair or against a wall, etc.

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. Something like "peace" or "trust" or "surrender" that would be meaningful to you.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts\*, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

\*thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections

The **Prayer of Examen** is typically practiced in the evening before bed, but can be done any time). In the Prayer of Examen we review our recent past to find God and God's blessings in life. We also look back to find moments in the day when things didn't go so well—when we were hurt by something that happened to us, or when we sinned or made a mistake. We give praise and thanksgiving for the blessed moments. We ask forgiveness and healing for the difficult and painful moments. Having reflected on this past day, we then turn to the day yet to come and ask God to show us the potential challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. We try to anticipate which moments might go one way or the other for us: toward God's plan or away from it. We ask for insight into what graces we might need to live this next day well; patience, wisdom, fortitude, self-knowledge, peace, optimism. We ask God for that grace, and we trust that he wants us to succeed in our day even more than we do.

It is helpful to write down what you believe God is speaking to you in a journal. Over time you might find patterns of failures or ways that God has been faithful in leading you. Again, be sure to celebrate God moments and divine appointments. Don't beat yourself up! God is good and gracious and merciful. His Spirit will NOT condemn you, but will convict you (to repent and change).