

AN ADAPTATION FROM THE FIRE OF THE WORD,
BY CHRIS WEBB



FIND YOURSELF

in the Story...



THE SALVATION ARMY
TERRITORIAL HEADQUARTERS

440 WEST NYACK RD.
WEST NYACK, NY 10994

TERRITORIAL LEADERS
COMMISSIONERS BERRY C. & SUE SWANSON





ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

There was a kind of engagement with scripture that Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), the founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), sought to encourage when he composed his famous Spiritual Exercises in the early sixteenth century. This was a short book which became a manual for spiritual directors, which describes a structured plan for slowly and prayerfully reading the Gospels and finding ways of encountering the living Christ through his living Word.

The basic method of the Exercise is very simple. Ignatius would encourage people to begin by paying attention to every detail of a Gospel story: the setting, the people involved, gestures and words, the time of day or year. He would teach them to use their imagination to recreate the scene in their minds, making it as present to the senses as possible – if you were there:

- What would you see?
- What might you hear?
- What fragrances drift through the air?
- Is it warm or cold, wet or dry?
- Who is gathered around you?
- What are they doing?
- Where is Jesus in this story, what is he doing, and how are others reacting?

We might imagine a director preparing to shoot a scene for a movie. In his mind he has to consider every detail.

- How will this scene look and feel?
- What movements are required?
- What dialogue will take place?

The director has to become supremely attentive to detail – and so must we, Ignatius might add.

This Spiritual Exercise encourages people to insert themselves into the scene. Don't just watch; participate. Can you imagine yourself as a disciple or a person in the crowd? As a leper or blind man, a sinful woman or righteous Pharisee? What is it then like, experiencing these unfolding events? If, in your imagination, you are no longer a passive observer but an involved actor in the scene, how does it affect your perception of the story? In particular, Ignatius counseled his directees to pay close attention to their emotions: what do you feel? Our emotional responses often give us important clues about the way the story is directly touching us – where we struggle with or rejoice in the gospel message. They may shape the way we want to respond to what Jesus is doing, even taking the story off in unexpected directions.

Journal and Reflect continued...



SPIRITUAL VISION

In Western culture most people have come to see the imagination as frivolous, playful and essentially disconnected from the real world. In ancient times people greatly respected (even feared) their dreams, seeking to listen to the voice of their imagination by night; we dismiss our dreams as the product of stress, stimulation or overindulgence in cheese. Daydreaming and fantasizing are equated with wasting time and laziness.

In previous generations, however, Christians took a much more positive view of the imagination? It was seen as the soul's equivalent of the body's physical senses. The imagination is where we can store ideas, concepts and memories and a place where our five senses could be integrated and processed – and also as the primary gateway of spiritual experiences



EXPLORING THE EXERCISE

Settle yourself somewhere quiet where you are unlikely to be disturbed. Turn to a passage of Scripture on which to meditate. The seven passages listed at the end of this booklet are drawn from the heart of Jesus' life and ministry, might be an excellent place to start.

Follow the steps outlined below as you pray the passage:

- Imagine the scene clearly and vividly as you can. Involve all your senses; imagine sounds, smells, even taste and touch.
- Allow yourself to be drawn into the scene as you imagine it. Place yourself in the shoes of one of the characters – a member of the crowd, an onlooker, a disciple, a questioner or a sick person lying before Christ.
- Allow the events of the narrative to run through your mind, and pay attention to the details of what people say and do.
- Pay attention to your reactions. What feelings are stirred up as you experience this Gospel story? How do you want to respond to Jesus' questions and challenges?
- At some point (whether in the midst of the story or at the end) allow your reaction to become the starting point of a conversation with Christ. Speak "as one friend speaks to another." Listen carefully and attentively for his response, trusting that Christ truly longs to speak with you.



GOSPEL SUGGESTIONS

Choose one of the following Scripture portions and used the bullet points outlined in this booklet to help you find yourself in the story. After journaling your thoughts spend some time in reflection to hear what word the Lord has for you through this exercise.

John 2:1-12	The Wedding at Cana
Matthew 8:23-27	Jesus Calms the Storm
Matthew 15:21-28	The Syrophenician Woman
Mark 10:46-52	Blind Bartimaeus
Matthew 19:16-30	The Rich Young Ruler
Matthew 14:13-21	Feeding of the 5,000
Matthew 17:1-9	The Transfiguration of Jesus

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