

Welcome!



The following pages are a compilation of the ten weeks of themes and meditations of the *Desires of the Heart* series, an introduction to Ignatian prayer based on the Spiritual Exercises and the life of St Ignatius of Loyola. Saint Ignatius lived a life of gallant soldierhood that was interrupted by a cannon ball in the knee. This may have been the best thing that happened to him as during his convalescence God planted the seed that would lead to great spiritual ideas like the discernment of spirits, magis, imaginative prayer, and the Examen (to name a few). Ignatius' role in God's story brought us the Spiritual Exercises, on which this series is based.

### **Who is this for?**

Originally designed for Jesuit university undergraduates, the ten weeks touch on themes relevant to those, perhaps, toward the beginning of their spiritual journeys. But the journey of faith begins at different times and in different stages of life, so *Desires of the Heart* is perfect for anyone wanting to deepen their spirituality. Since each week is meant to be led by a leader, *Desires of the Heart* is perfect for groups. Even spiritual directors may find the content or meditations helpful to share with their directees.

### **What is the setup?**

Each week includes a single-sheet handout for participants and a *Leader Sheet* with pointers and a relevant guided meditation (with the exception of week 8). Leaders should be generally familiar with Ignatian spirituality and able to explain the background on each week's theme before guiding participants through the meditation. You may wish to experience the series on your own first by visiting [godinallthings.com/desires-of-the-heart](http://godinallthings.com/desires-of-the-heart) and listening to the audio linked there.

For universities, it may be fitting for this series to be offered in the spring semester, culminating just before Easter break. Those in the midst of making major transitions (graduation, finding a job) may find weeks 6-8 especially helpful. Each gathering is intentionally short, lasts approximately 20 minutes, and may precede Mass, adoration, or another prayerful time.



***“Prayer is as natural to us as breathing is. We don’t have to be taught how to pray. We have only to be invited to start praying and then to be helped to become more conscious of our prayer.”***

*– Joseph Tetlow, SJ*

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**Week 1: Freedom & Foundation**

*Oriented toward God; preparing for prayer*

**Week 2: Desire & Grace**

*Seeking God and naming my desire*

**Week 3: Examen**

*Prayer through reflection; what our feelings tell us*

**Week 4: Art & Imagination**

*Praying with our senses*

**Week 5: Colloquy**

*Conversation with Jesus*

**Week 6: Discernment of Spirits**

*The tension of good and evil; consolation and desolation*

**Week 7: Call & Response**

*On mission with Jesus*

**Week 8: Making Choices in Christ**

*Ignatian decision-making; determining God’s will*

**Week 9: Sin**

*The personal and cosmic effects of sin; God’s mercy*

**Week 10: Love**

*Contemplation on the Love of God; God’s unceasing giving and gifting*

## + Desires of the Heart: Themes of Ignatian Spirituality +

### ***DESIRE & GRACE***

*Seeking God and naming my desire*

#### **BACKGROUND**

In the Spiritual Exercises, one of the first things an exercitant does is ask God for a grace: “What I want and desire”. Doing this centres ourselves and reminds us how we need to turn toward God in our need. Long before modern psychology, Ignatius understood the importance of “You need to name it to claim it”. Can we truly claim our time of prayer as a time of needing our Lord and God?



Ultimately, our *deepest* desire should be to praise, reverence, and serve God. Desires are important because we ultimately want them to lead toward God (the desire under the desire).

#### ***The grace I ask for should be...***

- according to what we might be praying with (Resurrection: sharing in Christ’s joy; Passion: sharing in Christ’s suffering)
- something I do not have, something I want, and something only God can give
- Ignatius has us focus on affective graces—things to be felt and experienced

#### **PRAYERFUL REFLECTION**

- ❖ What desires are in my heart? I reflect on the deep desires that lead me toward God, not away from God.
- ❖ What are God’s desires for me? I recognise that God has dreams for me.
- ❖ Might my desires and dreams align with God’s?
- ❖ I ask God for this **grace**: *That I may have the desire to want what God wants for me.*

#### **RESOURCES**

[jknirp.com/ignatz.htm](http://jknirp.com/ignatz.htm) - Commentary on what our desires can mean to our faith life  
[goo.gl/PFB8PA](http://goo.gl/PFB8PA) - Asking for a grace

*“There lives the dearest freshness deep down things.”*  
 - Gerard Manley Hopkins, SJ

*“Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart’s desires.”*  
 - Psalm 37:4 (NRSV)

## + Desires of the Heart: Themes of Ignatian Spirituality +

### ***DESIRE & GRACE***

*Seeking God; preparing for prayer*

#### **POINTS**

- Review handout
- All our desires should come down to wanting to praise, reverence, and serve God (Principle and Foundation)—our deepest desire
- Ignatius usually asks us to pray for a grace before every prayer. This can help centre us and focus on God. It should be something affective, ultimately something I can experience or feel in my prayer time or the future.
- Think of asking for a grace like the “holy water of our prayer”. Blessing ourselves with holy water before entering church helps us focus ourselves on God and what we’re about to do.
- It’s important to pay attention to your gut feelings—your *initial* reaction or desire.

#### **REFLECTION (6 min)**

I settle myself from all the busyness of the day, place my feet on the ground, and seek for my soul to be centred. As I close my eyes I acknowledge all the things in my life that call out for my attention. I acknowledge the deep needs I have in my relationships, in my faith life, and even in my future. I ask God for this swirling of thoughts and needs and desires to slow down. I put these things aside for a moment and allow the Holy Spirit to embrace me and envelop my heart. (pause 15 seconds)

I now look deep into my heart and see if I can notice something deep within me, some underlying thing I truly need in my life. I want to focus on something *affective*, something I can feel or experience. This is something only God can give me, something that can help me serve God in a better way... It could be to reduce my anxiety or having a feeling of confidence. It could be to grow in my prayer life or to grow in my love and care for someone. I let my gut choose one thing: this is the grace I will ask God for. (pause 30 seconds)

How does this desire lead me toward God? How can it deepen my relationship with God in my life? (pause 30 seconds)

I see this desire of mine, this grace I have asked for, and imagine it floating up to God like a feather being gently lifted up by the wind. Slowly it rises up and is received by God in heaven. The Lord has heard my request, this desire that I hope will lead me to a deeper relationship with God. I consider how God might feel receiving such a request. Does God share in my desire? (pause 1 minute)

God holds onto this feather and will release it back to me in time. I now take a moment and ask God to help me pay attention to the ways in which he responds to the grace I have asked for, as I move into the future. I then silently end with a Glory Be or other familiar prayer. Then I open my eyes.

- *Next Week: Examen - Prayer through reflection; what our feelings tell us*

## + Desires of the Heart: Themes of Ignatian Spirituality +

### **ART & IMAGINATION**

*Praying with our senses*

#### **BACKGROUND**

During St Ignatius' pilgrimage to the Holy Land he stopped in Manresa, Spain in 1522. There he spent ten months praying and working in a hospital. It was on the banks of the river Cardoner that Ignatius was overcome by one of the most powerful visions of his life. He had experienced the very presence of God and received a divine insight and understanding of supernatural mysteries that cannot be explained: He realised God's presence could be found in all things and wasn't confined just to buildings, rituals, or formulaic prayers.

During recovery from his injury at the Battle of Pamplona he daydreamed about being a valiant knight and also being a saint battling for Christ. This idea of imagination and finding God in all things, including our senses, is incorporated into the Spiritual Exercises.

- ❖ Use a gospel passage and place yourself in the scene. Hit play to see what happens. What is the environment like? How do your five senses respond? Do you observe or interact with others in the story?
- ❖ Look at some artwork. Is there a feature that strikes you? Does it evoke a certain emotion or thought? What does it reveal about God and your life?

#### **RESOURCES**

[prayerwindows.com](http://prayerwindows.com) - A resource from Bob Gilroy, SJ on praying with art as well as creative prayer exercises using your imagination

[onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Imagination/](http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Imagination/) - Beautiful imaginative contemplations using gospel scenes

[picturinggod.ignatianspirituality.com](http://picturinggod.ignatianspirituality.com)



*Albrecht Dürer, The Flight into Egypt*

*"...the eyes of his understanding began to be opened."  
- St Ignatius, Autobiography*

## + Desires of the Heart: Themes of Ignatian Spirituality +

### **ART & IMAGINATION**

*Praying with our senses*

#### **POINTS**

- Review handout
- God gave us the gift of imagination and of the mind: God can use it to communicate with us
- The key with this kind of prayer is to trust your imagination, whether it's a conversation with a character in a gospel story or you receive an unexpected insight during prayer, trust that God might be trying to show you something.
- Ignatius uses this throughout the meditations in the Spiritual Exercises, in both scripture and non-scripture meditations.
- The flight into Egypt is a gospel passage St Ignatius suggests to his retreatants to pray with.
- Using imagination for prayer knows no bounds and it goes beyond scripture and artwork.

#### **MEDITATION (5 min)**

Let us now use our imaginations to enter into a gospel story. First we centre ourselves and acknowledge that we are in the presence of God; that presence dwells within us and desires to speak to us through prayer.

As I read about Mary and Joseph's flight into Egypt from Matthew's gospel you may either close your eyes or focus on the picture on your sheet. Allow your imagination to take hold of the scene.

*...an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." (Matthew 2:13-15)*

As you look at this picture you see Mary on a donkey holding the Christ child. Joseph looks back at her and Jesus with concern and love, but he realises they are in a hurry. Even the animal on which Mary rides knows he has a mission, to get the baby Jesus out of Bethlehem and into safety as soon as possible. Amidst the rush, Mary gently looks down upon her sleeping Son.

You may wish to imagine yourself there with the Holy Family, maybe as their servant along with them on their journey. You wonder what Mary is thinking... She

is holding in her arms her God, the Messiah. She would do anything to protect her Child. After all, when she said yes to the angel Gabriel, she took this responsibility upon herself. Now there were people out to kill her Son...

And what trust she must have in Joseph. The only indication that Herod is out to get Jesus is her husband's dream. They are leaving everything behind in Bethlehem. Joseph's leaving his job. They are leaving their friends, and they can't say goodbye. The road ahead is dark and long. Only uncertainty lies before them...

What feelings appear in your heart as you witness this? ...When Mary and Joseph stop for a rest they ask you to hold the baby. As you hold Jesus in your arms you can feel his weight. He is now awake, but quiet. As he looks up to you how do you feel? How do you feel holding the Son of God in your arms? ...Is he worth the sacrifice you and the Holy Family have made leaving their home town to go to an unknown place?

Take the last few moments of this prayer time to continue to gaze at the picture in your mind or the picture on the sheet. Ask yourself: What is God showing me this evening? Thank God for this grace and silently end with an Our Father, Hail Mary, or another familiar prayer.

- Offer an opportunity for people to share their feelings or experiences
- *Next Week: Colloquy - Conversation with Jesus* (another opportunity to use our imagination)