

A STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO MEDITATION

Meditation Guide

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Each day you should reserve some time – 5, 10, or 15 minutes can be a good start – to spend in quiet, heart-to-heart conversation with Christ. This is called Christian meditation. The goal of this kind of prayer is to deepen your personal relationship with Christ, praising God and receiving his grace, and to identify yourself more and more with the purpose of your life: to live in communion with God through the fulfillment of his will. As you develop the habit of this prayer, you will find ways to personalize the method. To begin, however, and in order to overcome the distractions and dryness common to those starting off on a more demanding life of prayer, the following structure has shown to be of great utility.

Be sure to choose a time and place conducive to the silence and attention required; most spiritual masters recommend that we do our meditation early in the day, before the thousand cares of this busy world tangle us up in their knots. They also recommend that we do it at the same time every day, and in the same place, somewhere quiet, where we know that interruptions and distractions will be limited. More important than the time and place, however, is the commitment to make meditation part of your daily spiritual fare, no matter how busy you get or little you feel like praying.

Your meditation can be divided into 4 steps – the four “C”s:

Concentrate, Consider, Converse, Commit

Concentrate

This simply means focusing your attention on God, on his presence, on your relationship with him. You renew your faith, your love, your hope in him. You ask him for the particular grace you are seeking in this time together with him. You recall that he created you and is interested in you – so much so that he sent his Son to save you and established the Church to guide you to your eternal home. This first step of your prayer means conCENTRrating on your true CENTER: your identity as a creature, a beloved child of God in need of his grace.

Consider

In the second step of your meditation you take a passage from Scripture, or from a spiritual book, or the Catechism, or the writings of a saint, or even a sacred image or a beautiful natural landscape (you work out what kind of material is best for you through experimentation and the guidance of a spiritual director) and you read it over. You reflect on what it means, what it tells you about God and his ways and his plans, and what it means for you personally, in your particular situation and state in life. In this stage you ponder in your mind and heart some truth or aspect of God’s revelation, you apply it to your life and make it your own. Sometimes asking questions can help your consideration: what is the meaning of the passage? What are its key words? What is going on here? How would I express it in my own words?

Converse

Here is the core of the meditation: a heart-to-heart conversation with Christ about the passage you have been considering and the insights that the Holy Spirit has been giving you. This intimate, personal exchange is what separates Christian meditation from other merely psychological exercises that don't move beyond concentration. Here is the mark of true prayer, where you respond to the Word of God with words of your own, expressing your admiration, your gratitude, your love, your confusion, your need – whatever the consideration stirred up in your soul. You also give him time and room to speak to you. He often chooses to do this not with words or even ideas, but by moving your will, by directly touching your heart. (Try not to get hung up on hearing him explicitly every day, but you should be able to look back over several days or weeks and recognize his action in your prayer life.) As you converse, in the silent depths of your heart you open yourself to God, offering your life and inviting him once again to come and show you the way to a living communion with him. All the other steps of the meditation are directed to this step, so if you only need a brief moment of concentration and consideration in order to enter into heartfelt conversation with the One who loves you, don't dawdle on steps one and two. Normally, however, we need to gather our attention in order to be able to hear and respond to the Word of God, and steps one and two help us to do that.

Commit

Finish your prayer by letting it affect your life: commit yourself to do something concrete today as a result of the time you spent with our Lord, whatever you think the Lord is asking of you or whatever you think would please him. Whether it means making an extra visit to a chapel to spend more time with him, or asking someone to forgive yesterday's temperamental outburst, or visiting someone who is in the hospital, or calling that person who needs a call – something concrete, measurable, real; something about which you can say at the end of the day: yes, I did that, or no, I didn't. This insures that our prayer life doesn't become a mere psychological sedative or an exercise of vanity. As you offer this commitment to the Lord, thank him for his presence and the graces he has given you during this time of prayer, ask pardon for your distractions (especially if you invited them or gave in to them out of laziness or lack of faith), and finish by entrusting the fruits of your prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary through reciting a Hail Mary.

End with the sign of the cross, and then go forth to glorify God by fulfilling his will out of faith, hope, and love.