

Reflection Questions for

BEGINNING TO PRAY

By Archbishop Anthony Bloom

- Session 1: Introduction
- Session 2: Chapter 1
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- Session 6: Chapters 5 & 6

The following set of reflection questions were developed by Presbytera Helene Hall and Phyllis Meshel Onest in the fall of 1993 for the St. Macrina Study Group / Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church / Akron, Ohio.

St. Macrina's meets weekly during the school year to learn more about the Orthodox faith. Various texts and taped lectures have been used, including

1. Partakers of Divine Nature by Archimandrite Christoforos Stavropoulos & translated by Fr. Dr. Stanley Harakas.
2. Our Hearts True Home edited by Virginia Nieuwsma.
3. Raising Them Right by Theofan the Recluse.
4. Way of the Ascetics by Tito Colliander.
5. Videotape of Fr. Thomas Hopko: "God's People at Work - Being Christian in the Modern World".
6. A Year of the Lord [5 volumes] Bible Study by Fr. Ted Stylianopoulos.
7. Of Life and Salvation by Fr. Stanley Harakas.

BEGINNING TO PRAY Reflection Questions

Session 1: Introduction

1. Archbishop Anthony's father is quoted on page 5: "Always remember that whether you are alive or dead matters nothing. What matters is what you live for and what you are prepared to die for? How can I teach this to my children / others?"
2. On page 8 Archbishop Anthony shares how unconditional love touched his life. Name one of the first examples of unconditional love in your life, other than your parents.
3. Archbishop Anthony speaks of, "doubting in order to discover the reality of life." [p. 11] Share an experience of doubting which became a lesson of life.
4. Do I see myself as a beggar, hoping someone else will pay or am I prepared to pay the cost? [p.13]
5. Do you agree with the statement, "the realm of God is dangerous"? [p.16] Give an example.
6. How do I feel about the statement "there is a way of being defeated, even in our faith and a this is a way of sharing the anguish of our Lord"?

BEGINNING TO PRAY Reflection Questions
Session 2: Chapter 1 - "The Absence of God"

1. In the first paragraph Archbishop Anthony speaks of "breaking through to God" and "God breaking through to us." When has this occurred in your own life and how did you feel?

2. Regarding the "mutual relationship" we are to have with God, Archbishop Anthony states "that God could complain about us a great deal more than we about Him." Why? When in your life could God have "complained" about you? Would you have "complained" if the situation were reversed?

3. After the story of the adulterous women, Archbishop Anthony talks about "covering Christ's eyes." He goes on to say "Do we not do this, to a certain extent, when we ignore the divine presence and act according to our own desires, our moods, contrary to everything which is God's will?" When do we do this in our own lives?

4. Archbishop Anthony speaks to us about Christ not coming to us because we are not there to receive Him. What keeps us/you personally from Him?

5. We hear people say, and may have said ourselves, that "God is testing my patience, my faith, my humility." Why does Archbishop Anthony believe this to be a false piety? Do you agree or disagree? Why? [p.31]

6. What were your thoughts when you read "Before you knock at the door, you must realize that you are outside"?

7. Summary Question: Throughout the chapter we read about times God seems to be absent. What are the 5 reasons that Archbishop Anthony discussed in this chapter?

[Prepared by Phyllis Meshel Onest, 10/93]

BEGINNING TO PRAY: Reflection Questions
Session 3: Chapter 2 - "Knocking at the Door"

1. Share a time of pure thanksgiving to God for something simple such as the cucumber.

2. What are some ways we can curb our imagination to keep from being enslaved to sins of the flesh?

3. Explain how focusing our attention on a visible sign of God [ex. cross, icon] becomes a barrier.

4. Of the following, which is my strongest? Which is my weakest? Explain.
Bow - attentiveness
String - have our heart in it
Strength - our lifestyle
Shaft - words of prayer

5. In light of the story of the shepherd, what gifts is God receiving from those whose ministry is motherhood / parenthood?

BEGINNING TO PRAY: Reflection Questions
Session 6: Chapter 5 - "Addressing God"

1. Personal: Do you have a nickname that bonds you to another person? How do you feel when you are called by that name?

2. How did you feel when you read that God has a name for you that **only** He knows, and that name that brought you into being?

3. Now that we have learned that the way we pray for another affects our relationship with that person, what - if anything - will you change about your prayer life?

Chapter 6 - "Two Meditations"

1. What impact did the two images of the Mother of God have on you?

2. How can you "surrender to God" so that, like the Theotokos, you are ready to do whatever He wills?

3. What have you learned from the example of Staretz Silouan?

[Prepared by Phyllis Meshel Onest, 11/93]