

Are Our Prayer Experiences of God?

How do we know that the Companioned Prayer™ experience is of God? Because our prayer is made to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; because we are praying God's will, not ours; by the nature of the experiences; by the relationship of the experiences to scripture and the teachings of the Church; and by the prayer's fruits. Not just one, but all of these together form our knowing.

A Prayer to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

What makes any prayer a way of communing with God, and not simply a self-serving expression, is our intention and our faith. We believe in God and his accessibility, and we enter into a communion with him through a relationship of faith, love and hope. This is what we are doing in Companioned Prayer. We pray to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is how we begin and continue our prayer. This is absolutely central to what we are doing, and it is within this that we experience our prayer. Within this personal relationship of faith, love and hope we listen inside to what it feels like God is calling us to be aware of in our life, to those challenges, trials, concerns, joys, thanksgivings and aspirations that are personal to us. We open ourselves to God and trusting in him we bear our soul, our all. We allow ourselves to be present to one of our most personal and private aspects of our life because we know that in prayer, God may let his love and mercy be known to us from right within our very intimate and tender concern or aspiration. In essence, we are bringing this personal and private part of our self to God, taking our hurts and our joys to the tender loving heart of Jesus and our self along with them. In his presence in community and within us, we wait in faith for God's will and his grace to be felt and known, for the movement of the Holy Spirit. And then we rest in whatever blessing or understanding we may have received, and pray a prayer of thankfulness or other response as appropriate.

Praying in God's Will

Some people may wonder why this prayer seems to be so efficacious. Why does it seem that God answers our Companioned Prayer so often compared with our awareness of his response to our other prayers? This may be in part because in Companioned Prayer we seek to actively pray his will instead of our own will:

1. By allowing God to pick our prayer subject we are following his will instead of our own.
2. By following and letting go into the movement of the Holy Spirit as our prayer subject shifts and evolves, we continue to follow his will instead of our own.
3. By being in our prayer with simple humility and faith, we are surrendering to his will instead of our own.
4. By letting go into the loving heart of Jesus, we are surrendering into the love of God, which is his nature and will.
5. By continually taking the time to just be with what comes from God and to notice and nurture our awareness of it, we are letting go into what God wills for us instead of our own will.

We do all this with full freewill, in faith and simple humble trust in the love of the living, ever-present God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God personally knows us, loves us, and wills only the best for us. As we give ourselves to him in Companioned Prayer by conforming our prayer to his will, it is our experience that he reveals his will in us through his grace and his love.

The Prayer Experience

When we pray in this way, we can find ourselves surprisingly open to God's mystery and loving personal gift. Over and over again, people describe their experiences as gaining insight and understanding, new directions and discernments, a realization that what was received was given as gift, that we did not make it happen and in fact we could never have made it happen; and that what did happen was very personal and private healing, reconciliation, understanding, love and grace. We experience all this with a sense of mercy and often a strong sense of the personal divine presence. God's very real mystery, of his being deeply and actively involved in our life beyond our appreciation for this personal love, is usually an overall quality of our prayer experiences. As revealed by God in our prayer experience, we may also gain direct awareness of his awesome power as well as his awesome loving tenderness, forgiveness and care.

Symbols and showings that come to us in the prayer may often be related to scripture. Sometimes the appreciation that they are scripturally based may not happen until later when we read or hear the relevant passage. Sometimes their scriptural relevance is clearly understood immediately. The presence of God may also be felt more than through symbols. We may find Jesus gently revealing himself, healing us and calling us to a new life in him. God may choose to open our hearts to his mystery and love in personal ways beyond our rational expectations or understandings; ways that call directly to our hearts and souls.

Christian Scripture, Faith and Tradition

These interior Companioned Prayer experiences reflect many fundamental tenets of Christianity. By experiencing these directly, interiorly and with both personal and universal applicability, the prayer experiences are confirmed over and over again to reveal the living waters of the faith. We find our own prayer experiences directly reflected in scripture and in the teachings of the Church.

Are these experiences something new? No. They have been going on for 2000 years. The Church has an incredibly rich and well documented history of people of faith who have recorded such experiences and expressions over the centuries. In addition, it is now and always has been the common experience of Christians everywhere that God is personal and universal, awesome and loving, that he gives us freewill but is also merciful and saving. You don't have to be a saint in order to know the simple yet profound truths of Christianity. You can know them directly through prayer. And if any of your individual prayer experiences do not have clarity of meaning, do not try to create your own clarity. Trust that the knowledge you need will be revealed by God, with your faith, given to you out of his mercy and grace in the manner and time when it is best for you. This may occur when you least expect it. It can occur within another prayer, or during worship, as a result of service, or within a loving relationship. Within all this, we find that the reflections of our prayerful experiences and our ongoing Christian formation are crucially and wonderfully

supported by the rich teachings and traditions of the Church. Reflection and discernment are most valuable within a Christian community established in faith and supported by history, tradition, and others who understand the tender whisper of Christ within.

The Church has wonderful resources and writings of spiritual teachers who have followed the inward journey of Christ's call. Examples are Julian of Norwich, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Therese of Lisieux, Thomas Merton, Meister Eckhart, and many many others. And certainly read and listen to the scriptures. But with the awakening of your awareness of God within your heart, trust and follow God's loving draw and expression within you. Your spiritual path will be unique to you. It will be your living, personal relationship with God as revealed by him. It will not be the identical path of another saint. Whether your journey follows a traditional form or is more uncommon, it will be your own path, your own journey, because it will be God personally calling and revealing himself in you. Therefore, have trust and faith in his very special loving presence as he beckons, pulls and fulfills you in his ways. Be sensitive to this loving presence with a sensitivity learned and nurtured in Companioned Prayer, and with the many other aspects of the Church's worship, prayer and traditions. Be continually open to the living mystery of God within you.

It is not the singular experiences of Companioned Prayer that are the objective of our spiritual journeys. It is God's loving presence revealed within us and his drawing us into him in our heart, and our responsive expression of that love, which is the goal of our spiritual journey. Companioned Prayer is just one wonderful way to discover and nurture that joy within a full life of faith.

The Prayer's Fruits

After praying do we find ourselves to be kinder, more open to accepting others? Or are we more irritable and judgmental? What is the outcome of the prayer in our life? What is the effect of regular practice over time? Prayer that is authentic, that is based in the grace of our Lord, will bring about changes in us and in our relationships. With true prayer we will find ourselves silently being in God's love and giving love to others, and serving them. God's real loving kindness, compassion, humility, and appreciation of others find expression through us. We feel more fulfilled, free, normal, peaceful, and whole. We find it easier to connect and communicate with other people with empathy and delight. We are naturally more present. Our gratitude and playfulness are enhanced; and our sense of belonging and of being a part of God's loving mystery is our daily experience.

These are the fruits of a regular practice of Companioned Prayer. Love and charity will grow in us, as will our discipleship. This discipleship will be not only a personal relationship with our savior, but will be increasingly identified with our Christian community, our brothers and sisters in Christ, his Church, his body.