

First Meeting: Establishing a Habit of Silence

Check In: Begin by giving each person present a minute or two to say how they are doing. Emphasize that this is not a time for conversation and ask everyone to hold silence as somebody shares.

Scripture: Read a scripture relevant to the work of your group (eg. Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 20:28-33; Titus 1:5-9; Jeremiah 1:4-9 for church work)

Opening Prayer: Pray for the group that they would have the courage and faith to allow God to fulfill in them the call he gave them in the passage just read.

Scripture: Have someone read 1 Kings 19:1-13 and then ask the following questions

- What is going on in this story?
- Why is Elijah so upset? (Do you ever feel this way?)
- This passage repeatedly says “but the Lord was not in . . .” What are some things we expect God to be in but he isn’t?
- Where did Elijah finally hear God?

Explanation of Process: Say something similar to, “Too often we look for God to be speaking to us in the big loud things, the things pounding at our door, the scary and powerful things. But we need to learn that while God may be in these things, he often speaks to us in still small things as well. In our world we focus on the secondary causes, but the Biblical world focused on primary causes. For everything the primary cause is God. We need to focus on God behind the sounds we hear, behind the soft sounds and the loud ones. To become aware of God as the cause of *everything*.”

Silence: Lead the group through the following exercise:

1. Cover your eyes with your hands and plug your ears with your thumbs so that you can not see or hear anything
2. Take 10 deep breaths, focusing on the sound of your breathing
3. Remove your hands and place them to rest in your lap
4. Listen to all the sounds around you, each sound is actually made up of several different sounds, focus on a sound and try to hear the sounds that comprise it (5 minutes)
5. Become aware of the act of listening (5 minutes)
6. Now back to the sounds (5 minutes)
7. Become aware of the fact that God is the primary cause behind all the sounds, that each sound was created and sustained by God.

Closing: After sufficient time in this exercise ask the group to repeat it each day until your next meeting (if appropriate for your meeting schedule). Pray for the members of the group and thank God for being present.

Second Meeting: Turning to the Light

Check In: If there has been significant time between meetings, begin by giving each person present a minute or two to say how they are doing. Emphasize that this is not a time for conversation and ask everyone to hold silence as somebody shares.

Review: Again, if there has been time between meetings, ask each person to share for a minute or two about their time in silent awareness since your last meeting.

Scripture: Read a scripture relevant to the work of your group (eg. Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 20:28-33; Titus 1:5-9; Jeremiah 1:4-9 for church work)

Silence: After the reading sit in an aware silence for a few minutes.

Opening Prayer: Break the silence with a prayer for the group that they would have the courage and faith to allow God to fulfill in them the call he gave them in the passage just read.

Scripture: Have someone read John 1:1-9 and then ask the following questions

- Who is the Word?
- Who is the light?
- Who does the light enlighten?
- Is there anyone he does not enlighten?

Have someone read James 1:19-21

- What is able to save our souls?
- What does it mean to receive this word?
- How do James instructions at the beginning to be quick to hear help us to understand how to receive the word?

Explanation of Process: Say something like, “Parker Palmer wrote, *‘each of us has an inner teacher, a voice of truth, that offers the guidance and power we need to deal with our problems.* But that inner voice is often garbled by various kinds of inward and outward interference.’ Quakers call this voice “the inner light.” Roman Catholics call it the analogia entis, a doctrine that God’s being is the only true being, meaning that for us to exist is a participation in his being. The idea is that deep within us is the implanted word or the light that enlightens us. The part of us made in God’s image. God speaks to us directly in this part of us. We don’t necessarily have to look outwardly, but inwardly to hear what God is saying.

Silence: Lead the group through the following exercise.

1. Sit up straight and close your eyes
2. Listen to the silence in the room (5 minutes)
3. Become aware of every thought that comes into your mind
4. Do not follow your thoughts, rather note them and move on (5 minutes)
5. Now become aware of the act of thinking. Think about all the thoughts you had (5 minutes)

6. What do these thoughts say about you? About what God is speaking to you?

Closing: After sufficient time in this exercise ask the group to repeat it each day until your next meeting (if appropriate for your meeting schedule). Pray for the members of the group and thank God for being present.

Third Meeting: Group Discernment

Check In: If there has been significant time between meetings, begin by giving each person present a minute or two to say how they are doing. Emphasize that this is not a time for conversation and ask everyone to hold silence as somebody shares.

Review: Again, if there has been time between meetings, ask each person to share for a minute or two about their time of turning to the Light since your last meeting.

Scripture: Read a scripture relevant to the work of your group (eg. Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 20:28-33; Titus 1:5-9; Jeremiah 1:4-9 for church work)

Turning to the Light: After the reading sit in silence and turn to the light.

Opening Prayer: Pray for the group that they would have the courage and faith to allow God to fulfill in them the call he gave them in the passage just read.

Scripture: Have one or more people read Acts 15 and ask the following questions.

- What is the problem?
- What do Paul and Barnabas declare in verse 4?
- What does Peter appeal to in verses 7-9? Paul and Barnabas in verse 12?
- What seems to be the criteria for this decision?

Explanation of Process: Share with the group that you will be seeking to discern God's will based on where he has been moving already. To do this, they will need to have been aware of what is happening already (which is where most decisions come from) as well as where God is leading them internally through their turning to the light (which is not where most decisions come from).

Group Discernment: The moderator of the meeting should communicate in this time only by asking questions. No instructing or leading is to be done. It is also important to keep this from becoming a conversation. At this point you are only responding to what God has said, not to one another.

1. Begin by asking, "In light of our awareness, our turning to the light, and our readings, what is God inviting us to?"
2. Allow everyone a few minutes to share. Everyone should hold silence while each person shares.
3. Ask clarifying questions when needed.

Personal Discernment: Take a short (10-15) break for individuals to prayerfully consider what has come from the group discernment. Do not allow this to be a time to talk to one another, but only to talk to God.

Clarification of Discernment: In this time attempt to narrow down God's invitation to its simplest form.

1. Begin by asking, “Is there a common thread among all of our insights? If not, could the insights be categorized into a few different common items.”
2. Allow conversation here, but remind the group to be prayerful and to be quick to hear.
3. As much as possible without forcing it, try to narrow it down to just a few different “invitations.”

Closing Prayer: When it becomes clear that a consensus has been reached invite the group to hold silence for a few minutes. Ask them to pray over the options uncovered until your next meeting. Also ask them not to discuss the options with one another to avoid bias. Pray for the group and thank God for his presence.

Fourth Meeting: Group Decision

Check In: If there has been significant time between meetings, begin by giving each person present a minute or two to say how they are doing. Emphasize that this is not a time for conversation and ask everyone to hold silence as somebody shares.

Scripture: Read a scripture relevant to the work of your group (eg. Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 20:28-33; Titus 1:5-9; Jeremiah 1:4-9 for church work)

Turning to the Light: After the reading sit in silence and turn to the light.

Opening Prayer: Pray for the group that they would have the courage and faith to allow God to fulfill in them the call he gave them in the passage just read.

Scripture: Have one or more people read Luke 24:13-35 and ask the following questions.

- Jerusalem is the center of religious life. Why are they leaving it?
- What makes them return to Jerusalem?
- Likewise, why do we leave the center of our religious life and what would make us return to it?

Group Decision: Present the invitations uncovered in the last meeting. Hold silence for a few minutes and then discuss each invitation by considering

Cons: Allow group members to share the negative side of this invitation. Do not allow this a time to converse or to defend, but only to say the struggles.

Pros: Allow group members to share the positive side of the invitation. Again, this not a time to converse but share from the light.

**Take a few minutes before moving between Pros and Cons to allow individual prayer and reflection.*

Individual Discernment: Take a short (10-15) break for individual prayer and discernment.

Sharing: Ask the group to share from their time of discernment. Conversation is allowed, but, again, remind the group to be prayerful and quick to hear. At this time a consensus may begin to emerge. If it does not do not argue the point. Instead take a break and meet again at another time and repeat the process. If consensus is reached, rest in it and meet again to see if everyone is still at peace.

Closing: Invite the group to hold silence for a few minutes. Ask them to pray over the decision for the next few days. Pray for the group and thank God for his presence.