

PRAYING IN SILENCE

LENT 2021 TURTON MOORLAND TEAM MINISTRY



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Introduction to silent prayer

We cannot put ourselves directly in the presence of God if we do not practice internal and external silence. In silence we will find new energy and true unity. Silence gives us a new outlook on everything. The essential thing is not what we say but what God says to us and through us.

In that silence, He will listen to us; there He will speak to our soul, and there we will hear His voice. Listen in silence because if your heart is full of other things you cannot hear the voice of God.

But when you have listened to the voice of God in the stillness of your heart, then your heart is filled with God.

The contemplatives and ascetics of all ages have sought God in the silence and solitude of the desert, forest, and mountains. Jesus himself spent forty days in the desert and the mountains, communing with the Father in the silence of the night.

We too are called to withdraw at certain intervals into deeper silence and aloneness with God, together as a community as well as personally; to be alone with Him, to dwell lovingly in His presence, silent, empty, expectant. We cannot find God in noise or agitation. What is essential is not what we say but what God tells us and what He tells others through us. In silence He listens to us; in silence He speaks to our souls.

In silence we are granted the privilege of listening to His voice.

How is it possible to reach inner silence?

Sometimes we are apparently silent, and yet we have great discussions within, struggling with imaginary partners or with ourselves.

The turmoil of our thoughts can be compared to the storm that struck the disciples' boat on the Sea of Galilee while Jesus was sleeping. Like them, we may be helpless, full of anxiety, and incapable of calming ourselves. But Christ is able to come to our help as well. As he rebuked the wind and the sea and "there was a great calm", he can also quiet our heart when it is unsettled by fears and worries

Calming our souls requires a kind of simplicity: Silence means recognising that our worries cannot do much. Silence means leaving to God what is beyond our reach and capacity. Remaining silent, we trust and hope in God.

Monday - "Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10

Place & Posture

Find the place which is right for you. A place where you feel comfortable, with little or no distraction. The best posture is that which helps you to be both attentive and relaxed at the same time.

Opening to God It is a bit like sunbathing! When you sunbathe, you take off your clothes to let the sun get to you and warm you. So, in prayer, you open yourself to the light of God, that God may bathe you in light and warm you with rays of love.

Prayer is God's gift to us.

Our part is to be actively receptive. "I hold myself in quiet and silence, like a little child in its mother's arms, like a little child, so I keep myself." Psalm 131:2

Some suggestions for becoming relaxed and attentive:

Awareness of the Body: Concentrate your attention on what you can feel. Begin with the crown of your head and work your way down through your body to your toes. Allow time (a few seconds) for feelings in each part of your body to become apparent.

Become aware of any sensation at the crown of your head, then your forehead, face, the back of your neck...

Notice any feelings in your shoulders, arms, hands... your back, chest, stomach...

Become aware of any sensation in your legs, ankles, feet, toes...

Become aware of the touch of clothes, your body touching the chair, the floor...

Recognise God's presence in your body, in your feelings, in you as a person.

"In God I live and move and have my being." Acts 17:28

Awareness of Sounds: Listen to the sounds around you. Try to identify each one.

Do not rush or strain. Concentrate your attention wholly on each sound.

Recognise God's presence in the sounds...

"And after the fire there came a still small voice." 1 Kings 19:12

Awareness of Breathing: Turn your attention to your breathing...

Listen to the sound of your breath... Do not deliberately change your breathing, simply be aware that you are breathing!

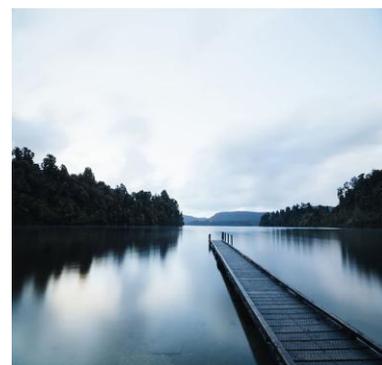
Be aware of breathing in... breathing out... notice how this feels.

Be aware of sensations in your nostrils... the rise and fall of your chest...

To turn this into more explicit prayer, let your in-breath be a breathing in of the goodness and love of God, and your out-breath be a breathing out of all your worries, guilt, and anxiety. You could try touching a stone, a shell, rosary beads, a crucifix... listening to music.

These exercises can be ways of relaxing into prayer.

Or they can be, in themselves, a still, attentive prayer of loving presence to God.



Tuesday – Awareness Walk

Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Psalm 34:8

According to one of the Apocryphal Gospels, Jesus is reputed to have said: "Lift the stone and you will find me. Cleave the wood and I am there."

Walk for exercise first if you need it.

Take good strong breaths of fresh air. Resist hurry. Slow down to an easy stroll.

LOOK

Become aware of the sky, clouds, light, and shadow...

See colours, shades, tints...

Look at patterns – shape, height, depth, thickness...

Notice trees, shrubs, flowers, grasses...

Be aware of shapes of buildings – roof, tiles, chimneys...

Notice stillness and movement – birds, insects, animals...

TOUCH

Feel the sun's warmth, the cool breeze, cold air, wet rain...

Feel texture – sharp, rough, smooth, prickly...

Touch grass, stone, bark, petal, leaf...

Touch the earth, feel water; walk with bare feet.

SMELL

Smell scents – flowers, herbs, pine needles, grass, earth...

Other smells – of industry, smoke, concrete, tarmac, animals, rubbish, fumes...

LISTEN

Shut your eyes and become all ears...

Listen to water, birds, insects, animals, cars, people...

Hear far off sounds, near sounds... Listen to your own breathing and heartbeat...

TASTE

Taste water... Chew on a piece of grass...

When you come to your next meal, savour every mouthful.

Do not try to think, just **BE!**

Let thoughts, however good, drop away for the present.

Focus on one thing that particularly draws you, become aware of it, look more closely.



God is hidden within the ordinariness of our daily life and work, but we need our eyes opened to see and become aware of God's presence."

Wednesday – imaginative Contemplation

“Come and see,” said Jesus... .. and the disciples saw. John 1:39 John 20:30



In this method of prayer, we enter into a scripture passage by way of our imagination.

By letting our imagination run free, we are able to re-live the events of Jesus' life, to be present as they unfold, and to participate in what happens. We can even be present and participate as events unfold in the stories Jesus told. We can

also re-live other events recounted in scripture.

As you meet with Jesus in the gospel stories and in the events recounted in scripture, talk with Jesus, enter into dialogue, have a heart-to-heart conversation.

BE THERE with him and for him WANT HIM hunger for him LISTEN to him LET HIM be for you what he wants to be RESPOND to him.

“The Holy Spirit will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.”

John 14:26

- + Spend a little time coming to a relaxed attentiveness and to an awareness of God's loving presence.
- + Imagine the event is happening now and see it unfold before you. If at first you find this difficult, imagine you are telling the story to a small child, making it as vivid as possible.
- + Through imagination enter the scene or the story, as if you were really there – trust the Spirit who is leading you.
- + You may 'see' the place, the people, the events – or you might sense yourself there, not so much through pictorial images as through feelings and awareness.
- + Use your senses. Look around you, listen to sounds, use touch, taste, smell...
- + You may find yourself becoming a central character in the scene, or you may be a bystander. You may find yourself changing role from time to time.
- + Watch what is happening, listen to what is said. Talk with the people there, talk with Jesus.
- + Let yourself 'wander' in the scene, feeling whatever, you feel, relating to the people there, allowing your own life experience to mingle.
- + Your imagination may picture events unfolding differently than in the scriptures. This is okay. Let the Spirit, working through your imagination, take you where it will.
- + At the end of the reflection time spend a few minutes being with Jesus (or God, or the Spirit) – just as you would with a good friend. Sometimes talking, sometimes listening, sometimes simply being together in silence. Let a conversation develop. Speak from the heart, simply and honestly.

Some Scripture Passages for Imaginative Contemplation

Jesus Praying

Luke 3:21-22 Jesus is baptised

Luke 9:18-21 The Transfiguration

Luke 22:39-46 Jesus prays in his agony.

Forgiveness

Luke 7:36-50 A sinful woman washes the feet of Jesus.

John 8:3-11 An adulterous woman about to be stoned.

Luke 19:1-10 Jesus calls Zacchaeus

Healing

Mark 1:40-45 Cure of a leper

Mark 2:1-12 The cure and forgiveness of a paralytic

Mark 3:1-6 Curing of a man with a withered hand.

Mark 5:1-20 The Gerasene demoniac

Mark 10:46-52 The cure of blind Bartimaeus

John 5:1-18 Curing the man at the pool.

Compassion

Luke 10:25-37 The good Samaritan

Luke 15:11-32 The story of two sons

Trust

Matthew 14:22-33 Walking on the water.

Mark 4:35-41 Calming of the storm

Luke 1:26-38 Annunciation to Mary

Luke 21:1-4 The widow's mite

Thursday - Lectio Divina

“The Lord gave me the scroll to eat and said, ‘Feed on this scroll which I am giving you and eat your fill.’ I ate it, and it tasted sweet as honey.” Ezekiel 3:2-3

Reading - Meditating – Praying – Living

In this method of ‘sacred reading’ we approach the scripture passage as we would a love letter. It is God’s word of love to us.

+ Take time to relax. Be aware that God loves you just as you are. And trust that, whatever your mood or feeling, it is okay to come as you are.

+ Ask for what you most desire. What do you want to ask God for? How would you like God to be for you? How do you want to relate to God?

+ Take time to read the passage. Try not to think about it or make judgements. Do not strive for meanings. Simply let its mood meet you, be with it, be open to what God might want to touch in you.

+ Take just a few words at a time, maybe only one word. Allow the words to wash over you, savour them.

+ Stay with the word or phrase which seems to hold your attention. Rock it and hold it deep within you. Relish it – rather like sucking a boiled sweet. Absorb it the way the thirsty earth receives the rain.

+ Be aware of any feelings that are evoked in you. There may be images, pictures from your own life experience, or simple stillness within the mystery.

+ If ‘distractions’ from everyday life come in, let them! Let the word of God enter into your everyday experience – your worries, anxieties, hopes and longings – and pray out of the mixture of your life experience and God’s word.

- + Read and re-read the passage, lovingly, as you would a letter from a dear friend or lover (constantly returning to those words and phrases which move you); or as you would softly sing the chorus of a love song.
- + At the end take a few minutes to be with Jesus, God, the Holy Spirit – as one good friend is with another. Take note of feelings, striking thoughts, images... Let a conversation develop.
- + Given how you were at the beginning of the reflection and what you asked for, how do you feel now? There is no place you should have arrived at – wherever your prayer has taken you is okay. Whatever has happened will reveal something to you of how God is at work in you, touching your own story. Do not be anxious, God will speak to you. Do not try to figure things out. Do not look for lessons or answers.

Let God pray in you!

Lectio Davina

Some scripture passages for prayer, well suited to being read slowly, relished, and savoured.

Psalms 8, 23, 46, 63, 91, 131, 136, 139, 145

Isaiah 43:1-7, 45:9-13, 49:14-16, 54:4-10, 55:1-11

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Romans 5:1-11, 8:31-39

Ezekiel 36:22-26

2 Corinthians 4:7-16 5:16-21

Hosea 11:1-9

Ephesians 1:3-14, 2:1-10, 3:14-21

Zephaniah 3:14-18

Philippians 2:1-11 3:7-16 4:8-13

John 15:1-17

Colossians 1:14-20

Friday – Review time

Look back over the week.

If we reflect on our prayer, we can begin to make real and grounded connections between our prayer and our lived experience – between God's story in Scripture and the story and mystery of God in our own lives. After a prayer time, make yourself a drink and spend a few minutes reflecting on what happened during your prayer time.

How was I when I began my prayer time? Where was I during the prayer?

What thoughts came to me during my prayer? What feelings were around during the prayer? Is there a word or phrase that stands out for me? Where was God in my prayer? What was my experience of God? What is God saying to me?

How was God/Jesus looking at me? How do I feel now? Is it different from when I began? If it is different, where was the movement during my prayer time? What brought about the change of mood?

Do not panic if you cannot answer all the questions. God will guide you to the ones which are important for you. Afterwards, perhaps jot down a few notes in a notebook.

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