

TOOL: Imaginative Prayer

Prayerful reflection three times a day • Daily



Introduction

Saint Ignatius of Loyola was a Spanish priest during the 1500s. Before converting to Christianity, Ignatius was a military soldier who was injured while serving. During his recovery, he read tales of knights and imagined himself inside the stories as a military hero. He also began reading some Christian literature and the Bible while recovering. Using his imagination once again, Ignatius would place himself inside the stories told in scripture. He realized using his imagination in this way did not allow for him to see himself as the hero. Rather, this practice led to feelings of love, joy, and peace.

Ignatius converted to Christianity and trained to become a priest. He began practicing and developing many spiritual practices, growing a following of religious students who wished to learn his practices. His work, *Spiritual Exercises*, continues to teach these practices to fellow believers even today.

By yielding all of ourselves to God in prayer, Ignatius believed our God-given senses enabled us to encounter God. He believed the imagination was a gift from God, and using it in prayer opened Christ followers to deeper ways of experiencing the Spirit through scripture. Not only did Ignatius' imaginative prayer practice lead him to following Christ himself, but this practice continues to be one of his most popular practices among believers who seek to encounter the Spirit in deeper ways through prayer.

Practice

Before beginning, pick a narrative story in scripture. Great options include the parables of Jesus, the descriptive accounts of Christ's ministry in the gospels, or the historical narratives of Abraham, Moses, Ruth, Deborah, or David in the Old Testament. Select a passage that is not too long, roughly using the divided breaks in your Bible as a guide.

1. Spend a few minutes in silence. Focus on your breath in and out. Offer yourself fully in prayer to the Spirit. Ask the Spirit to speak to you through the passage using your imagination.
2. Read the scripture passage slowly to yourself, paying attention to the story.
3. Contemplate some of the questions below:
 - What do I see, smell, hear, touch?
 - What is the weather like?
 - What does the landscape look like?
 - Who/what do I see myself as in the passage? A central character? A bystander? An inanimate object in the story?
 - What am I doing?
 - How am I reacting to the events?
4. Reread the passage again.
5. Contemplate the following questions:
 - How does it feel to be this person/object in this story?
 - What am I thinking or feeling about God/Jesus?
 - What is the Spirit showing me in this passage?
6. Respond to God in prayer. Say whatever you need to say to God about what the Spirit revealed to you during your reading and contemplation.
7. Spend some time resting in God's presence. Pay attention to God.

Debrief your experience

After practicing with this tool, debrief your experience with your Praxis Group. Below are some questions to process together:

- Check in on life. (Where are you experiencing Christ's presence this week? What burdens are you carrying?)
- What did you learn from this practice?
- Describe your experience with this practice. (What feelings came up, what went well, what got in the way? How has it impacted your relationship with God?)
- What is the next step for you?