

How to Meditate – How to Practice Mental Prayer

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Normally when we pray we like to speak a lot but we don't like to listen. Prayer in itself is as necessary for our spiritual life as breathing is necessary for our bodily life. Not to pray daily will have the same results for the life of the soul as not breathe would for the life of the body, which is sickness and death.

By example and word, Christ taught the necessity of prayer. Prayer means to be with God and sometimes speak with Him. The majority of people like to speak to God but very few speak with God. To speak with God implies that we also listen, not only speak. How can we listen to God? Besides vocal prayer we also need mental prayer. Meditation is a very simple process that involves your mind, your heart (emotions and affections), and your will. Anyone can do it. While meditation is not the only way to pray, thanks to teachings and experience of many saints, this is simple method which seems to be particularly effective in helping people get started and be transformed.

- 1.) **Find a time and a place** for your **daily prayer** (write your date with God in your schedule).
- 2.) **Recollect**. Take a minute or two to close your eyes and recall the presence of God within you.
- 3.) **Invite the Holy Spirit** to come and guide your time of prayer.
- 4.) **Read** the chapter, paragraph, or Psalm containing a verse you would like to reflect on, and then reread the verse alone.
- 5.) **Reflect** (this involves your mind). You may find taking a few of the words at a time and mulling them over in your mind to be helpful. Reflection is when you focus your attention on a passage, idea, icon, etc.
 - a. If you are using a verse from the Gospels, you can use imaginative meditation. You could imagine that you are there and that, Jesus is speaking to you. You could imagine that you are Jesus, one of the disciples, or other characters in the story that are being healed, rebuked, forgiven, or welcomed.
 - b. You can also just think about the meaning of something that you read. You should learn about the context of the passage by reading the surrounding text and using footnotes in your Bible. You can think about parts of other prayers that you may have memorized or other passages you know that are related to the passage you have chosen.
 - c. You can think about how it applies to your life. For example, you might think of some sin in your life or someone else's sin that has hurt you, and of how God can bring forgiveness and healing to that sin or injury.
- 6.) **Affective** prayer (this involves your heart): While you are reflecting your heart may be inspired to talk to God about a particular aspect. As you focus on this aspect, your desires or affections are engaged. You can invoke these affections with or without feelings. When you find an area of focus spend some time talking to God about what your heart is experiencing. For instance, if you were meditating on a verse on Jesus' suffering and death and you think of a time that you suffered unjustly, that is a signal that you should pray about it. You can talk it through with God and thank Jesus for suffering that same humiliation and rejection like you. You might ask Him to help you forgive those who did it to you by asking the Holy Spirit to help heal you, and to guide you in how to respond in a Christ-like manner to those who hurt you. If you experience awe and

taste the presence of God, you can stop thinking and let Him work in you while you simply trust and enjoy His presence.

- 7.) **Resolution** (this involves your will): After you have thought about Christ and His words or actions, and your heart is on board, you should now engage your will. Your ability to change, and grow in Christ-likeness comes from this part of the prayer. A will that is resolved to do good, is fortified by the Holy Spirit. You will want to make a precise and practical resolution in response to your experience in prayer. For example, if you experienced gratitude while meditating on the suffering and death of Christ, you might make this type of a resolution: “Lord, I resolve to spend five minutes tonight writing down two things I am grateful for.” Note that it is **precise**; it is attached to a specific time and it gives you a specific spiritual homework. It is **practical**; you are now resolving to be aware of two things you are grateful for today.
- 8.) **Entrust your Resolution**: Ask Mary, a favorite or patron saint, and/or your guardian angel for help. You can entrust your resolution to them and ask them to pray for you to help you.
- 9.) **Carry a Word for the Day**: Carry in your heart the word you felt God speaking to you in prayer.

Meditation has a double purpose, one **intellectual** and the other **affective and practical**. The intellectual purpose is to arrive at firm convictions concerning some supernatural truth; hence the importance of the intellect in mediation. But one could acquire firm convictions by speculative study, and therefore this cannot be the principal purpose of meditation nor that which makes meditation true prayer.

The most important element in meditation is the **act of love** aroused in the will on the presentation of some supernatural truth by the intellect. As St. Teresa points out, meditation consists not so much in thinking a great deal, but in loving a great deal. When the will bursts forth with love, in intimate **relationship** is established between the soul and God, and then it is that the soul can truly be said to be praying. To read something spiritual is merely a preparation for the arousal of love.

According to theologians, one can recite vocal prayer and even go to Mass and still remain in mortal sin. **But no one can meditate daily and remain in mortal sin.** Vocal prayer and mortal sin sometimes go together (sad to say). Mental prayer and mortal sin cannot go together: either you will leave mental prayer or you will leave mortal sin. When you really reflect on the truth and you relate what you read with your life you can't go on with your sinful conduct. You want to reform your behavior. Mental prayer engages the mind with its thoughts, the will desires to do good, and the heart falls in love with the Lord. Mental prayer **transforms** the person so that he/she can reach the fullness of the Christian life, which is Holiness. Mental prayer prepares the way **for union with God**, which is a foretaste of Heaven. It will lead to the **fullness of joy**.

Recommended Books for daily meditation:

- St. Josemaria Escriva and Francis Fernandez, [*In Conversation with God*](#)
- Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D., [*Divine Intimacy*](#)
- Jacques Philippe, [*In the School of the Holy Spirit; Searching for and Maintaining Peace; Called to Life; Interior Freedom*](#)
- Mark Links, S.J., [*Challenge*](#)
- St. Josemaria Escriva, [*The Way; The Furrow; The Forge*](#)