**Listening to God**

*I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. -Galatians 1:12*

Weaving the principles of the Bible into our everyday lives is a challenge we all face as Christians. It’s easy to have good thoughts on Sunday as the pastor preaches an inspired message or as we read through a particularly moving passage of scripture. Working these ideas into practice requires a conscious, disciplined effort, but more than that, it requires the Holy Spirit. We have learned in earlier series the difference between a faith driven by “law” and faith inspired by the Holy Spirit. As we struggle through the difficulties of understanding and applying scripture, we are reminded again of Jesus’ words in John 15, “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” Throughout scripture, God promises us all that it is His desire for our lives to be spiritually fruitful. When God makes a promise, He is faithful to it, and this promise is no different.

**Please read Galatians 5:22-23 and Colossians 3:12-15 and list some of the fruits of the Holy Spirit:**

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**Now choose three of these characteristics that you would like to increase in your own life:**

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As we read these passages, they beg the question…How do I get from point A to point B? How do I get from wanting these characteristics to allowing God to grow them in me? First is our assurance of the Holy Spirit.

**Please read Luke 24:49 and paraphrase it here:**

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**What had the Father promised? Please read Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:1-4, 14-21 for the answer:**

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In week five, we talked about hearing God with our heart. That “hearing” is sometimes called the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of God lives in us as a result of our relationship with Jesus Christ. That living spirit speaks to us in ways sometimes referred to as our “gut feeling” or a “hunch.” Another way God speaks to us is through scripture.

**Please read 1 John 2:20-27. With a special focus on verses 20 and 27, please sum up this passage:**

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If we are assured of the Holy Spirit living in us, and we know that He will speak directly to us, with no “middle man,” then how can we invite that to happen? This week we will explore the practice of Lectio Divina to help us find answers to this question. Lectio Divina is latin for divine reading, spiritual reading, or holy reading. This practice has been dated as far back as 220AD and later became one of the foundations for life in monasteries. In her book *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*, Thelma Hall explains “Despite many centuries of fruitful practice, Lectio Divina…gradually fell into disuse (except in monastic practice) toward the end of the Middle Ages [and was] relegated to a category not for ‘ordinary’ people.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Hall goes on to describe the process used in Lectio Divina as spontaneous and uncomplicated. For a practice with such a fancy name, many have found it to be a startlingly simple way to invite God to speak to them on any number of issues.

Lectio Divina encourages meditation on specific pieces of scripture to filter out God’s personal message in the very moment of the reading. Don’t be put off by the word meditation. It’s not the legs folded, humming kind of meditation we sometimes picture. In this context it just means sitting quietly and listening for the voice of God.

There are three steps to the process of Lectio Divina: Read (lectio), Listen (meditatio), Respond (oratio).[[2]](#footnote-1) The process is as follows:

1. **Settle**: Spend a few minutes settling down and pray that your heart may be opened and receptive to the gift God knows you need today. Only the Breath, the Spirit of God, can bring the word to life. Let your breathing become deep, slow, and steady as you invite the Spirit to speak to you.
2. **Read (Lectio)**: Begin reading at a place you have previously chosen, and read on very slowly with an open mind. Don’t study the text, just read it slowly, aloud if you find that helpful. It is useful to read the text several times. This is the “lectio,” or reading. When a particular sentence, phrase, or single word “lights up,” or “rings a bell,” or seems striking or inviting put the Bible down. Resist the temptation to go on, and do not start thinking up reasons why the phrase has claimed your attention. Here the reading stops and the “meditation” begins; the absorption through repetition. So, for example, you might be reading the tenth chapter of John’s gospel where Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. As you come to verse 14, these words seem to have a special allure, “I know my own, and my own know me.” This is the verse you now meditate with.
3. **Listen (Meditatio):** Gently repeat this phrase or word again and again within your heart. Let the repetition be gentle and not mechanical. There is no need to conjure up any mental picture to accompany the words or to try to make yourself feel any particular emotion as you speak them. Resist the temptation to force particular lessons or meanings from the words. You know what the words mean well enough; the repetition is to allow you to savor them at another level. After some time you may find that a longer sentence or phrase has shortened itself to a single word. Gradually absorb that word. So, “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you,” might be distilled into the single word “peace” (John 20:21). In time you will become aware of an impression the words have made on you, a feeling or attitude. When you have become aware of this, move to the next step.
4. **Respond (Oratio):** Now is the time for “oratio,” the praying of your response. Express to God, in the simplest way possible, the impression the words have made on you. You may want to thank God for the gift they convey, ask the questions they have stirred in you, or put into words the longings or needs they have brought up. Keep it simple, pray spontaneously. You may want to respond by remaining in silence in the presence of God, appreciating the grace or attitude the words of scripture have instilled.
5. **Close:** After some time you will not be able to sustain your spontaneous praying or state of awareness. Distractions set in. You may bring the time to a close with thanksgiving or the Lord’s Prayer.

This process can bring peace, answers, and a fresh understanding of scripture. I have met with God inside this process many times and have begun using it to get my “daily bread” in my prayer time. As you become familiar with the process, it becomes more effortless to move through it.

Are you ready to hear God in your life? Make some time this week to practice these steps and deepen your listening skills. No matter what your troubles or trials, when you dedicate this kind of time and attention to scripture, God will absolutely speak to you through His Word.

**How did God speak directly to you through this week’s lesson?**

**What is your response to Him?**

**Please write Psalm 46:10** **and commit it to memory:**

**Group Workshop:**

Using the workshop pages attached, practice Lectio Divina with the following scriptures: Psalm 139, Ephesians 3:14-19, John 17:9-19

1. Thelma Hall, R.C., *Too Deep For Words:Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (Paulist Press, 1988), 1

   **Prayer Workshop-Lectio Divina**

   **Psalm 139** (Lectio)

   Key sentence/phrase/word (Meditatio)

   My Response (Oratio)

   **Ephesians 3:14-19**

   Key sentence/phrase/word

   My Response

   **John 17:9-19**

   Key sentence/phrase/word

   My Response

   **Prayer Journal: Lectio Divina**

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   | **Date/Scripture (Lectio)** | **God’s Word (Meditatio)** | **My Response (Oratio)** |
   |  |  |  |
   | **Date/Scripture (Lectio)** | **God’s Word (Meditatio)** | **My Response (Oratio)** |
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   [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. This version of the Lectio Divina process is adapted from *The Word Is Very Near You*, Martin L. Smith, Cowley 1989 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)