WAY OF LIFE

STAY ◆ SHARE ◆ SERVE



Sacred Conversations

Becoming a Listening Church

Resources for Participants & Group Leaders

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London Centre for Spiritual Direction



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'The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear.'

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together

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If you prefer a plain text and/or easy-read version of this resource, you can access this at lent2027.wayoflife.london, or email mirjam.ngoy@london.anglican.org.



SACRED CONVERSATIONS

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. Isaiah 65:4

The offering

This Lent series invites us to explore discipleship through the practice of listening. Drawing on Scripture and our own experience, we will explore what it means to listen deeply to God, one another and the world around us.

Inspired by the God who hears us, each session encourages us to slow down and pay attention, especially to voices and stories beyond our own. Through prayer, reflection, conversation, and simple listening practices, we will explore how attentive presence and honest conversation open us to the movement of the Spirit.

This offering invites us to become communities shaped by listening – places where people can be heard, relationships can deepen and discernment can be shared. At a time when public life is often marked by speed and certainty, we are invited to practise a different way of being together: learning to listen first.

Weekly themes

- **WEEK 1: Presence** - A God who hears us
- **WEEK 2: Behold** - Learning holy curiosity
- **WEEK 3: Threshold** - Listening across difference
- **WEEK 4: Grief** - Listening to suffering
- **WEEK 5: Life** - Listening for resurrection

How the sessions work

The programme runs over five weeks, combining a weekly online session with a local listening practice group. Each online session lasts one hour and is hosted by one of our bishops or archdeacons. British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation will be provided during the live sessions.

1. Join the online session

Join the live session on Tuesday evening. You can log in individually from wherever you are, or join together with others from your church or group. If you cannot join live, recordings will be available by 4:00 pm each Wednesday at http://lent2027.wayoflife.london.

Each online session follows the same pattern:

- Welcome and opening liturgy
- Opening question
- Reflection by the guest speaker
- Conversation with the host
- Embodied prayer practice
- Introduction to a listening skill
- Notices and closing liturgy

2. Practice listening locally

After the online session, participants are invited to meet in their own church or group for around half an hour of listening practice. These gatherings are organised

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and facilitated locally, using the provided handouts and Group Leader Guidance *(page 18-25)*.

Embodied practice

We include an embodied prayer practice each week to highlight that Christian discipleship is never only a thinking or believing journey; it is fully embodied.

Scripture and the Christian tradition remind us that we encounter God through our whole selves. By paying gentle attention to breath, posture, movement and sensation, we learn to notice God with us in our real, lived experience – our vulnerabilities, limitations, joys, and longings.

Whether our bodies feel strong or fragile, mobile or limited, we are invited to honour the gift of our physical lives and to attend to God's presence within them. Each practice can be adapted to different bodies and access needs. You might participate through movement, breath, imagination, stillness or simply by attending to the words.

A note on human experience

We all have a story to tell. Our stories are shaped by our experiences, relationships, communities and cultures – and each person we meet carries a story that we may know very little about.

In a culture where so many voices compete to be heard, it is deeply countercultural to listen first. Listening asks us to make space for another person's experience before rushing to speak, respond, explain or assume that we already understand.

This series invites us to practise that kind of deep listening: listening to others as God listens to us and hears our whole selves. As we listen with the Spirit, we may discover new possibilities for connection and understanding in our churches and communities, particularly with those whose voices and experiences have historically been overlooked or unheard.

A note on language

Throughout this resource, words such as listen, hear, notice and sense are used broadly. People experience and communicate in different ways, including through speech, writing, British Sign Language (BSL), Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), gesture, silence and other forms of communication. The practices can be adapted accordingly

When we use language such as sensing or noticing what God may be doing, this is an invitation to attend prayerfully and tentatively, rather than a claim that we know with certainty what God is saying or what another person is experiencing.

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PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

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THE LITURGY

OPENING

1 Candle

We light a candle as a sign of God's presence with us and among us.

2 Breath prayer

Speak, O Lord *(inhale)*
Your servant is listening. *(exhale)*
1 Sam 3:10

3 Opening prayer

Loving God,
we gather in your presence
to learn to listen faithfully.
You hear the cries of our hearts
and never turn away from us.
Open our hearts to hear you,
that we may listen with your love.

Jesus Christ,
you see into the depths of our lives
and meet us with compassion and grace.
Give us courage to attend to what is
difficult and wisdom to hear what you are
revealing.
Open our minds to hear you,
that we may listen with your grace.

Holy Spirit,
guide us as we listen and learn together.
Give us patience and understanding.
Open our spirits to hear you,
that together we may discern your voice.
Amen.

4 Bible reading

CLOSING

1 Breath prayer

You hear the cries of our hearts, *(inhale)*
teach us to listen well. *(exhale)*

2 Closing prayer

Loving God,
we have gathered in your presence
to listen, reflect and learn together.
Thank you for meeting us here
in all that we have heard and shared.
Keep our hearts open to your love.

Jesus Christ,
thank you for showing us
what it means to listen with compassion.
Help us to carry what we have heard
into the lives we share.
Keep our minds open to one another.

Holy Spirit,
continue to guide us
as we listen in our churches and
communities.
Give us wisdom to discern your voice
and the courage to follow where you lead.
Keep our spirits open to your presence.

3 Blessing

Go forth now in peace, confident that the One who listens goes with you to guide your steps. May you walk this week with the deep assurance that you are heard, known and never alone. And may you extend that same grace to those you meet, that through our listening we may become ever more the Church God calls us to be. Amen.

We blow out our candles.

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SACRED CONVERSATIONS

WEEK 1 | PRESENCE

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT - ONLINE SESSION

Theme: Presence

A God who hears

Before we learn to listen to one another, we begin with the God who listens to us.

In the story of Bartimaeus, Jesus hears a voice that others are trying to silence. He stops, calls Bartimaeus to himself and asks: "What do you want me to do for you?"

Jesus does not assume that he already knows what Bartimaeus needs. He makes space for him to speak.

Our own listening begins here – with the discovery that we are known and heard by God. As we learn to trust that we are deeply known and loved, we are invited to extend that same attention to others.

God listens first. Our listening is a response to the God who has already listened to us.

1 Opening liturgy

You can find the opening and closing liturgy on a separate handout *(page 6)*.

Bible Passage

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.
Mark 10:46-52 (NRSVA)

2 Opening question

Can you think of a time when you felt really listened to? What images, feelings, or memories arise for you?

3 Guest speaker contribution

4 Conversation with host

5 Embodied practice

6 Listening skill introduction

Responding in silence

We are often used to offering something back when someone speaks – a response, question, reassurance or advice. This practice invites us to resist that impulse. Instead, we practise being fully present and simply receiving what another person shares.

As you watch, notice:

- *What does the listener do?*
- *What does the listener hold back from doing?*
- *What do you notice about the space created by the silence?*

7 Notices and closing liturgy

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PARTICIPANT HANDOUT - LOCAL GROUPS

8 Listening practice

Before you begin

- **We listen to connect, not to fix:** We are here to offer attentive presence – not to give advice, persuade, or solve problems.
- **Participation is voluntary:** You are free to speak, pass, or choose to simply listen. Silence is a fully valid way to take part.
- **All communication is valued:** We welcome speech, British Sign Language (BSL), writing, or gestures.
- **Confidentiality is key:** We hold what is shared with care. The only exception is if a safeguarding or safety concern arises.
- **Compassion over perfection:** You don't have to agree with everything you hear, and there is no expectation to get the practice "perfectly right".
- **Take care of yourself:** If anything feels too much, you can pause, step away, or choose not to share. You may wish to speak to somebody you trust afterwards.

A note about silence

Silence can sometimes feel longer than we expect. We may notice our minds wandering, feel restless, or become aware of how uncomfortable it can be simply to sit without doing anything. This is perfectly normal.
There is no need to make anything happen or to fill the space. In this practice, we respond with silence to give the speaker's words room to breathe, and to allow ourselves to be exactly as we are – trusting that God is at work even when we cannot see or sense it.

The practice

The invitation in this practice is to respond entirely in silence. No verbal feedback is given after a person speaks.

1. Speak

One person shares for 2–3 minutes in response to one of these wonderings:

- **I wonder what today's session has stirred within you.**
- **Tell about a time when you experienced being deeply listened to. What was that like?**
- **I wonder what you notice about the way Jesus listens to Bartimaeus.**
- **I wonder what happens within you when you find listening difficult.**

2. Receive

The rest of the group listens without interrupting, advising, interpreting or asking questions.

3. Be still

After the person finishes, remain in silence for approximately 30 seconds before moving to the next person.

Repeat the three steps until everyone who wishes to share has had a turn.

After the practice

Take some time to reflect on the experience as a group:

- *What was it like to speak without anyone interrupting, responding, or trying to fix things?*
- *What did you notice during the silence?*
- *What helped you remain present to the speaker and to the space?*

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SACRED CONVERSATIONS

GROUP LEADER GUIDANCE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome

Thank you for taking on this important role in the Lent series. Your presence and care help create a supportive space where participants can learn and practise new ways of listening.

You don't need to have all the answers or be an expert in listening. Your role is to hold the space with openness, kindness and attentiveness, helping participants feel heard and respected. You are learning and practising alongside the group.

Pastoral care

This series invites participants to share personal experiences, reflections and questions. Difficult or emotional things may sometimes arise.

Your role is to offer compassionate presence and gentle guidance, not to provide answers or act as a counsellor or therapist. Encourage participants to share only what they feel comfortable sharing. They can pause, step away or choose not to share at any point.

If difficult feelings arise, it is okay to pause and acknowledge them with care. You do not need to fix the situation or provide answers. Sometimes simply acknowledging what someone has shared is enough.

If someone needs additional support, encourage them to seek professional help where appropriate. This series is not a substitute for mental health care.

The following organisations offer professional support and may be helpful for signposting participants:

- BACP: www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists
- Mind: www.mind.org.uk/information-support/
- National Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 2000 247
- NHS Talking Therapies: www.nhs.uk/service-search/mental-health/find-an-nhs-talking-therapies-service
- Rape Crisis England & Wales: https://rapecrisis.org.uk/
- Shout: The UK's free, confidential, 24/7 mental health text service: www.giveusashout.org or text 85258
- UKCP: www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist/

If a safeguarding concern or serious concern about someone's safety arises, follow your church's safeguarding procedures and seek advice from the appropriate safeguarding lead.

The online session

Before the online session

Remind your group that these Lent sessions are designed to create a caring and attentive space where participation is always voluntary. Participants can step away and return whenever they feel ready.

Make sure everyone has access to the

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liturgy handout and the handout for that week's session.

Remind participants that there will be time for reflection after the online session, when they will also have an opportunity to put the listening skill introduced into practice.

During the online session

Opening question

There won't be time for group conversation at this point. Participants can jot down a brief response individually or, where appropriate, share a word or short phrase in the chat.

Embodied practice

Remind participants that they can adapt the practice to their bodies and access requirements. They can open their eyes, change posture, take a break or participate through movement, breath, imagination or stillness, in whatever way feels safe and appropriate for them.

Local listening practice groups

Purpose of the groups

Listening practice groups provide an opportunity to try out the listening skills introduced during the online sessions, rather than simply talking about them.

Each week, participants will be invited to try a particular way of listening. The practices build gradually across the five weeks:

Week 1 - Presence
Listening skill: Receiving in silence
Aim: Learning that receiving and listening can be enough in themselves

Week 2 - Behold
Listening skill: Reflecting back
Aim: Paying deep attention

Week 3 - Threshold
Listening skill: Asking an open question
Aim: Growing in curiosity

Week 4: Grief
Listening skill: Notice, sense, feel
Aim: Being present to ourselves and others

Week 5: Life
Listening skill: Offering a wondering
Aim: Discerning new possibilities

These are not conventional discussion groups. The aim is to practise listening differently and then reflect together on what we noticed and experienced. You may sometimes need to gently bring the group back to the practice if conversation takes over.

A successful practice doesn't depend on everyone speaking or reaching a particular conclusion. Sometimes the most meaningful thing is simply being listened to without interruption, allowing silence or noticing our own responses.

Key principles

- **We listen to connect, not to fix:** We are here to offer attentive presence – not to give advice, persuade, or solve problems.
- **Participation is voluntary:** You are free to speak, pass, or choose to simply listen. Silence is a fully valid way to take part.
- **All communication is valued:** We welcome speech, British Sign Language (BSL), writing, or gestures.
- **Confidentiality is key:** We hold what is shared with care. The only exception is if a safeguarding or safety concern arises.
- **Compassion over perfection:** You don't have to agree with everything you hear, and there is no expectation to get the practice "perfectly right".
- **Take care of yourself:** If anything feels too much, you can pause, step away, or choose not to share. You may wish to speak to somebody you trust afterwards.

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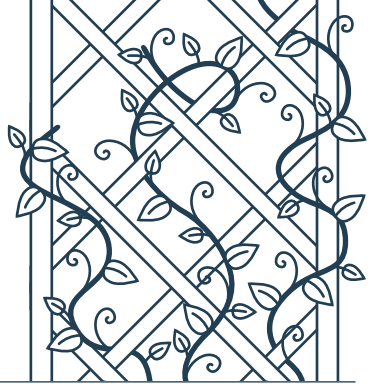
GROUP LEADER GUIDANCE



How the groups work

At the beginning of each group, the group leader:

- Welcomes participants and briefly reminds them of the key principles.
- Introduces the listening skill for that week, using the short explanation provided in the participant handout.
- For groups of more than 8–10 people, considers splitting into smaller groups, each with someone to guide the practice.

The group then follows the listening practice:

- One person shares for approximately 2–3 minutes while the others practise that week's listening skill.
- The appropriate silence or response is offered, following the weekly instructions.
- The practice is repeated as time allows, giving everyone who wishes to an opportunity to speak and listen.
- The group takes a few minutes to reflect together, using the questions in the weekly notes.

Keep an eye on the time and agree in advance how much is available for each person, so that everyone who wishes to participate has an opportunity.

A note for group leaders

Your role is not to keep the conversation moving. Resist the temptation to fill silence, explain what someone meant, or draw the group into discussion.

Silence can feel longer than we expect and may be uncomfortable. If you have promised a particular length of silence, allow the full time. Setting a timer beforehand means you don't have to watch the clock. Trust that silence is part of the practice, and that God can be at work even when nothing seems to be happening.

If the group moves away from the practice, gently bring it back: *"That's interesting. For now, let's stay with the listening practice rather than discussing it."* Or: *"Let's pause there and notice what happens when we simply listen."*

Optional: leading sessions offline

We understand that some groups may not be able to join the live online sessions. If this is the case, you have flexibility in how you run each week.

You may choose to show the full recording of the session and then facilitate the listening practice group.

Alternatively, you might lead some sections of the session yourself, such as the liturgy, opening question and embodied practice, while showing recordings of other parts, such as the guest speaker's contribution, the conversation with the bishop or archdeacon, and the modelling of that week's listening skill. You can then facilitate the listening practice group.

If you would like to lead the embodied practice yourself, you will find the handouts for each week on the following pages.

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GROUP LEADER GUIDANCE

EMBODIED PRACTICE SCRIPT - WEEK 1 | PRESENCE

Aim of the practice: To receive what we have heard and to become aware of God's presence with us.

Practices can be adapted to suit all bodies and access needs. Please encourage participants to honour their own comfort and boundaries, adjusting posture, taking breaks, or engaging in ways that feel right for them.

Find a comfortable position. If you are able, place both feet on the floor and let your hands rest loosely in your lap. Notice the support of the chair beneath you and the ground beneath your feet.

Take a slow breath and allow yourself to become present.

Become aware of the God who is with you, the God who listens to us before we listen to one another.

We have prayed together, listened to our guest speaker and shared in conversation. Simply receive what you have heard.

[Pause]

If it feels comfortable, gently turn your hands so that your palms face upwards. Let your hands rest open, without holding them rigidly. Notice the feeling of your hands in this position. Notice your fingers, your palms, the contact with your lap.

As we quieten ourselves, we can feel the urge to grasp something, work something out, prepare a response or decide what we think.

Notice if you can feel any of that urge in your body. Perhaps as tension, a movement, or a sense of wanting to do something.

For this moment, there is nothing you need to grasp. Let your hands be open. Receive.

[Pause]

Bring to mind something from the sharing that has stayed with you. Perhaps a word, a story, an image, something that encouraged you or something that challenged you.

You don't need to explain why it has stayed with you. Simply hold it gently.

[Pause]

Notice what is happening in your body as you hold it. Notice your breathing. Is anything shifting, tightening or softening? Remember that you don't need to change anything.

As you breathe, hear these words:
I don't have to respond.
I can simply receive.

[Pause]

Now become aware once more of the God who is with us, the God who listens to us before we listen to one another.
You are heard.
You are held.
You don't need to perform or explain anything here.

[Pause]

Slowly let your hands return to rest. Notice the movement as your palms turn and your hands settle.
Take a moment to notice how you are sitting, how you are breathing, and what it feels like to receive without needing to respond.
When you are ready, gently return your attention to the room.

Transition

We are now going to practise offering that same kind of presence to one another: listening without interrupting, and allowing silence instead of rushing to respond.

(Continue with watching the 'Listening skill introduction', page 7)

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Thank you for taking part in this Lent journey!

Click here or scan QR code to share your feedback

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For more Discipleship and Spiritual Formation resources, visit:

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