

Session 8: Paying Attention and Responding to God (The 'How' of Discipleship 3)

Head

Heart

Hands

ATTENTIONAL

"Christians grow through being intentional over the thoughts, experiences and feelings that influence our character".

SUBMITTED

"Christians grow as we continue to choose to lay down our will for the sake of God's".

ACTIVATED

"Christians grow when we put into practice new ideas and teaching we gain, often from the invitation of others".

Session Aims

- To reflect on the importance of developing a day by day, moment by moment practice of seeking to pay attention to God and respond, as a key discipleship practice.
- To learn and practice a simple pattern of reflecting on the 'kairos moments' when we sense God is seeking to get our attention.
- To reflect on what using this method with others requires from us as enablers of discipleship.

Key Bible Passages

- Exodus 3.1-10 (Moses and the burning bush)
- Mark 1.15 (Jesus announces the Kingdom)
- Matthew 7.24-27 (the wise and foolish builders)

Summary of Session Content

- Continually seeking to pay attention to God and respond to God's prompting is key to everyday discipleship.
- This is not easy for us, as we live in a society full of distractions, where many other voices (some unhelpful) are trying to get our attention.
- 'Distraction is the curse of our age. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of efficient people, or busy people, but for *present* people' (Nathan Foster).
- We seek to 'pay attention and respond' to God because this is how Jesus lived: 'I tell you the truth, the Son of Man can do nothing by

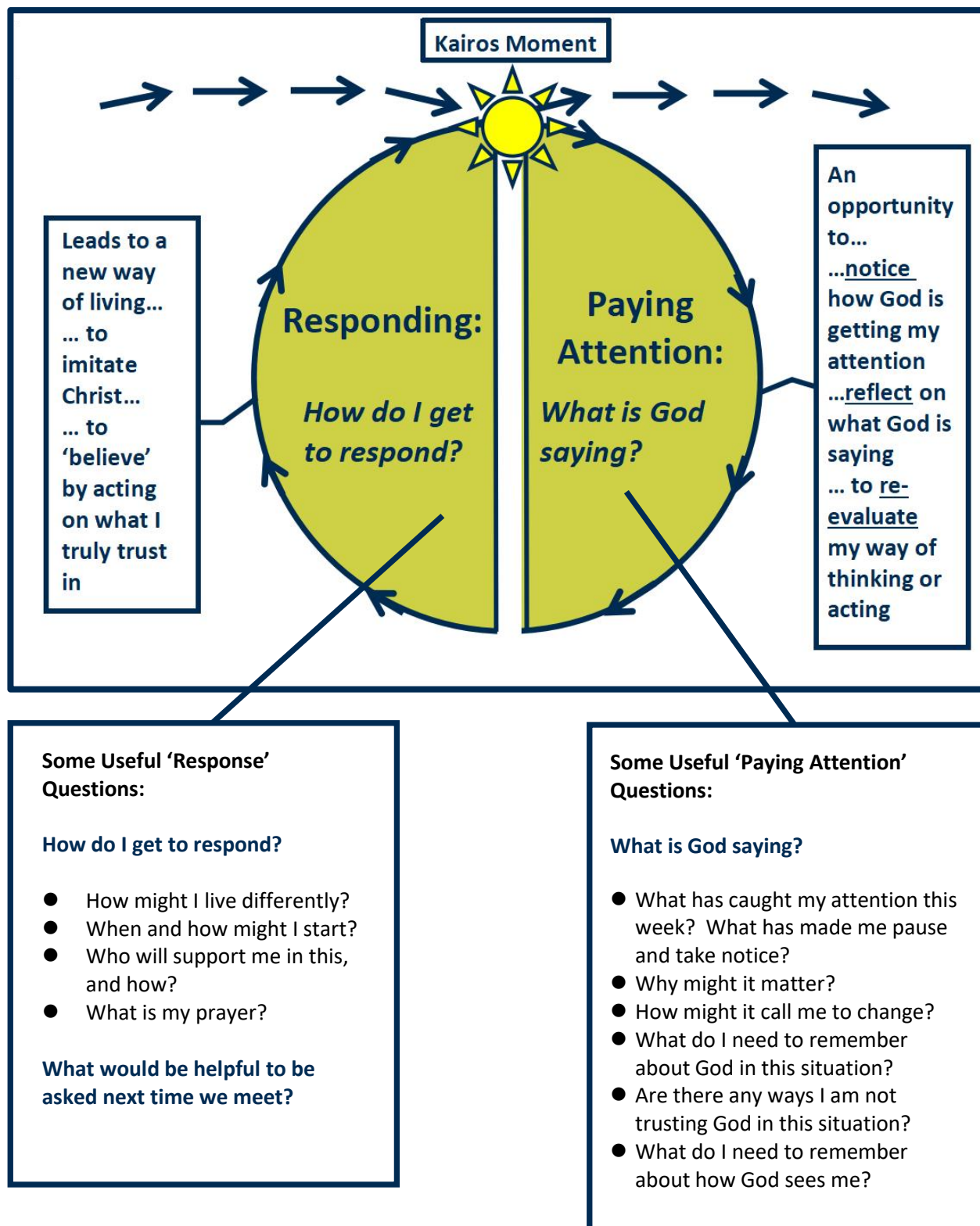
Space for your Notes...

himself; he can only do what he sees is Father doing' (John 5.19).

- Paying attention and responding to God is a group practice as well as an individual practice – the Greek word for 'church' (ekklesia) literally means we are a 'called out' body of people.
- This is not just for special occasions, but is a daily habit.
- Jesus announces the Kingdom by saying: 'The time has come! The Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!' (Mark 1.15).
- The Greek word for 'time' here is 'kairos' – meaning the right time, or a specific moment. As disciples we are looking for 'kairos moments' in our lives, which remind us of God, or through which God might be getting our attention.
- Kairos moments can be big or small – a major world event, or hearing a bird singing
- Paying attention is vital... but we also respond/obey – 'whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice' (Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders). This isn't just navel-gazing!
- Enabling discipleship involves a significant element of helping each other to 'pay attention and respond'. This requires us to be gentle, humble and patient with each other, discerning together rather than trying to squeeze other people's experience into our expectations.
- In all this we need to remember some widely-accepted wisdom on hearing God's voice:
 - God's voice and Scripture don't contradict
 - We can test out our listening with other Christians
 - We should apply our reason (all of us can get it wrong)
 - God is gentle with us – focus on the next step, not the big picture
 - Apply the 'fruitfulness' test – does it produce the fruit of the Spirit, build up the Church in love, and allow the Kingdom to break in?

Discipleship Tool/Practice

The following diagram¹ offers a simple method of paying attention and responding to God. It is based on both ancient Christian practices and more recent thinking on reflective practice. Work through the questions one by one, in the direction of the arrows.



¹ The diagram is based on various action-reflection cycles. The addition of the 'kairos' moment comes from the reflective cycle used in Breen and Kallestad, *Life Shapes*, 40.

Similar questions, written out in 'you' form, with space for notes

Paying Attention

What has caught your attention this week? What has made you pause and take notice?

What do you think is going on here? Why do you think it matters?

Might this be calling you to change? If so, what/how?

What's true of God in all of this?

How far would you say you are trusting God in this situation? In what ways?

What is it important to remember about how God sees you in this situation?

Responding to God

How might you live differently in response?

When and how might you start?

Who might support you in this, and how?

What is your prayer in this situation?

What would be helpful for me/us to ask you next time we meet?

Reflection questions on the Tool/Practice

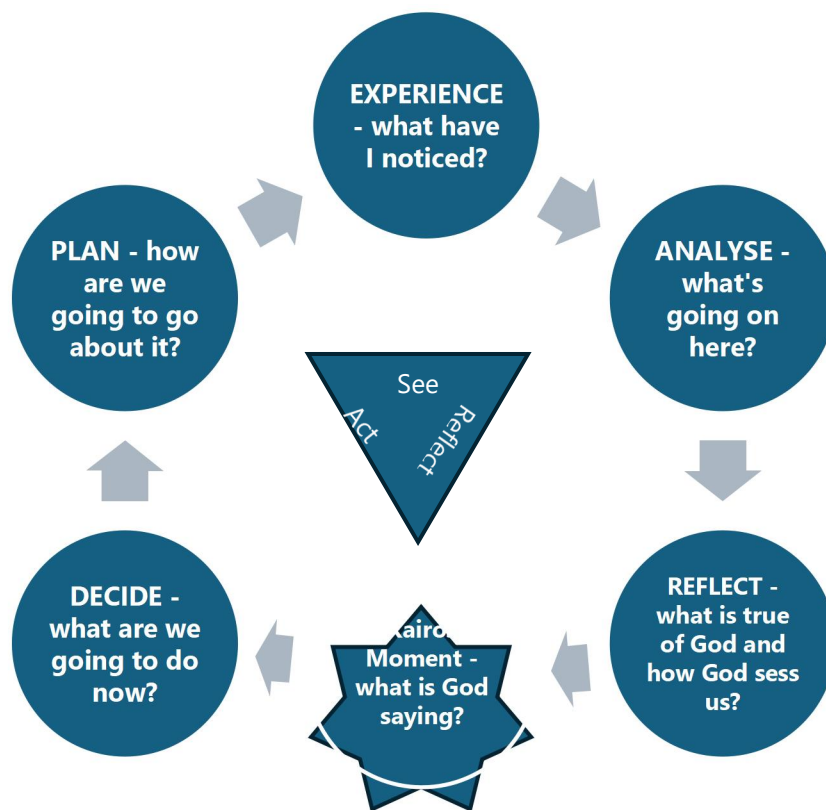
After you have practiced working through the reflective spiral, you can use these questions to help you reflect on your experience of using the 'paying and attention and responding' method:

- What was easier and harder about using the method?
- Do I find it easier to notice where God is getting my attention through reflecting on my own, or by conversation with others?
- What might help me to notice God in my everyday moments?
- Are there any of the questions on the diagram I would find it hard to ask? Why?
- How can I help others to grow in this attitude?
- What does that require of me, as a person/a listener/an enabler?

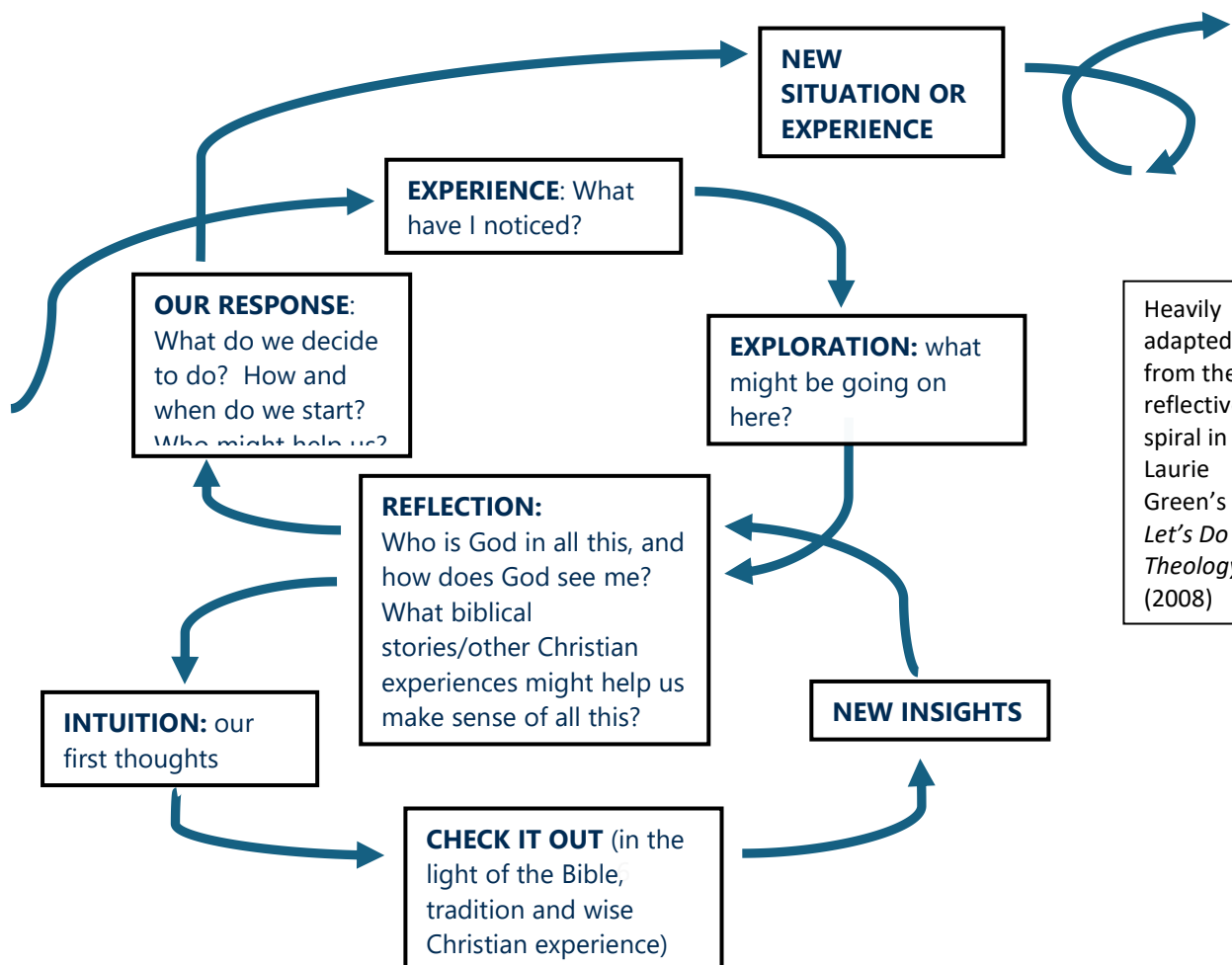
Enabling Tips:

- 'Paying attention and responding to God' involves developing some important habits:
 - Expectation that God might want to speak to us in the everyday
 - 'Wide margins' in our lives – i.e., time and space to pay attention
 - Learning to be still and keep turning our attention to God
 - Patience – we might need to start small and pay attention to simple things first
- When using the reflective spiral, ask all the questions in order. It might feel clunky at first but will become more natural.
- **Don't...**
 - Miss out the 'paying attention' side because you're desperate to problem-solve
 - Miss out the 'responding' stage and end up with a talking shop
 - Miss out the 'God' stage because it's awkward/unfamiliar
- **Do...** use this tool with gentleness – we're walking alongside people to help them hear and respond to God, not bullying them into our way of seeing things.

Two Alternative Versions



Adapted from an idea by Andrew Todd, (reproduced in Thompson, *Theological Reflection*, p.56) with new questions



Heavily adapted from the reflective spiral in Laurie Green's *Let's Do Theology* (2008)