

that shimmers or is tugging at you and inviting you to go deeper. Repeat the word or phrase to yourself, allow it to resonate within you.

Meditate

Now you begin to meditate on your word or phrase. This is like clicking on a linked word on a web page, you are going deeper. As you re-read the passage you have permission to leave the confines of the exact text and allow God to guide your thoughts about that word or phrase. What images come to mind? What thoughts, feelings or memories does it invoke? Trust that Jesus has heard your prayer and seeks to speak to you exactly what you need to hear. Savour the thoughts that come to you.

Talk with God

As you read the passage a third time, ponder how you will respond to the word or phrase that God is speaking to you. Is there something God wants you to remember, to do, or take hold of? What do you most desire to say to God or to ask of God? It may be as simple as saying, "thanks." After you read the passage, speak to God and then return to the posture of one who listens. Allow God to answer you.

Contemplate

Eventually the conversation comes to an end. Maybe you've run out of time or maybe you have nothing left to say, and God too may have become silent, for now. Rest in what you have heard. Express your gratitude to God for encountering the living Word. If God has called you to a particular action, ask for God's blessing as you commit yourself to this. If you heard nothing, know that Jesus is pleased that you wanted to spend time with him, and you did. Ask Jesus for help and strength to try again at another time.

Adapted from Daniel Wolpert, *Creating a Life with God*

Advent Spiritual Exercise **Listening to God's Word**

God Speaks to Us

This fundamental truth makes it possible for us to pray, learn and grow in our faith. God has been concerned for each of us long before we became concerned for ourselves or for him. God's communication with us is motivated out of his love for us. God speaks with us in many different ways:

- **through the Scripture:** God's authoritative Word, where we hear God's voice and encounter God's presence (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- **through Jesus:** God's Word made flesh. If it doesn't sound like Jesus, it's not God's voice (John 1:14; John 10:27, Hebrews 1:1-3).
- **through others:** We can discern God's voice in the words of others, particularly those who are joined with us through faith in Christ Jesus (Proverbs 2:1-5).
- **through nature:** Creation is another form of God's self-revelation (Psalm 19:1-4, Romans 1:20).
- **through circumstances:** God's voice is discerned in our hearts through the events and experiences of our lives (Romans 2:15).

Our response to God's initial move of speaking is to listen to what has been said. This is the basic rhythm of prayer. God speaks, we listen. We speak, God listens.

What is Listening?

- a) **Listening is a choice:** Choosing to listen to someone else is a decision. It is an action that requires energy and discipline.
- b) **Listening is a gift:** When you choose to listen, you offer the other person the gift of being understood, seen, connected, and valued. Think about listening as a gift that you either give or receive. This places a new emphasis on

the value of listening. It makes it easier to slow down and savour the conversation, either by opening ourselves up to receive the gift or by extending the hospitality of giving the gift.

- c) **Listening is an art:** Listening requires something special that elevates the experience from an action to an art. Some people do this brilliantly. When two people are deeply listening to one another, we sense that they are truly present to each other. When they also become aware of and present to God – we call this holy listening.

Holy Listening

- Silence is a basic quality of holy listening.
- If we are speaking, we hear only what we already know. When we listen, we may learn something new.
- To contemplate means creating time and space for God to meet with and work within you.
- Holy listening is the practice of exploring our relationship with God. It's taking time to slow down and listen to what he has to say to us.
- Silence provides space for our souls to be present to God rather than being present with our minds alone.

“Prayer is God’s breathing in us... being useless and silent in the presence of our God belongs to the core of all prayer.”
– Henri Nouwen

Listening to God in Scripture

- Reading the Bible for transformation is a way of holy listening that requires us to engage the written Word of God with our mind, our heart, our emotions, our body, our curiosity, our imagination, and our will. When we read the Bible this way, we make it a priority to listen to God in the context of a personal relationship with Him.
- As we do, we must also pay attention to our own thoughts, emotions, and reactions. In addition to asking, “What does the text say? What does it mean? And how do I apply it in my life?” We might also ask:

- a) How do I feel about what is being said? What do I find resonating deeply? Where do I find myself resisting and wrestling with what the Scripture is saying? Those areas of resistance often indicate a place where God is at work.
- b) Why do I feel this way? What aspect of my inner being is touched, challenged, encouraged or spoken to through this Scripture?
- c) What do my reactions tell me about myself, my attitudes, my relating patterns, and my behaviours? Am I willing to look at them in God’s presence?

A Listening Prayer

“Lord, I believe my life is touched by you, that you want something for me, and of me. Give me ears to hear you, eyes to see the tracing of your finger, and a heart quickened by the motions of your Spirit. Lord, speak for I am listening. Amen.”

Adapted from Ted Loder, in *Guerrillas of Grace* (1984)

Lectio Divina Exercise

Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading) is also known as the Prayer of the Listening Heart. This process of reading takes seriously the notion that the Bible is the living Word of God and that through the Bible, God can speak directly to the reader now, in real time.

The key is not to focus too much on the literal surface meaning of the passage you are reading. That meaning may end up being important, but God may use the passage to speak to you about something completely unrelated to its literal content. Technically there are four phases to Lectio Divina, but as with any conversation, there is a back-and-forth ebb and flow.

Begin by picking a passage of between 10 to 20 verses. Some suggested passages might be Isaiah 26:1-9 or Luke 1:5-25.

Read

After selecting a passage, read it to yourself, allowing the words to sink down into the depths of your being. Listen for a word or phrase from the passage that catches your attention over all the others,