

# Abiding Alone With God

## Listening Prayer - Contemplative Prayer

October 2, 2021

### I. Introduction

“Thus says the LORD:  
Stand in the ways and see,  
And ask for the old paths, where the good way is,  
And walk in it.  
Then you will find rest for your souls...” Jeremiah 6:16 (NKJV)

“There is no path to God that is not first God’s path to us.” Bernard of Clairvaux

“When You said, ‘Seek My face’,  
My heart said to You, ‘Your face LORD, I will seek.’” Psalm 27:8 (NKJV)

The question, as Henri Nouwen addressed it in *The Way of the Heart*, is not, “How am I to find God?” but, “How am I to let myself be found by God.”

**7 formational habits**  
**Abiding alone with God**  
**Bible study**  
**Eating**  
**Resting**  
**Fasting**  
**Slowing Down**  
**Curating media**

### II. Setting the Stage: Consecrating Time and Space (Cue)

“We are like a jar of river water shaken up. What we need is to be still long enough for the sediment to settle and let the water become clear.” Ruth Haley Barton

#### A. Environment

Find your Eremos (quiet place)  
Remove Distractions  
Get comfortable

#### B. Time

Set a reasonable amount of time

#### C. Silence and Solitude

Silence  
Solitude

Silence and solitude “creates a space in us which Christ can grow, transforming our spirit and we begin to respond to life rather than react to it.” Jan Johnson

## **D. Habit Stacking**

### **i. Scripture Meditation**

I want to be in the word of Lord that I may have the Lord of the word in me.

### **ii. Prayer**

“We live in a Trinitarian universe, one where infinite energy of a personal nature is the ultimate reality. When we pray we enter the real world, the substance of the kingdom.” Dallas Willard

Adoration and thanksgiving

Confession and repentance

Supplication and Intercession

Intercession without abiding turns into God-on-demand

Once you have withdrawn into your quiet space and come into the presence of God through scripture meditation and you've lifted up the petitions of your hearts, you can now focus on contemplative prayer.

## **III. Contemplative Prayer (Craving)**

Contemplative prayer is a prayer of quiet calmness in which we drink deeply at the life-giving fount.

The term contemplative comes from the Latin words *con* (meaning “with”) and *templa* (“the place where God dwells”)

### **A. What contemplative prayer is not:**

Not Eastern Meditation

Not about having unusual or mystical experiences

Not inaction

### **B. What it is:**

It centers in loving God and enjoying His presence

Gets simpler, not more complex as we go along

A prayer of silence

A prayer of the heart

It is Divinely infused prayer

Reflective and expansive

Simply being with God and listening whenever God may choose to speak

### **C. What Usually Happens:**

Nothing

Expect to do it poorly at first

Surrender (not give up)

Defects revealed

Change in the heart

Receive grace to obey

Becomes a regular rhythm of life with God

“Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more... And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less... Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love.” Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace*

God is relational.

“ It is only expected then that God would speak to us as persons who know each other, care about each other, and are invested in common enterprises together.” Dallas Willard

**Exercise:** Listen in Silence

“The silence is the secret, the first step, to finding treasure.

Silence your body

to listen to your thoughts.

Silence your thoughts

to listen to your heart beating.

Silence your heart

to listen to your spirit.

Silence your spirit

to listen to God’s Spirit.” Mama Maggie Groban

## IV. Obstacles

### A. Some Reasons We Don’t Hear God

Have an inaccurate or dysfunctional perception of God

Being the “Star” of our spirituality

Too busy or distracted

Don’t ask

Disobey

### B. Dark Night of the Soul

Time when it feels like God has abandoned you

Being in the desert (feels like something other than the “quiet place”)

God’s silence is not indifference

Not a time to despair

Time of purifying

“The corporate worship of God is indeed edifying, but it is in a lonely encounter that God can search the soul and lay it bare to receive both the scalpel and the balm of the Divine Physician.” George MacDonald, *Diary of an Old Soul*

“The dark night is one of the many ways God brings us into a hush, a stillness, so that He may work an inner transformation upon the soul.” Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

When you cease from striving, when you are about to give up, when the night seems darkest, when you surrender all to Him, God will, in that still, small, gentle voice say, “Now I can use you.”

Clarity in hearing God is blocked by various forms of noise. One of the first steps in learning to hear God is to be aware of the noise, start silencing it, and move beyond it.

### C. Hearing Voices; Recognize the Committee Members in Our Head

Rescuer

Picture Perfect Person

Impression Manager

Victim

Defender

Critic

Self-talk created by the committee members shapes our character and behavior.

Fielding distractions from the committee members is the most common pitfall of contemplative prayer.

## **D. Quieting the Committee**

Can't ignore them

Better to recognize them for who they are and gently escort them out the door of your mind

Get passed the debate mode

Replace self-voices with words directed back to Christ and His power to intervene

Pray - "Silence all the voices except yours Lord."

If the voice in your head is condemning you, it is from yourself or the enemy.

## **E. Discerning God's Voice**

God predominately speaks to us through our thoughts.- J. M. Comer Prayer Series Podcast

Tone of Voice

Does it sound like Jesus

Does it line up with scripture

It has the feel of the voice of God in it

"I know I've heard God when I don't feel guilt and am not afraid." Myrna Craig

"There is a place deep inside each of us where God's Spirit witnesses with our spirit about things that are true (Rom. 8:16). It takes experience and practice to learn to recognize the communication that goes on in that place." Ruth Haley Barton

## **V. Practice (Response)**

"Holy Spirit, think through me until Your ideas are my ideas." Amy Carmichael

"Truly my soul silently waits for God;

from Him comes my salvation.

He only is my rock and my salvation;

He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved...

My soul, wait silently for God alone; for my expectation is from Him". Psalm 62:1-2, 5 (NKJV)

### **A. Center Down**

Gently detach from the culture

Posture: Sit comfortably. Be attentive. Palms up on your lap to indicate you're ready to receive.

Orient your mind to Jesus with:

Breathing Techniques: Slow your breathing. deep inhale and slow exhale

Breathing Prayer

Word or phrase: Simply say "God" or "Jesus" or "Peace" or "Here am I".

Scripture: Recite meaningful scriptures

Hymn/worship/praise song: Sing your favorite song to draw you into relationship with God

Use these tools to refocus your thoughts, disprove the voices, and cling to the truth that Jesus will never leave you nor forsake you.

Caution: Don't spend all your time quoting or saying something. Do it long enough to settle yourself or re-center yourself when your mind drifts.

### **B. Listen**

Awareness

Be still and know He is God (Psalm 46:10)

Give entire attention to God

Be in quiet contemplation

“Teach me to stop and listen,  
Teach me to center down.  
Teach me the use of silence,  
Teach me where peace is found.

Teach me to hear your calling,  
Teach me to search your word.  
Teach me to hear in silence,  
Things I have never heard.

Teach me to be collected,  
Teach me to be in tune,  
Teach me to be directed,  
Silence will end soon.

Then when it is time for moving,  
Grant that I might bring,  
To every day and moment,  
Peace from a silent spring.”

Ken Medema

### **C. Abide**

“Abiding is habitual obedience. It has the idea of settling down or resting in Christ. It is evidenced by a life modeled after Christ” (NKJV commentary on 1 John 2:6)

Don't “do” anything  
Let the Holy Spirit guide.

### **D. As you emerge from your time with God**

Be content with the time  
Resist the urge to critique your experience  
Thank Him for His presence

**Exercise:** Let us go to the Lord in silence again.

**Gather Me To Be With You** - Ted Loder, Guerrillas of Grace

O God, gather me now to be with you as you are with me.  
Soothe my tiredness;  
quiet my fretfulness;  
curb my aimlessness;  
relieve my compulsiveness;  
let me be easy for a moment.

O Lord, release me from the fears and guilts which grip me so tightly;  
from the expectations and the opinions which I so tightly grip,  
that I may be open to receive what you give,  
to risking something genuinely new,  
to learning something refreshingly different.

O God, gather me to be with you as you are with me. Amen

Discern the thought you receive. If it is of God, rest there. If it is not from Him, identify the voice for who it is and replace it with the scripture truth that Christ is your Shepherd, you lack nothing.

## VI. Benefits (Reward)

“Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.’”  
Genesis 28:16 (NKJV)

### A. Encounter the Creator of the Universe

Intimate relationship with the Triune God  
Sacred in the secular

### B. Walk with God

Never alone  
Solitude in the chaos

### C. Release and Freedom

From calculation to contemplation  
Surrender control  
From duty to delight

### D. Become more like Christ

Prayers become other-centered  
Reforms your soul  
Renews your mind

You can become more like Jesus so that you can love more like Jesus

## VII. Conclusion

When we abide with God we are slowly being transformed, becoming the kind of person whose love, joy, and peace are contagious.

Live life directed by the clear voice of God  
Live life with a different agenda  
Live life as a disciple of Jesus

Progress - not perfection

Abiding with God is developing the practice of silence and solitude, being in God’s word, and contemplative prayer. These and other practices, over time, increase your connectedness with the Triune God.

As you go, ask God to help develop listening and contemplative prayer habits into your life and how you might intentionally make it happen. Remember, do as you can. Not as you can’t.

Peace and grace be yours

Sources:

Nelson’s *NKJV Study Bible*                      Various Podcasts - John Mark Comer (Bridgetown Church)  
*When the Soul Listens* - Jan Johnson      *Divine Conspiracy & Hearing God* - Dallas Willard  
*Celebration of Discipline & Sanctuary of the Soul* - Richard Foster  
*Invitation to Silence and Solitude* - Ruth Haley Barton