



Listening to God

Overview

There comes a point in our relationship to God where we desire not just to speak to him, but to listen. To hear his voice. As Jesus said in John 10v27, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” This is a Spirit-generated desire in the heart of a disciple of Jesus. In Luke 10v39, it was said of Jesus’ disciple Mary that she “sat at the Lord’s feet, listening to what he said.” This is the primary posture of a disciple of Jesus: sitting at his feet and listening.

But how do we hear God’s voice? He doesn’t speak in the ways we’re used to. Yet he speaks in a variety of ways. Ultimately through Jesus, then Scripture, circumstances, desire, prophesy, dreams, visions, the “still small voice,” and more.

Learning to sift through all the “voices” in our head and to discern how God is speaking to us is a key task of discipleship. But learning to hear is just the beginning; learning to obey is the even greater task. Our intention must be to really listen to God, with a heart of loving surrender and trust.

In this session’s exercises, we practice two ancient and time-tested ways of listening to God.

Notes

As you watch the teaching as a group, feel free to use this page for notes.

What stands out to you? What's going through your brain or body right now?

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Discussion Questions

Now let's enter a time of conversation. Circle up in your small group and talk about the questions:

- 01 Have you ever tried to listen for God's voice before? If not, why not?
- 02 What fears or hopes does this type of prayer bring up in your heart?
- 03 What's the primary way that you hear God's voice in your life?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Practice

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Now it's time to take what we've heard and put it into practice. The following exercises are key to ongoing development in a rich life with God.

01 *Lectio Divina*

This is an ancient Latin phrase, first used by St. Benedict in the sixth century. It means “spiritual reading.” It's a way of reading Scripture slowly and prayerfully, listening for God's word to you.

While you do not need to follow this four-step process, there are four movements to *Lectio Divina* that you may find helpful.

First, get somewhere quiet and as distraction-free as possible. Open your Bible and pick out a passage that's conducive to *Lectio* — a Psalm, a portion of the Gospels, or a section of an epistle (another word for letter, such as Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, etc.). Take a few deep breaths. Then:

- **Read** — A passage of your choice, slowly and prayerfully. Pay special attention to any words or phrases or ideas that jump out to you, or that move you emotionally or deeply resonate.
- **Reflect** — Reread the passage again, slowly. This time, pause over the word(s) or phrase(s) that were highlighted to you during your first reading. Meditate on them. Turn them over in your mind. Savor them.
- **Respond** — Pray your impressions back to God. You can use your own words or simply pray the text directly to God.
- **Rest** — Take a few minutes in silence to breathe deeply and rest in God's loving word to you.

Repeat this 3-5 times this coming week.

If you're doing this as a group, find somewhere quiet and distraction-free and read the four steps above out loud. Share your impressions with one another and pray them together to God.

02 Listening Prayer

First, get somewhere quiet and distraction-free. Then:

- **Breathe** — Take a minute or two to just breathe slowly and deeply, clearing your mind to receive God’s word to you. You may want to simply pray, “Father” or “Jesus” or “Come Holy Spirit” as you inhale and exhale each breath.
- **Silence** — Ask God to silence the voice of the enemy in your mind, to clear the air around you, to shield and guard your imagination.
- **Ask the Spirit to speak to you**
- **Open your mind and heart to listen** — 1 Corinthians 6:19 tells us our body is a “temple of the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit within you has direct access to your imagination. Wait quietly with a surrendered heart. He may come to you in a:
 - Word or phrase
 - Scripture
 - Thought
 - Metaphor
 - Picture in your mind
 - Short film, kind of a series of pictures in your mind
 - Feeling in your heart
 - Sensation in your body

If nothing comes, don’t judge yourself, or God. Just give thanks for his love and try again later. Our job is to be present to God and to listen for his voice when he desires to speak to us.

Test whatever you “hear” against Scripture and in community.

Finally, if God’s word to you was directional, obey. Go do what he said!

Reach Practice

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We all learn differently. Some of us prefer reading, others listening, and others doing. If you'd like to go deeper, choose what resonates with you and give it a try! Even if you don't try a Reach Practice, remember to journal in the Prayer Reflection section before your next session as a group.

Reading

Read chapters 6-8 of *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools* by Tyler Staton (pp. 115-162).

Podcast

Listen to episode 3 of the Prayer series from the Rule of Life podcast by Practicing the Way.

Exercise: Praying the Examen

This exercise, the Examen, was developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola as a way of reviewing our day with God. St. Ignatius taught that God often speaks through our emotions, and that, by becoming aware of them, we may also become aware of the Spirit's movements in our own lives. He also encouraged others to talk to Jesus as a friend, sitting with and sharing our lives with him. The Examen was designed as a regular practice for the end of the day or week.

You can follow this QR code to a video tutorial from Strahan Coleman that will guide you step by step, using prayer prompts.

Or you can follow the written tutorial on the following pages.



- 01 **Become aware of God** — Review the day with the eyes of the Spirit, asking God for the light to see. It may seem rushed to you, a blur or chaotic. If you feel overwhelmed or struggle to focus, ask the Spirit to help you see and bring focus to your mind.
- 02 **Look back with gratitude** — As you explore your day, take note of moments where you can thank God for what's been. It may be as simple as noting the provision of food and waking in the comfort of your bed. Think about the people in your day and the connections made. Where was God in each relationship or conversation? Recall the little things about your day, simple everyday pleasures, and discover God among them.
- 03 **Notice your emotions** — Reflect on your feelings throughout the day. What do you notice? Without judging what you felt, did you feel anger? Contentment? Empathy? Happiness? Embarrassment? Trusting that God speaks through our emotions, what do you think God was saying amidst them?
- 04 **Pray from one piece of your day** — Allowing the Spirit to highlight one element of your day, be it positive or negative, ask him to speak to you about it. Consider it with him and allow it to lead you to prayer, whether it's gratitude, intercession, petition, repentance, or praise.
- 05 **Look ahead to tomorrow** — Finally, ask God to prepare your heart for tomorrow. Notice how you feel about it — anxious, excited, nervous, overwhelmed — and invite the Spirit to speak to those joys and concerns. Ask for clarity for the day ahead and for peace to approach it with confidence. Ask for wisdom, for hope, for discernment.

Prayer Reflection

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Before your next time together with the group for Session 04, take five to ten minutes to journal out your answers to the following three questions.

01 Where did I feel resistance?

02 Where did I feel delight?

03 As you sat with God, did the Spirit convict or comfort you in any area of your life?

Note: As you write, be as specific as possible. While bullet points are just fine, if you write it out in narrative form, your brain will be able to process your insights in a more lasting way.