

Of course, not every experience of imaginative prayer will feel satisfying or produce earth-shattering results. Sometimes it will be dry, or hard to do. Nothing will seem to be happening. But even in these seemingly dry prayer periods, you are spending time with Jesus in the world of the gospels. Spiritual transformation is taking place at a deep level, even if you can't see it. Spending time with God always changes us.

Other times, though, this kind of prayer plunges you right into your favourite gospel passage. There you are in the middle of it, noticing things that you never noticed before—about Jesus, about the apostles, about the people he touched, about first-century Palestine, and about yourself. And once that happens, you may never again hear that gospel story in the same way.

Summary: Choose a Bible passage – one from the Gospels are often the best to use

- Imagine the scene, find a place within it. Let the story unfold in your imagination.
- Who are you within the story? Are you a central figure or an unnoticed bystander?
- What can you see, hear and feel around you?
- Listen to what is said and look around you.
- Look at the expressions on people's faces and listen to the tone of people's voices.
- What else can you hear, see or feel?
- Perhaps you will notice things not mentioned in the text.
- Is there anyone you want to engage in conversation.
- Once you have seen all you want to see and finished any conversations slowly come away from the Biblical scene
- In the silence and stillness – What is God saying to you through this experience? Is there anything he wants you to do?



Ignatian Imaginative Prayer

Meditation has always been an integral part of Christian prayer.

There are two main types of Christian meditation. The first is active meditation where we use our minds to actively ponder a Scripture or an aspect of who God is. The second type of Christian meditation is stillness meditation where we quiet our thoughts and allow God's presence to move in our hearts and souls.

Many Eastern and new age meditation practices have the goal of emptying the mind. Christian meditation is an attempt to empty the mind of unhelpful things in order to fill it with what is right and true; God himself, his Word and his promises.

Christian meditation involves becoming detached from the controlling and wearying influences of the world and attached to the living God through Christ. Such a 'coming away' better enables us to live for God and with God each and every day. Indeed, there are some simple practices we can all practice daily, even when in the midst of stressful situations.

Ignatian Meditation (Imaginative prayer)

Start by choosing a favourite gospel passage to reflect on, say, Mark's account of the healing of the paralyzed man (Mark 2:1-12). In this marvellous story, the man's friends cut a hole in the roof of a house in which Jesus is preaching. Then they lower their friend down, in the hope that Jesus will heal him.

As in any prayer, you first ask for God to be with you, remembering that any grace you receive in prayer is in itself a gift from God. Next, you read the passage and use your imagination to slowly set the scene; as St. Ignatius would say, you "compose the place" in your mind.

So you ask yourself: *Who am I in this gospel story?....*

Are you part of the excited crowd that has gathered to see Jesus? Are you the owner of the house, who is annoyed that his roof is being torn apart? Are you one of the man's friends, who have climbed onto the roof and are worried about losing their footing? Or are you the paralyzed man himself, desperately hoping for healing, but at the same time wondering what this carpenter from Nazareth can possibly do?

Next: *What do I see?* You might imagine what the house looks like, along with the expression on Jesus' face, or the looks of the people in the crowd.

Then: *What do I hear?* The gospel says that there were plenty of people squeezed into the house: As they listen to Jesus, are they loudly enthusiastic or reverently silent? Are there sounds from the courtyard outside? What do you imagine Jesus' voice sounding like?

Finally: *What do I smell?* So many people packed together might mean a fairly unpleasant odour! What about other smells—from the outdoor oven or the family goat?

In these ways you use your imagination and your senses to place yourself within the scene. Then you let the gospel story unfold, almost like a film playing out.

And here's the most important part: As the scene unfolds in your imagination, pay attention to any emotional reactions or insights that occur to you. For example, you might find yourself watching the paralysed man and feeling a deep longing or intense jealousy, thinking, "I need some healing in my life!" Or you may be happy at the miracles that Jesus did in his time, and continues to do in your own life.

You may also have an insight—not so much an emotional reaction as an intellectual one. Not long ago, I was praying with this passage and realized that the paralyzed man could not have been healed without the help of his friends. How often it is the community who carries us to God, who brings us to the place where we can be healed. The touching story is a way of looking at our friends, at our family, at our community, and at the church.

Living the Gospels. Imaginative prayer involves trusting that God is at work through your imagination and through whatever emotions or insights you may experience. At first this was hard for me to accept. Praying like this seemed silly, as years ago I told my spiritual director. "Isn't it all in my head?" I asked. "Aren't I just making it up?" Her wise answer me freed me from my doubts.

"You believe that God can work through all sorts of things in life—your mind, your heart, your soul. Right?"

"Yes," I said tentatively. "So why can't God work through your imagination?"