

follow Prayer: Imaginative Prayer

Introduction to Imaginative Prayer

Welcome to this session on **Imaginative Prayer**, also known as **Ignatian Contemplation**. In this session, we explore how God can speak to us through our imaginations and how to use our senses to enter into the stories of Scripture. Below, you'll find key points, scriptures, and guidance to help you engage with this contemplative practice.

What is Imaginative Prayer?

Imaginative Prayer is a practice rooted in the tradition of Saint Ignatius, who believed that the imagination is a gift from God and a primary way He communicates with us.

- **A Relational Practice:** Like other forms of prayer in this series, it is **relational and formational**—a way to talk to God about what we are doing together and to be shaped by His presence.
 - **Seeing the Story:** It involves becoming so familiar with a narrative passage of Scripture that you can close your eyes and "play it like a movie" in your mind.
 - **Filling in the Blanks:** The goal is to imagine what is "between the lines" of the text without contradicting the actual words of Scripture.
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How to Practice Imaginative Contemplation

Begin with a simple prayer of surrender: "Holy Spirit, I give you my imagination. Use it to lead me into a deeper understanding of this story and a deeper awareness of Jesus."

1. **Step 1: Select a Gospel Scene:** Choose a story from the life of Jesus that has action or dialogue (e.g., The Storm on the Lake, The Feeding of the 5,000, or Jesus at the Well).
2. **Step 2: Read and Settle:** Read the passage slowly two or three times until the details are familiar. Close your eyes and allow the "setting" to form in your mind.
3. **Step 3: Engage the Five Senses:** This is the heart of the practice. Don't just "think" about the story; "inhabit" it.
 1. *What do you see?* (The color of the water, the expression on Peter's face).
 2. *What do you hear?* (The wind in the sails, the murmur of the crowd).
 3. *What do you smell?* (The scent of charcoal fish, the dust of the road).
 4. *What do you feel?* (The spray of water on your face, the heat of the sun).
4. **Step 4: Find Your Place/Perspective:** Are you a disciple? Are you the person being healed? Or are you a bystander on the shore? There is no "wrong" place to be.

5. **Step 5: Interact with Jesus:** Allow the scene to play out. If Jesus approaches you, what does He say? What do you say back? Don't script the conversation; let it flow from your heart.
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Cautions and Tips

- **The "Scripture Filter":** The biggest concern people have is: *"Is this just me making things up?"* While our imaginations are involved, the "Caution" is to always filter your experience through the character of God as revealed in the Bible. If the "Jesus" in your imagination says something that contradicts the Jesus of the Gospels, you can safely set that thought aside.
 - **Don't Force the Drama:** Sometimes the most profound moments are quiet. You don't need a "burning bush" every time. If you simply sit on the grass near Jesus while He teaches, that is a successful session.
 - **Handle Distractions Gently:** If your mind wanders to your grocery list, don't be frustrated. Gently bring yourself back to the scene, perhaps focusing on a specific sensory detail like the sound of the waves.
 - **The Value of Community:** As the video suggests, doing this practice in a group or sharing your experience with a mentor can help "validate" what you are hearing and seeing, providing a healthy check-and-balance.
 - **Journaling the Encounter:** Immediately after your prayer, write down what happened. What did you feel? What word did Jesus speak? Reviewing these notes later often reveals patterns in how God is speaking to you.
 - **Best passages for imaginative prayer:** stories in Scripture, especially narrative scenes where there is movement, setting, dialogue, and people to observe. This practice is usually easier with passages you can "see like a movie."
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Biblical Example

- **Mark 4:35-41** – Jesus stills the storm while the disciples are in the boat.
- Ask:
 - How cold is the water?
 - How loud is the storm?
 - What do wet clothes feel like?
 - What is the texture of the setting?
 - What is happening in my body as I enter the scene?
 - What does Jesus' tone of voice sound like?
 - Are you afraid?
- **Mark 6:30-44** - Imagining the story of the feeding of the 5,000 from the perspective of a father carrying a sick son—feeling the burn in your biceps as you run to find Jesus, and the atmosphere of the kingdom as everyone is healed and fed.

Why Use Our Imagination?

We often approach the Bible as a "closed book" of facts to be studied. Imaginative Prayer turns the Bible into an "open door" to be entered.

By using our imagination, we move from being observers of a historical event to participants in a current relationship. It allows the Word of God to move "the longest fourteen inches in the world"—the distance from the head to the heart. This isn't about escaping reality; it's about using every faculty God gave us to recognize the Reality that is already present: that Jesus is with us, in the boat, in the storm, and on the shore.

Passages For Imaginative Contemplation

The Annunciation Lk 1:26–38

The Birth of Jesus Lk 2:1–20

Following the Star of the Messiah Mt 2:1–12

The Miraculous Catch of Fish Lk 5:3–11

The Wedding at Cana Jn 2:1–10

A Busy Day in Capernaum Mk 1:29–39

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man Mk 2:1–12

Jesus Heals the Centurion's Servant Mt 8:5–13

Jesus Forgives the Sinful Woman Lk 7:36–50

Jesus Calls Matthew and Eats with Sinners Mt 9:9–13

Jesus Cures the Deaf and Mute Man Mk 7:31–37

Jesus Heals the Bent Woman Lk 13:10–17

Jesus Feeds the People Mt 14:14–20

Jesus Cures the Paralytic at Bethesda Jn 5:1–18

The Transfiguration of Jesus Mt 17:1–8

The Woman Caught in Adultery Jn 8:2–11

Jesus Cures a Man Born Blind Jn 9:1–12

Jesus Invites Himself to Zacchaeus’s House Lk 19:2–10

Jesus Cleanses the Temple Mt 21:12–17

The Widow’s Mite Mk 12:41–44

The Anointing of Jesus Jn 12:1–8

Jesus Washes the Disciples’ Feet Jn 13:1–20

Jesus Is Betrayed and Arrested Mk 14:43–52

The Crucifixion of Jesus Lk 23:33–43

The Death and Burial of Jesus Lk 23:44–56

The Resurrection of Jesus Mt 28:1–10

Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene Jn 20:11–18

Jesus Appears to Peter Lk 24:33–34

Jesus Appears to the Disciples Jn 20:19–23

Jesus Appears to Thomas Jn 20:24–29

On the Road to Emmaus Lk 24:13–35

Jesus Forgives Peter Jn 21:1–19

The Great Commission Mt 28:16–20