

WEEKS OF GUIDED PRAYER

Prayer 'is less a matter of searching for God than of allowing oneself to be found by Him in all of life's situations.'

(Fr Peter Hans Kolvenbach SJ, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, 1983 – 2008)

Welcome to this **Week of Guided Prayer**.

This is an opportunity to discover or find again the value of prayer, to encounter the God who loves you and calls you, and perhaps to get help with a decision you need to make.

Have an expectant faith, though remember we cannot rush God. Be generous! If you are someone who is likely to leave prayer until the end of the day or turn up late for the meeting with your guide, acknowledge this and choose to make this week different. Do pray, and do please turn up on time. This experience will only be of value if you take it seriously. This is what we have found in our work with hundreds of people over the last few years. If you have every intention of praying and turning up on time, then be relaxed about the week.

You are committing to pray for at least 30 minutes each day. Make this a priority of the week. If the prayer is interrupted, see if you can find another half hour to try again. Your prayer guide will help you with suggestions. To make space for the prayer you may need to let something else go.

Do not worry if it feels like you have very little to report. Sometimes prayer seems to go well and sometimes not. Whatever happens or does not happen in the prayer you might take some notes afterwards and bring these to your meeting with the prayer guide. All your conversations will be held in confidence. In your first meeting your guide may well invite you to talk about yourself and what prayer is like for you at the moment.

You will meet your guide for up to 30 minutes, probably four or five times this week. Please turn up on time as a courtesy to your guide who will be waiting for you and so that you get

the full 30 minutes if needed.

Some pointers

- ◆ Plan your day. When will you pray, work, exercise, rest?
- ◆ Begin prayer by pausing for a minute to notice how God is looking at you.
- ◆ What do you desire from this prayer? Let God know.
- ◆ End your prayer by speaking with God as one friend speaks with another.
- ◆ Take a few minutes after the prayer to make some notes about what happened.

We strongly recommend that you come to the workshops and closing meeting if you are able. Don't worry if you can't.



Through our smallest words and actions Christ shows out His love to other people. (T-00651-OL)

A PRAYER TO BEGIN

In the busyness of this day
Grant me a stillness of seeing, O God
In the conflicting voices of my heart
Grant me a calmness of hearing
Let my seeing and my hearing
My words and my actions
Be rooted in a silent certainty of your presence
Let my passions for life
And the longings for justice that stir within me
Be grounded in the experience of your stillness
Let my life be rooted in the ground of your peace, O God
Let me be rooted in the depth of your peace



If we surrender ourselves to God's will in prayer and in our daily lives, the Holy Spirit will transform us and make us holy.
(T-02153-CW)

Visit the Spirituality website: pathwaystogod.org

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ENTERING INTO RETREAT

Come Away and Rest Awhile

It takes time to enter into a retreat. Time to begin to allow yourself to feel at home in a new routine. Time to adjust to the change of pace. Time to let your deeper hopes and desires come to the surface. Time to meet God in this place now.

The good news is that there is all the time in the world available. Even on the shortest of retreats, there is time enough to relax and let God do everything that God wants to do. So don't rush, but enter into the retreat asking God for the gift of wholehearted confidence and trust in God's care, especially during these days.

The rest of this prayer sheet offers a number of suggestions that might help you during the beginning of this retreat. Use whatever you find helpful, and leave aside anything that doesn't appeal to you at the moment.

Taking Stock

I take time to ask God to show me the 'me' that I am bringing into this retreat. How am I? How is my relationship with God at the moment? Who is God for me? How do I pray? How would I like to pray? What have been my high and low points recently?

Am I coming into this retreat with worries and concerns? I ask God to help me to recognise and name them so that they can be offered for His light to be shed on them.

Scripture Texts

You might find it helpful to use a passage of scripture to move you into the prayer of the retreat. However, all that is outlined above still applies. Take it slowly, and choose no more than one of the passages below for your prayerful reflection until the next meeting with your guide. Pick whichever first catches your attention – it doesn't matter if it is very familiar, or if it's a passage which is new to you.



Suggestions for Prayer

The Love of God: based on Isaiah 43:1-5

Thus says the Lord, who created and formed you ... Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, you are mine. Should you pass through the sea, I will be with you ... Should you walk through fire, you will not be scorched ... I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your saviour ... you are precious in my eyes, you are honoured and I love you ... Do not be afraid, for I am with you.

Matthew 11:28-30

'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

(Message translation) ²⁸⁻³⁰ 'Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.'

Psalms 139

Lord, you search me and know me,
You know if I am standing or sitting,
You read my thoughts from far away,
Whether I walk or lie down, you are watching,
You know everything about me.
If I climb the heavens, you are there,
There too, if I lie in the depths.
If I fly to the point of sunrise,
Or west across the sea,
Your hand would still be guiding me,
Your right hand holding me.

Other prayer possibilities before your first meeting with your guide:

Prayer walk

Take a walk.

Walk quite slowly, stopping whenever something catches your attention.

Notice how Creation looks, sounds, smells, feels.

There might be a conversation with the Creator or with Jesus as you go.

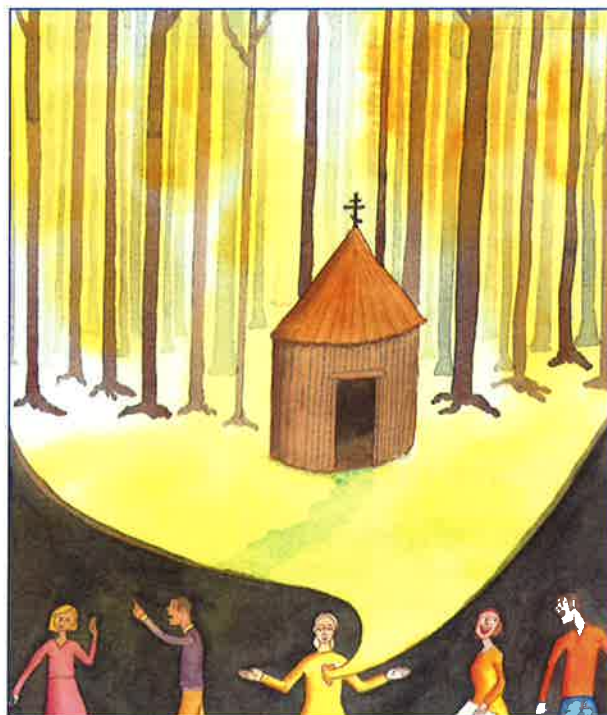
You might be connecting with God without the need for words.

It's possible!

Or pray in your usual way.

And, when you conclude your time of prayer, take a moment or two to check gently with God and with yourself as to how it went.

It is important to find time for silence and prayer, even in a busy life. If life is so hectic that it seems impossible, we should make a solitary place of our very own hearts. My heart can be, for me, a little 'poustinia', as Russians have called a prayer-hut; and I can meet Christ there, at peace with Him, no matter how many busy people rush around. (T-14651-CW)



STEPPING STONES

AN IGNATIAN PATTERN OF PRAYER

- ♦ Preparation – decide where and for how long you will pray. Read the passage (where relevant) and then, when you're ready, go to the place of prayer.
- ♦ God is looking at you with love – before taking up your prayer posture, pause, remembering that God is already there, is delighted that you have come and is looking at you with love. Stay for a minute noticing how God is looking at you.
- ♦ Become still – take up the prayer position of your choice and become still, noticing how you breathe in and how you breathe out. Don't try to change it, just notice it. If you start to think of other things, don't worry – simply come back to noticing your breathing again: each breath filling you with God's life and love.
- ♦ Offering – make a very slow sign of the Cross and offer this time of prayer to God. God is the one in charge of your prayer; God is the one who leads. Ask God to guide your prayer that this time of prayer may be to the service and praise of God.
- ♦ The Grace – God wants to give us everything that is good. We can tell God that we want this too. As we start to pray, we can imagine God asking us, 'What is it that you want? What would you like me to do for you?' And we can tell God what is in our hearts.
- ♦ Prayer – now start the prayer you have chosen – maybe imagining being in a Gospel story or trying one of the other ways of praying.
- ♦ Speak – with, and listen to God, as one friend would speak with and listen to another: heart to heart.
- ♦ Finish – bring your prayer together, and in the light of what has happened, make a simple prayer from your heart to God, speaking in your own words. Say an 'Our Father' or 'Glory be'.
- ♦ Make a slow sign of the Cross – leave the place where you have been praying, thanking God for the time He has been with you.



Looking Forward

It is a good idea to have a little break before writing a few notes about what happened in the prayer. You might keep a journal. What did I ask God to do for me in this prayer? What seemed to take me towards God? Was there anything that was difficult? Is there anything that it might be good to look at again?

INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS WITH YOUR PRAYER GUIDE

- ◆ There are 30 minutes available but stay only as long as you need.
- ◆ Share only what you want to share, but be open and generous; trusting.
- ◆ These meetings are not counselling or therapy. The focus is on God.
Talk about how you got on when you prayed – sometimes nothing happens.
That is fine – be honest. You will then get further help to pray.
- ◆ The guides are people like you who know what it is to have ups and downs.
- ◆ What else happened in the course of the day/night which struck you?



Prayer with Christ is glorious and effective, but without Him it is like calling out into the dark. (T-01363-OL)

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REVIEWING YOUR PRAYER

Happy the Eyes that See What You See ...

At the end of a period of prayer, it is useful to take a few moments to look back over the time and reflect upon what happened. This is not meant to lead to a judgement that the prayer was 'good' or 'bad'. It is, rather, to come to a deeper appreciation of what went on between God and me as I prayed, and to notice things in the prayer that I might want to return to the next time I come to pray. The following outline may help this review process.



When you have come to the end of a time of prayer, do something to mark the transition from prayer itself to the review. Stand up and move to another part of the room; go outside for a few minutes' breather; make a hot drink. Then come back and allow yourself five or ten minutes to look back over the prayer you have just done.

First ask God to bring to your mind and heart what it would be useful for you to notice in this review. Then recall how you had entered into the prayer. Were you using scripture, or stillness, or praying spontaneously, or some other method?

What were you hoping for in this time of prayer? Did you enter into it asking God for anything, and if so, what?

How did the prayer go? Was it easy or hard to stay with it today? Were you fully involved, or more like a spectator, bored or engaged?

Notice above all what was at the centre of the prayer for yourself on this occasion. Where did you experience life, or light, or energy, where did God seem close? Is there a word, phrase, or image, which captures something of this central point for you?

Were there times or areas in the prayer that you reacted against, which seemed to turn you away from God, or drain that same light, or life, or energy?

If the prayer led you into any sort of conversation with God, what did you say? How did God respond? With a word, a look, a gesture ...

Lastly, do you have any sense of 'unfinished business' in this time of prayer? Is there anything that you might want to come back to on another occasion?

It can be very helpful to keep a notebook in which you jot down a few reminders from this time of review.



Moses and the burning bush. (R-60039-CW-V2)

KEEPING A REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

There are many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe ...

(John 20:30–31)



Keeping a reflective prayer journal can be a great aid towards growth in the spiritual life. Over time it offers a record of experiences that you have had, and what you and God have made of them as they happened. This means that looking back it becomes easier to see how and where you have changed, in outlook or in patterns of behaviour. Such changes are often so slow and almost imperceptible that they can easily go unnoticed.

It is good to notice what such a journal is not. It is not simply a diary, recording in more or less detail the events of each day. It is not a list of things to do, or of tasks accomplished. Nor is it a record of the books you've read, the films you've watched, or the insights that have occurred to you. Yet it may contain elements of all of these.

One way of understanding what to record in such a journal is to ask yourself: 'What has stirred me up, has moved me, over the period that I am considering?' This puts you in touch with what Ignatius Loyola would call 'movements of spirits', and which he saw as being indicators of God at work in a person's life. What has moved you might be a conversation you have had; a book that you've read; a situation that you have encountered; a piece of work that you have done; etc. The journal offers you a chance to explore in more detail, with God, what the happening meant to you. It helps to avoid the feeling that T.S. Eliot notes: 'We had the experience, but missed the meaning'.

Some questions that might help you begin to journal:

- ♦ What was the experience that moved you?
- ♦ What went on in you as it was happening?
- ♦ What feelings, emotions, or memories did it evoke?
- ♦ What stays with you now, as you write, from the experience?
- ♦ Is there anything that God might be showing you in all this?

There are also separate exercises, or techniques, that you might want to incorporate into a journal of this kind. Examples would be:

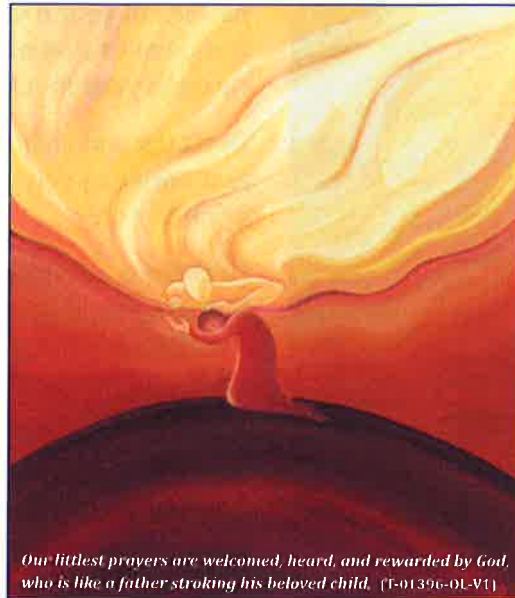
- ♦ Keeping a record of your times of formal prayer
- ♦ Constructing an imaginary dialogue with God, or with someone important to you
- ♦ Working through a question facing you, or a situation challenging you
- ♦ Exploring further a significant experience from your past, in the light of where you now find yourself

A key value in all of this is that you end up with a concrete record 'out there', something tangible that you can repeatedly return to.

STILLNESS EXERCISES

Like a Child at Rest

One of the things that frequently gets in the way of prayer is a lack of quiet and stillness, inside and outside of myself. I can perhaps do something about the outside noise: choose a quiet place, switch the phone off, pick a time when I am less likely to be disturbed. But what of interior stillness and silence? How do I stop my mind racing off in a dozen different directions, throwing up all sorts of



Our littlest prayers are welcomed, heard, and rewarded by God, who is like a father stroking his beloved child. (T-01396-OL-V1)

distractions which come between me and God?

Taking a few minutes to try one or other of these stillness exercises as I start my prayer can be very helpful in this regard. Sometimes this may be a preparation for another kind of prayer. At other times, simply entering into a companionable silence with God may be all the prayer I want and need.

Awareness of My Body

Start by sitting in a relaxed position, with your back straight, feet side by side on the floor, and your hands resting gently on your lap.



God the Father loves each one of us with a passionate love, and holds us in His tender embrace. (T-02693-BW-V3)

Concentrate for a moment on becoming aware of the feel of your feet as they press against the floor. Notice the feel of the ground beneath them, any constriction of your footwear, the feel of your individual toes – you might need to wiggle them a little to do this!

Now let that point of awareness travel up into your lower legs. Flex the muscles, and be aware of how this part of your body feels. Let any tension you find there relax and flow away.

Let that point of awareness move slowly round your body, gently travelling from one part to the part next to it. Notice the feeling in each place, and let any tension ebb away before moving on.

When your point of awareness has reached your head and face, and spent some time there, let it return to your feet, and slowly make the same journey again, releasing any tension initially overlooked, or that has built up since you last focused there.

When this process feels as if it has reached a natural conclusion, let that point of awareness come to rest somewhere at the centre of yourself, and remain there quietly.

Awareness of Sounds



As in the other exercises, start by sitting in a relaxed position, with your back straight, feet side by side on the floor, and your hands resting gently on your lap.

Take a few moments to focus on any sounds you can hear outside the room where you are sitting. Try to identify each, and for a moment or two focus on that one alone.

Without trying to block out those sounds (let them be!) let your attention move inwards, to any sounds you can hear within the room where you are – the ticking of a clock, the hum of electrical appliances, etc. For a few moments, let your whole attention be on these sounds.

Again, without blocking these out, let your point of attention take another step inwards, and be aware of all the 'noise' going on within yourself. This may be physical (the sound of your own breathing), or may be an awareness of the rush of thoughts and feelings passing through your heart and mind.

Finally, take one further step inwards, and let your awareness come to rest in some quiet, still place and the centre of yourself. Rest there in the quiet for as long as seems good to you.

Awareness of My Breathing

As in the last exercise, start by sitting in a relaxed position, with your back straight, feet side by side on the floor, and your hands resting gently on your lap.

Slowly let yourself become aware of the pattern of your own breathing. Notice whether it is deep or shallow, regular or irregular, through your mouth or your nose or both.

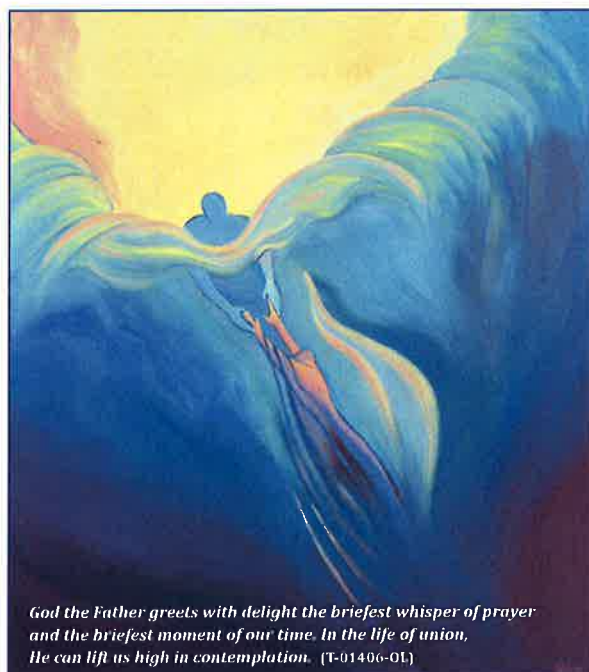
Don't try and change or control your breathing. Just notice as you breathe in, and as you breathe out.

(If there is anything in this experience that bothers you, if your breath starts coming too fast, for example, gently leave this exercise aside and move to one of the other stillness exercises.)

You may want simply to rest in the quietness that this awareness of breathing leads to. If, however, you want this exercise to develop into more explicit prayer, the following ideas may help:

As you breathe in, feel yourself drawing God's life-giving Spirit deep inside yourself, so that the Spirit fills the whole of your being.

As you breathe out, release anything that would tend to separate you from God, or get in the way between yourself and God.



RECALLING YOUR FAITH JOURNEY

I Am With You Always

This prayer-exercise invites you to look back over your life journey in order to let God enable you to recognise more clearly the ways in which God has been with you at all the different moments.

First take some time to become still and quiet, using an awareness exercise or any other way into prayer that you know from experience works well for you.

Then ask God to awaken in you, during this period of prayer, the gift of remembering; bring to mind in you whatever it would be good for you to notice.

Now simply let the 'landscape' of your life unfold before your mind's eye, and let your attention roam where it will within that landscape.

The following questions may help you in your reflection:

Where, in your life's journey so far, have the special moments been; the milestones and



When Our Lady greeted Elizabeth at the Visitation, they praised God for His love. Our Lady held in mind the whole world which Her Son wished to help.
(T-01714-OL)

the mountain tops (events, people, places ...)?

What gifts was God giving you in these times?

What about the valleys and the deserts – times of darkness, pain, or confusion? Where is the Lord in these? Where has God seemed absent?

Where have you come to crossroads, rivers to cross, a choice of paths – places of decision or crisis? How has God guided you in these times?

Draw a 'map' of your journey, in whatever way you like. You might want to use a picture, or words, or symbols – make use of whatever is most meaningful to you.

Spend some time sharing your memories and your map with God – let the Spirit lead you here. What does God want to show you?

Finally, as you stand again in the present moment, what might you need to ask God for to help you move forward on your journey?

In the wilderness, too, you saw him: how the Lord carried you, as a man carries his child, all along the road you travelled on the way to this place (...) your God, who has gone in front of you on the journey, by night in the fire to light your path, by day in the cloud.

(Deuteronomy 1:31–32)

MY BLESSED HISTORY



Christ walks amongst his people, with the pilgrims and the sick ones, a child on His shoulders. (T-01327-OL)

The purpose of this prayer-exercise is to look over my life, with God, recognising God's providential love and care for me from when I first existed. My own story, made up of so many diverse experiences, becomes blessed when, after sufficient remembering and listening with the heart to the mystery of these various experiences, I discover again God present and working with me through it all.

- ◆ Where have I experienced God in my life?
- ◆ When and where in my history have I felt God with me?
- ◆ Who are the people in my life who have mirrored God, in whom I have seen the face of God?
- ◆ Are there special places in my life where I have felt near to God?

(If you are spending a number of prayer sessions with this exercise, you might like to divide your life into sections, taking a different period of your life for each session.)

Prepare as usual: considering how you are with God at this time, what sort of mood you are in, beginning to think about this time of prayer.

Prayer

Spend time becoming still:

Ask for the guidance of the Spirit in your prayer ...

I ask for a deepening awareness of God's personal love for me and gratitude for God's care for me throughout my life.

Taking the different times of your life, slowly let your mind and heart move through those times, becoming more attuned to the presence of God throughout your life.

Let one memory touch off another

The following random headings may help to spark your prayer of remembering.

*friends relations school parents
buildings places teachers health gifts
holidays jobs responsibilities falling
in love talents struggles sacraments
experiences of church decisions
communities*

As you remember, be aware of any gratitude that you feel and take the time to give thanks to God for his many gifts to you, and his presence in your life.

If negative memories and feelings arise, acknowledge them as part of who you are, but then hand them over to God, who knows you better than you know yourself. Allow God to be free to shed light on these shadowy memories in God's own time.

Bring your prayer to a close and spend time reviewing the prayer and making notes.

You may like to express something of your life story using symbols, diagrams or art materials, or in some other way.

A PRAYER OF TAKING STOCK

Lord, You Search Me and You Know Me ...

In the course of this prayer, I jot down the 'vital statistics' of my life. As I note each piece of information, I raise my mind and heart to God my maker, and praise and thank the Creator for this detail in my life history and in myself. Note that God chose that I should come to be in a particular place and time, with particular parents and nationality, and all the rest. Am I content with God's choices for me?

To begin with, I write down my parents' names, and (if I know them) their birth places and dates of birth. I note my own birthday, where I was born, and any significant medical details. I note my gender, nationality or ethnic group, hair and eye colour, and my physical build. I note also my brothers and sisters – names, birthdays, significant details; and I note my extended family of uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces. I note the places and addresses I lived at before I was seven years' old. All this, God chose for me; for all this, I praise and thank God.



God the Father loves us as His children with a tender and unfailing love. (1-02550-01)

Then I note down half-a-dozen personal characteristics and qualities that were bred into me before I had a choice. Self-assurance or anxiety, intelligence, the language(s) I speak, habits of work and leisure, the activities I take pleasure in, even my sexual orientation. I note at the same time half-a-dozen characteristics and qualities that I have inherited from my parents and my extended family, those that I like and perhaps some too that I would just as soon not have. All this, too, God chose for me within the human family; for all this, I praise and thank God.

If I have time, I go on to note down five or six personal qualities in myself that I particularly like. Perhaps I am quiet, or outgoing, and I like that about myself. Perhaps I am very thorough, or sensitive to others' feelings, or truthful. Perhaps I have lots of energy, or accomplish a great deal. I note down these qualities and acknowledge them as gifts from the One who makes me. All this, too, God chose for me within the human family; for all this, I praise and thank God.

Finally, if I still have time, I go on to note down five or six personal qualities in myself that I do not particularly like. Perhaps I feel that I am too tall or short, or cannot shake off an ugly attitude. Perhaps I have a negative image of myself. Or find it too easy to dislike other people. I note down these qualities and acknowledge them as gifts from the One who makes me. All this, too, God chose for me within the human family; for all this, I praise and thank God.

Whenever my time is up, I recite Psalm 139. But I remember that God did not finish making me once, long ago, when I was conceived or born. I remember that God continues making me and has hopes for me and desires that I keep growing in love until I love as completely as God loves.

(Adapted from Choosing Christ in the World by Joseph Tetlow SJ)

THE HEALING OF MEMORIES

Did Not Our Hearts Burn Within Us?

Sometimes the memories of old hurts, of injuries done to me in the past, can surface when I come before God in prayer. Perhaps I find myself still full of resentment for events that occurred years or even decades ago. Maybe I recognise that I am unable to forgive another person, even if part of me would like to.

The following prayer-exercise has been found helpful in these kinds of situation. However, as with all such exercises, it is important not to force it. If I am asking to be able to forgive, or for healing, I can be sure that God will respond when the time is right. Is now the right time? Try this exercise gently, and see what happens.



Relax in whatever way you know helps you (e.g. recognising the sensations in your body; listening to sounds around you; awareness of your breathing).

Allow yourself to become aware of some memory that is still painful for you, and / or some person you tend to hold responsible.

In imagination see yourself with the person who you feel is the cause of the pain, anger, hurt or resentment. Take time to picture him

or her in a situation that would be familiar to you both.

When you are ready (without forcing anything) say everything you want to say to that person. Don't deny or censor any feelings you have ... or balk at strong language!

Go on until you have said all that you can and want to.

Listen to anything the other person might say to you.

Then let Jesus come into the place where you are together – talk to him about what you are feeling – listen to him as he speaks to you – to the other person – see him with them – speak to him from the heart – stay with this in any way that seems helpful.

However you are feeling at the end of the prayer time, and whatever has happened, take time to 'say it as it is' as you reflect on what has happened.

Healing is a gradual process; you may want to return to this prayer on other occasions.

Some people find it useful to write out this prayer as a dialogue, or to use art work while following the exercise.

*(Adapted from Sadhana – A Way to God
by Anthony de Mello SJ)*

LECTIO DIVINA – LISTENING WITH THE HEART

Your Word is a Light for My Steps

Lectio Divina (Latin for godly reading) is a simple yet profound method of prayer found in many traditions of Christian spirituality. Sometimes it is called 'meditative reading' or 'spiritual reading', but could perhaps better be described as praying with a listening heart. The 'lectio' of Lectio Divina is a listening with the heart, as you tend to do quite naturally when you are struck by the beauty of a sunset, as you are mulling over a treasured memory, or as you pay attention to someone you love.

In praying this way you hear a scripture passage or other sacred text and you let God guide your heart. You read slowly, with pauses, and relish or drink in the words you are hearing. A natural process takes place: heartfelt listening moves naturally into a deep reflection upon the words and the silences between them; and that deep reflection leads you to some kind of heartfelt response. You find yourself speaking from the heart to the God who has spoken to you.

Let the ease and rhythm of this approach to prayer carry you deeper into God.



Jesus Christ is revealed to us through His holy Word, whenever we read the Scriptures or hear them proclaimed at Mass. Through Him we come to know the Father. (T-07136A-CW-V2)

Beginning

Choose your scripture passage and become comfortable with it. Read it over a few times to get past any questions that arise about meaning. Invite God to speak to you through the text. Ask for openness. Let yourself settle into an expectant stillness.

This kind of prayer has three 'phases' that you move between as you feel drawn: lectio (reading), meditatio (meditation) and oratio (prayer).

Lectio

Read slowly and gently, listening with your heart to the words. There is no need to rush. No need to get to the end of the passage. When a particular word or phrase strikes you and seems to have some savour, linger with it ...

Meditatio

... let it into you. Pause with it. Let the word or phrase resonate. Repeat it to yourself, relish it, let it echo and soak into you until the 'flavour' begins to go, then ...

Oratio

... let yourself respond in prayer, in words from the heart, or a space full of silence, or spontaneous, unspoken feeling. Whenever the moment feels ripe, begin to read again ...

Ending

When you are ready, mark the end of your time of prayer with some closing gesture or words of prayer. Afterwards you might want to make a note of anything that seemed significant.

PRAYING SCRIPTURE WITH THE IMAGINATION

God often seems to speak to people in prayer through the imagination. This can move beyond what I feel I ought to say and think in God's presence and what I think the correct ideas ought to be. Instead the imagination helps me to understand what it is I really want from God, what it is God is calling me to or what it is that God is offering me at this moment in my life.

'But,' many people say, 'I have no imagination.' They tend to mean they don't have the kind of imagination that comes up with vivid, technicolour images. But imagination works in different ways for different people. Some see images with the detail of a film director. Others get a sense of the 'feel' of a place, without picturing it in the same way. Others again will build up a mental scene detail by detail.

Everyone has imagination! Take a moment now to get a sense of a place you are fond of, or a person you love. The power that enables you to know what that feels like is the imagination. And the following exercise can help you to use that same power in prayer.

This prayer works well with any gospel or Old Testament scene where there is action taking place (so don't choose passages that are simply teaching or poetry). One or two examples of suitable passages are given below.

Take a few moments to become still and quiet, and invite God to work through your imagination as you pray with the passage. Ask God for what you want, perhaps 'To know you more clearly, love you more dearly, follow you more nearly'.



Read through the text two or three times until you are thoroughly familiar with the story. Then let the scene gradually build up in your mind's eye. Take your time, see everything that is around, hear, feel, taste, and smell.

Where are you? Take your own place in the unfolding scene. You may start as a bystander, or one of the central characters, or simply enter into the action as yourself.

Let yourself be drawn naturally into conversation with Jesus or another participant. Stay in the scene for as long as you have chosen to, and then draw the prayer to a close.

Some passages suitable for imaginative prayer

Matthew 14:22-33

Mark 10:46-52

Luke 5:1-11

John 13:1-17

Exodus 3:1-6

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Peter walks on the water

The cure of Bartimaeus

Call of four disciples

Jesus washes the disciples' feet

Moses and the burning bush

The call of Samuel

PRAYING WITH ART

Perhaps the time has come when we learn to play with God as well as pray to God and in our play, true prayer will emerge.

(Matthew Fox)

Our Artwork

Praying with art can show us how we really feel. We meet the quiet depths of ourselves. It can reveal the gaps in our story, the untoldness of it and what we have been unable to express.

Preparation

Allow yourself to be drawn into this experience with a trusting heart. Choose your art materials and go to the place where you will pray. Allow yourself to settle. Imagine your whole self arriving. Offer the whole of yourself, all of this time, to God's service and praise.

What are you most aware of at this moment? Which feeling – which thought, which experience – is most with you? Today, allow the colours, the lines, the shapes, the dark and the light of your prayer to come to your awareness. Let them arise in your imagination. Allow yourself to stay in a receptive attitude and let God visit you. Let your whole self speak with God, through the art materials.

It is the creative potential itself in human beings that is the image of God.

(Mary Daly)



My love for art is for me a way of loving God. It even seems that art can expose parts of the self I was not aware of, so there is more of me laid bare for God to possess.

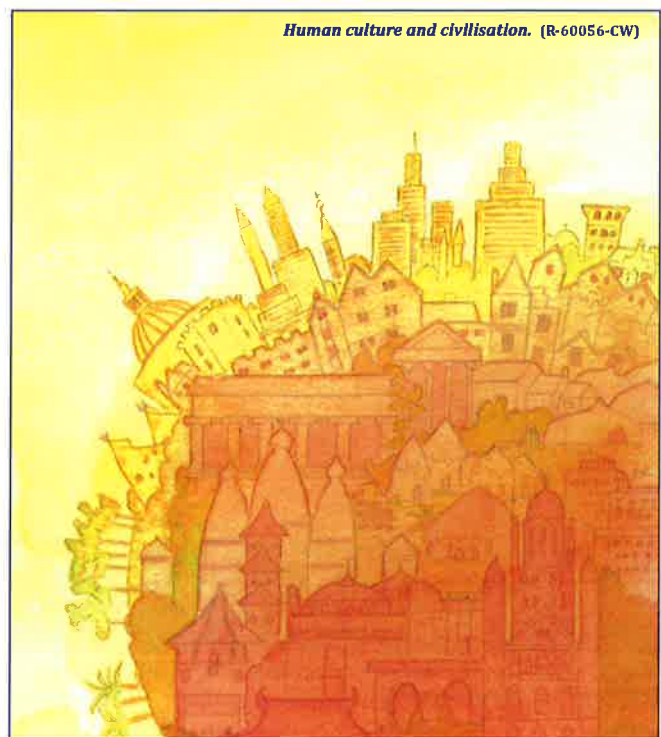
(Sr Wendy Beckett)

Getting Going

The process is the important thing. Make up your mind to let go of the end product! Let your hand draw/shape what it wants. Watch what takes place. Let your hand movements be the way they want to be – quick or slow, jerky or flowing.

Accepting your Artwork

When you are ready, put down your art materials and let go of your image-making activity. Be present in your artwork. Accept your work without analysing or judging it. What do you notice? Where does your eye rest? Speak to God about what you have noticed in this time of prayer. Gently withdraw from the image. Take some time to reflect on your time of prayer.



Human culture and civilisation. (R-60056-CW)

PRAYING WITH THE IMAGINATION

The Statue

A sculptor has been working on a statue of you. He gives you the key to his studio where your statue is ready, so that you can take all the time you want to examine it before it is shown to the public.

You open the door. There, in the middle of the room is your statue, covered with a cloth ... You walk up to the statue and take the cloth off ...

Then you step back and look at the statue ... What is your first impression? ...

Are you pleased or dissatisfied? ... Study all the details in your statue ...

How big is it? ... What material is it made of? ... Walk around it ...

See it from different angles ... Look at it from afar ... Then come closer and look at the details ... Touch the statue ... Is it rough or smooth? ... Cold or warm to the touch?

What parts of the statue do you like? ... What parts of the statue do you dislike? ...

Say something to your statue ... What does the statue say in reply? ... Keep up the dialogue as long as you or the statue have something to say ...

Now become the statue ... What does it feel like to be your statue? ...

What kind of existence do you have as the statue? ...



Through the gift of contemplation a soul can glimpse the awesome fire of love which is the Holy Trinity. (T-00050-0L)

Now imagine that, while you are your statue, Jesus walks into the room ...

How does he look at you? ... What do you feel while he looks at you? ...

What does he say to you? ... What do you reply? ...

Continue the dialogue as long as either Jesus or you have something to say ...

After a while Jesus goes away ...

Now return to yourself and look at the statue again ...

Is there any change in the statue? ... Is there any change in you or in your feelings? ...

Now say goodbye to your statue ...

Take a minute or so to do this and then open your eyes.

(Adapted from Sadhana – A Way to God by Anthony de Mello SJ)

EXPERIENCING GOD IN MY LIFE

The Prayer of the Examen

Take some time to become still, finding whatever quietness you can around you and within you. Use any method you find helpful for this – awareness of your breathing, sensations throughout your body, listening to the sounds round about ...

Enter the prayer with an attitude of gratitude, realising anew that all you have and are comes as a gift from God.

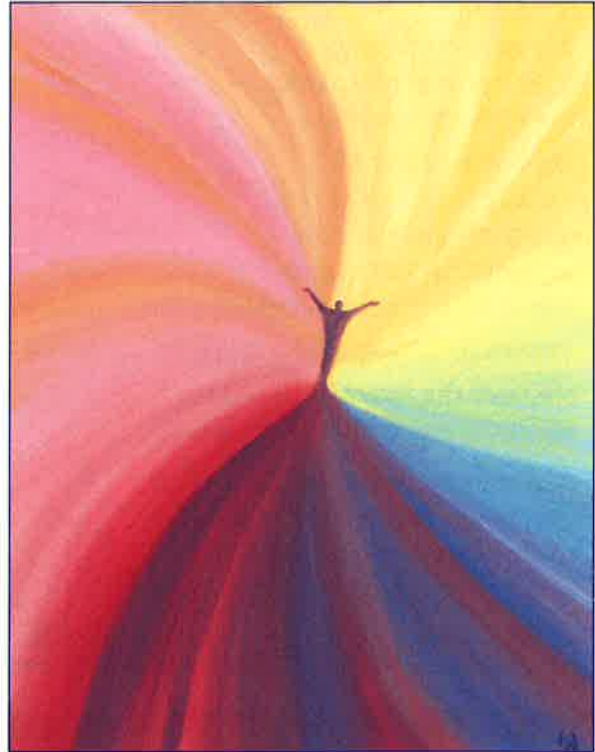
Ask for God's light as you review the period of time you want to look at, that God will show you what has been most significant.

Let your mind's eye look back over the time, gently noticing whatever catches your attention. There is no need to work hard at recalling every moment – let what will emerge.

Notice particularly moments of life, of light, of energy; and moments when these seemed drained. What was your response at the time? How would you want to respond to God now as you notice them again?

Speak to God 'as one friend speaks to another' about what you have noticed in the prayer.

End by looking ahead, and in the light of what you have seen, ask God for the gifts and graces you need for the time immediately ahead.



By surrendering to God in prayer, by 'falling' into Him, we immerse ourselves in the life and love of the three Divine Persons. (T-00065-01-V1)

Resources for the Examen

Online

Online audio Examen: <http://pray-as-you-go.org>, below the dates is a link, 'Try the Examen'

Handout in PDF: <http://www.rcdom.org.uk/documents/EXAMEN.pdf>

George Aschenbrenner SJ: article on the Consciousness Examen, a good summary:

<http://www.diocese.cc/upload/images/originals/Examens070510A.pdf>

Examen

Jim Manney SJ: *A Simple, Life-Changing Prayer: Discovering the Power of St Ignatius Loyola's Examen*

Timothy Gallagher OMV: *The Examen Prayer: Ignatian Wisdom for Our Lives Today*

Discernment

Timothy Gallagher OMV: *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living*

Gerald O'Mahony SJ: *Finding the Still Point*. Out of print but used copies available on Amazon

Ignatian Spirituality

Gerard Hughes SJ: *God of Surprises*

James Martin SJ: *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything; a Spirituality for Real Life*

Tim Muldoon SJ: *The Ignatian Workout: Daily Exercises for a Healthy Faith*

INSTRUMENTS OF GOD

I mean to sing to my God all my life, to Play for my God as long as I live.

Psalm 104:33

A small, wooden flute,
an empty, hollow reed,
rests in her silent hand.

It awaits the breath
of one who creates song
through its open form.

My often-empty life
rests in the hand of God;
like the hollowed flute,
it yearns for the melody
which only Breath can give.

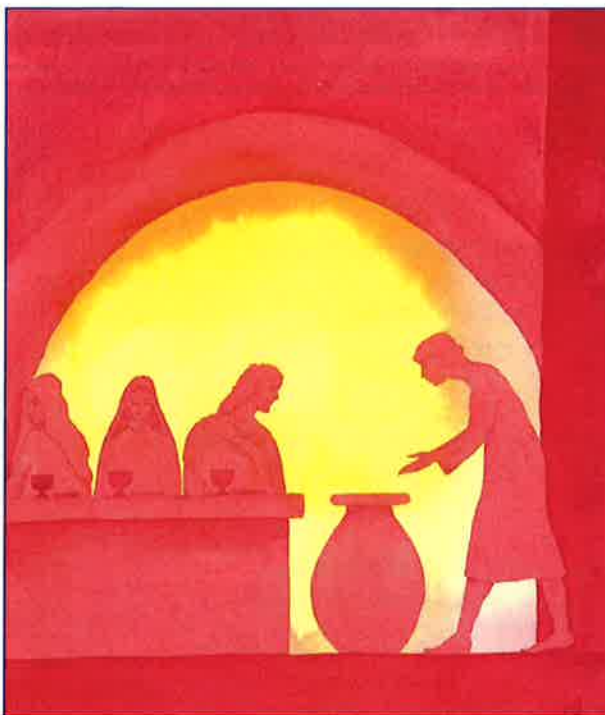
The small, wooden flute and I,
we need the one who breathes,
we await one who makes melody.

And the one whose touch creates,
awaits our empty, ordinary forms,
so that the song-starved world
may be fed with golden melodies.

(Joyce Rupp)

The flute, the violin, the drum are silent until the breath or hand bring the instrument to life. Each instrument is played according to its own design by a player who chooses music and tempo to bring out its best sound.

- ♦ If you are the instrument, what are you?
- ♦ What draws you to see yourself in this way?
- ♦ If God is the player, what is the music?
- ♦ How is it being played?
- ♦ What is going on for you both in this arrangement?
- ♦ Draw a musical instrument. Around it write words for the melodies God has played in your life recently. The words might include events, people, insights, gifts.
- ♦ Is there a particular word here that gets your attention? Why is that?



The miracle at Cana. (R-60100-CW)

As Kingfishers Catch Fire

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each
hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its
name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

I say móre: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: *thát* keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

(Gerard Manley Hopkins SJ)

DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

Finding God in our Experience

If we believe that God is acting in the world through the Holy Spirit, it makes sense to try to follow the movements of that Spirit in our lives. This does not only happen in peak moments of prayer or liturgy, but throughout our experience. Discernment of spirits is the reflective exercise of trying to sift through our feelings and thoughts, to see which could indicate the movements of God as he draws us to life, and which could indicate a countermovement, getting in the way of our relationship with God.

Guidelines for Discernment – Based on St Ignatius

Ignatius distinguishes between people who are trying to live a life of love, in relationship with God and those people who, as he says, are going from bad to worse, meaning their lives are totally self-focused with no regard for others or God. He indicates that the Holy Spirit acts differently in each case. These guidelines are for those who are trying to be open to the Spirit (whether or not they always manage it).

For these people of goodwill, the moods, thoughts and feelings that come from our lives being in tune with the Holy Spirit tend to be things like love, gentle inspiration, peace, courage, hope, openness, strength or repentance. (See fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22.) These movements help the person to engage in life, to 'choose life', they are welcomed and appreciated.



The journey of faith leads to light and joy, but we must be careful not to fall into the darkness through carelessness or pride. (T-06728A-CW-V2)

On the other hand the moods, thoughts and feelings that indicate a countermovement, going in a direction away from the prompting of the Holy Spirit tend to be things like nameless fear, anxiety, inappropriate sadness, self-centredness, seeing endless snags ahead, lack of hope. These feelings tend to paralyse, to prevent a person acting in a way they might wish, so as far as possible they are identified but not allowed to take centre stage, however fascinating.

When we are under the influence of a countermovement we call it 'spiritual desolation', when the Spirit is more clearly present we call it 'spiritual consolation'. The thoughts and feelings we are talking about here are not just superficial, fleeting sensations, but deeper streams within our heart and mind.



Our daily duties are like a golden string that shows us God's will and leads us to Heaven. (T-01445-01)

Spiritual Desolation

Why does it happen? Perhaps we are not living in a way we would like, not giving God any time, so busy rushing there is no time to pause, pray, be quiet. Perhaps it is time to make changes, to move on and we won't see it. Perhaps there is no obvious reason, BUT we can use the experience to try to be faithful, trusting God even though we don't feel like it.

- ♦ In desolation, try not to change major plans that were made at a time of consolation.
- ♦ Go against the desolation if possible, God is still there even if it does not feel like it.
- ♦ It usually helps if we can share our thoughts and feelings with someone we can trust and has some experience of the ways of God and faith.
- ♦ Desolation usually goes for our weakest points, this can help us to identify them.
- ♦ Be patient, hang on, consolation will return.

(NB Spiritual desolation is not the same as depression, care must be taken to distinguish the two.)

Spiritual Consolation

- ♦ Be thankful! Recognise the real gifts in your life and give thanks to God for them.
- ♦ 'Store it up', remember this experience and what it tells you about God, so that you can draw on the memories in difficult times. (Desolation will return!)
- ♦ Don't become too proud, or certain that you have life sorted out, remember how helpless you can feel when in desolation.
- ♦ Sometimes we have an experience of God that comes out of the blue, there seems to be no reason for it, but we know it is God. When this happens, it is good to still be aware of our actions, noting what was in the experience itself and what comes afterwards which may or may not be from God.



Prayer is like a glimpse of eternity, seen from the battlements of our earthly dwelling, as we pause and turn to God. The Saints are very close to us, in their glory. (T-00076-01)

CHOOSE LIFE

A Method of Discerning Prayer

Discernment is the name given to a form of prayerful reflection that seeks to know more fully the will of God in my own life, or the life of a group to which I belong. The will of God is not some kind of static, hidden blueprint, to which I must conform. It is rather an invitation to live creatively, using my God-given gifts and talents in a way that allows me to be most fully the person I truly am, the person God has created me to be.

Discernment happens at the point where head and heart come together. It involves doing my homework – what is the actual issue here, what are my options, have I a realistic sense of my strengths and weaknesses? It also calls me to take the time to discover how I really feel about the question, at a deep level, where I find myself most drawn.

Above all, discernment involves a choice between options which are good – I do not discern whether I should become a master criminal or not! – and is carried out in confidence that God will still be with me, whichever choice I make.

In the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius of Loyola speaks of three moments when discernment may take place:

First, there are times when I simply know what it is that I should do, without any doubt entering in. I may or may not be able to give convincing reasons for my choice. But I could not take another path and be true to myself.

Second, there are times when, faced with possible paths ahead, I find myself greatly stirred up at the level of my feelings. I may be greatly drawn to one alternative and repelled by another. Or my feelings may see-saw back and forth as I consider the options over time.

Third, I may approach the decisions I have to make in an unruffled state, finding that I can view the different possibilities with their different reasons calmly, without great

movements of feelings in any particular direction.

For Ignatius, the ideal is where the feelings (second approach above) and the intellect (third) pull in the same direction. In authentic cases of the first kind of discernment, there is no problem. Even here, though, it is worth checking out the responses of heart and head so that I do not get carried along by a blind enthusiasm.



Jesus raises Lazarus to life. (R-60097-CW-V2)

The following prayer exercise brings together the different elements of the discernment process, and gives time for me to note the direction that they incline me towards.

I begin this prayerful reflection by taking time to become still, outwardly and inwardly, and asking for God to show me in this prayer what it would be useful for me to see.

Next I spell out for myself as clearly as I can what my real options are in the situation

that I am trying to discern. What is the actual question that I am facing, and what are the concrete alternatives?

I then map out, using four columns, the two sides of each of two alternatives that I want to explore.

For example, if I am trying to decide between teaching in the UK and voluntary work overseas, the columns would look like this:

Advantages in UK teaching	Disadvantages in UK teaching	Advantages in overseas voluntary	Disadvantages in overseas voluntary

I spend time filling in whatever comes to mind for each of these columns. Then I take some time to sit and see how I feel about each option as I look at what I have written. If I have time, I spend a while imagining that I have opted one way or the other. What does that make me feel like? What is God feeling, saying?

If the matter is now clear, or I have no more time before I have to decide, I make a decision based on what I have seen and entrust it to God. Otherwise, I may choose to come back to this prayer at a later date. Either way, I draw the prayer to a close, perhaps noting anything significant.

The Summer Day

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean –

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down –

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

(Mary Oliver)

DECISION MAKING

Based on the Approach of St Ignatius of Loyola

It is assumed that:

- ♦ This is a choice between two or more good things
- ♦ There is probably an option that is more who you are (before God)
- ♦ This decision takes place within a believing community, rather than just what feels good to me – there are some Christian norms e.g. Scripture and the tradition of the Church

Other Presuppositions in Christian decision making:

- ♦ I already have a conscious relationship with God – in some way
- ♦ God wants what is best for me, what delights and fulfils – the Glory of God is the human person fully alive
- ♦ God wants me to live in love and for me to know I am loved
- ♦ God leaves me free (true lover)

God's love is not conditional on my response or right decision

Discerned decisions are about what God wants me to desire, they do not predict the future, there are no guarantees of success!

Another basic assumption – all human beings are deep down happiest when they live a life of love – loving God, self, others. 'It is in giving that we receive'. Selfishness, though a temptation for all, does not bring joy.

- ♦ Balance / Freedom – aim for this (it is not possible to achieve complete balance!)
- ♦ Being willing to do whatever is the will of God – law, what is most human.
- ♦ Being willing to sacrifice my superficial preferences, likes and dislikes to what is at the deepest level 'right for me' – my deepest desire – this may even be uncomfortable but I know it is right for me.
- ♦ I aim to use all my gifts in a way that will give greatest service to God.

Three ways in which I might come to a clear decision:

1. Blinding Flash

Everything becomes so clear that there is no longer any doubt in my mind; what I should do is obvious to me.

2. Following my deepest desires: Discernment of Spirits

Being aware of my own deep desires and feelings I come to realise that a particular course of action brings me peace as I think and pray about it over time. Before I come to such a place of peace, there are often swings of consolation and desolation. Over time these feelings / moods are weighed, discerned and reflected upon.

3. Working things out

When I cannot sift my deeper desires, or seem to have no particularly strong feelings one way or the other, it is useful to try to think clearly through all the issues around the decision. This will often also stir up my feelings.

I consider the pros and cons of all the options open to me and I try to see which would bring the greater good, which of the reasons for or against each course of action are important to me. I then see if the thought of following this action brings me peace and consolation.

Also at this time it is useful to engage your imagination and see if that helps to stir your desires.

- ♦ I imagine I decide X ... how does that feel ... and then imagine Y ...?
- ♦ I imagine a point in the future, how would I feel then if I do X or Y?
- ♦ I imagine a friend has the same decision to make ... what would I say?
- ♦ I imagine myself talking to God – what might he say to me? How does that feel?

Does one course of action bring a greater sense of peace and consolation?

Confirmation

Once you think a decision has been made you are still in the process of discernment, in this case waiting for some sort of confirmation.

- ♦ As I sit with this decision does it feel right? If so, can I say why?
- ♦ Does the sense of peace and gentle lightness persist?
- ♦ Does this decision seem to best fit 'who I am' before God?

(NB It may well not be possible to answer these questions, you are just left with a sense of '... mmm I'm pretty sure this is right.' Always a good idea at this point to give thanks for that.)

Relief that a decision has been made is NOT confirmation in itself, be careful.

With any decision between two good things, it is often difficult to let go of one option, even when the other becomes the obvious thing to do. It is common to have some sense of loss, even though the discernment basically brings peace.

For some people making a decision is always difficult, and many (perhaps most people) never arrive at absolute certainty. In the end we have to recognise that we do the best we can with the situation in which we find ourselves. We trust that the God who loves us unconditionally and draws us to himself will remain with us, helping us, whether we get it wholly 'right' or not. Fear of getting it wrong is one of the biggest obstacles to good discernment and decision making.



The Annunciation. (R-60037-CW)

Four elements to keep in mind (at all points in the process)

Faith

- ♦ Images of God and Jesus – how is God regarding you?
- ♦ Your sense of how God acts in the world. The following are a few misleading images:
 - Everything is predestined.
 - God is interested but not actively involved.
 - God is waiting impatiently for my decision.
 - God has the script but I cannot see it.
- A more helpful image:
 - God is lovingly leading me, in the decision with me, helping me even if I don't see it.
- ♦ Style of prayer, previous experience of discernment of spirits. Use of noticing and reflecting, rather than grabbing the first thought or text.
- ♦ Place of tradition and the Church if you are part of a community.

Facts

- ♦ Realistic approach to your own gifts and skills.
- ♦ Time spent gathering and considering different options.
- ♦ Different personalities: some people will want to limit possibilities too soon, others will keep opening up new possibilities, new lines of enquiry.
- ♦ Is there a time limit to this decision? Beware of desire for haste when it's not necessary.
- ♦ Openness to all the options.

Freedom

- ♦ You will never be totally free, but you can at least have the desire for freedom and 'indifference' and ask for the grace you need to move towards it in trust.
- ♦ You are aiming to be at balance, content with whatever the outcome because you know God, and that is more important than this particular decision.
- ♦ What is getting in the way? Others, self, lack of trust, lack of options, unrealistic desires ...
- ♦ Are you free enough, and happy to take a risk on God?
- ♦ Self-knowledge / maturity.

Fear

- ♦ Almost always plays some part in decision making.
 - 'What if I get it wrong? Will God be angry/distant/impatient/punitive?'
- ♦ It can be very subtle. E.g. concern for others that becomes paralysing for oneself.
- ♦ There will rarely be 100% confidence in a decision, a risk will need to be taken if you are to follow the promptings of the Spirit – who does not confirm by post! This is why trust and freedom are so necessary. In the end the actual decision should be secondary to you as you stand before God, it is the relationship with God, whatever the circumstances, which will give peace and hope.