

The Starting Point: Warm-up Stretches

Grace: Ask for the grace to see whatever it is that you might need or desire from God.

Introduction:

You may have read or heard about the Spiritual Exercises; however, you have decided that now it is time to start doing them. At the beginning of every prayer, it is helpful to take a moment to think about what you hope will happen during the prayer. What is the grace that you are hoping that God will give you? What is it that you might need or want from God during this time of quiet reflection?

This is a chance to look in to your own self. Reflect on the things that are on your mind (concerns, worries, hopes, and/or fears). Allow these concerns or anxieties to surface so that you can freely hand them over to God. The purpose here is to get a sense of where are you starting from. *There is no right or wrong answer.*

Some questions to ponder may include: For what are you thirsting? What are some of your deeper desires? With what has God blessed you? As you begin this year, what promises do you wish to make to God? What promises does God make to you? Dream of new things the Lord may want to give you this year. What are your hopes and dreams? What are you trying to accomplish this year? What steps will you need to take to make sure that you can accomplish them? Are there any challenges that you face that you might be concerned about? Are you open to receiving what God wants to share with you?

You may want to start at the beginning of your life. Since prayer is about your relationship with God, you may start by reflecting on how you came to be here. This time of reflection hopefully will stay with you throughout the week with a variety of images popping up in your head. Pay attention to the images that come to mind. Perhaps God is trying to share something with you. Allow the memories that have shaped you to come to mind.

Ask God to show you the important moments of your life. What "pictures" are there? With each part of my life, what "scenes" do I remember? Who are in those scenes? Some photos may be of happy times and others may be quite sad. Trust that whatever images come to your mind, do so for a reason. Take it easy. Go slowly. There is no rush. It is not a competition to see who can have the most images or the most profound recollection. As far as Spiritual Exercises go, this is a warm-up exercise. Sit with your images and enjoy them. They are gifts.

As you examine these images, ask for the grace to be able to discover God's presence in them. Where was God in those moments of your life? What was God's role?

After you finish reading the Scripture passages, spend some time reflecting on your life. Allow your thoughts to wander to imagine various people, places, and things. Write down the images that come to mind.



Some Reminders:

- Prayer comes readily to us when we let it.
- Using the Exercises, you will surely find your way to pray.
- All you need is these materials, a space to pray in and a set time for prayer.

When you go to pray:

- Remember first you are in God's holy presence.
- Then, take the scripture passage and quietly read through it.
- Think about it for awhile. Stay as long as you can.
- If you find yourself moved to do so, address God our Lord with reverence about your own thoughts.
- End your prayer with the Our Father, since that is how Jesus taught us to pray.
- Take a moment to jot down what happened.



Isaiah 55 Invitation to the Thirsty – “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor.” Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed."



Luke 14:25-33 The Cost of Being a Disciple - Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."



In these or similar words... During the relaxing time I was thinking mostly about my brother. I was recalling all of the good times we had as children. He leaves for college in one year, and I'm going to miss him. I was thinking about overall goals I have for this year: become closer with the Lord, come closer to my sister, and make straight A's in school. I also started to think about the direction I'm going in life, if it's a positive direction or negative. It made me realize that some things are going to have to change. I pray that God can help my brother sort some of his problems out also, and to do well in college.

Practicing What You Preach ... To increase your ability to be aware of God's presence and action in your life, make a personal commitment to complete the Awareness Examen daily.