

Part 7: Risk

Begin with three minutes of silence coming before God. Share your week's experience of prayer and your feelings about identifying fears and desires in relating to God. (20 minutes)

If we are exploring our relationship with God, we might be tempted to start by looking at what God wants of us, but our understanding of who God is may not be very clear. It is affected by other people's understanding of God and also by the fluctuations in our state of being and seeing.

To see God more clearly and openly, we need to become aware of our 'blind spots', our habitual reactions, our attitudes and the way we interpret our perceptions.

We therefore start by looking at ourselves: where we are, how we are and how in touch we are with our own feelings. According to Gerard Hughes, 'The more we know ourselves, the more we are in touch with Him.' (*God of Surprises*, p. 43)

To become more aware of ourselves, we need first to reduce outside noise and interference and make a space in each day to be still; to be fully present to ourselves.

Reflect on your past experience of silence for five minutes, thinking especially of difficulties you may have had and what you could do about them in future. Share these reflections with the group. (15 minutes)

Risk

For any journey to take place, we have to risk, which means leaving our securities behind and stepping out. We cannot remain where we are comfortable and at the same time move forward into life.

John Powell, in his book *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?*, is given the answer: 'I am afraid to tell you who I am, because if I tell you who I am, you may not like who I am, and it's all that I have.'

This reflects something of the imprisoning fears and self-doubt which cripple most of us and keep us from forward movement on the road to mature wholeness. None of us wants to be a fraud or to live a lie, but the fears that we experience and the risks that honest self-communication would involve seem so intense to us that seeking refuge in our roles, masks and games becomes an almost natural reflex action.

The following passage called 'The Exposure' looks at what it means to risk and to move. Read it through once, then read it a second time. As you listen, write down the first phrase that strikes you most and remain with it for as long as you can.

The Exposure

I think of times I come alive
and the times when I am dead.
I ponder on the features I assume
in moments of aliveness
and in times when I am dead.
Life abhors security:



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for life means taking risks,
exposing self to danger,
even death.
Jesus says that those who wish to be safe will lose their lives;
those who are prepared to lose their lives will keep them.
I think of the times when I drew back from taking risks,
when I was comfortable and safe:
those were the times when I stagnated.
I think of other times
when I dared to take a chance,
to make mistakes,
to be a failure,
and a fool,
to be criticised by others,
when I dared to risk being hurt
and to cause pain to others.
I was alive!
Life is for the gambler.
The coward dies.
Life is at variance with my perception
of what is good and bad:
these things are good and to be sought;
these others are bad and to be shunned.
To eat of the Tree of Knowing Good and Bad
is to fall from paradise.
I must learn to accept whatever life may bring,
pleasure and pain, sorrow and joy.
For if I close myself to pain
my capacity for pleasure dies—
I harden myself
and repress what I regard as unpleasant and undesirable
and in that hardness, that repression,
is rigidity and death.
So I decide to taste in all its fullness
the experience of the present moment,
calling no experience good or bad.
Those experiences that I dread – I think of them,



and, inasmuch as I am able, I let them come
and stop resisting them.

Life goes hand in hand with change.

What does not change is dead.

I think of people who are fossils.

I think of times when I was fossilized:

no change, no newness,

the same old worn-out concepts

and patterns of behaviour,

the same mentality, neuroses,

habits, prejudices.

Dead people have a built-in fear of change.

What changes have there been in me
over the past six months?

What changes will there be today?

I end this exercise

by watching nature all around me:

so flexible

so flowing,

so fragile,

insecure,

exposed to death –

and so alive!

I watch for many minutes.

(from *Wellsprings* by Anthony De Mello, used with permission.)

What is it saying about you? What feelings does it evoke? Try to be as sensitive to your response as you can. (15 minutes)

Write your reflections in your journal. Share what you can of your experience with the group. (30 minutes)

At home

Each day of this week, practise being silent for about ten minutes. Whenever you realise that your mind has wandered, don't become anxious, gently return to the stillness and awareness of yourself.

Be at home to yourself!

Reflect on this experience each time and journal it. If you have time, continue to meditate on 'The Exposure'. Notice any excitement or fear that you may feel and talk to God about it. Listen to what God says in reply. Write as much as you can about the experience.



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