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Awakenings Prayer Institute

THE PRACTICE OF

Prayerful Listening



Isaiah 50:4

The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. Morning by morning he wakens me; wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.

¹Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring, a Guide for seeking and giving direction*, (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity press, 1999), 42.

²Jeannette Bakke, *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2000), 43

³Charles de Foucauld, (b. 1858) quoted in Alan Jones *Exploring Spiritual Direction*, (Boston, MA: Cowley Press, 1986).

⁴Wes Johnson, "Independent Study in Spiritual Direction and Mentoring," (Bakke

"We are each writing the novel of our lives... while the Author of Life started the story, we will write our own endings...with varying degrees of attention to the Author's intended plots." ¹

A prayerful listener is one who helps us pay attention to the Author and His intended plots.

Begin With Prayer

Invite the Holy Spirit within and the Holy Spirit above to lead the session. Ask Him to help you listen to what the heart is saying. Pray that each of you will become aware of the Presence and be free of worldly distractions. Be silent for awhile.

Listen Well

"The opportunity to tell our story unhindered, uninterrupted is rare...it can be quite startling, therefore to feel another person fully attending to you, present with you and for you." ²

Listen to where the person is at in their story. Let the story tell itself. Do less talking. Refuse to show how much you know. As you listen ask the Holy Spirit to help you answer these questions:

- ◆ What truly constitutes our spiritual concern here?
- ◆ Am I really being attentive to the Lord in this?

Pay particular attention to things like personal prayer life and practices such as fasting and simplification in life; to senses of God's presence, absence, or callings; to experiences of fundamental meaning; to personal longings for God.

Refer to Other Resources

As prayerful listeners, we are entrusted with the care of God's precious creation of another human soul.

Prayerful listening is not counseling, although the Wonderful Counselor may speak.

Prayerful listeners do not try to fix each other, although healing may happen.

We come together as prayerful listeners to encourage mutual spiritual growth. Sometimes things come up that are more appropriately handled by another kind of helper. If that happens, encourage your friend to seek such counsel.

Parameters of Confidentiality

It is assumed that what is discussed during prayerful listening will be held confidential. However, there are exceptions supported by law and good sense. Some exceptions are listed below:

1. Any disclosure of current illegal activity,
2. Any disclosure of intention to commit a crime,
3. Any disclosure of a desire to harm oneself,
4. Any disclosure which has potential to cause harm if kept confidential.

What Holy Invitation is God extending through the unfolding story of this life?⁶

Finish in Prayer

Thank the Good Shepherd who guides us for directing the time you just spent with your friend. Ask Him to help you remember what He wants you to know and to go where He leads you. Pray for ever-increasing clarity and for your heart to overflow with love.

Journal

Directly following a time of prayerful listening, create a flow-of-consciousness journal entry. Write about what it felt like to meet with your friend. Describe the setting; the room where you met, how the furniture, lights and heat were set. Describe where you sat and why, where your friend sat. Describe how the meeting started; what you said and how you felt. Write about any sense of God's presence or absence in the meeting.

Describe the degree to which you felt God working or not working throughout the meeting. Write about what insights or lack of insight you may have experienced. As you conclude your journal entry, surface any principles, techniques and lessons that you observed about the practice of prayerful listening.

Conclude your journal entry in a time of reflective prayer. Then write a short prayer, expressing your consent to God's intent for you as a participant in the practice of prayerful listening.

Pray as You Go

Pray continually. Immerse the moment in the Presence. Try to remain aware of Him even as you speak. Listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Lord what he is doing in this life. Listen for His answer.

Silence is your friend. Stop and agree to be still from time to time if you need to refocus on hearing the Lord.

Link Needs to Scripture

Match up an appropriate text of Scripture to their situation and suggest that in the coming days they immerse themselves in prayer over that scripture.

Let the truth of Scripture find traction in their lives as you address an issue from the perspective of spiritual growth.

Charles de Foucauld (b. 1858) wrote "You must read a few lines of the Holy Gospels every day. You must steep yourself in the mind and spirit of Jesus by reading and re-reading, meditating and re-meditating constantly on His words and example; they must work on our souls like a drop of water which falls again and again on a slab of stone, always in the same place."³

Listening for the voice of the Lord in the stories of a person's life and connecting those stories to sacred Scripture is for me the essence of giving and receiving spiritual direction,⁴ (Prayerful Listening).

Ask Heart Questions

Instead of asking questions such as “And how do you feel about that?” or, “How is that working for you?” ask:

“What do you experience when you pray about that?”

This question gets people talking about where God is in the situation they are facing. Their responses invite conversations about the spiritual side of their problem.

To discover how is God acting in the life of this person ask:

“Where do you see God in this situation?”

To get someone thinking about what God is intending for this person ask:

“What do you sense God telling you about this?”

To invite deeper reflection on how Scripture speaks to this issue or this person ask:

“Is there a particular Scripture that connects you to this issue?”

Offer to search out a Signature Scripture together.

To encourage moving forward in spiritual growth ask:

“How is God inviting you to take a next step in your journey with Him?”

To redirect a conversation back to a prayerful experience ask:

How would you put that comment into a prayer?”

Use the Tools

In the Celtic Tradition, the art of Prayerful Listening is rooted in twin passions for Scripture and prayer.⁴

The following are powerful tools. Use them for your own soul care as well as with your friends.

- ◆ Praying Scripture—Experience the presence of God through the prayerful reading of His word.
- ◆ Prayers of the Heart— Praying God’s character, God’s mission and our soul’s deep need.
- ◆ Signature Scripture— Praying the Scriptures that address our soul’s deep need.
- ◆ Time Line Reflection—Discerning God’s workmanship.
- ◆ Praying your high points—Celebrating the Triumphs.
- ◆ Lamenting your low points—Persevering through the challenges.
- ◆ Unseat the Inner Vows—Returning God to His rightful place of authority.
- ◆ Silence—So we can hear His still, small voice.