

We meet God not just in formal times of prayer, but in the whole of life. Like Moses or Jacob we awake to realise that where we are is holy ground. We pray not just to gain clarity and understanding during the time of prayer, but to be alive and awake to God in the whole of life.

Jesus' use of parables, reveal his consciousness of the 'other side of the ordinary': a seed growing to a full-grown plant, a woman making bread, a shepherd guiding his flock, a woman searching for a lost coin – all reveal the workings of God. Things we see, and things we experience can all reveal God's presence and activity. People, places and events are steeped in God if we make attentiveness our practice. Sometimes dreams, if we pay attention to them, can give us clues about things we puzzle and worry about in our waking hours.

The Bible as God's living word, can be a meeting place with God. Reading the scriptures regularly can help us make sense of the scriptures that are our lives. As the disciples said about their encounter with the Risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus:

'didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us.' Luke 24: 32

It's also important to listen to ourselves: Gerard Hughes writes in **God of Surprises:**

Everyone has a rich, complex inner life of thoughts, memories, feelings and desires. Its composition is unique to us, the result of our heredity and all that we have done and all that has been done to us. There is no experience of our lives which does not register somehow in our body and our mind

Some of our thoughts, feelings, and reactions come out of the wounds of past negative experience. Sometimes the voice within us we hear is that of a significant person in our past – it may be a positive, life affirming voice, or a negative life denying voice. Somewhere in all this inner mix of thoughts, feelings and reactions is the voice of the Spirit. Our inner world is also 'holy ground'. It's not always easy to recognise the voice of the Spirit amongst all our inner feelings and thoughts; the Spirit's voice can get drowned out. The most important step, however, is telling God that we want to hear, and asking his help to be able to recognise the Spirit within what we feel and think.

In John's Gospel Jesus promises that the Father will send the Spirit **'to teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you'** **John 14: 26.** The Spirit speaks to us, and teaches us, in the midst of life, and reminds us – or helps us put together and make sense of – the glimpses we have received of God at work in our lives.

Before Annunciation

Attentiveness to God within us

Your life and mine is a mix of joys and sorrows, frustrations and forward steps, endings and beginnings. Somewhere within all this the Spirit of God is moving, desiring to draw us deeper into the life of God so that we grow and flourish, and our lives bear fruit.

This month's reflections are aimed at helping us listen and look more attentively for God within the day to day.

Spring comes quietly. Long before the first daffodils, crocuses or snowdrops flower, stopping us in our tracks, their shoots are pushing through the earth. It's easy to miss these shoots, especially when the winter weather doesn't provide encouragement to linger outside!

The annunciation – the angel's visit to Mary to tell her she was to be the mother of the Saviour – is described in dramatic terms in Luke's Gospel. But what had gone before – what strands of experience had made Mary the person she was; had led her to that moment when she was able both to hear and respond to God's invitation?

Between the accounts of Jesus' birth and the beginning of his ministry after the baptism by John the Gospels are almost blank about his life. In those years about which we hear nothing what was happening to Jesus? What experiences shaped him: what did he see, do, or hear in those silent years that led him to the Jordan and to a new beginning?

In our life and faith journey there may be many moments of annunciation – times when we see clearly what it is we have to be or do; the next step becomes clear to us even though we may not be able to see where the road will lead in the end. But what about the quiet times that lead up to these moments of change? What about now? Where are there shoots pushing through the earth? We might not see them unless we stop and look.

Exercises:

God in my Day

This is an awareness exercise to be used on a daily basis as a way of becoming more aware of where we meet God within outward events and our inner thoughts and feelings. It will probably take 5-10minutes.

1. Events of today

Like watching a video, I replay the day, letting God prompt my memory, and remind me of significant things that happened in my day, or insights that I gained

2. Thanksgiving

I thank God for the gifts of the day that have gone – the kindnesses shown me, the things that lifted my spirits – no matter how small.

3. Feelings experienced

I become aware of what I felt today and ask God to show me why I felt as I did.

4. Your call to me

I ask God to show me in what ways he asked something of me today..

in my dealings with people

in the way I treated myself

in anything I previously sensed I was called to do

I review how I responded

5. Forgiveness and healing

I bring to God anything that I need forgiveness for, trusting in God's readiness to forgive.

I bring to God anything from my day I need healing for, trusting in God's love that casts out fear, and binds up wounds.

6. Trust in God for the day to come

I let go to God any anxieties I have about the day to come

I ask God for the gift of what I most need for the day ahead.

Rather than take this plan to your prayer-time, learn the simple headings:

Events of today

Thanksgiving

Feelings experienced

Your call to me

Forgiveness and healing

Trust in God for the day to come

Signs of Spring

At this time of year we witness the very first signs of Spring. Go for a walk in a local park, look in your garden, or other people's, or in your window boxes and see what signs of new life are present – buds on trees, bulbs pushing through the earth. It may be you hear more bird-song or that there are Spring smells in the air.

Think about any signs of Spring in your life – any new beginnings – perhaps a new understanding or a new sense of what God calls you to. It may be they are small and tentative – buds rather than flowers.

Take time to be aware of them. Talk to God about them and where they might lead you.

Changing rooms

Imagine your life as it is now as a room..

what does the room look like: spacious, cramped, stylish, cluttered, cosy, light, dark?

what's in the room?

what do you like about the room?

what do you want to change? [you might want to move the furniture round, get rid of things, have new things in the room]

or...

Tidy out a drawer or a room that feels cluttered. Some things you will want to keep, some rearrange, some put in a new place.

Think and pray about:

what things in my life are important – things I want to hold on to?

what things in my life do I want to let go of?

what things do I want to find a different place for [e.g. to make them more or less important]

Becoming aware

At the heart of discipleship is attentiveness to God's word.

The meaning of 'disciple' is 'one who learns'. A disciple in biblical terms was someone who freely chose to be with, and listen and learn from a spiritual teacher.

The Lord Yahweh has given me a disciple's tongue, for me to know how to give a word of comfort to the weary. Morning by morning he makes my ear alert, to listen like a disciple.

Isaiah 50:4

Attentiveness and awareness was at the heart of Jesus life and ministry; his actions and words flowed from a listening to God, his Father. Sometimes he drew away from the crowds to pray, but even in the midst of people and activity he was being attentive to and aware of the guidance of the Spirit. Awareness and attentiveness express his, and our, dependence on the guidance of the Spirit. We listen first, and act second.