

# Practice

## SESSION 04: ENCOUNTER WITH OUR GOD

True transformation involves both content and practice. Take a moment to invite the Spirit to show you how to incorporate this practice into your life.

Our final session's spiritual exercise is listening prayer. We encourage you to continue beginning your day in the quiet before you turn to your phone. We recommend you add this exercise to your new morning rhythm, but you may choose another time.

Whenever you choose, this exercise is built on the theological truth that your body is the "temple of the Holy Spirit"<sup>1</sup>; the Spirit of God has direct access to your mind and imagination. He can interject his thoughts into your thoughts and his desires into your desires. Learning to make space for this to happen, and to discern his voice from *all the other voices* in our head, is a key task of discipleship to Jesus.

The exercise itself is very simple.

- 01 Find a quiet, distraction-free time and place, put away your phone, and get comfortable.
- 02 Take a few minutes to just breathe deeply, in and out. You may want to simply say "Father" or "Come, Holy Spirit" as you inhale each breath. Let yourself slow down.
- 03 When you're ready to begin, ask God to silence the voice of the enemy, to clear out of your mind and the air around you any voices that are not the voice of God.
- 04 Then, ask God to speak to you. This can be as simple as praying, "God, please speak to me." or "God, is there anything you want to say to me?"

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19

05 Finally, open your mind and heart to God’s Spirit and *listen*.

- What comes to mind may be ...
  - A line or passage of Scripture
  - A word or phrase
  - A thought or feeling
  - A picture in your mind
  - A sequence of pictures that “play” like a short film in your imagination
  - A memory
  - Something you have recently thought about, read, heard or seen
- Don’t feel like you have to strain. Just wait quietly.
- Often, the very first thought that comes to mind is from God.
- Something may come, or it may not, either way is fine. Our job is just to listen, not to make God speak.

06 Discern. It’s very important that you test everything you “hear” against Scripture and in community. Don’t be afraid to check it against the Bible, talk to your pastor, or share it with other followers of Jesus. This is the practice of discernment, and it’s something we do *together*.

07 Reflect and rest. If something comes to mind, spend a little time reflecting on it, asking the Spirit to clarify in your mind the meaning of his word to you. Write it down so you can remember it and spend more time in reflection on it in the coming days. And if nothing comes to mind, that’s okay. Our job is to listen, not make God speak. Just rest in trust in the Father’s love for you in Christ and by the Spirit.

Our recommendation is that you do this exercise daily, but you might just want to practice it once or twice this week. The goal is to begin really listening deeply for God’s voice in your life and learning to live off his words to you.

As you think about this coming week, when would you like to engage in this practice?

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# Reach Practice

## SESSION 04: ENCOUNTER WITH OUR GOD

### Reading

Read Chapters 10-12 of *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* by Ruth Haley Barton.

### Podcast

Listen to episode 4 of the Solitude series from the Rule of Life podcast by Practicing the Way.

### Exercise: Retreat

We've been dipping our toes in the water of solitude for the last three sessions; now it's time to dive all the way in. Ten minutes of silence is a great way to begin your day, but there are some things that can only happen in longer periods of solitude. The spiritual life has its own pace, and it's *slow*, not hurried. We invite you to go away, slow down, and enter into this experience of God through the practice of retreat.

Any quiet place will do — a retreat center, monastery, cabin, guest house, campground, park, or even your own home if no one is around and all your devices are powered off. Find your “desert.”

There's no “right” length of time to go away. You may choose to go overnight or even for a few days. Many cities have a monastery within driving distance, and they usually offer silent retreats for anyone who is interested. Or you may just want to go away for a few hours.

There's no “right” way to spend your time on retreat. In fact, be careful not to overfill it with spiritual busyness.

We all learn differently. Some of us prefer reading, others listening, and others doing. If you'd like to go deeper, choose what resonates with you and give it a try! Even if you don't try a Reach Practice, remember to journal in the Solitude Reflection section before your next session as a group.