

The Practice of Listening Prayer (Breakthrough Prayer)

Jesus in John 14:12-14 says, “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

This passage begs the question what should we ask for? As a church, what should we ask God for? Rather than immediately say what comes to mind—more children, more people in our pews, more money for our budget, more volunteers—let’s stop and commit to intentionally practice listening prayer.

What is listening prayer? Listening prayer is where an individual, church leaders, and entire congregations regularly take time out to pray for a word from God in order to find direction. Examples would be:

- God we don’t know what to do. Help us! Show us the way.
- Lord, we believe you want to demonstrate your power and love through our congregation to those in our community. Show us what we need to do for our part.
- Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds that we might not miss the big thing you want to do through us in order to bless our community with your love.

So, the first step in practicing listening prayer is collectively deciding it’s an important practice that we should be doing. A second step is to write your listening prayer. This typically is done by working together with the others who will be joining you in prayer. Once you’ve done this, you’re ready to share the prayer and encourage people to regularly pray it.

Listening prayer is not meant to take the place of the existing prayers being prayed, but it is an additive. It is incorporated into the prayer time at worship, prayer at the beginning and/or end of meetings, prayers of Sunday school classes, small groups and other gatherings. Individuals are encouraged to add it to their daily prayer lives. Sometimes churches will have a set time of the day that everyone is encouraged to pray the prayer wherever they happen to be.

Just as important to praying the prayer is regularly checking in with one another to share what God seems to be saying. If we skip this step, we will likely miss what God is telling us and we won’t see our prayer life shape our decisions and direction.

This practice of praying, listening, and sharing becomes a regular part of the church’s life. It is a part of every ministry decision, a part of discerning God’s vision, and it shapes a church’s engagement with its community.

The church goes at the speed of the Holy Spirit, just as the Israelites in the Wilderness moved as the Pillar of Fire led them by night and the Cloud by day. As a result, the

church gets its power and direction from the Holy Spirit—resources show up, people are energized, and ministries bear fruit!

So, the steps again are as follows:

1. Decide to practice listening prayer. Answer why we should do it.
2. Create a listening prayer.
3. Regularly pray the prayer and listen to the Spirit of God.
4. Regularly check in with others and share what God seems to be saying.
5. Act on what God is saying, allowing it to shape and guide your ministry.

For more information, check out resources by Sue Nilson Kibbey.*

*Sue Nilson Kibbey has written extensively about this type of prayer, which she calls Breakthrough Prayer. One of her books is *Open Road: The Adventure of a Breakthrough Prayer Initiative*.