



SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Listening Prayer

This season of life is marked by much change and unknown. Change of job dynamics, change of relationship dynamics, change of health, unknown future plans and dreams. Inevitably these changes are accompanied by a flood of different thoughts, feelings, and emotions. We may find our mind begins to wander more, our thoughts seem more worried and distracted, and our body holds more tension. These things, if not properly attended to, can become increasingly unbearable. It is easier to lose sight of God, and his voice becomes more difficult to hear amongst all the others.

Author Jennie Allen writes, "How can the thing that houses all those thoughts—just a bunch of folded tissue—contain so much of what makes us who we are?...The greatest spiritual battle is being fought between our ears. What we believe and what we think about matters, and the enemy knows it. And he is determined to get in your head to distract you from doing good and to sink you so deep that you feel helpless, overwhelmed, shut down, and incapable of rising to make a difference for the kingdom of God."

In Philippians 4:8, we see Paul teaching the Philippians something about their thoughts. He instructs them to fill their minds with thoughts that will inspire worship of God. He names specific ways in which they should practice thinking and the fruit that is produced because of it.

Just think about this for a moment: the average person has around 3,000 thoughts per hour and 50,000 thoughts per day. 50,000 thoughts! How many of those thoughts are true, are noble, are right, are pure, are excellent, are praiseworthy? How many of those thoughts produce contentment? How many of those thoughts draw us into experiencing the peace and joy of God? How many of those thoughts do we invite God into?

Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Our minds and our thoughts are the starting point. They are what dictate feelings, behaviors, decisions, reactions, and beliefs. Where our mind dwells matters. So, what does it look like to renew our minds? What would happen if we spent intentional time noticing and naming our thoughts and what they produce in us?

In this season of disease, unemployment, change, and uncertainty, we want to be there for our family, friends, and co-workers. To be at our best for them, we need to allow God to care well for us. The familiar words of flight attendants before takeoff may be applicable, "Should the cabin lose pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the overhead area. Please place the mask over your own mouth and nose before assisting others." Does it feel like your cabin has lost pressure? Do you lack energy, focus, or feel out of sorts?

So many of us know all too well the way the things of this world can begin to consume our thoughts. Our minds jump from to-do lists to worries, from demands to disappointments, from everyday

stresses to our greatest fears. And that's just our thoughts! Our feelings and our bodies speak as well. We can so easily become distracted by our own voices and thoughts that they drown out the voice of God.

Listening prayer turns us away from those elaborate internal dialogues and inner chaos we experience. This spiritual practice invites us to let go of our own voice and listen to a better one—God's loving voice.

As you practice listening prayer, don't spend too much time worrying about the moments when your mind begins to wander or becomes distracted. Instead allow your mind to release those things and humbly return your listening attention to Jesus. He is still there.

If you have children you are leading through this exercise, it would be helpful to go through it on your own first, so you can better tend to their emotions and thoughts. When we attend to ourselves well, we can be more present with others.

LISTEN TO THE GUIDED AUDIO

As you begin this listening prayer exercise, you're encouraged to find a space, wherever it may be, that is free of distractions and noise. Find a comfortable position and relax your body. Close your eyes and begin taking a few focused deep breaths.

~ SHORT PAUSE ~

As you move into this time of listening, ask God, through his grace, to show you the answer to these questions. As you move through each question, you may find it helpful to just sit in the stillness of his presence, naming your answers through prayer. You can also journal or write scriptures, phrases, or words that come to mind as you listen. Respond as you feel God is inviting you to.

~ SHORT PAUSE ~

As we begin, notice what you are feeling. What are your emotions in this very moment? Are you experiencing anger, sadness, joy, peace, hope, frustration, disappointment or other emotions? Spend some time talking to Jesus about them. Take a few moments to notice what they are tied to and name them in God's presence.

~ PAUSE SEVERAL MOMENTS ~

Now let's turn our attention to our thoughts. What are you thinking right now? Take a few moments to notice every thought that enters your mind—even if it seems trivial. What are the thoughts occupying your mind right now. Take a few moments to notice them and name them in God's loving presence.

~ PAUSE SEVERAL MOMENTS ~

Let's take a moment now to notice what's happening in our bodies. Sometimes we can ignore what our bodies have to say to us, but God made our bodies to be wise. They can have a lot to say. Pay attention to what you are feeling in your body. What do you taste? What do you smell? Hear? What do you feel in your body? Is there tension anywhere? If so, where? Are you breathing? Take a few moments to notice and name these things with God.

~ PAUSE SEVERAL MOMENTS ~

Now that we've identified what our own voice sounds like, let's turn our attention to the Father. Take a deep breath, laying these things you've named at the feet of Jesus. Imagine yourself in the presence of God, your loving Father. Invite him to speak. What does he have to say to you today?

~ PAUSE SEVERAL MOMENTS ~

Take a few moments to respond in prayer to God's voice.

~ PAUSE A FEW MOMENTS ~

Loving Father, thank you for your attentiveness to me. For speaking your love over me. Jesus, I invite you to carry the burdens I'm holding. I trust you to keep them and release them to you. Holy Spirit, guide my thoughts, feelings, and body through this difficult season and give me your strength. Amen.

For families with students and children

If you have **Middle School or High School students**, invite them to participate in the full exercise with you, naming their thoughts, feelings, and paying attention to their bodies. Do your best to welcome what they share without feeling the need to fix it. Pray for God's guidance to help you hold a safe space for their responses. If they're having trouble hearing God's voice, take that time to speak truth over them. You can also read through a Scripture together like Psalm 23, 139, or Isaiah 43:1-5, inviting them to hear God's voice.

If you have **elementary-age children**, invite them to participate with you as you lead them through naming their feelings, thoughts, and what they're holding in their bodies. You might find it helpful to [visit this feelings chart](#) with some detailed emotions they can name.

As you're leading them through naming their emotions, use the emotions wheel on the next page. Allow them to write or draw on the wheel as they voice their emotions. Remember, none of these emotions are bad. Pray for your child to feel God's love as they name what they are feeling.

When you've talked through their emotions, ask them what questions they have. Invite them to share their thoughts with you. These may be few or they could be several. Allow your child to express his or her thoughts. Remind them God cares about every thought or question they have. Even if he does not give an answer right away, he's listening.

When they've shared their thoughts, ask them what they feel in their body. What do they taste, touch, hear, smell? You may get some interesting answers to this question and that's ok! Allow them to pay attention to what their bodies are holding. Remind them that God cares about their bodies, too! After all, he made them!

After you've listened to what your child senses in their body, take some time to speak God's truth over them. You can pray a prayer of God's blessing over them from the script below or you can say your own words or combine them. The important thing is to remind them they are loved and known by their Heavenly Father and he cares deeply about them.

God is a good Father who cares about your every feeling, every thought, and everything your body does. He is ready to listen to you anytime anywhere. Jesus wants to walk with you as you are sad or frustrated. He wants to share in your happiness and joy. He is always with you and always loving you and that will not change. You can share anything with him. He is your helper and wants to be your friend.

FEELINGS WHEEL

