

Learning to Listen

It's very difficult for most of us to simply listen. We are accustomed to listening in order to solve, look for answers, be entertained, hear what we want to hear, or give advice. Yet cultivating a more open-ended attitude of listening is crucial to our spiritual lives.

The heart of prayer involves a listening attitude, one in which there is no need to "produce" anything...to do anything...to achieve anything. Imagine enjoying a sunset or sunrise with a good friend...or watching a baby sleeping...or gazing at the clouds rolling by on a lazy summer day...or listening to the ebb and flow of waves on the beach...Just pick one of these that appeals to you and imagine being there for a moment...(pause)a

In these moments, we are just "being"...doing nothing..."wasting" time...willing to wonder...open to being surprised...

Many of us don't often take time to listen and be in this way or to cultivate this way of unpressured listening. But this interior attitude or posture of listening is one of the most helpful habits we can develop in the spiritual life. It frees us to simply be ourselves before God in prayer and to let others be themselves in our presence. By listening with greater willingness and receptivity, we can become more attuned to the movement of God in our lives and become more loving persons as we deepen our awareness of God present and moving in others.

To more deeply develop this listening attitude in prayer, consider using the exercise below...

"Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10)

Scripture clearly tells us that God desires to be with us, to speak to us...

"Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me." (Rev. 3:20)

"Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb." (Deut. 32:1-2)

Take 5 minutes and simply "be" with God, using the listening attitude described above. You might begin by taking some deep breaths to relax your body and calm your mind, or you might ask the Spirit to help you to listen, to be.

The Awareness Examen

An introduction from [ignatianspirituality.com](http://www.ignatianspirituality.com)

How Can I Pray?

A great way to pray is to look for God's presence in your life. More than 400 years ago St. Ignatius Loyola encouraged prayer-filled mindfulness by proposing what has been called the Daily Examen. The Examen is a technique of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and to discern his direction for us. Try this version of St. Ignatius's prayer.

1. Become aware of God's presence. Look back on the events of the day in the company of the Holy Spirit. The day may seem confusing to you—a blur, a jumble, a muddle. Ask God to bring clarity and understanding.

2. Review the day with gratitude. Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in the presence of God and note its joys and delights. Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details.

3. Pay attention to your emotions. One of St. Ignatius's great insights was that we detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on the feelings you experienced during the day. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying through these feelings? God will most likely show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these sins and faults. But look deeply for other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants you consider a new direction in some area of your work? Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you should reach out to her in some way.

4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it. Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling—positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant. Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart—whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

5. Look toward tomorrow. Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up. Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to **talk to Jesus like a friend**. End the Daily Examen with a conversation with Jesus. Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for his protection and help. Ask for his wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God. End the Daily Examen with the Our Father.

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