

MEDITATION: GOD'S GIFT OF INNER PEACE

with Rev. Mike Fonfara, D.Min.

Would you like to enjoy God's gift of more peace in your life? Would you seek this peace if it cost nothing but time, requires no special equipment except your choice of a Bible verse or relaxing music, could bring better health, and holds promise of a better day because of hearing God's still small voice? If you find these questions appealing, please join me in the adventure of Christian meditation. Through Christian meditation, I have enjoyed all of the benefits identified in the previous sentences. I wish the same for you.

What is Christian meditation? It is the art of relaxing the body while quieting the mind to experience God's presence, understanding the Word, and determining how the Almighty's power is present in one's life. Meditation engages the Holy Spirit for a time of praising God, confessing the issues in your life, receiving divine insights, and enjoying some time of wholesome rest. It is amazing what meditating five, ten, fifteen, or thirty minutes a day can do for one's life!

Who meditates? People have practiced meditation for eons. Eastern religions encourage the practice. Judaism encourages it. Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant Christian communities encourage meditation, too. Even Native Americans add meditative practices to their rites. Many common Christians do it regularly in church fellowships, house gatherings, and in their own private comfortable places. You can practice Christian meditation, too!

Why bother practicing Christian meditation? In addition to the body, mind, and spirit benefits, it is a biblical practice (read Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:1-3, and Romans 12:2 for starters), it's wholesome for any age, and it feel good being in God's presence. Jesus meditated by getting away from the Disciples and crowds for deep prayer as well as conversation with God. (Please read Jesus' praying in the Garden of Gethsemane as recorded in Matthew 26:36-46 for a meditation role model.)

Will the meditator feel these benefits immediately? No. Like so many beneficial life activities, it takes time, learning, and practice to become proficient in meditation and receiving the joys it brings. Keep going, enjoy yourself, and do not expect too much too early and you will soon see results.

When do Christians meditate? Many Christians meditate in the morning upon rising and/or in the evening before retiring. I find it beneficial to find a quiet place in church and spend some meditative time before worship. In short, this spiritual exercise is enjoyable at any time around the clock when the Holy Spirit leads you into it.

Would you like to try meditation?

First, I am required to give this warning.

REQUIRED NOTICE

**Do not meditate while driving a car, operating machinery,
or in any situation when full attention is necessary.**

Meditation slows down reaction time.

Now, follow these instructions.

Seek a private meditation space following the advice of Jesus in Matthew 6:5-6 (NIV), “But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray so your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” To meditate effectively, one must be comfortable and silent to focus inwardly. Exercise venues include the one mentioned in Matthew 6:5-6, lying down in bed, sitting in a comfortable chair, taking a yoga position, stretching out on the sofa, lying down on your lawn, getting comfortable on a local beach, or other places ripe for prayer.

You may want to select appropriate music, Bible verses (John 3:16 or Romans 8:31-32), inspirational messages, and/or prayers like The Jesus Prayer to guide your inward journey.

Is your body comfortable? Let’s go! Follow this process.

- 1) Say a prayer asking God to bless your meditative efforts.
- 2) Take a deep cleansing breath. Release the breath slowly relaxing the body as you do.
- 3) Breathe in-and out naturally with a slow rhythm relaxing even more when exhaling.
- 4) Starting with your head, relax all muscle groups until you reach the feet. (Relax cheeks, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, abs, leg muscles, and feet.)
- 5) Enter into a trance-like state. Spend as much time as you like letting the tranquility and inner peace fortify and comfort you. (Don’t concern yourself with the deep relaxation state. If you get too deep, you may fall asleep and awaken later refreshed.)
- 6) Here are some options helpful during your meditative state. Enjoy complete silence letting God speak to you. Play soothing music. Remember a favorite Bible verse. Pray for as long as you want. Here is the point. Be still and hear God’s voice that appears in surprising ways!
- 7) Slowly end the exercise with stretching, yawning, and other smooth body movements.
- 8) Think about what happened during your meditative time. Say a prayer of thanksgiving. Write in your journal. Discuss interesting dynamics with your spiritual director. Process your experience in some way.

Be patient! Like any skill, it takes practice to become proficient in meditation.

Want further resources?

Most of the information you will need to become an experienced meditator is found free on the internet. Type Christian Meditation in the search bar and you will have plenty of sites to choose from for your learning. Be selective! Many of them are real thin in authenticity. Some are gimmicks to get you to others sites that cost money. Surf the Internet wisely. Spend time on only those sites which speak to your particular interests and needs.

Here are two books I recommend.

- Finley, James. *Christian Meditation: Experiencing the Presence of God* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005). Former Trappist monk, Fr. James Finley, gives the reader the basics of Christian meditation in the Fr. Thomas Merton style.
- Benson, Herbert and Proctor, William. *Relaxation Revolution: Enhancing Your Personal Health Through the Science and Genetics of Mind-body Healing* (New York: Scribner of Simon Schuster, Inc., 2010). Benson and Proctor offer readers very technical, but convincing, arguments on the health benefits of meditation beginning with the actual transformation of human genes, the building material of our physical bodies.

Thank you for letting me share Christian meditation. It brings much joy to my life. You may be able to say the same thing after a little while doing this Christen exercise.

Walk in peace!

Rev. Mike Fonfara, D.Min., serves God's cause as an honorably retired pastor in Tampa Bay Presbytery (Florida) providing spiritual direction, professional storytelling, Christian meditation training, and local studies into the Celtic and Native American cultures from which he comes. He is an experienced workshop leader and brings enthusiasm as well as vitality to the classroom. Mike has served on the POAMN's Executive Committee in various capacities, and also was a member of the Association of Retired Ministers, Their Spouses or Survivors (ARMSS).