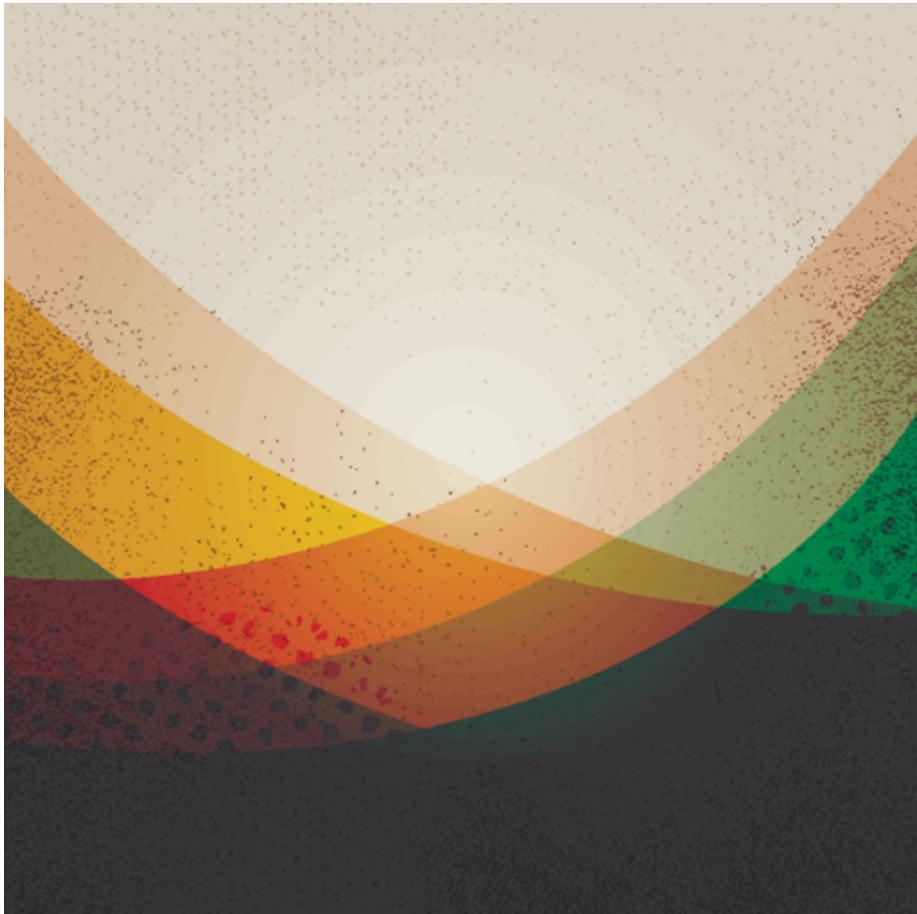


THE RULE OF LIFE



SOLITUDE, SILENCE & LISTENING



Name: _____

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“O Lord my God, tell me what you are to me. Say to my soul, I am your salvation. Say it so that I can hear it. My heart is listening, Lord; open the ears of my heart and say to my soul, I am your salvation. Let me run toward this voice and seize hold of you. Do not hide your face from me: let me die so that I may see it, for not to see it would be death to me indeed.”

— **AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, CONFESSIONS**

The Rule of Life: A Review. In the Holy Trinity — God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit — we witness an eternal community of love. A great mystery of Christian faith is the Triune God’s desire and faithful work to welcome humanity (you and me in all our frailty) into his great love.

At the heart of the Rule of Life is an invitation to encounter and experience the Triune God and his great love. The root meaning of “rule” is pattern. We all have a “rule of life” whether we know it or not. We inhabit patterns — or habits and practices — that either move us towards God and his love or move us away. Or said another way, we all inhabit patterns that either help us to see and experience our ever-present God, or we inhabit patterns that make us blind and apathetic. Following the rich traditions of the Church, especially the wisdom of monastic communities old and new, we at Grace Pasadena desire to call one another into habits and practices that cultivate a deeper and life-giving awareness and experience of God.

To that end, we are spending the year examining the Rule of Life. Each month, we are focusing on a different aspect of the Rule. This month, we’re *focusing on solitude, silence and listening*.

Each month we will offer prayer guides, classes and seminars to help us explore different aspects of the Rule. Each ministry area will also

find ways to integrate the monthly aspect into their own events and gatherings. Our goal is to make this an individual and communal effort, for God saves us as a people.

As we consider our current habits and practices and take on new ones, let’s keep in mind the following goals: (1) Our goal is not perfection or to master every spiritual discipline. Our goal is to be mastered by God and his love;

(2) While each spiritual discipline and practice are for all of us, the Holy Spirit forms a rule of life that is unique to individual and household. That is, we are all called to pray, rest, listen, find solitude and be generous each day of our lives, but how those practices take shape day-to-day will usually vary person to person. The goal is not uniformity of practice, but conformity to God’s love through the rule of life the Spirit gives to us.

This month we’re considering and practicing solitude, silence and listening.

Solitude in an Age of Distraction. Every culture and era has offered distractions to busy hearts, minds, and bodies with words, ideas and more things to do. Our times are no different. What is different, however, is the availability of these distractions. The rise and intersection of computers, smart phones and the Internet mean non-stop and instant access

to every manner of distraction. Not only does this include shopping, music, videos, books, and the like, but also social interaction.

Good things are constantly vying for our attention, and as we give in and spread our lives thin through over-connection, the result for many of us is fragmentation. And in this fragmentation, we lose our sense of self and others, and most importantly, we become immune to God's presence and love.

Many religious and non-religious thinkers and writers have started voicing their concern about our current experience of distraction, over-connection, and fragmentation. Articles about the dangers of distracted parenting, distracted work, distracted friendship, distracted driving, distracted education, distracted eating and the like me to surface weekly, if not daily. There's plenty advise on how to limit screen time and smartphone use, how to manage e-mail and Slack, and how to have unplugged vacations. Much of this advice is geared to recapturing some semblance of solitude in our lives.

While much of the advice is good and helpful, the underlying understanding of solitude is often too thin. We often take solitude to mean "me time." It's a private time akin to a watering or gas station where we can take a break, refocus, and recharge so we can go back to our lives of distraction. But this is not the solitude we find in the Bible or in the life of the Church.

True solitude is "the place of conversion" as Henri Nouwen puts it. It's where the words of Isaiah 30:15 come to life: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is

your strength." Solitude is the space in which we encounter the living God and his love and where we are made new.

How? True solitude, like fasting, releases us from our distractions, especially the ones we lean on too much. In solitude, we step away from phones, music, shows, books, activities and even people. As we do so, the temptation to return to them and the comforts they offer quickly surfaces. This is when the Spirit helps us see how we use our distractions for our sense of identity and security, or to numb ourselves from the brokenness we experience from the sin in and around us. In this way, solitude brings about conversion—solitude rattles the thin supports of our lives and invites us to surrender our entire selves to God and his love in for us in Jesus Christ.

Silence in an Age of Distraction. Going hand-in-hand with solitude is silence. We sometimes equate silence as a kind of nothingness and the removal of all words and noise. In our age of constant distraction, silence is an increasingly rare and sought after commodity. "I can't hear myself think" is a common phrase uttered by modern people. Many popular meditation practices encourage a recapturing of silence by teaching techniques to empty the mind and focus inward. There's some wisdom there, but it's too thin. This is not what we see in the Bible or in the life of the Church. What we see is that true silence leads us away from our old selves and to true fullness and outward attentiveness.

The 3rd century monastic communities that formed in the Egyptian desert were fond of silence and practiced silence because of the

relationships between silence and the Word of God in Scripture. In Genesis, in the beginning, there was a void and a vast silence. Into this nothingness, God spoke his Word and created all things in heaven and earth. Scripture tells us that this Word persisted in the world even after our sin brought death and chaos (Isaiah 55:11). At the right time in history, the Word becomes flesh in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, the very Word of God comes to us in our darkness to speak healing, forgiveness, recreation and new life. Silence and the Word go hand in hand.

While the people of Israel often perceived silence as judgment or the loss of God's favor (Ps 28, Ps 74, Ps 94, Isaiah 47:5), silence still had deep spiritual value and significance. In the story of Elijah, silence becomes the medium for God's presence (1 Kings 18ff). God appears to Elijah while he's hiding on a mountain from his persecutor. At first, Elijah is unable to perceive God. He looks for God in a strong wind, an earthquake and a fire. Elijah finally perceives God in a low whisper (1 Kings 19:2, ESV), which can also be translated small voice, or thin silence.

The Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, the God whose Word resounds through all time is found in silence. Paradoxically, silence does not point to divine absence, but to divine presence and fullness. Do we have ears to hear in our current age of distraction?

From Solitude & Silence to a Listening Life.

The ancient desert mothers and fathers saw their own silence as an appropriate to God's presence. Likewise, other communities of

Christians that adopted a Rule of Life held silence as an important value. They describe silence as a fire that fuels the conversion they experienced in solitude. While we are not monks or nuns, there is much to learn adopt from their practices of silence in our noisy world.

Practically speaking, they saw in Scripture how the Holy Spirit uses silence to restrain sin. For example, Psalm 4:4 urges, *"Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent."* Psalm 34 says similarly James 3 continues and urges silence because the tongue *"is a fire, a world of unrighteousness."* The right word brings new healing, but our inclination is to speak unloving words of chaos. Silence is necessary to keep us from speaking evil into the world.

Silence is necessary for another, more fundamental reason. Silence enables us to listen to God's Word. If God is present in a still small voice or thin silence, then we must listen for it. If we're constantly talking or filling our lives with other words and noise, then we lose our ability to discern God's constant presence and voice of love. Many ask: "Why can't I hear God's voice?" Adam McHugh responds with another question: *"[I] wonder whether the real question is 'Why won't I hear God's voice?'* *The scriptures present a God who speaks to humanity regularly, in a myriad of different ways, and yet who charges us with not listening."*

God's Word is always with us; God is always speaking. God is the lover who is incapable of not speaking his Word of life to his beloved. The great lie is that God is distant and withholds

his Word from us. That may be our perception, but that is far from the truth. As Psalm 74 says: *“We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long... Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.”* Silence is necessary so our ears can become sensitive to God’s Word and more adept at recognizing the ways he’s manifesting his salvation day-to-day.

So, silence enables deep listening, and listening is absolutely required for discipleship. We see this over and over in Gospels. As the Spirit descends on Jesus after his baptism, God the Father tells the world to listen to Jesus (Mark 9). God the Father says the same at Jesus’ Transfiguration. (Luke 9). In his teachings, Jesus implores all who would follow him to use their ears to listen carefully. In comparing himself to a Good Shepherd, Jesus says he knows his flock and his flock know his voice (John 10).

Not coincidentally, the verbs “to listen” and “to obey” share the same roots in Greek, Hebrew and Latin. The two are intractably linked. We cannot obey God, we can not follow, without listening. This is what Adam and Eve’s story in Genesis 3 illustrates: they sinned when they stopped listening to God and listening to the voice of the serpent.

So, it is impossible to love God and one another without listening. In Matthew 22, Jesus reiterates the two greatest commandments. The first is to love God and the second is to love our neighbor as ourselves. We can obey these commands to love only if we are listening deeply. Silence always leads our hearts outwards.

And silence does not mean we never talk or that the Christian life is a completely passive. But we must first listen if we are to speak life-giving words and do good works for others. Love in action is the fruit of solitude, silence and listening.

The Guide and Final Encouragements.

We offer this guide to help you and the community of Grace Pasadena cultivate solitude, silence and listening. As we grow attentive to God’s presence and voice, and may we also grow attentive to one another. As we listen to God, may the Spirit help us offer the gift of listening to one another.

This monthly guide has weekly prayers and daily readings from the Gospels (as taken from the Book of Common Prayer), as well as questions and exercises to help you engage Scripture and offer yourself to the Spirit’s formation. The guide contains many different ways and suggestions to engage in solitude, silence and listening. If these are unfamiliar or uncomfortably practices, practice what you can, even if it’s for a few minutes or less, and build on them. The Holy Spirit is with you!

Use this guide on your own, with your roommates or spouses, and even your family. Again, this isn’t about your performance, or how much or how little you do. This is about growing in Christ and his love starting where you are. Let’s give ourselves to our God and seek God together.

With great love for you all,

The Pastors and Staff of Grace Pasadena

WEEK OF OCTOBER 1

As you begin, remember the good news: God is near! This is not about perfection, but about enjoying God's presence. So, pray as you are able: use the guide in its entirety or focus on a part. Take the opportunity to practice solitude, being still before God and listening to his voice of love.

OPENING SCRIPTURE — PSALM 46:10A

"Be still, and know that I am God..."

Read the verse again, but first, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Spend a few moments enjoying God's presence.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God, you send your Word to us in love: We confess our slowness to listen. Our ears are stuffed with too much noise. Our hearts are full of worry. Our minds are loud with selfish schemes and plans. Our bodies are too restless. Our lack of stillness before you has led to doubt and chaos. By your Spirit, quiet us with your love. Speak your words of forgiveness, mercy and renewal. Give us ears to hear. In Jesus's name. Amen.

For reflection: Pray through the confession again and ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind practices, patterns and habits that keep you from hearing and listening to God's voice of love.

GOSPEL READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Tuesday	October 1	Matthew 7:1-12
Wednesday	October 2	Matthew 7:13-21
Thursday	October 3	Matthew 7:22-29
Friday	October 4	Matthew 8:1-17
Saturday	October 5	Matthew 8:18-27

FOR REFLECTION:

- Re-read the passage slowly. What words stand out to you from the passage and why?
- Consider the questions and practices on the next page.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer to God prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the following Collect:

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

- **Tuesday:** Is solitude something you value and why or why not? How often do you practice solitude and what do you do during that time?
- **Wednesday:** Think about your encounter/experience of the opening Psalm, confession or the Gospel reading. Did you rush through them, or did you savor the words? What helps you keep still before God? What makes it difficult?
- **Thursday:** Take a few moments to mediate on Psalm 46:10 again or on the words that stand out to you from the Gospel passage. But this time, even more slowly: (1) Close your eyes and take 5 deep breaths; (2) Take 5 more breaths and with each breath, silently speak the words of Psalm 46:10 or the ones from the Gospel passage; (3) Then think about a relationship, situation, worry, or desire. How might the Holy Spirit be using the Psalm or the words from the Gospel to speak to your relationship, situation, worry or desire?
- **Friday:** Repeat the practice from Thursday.
- **Saturday:** Repeat the practice from Thursday. How did your experience of stillness before God and his word change in the last few days? What felt fresh to your heart, soul, mind and body? What was challenging?

WEEK OF OCTOBER 6

As you begin, remember the good news: God is near! This is not about perfection, but about enjoying God's presence. So, pray as you are able: use the guide in its entirety or focus on a part. Take the opportunity to practice solitude, being still before God and listening to his voice of love

OPENING SCRIPTURE — ZEPHANIAH 3:17

"The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

God is singing his love song to you loudly! Take a couple deep breaths, ponder this wonderful truth and be glad. What song can you sing back?

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. *(pause)*

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. *(pause)*

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us your peace. Amen.

This traditional prayer for forgiveness is called the Agnus Dei, which is Latin for "Lamb of God."

GOSPEL READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Sunday	October 6	Genesis 21:1-17; 28:10-22
Monday	October 7	Matthew 8:28-34
Tuesday	October 8	Matthew 9:1-8
Wednesday	October 9	Matthew 9:9-17
Thursday	October 10	Matthew 9:18-26
Friday	October 11	Matthew 9:27-34
Saturday	October 12	Matthew 9:35-10:4

FOR REFLECTION: *Consider one or more of the following:*

- How does the passage help you see Jesus? How does it help you see yourself?
- Repeat the practice from last week, but dwell on the Gospel passage. Let the Holy Spirit use the words of the passage to speak to different situations, relationships, worries and desires.
- Consider the questions and practices on the next page.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer to God prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the following Collect:

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we to pray, and to give more than we either desire or deserve: Pour upon us the abundance of your mercy, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

- **Monday:** What are the few first words you hear (listen to) when you wake up? What are the last few words you hear (listen to) before you go to bed? How might these words be shaping your day and your sleep? How might they be shaping your hope and faith in God? Your relationships? Your body?
- **Tuesday:** Consider adopting the following practice for the rest of the week: No phone/books/music/etc... in the morning before being still and listening to God's Word of Love in Scripture. Need something more concrete? After waking up, spend 2 minutes in a quiet place and dwell on Zeph 3:17. That's it. The goal is to start the day with just a few moments of attentiveness to God's love song.

If this is difficult (maybe you have kids jumping in your bed?), then try the practice before you start your day's work and activities.

Take note of your encounter and experience of silence and listening.

- **Wednesday:** Repeat the practice from Tuesday.
- **Thursday:** Repeat the practice from Tuesday.
- **Friday:** Repeat the practice from Tuesday.
- **Weekend:** Repeat the practice from Tuesday. How did your experience of stillness before God and his word change in the last few days? What felt fresh to your heart, soul, mind and body? What was challenging?

WEEK OF OCTOBER 13

As you begin, remember the good news: God is near! This is not about perfection, but about enjoying God's presence. So, pray as you are able: use the guide in its entirety or focus on a part. Take the opportunity to practice solitude, being still before God and listening to his voice of love

OPENING SCRIPTURE — ISAIAH 32:8

"My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places."

Before you continue, consider your environment. Is it quiet? Is your phone out of reach or on airplane mode? Remove as many distractions as you can, and as you enter solitude, savor God's presence and peace.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. *(pause)*

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. *(pause)*

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us your peace. *Amen.*

Pray through the confession again. Where you feel the most conviction? Which words are you resisting? Offer these to God and ask the Holy Spirit for new life and freedom.

GOSPEL READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Sunday	October 13	Isaiah 53
Monday	October 14	Matthew 10:5-15
Tuesday	October 15	Matthew 10:16-23
Wednesday	October 16	Matthew 10:24-33
Thursday	October 17	Matthew 10: 34-42
Friday	October 18	Matthew 10: 11:1-6
Saturday	October 19	Matthew 11:7-15

FOR REFLECTION: *Consider one or more of the following:*

- How might God be using the passage to shape your compassion for your neighbors?
- With the words of Scripture in your hearts and minds, consider the daily exercises on the next page. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond honestly.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer to God prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the following Collect:

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

This week, continue one or two of the practices of the previous weeks. Also, consider the ways you can offer listening as a gift to your neighbor. That is, in your conversations with people this week, make it a point to speak less and listen more. The following wisdom is adapted from Susan Phillips' *THE CULTIVATED LIFE*:

Preparation:

- Stop and turn toward the speaker physically, mentally and spiritually.
- Ready yourself to receive what the other person presents, and ask God to help you listen.

Awareness:

- Notice the other with all your senses: What is communicated in words? Posture? Facial expression? Absence of words?
- Notice yourself. What thoughts, feelings and sensations do you experience? Take note of them, and turn again to focusing on the speaker. Move to the background any judgments, desires to fix or your own interpretations of the speaker's experience that crop up.
- Notice God's presence: Does the speaker refer to spiritual matters? Do you sense the Spirit in the conversation? Does what you hear resonate with God's Word? Ask God to direct your listening, and notice what most draws your attention.

Response:

- Return repeatedly to engaged, silent attention. Let the other lead the conversation.
- Communicate your attunement to the other person, nonverbally (e.g., eye contact) and with verbal prompts (e.g., "Hmm").
- Offer minimal verbal responses in a tentative way, allowing the other to correct you when you're not accurately understanding. Simply state what your attention has been drawn toward. For instance, what you've heard ("You've mentioned beauty a number of times in this story of grief"), what you've experienced while listening ("I feel moved when I hear you talk about your time at the beach") or what you notice in the speaker ("You strike me as courageous in telling this story").
- Respond with grace, imagining how the person before you is beloved by God and remembering that the speaker is vulnerable while being heard.
- Speak when invited by the other person, and before you speak, ask God to give you words.

Closure:

- If you bring the time to an end, do so gently and appreciatively.
- You might let the other person know that what's been said will be held confidentially..
- Be aware that you have received a gift. Hold the gift and its giver with respect and in prayer.

At the end of the week, think back on your conversations. How did offering listening as gift change and deepen your relationships? How did it change the way you saw and moved toward your neighbor? How did it open your eyes to God's presence in the lives of your neighbors?

WEEK OF OCTOBER 20

As you begin, remember the good news: God is near! This is not about perfection, but about enjoying God's presence. So, pray as you are able: use the guide in its entirety or focus on a part. Take the opportunity to practice solitude, being still before God and listening to his voice of love

OPENING SCRIPTURE — MARK 9:7

"And a cloud overshadowed [Peter, James and John], and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

Are you ready to receive God's word? Jesus is speaking. Those who have ears, let them hear...

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. *(pause)*

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us. *(pause)*

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us your peace. *Amen.*

For reflection: This is the third week the Agnes Dei has been offered. How does confessing simply with abundant silence strike you?

GOSPEL READINGS FOR WEEK 1

Sunday	October 20	Hebrews 2:8-9; Phil 1:21-26
Monday	October 21	Matthew 11:16-24
Tuesday	October 22	Matthew 11:25-30
Wednesday	October 23	Matthew 12:1-14
Thursday	October 24	Matthew 12:15-21
Friday	October 25	Matthew 12:22-32
Saturday	October 26	Matthew 12:33-42

FOR REFLECTION: *Consider one or more of the following:*

- How does the passage help you see and experience God's great love and presence in the ordinary moments and happenings of your day?
- With the words of Scripture in your hearts and minds, consider the questions on the next page. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond honestly.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer to God prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the following Collect:

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

Continue the practices of solitude, silence and listening from the previous weeks. Revisit some of the questions as well. Use this space for any notes, thoughts, prayers and responses that emerge.

WEEK OF OCTOBER 27 TO 31

As you begin, remember the good news: God is near! This is not about perfection, but about enjoying God's presence. So, pray as you are able: use the guide in its entirety or focus on a part. Take the opportunity to practice solitude, being still before God and listening to his voice of love

OPENING SCRIPTURE — 1 SAMUEL 3:10

"And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant hears.'

Take a few moments to remember that God calls us by name and speaks to us as his beloved children. Take a few deep breaths and let that good news sink in.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Let the words of Psalm 4:4 guide your confession this week:

Be angry, and do not sin;
ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.

GOSPEL READINGS FOR WEEK 1

Sunday	<i>October 27</i>	Psalm 8; 1 Timothy 1:16
Monday	<i>October 28</i>	Matthew 12:43-50
Tuesday	<i>October 29</i>	Matthew 13:1-19
Wednesday	<i>October 30</i>	Matthew 13:10-17
Thursday	<i>October 31</i>	Matthew 13:18-23

FOR REFLECTION: *Consider one or more of the following:*

- Reread the passage and take note of any words or phrases that stick out to you. Take a few deep breaths and mediate on a word or phrase. How might the Spirit be using the passage to bring you new hope and faith?
- With the words of Scripture in your hearts and minds, consider the daily exercises on the next page. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you respond honestly.

CLOSING PRAYERS

Offer to God prayers for the day and its tasks, the world and its needs, the Church and her life. Conclude with the following Collect:

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our

QUESTIONS & PRACTICES FOR THE WEEK

Continue the practices of solitude, silence and listening from the previous weeks. As you do so, consider how you can encourage solitude, silence and listening in your:

- Family / life with roommates:

- At work

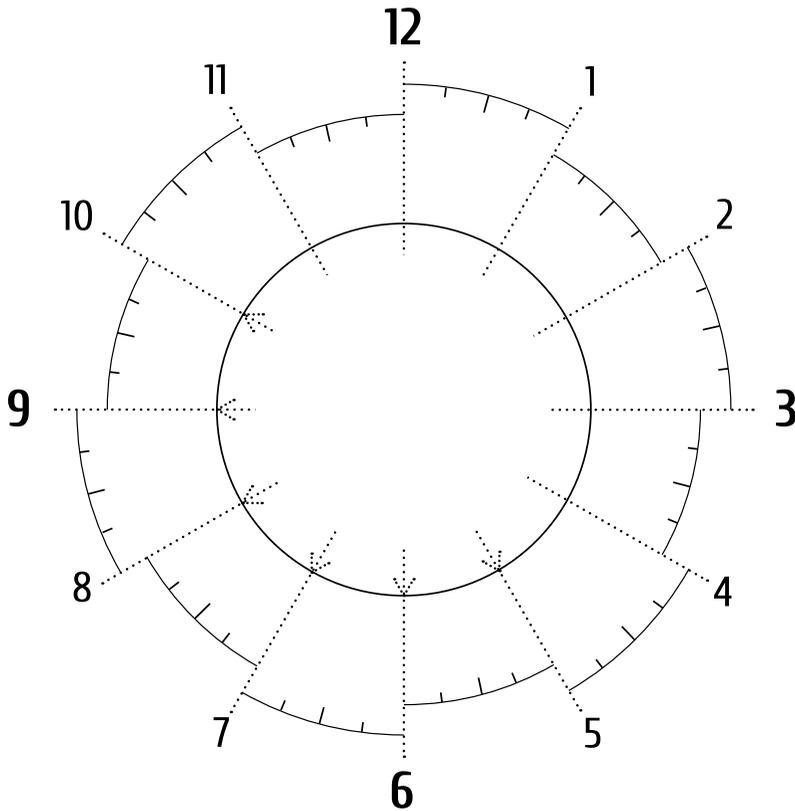
- In your City Group

- Other areas:

Think back on the month. What practices of solitude, silence and listening resonated the most? Which practices do you want to continue?

MONTH IN REVIEW / LOOKING FORWARD

Think back on the month. Think about the times of day that you found most conducive for solitude and silence. Is there a pattern? What would your day look like if you had multiple, regular moments of solitude and silence, even if short ones? If it's helpful, try mapping out your day with the visual planner below (adapted from Sliceplanner) and see what emerges.



NOTES & OTHER RESOURCES

For Additional Reading

- *The Way of the Heart* by Henri Nouwen
- *The Cultivated Life*, chs 3 & by 6 Susan Phillips
- *The Listening Life* by Adam McHugh

October 2019
Grace Pasadena
www.gracepasadena.org