

# **“BEING ALONE WITH GOD AND YOURSELF”**

## **Three Prayer Exercises** **For Personal Growth and Christian Life**

### **Note:**

- ✓ *Occasionally, we have to be alone with ourselves in solitude, in prayer and in reflection away from our occupations and friends in order to find God and our true self*
- ✓ *Here below, you will find three prayer exercises based on three different reasons why should we, occasionally, spend time alone with God; namely,*

***One:*** *You need to be alone with God and yourself, to be what you are supposed to be, not what others want you to be.*

***Two:*** *You need to be alone with God and yourself, to be what you really are, not what you think you are*

***Three,*** *You need to be alone with God and yourself, to do what God wants you to do, not what others or you want to do.*

### **Uses of These prayer exercises**

- ✓ *For Personal reflection and prayer.*
- ✓ *As points for meditation*
- ✓ *For talks and sermons*
- ✓ *For awareness sessions*
- ✓ *For prayer meetings*

### **Target Audience**

- ✓ *Individuals, groups and all publics.*

**Note:** Take one exercise at a time. To take the three of them in one sweep would be too much.

## **1<sup>st</sup> First Exercise**

### **SOMETIMES YOU NEED TO BE ALONE WITH GOD AND YOURSELF,** **TO BE WHAT YOU ARE, SUPPOSED TO BE,** **NOT WHAT OTHERS WANT YOU TO BE.**

#### **Step 1. Short Reflection: Be “yourself” Suggested ideas**

- People, society, family, school, church, friends, etc., force us to be what they think we ought to be – quite often something different from what we are.
- Consciously or unconsciously they force their “expectations” on us. They take it for granted that we should behave in certain “pre-cast” ways.
- They force us to play “roles”: social roles, educational roles, family roles, etc.
- Social pressures, most of the times, unnoticed by us, are a threat to our being ourselves.
- As by osmosis we introject all sorts of “ought” “musts”, “haves” and “shoulds”. We become compulsively driven by all those unchallenged obligations and introjections..

- Our true selves are suppressed, crushed out of existence. We end by losing our identity. We do not know who we are!
- To be ourselves we have to challenge many of the assumptions of our society, and environment, be critical of the injunctions forced on us. For this, we need time to be alone.
- We need moments of “self-intimacy”, spontaneity, of brutal personal sincerity, of dauntless courage.
- We need also moments when without censors and critics we can cry, smile, yell, stretch, dream, shout, kid, romp, curse, fool and be free of constraints.
- In these moments of solitude we have to reflect whether in our daily life we are “phony”, artificial, unnatural, pretending, putting up a show, relaxed, spontaneous or forced.
- TIME SPENT ALONE WITH OURSELVES IS NEVER WASTED, IS FRUITFUL, INVIGORATING.
- In we cannot, or we find it very hard to be alone with ourselves, it is worth finding the cause. There might be something wrong with us!
- Many people are afraid to face themselves. It may be painful to discover what we have become, instead of being what we are!

### **Step 2. Short Introspection**

*Give a copy of these points to participants.*

**REFLECT DEEPLY on these questions. The answers you give to them, may indicate to you whether you are a “genuine” person – or just playing a “role”. Whether you are what you are, or what others want you to be.** *Give the participants time for reflection.*

- Are you afraid of telling others what you truly feel and think?
- Are you acting in ways that make you feel strange and artificial?
- Are you over-concerned about what others think or feel about you?
- Do you ever have a feeling of being trapped in your style of life?
- Do you feel some unexplained resentfulness at being what you are?
- Do you often feel angry without knowing exactly why?
- Do you smile and laugh a lot in life?
- Do you have a good sense of humor or you are too serious?
- Can you enjoy yourself and allow yourself some innocent pleasures?
- Do you try to please everybody?
- Can you say “No” to people without remorse’s or guilt?
- Are you afraid of displeasing others?
- Do you expect approval, recognition and appreciation for all you do?
- Are you over-affected by criticism and negative remarks?
- Do you perform your “duties” and “obligations” because you want to or because you feel bound to?
- In your ways of talking, do you use the words “I have to”, “I must”, “I ought”, “I should” rather often?
- Do you enjoy the work you do?
- Can you indulge in intimacy and deep friendship?

### **Step 3 Personal Prayer**

- Pray to Jesus to help you to be yourself, not to be led by others, not be play roles. Jesus never played roles

- Let the participants spend some time in personal prayer.

#### **Step 4. Group Sharing and Prayer**

- Encourage the participants to freely share their thoughts and reflections.
- Anyone may ask the group members to give him feedback and tell him how they see him. Does he come to them as genuine, free, tensed up, constrained, etc? What's the image they have of him?
- End this exercise by a shared and spontaneous prayer.

## **Second Exercise**

### **SOME TIMES YOU NEED TO BE ALONE WITH GOD AND YOURSELF TO BE WHAT YOU REALLY ARE, NOT WHAT YOU THINK YOU ARE**

#### **Step 1. Short Input – Suggested Ideas**

- There is a great difference between our “true self” - what we are, - and our “self image”, namely, what we think we are.
- The true self is the person God made us with all our positive and negative pints. The “self image” is not real, it's imaginary. It is a mental picture of how we perceive ourselves
- Of necessity, our “self-image” is poorer than our true self, because we do not know all our potentialities and even more, because of the negative feedback we have received from others.
- People, specially “significant people” in our lives, acted like mirrors in which we see ourselves reflected or portrayed. People, as a whole, are more prone to see our obvious shortcomings than our hidden abilities.
- Over and above, the society we live in, have “expectations” and “standards” against which they judge us. If we do not measure up to those standards, we are unfavorably rated. Thus a poor self-image is born or reinforced.
- From childhood days, we judge our selves and our worth through the expectations, approval or disapproval of others.
- We become dependant on others in order to know ourselves. We “imagine” ourselves to be what others tell us we are. It's a fatal mistake
- It leads to self-dislike, self-rejection and even self hatred.
- Jesus knew who He was. All criticisms, judgments and condemnations of the crowd, of the authorities, of his society, even of his relatives did not make him change his “self-image, nor his behavior, his talk, his actions”.
- He spent time alone with God and with himself to be himself. Like Jesus we need time for ourselves, to reflect, search and find out our true self.

## **Step 2. Short Introspection**

*Give a copy of these points to all participants.*

**REFLECT DEEPLY ON THESE QUESTIONS. The answers you give to them will indicate to you whether you have a true self-image or a distorted one. Whether you see yourself as you are, or not.**

- Do you like yourself?
- Do you feel comfortable with yourself?
- Do you cover up your shortcomings and deficiencies by pretences and lies?
- Do you over apologize to others for annoyances you cause to them?
- Are you feeling confident to address a crowd?
- Do you try always to be on the spotlight?
- Do you try to create a good impression and cut a good figure?
- Do you feel over discouraged with criticisms and negative remarks?
- Do you easily change your opinion after hearing others?
- Can you give your opinion when asked for?
- Are you easily influenced by what others say about you?
- In a group or a crowd, do you share and open your mind or keep mum?
- Do you feel embarrassed to disclose your family status, economic position, education and ethnic group?
- Do you boost your image by adding degrees, titles, etc., after your name?
- Can you challenge the image others have of you?
- Can you hold different opinions and views?

## **Step 3. Personal Prayer.**

- Pray to Jesus to help you to know, to love and accept yourself. Jesus knew himself.
- Jesus never labored under the burden of a false “self-image”. He spent hours alone with himself.
- Allow the participants to spend some time alone in personal prayer.

## **Step 4. Group Sharing Prayer**

- Encouraging the participants to freely share their thoughts and reflections.
- Anyone may ask the group members to give him feedback and tell him how they see him, his qualities and potentialities.
- Encourage them to help him to discover and improve his true “self-image” he may have and shed negative thoughts about himself.
- End the prayer with a shared and spontaneous prayer.

## **Third Exercise**

**SOME TIMES YOU NEED TO BE ALONE WITH GOD AND YOURSELF  
TO DO WHAT GOD WANTS YOU TO DO,  
NOT WHAT OTHERS OR YOURSELF WANT.**

### **Step 1. Short Input – Suggested Ideas**

- People – Society, friends, family – expect us to do some things in life. For instance, . to be a businessman, a doctor, a scientist, to hold a high position, etc.
- We too want to do something in life. A job, a profession, to have a family, to live in this or that country etc..
- We have our own pet ideals, plans and dreams.
- Yet, God may have quite different ideas or plans for us. God’s thoughts are not our thoughts.
- The crowds wanted to make Jesus King. Jesus knew that this was not what his Father wanted,
- The people, his own disciples, the rulers of Israel wanted and expected a Messiah who would be powerful, influential, rich, a sort of emperor. God had some other plans for Jesus.
- It is in prayer, in solitude, in the desert, on the mountains alone with God that Jesus found out what sort of Messiah his Father wanted him to be.
- Jesus did not like to be a suffering messiah – in the Garden of Olives he prayed to God to free him from the passion – Yet, in that agonizing solitude and prayer he came to know the will of his Father, and accepted it!
- It is in prayer and solitude that you have to find out and discern what God wants you to do. It may be something very different from your cherished dreams and expectations.
- Something very different from what your parents and friends expect of you.
- We have to withdraw to solitude and prayer – not once, but many times to be able to do what God expects from us..
- To be his disciples we have to do what Jesus did: “he went to a lonely place all by himself to pray.”

### **Step 2. Short Introspection**

*Give a copy of these points to all participants.*

**REFLECT DEEPLY ON THESE QUESTIONS. The answers you give to them will indicate to you whether you are really doing what God wants you to do, not what others want or what you want.**

- How often do you break away from your daily duties and routine and spend some time in personal prayer?
- Are you so sure that what you do is what God wants you to do? Then, what do about it?
- Are you in your life, searching, discerning the will of God? How?
- Are you doing what God wants you to do, or what your Parents, your friends and the world you live in expect you to do?
- Had you ever had the courage to do what God inspired you to do even contrary to the liking of your parents and dear friends?
- In your daily life whom do you try to please? Yourself, others, or God?
- Did you ever faced criticisms or ridicule for sticking to your conscience?
- Before you plunge into a new work or into a new project, do you pray and find out whether that is what God wants you to do?

**Step 3. Group or Personal Prayer**

In silent reverence, remember Jesus praying and spending time all alone by Himself in lonely places, then pray to Him for the following graces'

- ✓ For courage to do in all things – big and small – what God wants you to..
- ✓ To show you what He would like you to do in your future life: studies, career, any other work or vocation?
- ✓ For courage to stand for your convictions and follow your conscience even against the liking of your dear ones and in the face of criticisms.

End the your prayer by reading, meditating and singing – if you can - the Hymn:

**It takes Courage to Follow a Call.**

