FUTURE OF FAITH

Sacred Tools for Courageous Connection



TEXT TO CONNECT

AN ACTIVITY TO CONNECT DAILY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

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LISTENING IS SACRED

Listening to each other is a sacred act. Listening to others' stories is an encounter with the divine because we are all made in God's image.

It emphasizes the interconnectedness of all people and the importance of fostering an environment where all voices are valued and heard.

Deep listening can have a profound impact on others' personal development, emotional well-being, communication skills, and overall sense of empowerment. It also transforms the listener.

Listening is more than hearing. It is not a call to respond but to embrace silence and sit with others' experiences. When you're truly listening, you are a conduit to the sacredness of the other person.

Sacred listening is a way to create connection through empathy, thoughtfulness, intention, and action. It can be infused into faith programs, community initiatives, family time and everyday interactions to provide each other with vital skills and emotional tools, equipping us all for a well-rounded life.

We aim to help you and others in your world to experience a sense of the divine, reinforcing the belief that in each act of genuine listening and understanding, we encounter God's presence in each other.

YOUR GUIDE



MEGAN BISSELL

Sociologist and Researcher

I built these tools as a guide for you to listen to the people in your life with intention and compassion. I based the activities on my experiences as a sociologist, a researcher, a research consultant, and as a parent of young people. One of the most valuable things we can do for young people is to get out of the way, making space for their voices, while also being present and hearing what they say. Listen with wonder, curiosity, and empathy.



INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING

INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING

In the heart of every person is a story—a constellation of experiences, beliefs, and dreams uniquely their own. As guides and champions of their spiritual and emotional development, you are called to embrace each person with deep reverence and careful attentiveness. This workbook is a guide to honing the art of Sacred Listening, a pivotal skill in nurturing your connection to the people you support in their own faith journey. In an era where conventional pathways to belief are uncertain or untrusted, listening is the most important thing you can do for someone.

Sacred Listening Theory

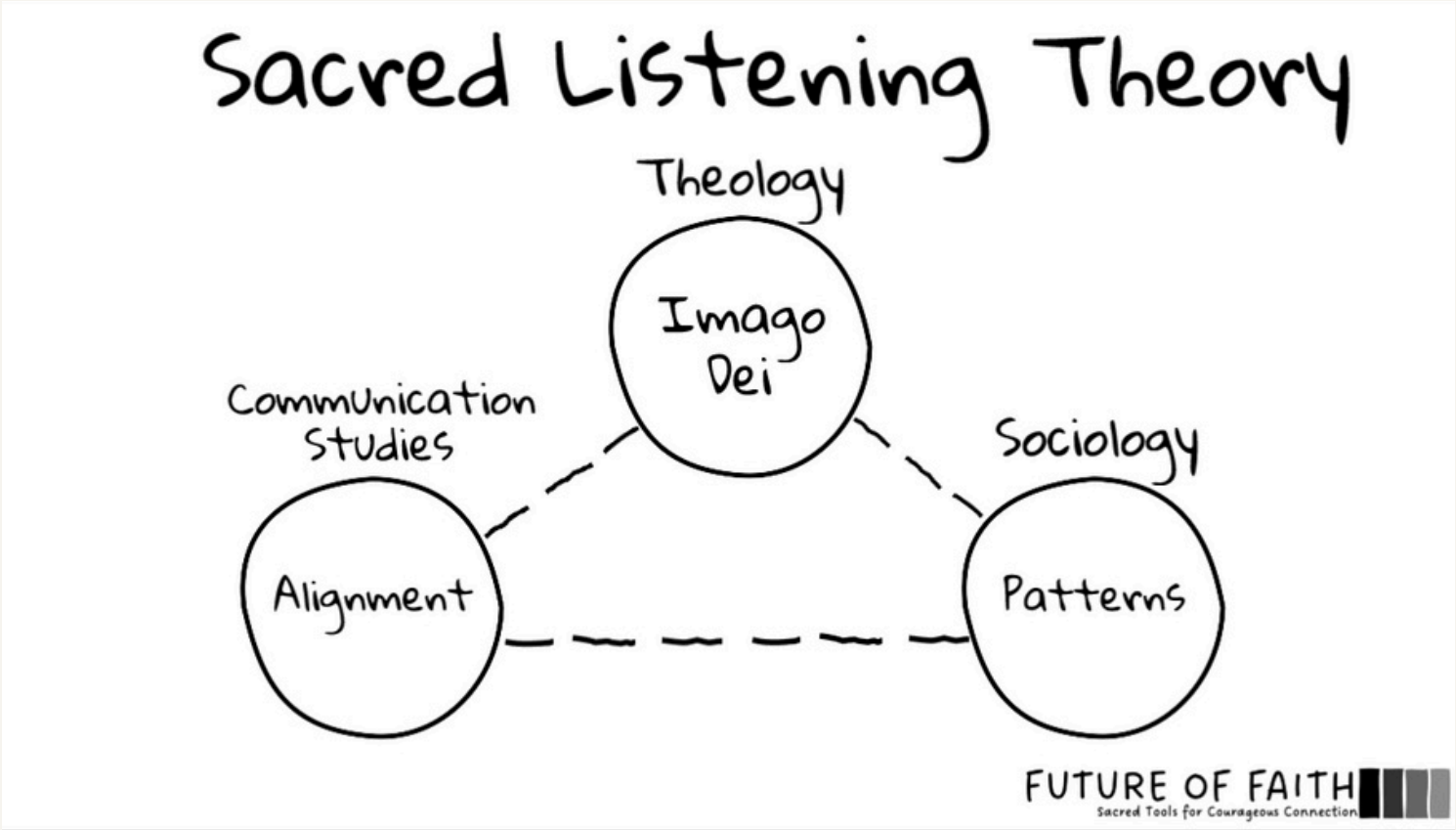
Sacred Listening is both a theory and a process. The three-part theory integrates principles from Theology, Communication Studies, and Sociology. Theology helps us find and embrace the sacredness of every person, which sets the tone for every interaction (Imago Dei). Communication Studies centers the importance of genuine engagement (Alignment) in ways that respect the context of the sacred person we're interacting with. Sociology guides the insightful analysis of information we learn from others (Patterns) and gives us ways to use what we learn to connect deeply, follow up and scale relationships beyond ourselves. In short, Sacred Listening is listening to each other in divine encounter, systematically.

Sacred Listening Process

The Sacred Listening process is easy to use, replicable in any setting, and helps scale relationships. It translates to any context and embodies a framework that can be practiced in large settings, small groups, or individual interactions. The process is directly connected to the theory. The first phase (Intentions) of the process is to center everyone by creating a sacred space through ritual and intention setting. The second phase (Ask and Record) aligns everyone through inquiry, sharing, and capturing information, which is carefully tuned to the diverse methods by which people express their lived experiences. The third phase (Explore and Follow-up) requires thoughtfulness and planning to look for patterns in what people share and find ways to use those patterns to follow-up in the ways people need you most.

The diagram on the following page illustrates the theory with the process.

INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING



Why Sacred Listening Matters

Life moves fast. The ability to deeply connect with others, quickly, is more crucial than ever. Listening authentically can transform interactions, build trust, and create meaningful relationships. Sacred listening allows us to:

- Feel and foster sacred moments with people in everyday interactions.
- Ask meaningful questions and gather important information that leads to deeper connections.
- Recognize patterns in what people are experiencing so that you can respond to needs in a timely and relevant way.
- Scale relationships to build and strengthen your community.
- Form empathetic and open connections that help us receive new ideas, sparking wonder, curiosity, and joy about faith in a world where narratives about faith are often fear-driven and negative.
- Be transformed. When we listen deeply to each other, in divine encounter, we are all changed.

INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING

Scaling Relationships Through Sacred Listening

The future of faith is relationships. Our old, institutional methods of connection don't work anymore because people don't trust institutions. Building the future church will require an intimate, hyper-local approach, based on individual relationships. All of that is very clear from the mountains of data collected by national research organizations.

But this call to relational ministry poses a fundamental problem for those in ministry: How do we do relationships at scale? How do we reach hundreds of people and pay attention to their lives?

Sacred Listening Tools provide the framework to do relational ministry at scale. It is difficult to hold information from all your relationships in your head, especially when trying to connect with dozens or hundreds of people. These tools help you to gather and use information to make and share intentional connections, rather than just relying on your memory. By scaling up (growing our communities), scaling out (involving more people in ministry), and scaling down (deepening individual relationships), we create a thriving, engaged community. Sacred listening is the foundation of this approach, enabling us to connect, understand, and grow together.



INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING

What You'll Discover in This Workbook

This workbook is designed to walk you step-by-step through the process of Sacred Listening in the context of an activity that fits your setting.

Here's what you will find:

- Easy to follow process: The three-phase Sacred Listening process focuses interactions and helps you to build your own capacity for deep listening.
- Insightful questioning: Master the art of asking questions that evoke deeper conversations about faith, purpose, and identity.
- Ways to identify patterns: Recording information and finding patterns is key to deep connection and subsequent follow-ups.
- Trust-building strategies: Develop techniques to create environments where faith can be explored freely and sincerely.
- Replicable practices: The steps of the process are built into a template to help you think of any interaction, event, or activity as an opportunity for Sacred Listening.

The Transformative Power of Sacred Listening

These tools are designed intentionally to be both formative and summative. At the end of each Sacred Listening Tool, you will be left with summative information you can use to take the right, next steps to engage someone, and the process of listening deeply to them will form you both into a trusting relationship.

Sacred listening benefits the listener as much as the speaker. By learning to listen with empathy, we open ourselves to transformation, gaining new insights and a deeper connection with the divine as revealed in the lives of others. In listening, we ourselves are heard; in guiding, we too are led.

Sacred Listening Tools are not a transactional form of information gathering, like a survey, and they are not a one-off experience without structure, like a conversation. They are intentionally designed tools to help transform you and your community into a deeper relationship with the divine.

INTRODUCTION TO SACRED LISTENING

A Call to Action

Let this workbook be your guide as you carve fresh trails in the landscape of contemporary faith. To listen—with full presence—is an act of immense reverence and love. It is within the holy exchange of narratives and experiences that trust is reestablished, faith is envisioned, and souls are elevated.

Thank you for choosing to make this journey, for accepting the call to be stewards of curious souls in a world that sorely needs custodians of spiritual wisdom. Your role is crucial, your presence a light. Together, let us step forth with attentive ears and tender hearts, to listen, to discern, and to love.

"Being listened to is so close to being loved that we can't tell the difference."
- Rev. Dr. Frank Thomas

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

This workbook is designed to guide you through the practice of Sacred Listening, fostering deep and meaningful connections. Follow these tips and subsequent steps to ensure you get the most out of your experience.

Take Your Time
Open the activity on a device or print it out. Helpful tip- if you can open it on an iPad or tablet, it scrolls like an eBook. It's a PDF to make sure it can open or print easily.

The first section, "Introduction to Sacred Listening" is just for you to put yourself in the frame of mind. Read through the subsections carefully to orient yourself. These sections share the sentiment, theory, and process for Sacred Listening.

Engage with the content at a comfortable pace. Reflect on the principles and practices presented.

Give yourself the space to fully understand the concepts before moving on to the next section.

Pay attention to the Guidelines section. These were honed through practice and feedback using the tools.

But most of all, make a commitment to shifting your mindset toward relationships rooted in listening as your primary orientation to others in your ministry.

Reflect and Write
When you get to the "Activity" section, pay special attention to the "Purpose" pages. This is the contextual explanation for the specific activity. There are prompts in the activity that queue you to share this Purpose with participants. Take time to write down how you would paraphrase this section or plan to read it aloud to launch the activity. You will share this Purpose during "Set the Tone" in phase 1.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

As you read the Purpose, jot down any questions that arise. These could be questions for yourself, for group discussion, or for further exploration. What else do you want to do with this activity?

Capture any immediate thoughts, reactions, or insights that the content sparks.

Engage with Prompts
Read through the entire "Activity" section and engage with the prompts before you do the activity with others. There are places where you need to think and prepare.

Throughout the workbook, you will find various prompts designed to deepen your understanding and application of Sacred Listening. Take the time to respond thoughtfully.

Use the provided spaces to write your responses. This helps in tracking your progress and insights.

The "Materials" and "Set-up" pages are for your use, with our suggestions, based on the activity.

Read through all of "1. Intentions" (Make dynamic when we build the PDF)

- This is the cornerstone of Sacred Listening, as it's the sacred tone setting part of the activity.
- Integrate your paraphrasing of the "Purpose" of the activity as you plan this phase out.
- Take notes and highlight places where you want to transition, prompt them to do something, or if you need to prepare.
- This is where you'll put together something that will become a ritual for your time together, so choose what you need for that ritual. i.e., a relevant poem or a line of scripture.
- Plan a few reflection questions and prompt them to share a keyword or just take time to write down their thoughts.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

Read through all of "2. Ask and Record"

- Think about the ways you need to be present.
- What distractions are in the room?
- What will you practice and embody during the "Align Expectations" portion?
- Write down any additional questions that you may potentially ask during the "Conduct Meaningful Inquiry" section of this phase.
- Write down actual transitions and segues into next steps.

Read through all of "3. Explore and Follow-up"

- Have a plan for bringing your group or person back together after collecting information. Regrouping for the "Explore" can be challenging, so have a plan to grab them right away.
- This section requires planning and forethought because most people aren't in the practice of looking for patterns in things.
- Let your group or person know that you'll be following up with them, and ask permission for how to contact them, when needed.
- Plan regular follow-up sessions or personal check-ins to reinforce the practices and principles of Sacred Listening.
- Encourage ongoing dialogue and interaction among participants or within yourself through reflection and journaling.

Scale Relationships

Scaling is crucial. Plan for how you will follow-up. It can be tempting to think the work is finished when the activity is concluded, but the real power of Sacred Listening Tools comes in the ways you use the information and trust you've gained from the exercise. Schedule follow-ups and be diligent.

Use the insights gained to expand your practice of Sacred Listening to new contexts and relationships.

Focus on both scaling out (involving more people) and scaling down (deepening individual connections).

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

You don't have to be the only one to follow-up. One of the most significant parts of Sacred Listening is that you will learn things that help you connect people to each other. Where someone in your community might be reluctant to sign up as a volunteer indefinitely, they will be much more likely to reach out to someone who is going through a hard time if it is something they have also experienced. Look for connections between people to help build a culture of relationships.

For You

Following the activity is a space for you to reflect, suggestions for follow-up conversations with your group or person, and a step-by-step template to use to build your own Sacred Listening activities and practice, if you'd like. The activities we create are usually built to be done more than once, but you may have your own questions to ask and things you want to do.



SACRED LISTENING PROCESS

Each tool we build follows the process below. This section is for your information only. All you have to do is follow the outline in the pages that follow and we'll guide you through each of these steps.

Phase 1: Intentions

The person sitting across from you is sacred. The space you are creating together is sacred. Sacred Listening begins by recognizing that the interactions you are having with others are powerful, meaningful, and divine. Sacred Listening starts by setting a very intentional, respectful, and empathetic tone for the session that facilitates a deep and meaningful engagement.

To focus on the Intentions Phase:

- **Establish a Sacred Space:** Everyone is sacred, made in the image of the divine, so the time and place you share with your group should be regarded as sacred. Verbally share that with the group and remind them that your time together is safe for people share without judgement.

- **Set the Tone**: Communicate the Purpose (paraphrase or read) and expectations for your time together clearly. This helps put everyone in a similar frame of mind and sets the stage for a heartfelt exchange. Articulate why you are doing this together.

- **Engage Through Rituals:** Introduce rituals that resonate with the group's cultural or spiritual preferences, such as meditation, prayer, or a shared reading, to deepen the collective sense of sacredness. Work together to co-create a ritual that is meaningful to your group. Recreate this same type of ritual practice every time you come together, even if the content changes.

SACRED LISTENING PROCESS

Phase 2: Ask and Record

Questions signify interest and attention. Genuine curiosity aligns people to one another, leading to inclusive dialogue. But inquiry is not always enough to lead to connection. Writing down what others share actively engages you, demonstrating that you are committed to understanding and remembering what they share. It may seem counterintuitive to take notes while someone is sharing, but it is crucial knowing them more deeply.

To focus on the Ask and Record Phase:

- **Alignment**: Carefully tune in to the diverse methods by which individuals express their experiences and truths. Pay attention to how people are engaging. Do they write things down or speak more? Do they draw pictures?

- **Ask Great Questions**: Facilitate a structured dialogue where participants are encouraged to ask and respond to open-ended, meaningful questions. This practice elevates every voice and opens avenues for deeper inquiry.

- **Write it Down**: Demonstrate active listening by taking detailed notes. This not only shows respect and attention to the speakers but also ensures that the insights gathered are remembered and valued.

SACRED LISTENING PROCESS

Phase 3: Explore and Follow-up

Exploration leads to discovery. Explore the information you wrote down to discover patterns, themes, and ideas that emerge. The patterns you find will give you clues to what is happening with the people you engage with and what you should do to follow-up with them. It will also help you know how to scale relationships.

To focus on Explore and Follow-up Phase:

- **Look Back and Learn**: Use the information you collected to have an intentional conversation. You will work together to spot the big ideas and feelings that kept popping up. Look for trends in keywords, behaviors, and shared thoughts.

- **Keep in Touch:** Set up times to meet again or check in with each other. This shows you care about continuing the conversation and value everyone's contributions. Encourage everyone to keep talking and sharing, whether through social media, regular meetings, or casual get-togethers. This keeps your community tight-knit and growing.

- **Spread the Word**: Think about ways to bring more people into relationship. Maybe start a group or network where these conversations can keep blossoming, reaching more people and making a bigger difference. Use the patterns that you found to help connect people to each other.

> "Listening is being able to be changed by the other person."
> – Alan Alda



ACTIVITY: TEXT TO CONNECT

PURPOSE

In a world increasingly marked by isolation and emotional struggles, especially among young people, the church is called to be a sanctuary not only for spiritual growth but also for mental well-being. The urgency of this task is ever more evident given the soaring concerns around youth mental health, amplified by the ramifications of the ongoing pandemic. While mental health care is a specialized field best left to the experts, the church—especially youth ministers—have a significant role to play in fostering emotional and spiritual wellness. In line with this mission, we introduce a four-week activity designed to be a holistic approach to pastoral care, blending data-driven insights with empathetic, faith-based interactions.

At the core of this initiative are daily emoji check-ins—a simple yet powerful tool to gauge the emotional pulse of our young community. Through a single emoji, participants can quickly and effectively communicate their emotional state for the day, providing the youth minister with an immediate, albeit abbreviated, insight into their well-being. This acts as an initial touchpoint for the minister to monitor, connect, and offer timely support.

To supplement these daily glimpses and dig deeper, twice-weekly prompts invite more nuanced reflections on faith, life, and other areas of interest. These open a space for youth to consider questions of significance and allow the minister to better understand the various facets that make up their daily emotional states.

The activity's final phase is dedicated to finding patterns and tailored follow-up. Here, the gathered information from the check-ins and prompts is not just tallied but translated into actionable insights. The youth minister can identify trends, spot potential red flags, and most importantly, offer highly personalized pastoral care based on these insights. This not only enhances the depth of individual relationships but creates a domino effect of trust and openness within the larger youth community.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- [ ] A smartphone with a texting plan
- [ ] A computer with Excel or Google Sheets
- [ ] The phone numbers of those in your group (gathered with appropriate permissions)

SET UP

Create a Spreadsheet

Open Excel or Google Sheets and create a new spreadsheet. Label the columns: 'Name', 'Date', 'Emoji Status', 'Color Code', 'Monday Prompt', 'Thursday Prompt'.

Text Introduction

Send an introductory text to your youth group members explaining the purpose of the activity and asking for their consent to participate.

Example:

"Hi all, this is [Youth Minister's Name]. I'd like to start a daily check-in via text to see how you're doing and connect on faith and life topics.We'll just try it out for four weeks. Are you in? 😋"

Consent and Add to Spreadsheet

As members agree, add their names to the 'Name' column in the spreadsheet.

1.INTENTIONS

Sacred Listening begins by recognizing that the interactions you are having with others are powerful, meaningful, and divine. Sacred Listening starts by setting a very intentional, respectful, and empathetic tone for the session that facilitates a deep and meaningful engagement.

01

ESTABLISH A SACRED SPACE

Set up the idea that we are all sacred. Send an introductory message to each person. Feel free to use your own words and tone, but here is an example:

Hello [Participant's Name]. As we begin our conversation today, I want to acknowledge that this time is sacred. You are sacred, and the space we are creating together—even though it's virtual—is sacred too. This time is dedicated to listening and supporting you as you navigate your emotions and your spiritual journey.

1.INTENTIONS

02

SET THE TONE

Make notes about the "Purpose" section that you want to share to set the tone and expectations for the activity. Clarity is kindness. Use your own words or what we've provided below.

Share the following about the activity, along with or instead of your notes about the Purpose:

Our purpose in connecting like this is to create a safe space where you can freely share how you're feeling, both emotionally and spiritually. Over the next four weeks, we'll be checking in daily using emojis to express how you're doing, and twice a week, we'll have a conversation based on some reflective questions. This is a judgment-free space, and everything you share will be respected and kept confidential.

- Clearly communicate the structure: daily emoji check-ins and twice-weekly reflective conversations.
- Set expectations for confidentiality, respect, and active listening.

1.INTENTIONS

03

ENGAGE THROUGH RITUALS

Since this is partially an independent activity, take the time to share with them ways to build daily ritual. Here are some scripts and action guides to build ritual together...over text message!

Part of building a strong emotional and spiritual foundation is creating regular practices that help you stay connected to yourself and your feelings. Over the next four weeks, I'd like to help you set up some simple rituals that can become part of your daily or weekly routine. These will include setting reminders, scheduling reflection time, practicing how to respond to your emotions, and developing a habit of self-reflection. Let's start by setting up some practical ways to help you check in with yourself regularly.

Set Reminders:
Script: "To help you stay on track, I suggest setting up daily reminders on your phone or calendar to check in with yourself. These can be simple alerts that remind you to pause and consider how you're feeling. This daily check-in can be as quick as sending me an emoji that reflects your mood or taking a moment to jot down a few thoughts."

Guide: Help them set up these reminders at a time that works best for them, whether it's first thing in the morning, during a lunch break, or just before bed.

Schedule Reflection Time:
Script: "In addition to daily check-ins, it's important to carve out some dedicated time each week for deeper reflection. Let's choose a couple of specific times each week where you can spend 10-15 minutes reflecting on how you've been feeling, what's been on your mind, and how your faith is influencing your emotions. During this time, you can answer some guided questions or simply write about whatever comes to mind."

Guide: Work with them to choose specific days and times for these reflection sessions. Encourage them to treat this time as a non-negotiable appointment with themselves.

1.INTENTIONS

03

ENGAGE THROUGH RITUALS

Practice Responding to Emotions:
Script: "As part of your daily check-ins and weekly reflections, it's helpful to practice responding to your emotions in a healthy way. For example, if you notice that you're feeling anxious, you might practice deep breathing or prayer. If you're feeling joyful, you might express gratitude. The idea is to start building a habit of acknowledging your feelings and responding to them intentionally."

Guide: Offer them a few simple techniques or practices they can use to respond to different emotions. These might include mindfulness exercises, journaling prompts, or short prayers/meditations.

Build a Habit of Self-Reflection:
Script: "Self-reflection is key to understanding yourself better and growing emotionally and spiritually. To help you with this, I'll provide a few 'How am I?' type questions that you can use during your reflection times. These questions are meant to guide you in exploring your thoughts and feelings more deeply."

Guide: Share the following questions, or create others that suit their needs:
"How am I feeling right now? What emotions are present?"
"What's been on my mind lately? Are there any recurring thoughts or worries?"
"How is my faith influencing my current emotional state? Where do I see God in my experiences?"
"What am I grateful for today? What has brought me joy?"
"What challenges have I faced recently, and how have I responded to them?"

Encouragement:
Script: "Remember, these rituals are here to support you. It's okay if you miss a check-in or if some days feel harder than others. The important thing is to keep coming back to these practices and giving yourself the space to reflect. Over time, you'll start to see patterns in your emotions and thoughts, and that awareness will help you grow stronger emotionally and spiritually."

2.ASK AND RECORD

01

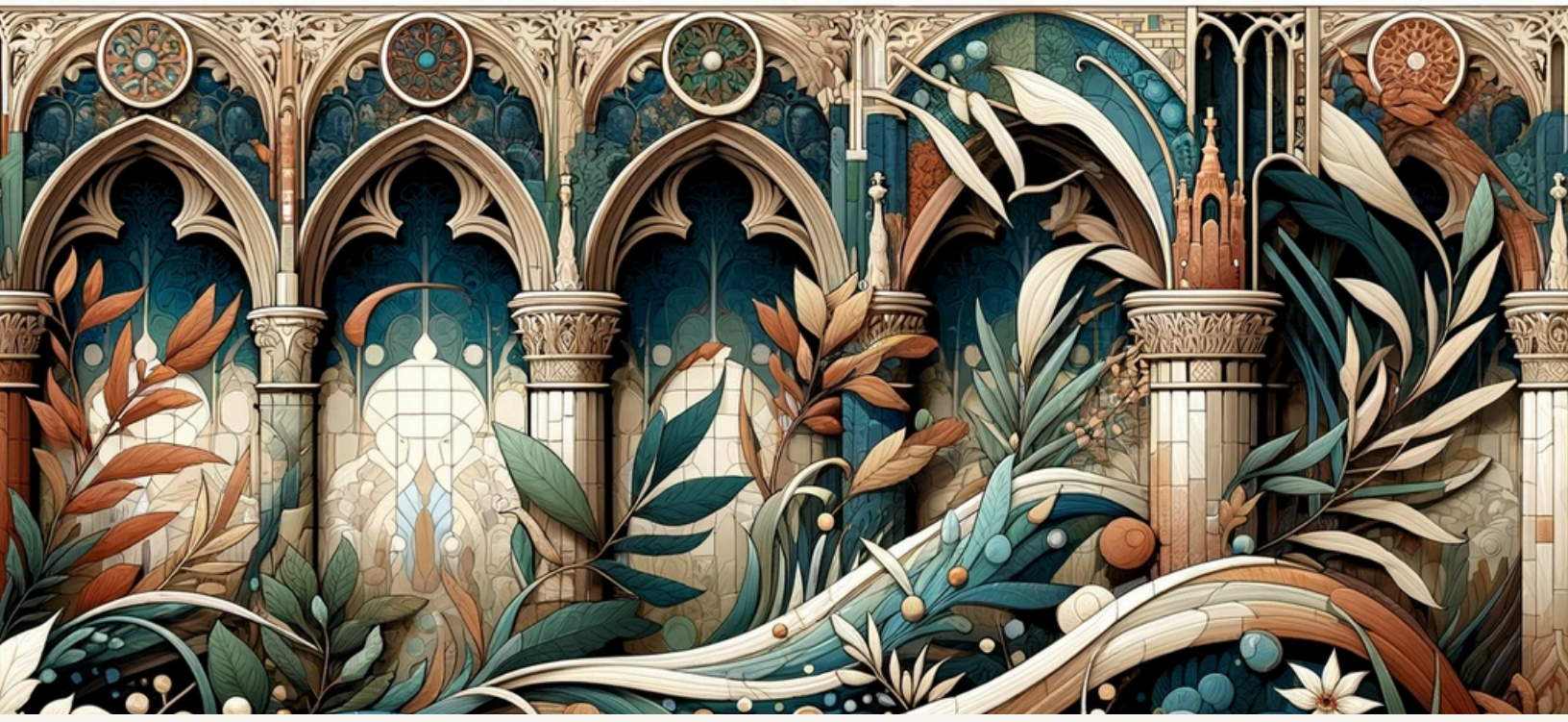
ALIGNMENT

Daily Text:

The daily emoji check-ins serve as the heartbeat of this four-week program, offering a quick but profoundly insightful glimpse into the emotional states of the youth involved. The purpose here isn't just to collect information; it's to open a window into the daily lives of young people, many of whom are navigating challenging emotional and spiritual terrains. In essence, these daily emoji check-ins are miniature acts of pastoral care, leveraging technology to maintain a caring presence in the lives of young people.

Twice Weekly Prompts (Mondays and Thursdays):

While the daily emoji check-ins offer a quick snapshot of emotional states, the twice-weekly prompts dive deeper, serving as pivotal moments for introspection and dialogue. This phase has a dual purpose: first, to open a space for more substantive conversation about faith, life experiences, and personal interests; and second, to enrich the data set with nuanced responses that go beyond the emotional shorthand of emojis. Through these prompts, the youth minister can better understand the spiritual and emotional dimensions that underlie the daily emojis, thus enhancing their capacity for empathetic and informed pastoral care.



2.ASK AND RECORD

02

ASK GREAT QUESTIONS

Daily Text Prompt (Days 2-28):
Each day, send out a text asking how they are doing. Try to choose a time that works in their schedule and that you both agree upon based on their rituals. Try different types of daily prompts to see what resonates with them and encourages response.

Example:
"Good morning! How are you feeling today? Reply with an emoji. Here's mine: 🌈."

Twice Weekly Prompts (Mondays and Thursdays):
Send Prompt:
In addition to the daily emoji, send out a prompt that can be answered in one or two words.

Examples:

"What's one thing you're grateful for today?"

"Name a moment you felt close to God this week."

"What's one word to describe your mood?"



2.ASK AND RECORD

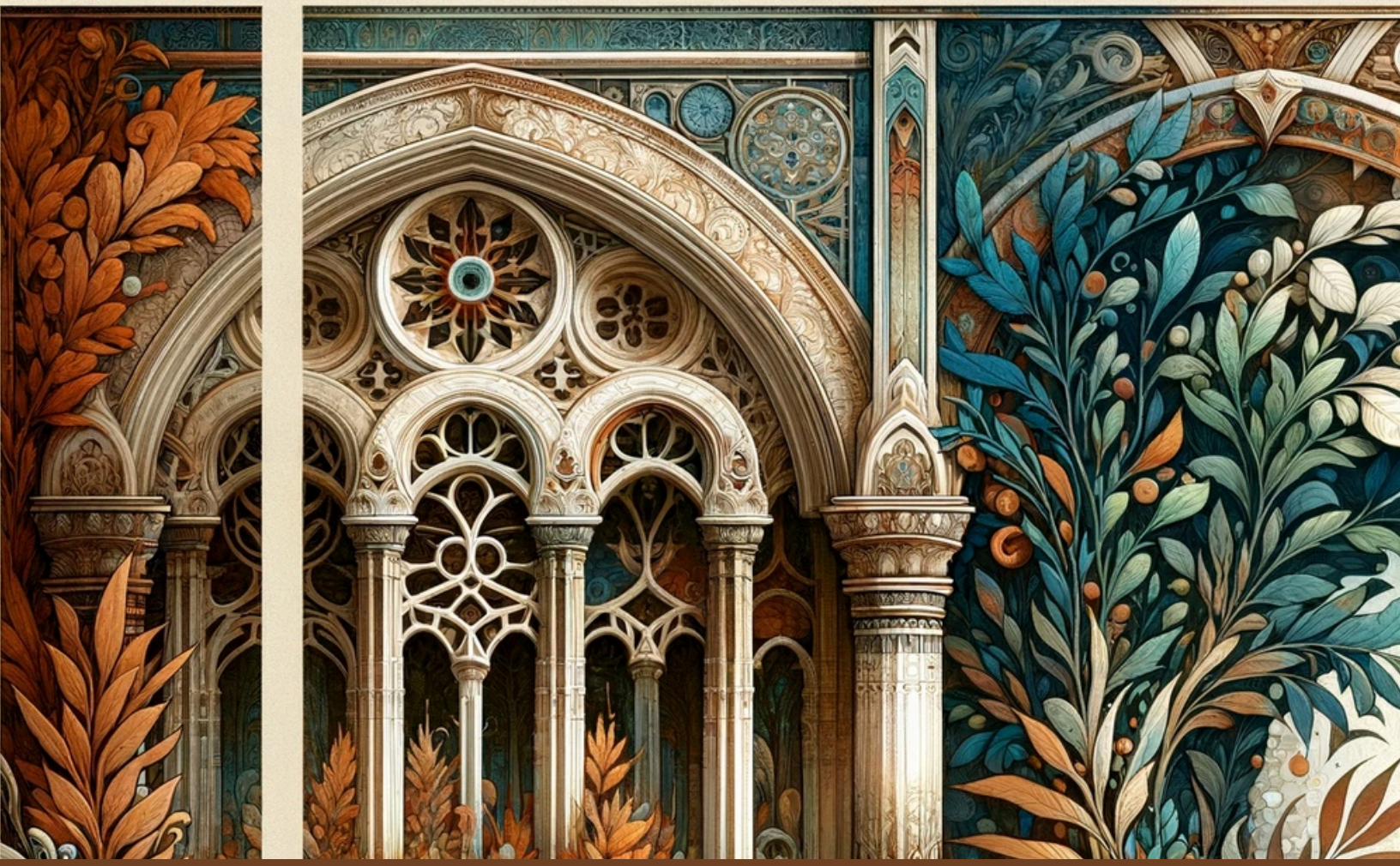
03

WRITE IT DOWN

Daily Emoji Check-ins (Days 2-28):
As you receive emojis, record them in the 'Emoji Status' column corresponding to each name and date. Make sure to record your own as well!

Color Coding:
Use conditional formatting to color code the 'Emoji Status' based on your pre-defined color scheme (Red for not good, Yellow for OK, Green for good, and Purple for Other).

Track Prompt Responses:
As answers come in, record them in the 'Monday Prompt' or 'Thursday Prompt' column corresponding to each name and date.



3.EXPLORE AND FOLLOW-UP

01

LOOK BACK AND LEARN

Review Spreadsheet: Examine the trends in emojis and responses to prompts. Note any patterns or shifts in mood or engagement.

Tailored Questions: Based on your analysis, follow up with more specific questions or support.

Examples:

"I noticed you've been feeling down recently. Anything you want to talk about?"

"You mentioned feeling close to God when volunteering. Want to join our next community service event?"

02

KEEP IN TOUCH

Establish a plan for ongoing check-ins, whether through regular text messages, phone calls, or another preferred method.

Script: "I really value the time we've spent together, and I want to make sure we continue to stay connected. I'll check in with you regularly to see how you're doing, and I'm always here if you want to talk. How would you like me to stay in touch—through messages, calls, or something else?"

Encourage the participant to reach out between scheduled conversations if they need support.



3.EXPLORE AND FOLLOW-UP

03

SPREAD THE WORD

The truest measure of this program's success lies not just in the data collected but in the authentic relationships fostered. For each green emoji or affirmative response to a spiritual prompt, there's a young person feeling a little less alone and a little more connected to their community and their faith.

Trusted relationships can be scaled so that you don't have to manage all of it alone. You can repurpose this activity with other groups and empower your participants to share their knowledge and teach the rituals.

Here are some ideas for supporting the young people in your life in ways that reach beyond you, but reflect and write down your own ideas below:

Peer-Led Small Groups:
Encourage participants to form small groups with peers in their schools, neighborhoods, or social circles. Provide them with a basic structure, including suggested check-in questions, reflection prompts, and ideas for group rituals.

Mentorship Programs:
Pair participants with members of the community or those going through similar challenges. Provide training or resources on how to be an effective mentor, focusing on listening skills and emotional support.

Community Support Networks:
Facilitate the creation of informal support networks where participants regularly check in with each other and others in the community. This could involve setting up a buddy system, where each person is responsible for reaching out to someone else regularly.



FOR YOU AND FOLLOW-UP

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR DOING SACRED LISTENING

Lean into the "Sacred"

- Mindset Shift: Remind yourself that every interaction is sacred. That person sitting across from you is a reflection of God, star stuff, divine energy…sacred.
- Understand Intentions: Most people don't take any time at all to breathe, center, be still, or even be present. Intention-setting by using a ritual, no matter how small, anchors you to the sacred being you're interacting with. A deep breath, a moving poem, a song, a candle; it's a symbol of their importance to you, and the significance of the moment.

How to Be Present When Listening

- Ground Yourself: Just as you set an intention for your time with others, make sure you do that for yourself. Before starting an activity, take a moment to center yourself. Deep breaths and a moment of silence can help you focus and be fully present.
- Maintain Eye Contact: Show your engagement and respect through eye contact but be mindful of cultural differences regarding direct eye contact.
- Body Language: Use open and relaxed body language to create a welcoming atmosphere.

Active Listening and Alignment

- Reflective Listening: Paraphrase what the speaker has said to show understanding and encourage them to expand on their thoughts.
- Ask Open-Ended Questions: Encourage deeper conversation with questions that require more than yes or no answers.
- Non-Verbal Cues: Nod, smile, and use other non-verbal affirmations to show that you are engaged.
- Ways of Sharing: Be very intentional about how you ask people to share. Offer options for communication to honor different styles and needs.

Listen More, Speak Less

- Respect Sacred Moments: Consider each person's story as sacred. Avoid interrupting, as you wouldn't disrupt a sacred moment.
- Practice Patience: Allow the speaker to finish their thoughts without rushing to respond.
- Don't Have Answers: You don't need to have answers, solutions, or even a response. "I don't know" is an acceptable thing to say. So is nothing at all.

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR DOING SACRED LISTENING

The Laws of Listening

- Listen First: Prioritize truly hearing the speaker's words and emotions before formulating your response.
- Listen Again: Reflect on what was said, confirming your understanding.
- Listen More: Continue to engage with the speaker's message, demonstrating ongoing interest and respect.

Prime Them to Share

- Preparation: Let participants know in advance that they will be sharing their stories. Give them time to prepare mentally and emotionally.
- Encouragement: Reassure them that their voice is valuable and appreciated. Make sure they know their words are safe with you.
- Transparency: Share your own stories that are relevant without taking up too much space. Be an open person.

Embrace Silence

- Silence is Sacred: Create an environment where silence is comfortable. It is a space for reflection and processing.
- Respect the Pause: Allow silences to exist naturally. If you respect and revere the silence, so will they.
- Make Silence and Normalize it: Be quiet so that silence happens, then emote positively, breathe again, and demonstrate that you're embracing it as a sacred moment. Just let it happen.

Pre-Write Prompts and Follow-Up Questions

- Be Prepared: Write prompts and follow-up questions to pull from in advance to ensure a smooth flow of conversation. You don't want to be formulating your next question while they're speaking.
- Adapt as Needed: Use these prepared questions as a guide but remain flexible based on the direction of the conversation.
- Open-Ended Questions: Use questions like "What has been on your mind lately?" or "Can you tell me more about that?"
- Follow-Up: Reflect back what you've heard and ask for more detail. Example: "That sounds challenging. How did you feel about it?"

TIPS AND TRICKS FOR DOING SACRED LISTENING

Handling Difficult Conversations

- Empathetic Responses: When someone shares something difficult, respond with empathy. Phrases like "Thank you for sharing that with me" or "I can't imagine how that feels" can be validating.
- Follow-Up Ideas: Ask gentle follow-up questions that allow the speaker to elaborate if they choose. "Can you tell me more about that experience?" or "How has that affected you?"

Flexibility

- Adaptability: Be okay with the session not going according to plan. Flexibility allows for genuine and meaningful interactions.
- Go with the Flow: Let the conversation naturally evolve, even if it deviates from the planned structure.
- Patterns: The patterns you discover in the information you collect will make sense to you. Let them emerge and be patient with yourself as they do. You'll see patterns in individuals and in groups.

Transparency and Trust

- Clear Communication: Explain why recording their words is beneficial, especially in spaces where trust may be an issue.
- Building Trust: Be honest about the purpose of the recordings and how they will be used to honor their stories.

> "Silence is essentially a surrender to the holiness of the divine mystery."
>
> – Sister Wendy

DIY SACRED LISTENING

As we started using the Sacred Listening tools in the field, we realized that it would be helpful for you to have a set of prompts and action steps to build your own version using activities that your group or community enjoys. This DIY guide helps you take your local knowledge and put it into our framework so you can use any activity to make connections, gather information, and scale relationships. We suggest following the steps of this guide with your group as a community building exercise!

Instructions: Use this template to create your own Sacred Listening activity for any interaction. It can be used for anything from building a full-scale activity to using the prompts to practice everyday engagement.

01

INTENTIONS

Objective: Recognize and establish the sacred nature of the interaction.

Establish a Sacred Space

Prompt: Begin by acknowledging that each person here is sacred. Remind each other that this space is sacred and free of judgment, where all ideas are welcome.
Action: Describe how you will create a sacred space (e.g., a moment of silence, a grounding exercise).

Set the Tone

Prompt: Clearly state the purpose and expectations for this interaction, emphasizing care and mutual respect.
Action: Write down your purpose and expectations for the session.

Engage Through Rituals

Prompt: Introduce a ritual that resonates with the group's cultural or spiritual preferences to deepen the sense of sacredness.
Action: Describe the ritual you will use (e.g., meditation, prayer, shared reading).

DIY SACRED LISTENING

02

ASK AND RECORD

Objective: Facilitate inclusive dialogue through genuine curiosity and active notetaking.

Alignment

Prompt: Pay attention to how individuals express their experiences. Note different engagement styles.

Action: Describe how you will observe and record these expressions.

A*sk Better Questions*

Prompt: Encourage open-ended, meaningful questions that invite deeper responses.

Action: List three to five open-ended questions you will ask (e.g., "What was a meaningful experience for you recently?").

Write it Down

Prompt: Show respect and attention by taking detailed notes.

Action: Decide who will take notes and how the notes will be recorded (e.g., notebook, digital document).

DIY SACRED LISTENING

03

EXPLORE AND FOLLOW-UP

Objective: Identify patterns and themes to deepen relationships and plan future engagements.

Look Back and Learn

Prompt: Review the notes to identify key themes and patterns. Discuss the big ideas and feelings that emerged.

Action: Describe how you will review and discuss the collected information.

Keep in Touch

Prompt: Plan follow-up meetings or check-ins to continue the conversation.

Action: Write down your plan for regular check-ins or follow-up meetings.

Spread the Word

Prompt: Think about ways to involve more people in these conversations and expand your circle.

Action: Describe how you will share your insights and engage more people (e.g., starting new groups, hosting events).

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

For the 4 weeks following your activity, check in with each person you connected with in a meaningful way. You can text them once a week and either ask them a personally crafted question based on something from your time together, or one of these directed questions. They should know you're thinking of them, and that you don't want anything from them. Note how they responded (or didn't). You don't have to track specific answers, but rather their receptiveness, openness, opportunities you have to adjust your messaging, etc.

Week 1: Have you connected with someone this week that means a lot to you?

Week 2: How many conversations have you had about faith, religion, spirituality, etc. this week?

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Week 3: How many times did you feel uncertain about talking to someone about faith, religion, spirituality, etc.?

Week 4: Who can you go to this week to have a conversation about faith, religion, spirituality, etc.?

YOUR REFLECTION

This page is for your own reflection and follow up notes. This is a great place to capture future questions, observe patterns, and be reflective of your own behaviors, biases, and feelings during this exercise.

Be honest with yourself. Where are the places that you are uniquely positioned to be a trusted person in your community? What is getting in your way? How can you listen better? What are the listening practices you need to develop?

THANK YOU!

We are honored that you are part of the Future of Faith community. We are committed to listening more deeply so that we can have better conversations, ask better questions, and tell better stories in our faith lives. Please visit our website for more exercises focused on different audiences and objectives. www.futureoffaith.org



FUTURE OF FAITH

Sacred Tools for Courageous Connection