

Senses in Creation – a contemplative meditation

Using our five senses to experience God's world from his viewpoint we can slow down and draw nearer to him.

At the end of each section pause – is there anything God is prompting you to talk with him about? Take as much time as you need before moving on to the next section. You might like to write down or draw what comes to mind.

If at any point you feel distracting thoughts intruding, make a short note of them and carry on. There will be an opportunity later to pick up on anything important.

1. LISTEN

Close your eyes and listen to the sounds around you. Are they manmade or natural, loud or soft, intrusive or soothing? Pick one particular sound and listen to it for a few moments. What strikes you about the sound, how might God feel about this sound?

Keep very quiet and listen for the stillness of creation beneath the noise.

*The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship.
Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known.
They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. Yet their
message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world.
Psalm 19:1-4*

2. SMELL

*Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is
perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are
perishing. 2 Corinthians 2:15*

Keeping your eyes closed, notice the smells around you. Wet or dry, manmade or natural, subtle or overpowering? Try to describe what attracts or repels in these scents. How might God interpret the smells around you?

3. LOOK

*The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with
seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And
God saw that it was good. Genesis 1:12*

Now look around at God's creation, what is in the farthest distance, what is at your feet? Choose something natural to look at in detail, a leaf or flower, a rock or a creature. Notice the intricacy of God's design, his attention to detail. What strikes you about the object you are studying? What might God see when he looks at it?

4. TOUCH

When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers – the moon and the stars you set in place – what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Psalm 8:3-4

The human hand contains about 100,000 nerves – and our brains use all the signals from these nerves to interpret and shape the world around us.

Pick up a natural object hold it gently with your eyes shut, what do your fingers tell you about it? Rough / smooth, damp / dry, warm / cold?

God knows and loves everything in the universe to this intimate level of detail, including you.

5. TASTE

It may be that there is something edible that you can forage from around you, but please don't pick anything that might be poisonous. Take the piece of food/fruit you brought with you, take a bite and savour it on your tongue. What sensations do you experience? (NB – don't throw away the pips/stone – you'll need it later!)

Wisdom says... “Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed... learn to use good judgement.”

But Folly says... “Stolen water is refreshing; food eaten in secret tastes the best!” Proverbs 9:5-6 and 17

Our tongues are also incredibly sensitive, able to distinguish both texture and taste, telling us if something is edible or not, but sometimes they can deceive us. There are many flavours and textures which are pleasing to our taste buds, but if we eat too much sugary or fatty or salty food it's not good for us!

Taste and see that the Lord is good. Psalm 34:8

God knows what is best for us not just in what we physically eat, but in our whole lives if we surrender them to him.

*Father God, thank you for the senses you gave us,
enabling us to interact with you, your creation and each other.
Teach us through your Holy Spirit to experience your world as you do.
Show us by the example of Jesus how to love the world as he did. Amen.*

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Check back through any notes you made of thoughts that distracted you. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal if there is anything that you need to continue to talk with God about. Spend as much time in prayer as you need.

## When Things Aren't Right – an active meditation

You may have decided to do this retreat because there is something that needs sorting out between you and God, or something may have come to mind during the earlier contemplative meditation which you would like to dwell on more.

### 1. Lamentation

*Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day. Genesis 1:31*

Looking around us we can see that things are no longer 'very good'. Indeed, there is much that we know is wrong, but it often seems we are stuck and cannot bring about change. Think of something that you consider to be unjust in life, but that you feel powerless to change. It might be something personal to you, or something affecting a friend or loved one. It could be something you see in the world around you.

Take a sip of your drink of water, then slowly and carefully pour a little out (but not all of it). Allow it to drip and fall onto the ground, watch it soak in and seep away.

Sometimes our cries and prayers can feel like this – as though they are just drops of moisture in a desert having no effect, we can feel let down, frustrated even angry, that God doesn't fix something we can see is blatantly wrong. There is no easy solution, we live with the tension of an imperfect world. Ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of perseverance to keep lamenting without giving in to despair.

### 2. Confession and Repentance

If we are honest we know that much wrong in life is because of our own behaviour.

*I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right,  
but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. Romans 7:15*

Sin is a bit like litter, there's usually some lying around in a corner. The odd bit might not bother us, but it could be damaging someone or something else, and if it builds up, it smothers good and beauty. Look around you for some litter. Pick it up, bring to mind a particular sin you are aware of and pray:

*I confess that I have sinned in thought, word and deed,  
through what I have done, and what I have left undone.  
I have not loved you with my whole heart.  
I have not loved my neighbours as myself.  
In your mercy forgive what I have been,  
help me to amend what I am, and direct what I shall be;  
that I may do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you, my God.*

*adapted from Common Worship (Church of England)*

Thankfully because of Jesus we know all sin can be forgiven. Find a bin to put the litter in (or take it home to dispose of). Then using some more of your water pour some out on your hands to wash them clean of any dirt from the litter and symbolically from the wrong doing you have just confessed.

*If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. 1 John 1:8*

### **3. Putting things right – a new beginning**

Often we stop at the point of receiving forgiveness, but the Old Testament had a policy of ‘making restitution’ or putting things right.

*When a man or a woman wrongs another, breaking faith with the Lord, that person incurs guilt and shall confess the sin that has been committed. The person shall make full restitution for the wrong, adding one-fifth to it, and giving it to the one who was wronged. Numbers 5:6-7*

Spend a moment to consider an action you could take to help to ‘put things right’, make a note so you don’t forget when you get back home.

As a symbol of putting things right take the pips/stone from the fruit in the first meditation, if the ground is damp enough from where you earlier poured out water in lamentation and washed your hands clean to symbolise forgiveness, and it’s a suitable spot, then press the pips / stone into the earth. If it’s not a sensible place, find somewhere you can plant your pips / stone and water with the last of your drink.

Ask God for new life to blossom, and a new beginning to grow.

*The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. Isaiah 35:1*

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At the end of this short time of retreat you might like reflect further on anything that has been particularly meaningful or caught your attention. Offer your thoughts and feelings to God in prayer.

*God grant me the compassion to see through your eyes,
the humility to own my failings,
and the joy of knowing your love.
Through your blessings, may I bless others,
that together we may glimpse your coming kingdom. Amen.*