Listening Hearts 2

Cultivating spiritual friendships through guided questions and discussions

The goal of Listening Hearts 1 was learning to listen well to each other. Listening Hearts 2 focuses on improving our ability to hear God and learning how to encourage each other with what we hear. We will try a few new spiritual formation practices. One is called Palms Down, Palms Up and another is called *Lectio Divina*, which means "divine reading". We will also gradually increase our time of silence to five minutes as we work toward having a peaceful soul at rest.

If you haven't completed Listening Hearts 1 yet, we recommend you start there. It is best to follow the Listening Hearts modules in order, completing each module before advancing to the next, so the spiritual practices used in the program become familiar and bonds are built within the group.

This booklet contains some basic instructions followed by eight session outlines.
Feel free to adapt them as needed.

We hope that you will make deep connections with each other and "consider how to stir up [each] other to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24, ESV).

This resource is an adapted version of Soul Sisters, created by Canadian Baptist Women of Ontario.
Atlantic Baptist Women is very grateful to our sisters at Canadian Baptist Women of Ontario and Quebec for sharing their resource with us and allowing us to modify it for our context.
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GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

1

INVITE one or more people to meet with you, explaining what is involved.

- For two people, each session will last about 30 minutes. For small groups, expect an hour and a half. Small groups of up to 6 people work best.
- Decide when you will meet and whether you will meet in person, by phone, Zoom, etc.

2

ORGANIZE

- *For two people:* Use the questions as fits you best.
- *For three to six people:*

You will probably want to choose a facilitator. It could be the same person every week or it could rotate from week to week. The facilitator reads the question and then opens it up for people to respond. The facilitator watches the time and gently signals when it's time to move ahead.

For large groups:

- Begin the session together for the welcome, reminders, and silence. Then divide up into groups of about 4–5 people each. Keep the same group divisions for all the sessions so you can develop depth over time.
- Let each group choose a facilitator as above.

3

PREPARE

- Download materials from Resources at atlanticbaptistwomen.ca or copy this booklet.
- Send each person the session outlines. People like to know the questions in advance.
- Send a reminder email or phone call a day before each meeting.

4

PRAYERFULLY BEGIN YOUR FIRST SESSION

SESSION 1: Reconnecting

1. Welcome back! Begin by renewing your commitment to confidentiality.

2. Remind the group about the practice of silence:
   During this time don't pray or think over things—just rest with God. Sometimes we need to be quiet and slow down in order to listen well (both to God and to others).

3. Read 1 Peter 5:7 (WE): *"Turn all your troubles over to him, because he cares for you and is watching over you."*

4. Read the instructions for Palms Down, Palms Up. Then guide the participants through the practice and go directly into a time of silence.

Palms Down, Palms Up

Sometimes doing something physical can help us make an equivalent spiritual change. This ancient practice is designed to help us release our worries to Christ.

1. Close your eyes and hold your hands out in front of you with the palms facing down. Silently name the fears, frustrations and burdens you are carrying one by one. Perhaps there is someone you are worried about; perhaps you have a relationship in conflict. What is causing you stress?

2. As you name each item, pray to release it (e.g. Lord, I entrust my child to you; I give you my fear about this medical appointment …). Imagine God's hands held out and ready to receive what you are letting go.

3. Then, slowly turn your hands over. With palms up, pray to receive whatever God has for you. Sit quietly for a minute of two.

"Cast all your worries on him, for he cares for you."
(1 Peter 5:7, TLV)

For slightly different versions try
https://www.waterfromrock.org/2013/04/15/palms-up-palms-down-2/

https://waterfromrock.org/2016/07/25/palms-down-palms-up/

5. Have 1–2 minutes of silence (use a timer on vibrate if desired), then say: *"Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds so we may keep company with you and one another. Amen."*

6. Review the procedure for Sharing Times:

- Read the question.
- Let one person answer while the others listen without comment.
- Pause: Take a few deep breaths.
- Let one or two people ask a question to expand or clarify. For example, What else happened? How did you feel? How does this event connect to other things in your life? What do you want to do next?
- Continue until everyone has had a chance to share while the others listen, pausing after each one, and asking one or two questions.

BREAKOUT GROUPS

7. Check In: **On a scale of 1-10, how have you been over the last few months? Tell us about one key thing that happened.**

8. Share your answers to the questions for this session.
   - **What are your hopes for the next few months? For the next few years?**
   - **What things make you anxious? How do you manage that?**

9. Practice Palms Down, Palms Up with the burdens the group just shared.

10. Close in prayer. Decide when you will meet next.

Notes:

SESSION 2: Connect Through Scripture

BREAKOUT GROUPS

1. Welcome

2. Reminders: Remember to be absolutely disciplined about not sharing anything you hear in this group.

3. Say: *Let's pray and invite the presence of Christ. Ask him to draw near. Remember He promises in James 4:8 that if we come near to him, he will come near to us.* Then be silent for 3 minutes. At the end, say: *"Come Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds so we may keep company with you and one another. Amen."*

4. Check in: **Share one high point and one low point since we last spoke.**

5. Share your answers to the questions for this session.

   Work on listening slowly, without distraction or hurry. As we get to know each other, the natural tendency is to talk longer. Remember to keep your answers to 2–3 minutes so each person has time to share. Pause after people speak so they don't feel rushed. Perhaps they have one last thought to add. If one or two people want, they can ask a question to draw out more of the story. Remember not to give advice or jump in with your own experience.

   Questions for this session:
   - **Talk about a time when God spoke to you through a particular Scripture. What was the verse? What did God say to you?**
   - **Looking back over your life, what period has been the most spiritually fruitful? Why do you think that was?**

6. Pray Scripture over each other. You can use Isaiah 61:3-4 or another passage if you prefer. Set a date and time to talk again.

How to Pray Scripture

Praying Scripture can broaden your prayers and it can give you confidence that you are praying the will of God. It's easy to do.

Read a few verses. (If a number of people will pray, you can choose to each read one verse before you pray, or you can read a short passage and then each pray as you are led.) Pray, asking God to give each of those blessings to the person you are praying for.

You can choose verses of praise or petition. Here are some possibilities:
1 Chronicles 29:10–13 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17 Philippians 1:9–11 Colossians 1:9–13

Here is one example of how to pray Ephesians 1:16–20: *Lord, I thank you for ---. Please reveal yourself to her so that she can know you more and more deeply. Help her to have ever deeper assurance that you have called her to good things. Let her have great faith and experience your great power. Thank you that your power to work in and through her life is still as strong as when you raised Christ from the dead. Thank you for Jesus. Amen.*

SESSION 3: Hearing God Speak Through Scripture

1. Welcome.

2. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT): *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people for every good work." Let's pray and invite the presence of Christ.* Then be silent for 3 minutes. At the end, say: *"Come Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds so we may keep company with you and one another. Amen."*

3. Read the description of *Lectio Divina*. Guide the group through *Lectio Divina* using John 10:1-5. At the end, have each person briefly share what God highlighted for them as they reflected on the Scripture passage.

> ***Lectio Divina***
>
> This is simply Latin for divine reading. It is an ancient way of reflecting on Scripture.
>
> 1. Choose a short passage from the Bible.
> 2. Ask God to speak to you through His Word.
> 3. Read (or listen) to the passage slowly three times, pausing between each one to reflect.
>
> - *First time*: Imagine the scene. What does it look like? Sound like?
> - *Second time*: Which word or phrase are you noticing most?
> - *Third time*: How could that word or phrase apply to your life? What might God be saying?

BREAKOUT GROUPS

4. Check-in: **What is something you are grateful for today? What is difficult for you right now?**

5. Share your answers to the questions for this session. Remind the group that we are only sharing our questions, not our answers. We will gradually come to answers over the rest of the sessions.
   - **What questions do you have about learning to hear from God personally?**
   - **What intrigues you about this subject?**

6. Pray for each other, dividing into pairs if desired, with each person sharing a prayer request. Remember to pray for each other during the week.

7. Confirm when you will meet again.

SESSION 4: You Have Heard God Speak

1. Welcome.

2. Read Psalm 143:10 (NIV): *"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground."*

   Say: *Let's pray and invite the presence of Christ. Are you relaxing enough that you would be aware of Him?* Spend some time in silence. Try four minutes if the group feels ready. At the end, say: *"Come Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds so we may keep company with you and one another. Amen."*

3. *Lectio Divina*: Continue on from the last session with John 10:14-18. Ask the group:

   - **What words or phrases stood out to you?**
   - **What might God be saying to you?**

Lectio Divina

This is simply Latin for divine reading. It is an ancient way of reflecting on Scripture.

1. Choose a short passage from the Bible.
2. Ask God to speak to you through His Word.
3. Read (or listen) to the passage slowly three times, pausing between each one to reflect.

   - *First time*: Imagine the scene. What does it look like? Sound like?
   - *Second time*: Which word or phrase are you noticing most?
   - *Third time*: How could that word or phrase apply to your life? What might God be saying?

BREAKOUT GROUPS

4. Check-in: **What has God been doing in your life?**

5. Questions for this session:
   - **What ways has God used to speak to you? List as many ways as you can.**
   - **Take turns explaining how you have heard from God in the same way others have.**

6. Pray for each other referring to Psalm 143:10 or other Bible verses that come to mind.

7. Don't forget to set your next meeting.

SESSION 5: Being Led by God

1. Welcome.

2. Read Psalm 31:3 (NIV): *"Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me."*

   Use Palms Down, Palms Up to lead into four minutes of silence:

> ***Palms Down, Palms Up***
>
> Sometimes doing something physical can help us make an equivalent spiritual change. This ancient practice is designed to help us release our worries to Christ.
>
> 1. Close your eyes and hold your hands out in front of you with your palms facing down. Silently name the fears, frustrations, and burdens you are carrying one by one. Perhaps there is someone you are worried about. Perhaps you have a relationship in conflict. What is causing you stress?
>
> 2. As you name each item, pray to release it ("Lord, I entrust my child to you. I give you my fear about this medical appointment."). Imagine God's hands held out and ready to receive what you are letting go.
>
> 3. Then slowly turn your hands over. With palms up, pray to receive whatever God has for you. Sit quietly for a minute of two.
>
> *"Cast all your worries on him, for he cares for you."*
> *(1 Peter 5:7, TLV)*
>
> For slightly different versions try
> https://www.waterfromrock.org/2013/04/15/palms-up-palms-down-2/
>
> More recent as above:
> https://waterfromrock.org/2016/07/25/palms-down-palms-up/

   At the end of the time of silence, say: *"Come Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds so we may keep company with you and one another. Amen."*

BREAKOUT GROUPS

3. Check-in: **What is one area where you feel you need God's guidance right now?**

4. Questions for this session:
   - **Describe a time you experienced direction from God. What helped you see it was from God?**
   - **Describe a time when you think you may have missed God's direction.**
   - **How can becoming a better listener help you become a better follower of God?**

5. Pray for leaders in your church, workplace, government, etc.

6. Confirm the next session date.

SESSION 6: Learning By Questioning

BREAKOUT GROUPS

1. Welcome.

2. Read Acts 17:28a (NIV): *"'For in him we live and move and have our being.'"* Deliberately relax before you enter into silence – close your eyes and take several slow deep breaths. Notice where you may be holding tension. Enjoy four minutes of silence.

   At the end, say: *"Come Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds so we may keep company with you and one another. Amen."*

3. Check in: **Share one opportunity that presented itself to you recently.**

4. Questions for this session:
   - **What is one question of faith you have always wondered about?**
   - **At what point in your life was your faith strongest? Why do you think that was?**
   - **How has God's Word been a light to your path? How are you wanting light for your path today?**

5. Pray for one another, considering Acts 17:28a, Psalm 119:105 (NIV) ("Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."), and other Bible verses that come to mind. Pray for God to illumine the path for one another and that each one would know and experience God's trustworthiness as Lord and guide.

6. Divide into pairs to become **Listening Hearts Companions** who will pray with and support each other during the week. You may want to draw names rather than allow people to choose their partners to give people an opportunity to get to know someone in the group better. Arrange a time to talk with each other voice to voice over the coming week. Review the spiritual discipline of the *Examen* together. Practice the *Examen* over the coming week and discuss your experience with your Listening Hearts Companion when you meet.

   Examen

   Invite God. Ask God to reveal himself to you. Then sit quietly.

   Be thankful. Recall the day and give thanks for the people and events it contained. Give a sacrifice of praise for what was difficult.

   Notice emotions. Pay attention to what you felt during the day. What might God want to reveal to you through those emotions? Ask God to help you untangle your experiences.

   Notice God. What were your God Moments today? When were you aware of Him? What do you think He was doing?

   Bless tomorrow. Give tomorrow to God, who is absolutely trustworthy. Offer yourself to Him in love. Rest.

7. Confirm your next meeting time.

SESSION 7: Meditating on Scripture

BREAKOUT GROUPS

1. Welcome.

2. Read 1 Peter 2:9-10 (NLT): *"But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. 'Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy.'"*

   Let's take five minutes to rest in the quiet presence of Christ. At the end, say: *"Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds so we may keep company with you and one another. Amen."*

3. Check in: **Share one Bible verse you read that spoke into your life this week.**

4. **Learning to meditate on Scripture**: Take turns reading 1 Peter 2:9-10 from several translations. Notice words or phrases and any connections that stand out as you read. You may want to circle those words or phrases and draw lines between the connections you notice if you have a printed version of the scripture in front of you. Take a few minutes individually to think about the passage.

   Questions for this session:
   - **Silently repeat a phrase that stands out to you, emphasizing a different word each time. What do you notice?**
   - **If God wrote a note to you based on this phrase, what would it say?**

5. Pray for one another, inviting the presence of God into one another's lives.

6. Plan to connect with and pray with your Listening Hearts Companion through the week.

7. Confirm your next meeting time.

Notes:

SESSION 8: Peer Spiritual Formation

1. Welcome.

2. Read 2 Peter 1:5-7 (NCV): *"Because you have these blessings, do your best to add these things to your lives: to your faith, add goodness; and to your goodness, add knowledge; and to your knowledge, add self-control; and to your self-control, add patience; and to your patience, add service for God; and to your service for God, add kindness for your brothers and sisters in Christ; and to this kindness, add love."* Invite the presence of God. Have five minutes of silence. At the end, say: *"Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds so we may keep company with you and one another. Amen."*

3. Read the following, asking volunteers to look up and read the Bible verses: *The goal of peer spiritual formation is to speak the truth in love into each other's lives (Ephesians 4:25) and to encourage and build one another up (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Listening Hearts 3 will explore this concept more fully.*

4. Review the Principles for Peer Spiritual Direction below:

Principles for Peer Spiritual Direction

As each person speaks, try these steps of *Peer Spiritual Direction* all at once:

- **Notice** any memories or feelings of your own that could distort your listening.
- Is there **a question** that could bring out more of their story?
- Is there a **verse or phrase** that God seems to be bringing to mind?
- **Test** that verse or phrase.
- **Offer it as a possibility.**
- Give the receiver a chance to think briefly and respond.

"Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." (Proverbs 16:24 ESV)

5. Session Questions:
   - **How have the spiritual practices introduced in our sessions deepened your relationship with God? Which one(s) will you continue to practice?**
   - **Has God brought someone to mind who would benefit from the spiritual practices you've learned?**

6. Pray blessings for each other.

BREAKOUT GROUPS