



## Using Image and Reflective Practices in Spiritual Direction



Our encounters with the holy are rooted in symbol and speak the language of dreams. Utilizing image in spiritual direction sessions can open the door to listening to and engaging the inner symbolic life in deeply meaningful ways.

*When the Soul wants to experience something she throws out an image in front of her and then steps into it.” — Meister Eckhart*

- Have a variety of images available for directees to choose from. These might include:
  - Landscape images that can help map where a person is in their current journey.
  - A collection of SoulCollage® or other collage cards to allow the directee to select the one which has the most energy for them at a given moment then open conversation about the images contained on the card and what they evoke, or series of cards to represent an unfolding timeline of their journey. Three cards might be past, present and what yet to be revealed.
  - Use a card or image and have the person tell a story about the card or image. Work the story as you would a dream. If this were my card....
  - Choose an image that seems in some mysterious way related to a dream or life situation and let the images speak.
  - Choose a card or image and do a form of the “7 magic questions” to see what arises.
  - Choose a card or image and use the 4 functions amplification questions to mine the meaning of what is arising.
- Have directees create a quick collage choosing from 5-7 images.
- Use created collages or other images in a form of Visio Divina. Engage the image in a similar way to Lectio Divina.
- Have the person spend a few contemplative moments with the card journaling what arises. Start with the Journal prompt: “I am one who...”
- Create “Word Webs” with associations to three or four of the primary images on the collage.
- Spread the collected images into a path on the floor or arrange them in a circle around the person and have them physically engage with the image.
- Use Active Imagination to engage a particular portion of scripture, sacred story, a poem, or fairy tale.
- Use a reflective practice like the Daily Examin to assist a directee in reviewing events in their life.

Using these processes oftentimes allows inspiration to emerge freeing us to be more open to the movement of the Spirit in our lives.

## Amplifying Images ("7 magic questions")

Pick an images (things or characters) that you are "drawn to", seems important, curious or emotionally significant to you.

**Let the Image Speak** – Close your eyes and bring the image (that thing or person) to your mind's eye. Take 3 deep breaths bring the image closer and on the 3rd breath imagine yourself as that thing in your dream. Now speak as the dream image would.

Answer the following questions with the first thing that comes to mind. Try not to edit your thoughts. Record your statements. Speak in the first person present tense, using "I am" statements. If "becoming" the dream image is too difficult then imagine yourself asking the dream image these questions, and imagine what the answer might be.

1. Who or **what are you or if a person who are you** (describe yourself and how you feel):

"I am ...

2. What is your **purpose or function** (what do you do)?

"My purpose is to....

3. What do you **like** about being that dream element?

"I like....

4. What do you **dislike** about being that dream element?

"I dislike ....

5. What do you **fear most** as that dream element?

"I fear ....

6. What do you **desire/hope** most as that dream element?

"What I desire most is to .....

7. What message do you have for the dreamer?

## MBTI Four Functions Image Amplification

Circumambulate an image using the Four Functions: Intuition-Sensing & Thinking-Feeling:

1. **Sensing:** What specifically do you see? Note the colors, textures, light, etc. What are the hard-dry facts of the image? Describe the particularities of what you see.
2. **Feeling:** Attune to the collage and do a body scan to note any responses the body has to images or portions of the collage. Notice what stands out, what has energy or emotion. What seems most important to you? Is there anything that creates a negative reaction or repulses you?
3. **Thinking:** Begin to notice how things connect? For example, what color is in what area of the collage and how is it related to other parts of the image? Which items on your collage seem to be in relationship? How is the collage organized?
4. **Intuiting:** What is constellating? Where does this grouping of images come from? What hints to you see about where this collage is heading? What seem to be the constructive or destructive potentials? What is your hunch about what the image is revealing? Notice anything that reminds you of something in ordinary life or brings back a memory from the past or relates to a dream.

## Try Visio Divina

- Have the directee pick out an image from a collection you have available.
- Instruct them to look at the image and let their eyes stay with the very first thing that they see. Encourage them to keep their attention on that one part of the image that first catches their eye. Try to keep your eyes from wandering to other parts of the picture. Breathe deeply and then gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.
- Now, let you, have them let their eyes gaze at the whole image. Encourage them to take their time and look at every part of the photograph. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or so.
- Pose the following questions for them to consider:
  - What emotions does this image evoke in you?
  - What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?
  - Does this image lead you into an attitude of prayer? If so, let these prayers take form in you. Write them down if you desire.
- Then have them rest in silence for a few minutes before sharing with you.

*Adapted from: <https://www.upperroom.org/resources/visio-divina>*

### Examples of questions to encourage reflective practice:

- Recall a time during the past week or so where you felt joy, awe, peace, or a sense of oneness with creation or another person?
- Has anything happened since we last met that you are curious about or distressed about? Reflect for a few moments on what happened.
- What did you feel? Where was the sensation in your body?
- What was easy?
- What went well?
- What was difficult?
- What went badly?
- What would you change if you could?
- Wonder into what would happen if...

### Resources for Reflective Practice:

<https://libguides.cam.ac.uk/reflectivepracticetoolkit/models>

<https://vault.soulshpherd.org/tool/list-of-spiritual-direction-questions/>

<https://insideoutmastery.com/self-reflection-questions/>

# The Daily Examen Prayer

## 1. Become aware of God's presence.

Look back on the day and note the times you felt God was with you, assisting. Feel God with you now and ask to become more conscious of God's presence. It may be helpful to repeat a phrase like, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46v10), or any other prayer that connects you to a Higher Power.

## 2. Look back with gratitude.

Review the past 24 hours and notice what you're thankful for. What happened to make you feel blessed? Take a moment to give thanks to God for providing you with these blessings.

## 3. Take an honest look at your day.

Note everything that happened over the course of the past 24 hours, your interactions with others, and your emotions. We often rush through each day, not pausing to reflect. Doing a deep, honest reflection of the past day causes us to learn more about ourselves and improve our future actions.

## 4. Choose one part of the day, and pray about it.

From doing your review, you might find something God is directing you to work on - an emotion, a relationship that needs mending, an unpleasant situation. Pray for it, ask God's guidance to resolve it.

## 5. Pray for tomorrow.

Ask God to guide you tomorrow, leading you to your highest purpose. Send love and light to tomorrow, praying for wisdom and strength. Feel deep gratitude, knowing God has already answered your prayer and tomorrow is already blessed. Take some deep breaths, and know that all is well.

<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/d3/01/fa/d301fa60a54605a574baf0a6b901eba8.jpg>

# Active Imagination

1. Choose a story from scripture, a poem, a myth or a fairy tale.
2. Read the passage several times. Perhaps once you'll read slowly as if for the first time. Another time through, maybe reading it aloud will help you get the feeling of the whole scene.
3. Invite Sacred presence to be present with you, to guide and protect as you seek to be in relationship through the reading.
4. Now quiet yourself in a prayerful or meditative way. Some people use techniques like body awareness and breathing to still themselves.
5. Let your imagination work on the scene. Imagine the location. In other words, are you by a lake or on a mountain? What time of day is it? See the people involved. Who is there? How do your feet feel? What do you bump into, touch with your hands? What do you smell? What do you taste? What sounds do you hear or what is being said? What emotions might be in the hearts of various people? What actions are happening?
6. Put yourself at the scene. Take the place of one of the characters and see the scene through the eyes of that person or being. What is he or she feeling? Thinking? Doing?
7. Release your imagination from your inner critic. Your imagined scene need not reproduce the scene with forensic accuracy. Let go. The point is neither to see "right," nor to cover everything, but to be with Holy in what is taking place in the story or poem.
8. On the other hand, do not be consumed and overwhelmed by your emotions. With intention, choose to be "taken in" by your encounter with the scene. Emotionalism is not the goal in itself. Experiencing the presence of the sacred, is the goal.
9. Now "freeze frame." Stay with a particular snapshot of the scene. Ask what wisdom is here for you to see. Allow your imagination to serve your questioning and desire to experience the Holy.
10. Active Imagination is experiential. Perhaps you simply spent uninterrupted time in quiet contemplation. The purpose is not necessarily to gain new spiritual insights—though these may come—but to deepen your relationship with all that is sacred.

*Adapted from <https://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Imagination/Intro.html>*

## Sample Passages for Active Imagination

**The Bone Singer:** A story told by Clarissa Pinkola Estes

This is a snippet of a telling, you must imagine into this myth to find your own tale. Clarissa Pinkoala Estés tells of La Loba, an ancient Indian woman, who painstakingly gathers all the scattered bones of a long dead wolf from the desert floor. She places them, slowly, carefully, on the floor of her cave until every bone is there. Then she sings and sings over them, until the wolf bones take on flesh, blood flows and new life leaps forth as a wolf. As the wolf jumps up and runs away into the desert, it turns into a wild and laughing woman.

**The Peace of Wild Things** by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water,  
and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

**Jesus Calms a Storm:** (*Mk 4.35–41; Lk 8.22–25*)

<sup>23</sup>Jesus got into a boat, and his disciples went with him. <sup>24</sup>Suddenly a fierce storm hit the lake, and the boat was in danger of sinking. But Jesus was asleep. <sup>25</sup>The disciples went to him and woke him up. “Save us, Lord!” they said. “We are about to die!”

<sup>26</sup>“Why are you so frightened?” Jesus answered. “How little faith you have!” Then he got up and ordered the winds and the waves to stop, and there was a great calm.

<sup>27</sup>Everyone was amazed. “What kind of man is this?” they said. “Even the winds and the waves obey him!”