

Faithful Innovation

Listen: The Way Forward



The Way Forward

The way forward begins with listening: listening to God, listening to each other, listening to ourselves, and listening to the world around us. Listening to God together through dwelling in the Word and dwelling in the world helps us begin to name what God might already be up to in our midst. Listening to stories about what we long for and what we've lost (or are afraid to lose) as well as listening to the church community, neighbors, and loved ones help our hearts align with what God cares about most.

Workspace

Answer the following questions honestly to discern your level of engagement with the listening practices in this section. If you can answer the questions easily, you might be ready to move on to the next section. If not, this section might be a good place to focus right now.

Where is God active in your life?

What might God be saying to you in and through Scripture right now?

How do your friends and family think God is active (if at all) in their lives?

What recommendations do your peers have for how you can better connect with God?

Dwelling in the Word

When we seek to find out where God might be active in our lives, and as we consider where to join in with that work, one of the core practices to engage in is dwelling in the Word. When we dwell in the Word together, we listen to Scripture together and we allow God to speak to us through it.

"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work."—2 Timothy 3:16-17



An Ancient Practice

Dwelling in the Word is an ancient way of reading Scripture. It involves spiritually submitting to the text as one way God speaks to us, with a willingness to be shaped by what God might want to say through the Scripture. In this way, we are being interpreted by the text together as we listen to it.

Three questions guide our listening:

1. What caught your attention?
2. What questions does this passage create for you?
3. What do you think God might be saying to you through this passage?

Listen to the Word together:

- Pray that God will speak to you.
- Read the text, slowly.
- Allow for silence.
- Read again.
- Allow for silence.

Listen to someone else:

In-person version

- Find one person you can share your thoughts about the text with, a “reasonably friendly looking stranger,” someone you maybe don’t know well.
- Spend four to five minutes each sharing about what caught your imagination, a question you have, or what you think the Spirit might be saying.



Online version

- Pair up with another person virtually and share your thoughts about the text with them.
- Spend four to five minutes each sharing about what caught your imagination, a question you have, or what you think the Spirit might be saying.

Share in a group:

- In a group of six to eight people, share what you heard your conversation partner say.
- Consider what God might be saying to you as a group. What are you hearing?

Choosing a Text

Selecting a text for dwelling in the Word is often as important as the practice itself. You may choose to follow your denomination's liturgical calendar or revisit text you read during a recent church service.

Or you may want to select texts that are thematically relevant to the issues or challenges you are presently facing. The suggested texts below include themes of provision, comfort, trust, fruitfulness, growth, and hope. There are many options beyond these; this list represents verses that have been used repeatedly by the Faith+Lead team.



Suggested Texts:

- Exodus 3:1-10 (Moses and the burning bush)
- Exodus 16:1-5, 11-20, 31 (manna and quail in the desert)
- 1 Kings 19:4-13 (God and Elijah in the wilderness)
- Isaiah 40:1-11 (comfort for God's people)
- Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 (exiled Israelites in Babylon)
- Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (parable of the weeds)
- Mark 4:1-9 (parable of the sower)
- Luke 10:1-12 (mission of the seventy disciples)
- John 15:1-11 (Jesus as the true vine)
- Acts 8:26-40 (Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch)
- Acts 16:6-15 (Paul's journey to Macedonia)
- Romans 8:12-25 (heirs with Christ and future glory)

Dwelling in a Single Text

Many ministry leaders report having rich experiences by staying with a single text over a season, which could be several weeks to several months in length. By repeatedly exposing ourselves to the same passage, we open space for God to reveal how the text is transforming us over time. Words and phrases that once seemed familiar can take on new and deeper meaning as we discover the living power of God's Word.

Invite the Spirit's Leading

No matter how you choose to select your text or how long you read the same passage, invite the Spirit to lead you toward finding the text that God will use to speak to you. The entire purpose of the dwelling practice is to enter into fellowship with God and to listen for God's voice. Be ready to discern the Spirit's movement through what you hear!



Dwelling in the World

When we are beginning to name what God might be up to in our midst, the simple practice of reflecting on everyday activities can help us begin to name God's presence and activity.

"Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night,' even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you."—Psalm 139:7-12

Dwelling in the world is a simple practice of reflecting on God's movement in our daily lives in conversation with a partner.

Step 1: Reflect (several minutes in silence)

Reflect back on the previous week. When was there a time when you had an opportunity to share God's peace with someone? This could be a friend, stranger, colleague, neighbor, or family member.

- Go back imaginatively into that encounter. What might God have been up to there?
- If you were to reconnect with that person, what might God want to do?



Step 2: Share and Listen

Find a partner (preferably a reasonably friendly looking stranger!) and spend several minutes sharing your story and reflections.

Step 3: Regather and Listen

Those who feel so led may share highlights of their stories, wonderings, or reflections with the larger group. Or, with permission from your partner, you may share your partner's story highlights.

Listening to Longings and Losses

This spiritual practice of lament invites you to enter into a process of lamenting the longings and losses that accompany any type of change that occurs as we faithfully innovate. Fears of loss can prevent oneself from pursuing faithful innovation. Lamenting can create space for grieving losses as well as building trust in God's direction for the future.

"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."—Psalm 42:5 NIV



A Spiritual Practice of Lament

Begin with These Questions

What's one wish you have for your life?

What's something that used to happen (or used to be true) in your life that you wish would return?

What's one thing you fear might be lost as you move into the future?

What's something that has changed that you feel is a loss in your life?

Lamenting Longings and Losses

Address God

Direct your lament to God, framing the conversation about your longings and losses as a prayer.

Complaint

Name what you long for and wish was true about your life. Name your fears about what has been or could be lost as you move into the future.

Confession

Confess your need for God's grace and forgiveness in your life.

Ask God for Help

Name what you want God to do for you. Express your longings and losses as a request.

Affirm Trust in God

Affirm your trust in God and God's leadership over your future.

Promise to Praise God

Praise God for who God is, what God has done, and what God will do.



Listening to Spiritual Stories

Listening to each other is an essential practice for learning to ask different questions. As we learn to listen to each other well, we also increase our capacity to hear what God might be saying to us. By creating space to listen to others, we want to especially focus on hearing people's stories of a time when they were most spiritually engaged and energized. And in listening to each other's stories, our capacity increases for listening to God and what God might be up to.

"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.'"—Matthew 9:36–38

Listening to Your Spiritual Circle

People in Your Spiritual Circle

Ask people in your spiritual circle—friends, family, members of your church community—about when they have felt most spiritually alive. Take note of their responses and reflect on them moving forward. Here is a possible introduction to your conversation:

"I am interested in learning more about how people experience God in their everyday lives. So I'm asking several people a few questions about their spiritual lives. Thanks for being willing to talk to me."

Suggested questions:

Can you reflect on a time when you would say you grew spiritually in a significant way? Describe what was happening in that period of your life.

What was it about this time of your life that you think caused you to grow spiritually?

Was there something during this time of your life that you think God was trying to teach you or show you?



Where do you experience God's presence most often now? (i.e., in worship, in nature, in conversation with friends/family, in prayer, in Bible study, at yoga, etc.)

