

Guidelines for Teaching Companioned Prayer™

These guidelines are for experienced companions who will be offering Companioned Prayer to people new to the prayer. This material is excerpted from chapter 13 of the book, *Companioned Prayer*, available from the CPCF's website at www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources. See that chapter for more detail.

Share From Your Heart

Share and teach Companioned Prayer from your inner sense of the holy, from your heart and soul, and then to see what happens. Share Companioned Prayer as a personal, faith-centered, spiritual, prayer practice that through faith, can open one to reconciliation, to mystery, and to God and Christ. Do not share or offer anything less. Share because you feel called by God to do so. Share with joy and humility. Know that the gifts and insights that you share are not yours, but are shared with you out of God's loving grace. Therefore, share and teach in His name only.

You do not need to be a "whole person" or "perfect" in order to share or teach. Teaching from open brokenness is much more valuable than teaching from some sense of purity or from a sense of having all the answers. From the perspective of incompleteness, personal challenges and trials owned and shared with Christ, it is okay to be a leader. When you feel called by God to share Companioned Prayer, you must teach, guide and inspire. You can do it without controlling. You can do it in a way that encourages and invites each person to be open to the mystery of growth and gift from within. Know that you are not responsible for the student's inner experiences. You are powerless to make anything happen. It is between the person and God.

More important than the actual instruction, is the attitude of the instructor. You must let go of wanting to fix people, of wanting them to have wonderful prayer experiences, of wanting them to adopt Companioned Prayer as their means to personal salvation or as some kind of supercharged spiritual path. You are not the savior. You must let all of that go; and instead just be very genuinely happy to be with each person on a very personal level, to offer to share the prayer and some instruction, but most of all simply to be loving, personal, and caring for one another. That is the goal of sharing Companioned Prayer: to create that kind of environment and those kinds of relationships. This environment and these relationships are built on mutual trust, vulnerability, humility, compassion, and friendship, all within the context of Christ's loving presence within all of us and his love for all of us. Abide in his love felt within us, and share his love with others in the reality of our actual presence to one another. Then within that very authentic Christen love and fellowship, let God do what he wills with respect to the instruction and personal experiences of Companioned Prayer, and don't be concerned about the results.

Remember you are sharing or teaching prayer based on faith and love; not sharing or teaching faith based on prayer. In other words, don't use teaching of Companioned Prayer as an excuse to teach your particular faith orientation or your personal religious views. Your goal is not to convert anyone to your religious beliefs. Your role is not to "save" anyone. Teach Companioned Prayer as a process of inner personal spiritual unfoldment, mystery, gift, growth, discovery, and grace. A

way to experience God's love from within – to know his presence and to be open to listening for his encouragement, love and direction. Let God do the “converting.” He will be much better at it than you. Give your students the freedom to have their own personal relationship with God as he chooses to reveal himself within their prayer. Have faith that God will do whatever is right for each person.

Do not get drawn into theological or biblical debates or justifications. The justification is God's self-revelation within the prayer experience itself. The purpose of teaching in a faith-centered manner is to support the experience of letting go into trusting God, not to intellectually justify the prayer.

A Process of Mutual Discovery

When teaching, you and your students are all involved in a mutual process of discovery and learning. Let them know that unlike learning traditional subjects like history, math or philosophy, we are not here to learn about facts or ideas. Rather we are here to learn an ongoing process of how to be open to new discovery from within – from God.

Sharing Your Personal Testimony

While sharing or teaching Companioned Prayer, over the course of the full program, it is not only okay to share some of your own prayer experiences and growth, it is necessary. Your personal testimony will help people to learn to trust and value their own prayer experiences, as well as the prayer process. Or you may wish to share your experiences anonymously; that is, without necessarily saying that they are yours. Similarly, you can share some experiences of others just as long as you do not identify who they belong to. Just as hearing our symbols reflected back to us in the prayer grounds us in the experience and invites us to continue our prayer journey in faith, when we hear others share their prayer experiences we often hear similarities with our own experiences. And that reinforces our experiences and promotes understanding within us and between us of what this prayer is all about, how spiritual growth happens, and why this is a spiritual process. It builds trust in letting go into all of it, into surrendering to God within the prayer experience, and inspires us to continue.

When sharing experiences, be humble and respectful of others. Let them know that you do not expect them to share if they do not feel comfortable doing so. Always choose your opportunities to share in relation to illustrating some point about the prayer practice that will help them learn to trust God. Let people know that everyone's experiences are different and that specific experiences are not a measure of anything, and certainly not an indication of holiness. They are in fact more indicative of our wounded and broken life, and our profound spiritual needs; together with the undeserved and underappreciated gift of God's mercy given out from his complete lovingness. Thus, one prayer experience is not better than another. Our goal is not any particular experience. What we receive each time in prayer is what we need most.

Another benefit of witnessing some aspect of your or others' prayer experiences, and of relating these experiences and the prayer process to the Christian experience, is that it helps convey the

sense of mystery, grace, and God's presence within the prayer. It will allow you to communicate the essence of this practice – that it offers a way to be open to the divine, completely as personal gift. Those learning the prayer will catch the sense of this, supported by their own personal spiritual experiences, as they risk being close to their issues within the power of their faith in God.

Intellectual Discussion

When teaching, do not try to define your prayer experiences or those of your students, theologically or any other way. Don't put their experiences into a box and constrain them to your definitions. For example, do not try and define "grace" or "God." Keep it open and mysterious. Let people define their own experiences from the nature of their experiences, recognizing that such definitions are personal and will change as the individual changes and grows. In this respect, one definition is not more "right" than another, so just don't get into it. Leave figuring out the meaning of prayer experiences to outside of teaching or sharing the prayer. In fact, it is best to refer theological discourse to the church or religious organization of which your group is a part.

In addition, thorough or detailed discourse about the prayer practice within the learning sessions can make the learning of the prayer feel like an extensive intellectual explanation, which can get in the way of letting go. Extensive explanation establishes the context of learning to pray to be analytical thinking, and reinforces the feeling that analytical thinking and logic should be the medium of the experience, thereby causing the learning of surrender to God within the prayer, and openness to the experience of surprising mystery and grace, to be more problematic. Teaching Companioned Prayer is actually more "personal mentoring" than what we might otherwise think of as "teaching."

This does not mean that questions should not be answered, or that inquisitive discussion should be stifled. Intellectual understanding should be clear and satisfied. However, let many of the answers come from the beginners' experiences within their prayers, instead of all through explanations or group discussions. Encourage your students to take their doubts, intellectual issues and curiosity into their prayer experience, being open to allowing those very questions and issues to be their prayer subjects, unfolding and developing over time.

Similarly, providing people with many handouts or even a copy of the book *Companioned Prayer*, when they are being introduced to the prayer or anytime soon after they have begun the practice, is usually not helpful. It can actually hinder their walk with God with this prayer. While we do want to nurture their ongoing prayer practice, it is important not to try to engineer their growth and learning. A Companioned Prayer teacher/mentor is more like a gardener who tends the garden but who realizes that God is the one who actually makes it grow. You can rely upon God. It is his mercy and grace experienced through our encounter with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit through faithful Companioned Prayer experiences that will provide the spiritual awakening and growth that is just right for each individual. The support of a learning environment is important, but it is God who ultimately calls each person to himself. It is not a book full of information or an exhaustive intellectual program that will do it. Create a space to let God do it, and encourage participants to open their hearts to him in faith.