

Weeks of Accompanied Prayer

Do you ever wonder about the connection between faith and daily life?

Are you looking for a deeper personal relationship with God?

Do you sometimes find it difficult to pray?

Would you like to know more about different ways of praying?

For people who have a desire to grow in their own inner journey, to deepen their relationship with God and to explore new possibilities in their prayer life, going away to a retreat house may provide a few days of peace and silence. It may however be a struggle to keep hold of this when returning home to everyday life. Many do not have the resources of time or money to go away for an individually-given retreat at a retreat centre.

A Week of Accompanied Prayer (WAP) brings the retreat to people, where they live, so that they may have the experience of being affirmed and accompanied each day of the week and given the chance to try out new or different ways of praying. The week is a wonderful opportunity to make a retreat right in the middle of everyday life.

What is a Week of Accompanied Prayer?

The week starts with a group session of all participants who come together, usually on a Sunday afternoon, to learn more about what is involved, to meet the prayer companions and fix a time for their daily session. The opening meeting lasts about an hour and a half and includes an explanation of ways of praying with a Scripture passage and a chance to pray it together. We are all different and we each come to God in our unique and personal way. The week provides some time and space to look at where God touches our lives in our daily routine and to explore ways of drawing closer to God. This retreat in daily life is individually guided by a companion and therefore adapted to the needs of each person.

Who are the prayer companions?

The prayer companions come from a variety of places and may be lay, ordained or members of a religious community. They are all trained in listening skills and prayer accompaniment. Some travel in each day, some stay locally and are given hospitality by people in the area. The companion is a listener and the time of sharing concentrates the participant on the present moment and on thoughts and feelings arising from the prayer.

The commitment

Participants are asked to give a commitment to spend half an hour a day in prayer and reflection on a suggested scripture text then to share something of the experience with their companion at a regular time each day for up to half an hour in total confidence. It is not a scripture exam or someone checking up on the quality of our prayer. It is simply just sharing what is comfortable about the daily prayer time.

The week ends with another group session on the last day of the retreat, to draw together and reflect on the experience of the whole week and offer it to God in thanksgiving. It also provides a chance to consider a follow-up event such as a quiet day in the future.

How can I find time?

It is not always easy to find a regular half hour each day for prayer, but don't let that put you off. Ideally it's good to find a quiet space at home away from telephones, doorbells and other interruptions or in a church on the way to work or in the lunch hour, sitting on the train or bus or even walking the dog. The important thing is to focus on an attitude of quiet reverence with a heart open to receive. This kind of retreat in daily life provides an opportunity to refresh our prayer experience, to pause with God in the middle of our daily schedule and to rediscover Him as our true companion on our journey of faith.

It's flexible and ecumenical

The format is very flexible and has been used in schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and prisons. It can be spread over several weeks, such as in Lent or Advent. In this case the meetings with companions take place once a week, providing more time and more resource material for prayer. This can lead to establishing a new rhythm of prayer and a deeper commitment to ponder the mysterious presence and action of God in our experience.

Although occasionally a church will run its own WAP, it tends to be an ecumenical activity with a number of local churches taking part together. Sometimes these may be members of local Churches Together Groups who may be used to joining in various events on a regular basis. This can prove to be helpful in sharing the organisation of the week.

Over to you

If you think you would like to organise a week of accompanied prayer or participate in a week or talk to someone who has done so, why not give it a try? Ask around to find if there are local spirituality advisors or people involved with quiet days, spiritual direction or prayer courses.

Try contacting: Reflect – Methodists supporting spirituality & retreats. www.reflectretreats.co.uk

The Retreat Association www.retreats.org.uk tel. 011494 569056

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