



Listening Hearts 4

PREPARING TO BE MISSIONAL



Impacting the World for Christ

This resource is an adapted version of Soul Sisters, created by Canadian Baptist Women of Ontario and Quebec. 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. Soul Sisters is a program of Canadian Baptist Women of Ontario and Quebec ©2018. Revised 2022. Revised with permission of CBWOQ as Listening Hearts by Atlantic Baptist Women 2024.



INTRODUCTION

- Please complete Listening Hearts 1, 2, and 3 before starting these sessions. We want mission to flow out of the abundance of our walk with God so the spiritual formation practices we cover in those sessions need to be embedded first. Those earlier sessions are also designed to help you gradually increase vulnerability with each other.
- Listening Hearts 4 has a dual focus. Each session will include a spiritual formation practice and a mission exercise.

We pray that, as you turn your focus outward, you will continue to strengthen the core of your relationship with God and that you will become carriers of the loving presence of God.



WHAT IS SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIP?

Safe space

What we say in this context matters. Remember to be absolutely disciplined about not sharing anything you hear in this group outside of the group. Let us honour the vulnerability that it takes to share our souls with one another.

Grace and Compassion

We each come to this group having different backgrounds and perspectives. When we receive each other with grace and compassion, we are able to learn from one another and grow.

Deep Listening

Unhurried, non-judgmental listening creates an environment that supports people and gives them space to see where God is.

What does this look like?

- We don't interrupt but instead offer the gift of our full attention.
- We don't give advice or try to fix someone's problem. Although our desire is to help others, our suggestions may cause the person to feel unheard or even undermined. The goal of deep listening is to listen well to each other and to learn to listen to what God might be saying to them as well.
- We don't evaluate (especially not to criticize or judge) but trust the Holy Spirit to do his work.

God is Here

God is present with us. As we learn to listen, let us remember that we are here to bring ourselves and others to Christ and let him speak truth and life.

Session 1

STRENGTHENING OUR CORE

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome back!

2. Reminders

Theme of Listening Hearts 4 - Preparing to be missional
Reaffirm commitment to confidentiality

3. Spiritual Practice - *Visio Divina*

Read *Visio Divina*. Go through the practice together and go directly into silence for 3-4 minutes. At the end, say, "Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds as we keep company with you and with one another. Amen."

4. Missional Focus - Mission as worship

Mission from the core outward. We want our mission to be built upon continuing encounter with God. In other words, we don't graduate from spiritual formation to do mission but, rather, mission flows out of communion with God.

Mission as worship. We offer love to others as an intentional, conscious act of worship to God. Jesus identifies so closely with people who are hurting that he says what we do for them, we do for him (Matthew 25:40).

Holistic mission. Rather than being compartmentalized, we are consistent and integrated in who we are, what we say, and what we do. We proclaim a gospel of righteousness that has implications for all of life.

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

Share your answers to the questions for this session. For each one:

- Read the question.
- Let one person answer while the others listen without comment.
- Pause: take a few deep breaths. Let what they said sink in.
- Continue until everyone has had a chance to share while the others listen, pausing after each one.

Questions for this session:

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how have you been since the last time we met?
- What has been the most significant thing in your spiritual life since we last met?
- Reflecting on today's *Visio Divina* spiritual practice, what quality or characteristic of God do you want to fill your life?
- As you respond to God's love by loving others, what do you want to ask God for to help you love people like he does?

2. Pray together

3. Homework

- Spend some time reading and meditating on Matthew 10:42.
- Take some deliberate time for silence without any distractions and invite God's presence. If possible, try to spend at least 5 minutes in silence each day until the group meets again.

Spiritual Practice

VISIO DIVINA

In Listening Hearts 2, we learned about *Lectio Divina* (which means “Divine Reading”). It is an ancient Christian practice of focusing on a small part of Scripture so as to let it penetrate our hearts. There is a similar practice called *Visio Divina*.

With this practice, you look at a picture while meditating on a piece of Scripture. Visual learners may find this especially meaningful. If you feel uncomfortable, simply close your eyes instead and listen to the verse. The idea is to let God speak to you.

- Facilitator, please open in prayer.
- Slowly read Matthew 10:42.
- Observe a few minutes of silence, reading the verse at least one more time.
- Facilitator, close with a quiet “Amen.”
- Then ask: What came to mind as you looked at the picture?



Session 2

MAKING ROOM

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome back!

2. Reminders

3. Spiritual Practice - Silence

Read Psalm 16:11 (ESV): *“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”* Invite the presence of God. Spend 4-6 minutes in silence. Close the time of silence by praying, “Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds as we keep company with you and with one another. Amen.”

4. Missional Focus - Sabbath

Read and reflect on Genesis 2:2-3. What blessings do you receive from rest? How can you make more time for holy rest?

Consider the following quote by Ruth Haley Barton:

“The point of the Sabbath was (and still is) to honour the body’s need for rest, the spirit’s need for replenishment and the soul’s need to delight itself in God for God’s own sake. It begins with the willingness to acknowledge the limits of our humanness, taking steps to live more graciously within the order of things—and the first order of things is that we are creatures and God is the creator. God is the only one who is infinite. I am finite which means that I live within the physical limits of time and space and the bodily limits of strength and energy. There are limits to my capacities relationally, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. I am not God. God is the one who can be all things to all people. God is the one who can be two places at once. God is the one who never sleeps. I am not.”

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

Questions for this session:

- What is your experience of Sabbath? What do you long for from the God of the Sabbath?
- Where could you pare down your schedule to reduce stress and create margin to reach out to other people?

2. Pray together

Pray for each other that God would begin to align our hearts to his, to open our eyes to what he is doing around us, and how we can join him in his mission. Use Matthew 6:31-34 (NCV) to guide your prayers: *“Don’t worry and say, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ The people who don’t know God keep trying to get these things, and your Father in heaven knows you need them. Seek first God’s kingdom and what God wants. Then all your other needs will be met as well. So don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will have its own worries. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

3. Homework

- Spend some more time this week reflecting on Genesis 2:2-3. Think of a role you play in your life (employee, parent, friend, child, volunteer, etc.). Do you feel anxious or stressed in that role? How could Sabbath transform your approach to that role?
- Write down the elements of a typical service at your church. Begin to think about how a newcomer might see it or experience it. Write down your observations.

Session 3

DEVELOPING AWARENESS

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome back!

2. Reminders

3. Spiritual Practice - Silence

Read Psalm 119:18 (GW): *“Uncover my eyes so that I may see the miraculous things in your teachings.”* Begin by saying a simple prayer, offering the group to God and inviting the presence of the Holy Spirit. Spend 5-7 minutes in silence. Close by praying, “Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds as we keep company with you and with one another. Amen.”

4. Missional Focus - Sacred Pathways

- Read Sacred Pathways.
- Do you strongly identify with one of the Sacred Pathways?
- Can you suggest other examples that are not on the list?

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

Questions for this session:

- How was your experience of Sabbath over the last week?
- How could Sabbath transform your approach to one or more of your life roles?
- What were your observations of your church service? How would you describe your church’s culture (traditional, casual, intellectual, like family, etc.)?
- Imagine someone comes to church for the first time in their life ... and they choose yours.
 - What good things would they notice?
 - What might confuse them? What might make them feel uncomfortable?
 - What could you do to make them feel more comfortable and less confused?
 - Are there more effective ways to meet them where they are? Did you notice your church using language and patterns that they might not understand?

2. Pray together

Read James 2:1-9. Pray for each other’s churches. Pray for the experience new people will have there and invite God to impress upon our hearts a better idea of how to make them feel welcome and included.

3. Homework

Research ethnocentrism. Consider how it might affect how we relate to those outside the church.

Spiritual Practice

SACRED PATHWAYS

Our personalities and gifts often make it easier to connect with God in certain ways. Some have called those differences sacred pathways. For example:

- I. Naturalists: feel closest to God outdoors
- II. Sensates: worship God experientially
- III. Traditionalists: love God through ritual and symbol
- IV. Ascetics: love God in solitude and in simplicity
- V. Activists: love God by advocating for justice
- VI. Caregivers: love God by loving others
- VII. Enthusiasts: celebrate a miraculous God
- VIII. Contemplatives: adore God
- IX. Intellectuals: love God with their minds

On one hand, we want to make best use of the pathway that suits how God has made us. On the other hand, sometimes it's good to try other paths to broaden our experience of God.

(Adapted from, "Sacred Pathways," Alpha Discipleship Tool)

Session 4

LEARNING TO SEE

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome back!

2. Reminders

3. Spiritual Practice - Gospel Contemplation

Read Gospel Contemplation and do the practice together. End the practice with 3-4 minutes of silence. Close by praying, "Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds as we keep company with you and with one another. Amen."

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Missional Focus - Your definition of the gospel

The first and most important task of any missionary is to understand and truly respect the host culture. That requires a willingness to set aside an attitude of judgment.

2. Sharing

Questions for this session:

- What did you discover about ethnocentrism? Have you noticed yourself (or others) behaving in a way that favours a particular culture at church or in society?
- What might God be bringing to your attention as you see and relate to others? Was there anything new that you realized?
- How can you apply this in your own life? Consider your situation in the same way that you considered Luke 18:9-14 during the Gospel Contemplation. What is God highlighting for you in your situation?

3. Pray together

Begin by asking God to show you a circumstance where you looked at someone's outward appearance rather than focusing on their heart. Wait in silence for several minutes.

Close with a prayer, offering confession for the past and asking the Holy Spirit to remind and empower us to forsake judgment in the future.

4. Homework

As you move through your week, ask God to help you look beyond the surface of a difficult person to see their true spiritual need. Pray about the situation and how God wants you to respond.

Spiritual Practice

GOSPEL CONTEMPLATION

Very closely related to *Lectio Divina* is Gospel Contemplation. The goal of both is to deeply interact with a short passage of Scripture but, in this case, we also add the benefit of imagination to help us notice things we might otherwise miss.

The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)

- Have the group close their eyes and imagine the scene as the facilitator reads Luke 18:9-14. What does it look like and sound like? How do you feel?
- For the second reading, ask the group to pay attention to a word or phrase that seems to stand out for them.
- For the third and final reading, ask God what he wants to say to you through that word or phrase.

Session 5

INVITING GOD'S HEALING

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome back!

2. Reminders

3. Spiritual Practice - Healing Prayer

Spend some time reflecting on Psalm 103:2-4 (NIV): *“Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion.”*

Enter into a time of silence for 3-4 minutes. End by praying, “Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds as we keep company with you and with one another. Amen.”

Meditate on Jesus’ question in Mark 10:51 (NIV): “What do you want me to do for you?” Spend 3-4 minutes silently responding to Jesus in prayer.

4. Missional Focus - Reflective Listening

When we listen to others, what are we paying attention to? Do we listen without surprise or shock? Are we slow to speak? Do we allow space for God to speak?

Here are some examples of positive ways to reflect back what we are hearing:

- I heard you use this word several times.
- I hear excitement/frustration/etc. in your voice.
- I hear you asking a lot of questions.
- This particular phrase stood out to me.
- Can you tell me more about what you meant when you said...?

Try using these and similar phrases to reflect what you hear others saying in this session.

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Share and pray together

You may need healing in one or more aspects of your life (physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, etc.). Share your desire or hope for healing as you feel comfortable. Pray for each other.

2. Homework

Look for Scripture verses about mission. Choose one that especially resonates with you as something you want to ask God to do through you. Write the verse on a card and bring it to the next session.

Session 6

UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL CHANGE

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome back!

2. Reminders

3. Spiritual Practice - Silence

Romans 12:2 (MSG) says, “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

With this verse in mind, enter into five minutes of silence. End the practice by praying, “Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds as we keep company with you and with one another. Amen.”

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Learning to receive promises from God's Word.

- Take turns reading the verse you chose about mission.
- Considering your verse:
 - How would you like God to use you?
 - Is there a promise in this verse for you?
 - Pray for each other that God will affirm these promises in your lives.

2. Missional Focus - Understanding Postmodernism

There has been a massive cultural shift in recent generations as we move from modernism toward postmodernism. Here are some examples of what that might look like:

- Moderns believe that reason will lead to universal truths all cultures will embrace while postmodernism believes there are no truths that humans can fully comprehend and hold as universal.
- For moderns, knowledge is most valued and science and rationality are the best ways of determining truth. For postmoderns, experience is most valued and multiple perspectives give a fuller picture of the truth.
- Moderns strive for order and control; postmoderns strive for relationship and connectedness through consensus building.

3. Sharing

- As a group, try to think of other examples of the differences between modernism and postmodernism.
- How do these differences show up in your church, home, or community?
- How does your particular culture affect your worldview and the changes you see happening in your culture? What are some positives and negatives about the changes you see?
- Which group do you feel you belong to? Where might you need to grow in order to connect well with those who feel they belong to the other group?
- How does the verse that you chose about mission relate to how you respond to today's cultural changes?

4. Pray for one another, reflecting on Romans 12:2.

5. Homework

What is hospitality? Where is it currently present in your life? Read Hebrews 13:2. This verse uses the word "stranger" to emphasize that hospitality extends beyond those we are already familiar with.

Spend some time quietly reflecting on the passage.

- How does God show hospitality?
- What is God inviting you to? What is your response?
- How does your hospitality become missional?

Session 7

STRETCHING

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome back!

2. Reminders

3. Spiritual Practice - Silence

Read Psalm 40:1 (NIV): *“I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry.”* Enjoy five minutes of silence. At the end, pray, “Come, Lord Jesus, fill our hearts and minds as we keep company with you and with one another. Amen.”

4. Missional Focus - Learning to notice

Discuss the following with the group:

- How does the specific language we use in church affect hospitality? What are some words and phrases we use that people in our local coffee shop would never say?
- Come up with some examples of how to turn “Christianese” into everyday language that unchurched people recognize.

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

- Jesus had no home but yet he was hospitable. Based on the reflection you did for homework, how does God show hospitality?
- Do you have relationships with people outside of the church? If yes, how might you extend hospitality like Jesus did? If not, how might you begin to develop a relationship with someone outside the church?
- Do you sense God inviting you to extend hospitality in some way or to someone in specific? If so, what is one step you might take this week?

2. Pray together

Close by praying Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV) for one another.

3. Homework

If you were sensing God inviting you to extend hospitality, take some steps this week to practise being hospitable. Remember to use cultural awareness and reflective listening as you interact with others.

Recall the mission verse you chose in Session 5. Be prepared to read it during our next session.

Session 8

CARRYING GOD'S PRESENCE

Part 1: Larger Group

1. Welcome back!

2. Reminders

3. Spiritual Practice - Liturgy

Liturgy: a specific order of service; sometimes includes a prewritten prayer, readings, the eucharist, and giving thanks.

- Invite volunteers to read:
 - Romans 1:1 (NIV): *“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.”*
 - Romans 12:1 (NET): *“Therefore, I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice – alive, holy, and pleasing to God – which is your reasonable service.”*

Enjoy five minutes of silence. End the silence by reading the blessing adapted from Every Moment Holy.

- Invite volunteers to read:
 - John 20:21 (NIV): *“Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’”*
 - Isaiah 6:8b (TLB): *“And I said, ‘Lord, I’ll go! Send me.’”*

Part 2: Breakout Groups

1. Sharing

- Did you practice hospitality during the week? How did it go?
- What did you learn? What worked? What didn't work? Were there any barriers to getting started?
- What steps could you take next?

2. Consecration

Consecration: the solemn dedication to a purpose or service, association with the sacred.

- Share your mission verse from Session 5 and describe how you intend to carry God's presence with you going forward. How has your sense of mission changed or developed during these sessions?
- Spend some time encouraging each other with the ways you see God at work in the members of your group.
- Pray over and bless one another, asking God to fulfil his purpose in your lives.
- Read the final blessing by St. Teresa of Avila:

May today there be peace within.

May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you.

May you be content knowing you are a child of God.

Let this presence settle into your bones,
and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love.
It is there for each and every one of us.

Spiritual Practice

BLESSING

ADAPTED FROM EVERY MOMENT HOLY BY
DOUGLAS KAINÉ MCKELVEY

We are gathered here because we believe that we are called together into a work we cannot yet know the fullness of. Still, we trust the voice of the One who has called us.

And so we offer to you, O God, these things: Our dreams, our plans, our vision. Shape them as you will. Our moments and gifts. May they be invested toward bright, eternal ends.

Richly bless the work before us, Father. Shepherd us well. Let us listen for Your voice, our hearts ever open to the quiet beckoning of Your Spirit in this endeavour.

Let us in true humility remain ever ready to move at the impulse of your love in paths of your design.

We cannot know the end of another person's story. Our lives so often only briefly intersect. So let me be content to minister regardless of visible outcomes, trusting that the small mercies I extend will be woven into the larger theme of redemption at work in the lives of others as you woo them to yourself, drawing their hearts by graces offered, and shaping my own heart too, in this process of learning to serve well, and by learning to serve well, learning to love well.

We praise you, Lord, and thank you for the commitment and time given by this community of women you have so uniquely charged and gifted for the specific ministries they have served. We pray blessing and abundance over their lives—that they may receive all that they continue to pour out, and then some. Continue to walk with and lead us all as we tune into your continued promptings through the Spirit.

“The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.”
(Numbers 6:24-26, NKJV)

Amen!