

*It is a gesture of prayer, without words. What are you expressing to God through it? Stay with it for a while. Repeat the movement in your own time. At the end I shall invite you to open your eyes gently.*

Allow people a few minutes to comment on this exercise. Suggest that this is one way of making a prayer with the body. There are many others, one is suggested on the handout, encourage people to practise these exercises at home.

End with a final exercise and prayers.

#### **Exercise 4**

*We shall end with a final exercise and prayers. Again sit comfortably, feet on ground, back supported, hands on lap, eyes closed. Become aware of the sensations in your body... slowly raise your face toward God... keep your eyes closed... what are you saying to God through your upturned face? ... stay with that for a few moments.... Then become as aware as possible of the position of your face.... of the sensations on your face.... After a few moments become aware of what you are expressing to God through your upturned face, stay with that for a while...*

#### **Closing Prayers**

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him....  
Be still before the Lord, and wait ...  
Be still before the Lord....  
Be still...  
Be ...

*Psalm 37.7*

I desire to be all silence,  
all adoration,  
to penetrate ever deeper and deeper into God,  
and to be so filled with God  
that I may by my prayer  
give him to those who do not know him.  
*Elizabeth of the Trinity*

# Learning to be Still

*Leader's Notes - Session 1:*

## **Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him. (Ps 37.7)**

### **Opening Prayer**

I desire to be all silence,  
all adoration,  
to penetrate ever deeper and deeper into God,  
and to be so filled with God  
that I may by my prayer  
give him to those who do not know him.  
*Elizabeth of the Trinity*

### **Introduction**

This session we shall be using some exercises to help our bodies to be still and to use them in prayer. Our faith is an embodied one, God in Christ took on human form, so our bodies are an important part of our prayer and we need to attend to them.

When we stop being active we often experience restlessness. Being still, physically and mentally is not easy. But we need still bodies in order to still the mind. When we pray we need to be still so we can still the mind in God's presence and be open to God. Generally speaking, the head is not a good place for prayer. These exercises are intended to help us get out of our head.

### **Exercise 1**

*Sit comfortably with your feet on the floor and your back supported by the chair. Close your eyes.  
I invite you to become aware of the sensations in your body at this moment ... Be aware of the touch of your clothes on your shoulders ... on your back... your back touching the chair... your hands on your lap... become aware of your thighs touching the chair... become conscious of your feet touching your shoes... now become aware of your posture ...*

*Continue to move around your body in your own time, stay a few moments with each part. If you wish, dwell on other parts of your body, head, neck, arms, chest..., the important thing is to get the feel, the sensation of each part of your body.*

*After five minutes I shall invite you to open your eyes gently.*

Invite everyone to say briefly how this exercise was for them. Emphasise that what is shared is confidential to the group and that there should be no discussion and that all are free to say nothing.

Either here or later, depending on what comes up, talk a little about our tendency to live in our heads, rather than in our senses, anywhere but in the present moment. This can lead to all sorts of things, tension, feeling of guilt. To pray we need to be in the present moment and to stay there.

Our prayer often starts in our head, the area of thinking and talking but it needs to move into the heart, the area of feeling, sensing, intuiting. This is where contemplation starts and prayer becomes transforming. [If any express an increase of tension, rather than feeling more relaxed, encourage them to notice where this tension is and what it feels like.]

Before moving on to the second exercise invite everyone to stand up and stretch, to imagine they are picking luscious cherries which are just out of reach!

## **Exercise 2**

*This is an exercise in stillness. If we wish to learn to pray, we must learn to be still to quieten ourselves. This stillness often becomes the prayer where God reveals himself. We are going to repeat the first exercise, but this time going over the whole body, starting with the top of the head and moving down to the tip of the toes. Be aware of the sensations in each part, don't think about them, just notice them for a few seconds. If there is no particular sensation, simply move on. Gradually you will begin to notice more sensations, some very subtle. Become aware of each part of the body, then rest in the awareness of the body as a whole and notice the complete stillness of your body.*

*And be aware of the stillness in the room. Keep moving around the body and resting in the stillness of the whole body for about 10 minutes*

Stretch; repeat the exercise with emphasis on the importance of not moving. Explain...

*It is really important not to move any part of your body while doing this exercise. This can be really painful, however comfortably you are sitting. Your body will protest. It will be difficult at first, but stay with it, be aware of the pain, it will gradually go away. You may start to feel tense again, if so simply stay with the tension as long as necessary until it disappears. It is quite usual to start itching, but again it is important to remain still and resist the temptation to scratch. The itch will go away!*

*At the end I will invite you to open your eyes gently. Then we will have coffee in silence. Please help yourself. You may like to move around and take a walk outside. When we gather again, we will take a few minutes to share how we found this second exercise.*

Now invite people to sit comfortably again, feet on the floor, back supported, eyes closed and start the exercise as before, but leave people to do it in their own time for about 10-15 minutes.

## **Coffee**

In silence: encourage people to move as they have coffee. Gather for sharing of experience of Exercise 2, remind people of the ground rules.

## **Exercise 3**

*This is an exercise to use the body specifically to express our prayer.*

*Again sit comfortably, feet on ground, back supported, eyes closed. Quieten yourself by becoming aware of the sensations in your body... notice the tiniest sensations as you move around your body. Very gently, rest your hands and fingers on your lap. Close the fingers into the palm of the hand, gently, to make a fist. Very, very slowly, open your fingers as though the petals of a flower are opening in slow motion... Be aware of each movement. Rest with your hands open on your lap, palms upward, become aware of the gesture itself.*