

MEDITATION AT ST GEORGE'S

All are welcome to join the meditation sessions at St George's. No previous experience is needed. Throughout the session, the focus is on fostering a sense of simplicity and attentive silence where words are kept to a minimum. The vital part of each session is the period of silent mediation. Though the sessions are guided by a group leader, each person's contribution is essential in helping everyone be still in the presence of God.

OUTLINE OF EACH SESSION

- **Welcome and introduction**
- **Talk**
- **Meditation**
- **Questions**

For each session candles are lit before people arrive. Suitable music may be played. People are greeted by the group leader at the entrance to Lady Chapel. As people begin to settle down, the group leader may, if necessary, gently encourage people to stop talking.

When everyone has gathered, the group leader welcomes everyone.

The leader will explain the format and go over basic instructions for meditation (see overleaf).

The group leader gives a short talk or reads a text about meditation.

After the talk, the lights may be dimmed.

The meditation session begins with the leader saying the following prayer:

O Comforter, Spirit of truth,
you are in all places and fill all things,
treasury of blessings and giver of life,
come and dwell with us,
cleanse us from every stain
and save our souls, O gracious one. *All: Amen.*

The group leader will sound the gong three times.

Listen to the fading sound of the final chime and let it take you into silence.

The meditation will end with the sound of the gong.

The group leader will read a short text or passage of scripture.

The group leader will invite questions – the point is not to enter into lengthy discussion but encourage people to share queries arising out of meditation. Questions need not be answered straightaway. Group leaders may come back with responses at another time.

The session finishes with the following prayer. All who wish may join in:

**God be in my head, and in my understanding;
God be in my eyes, and in my looking;
God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;
God be in my heart, and in my thinking;
God be at mine end, and at my departing. Amen.**

THE ESSENTIALS OF CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Meditation is as natural to the spirit as breathing is to the body. Deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, it is an ancient spiritual discipline, a simple way to be present to God. The tradition does not say that meditation is the only or the best way to pray. It simply conveys the wisdom, at once practical and holy, of daily silent prayer. It transmits the essential teaching of contemplative prayer, first articulated in the early church through the teachings of the Desert Fathers and passed on down the centuries. This tradition advises the following simple practice:

- ❖ **Choose a quiet place. You may wish to light a candle and play music before starting.**
- ❖ **Sit down comfortably on a chair, kneeler, or the floor.**
- ❖ **Keep your back straight but do not force or strain it.**
- ❖ **Place your hands on your knees or on your lap.**
- ❖ **Still any tension and movement in your body so that you feel relaxed but alert.**
- ❖ **Close your eyes lightly.**
- ❖ **You may wish to take a single deep breath in and out to centre yourself.**
- ❖ **Now breathe normally, without forcing yourself, staying relaxed and alert.**
- ❖ **Slowly and interiorly, say your meditation word (e.g. Abba, Jesus, maranatha).**
- ❖ **Continue repeating it gently and faithfully for the whole time of the meditation.**
- ❖ **When thoughts or images of any kind arise, simply let them go.**
- ❖ **Return to the word gently as soon as you realize you have stopped saying it.**
- ❖ **Don't evaluate yourself. If you do, don't be harsh on yourself. Just say your word.**
- ❖ **Stay with the same word during the meditation and from day to day.**

Especially for those who are new to meditation, we recommend using the word 'maranatha' as a focus. This is an ancient Christian prayer from the language Jesus spoke, Aramaic, meaning 'Come Lord'. Repeat the word in four equal syllables, ma-ra-na-tha. Listen to the word as you say it and give it your full attention, but don't think about its meaning. Distractions will come but don't try to repress or fight them. Simply let them pass. When you do find that one has hooked your attention, simply return in faith to saying the word. This is the 'work of the word'. Meditate twice a day, ideally in the early morning and early evening. The optimal length of time for meditation is 30 minutes but might begin with twenty and gradually increase.

Once you have begun this simple daily practice, there are a few guidelines concerning your attitude to the experience that will help you and others go deeper. First, don't assess your progress. The feeling of failure - or success - may be the biggest distraction of all. Do not expect or look for 'experiences' in meditation. You don't have to feel that anything should be happening. This may seem odd at first, because the experience of silence is so unfamiliar to most of us personally and so alien to our culture. And we are not used to being simple. The silence, stillness, and simplicity, however, do have a purpose. In one of the parables of the Kingdom, Jesus compares the Kingdom to a seed that someone plants in the ground. The person then goes off to live an ordinary life while the seed grows silently in the earth, how he does not know. The same thing happens to us, as the word is rooted evermore deeply in our hearts. And, as in the parable, there will in time be signs of growth. You will not always find them in your meditation itself, but in your life. You will begin to harvest the fruits of the spirit; you will find that you are growing in love. And if you ever stop the practice of meditation, whether for a day or a month or a year, simply return to it again with confidence in the infinite generosity of God's Spirit that dwells in and among us all.

Resources are taken from The World Community for Christian Meditation (wccm.org). Please do visit their website for a wealth of information about meditation.