

Prayer Guide – Week 2

LISTENING PRAYER

“Truly my soul finds rest in God.” Psalm 62:1

With our bodies and minds active all day, we can hardly expect our inner selves to be naturally still when we sit down for prayer. Thoughts dash about in our heads as we remember something we forgot to do, an appointment we want to make, or a conversation we had. Since we experience so little silence, silent moments tend to be only another time we can continue to use our busy minds.

To allow ourselves to become still and experience the quiet mind that is open to God, let us take few moments to consciously prepare ourselves to listen to what God is saying to us.

Prayer Invitations

Here are a few invitations that may be helpful. None of these are guaranteed to prevent distracting thoughts or drifting minds, but each offers a focus to help in “centering.” As external thoughts intrude, just let them go and gently return to your place of quiet. Remember to write your prayers and place them in your prayer box.

- Shut your eyes and be conscious of your breathing. Now, gradually slow your breathing as you feel yourself to be a part of all creation, realizing that into you God blew the breath of life. Reflect on your time in prayer. Dear Jesus...
- As you inhale, picture yourself being filled with Jesus’ love, forgiveness and mercy. As you exhale, picture all the problems or concerns in your life drifting away. Dear Jesus...
- Light a candle, and see the candle flame as an extension of your heart, burning to have deeper communion with Jesus and to be filled with the light He brings that gives life. Write your prayer on a card and place it in your prayer box. Dear Jesus...
- Offer to Jesus all the thoughts, concerns and barriers that keep you from wanting to listen. Ask for whatever forgiveness you think you need at this time, then listen and accept the grace and mercy Jesus brings. Dear Jesus...

- When you start to pass judgment on your praying and listening skills, stop. Turn to Jesus and imagine how happy He is that you have turned back to Him rather than engage in a diatribe against the one He loves (you). Listen to the loving words Jesus says to you. Write them down.

Dear Jesus...

- This week, practice not interrupting. Just listen. What do you learn about someone that you never knew before because you listened deeply? Tell Jesus about it in prayer. Dear Jesus...

Prayer Advice

The more we practice turning from self-judgment to Jesus, the quieter our soul becomes. Returning to Jesus is how we learn to wait attentively. If nothing seems to be happening in our prayer, if God seems silent, we return to the truth that we are not separate from God. We may not “hear” a specific work, but God is near, closer than our own breath, abiding deep within. Our part is to faithfully show up, seek, knock and refuse to engage in an inner dialogue with our distractions.

For some, the most natural way to listen to God is through creation. Psalm 19 acknowledges that God’s creation speaks loudly of divine realities. Creation has a unique language of proclamation and praise. Listen to the birds in the morning and the crickets at night. Each part of the created order speaks eloquently of the Lord, just as consummate artistry reveals the soul of the artist. *Also see Psalm 8.*

Listening to worship music helps to listen for God in prayer. Reflect on what captures your heart. Repeat the words to yourself. Hear Jesus speaking these words to you. Let the words rest inside you and quiet your heart.

“If the heart wanders or is distracted, bring it back to the point quite gently and replace it tenderly in Jesus’s presence. And even if you did nothing during the whole time of prayer but bring your heart back and place it again in Our Lord’s presence, though it went away every time you brought it back, your prayer would be very well employed.”

Based on a quote from St. Francis de Sales, 1567-1622

Resources:

Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home by Richard Foster

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life by Marjorie J. Thompson

Spirit Windows: A Handbook of Spiritual Growth Resources for Leaders by Ann Z. Kulp

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives by Dallas Willard