Imaginative Prayer
Experiencing God's Presence

Imaginative prayer is a practice that uses our imagination to connect with the presence of God in our lives. God is always with us. We cannot escape the loving, personal presence of our Creator, but we often struggle to live in the awareness of this reality. Imaginative prayer is a way of intentionally meeting with and resting in the loving presence of God.

We may imagine simply sitting or walking with the Lord, or perhaps we use our imagination to see and feel God placing a hand on our shoulder or comforting us with a loving embrace. We can also use our imagination to enter a Gospel story. Ignatius of Loyola taught this method of contemplation as a way to meet with Jesus through the words of scripture, taking in the sights, sounds, and even smells of the scene.

Our culture is highly rational. We are taught to view life almost exclusively through the lens of reason and logic. This is why using our imagination to enter a Gospel story can be such a meaningful practice. It is good to read, study, and apply God's Word, but how often do we contemplate it, ponder it, or immerse ourselves and meet God in scripture?

We are more than rational beings. Our actions are primarily driven by emotion and desire, not logic. Engaging scripture solely from a rational perspective rarely forms our behavior, but when we enter a Gospel story with our imagination, we participate with our whole selves; we are immersed in the story. And when we meet Jesus face-to-face, our relationship with him grows deep, and we are formed in his likeness. Imaginative prayer helps us become gospel people.

It is not knowing a lot but grasping things intimately and savoring them that fills and satisfies the soul."

Ignatius of Loyola

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 19:14

Imaginative prayer makes the Jesus of the Gospels our Jesus. It helps us develop a unique and personal relationship with him.

David L Fleming, SJ

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

Ephesians 1:18

Imaginative prayer encounters with God stir the emotions. They provoke feelings of gratitude and evoke courage and humility. Their purpose is to call forth a heartfelt desire to know Jesus and to follow him.

IgnatianSpirituality.com

Logic will get you from A to Z; imagination will get you everywhere.

Albert Einstein

Resources

Pray with Your Imagination by David L. Fleming, SJ

The Ignatian Adventure by Kevin O'Brien, SJ

Meditation and Contemplation by Timothy Gallager, OMV

Imagining Prayer Exercises on PrayAsYouGo.org/imagining-prayer-21

Imaginative Prayers on ThePracticeChurch.com/imaginative-prayer-series

This resource was created by The Practice Church. Learn more at thepracticechurch.com

Experiencing God's Presence

In the practice of imaginative prayer, we use our imagination to connect with the presence of God. If we practice the way Ignatius raught, we imagine ourselves in a Gospel story. We see the sights, hear the sounds, and meet Christ face-to-face. As you practice this form of prayer, do not worry about historical accuracy. Simply place yourself in the scene and allow God to direct your imagination.

If you are concerned about your imagination getting the best of you, it may be helpful to consider if the practice is bringing you into deeper relationship with God or cultivating the fruits of the Spirit in your life. If it does, perhaps God in in the practice with you. If you are still unsure, you might process your experience with a trusted friend or spiritual director.

Begin in prayer
As you begin your time in this practice, find a comfortable position and take a deep breath. Remember, you are in the presence of God. Take another deep breath and remember you are loved by God. Take one more deep breath and ask God to direct your imagination.

Familiarize yourself with the story
Read through the passage a few times to become familiar with it. Read the story reflectively, noticing the details.

Place yourself in the scene
Close your eyes and imagine yourself in the scene.

- Who are you? Are you one of the people named in the story, or are you someone looking on?
- Observe your surroundings. What do you notice? Examine the setting. Take in the sights of the people and the place.
- What do you feel? Is it hot or cold? How do your clothes feel on your skin?
- Are there any particular smells or tastes in the scene?
- What do you hear? What kind of sounds are present? Is anyone speaking? What is being said?

Now allow the story to play out from your perspective. Pay attention to the people in the story. Pay particular attention to Jesus. Notice the actions, body language, and tone of voice of those in the story.

If the narrative itself does not bring you to meet personally with Jesus, go to him or imagine Jesus coming to you. What does he have to say? What does he do? Linger in this moment.

Reflect on your experience
Finally, spend a moment reflecting on your experience. How did God meet with you in this prayer? Is God inviting you to a particular action? Take a moment to thank God for meeting with you.

Passages to Practice Imaginative Prayer

The Annunciation
Luke 1:26-38

The Birth of Christ
Luke 2:1-21

The Baptism of Christ
Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus Heals Bartimaeus
Mark 10:46-52

Jesus Calms the Storm
Mark 4:35-41

Jesus Walks on the Water
Matthew 14:22-33

Peter Declares Jesus is the Messiah
Mark 8:27-30

The Rich Young Ruler
Mark 10:17-22

Jesus Heals a Sick Woman
Mark 5:21-43

Jesus Visits Mary and Martha
Luke 10:38-42

Jesus Washes his Disciples' Feet
John 13:1-17

The Resurrection
Matthew 28:1-10