

WEEK THREE
PRAYER PRACTICE
Ignatian Contemplation
(Imaginative Prayer)

The 16th century prayer exercise known as Ignatian Contemplation, or imaginative prayer, is a unique way that engages the mind and heart and stirs up thoughts and emotions. In this spiritual exercise, you place yourself inside a biblical story, using your imagination to interact with Jesus and others. As you open your mind and imagination you will begin to experience the story, enveloping the scene and interacting with those present.

Ignatian Contemplation is meeting God through story as you “live into” it with all your senses and imagination. AS you become a participant in the story, you let the Spirit guide the prayer. Don’t force anything to happen, just let it happen to you, within you, around you. As you pray the story for many, listen to what God is teaching you and what it means for you.¹²

STEP 1: Find a place.

Choose a location that is quiet, where you will not be interrupted. This space should allow you to move around but also be free from distractions.

STEP2: Choose your text.

For the purpose of this study we will be looking at stories of Jesus on the water. In these stories Jesus enters the chaos and brings calm. While I encourage you to use one of these stories you are welcome to choose your own.

STORIES:

- Jesus calms the storm: Matthew 8:23–27, Mark 4:35–41, and Luke 8:22–25
- Jesus and Peter walking on the water: Matthew 14:22-34, Mark 6:45-53, John 6:15-21

STEP 3: Read and investigate the story

Each of these stories are found in three of the gospels. While similar, they all provide slightly different perspectives or details. To fully embrace the story consider reading from all three translations. After reading the story, ask yourself...

- **Who:** Who were the main players, who else was there? What is the mood of the people?
- **Where:** Where does the scene take place? What might the surrounding area look like?
- **When:** What time of day is it? How might that shape the scene?
- **What:** What is happening in the scene. What are the people doing? What is happening around them?

STEP 4: Calm and Quiet.

Take several deep breaths and clear your mind, consider using our breathing prayer. Offer to God all your pride and ambition and ask for peace and grace that you need right now. Open your heart to the coming process by reflecting on elements of the story that connect with your soul.

¹² https://www.luther.edu/grace-institute/assets/Ignatian_Contemplation__Imaginative_Prayer.pdf

STEP 5: Enter the story.

As you begin to picture the story in your mind, place yourself inside the scene. Using your imagination, become one of the characters and begin to interact. If you get distracted or your mind wanders, gently return to the biblical text and re-enter the scene.

- **Observe:** What is going on around you in the scene: what you see, hear, feel, smell, taste, touch.
- **Dialogue:** Talk with the characters. Ask them about what is going on. Share with them what you are seeing or feeling. Ask them questions and listen to their replies.
- **Participate:** Engage in the activity of those around you. See yourself not as an observer, but a participant. Become a part of the story.
- **Notice:** What is going on inside you? How are you feeling? Are you experiencing fear, joy, sorrow, peace, confusion, love, anger, etc.

STEP 6: Connect with Jesus.

As the scene winds down, process your experience with Jesus. Share with him what you saw and felt. Speak heart-to-heart, as if conversing with a close friend. Ask Jesus what he wants you to learn from the experience. See what he has for you today.

STEP 7: Process

Take time to process your experience. What did you experience during this time of prayer? What did Jesus want you to learn from your experience? How did your experience reshape the story from the Bible? Consider writing about your experience in a journal or drawing what happened while in your scene.