

LISTENING HEARTS MINISTRIES

EXPLORATIONS

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Tapping into Creative Forces

Suzanne Farnham
Founder

When we immerse ourselves in the divine presence and open ourselves to the forces of creativity, we allow the Spirit of God to create our eyes and ears and hearts anew.

Music, art, literature, nature, and activities for which we have a passion can provide active channels for God's renewing powers. To enter such a channel, name a concern (personal, professional, or societal, large or small) to present to God for guidance. Proceed by first engaging your reasoning faculties, then moving into a contemplative mode, and, finally, stimulating your creative impulses.

To prepare the way, clearly and concisely identify the issue you will use as your question for discernment. Pray about it. Gather relevant information and ideas. Analyze them; evaluate them. Consider pros and cons. Consult people you respect. Arrive at a preliminary position.

Once this mental work is done, set aside a substantial block of time. Find a quiet, comfortable spot where you can become immersed in God's all-embracing presence. Take your discernment issue and your best understanding of how you might handle it with you, but do not hold them close. Instead, let them hover at your periphery. In silence, offer to God your entire self, your issue, and your sense of how you might move forward with it. Then, with a quiet mind and a relaxed body, try to let your thoughts, your feelings, and your entire being rest gently in God—for at least ten minutes and possibly for much longer.

As the stillness recedes, name a longstanding area of personal interest to you such as sports, biology, gardening, music, theater, dance, art, technology, business. While fully encompassed in God's embrace, open your inmost self to the discovery of an association or analogy within your selected field of interest—an artistic piece or a word picture—that connects with what you are feeling deep within. If you love classical music, is there a symphony or sonata

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Tapping into...



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that captures what you feel as you sit in centered silence? If you are a weaver, can you describe a fabric that might express your deepest feelings at this moment? If you are an avid sports fan, does any sports analogy spring from your depths as you sit in prayer with your question for discernment? Or, if Scripture is close to your heart, are you feeling like any character in the Bible at this moment, or does any passage of Scripture suggest itself to you? Avoid *seeking* a creative image from your head. Ideally, in your time of centered silence, your mind will descend into the center of your being. Stay in that space so that whatever emerges will come from your center of gravity.

Wait for a visual or auditory image to mark itself on your consciousness. Explore it imaginatively, meditating on it to discover what God may say to you through it. If it grips you, you may want to carry it with you in your heart as you return to normal activities, so that God may continue to communicate with you through it.

As we integrate creative energy with contemplative prayer, we open a passage through which God can re-create us.

Eventually, it can be helpful to gather with a small group of spiritual companions to share your experience in a serene setting. You might want to invite them to slowly and prayerfully pose questions to help you get further beneath the surface of your meditation. Such a group will add another dimension to your quest.

As we integrate creative energy with contemplative prayer, we open a passage through which God can re-create us. As we offer ourselves and our life situations to God, asking the Holy Spirit to penetrate our beings and release the creative forces bestowed by the Creator, we find ourselves entering the flow of God's Spirit and being carried to a place where our situation is illuminated with stronger light, seen in a broader perspective. In God, old perceptions continually fall away, allowing us to see matters in a new light: "The old has passed away, behold the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).



Alleluia and amen.

A Seed in Time . . .

**Alice Dorrance
Spartanburg, SC**

For a seed planted six years ago at the Church of the Advent, the life cycle continues to evolve. A group of nine parishioners regularly practice spiritual discernment and prayerful silence, tending and nurturing a Listening Hearts Ministries seedling. They listen to God and to each other and offer support for each other's lay ministries.

One member of the group serves on the church vestry. Listening to God more deeply is a life quest for her. This fall she led the vestry in a meditation based on part of Luke 8:8, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," because it instills in her the question, What is God trying to tell me? Convinced of the ministries' effectiveness in helping people listen prayerfully and intently to God and each other, she felt compelled to share the Listening Hearts discernment guidelines with the vestry.

A visiting deacon, attending the vestry meeting that day, found the listening guidelines so powerful that she requested copies of them to take to the next meeting of the search committee charged to call a new bishop for Upper South Carolina. . . . Seeds scatter with the potential to set down roots and grow.

Our new rector at the Church of the Advent, already familiar with Listening Hearts Ministries, repeated the sharing of the listening guidelines at the next vestry meeting. . . . Seedlings take hold with the potential to become strong.

To be a gardener is to know the exhilaration of feeling the earth under one's fingers, preparing the ground for chosen plants and treasured seeds. The Holy Bible has innumerable references to seeds, seed bearing, and seed time. God created the seed—silent, powerful, resilient, durable, seemingly impenetrable, yet permeable by the power of water. Commencing with a quiet, yet dramatic rupture, the germinating seed sends out roots and launches a shoot. What follows are the hopes and dreams of the sower for what the plant will become in the world.

And so it is with God's vision for humankind. We are given opportunities to carry God's messages to others; we are entrusted with the carrying of a seed—an idea, a plan for the building up of His kingdom. Attentive listening and openness to God's call require a bold and expectant faith.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isa. 55:10-11)

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Listening Hearts Ministries provides a range of programs, publications, and services that teach people the practice of spiritual discernment through prayerful listening in supportive communities.

The ability to discern develops in a relationship with God, as one becomes rooted and grounded in the heart of God.

—Listening Hearts, p.25

A Seed in Time . . .

We may not fully understand the plan as God sees it. Nevertheless, the gardener provides fertile soil for the seed, mixing in prayer and encouragement for God's plan to take hold. The bloom, the fruit, and the harvest could take years or a lifetime. It is *kairos* time, God's time. We may experience only glimpses of a bud or the fragrance of a bloom. With an open, discerning heart the gardener looks to the Creator for continual guidance in the planting and pruning. In a passion for the fulfillment of God's purpose there is the opportunity for the unexpected to occur. As we toil in the field, we are affected by the power of the seed message. We too, are touched by wisdom, like a gentle rain falling from the Spirit of God.

And so it is with God's vision for humankind.

Alice Dorrance, a trustee of Listening Hearts Ministries, is coordinator of the newsletter, Explorations, and facilitates a spiritual discernment group at The Church of the Advent, Spartanburg, SC.