

## Guidelines for Reflecting the Prayer Experience

These guidelines are for companions who are facilitating the first two sessions of the Companioned Prayer™ learning program. These companions should know the prayer from their own experience praying and companioning, understand the other guidelines and handouts of the program (including the Accessible and Safe Environment Guidelines), and from the book, *Companioned Prayer*, available at [www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources](http://www.CompanionedPrayer.org/supplemental-resources).

During the first two learning sessions, the companion assists the person who has just finished praying reflect upon and discern the value of their own personal prayer experience. In addition to helping each person validate the spiritual significance of their own prayer experience, having each person also hear each other's prayer experiences will also affirm the spiritual validity and importance of the prayer in their lives.

It is important that those who are learning the prayer understand that this type of additional discernment is not part of Companioned Prayer and that it only occurs in these first two sessions.

The goal of this reflection is not to change or enhance their experience, or to frame or interpret it in any particular theology or spirituality. Our Companioned Prayer inner prayer experiences can be quite subtle. When experiencing these for the first few times, it is easy for the person to not recognize or appreciate the personal value of their subtle experience.

The following guidelines are offered to help you (the companion) assist the person who is praying with this reflection process right after they have concluded their prayer. This type of guided reflection should only occur during the first two learning sessions. It should not be a part of any subsequent instruction or ongoing Companioned Prayer meetings. Overall, this guided reflection process is both nuanced and simple. It is also delicate, requiring that it not stray from the boundaries or guidelines presented below.

- It is vital that you should be humble when offering reflection and discernment assistance. The person's prayer experience is between them and God, not between you and them. You must not try to interpret or validate the person's experience for them. Your role is to assist the person discern and appreciate their own prayer experience for themselves. You can offer questions and observations that encourage the person in this reflection and discernment, but you should not attempt to interpret or validate their experiences for them.
- A significant part of this reflection and discernment is simply providing time after the prayer for this to occur, instead of going on to the next person or the next activity. Therefore, you should allow this space to occur and encourage a non-hurried reflective experience. It is within the space of this reflective time that the person can continue to be open to the Holy Spirit and become more aware of the nature of their prayer experience.

- Reflection and discernment are not intellectual analysis. Instead, they are a noticing and appreciating what has happened during the prayer. It is continuing to be responsive to the Holy Spirit and God's grace within. Therefore, the questions and guidance you offer should assist the person to continue to be drawn into that, instead of leaving that for theological concepts or analysis.
- When offering assistance in this reflection, never provide comments, observations or questions that imply your judgement or assessment of the person's prayer experience. These types of remarks are only permitted when they are the person's own and you are simply reflecting them back to the person. Otherwise, remarks that suggest or imply a judgement or favored outcome, even if off-hand or seemingly innocent, can have chilling effects upon a person's willingness to enter into their prayer, upon their relationship with God experienced within the prayer, and upon their relationship with their prayer companion. (This is also true anytime during the prayer, such as when reflecting symbols.)
- Prayer experiences of simple quietness, gentleness, peace, et cetera, are as fully valid as experiences of a more dynamic nature. Do not expect or desire the person to have any specific kind prayer experience. This is a contemplative prayer.
- Do not use this time to share your own prayer experiences, even if they relate to the experience the person just shared.
- Do not use the time for reflection to "save" anyone, to get them to affirm Jesus as their savior, or any other faith outcome. Use of Companioned Prayer and reflective noticing and discernment in this manner imposes your perception of what you think the person needs for their spiritual growth or awakening, and does not honor how God may be quietly and gently drawing them to himself through the gift of his grace within their prayer experience. Such efforts on your part would be manipulative and inappropriate.
- When asking questions to encourage self-reflection and discernment, honor the person's privacy of their prayer experience. You do not need to know the subject of their prayer, although the person should feel free to share it if they choose. But sharing of their prayer subject should not be presented as an expectation. You can encourage discernment and noticing, without asking about, exploring, or getting involved in their prayer topic.
- When a person does share about their prayer subject, do not probe into or explore their prayer topic, and do not ask or encourage them to do so. They should have every opportunity to keep their prayer topic private, to the full extent that they wish to keep it private. If they wish to share it, that is their option, but such sharing should not be considered an invitation for you to explore or to further lead them into their topic.
- In response to a person's sharing, do not provide personal advice about their prayer topic, and do not direct them to further explore or discern their prayer topic. Do not pose leading questions such as, "What will you do with this insight or grace revealed to you?" As a companion you know from your own prayer experience and faith, that the answers to the

person's issues, and the grace to allow the person to receive them, will come from God from within their prayer experience. Companioned Prayer and this time for reflective discernment should never be considered counseling or spiritual direction.

- Reflective questions and observations are best kept brief and simple. Avoid dialog and discussion that takes the person's attention away from the immediacy of their prayer experience. Use questions that help them notice and appreciate their actual prayer experience, rather than questions or remarks that move them into mental analysis or theological concepts. It is okay if they draw upon their faith when they are discerning the nature of their prayer experience, but ideally this should be as an inspiration of the Holy Spirit from within them.
- When the person shares in response to your reflective question, and when you sense that what they shared contains something that may be of significance to them, you can reflect a word or short phrase of it back to them that might capture the sense or essence of it. This type of reflection is the same as reflecting symbols during the prayer. Reflect back in the same tone and manner as shared, and give them a few moments to receive it.
- Sometimes when you ask, "Is there anything about your prayer experience that you can share?" or "What was that like?", the person will begin telling you about their prayer issue. When you reflect something back for them to discern, try to select something that is not their prayer issue but instead may be something in their prayer experience of how they experienced God's grace or mercy or peace, or some other prayer response. When hearing a description of their topic of their prayer, try to pick out a word or short phrase that is a symbol of how they felt being with God within their prayer, rather than their prayer topic.
- The use of reflective questions and observations should be gentle and compassionate; continuing within the overall experience of Jesus' tender love and grace that is the nature of Companioned Prayer.
- The reflective guidance that you offer should be flexible and responsive to the person and the grace of the Holy Spirit. It should not be a fixed format or fixed set of questions. The questions and observations provided in this section are suggested examples from which you may draw upon. Your reflective support need not be limited to this set of questions.
- During the time of reflection, based on the person's response, you may offer them an opportunity to further notice and nurture what they have shared or remarked upon. You can do this by asking, "Would it feel all right to close the eyes and spend a few minutes just noticing what all this feels like inside?" If they say yes, then invite them to be quiet inside and to allow themselves to be with how all of it (include reflecting back a symbol of what the shared, if appropriate) feels inside. In faith, add any other suggestions for noticing and nurturing as seems right in the moment.

- Keep all such reflective instructions invitational and not a direction or demand, and always include a phrase that lets them know how to respond to you when they are ready to go on, when they have completed the function, or when they are ready to stop.
- Often when responding to a question about their prayer experience such as, “What was that like?”, a person may simply say something like, “Nice” or “Peaceful.” These types of very simple answers may not be enough for the person to discern the more profound value of their prayer. Therefore, in this reflective role, you should encourage the person to explore what this “Nice” or “Peaceful” was like; to stay with it and to further notice. You can do so by first reflecting back the word they used (e.g., “Peaceful”) and then ask them to close the eyes and notice what all this like was like, what it felt like inside, and to be with what feels special within it.
- When you are ready to end this assisted post-prayer reflection, offer a personal prayer and blessing on behalf of the person. Say a prayer and blessing out loud, and then when finished, invite them to briefly capture what was special about their prayer in their journal. If you need to companion another person, you can begin while the first person is journaling.

### Sample Questions for Prayer Reflection

Suggested questions and observations for prayer reflection include the following:

- “Is there anything about your experience that you would like to share?”
- “What was that like?”
- “How did that feel inside?”
- “What happened when you prayed?”
- “Did you discover anything in your prayer?”
- “Was something new revealed to you?”
- “Does this prayer experience draw you into a closer intimacy with God?”  
“How does that feel?”
- Sometimes you can encourage the person to discern more about their prayer experience simply by asking a question, and then following up their answer with another similar (but not identical) question.
- If possible, reflect back a word or very short phrase that they used in describing their prayer experience, and then pause to allow them to naturally reflect more upon that word and its associated inner experience. Follow up with further invitational reflection about anything more they share, or simply ask them to notice if this [*symbol*] was special in some way.

- Follow up can be simply again reflecting back a symbol and waiting, or it might be more specific such as, “Would it feel all right to close the eyes and spend a few minutes just noticing what all this (reflect symbol, if shared) feels like inside?” If they say yes, then invite them to be quiet inside and to allow themselves to be with how all of this (include symbol if shared) feels inside. Ask them to take their time, and to let you know when they have done that.
- If a person has difficulty identifying anything that happened in their prayer, simply rephrase the question; for example, changing from “What happened?” to “How did that feel?”

When asking any of these reflective questions, you may wish to invite the person to close their eyes in order to help them recall and notice their inner experience.

It is best to minimize your own involvement in the person’s self-reflection of their prayer experience. In practice, this reflective exercise is usually much simpler than all of the above questions suggest. You will likely only need to use one or two of the above, or similar, sample questions when supporting the person’s self-reflection.

### Journaling

Individual journaling is part of the self-reflection and discernment of the prayer experience. Prior to the first session, ask participants to bring a journal to write in. At the first meeting, provide a blank journal or small writing pad to each person who did not bring a journal.

Request that after their individual time of sharing and reflecting, they write about their experience in their journal. They can do this while the next person is praying, or if no one else will be praying, give the person a few moments of quiet time to write before proceeding with the next activity. Encourage them to write and/or sketch about the feeling, insight and closeness to God that they experienced in their prayer and as reflected upon. Suggest that at this time their entries should be brief, even just writing or drawing a symbol if they wish. Encourage them to stay within the essence of their prayer experience, and to not expand into theological, social or personal implications of their prayer experience at this time. Suggest that they can always expand upon their journal entries when they are home.

Also let them know that these journal entries will not be shared; they are theirs alone. Also, they should not journal about what anyone else is sharing or experiencing.

This journaling should be encouraged throughout the first four learning sessions, and may be continued in regular ongoing Companioned Prayer ministry meetings.