

ALONE

with God

A Guide for Personal Retreats

Our Many Faces

a one-week sample booklet from the

WORKBOOK

Ron DelBene

with Mary & Herb Montgomery

ABOUT THE

ALONE *with God* WORKBOOK

Most of the people who come to me for spiritual direction want to make God a more integral part of their lives. Often, though, their days are so hurried and hassled that they find it difficult to fit prayer and reflection into their schedules. Thus I, along with my coauthors, created *Alone with God: A Guide for Personal Retreats*. The book is for those wanting to occasionally spend time in solitude, silence, and prayer. The time needed for a personal retreat is highly flexible: it could be an hour, a day, or a weekend.

This workbook and corresponding program have been adapted from my book *Alone with God*. The program asks that you spend 20 to 30 minutes each day with God's Word—time in which to slow your pace and listen more closely to what God is saying to you. Part of this time is spent reading the scripture story for the week. The rest is devoted to prayer, reflecting on the story and doing the daily exercise. The prayers in the back of the book are to be used as you see fit to enrich your spiritual life.

Each week in the *Alone with God* program, a single scripture story is prayed. By revisiting the same scripture daily, we discover new meanings and new applications to our lives. The weekly meetings that are part of the program provide an opportunity to share your encounter with God's Word. Through sharing our faith journey, we become companions on the way—companions who help one another put our joys and sorrows in perspective and see how God is present in the ordinary circumstances of our lives.

I encourage those who come to me for spiritual direction to keep a journal. These deeply felt writings reflect some of what happens when we invite God to enter more fully into our lives. Some journal entries are included in this workbook, and all are used with the permission of the people who wrote them. In the interest of privacy, names and certain identifying details have been changed.

As we grow in faith and love, we are better able to live in the awareness of God's presence and respond to the call to love one another. Spending time alone with scripture and sharing your insights enables you to see how you are being nourished by the gift of God's Spirit and what that gift is preparing you to do. Perhaps doors that were once closed will be opened, revealing not only a need to change but a way to change. Or maybe you will feel the wondrous release of forgiveness and a sense of peace that had previously been out of reach. May the time you spend with this program nurture your spirit and take you further on the journey that brings you closer to God.

—RON DELBENE

WEEK ONE: OUR MANY FACES

The story for this week
is that of the good Samaritan.
(Luke 10:30-35)

Week 1, Day 1



This week I am praying for _____.

PRAYER:

I give thanks to you, O God, my Creator. You have called me by name and know both my face and my inmost thoughts. Guide me to a fuller knowledge of myself that I may draw closer to you. Let me feel your presence in my daily life and know that your love is always with me. I ask this both for myself and for _____, my companion on the way. Amen.

CENTER YOURSELF:

Prepare for your time with God's Word by relaxing your mind and body. Some people do this by sitting quietly; others prefer gentle body movement. It is commonplace to feel distracted and have your mind cluttered with thoughts. Do not fight the thoughts or focus on new ones that come to mind. Instead, breathe deeply and reflect on this scripture:

Search me, O God, and know my heart.
— Psalm 139:23 (NRSV)

Let the scripture be a touchstone that you keep coming back to until you reach an inner calm.

THE SCRIPTURE STORY:

Read the story two or three times. You may want to read it silently and then aloud. There is power in the spoken word even when the voice is your own and you are the audience. Take your time. If something in the story grabs your attention, pause and reflect on it. Be open to letting God's Spirit lead your thoughts.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

— Luke 10:30-35



REFLECTING AND RESPONDING

The good Samaritan is a familiar story—so familiar, in fact, that the expression “being a good Samaritan” is widely recognized. If someone is called a good Samaritan, what does this mean to you?

Cite an instance when you felt someone was being a good Samaritan. This can be someone you know or someone you only read or heard about.

This week you are going to be asked to look at the good Samaritan story in more depth than you may have in the past. As you read it today, did any words or phrases stand out or speak to you in a particular way? If so, circle them.

Choose a word, phrase, or image in the story that has special meaning for you and write it here. (For example: *robbers, moved with pity, bandaging wounds.*)

Use what you have written as a reminder of the story.

INNER RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD:

Free yourself of distractions and be attentive to God moving quietly within your mind and heart. Some people like to sit in stillness; others prefer to move their body in prayerful expression. If your attention wanders, return to this scripture:

Yahweh, you search me and know me.
— Psalm 139:1

END WITH PRAYER:

I give you thanks, O God, for this time I have spent in quiet reflection. I look to your Word for a better understanding of who I am and who I am called to be. Guide me as I strive to live according to your call to love others as you have loved me. Amen.

Week 1, Day 2



PRAYER:

I give thanks to you, O God, my Creator. You have called me by name and know both my face and my inmost thoughts. Guide me to a fuller knowledge of myself that I may draw closer to you. Let me feel your presence in my daily life and know that your love is always with me. I ask this both for myself and for _____, my companion on the way. Amen.

CENTER YOURSELF:

Prepare for your time with God's Word by relaxing your mind and body. Some people do this by sitting quietly; others prefer gentle body movement. It is commonplace to feel distracted and have your mind cluttered with thoughts. Do not fight the thoughts or focus on new ones that come to mind. Instead, breathe deeply and reflect on this scripture:

Search me, O God, and know my heart.
— Psalm 139:23 (NRSV)

Let this be a touchstone that you keep coming back to until you achieve an inner calm.

THE SCRIPTURE STORY:

Read the story two or three times. You may want to read it silently and then aloud. As you read the story, think about how you are like two of the characters in the story—one of the robbers and the one who is beaten. Take your time. If something about the story grabs your attention, pause and reflect on it. Be open to letting God's Spirit lead your thoughts.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

— Luke 10:30-35



REFLECTING AND RESPONDING

God has created us to be wondrously complex. Often in scripture we find stories that reveal the various facets—or faces—of ourselves. Once we accept that we are a person of many facets and are aware of all our faces, we can take steps to reveal the very best that is in us.

For this session and the three that follow, you will be asked to look at various characters in the story. In doing so you are likely to make discoveries about yourself. A young man who gained insight into his own life from the robbers in the story said, "I remember a look I got as a kid, and now I find myself giving others that same look. It says, 'Don't you dare!' As a child I was robbed, and now I rob others."

We also rob ourselves and others when we say such things as "I'm not able to learn that" or "I'm too old" or "Girls can't do that" or "Boys aren't supposed to cry." Other remarks that reveal the robber in us are, "It'll never work" or "You wouldn't want to disappoint me, would you?"

Think of five ways you rob yourself or others.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Do you identify with the person in the story who is beaten? Perhaps like Bill, an attorney in his late thirties, you remember times when you wanted to cry out for help, but felt so beaten down you didn't have the energy. Or you see something of yourself in Sandra, a busy mother of two adolescents, who gets angry when what she really wants is compassionate understanding, but no one seems to care about her.

Write about a way in which you feel you are the one who is being beaten, or a way in which you beat on others.

INNER RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD:

Free yourself of distractions and be attentive to God moving quietly within your mind and heart. Some people like to sit in stillness; others prefer to move their body in prayerful expression. If your attention wanders, return to this scripture:

Yahweh, you search me and know me.
— Psalm 139:1

END WITH PRAYER:

I give you thanks, O God, for this time I have spent in quiet reflection. I look to your Word for a better understanding of who I am and who I am called to be. Guide me as I strive to live according to your call to love others as you have loved me. Amen.

Week 1, Day 3



PRAYER:

I give thanks to you, O God, my Creator. You have called me by name and know both my face and my inmost thoughts. Guide me to a fuller knowledge of myself that I may draw closer to you. Let me feel your presence in my daily life and know that your love is always with me. I ask this both for myself and for _____, my companion on the way. Amen.

CENTER YOURSELF:

Prepare for your time with God's Word by relaxing your mind and body. Some people do this by sitting quietly; others prefer gentle body movement. It is commonplace to feel distracted and have your mind cluttered with thoughts. Do not fight the thoughts or focus on new ones that come to mind. Instead, breathe deeply and reflect on this scripture:

Search me, O God, and know my heart.
— Psalm 139:23 (NRSV)

Let this be a touchstone that you keep coming back to until you achieve an inner calm.

THE SCRIPTURE STORY:

Read the story two or three times. You may want to read it silently and then aloud. As you read the story, think about how you are like two of the characters in the story—the priest and the Levite. If something about the story grabs

your attention, pause and reflect on it. Be open to letting God's Spirit lead your thoughts.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

— Luke 10:30-35



REFLECTING AND RESPONDING

Again today we look at characters in the story of the good Samaritan to see what they reveal about us. Perhaps we are like the priest when we are aware of abuse and fail to report it to the authorities or when elected officials violate the public trust and we do nothing in protest. Or we may be like the priest when we say, "Keep a stiff upper lip," to a friend who needs a listening ear, or to a needy neighbor say, "Call if I can be of help," instead of suggesting specific things you are willing to do. We may also be reacting like the priest in the story when we put off until tomorrow those things that need doing today.

Do you see something of the priest in yourself? Write about at least one instance in which you failed to reach out to someone in need when you had the opportunity.

Similarly, write about an instance when you did reach out.

We are behaving like the Levite when we step aside from those in need and say, "It'll do them good to work it out themselves; they'll learn that way." Cool and rational, we reason with our head and ignore what our heart is telling us. At times that approach is appropriate, but when applied to all situations it prevents us from acting with the compassion God expects of us.

Write about a time when you wish you had acted more compassionately.

Has there been a time when you disregarded what your head was telling you and did what your heart was telling you? If so, write about it.

Which of the faces of yourself gave you the greatest satisfaction?

INNER RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD:

Free yourself of distractions and be attentive to God moving quietly within your mind and heart. Some people like to sit in stillness; others prefer to move their body in prayerful expression. If your attention wanders, return to this scripture:

Yahweh, you search me and know me.
— Psalm 139:1

END WITH PRAYER:

I give you thanks, O God, for this time I have spent in quiet reflection. I look to your Word for a better understanding of who I am and who I am called to be. Guide me as I strive to live according to your call to love others as you have loved me. Amen.

Week 1, Day 4



PRAYER:

I give thanks to you, O God, my Creator. You have called me by name and know both my face and my inmost thoughts. Guide me to a fuller knowledge of myself that I may draw closer to you. Let me feel your presence in my daily life and know that your love is always with me. I ask this both for myself and for _____, my companion on the way. Amen.

CENTER YOURSELF:

Prepare for your time with God's Word by relaxing your mind and body. Some people do this by sitting quietly; others prefer gentle body movement. It is commonplace to feel distracted and have your mind cluttered with thoughts. Do not fight the thoughts or focus on new ones that come to mind. Instead, breathe deeply and reflect on this scripture:

Search me, O God, and know my heart.
— Psalm 139:23 (NRSV)

Let this be a touchstone that you keep coming back to until you achieve an inner calm.

THE SCRIPTURE STORY:

You may want to read it silently and then aloud. As you read, think about how you are like two of the characters in the story—the Samaritan and the innkeeper. Be open to letting God's Spirit lead your thoughts.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

— Luke 10:30-35



REFLECTING AND RESPONDING

The Samaritan in the story has become a hero of mythic proportions, some one willing to do a good deed whatever the cost to himself. But in reality he might have been much like us—wanting to help but hesitant or even fearful. Any traveler living at that time would have been aware of the danger that lurked along the road. Perhaps the Samaritan asked, "Should I stop, or shouldn't I?" As we know from the story, he decided to help. At times we too take the risk and do what we hope others would do for us.

Write about a time you chose to be a good Samaritan.

Write about a time when someone was a good Samaritan to you.



A grandmother who read the story of the good Samaritan saw herself as the innkeeper. “In my younger days, I took in stray cats and dogs and frogs and gerbils the kids brought home,” she said. “As the children grew up, I took in their stray friends and was never sure how many there’d be for breakfast. Now the kids have kids, and I’m back into stray dogs, cats, and grandchildren.”

In what ways do you wear the face of the innkeeper?

INNER RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD:

Free yourself of distractions and be attentive to God moving quietly within your mind and heart. Some people like to sit in stillness; others prefer to move their body in prayerful expression. If your attention wanders, return to this scripture:

Yahweh, you search me and know me.

— Psalm 139:1

END WITH PRAYER:

I give you thanks, O God, for this time I have spent in quiet reflection. I look to your Word for a better understanding of who I am and who I am called to be. Guide me as I strive to live according to your call to love others as you have loved me. Amen.

Week 1, Day 5



PRAYER:

I give thanks to you, O God, my Creator. You have called me by name and know both my face and my inmost thoughts. Guide me to a fuller knowledge of myself that I may draw closer to you. Let me feel your presence in my daily life and know that your love is always with me. I ask this both for myself and for _____, my companion on the way. Amen.

CENTER YOURSELF:

Prepare for your time with God's Word by relaxing your mind and body. Some people do this by sitting quietly; others prefer gentle body movement. It is commonplace to feel distracted and have your mind cluttered with thoughts. Do not fight the thoughts or focus on new ones that come to mind. Instead, breathe deeply and reflect on this scripture:

Search me, O God, and know my heart.
— Psalm 139:23 (NRSV)

Let this be a touchstone that you keep coming back to until you achieve an inner calm.

THE SCRIPTURE STORY:

Read the story silently or aloud. As you read it today, think about how you are like the final character in the story—the beast of burden. Be open to letting God's Spirit lead your thoughts.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

— Luke 10:30-35



REFLECTING AND RESPONDING

Many of us have an occasional day when we drag along with a tired step and stooped shoulders. Although we may not complain, it's obvious how burdened we feel. Shirley was such a person. One of her church's most active volunteers, she clearly identified with the beast of burden in the story. "I just let people pile the jobs on me," she said. "No matter how much I have to do I keep saying yes and I figure I'll get everything done somehow." If Shirley were more assertive and took on only as many jobs as she could reasonably handle, she would feel less burdened and find greater satisfaction in giving of herself.

Sandra was a young, single businesswoman, who wrote in her journal how conditions on her job led her to identify with the beast of burden.

The main insight for me this morning was that I tend to see myself as a beast of burden in my present job. I approach everything as if it is another instance of having something laid on me. I suspect that if I change my own attitude about myself I will be able to say no to things that I realize I cannot do. This will help me stop feeling so guilty when I don't get things done on time.

Do you ever feel dumped on or overworked? Then you might identify with the burdened animal. On the other hand, this may be a character with whom you feel no identification. Write about your experiences here.

I am like the beast of burden when _____

I am not like the beast of burden because _____

INNER RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD:

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Yahweh, you search me and know me.

— Psalm 139:1

END WITH PRAYER:

I give you thanks, O God, for this time I have spent in quiet reflection. I look to your Word for a better understanding of who I am and who I am called to be. Guide me as I strive to live according to your call to love others as you have loved me. Amen.

Week 1, Day 6



PRAYER:

I give thanks to you, O God, my Creator. You have called me by name and know both my face and my inmost thoughts. Guide me to a fuller knowledge of myself that I may draw closer to you. Let me feel your presence in my daily life and know that your love is always with me. I ask this both for myself and for _____, my companion on the way. Amen.

CENTER YOURSELF:

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Search me, O God, and know my heart.
— Psalm 139:23 (NRSV)

Let this be a touchstone that you keep coming back to until you achieve an inner calm.

THE SCRIPTURE STORY:

Read the story silently or aloud. On this final reading, be alert to additional insights about the characters and how they relate to your own life. Be open to letting God's Spirit lead your thoughts.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend."

— Luke 10:30-35



REFLECTING AND RESPONDING

Sometimes readers of the good Samaritan story do not identify with any of the characters. They feel as though they are observers, interested in the story but seeing no relationship to themselves and their own lives. If reading the story is like watching a movie that does not involve you, or like looking down at the earth from a cloud, you are reading as an observer. Both in reading God's Word and in life, we can choose to be more than observers. This requires only that we put aside some of our self-protective attitudes and risk identifying with others. In doing so we are likely to feel some of our past hurts and come to understand ourselves more fully. We then have an opportunity to change the way we regard ourselves and act toward others.

Tom was a graduate student who, in reflecting on the good Samaritan story, gained a valuable insight into attitudes and relationships. In this journal entry he writes:

I never permit myself to think of any time when I've been the beaten-on one. That may be why I get so angry when I hear about anyone out of work or people on welfare. My own inability to see myself as one who needs help hinders me from seeing that anyone would ever need help. Yet, down deep, I truly know I've been beaten on. Maybe that's why my girlfriend says that I'm cold and never seem to need anything. That needs to change.

Look back at the exercises you did this week. Reflect on your many faces and the strengths and weaknesses they reveal. What was revealed to you as your strengths?

What was revealed as your weaknesses?

If there are changes in yourself you would like to make, outline the steps you can take to bring them about. Be as specific as possible.

INNER RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD:

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Yahweh, you search me and know me.
— Psalm 139:1

END WITH PRAYER:

I give you thanks, O God, for this time I have spent in quiet reflection. I look to your Word for a better understanding of who I am and who I am called to be. Guide me as I strive to live according to your call to love others as you have loved me. Amen.



PREPARATION FOR THE GROUP MEETING

Look back over your reflections and responses for the past week. Pick out an insight or experience to share. Some people are more comfortable writing out prior to the meeting what they want to share. Use these lines or a separate sheet of paper.

Remember to bring this book to the meeting. You will need it for the closing prayer and may want to refer to something you read or wrote during the week.



► 5. Begin the closing ritual with a minute of silence. (Use your watch or a timer.) After the silence, ask everyone to look around the group with an awareness of how blessed all of you are to be sharing the journey of the spirit with one another. (Allow a brief moment to look around.) Ask the group to turn to this prayer in their books. Together pray:

Thank you, God, for calling us to this group.

Together we are on a journey
seeking a better understanding
of your Word.

Guide us to see how your Word
sheds light on our path
and brings us closer to you.

Help us be attentive to your presence
in our daily lives and to live out
your call to love one another.

Amen.

*In grateful appreciation for all the spiritual seekers
who have shared their lives and their stories with me*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Ron DelBene has been doing spiritual direction and leading programs in the areas of prayer, spirituality and personal development since 1963. Ron holds a Master's degree in Theology and a Doctor of Ministry in Spirituality and Organizational Systems. He has done additional postgraduate work in education, psychology, and counseling. He is an author, poet, artist and Episcopal priest. He was an assistant professor of theology, director of a campus ministry center, and national consultant in religion for an education division of CBS.

Since 1980, Ron's organizational system's leadership has been primarily in churches, empowering them in understanding their mission, goals and structure for effective and creative ministry. Ron and his spouse, Eleanor, reside in Trussville, Alabama, and have two grown children and two grandchildren.

Mary and Herb Montgomery are full-time writers who have created numerous books and educational projects to help both children and adults grow in faith. The Montgomerys live in a Minneapolis suburb.

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