

# Prayer tool kit

## Listening in prayer

### AIMS

To explore ways in which silence and listening play an important and refreshing part in prayer.

### Let me tell you...

As I student I used to travel into college everyday alongside my father who worked nearby. As we left the house we fell into an easy pattern of conversation and, as we got nearer to our destination, more and more silence. In the evening the pattern would reverse itself. At first we would say little and gradually as we got nearer to home, we'd have more to say about the things of the day. I realised that I had learnt a lot about silence from him and that silence was something with which he seemed very comfortable. Later, when we were all older and he was living alone, I reminded him of our daily commuting and what I had learned about silence alongside him on that daily journey. He seemed surprised and yet I know that we remain quite comfortable with each other, whether in conversation or silence.

### INTRODUCTION

Some people say that the better you know someone, the more comfortable are any silences between you. Perhaps this is especially true in our relationship with God. Sometimes we don't want to use words in prayer, so we can experiment with ways of being quiet in God's presence.

Silence, retreats, meditation and contemplation are all ancient prayer traditions but they're not confined to the past. In Prayer Year let's take the opportunity to dust down some of those practices and see how they can enrich us today.

### Contemplation

This is about approaching God without words, worshipping God from your heart not your head, and basking in God's presence.

Contemplation is sometimes called 'Soaking Prayer'. It means setting time aside to be still in God's presence. There is no agenda or sense of striving to achieve anything. Sung worship and a short Bible reading can help focus our thoughts.

If you are leading others in contemplation, begin by praying that the Holy Spirit will minister to them. A simple prayer inviting the Holy Spirit or a sung chant could be suitable.

You may want to invite people to lie on the floor (exercise mats, pillows and blankets are helpful) or stay seated. Consider people's comfort and any physical limitations they may have when planning for this. You might like to play some gentle music, either recorded music or a musician who can improvise. This might last for 10 minutes to begin with but as people become more comfortable with the activity you might want to extend it for up to half an hour.

A visual focus in the space you have created can be helpful. This might reflect a particular season, or relate to the Bible passage.

### Meditation

This is not wordless, but needs silence. Repeat a Bible verse or well-known prayer over and over again, maybe emphasising a different word each time. It's amazing what different insights can be gleaned by this: a bit like savouring a boiled sweet to get all the flavour.

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Some people use the Jesus prayer in this way:

*'Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner'.*

Others use a simple word or phrase like *'Come Jesus, come'.*

### Listening

Listening is vital to developing our prayer relationship. We may be listening to others, in order to discern their needs so that we may pray for them more carefully. But we also need to be listening to God. This may take some time but is very rewarding. As you spend more time quietly listening you will develop a greater sense of what God is like. You may 'hear' through words or pictures, real or imagined, through things you sense in your body or through dreams. Keep a record of what you 'hear', using whatever method helps you.

If this is new to you, you may want to find a prayer partner for shared support and encouragement. This could be someone who already does this or someone else who wants to begin. Either way, as you share your experiences together try to do so in an open and accepting way. Ask God to lead you to a wise mentor; wisdom has been likened to using oven gloves (it stops you getting burnt while handling something good).

Quakers are usually known for their silent meetings for worship. Attending a local Quaker meeting can help you experience silence and listening to God. You may be interested in attending a retreat or quiet day. Try visiting the website of the Retreat Association to find out more: <http://www.retreats.org.uk> (the URC is a member).

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### Prayer

God of stillness and  
creative action,  
help us to find space  
for quietness today  
that we may live  
creatively,  
discover the inner  
meaning of silence,  
and learn the  
wisdom  
that heals the world.  
Send peace and joy  
to each quiet place,  
to all who are  
waiting  
and listening.  
May your still small  
voice be heard  
through Christ, in  
the love of the Spirit  
Amen.

Prayer for Stillness, from the Retreats Association [www.retreats.org.uk](http://www.retreats.org.uk). Used with permission.

### EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

### THE NEXT STEP

If you want more toolkit items please revisit the website. You will find activities that feature silence and listening suitable for each season in the seasonal materials.