

Part 1: Silence

About This Program

A Way to God for Today is a spiritual development program for adults and upper high school students. In each of the six half—hour programs Fr. Anthony de Mello will describe important areas of spirituality. He will describe many spiritual exercises that will help your group make progress in these areas.

Each program concludes with a description of an exercise that should be done by everyone in your group immediately after the program. (For your reference a description of this exercise has been printed at the beginning of each guide.) Allow ten minutes for this exercise. Following the exercise invite the members of your group to share their experiences of the exercise if they wish to. All sharing should be entirely voluntary; the participants should feel comfortable not to share if they wish not to.

Because the group members may wish to share their reactions to the ideas in the programs, included in these prayer guides are summaries of the programs end discussion questions related to the content.

Also included in each guide is a reproducible that restates each exercise described during the program. Please make copies of the reproducible and give a copy to each group member after the program and prayer exercise. If you have time, allow the group members to do an additional exercise from the reproducible following the discussion.

SILENCE

Summary

Anyone who wants to find God must pass through silence. The three ways of gaining silence are:

1. By understanding the limitations of our words and ideas,
2. By truly looking, listening, and hearing without preconceived images, ideas, or reactions, and
3. By meditatively reading the scriptures. Illustrations and examples of each of these are given throughout the program.

Silence Exercise

Recall your favorite sentence of Jesus from the New Testament. Repeat it to yourself. Imagine Jesus is standing in front of you and is addressing those words to you. Don't dwell too much on the meaning of the words. Resist the temptation to react. Don't say anything and don't respond in any way. Let the words reverberate in your heart and resound in your being. When you cannot contain it anymore, respond to Jesus. (Allow five to ten minutes for this exercise.)

Discussion Questions

1. Fr. de Mello said, "Any way to God has to be a way through silence. If you ever come to union with God, you must pass through silence." Do you agree? Has Fr. de Mello interested you in silence? Have you ever practiced silence in the past? If so, how? How does Fr. de Mello's ideas about silence differ from what you had previously thought of silence? How will you practice silence differently as a result of this program?
2. To illustrate what silence is Fr. de Mello told a story about a king who, wanting to know how to be united with God, visited a spiritual master. The master said the only way was through silence. The king asked, "How is silence gained?" The master responded, "By meditation." The king asked, "What is meditation?" The master responded, "Silence." What do you think is the point of this story? What was the master trying to tell the king?

3. Fr. de Mello said that to gain silence you must understand that God is far beyond all your words and all your thoughts. Do you agree? If so, how should you come to know God? What are the limitations of words and ideas?
4. As a child, what images did you have of God? How have those images changed? What is your image of God now? Do you think this image helps your spiritual growth? Why or why not?
5. In the Second Lateran Council it was said that any image of God we have is more unlike him than like him. What do you think this means?
6. How does scripture help you to know God, even though it cannot give you a picture of God?
7. Why is God indescribable?
8. Fr. de Mello said that the second thing you need in order to gain silence is to look and listen. What was his point? How can you do this? How do you need to look and listen differently than you do now?
9. In the East they say, "God created the world. God dances the world." What do you think "God dances the world" means? How might it be possible that we see the dance but not the dancer? What is the difference? How are the dance and the dancer not one thing and yet not two?

Exercises for Silence

Understand

Come to the realization that words and ideas are inadequate. Meditate on this. Recall each idea you have of God and say to yourself, "He is more unlike this than like it. He is far beyond this and far better than this."

Look

Look at some nature scene or some object. Don't look for anything sensational. Just look as if you are seeing it for the first time.

Listen

Listen to all the sounds around you. If possible, avoid putting names to the sounds. Realize that each sound is really composed of many sounds. Don't look for anything sensational. Just listen to those sounds as if you are hearing them for the first time in your life.

Scripture

Recall your favorite sentence of Jesus from the New Testament. Repeat it to yourself. Imagine Jesus is standing in front of you and he addresses those words to you. Don't dwell too much on the meaning of the words. Resist the temptation to react. Don't say anything and don't respond in any way. Let the words reverberate and resound within you. When you cannot contain it anymore, respond to Jesus.

A variation of this exercise is to get into silence first. Then recall a sentence from scripture or get someone to read it to you. Those words of scripture will be etched in your heart and they will deepen your silence. They may take on a meaning that is quite beyond the power of words to express.