

Imaginative prayer exercise



Introduction

This works well as an individual exercise but it could also feed in to a group discussion as part of a retreat. It's based on Ignatian contemplative prayer (but with a twist). The Ignatian tradition involves using your imagination to engage with scripture by placing yourself within the scene of a particular story and building up a picture of what happens. The exercise below involves a little bit of preparation and a large amount of creative licence.

What you will need

A Bible, pen and paper, a quiet place

In preparation

Pick a gospel story which has at least two characters. Keep a copy of the original passage and then rewrite the story, changing the gender of one or more of the characters.

See example in the **appendix**.

Suggested passages

The Parable of the Prodigal Son
(*Luke 15:11-32*)

The Woman with the jar of ointment
(*Luke 7:36-50*)

Jesus and Lazarus
(*John 11:1-44*)

The exercise

Find a quiet place where you are not going to be disturbed. Allow yourself at least half an hour and don't be rushed. Read through the **original story** a few times, until you feel you know it well.

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?

If you want to, finish off with a simple prayer, or write down some of the things you have felt or noticed. There is a handout in the **appendix** you can use for this.

Now repeat this exercise again with the **rewritten story**.

Reflecting on the exercise

Here are some suggested questions to help you reflect individually or as part of a group.

- *How did you feel about the original and the rewritten story?*
- *Did changing the gender of a character make a difference to your response?*
- *Did the exercise give you any fresh insight into the original gospel story?*

Further ideas and resources

For groups and individuals who want to use this exercise as part of a longer session, or a series of sessions.

Creative writing

In response to this exercise why not have a go at writing a short story or poem based around either the original or the rewritten passage.

Ignatian prayer

If you want to explore the tradition of Ignatian prayer there are lots of online resources. For starters, try:

<http://www.prayerwindows.com/ignatian.html>
<http://www.beunos.com/prayerimaginative.htm>
<http://www.loyolahall.f2s.com/resources.html>

Bible study

This prayer exercise could easily be adapted for a bible study or discussion group. When we read passages about women in the gospels we often focus on their gender. Do we do the same with men? Does the gender of Lazarus or the prodigal son matter? What other constructs, identities, cultural values, stereotypes or power structures are at work in the stories of the men and women that Jesus encounters?

SCM's resource

Reading the Bible

(2007) has a section on feminist and queer theology.

There is also a bible study which demonstrates how the feminist hermeneutic of suspicion might be applied to a Bible passage.

The 'hermeneutic of suspicion' describes approaches to texts that look for hidden and underlying meanings.

Contact

scm@movement.org.uk
to order **Reading the Bible** (£10).

We'd love to hear from you if you've used this resource and have found it helpful. Comments and suggestions can be sent to links@movement.org.uk

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Appendix

Here is an example of a story that has been rewritten and could be used for this exercise.

Luke 7: 36-50 original text (from NRSV translation)

36 One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. ³⁷And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. ³⁸She stood behind Jesus at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe Jesus' feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing Jesus' feet and anointing them with the ointment. ³⁹Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.' ⁴⁰Jesus spoke up and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' 'Teacher,' he replied, 'speak.' ⁴¹'A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²When they could not pay, he cancelled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?' ⁴³Simon answered, 'I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the greater debt.' And Jesus said to him, 'You have judged rightly.' ⁴⁴Then turning towards the woman, he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.' ⁴⁸Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' ⁴⁹But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' ⁵⁰And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

Luke 7: 36-50 rewritten

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notes and thoughts



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original story

rewritten story
