



DEEPER CONNECTION

Five examples of Imaginative Prayer

To help you get a sense for the “flow and feel” of imaginative prayer, here are some written examples.

Writing out your prayer experience is optional, and if you do write it out, you do not need to worry about being polished. These examples are meant to serve as inspiration, not as a strict template. Notice, however, how each writer composed the setting of the Gospel story with specific details, and used that setting for a personal encounter with Jesus.

Jesus and the children

Matthew 18:1–5 and 19:13–15

I hear the disciples bickering with each other, their insecurities twisting their faces into frowns. Their eyebrows are crunched with confusion. Each of them is full of longing: longing to understand the Truth, longing for recognition. Even adults want to feel special, valued, and noticed. And we all wonder what is needed to know greatness. Who is the greatest?

Nearby, I see the children laughing and chasing each other, crawling through the dust under bushes. Their dark, tangled hair is decorated with tiny twigs and leaves. One of them has something smeared on their face—leftover lunch perhaps. The children squeal with joy as they play, seemingly unaware of the adults talking.

Then, Jesus turns and speaks to one of the children, his voice warm with gentle love. “Come here.” The child turns, sees Jesus’ kind face, and is brightens with delight. He jumps into Jesus’ wide-open arms and then Jesus swings him up into the air. The two of them are laughing, caught in a moment of play. The other adults, however, stand around staring. They’re confused and surprised.

Jesus holds the child close to his chest. The child is close enough to smell Jesus: a mix of sawdust, herbs, oil, wine, grains, and dust. They both giggle.

“Become like a child,” Jesus tells the adults, silently watching the two. “Humble yourself, then you’ll be great.” As Jesus says this, he taps the child’s nose.

I am nearby, sitting on a stump – a quiet observer. I am not yet aware of Jesus’ greatness, but I feel my body fill with excitement and attraction.

Who is this man who both delights children and informs adults?

How can I get to know him?

What could he teach me?

How can I experience his attention and be as close to him as that sweet child?

Blind Bartimaeus

This morning, I prayed with the Bartimaeus passage from Mark. At first I tried to imagine myself one of the crowd, but that was too much like watching the Gospel from outside, so I decided to pray as if I were Bartimaeus.

It was easy for me to relate to him, sitting by the side of the road. I wondered if I would have been angry or depressed if I had been in his situation. I am so dependent on sight, even with my visual problems, that the idea of being blind frightens me. And to have to rely on begging so I could buy food and pay for housing! I imagined myself sitting there and suddenly thought of the man who begs outside my church on Sundays. I almost always give him some money, but I rarely think of him the rest of the week. But today, because I imagined myself to be Bartimaeus, I wondered if he ever got angry when people passed by him. Did he feel invisible? It is the thing I hate most, to feel invisible. I hate it when people see me but don’t see me. But when I started to call out to Jesus, I was no longer invisible! People started paying attention to me! I remembered what I had heard about Jesus and suddenly knew I would ask him for my greatest desire: to be seen. Not to be ignored, invisible and irrelevant, but to be seen.

I remembered how moved I was when I read Hagar’s cry, “You are a God who sees!” I long to be seen that way. And then Jesus called me, and I was overwhelmed — I jumped up, threw off my cloak, and felt braver than I ever have. I almost wept when he asked me “What do you want me to do for you?” and I was shocked that I blurted out, “Lord, I want to see.” No, I thought, I want to be seen. But I realised it was true. I do want to see. I want to see others the way Jesus sees them. Maybe if I learn to see others like Jesus sees them, in time, perhaps people will look at me with the same loving gaze. I was so happy that this prayer was given to me. Because it is true: I want to see as Jesus does. I want Jesus to teach me his ways. I am tired of my own needs, my own limits. I want to be reckless. I want to be like Jesus. And I rejoice that he allows me to follow him on the way. I know the way leads to the Cross, but I am done with sitting on the side of the road and hearing him pass by. I want to be with Jesus and am so grateful that he wants me to be with him.

Jesus on the cross

I find myself standing with a small group of Jesus' friends: Mary Magdalene, Salome, Joanna, Mary, mother of James, James and John, and Mary, Jesus' mother. Many others are absent—most notably, Peter.

We are standing across the road from where Jesus and the others are crucified, the towering north wall of the city behind us. Here, we might escape the notice of the Romans and the small crowd of important men who have come to mock and gloat; travellers and passersby, too, watch the crucified men or cast their eyes to the ground. Few notice us here, yet we are close enough to hear the sharp rebukes of the important men, close enough to hear the loud voices of the Romans, close enough to hear the dangerous sound of their metal. Close enough, too, to meet Jesus' eyes.

The other crucified men gasp for air like a fish out of water, groaning and cursing. Jesus has been silent, mostly, although he keeps shifting the weight of his body from one side to the other; it reminds me of a child trying to find a comfortable position in bed. I can see that he is gasping for air, too, the way his broken chest rises and falls. He is covered in blood and great black and purple bruises. I can't imagine his pain, but I am glad it is not me up there.

The absence of so many of his followers makes me wonder what I am doing here. Why watch the end when I can do nothing to stop it and nothing to ease his suffering? Are we adding to his pain by watching his humiliation?

"We said we would follow him," Maty Magdalene says, not taking her eyes off him. Her jaw is set in the way she has when she is being stubborn. "So, we will follow him to the end."

There is blood on her, too: her lower lip is swollen and broken where a Roman cuffed her. She had been trying to reach Jesus, hurling insults at his torturers even as her friends restrained her. What would she have done if she had reached him? I don't know, I admire her spirit. I feel the same rush of anger at the meanness and the violence of the men who stand at the foot of the cross, snapping and biting like dogs. My anger toward them merges with my anger at all the bullies I've ever known—the ones from my

childhood- but the ones who seem to own the world, too. The ones who bomb innocent people and steal from the needy, the ones who use their words to scapegoat others.

I suspect that if I had the weapons at hand, I would have no problem using them against those men at the foot of the cross.

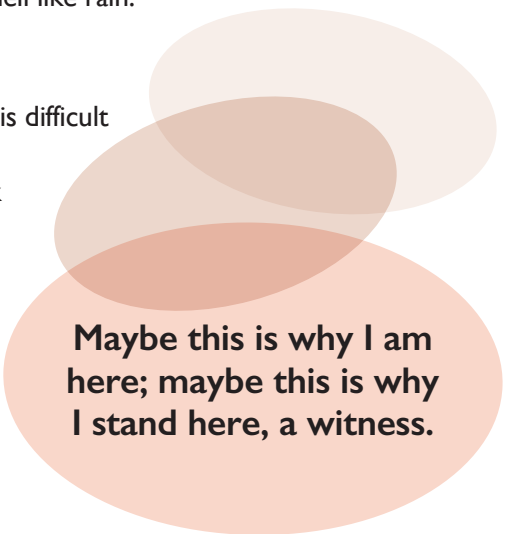
I feel angry at God, too—betrayed, maybe. Why does he hold back? Why does he allow the bullies of the world to slaughter and oppress the innocent? I am thinking of the Holocaust, and all the terrorism, and the wars. And I am thinking of Jerusalem, the city behind me, whose inhabitants will be slaughtered en masse by the Romans in just another forty years. Didn't they pray for salvation—if not for themselves, then for their children?

Salome, Joanna and the other Mary are huddled around his mother as if to make a wall around her. She is watching Jesus, her face drawn and wet with tears. Some of the women are reciting Jewish prayers that

I do not recognize them, and Mary seems to mouth them silently. A hot, dry wind lifts strands of hair across her face. Although the sky is practically black with storm clouds, it does not smell like rain.

Mary holds her gaze on Jesus.

I follow her eyes to Jesus' face. It is difficult to see those kind eyes struggling against the pain, but I do not look away, and I find him meeting my eyes, too. He sees me—and my anger, and my hurting, and my questions, and his eyes answer me.



Maybe this is why I am here; maybe this is why I stand here, a witness.

On the road to Emmaus

I am walking to Emmaus with a beloved friend at night, trying to make sense of these challenging times and looking for answers...

The air is warm, and the sky is clear, covered with stars. But it is still dark...

I hope dawn comes soon.

It has been a rough journey for months... I had never prayed so much in my life or entrusted my family and myself to You this much.

Master, You have always protected us, I know this in my heart, but I still have my moments of desolation when I can't find You in the suffering of our brothers and sisters...

In all those lives lost to the virus... violence... the exploitation of some sort... persecution...

There are days when I can't recognize You in the midst of all the pain around me.

Please listen to the prayers in my heart... hear my sadness, my confusion, my frustration.

But above all... let me hear You... let me see Your face...

Sustain me when my feet get hurt, and my soul becomes weary.

Suffering is redemptive...

"Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into His glory?" you said, and these words resounded deeply into my soul.

In the wait, silence, and loneliness, You are purifying us, oh Lord!

I want to cooperate with your plans... but please let me feel your loving presence...

Stay with us, for it is nearly evening, and the day is almost over."

In the midst of this trial, help me to recognize Your voice; bring me Your strength so I can totally unite my will to Yours, my Good Shepherd.

"Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into His glory?" you said, and these words resounded deeply into my soul.

Jairus's daughter

It is as if I'm Peter, walking with Jesus into the home of Jairus. Everyone else is sent away. It is only James, John, and I. I trust Jesus. I love Jesus. Yet, sometimes I think, why me? Why has Jesus trusted me to follow Him here into this moment? We step over the threshold into the shadowed stone building. Weeping women can hardly raise their eyes to us as we enter. Jesus asks them why they are weeping. Everyone looks at Jesus with confusion; some even laugh at Him, believing Him to be completely out of touch with what is happening.

They have not seen what I have seen. They have not seen this Man completely transform the ordinary into the Kingdom of God as I have. He told them to leave. The force of His words convicted them in an instant. They were ushered out, and the space changed. Jesus walked to the bed with the father and mother and us alone. That hand that I had seen do so much reached out and touched the lifeless hand of the daughter of Jairus. He wrapped His hand around hers and said, "Talitha cumi." It was as if His life coursed through her as He pulled her from death. Jesus looked at me and asked me to get her something to eat. Jesus is asking me to provide for her, who He has just lifted from death. Jesus has asked me to participate in the miracle He has wrought, feeding His sheep.

Jesus has asked me to participate in the miracle that He has wrought, feeding His sheep.

We meet at St Giles, Church Street,
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Tuesday Evening from 7.30pm

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