

**DAY 4: Meditation****INTRODUCTION TO IGNATIAN MEDITATION &  
FIRST PRINCIPLE AND FOUNDATION PART 1 [SE#23]**

Today, we will introduce the method and structure that Saint Ignatius uses for the daily meditations, and we will use that structure to make our first meditation. This meditation will be the first of three that considers what Ignatius calls the “Principle and Foundation” of the exercises.

**The Ignatian Meditation - Method and Structure****1. Place yourself in the presence of God**

Every meditation should begin by placing ourselves in God’s presence. Ignatius even recommends standing up for a moment near the place where we will pray, for about as much time as it takes to say the Our Father, and simply recalling that God sees us and is with us.

**2. Pray the Preparatory Prayer found in SE #46.**

In #49 of the exercises, Ignatius instructs us to always pray this prayer at the start of every meditation throughout the whole course of the spiritual exercises. It reads:

*Lord, I ask that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be directed purely to the praise and service of Your Divine Majesty. Amen.*

This reminds us that prayer depends on God, not our effort alone.

**THE PRELUDES**

The preludes to the meditation are shorter moments that prepare for the main meditation, but they are essential; they should never be skipped. There are three main types of preludes.

**3a) Prelude type 1: Summary of the theme**

The first kind of prelude that Ignatius sometimes uses is a brief summary, where he gives us the general theme and background information of the meditation. For example, if the meditation will be on a moment of the life of Jesus, Ignatius may briefly outline the surrounding context of the moment, and review the places and characters involved.

**3b) Prelude type 2: Composition of Place (Imagination)**

The second type of prelude we’ll encounter is called a “composition of place,” which means we spend time using our imagination to set ourselves in whatever scene the first prelude gave us. This is where Ignatius is asking us to engage our imagination, to create a strong image that we can dwell on in a more sensible way. The main reasons we do this are so that we steady our mind and give the imagination a vivid image to come back to when distractions come, and so that we can experience in a more first hand and personal way the realities of our faith, and of the life of Jesus. Ignatius understood that first hand experience offers stronger motivation than what is only known by second hand learning or theoretical deduction.



### **3c) Prelude type 3: Petition (Ask for a Grace)**

Every Ignatian meditation has a particular target, a specific grace that we're desiring to receive from God. So the petition is where we specifically ask for that grace.

### **4. Points for Meditation**

This is the main body, the heart, of the meditation. Ignatius will always highlight several key points for us to spend a good amount of time meditating on. In the video, the retreat director will present Ignatius's main points, and spend some time developing them in greater detail. It's here that you will want to pay special attention and perhaps take some notes so you can refer to these points during your meditation.

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### **5. Colloquy (Hear to Heart Conversation with God)**

This is a heart to heart conversation with God. Sometime, Ignatius offers us a concrete structure to use in the colloquy, with specific requests and specific prayers that we ought to pray as we talk to God. At other times he leaves us more free to simply speak and listen. The colloquy is actually the most important part of the meditation, because all meditation is for the sake of uniting with God and hearing His voice. **Leave at least 10 minutes for the colloquy in every meditation.**

### **TODAY'S MEDITATION- The First Principle and Foundation - Part 1: God**

**Note:** Ignatius does not introduce the structure of the meditation we just described until the exercises of the first week. I have gone ahead and applied that structure to the meditations we will do here, so that you can begin to get comfortable with the method. We spend three days on the principle and foundation because it is such an essential part of the whole course of these spiritual exercises.

### **Introduction to the Principle and Foundation - SE #23**

If you turn to #23 of the Exercises, you will notice that what Ignatius wrote here doesn't even fill a page. Yet, as the title says, this is the Principle and Foundation - not just of these spiritual exercises, but really of human existence in its most fundamental sense. It's like a very distilled Gospel.

Every science has first principles. A set of truths that really are the beginning, from which other truths are deduced. For example, mathematics takes the value of numbers to be self-evident and true. If you call that into question, you can't do math.

Because of this, we'll spend three meditations on this passage. There are **three primary things** that that the principle and foundation speaks about: **God, creatures, and the principle of "Indifference,"** so each day we will focus on one of these.



With that, here is the structure of this meditation.

### **1. Act of the Presence of God**

### **2. Preparatory Prayer, as in #46**

*Lord, I ask that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be directed purely to the praise and service of Your Divine Majesty. Amen.*

### **3. Prelude 1: Summary**

In this meditation, we will consider **who God is**. We'll remain just in the first sentence on the page, where Ignatius says **"Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul."** And within that sentence our focus will be on God Himself.

### **4. Prelude 2: Composition of Place**

Spend a few moments imagining these actions of God- look at an image of sacred art, like the creation image in the Sistine Chapel. We know God is purely spiritual, but feel free to see him the way He is depicted in art.

### **5. Prelude 3: Petition**

Ask our Lord in prayer for a **deeper and more correct knowledge of who God is**, as our Creator and Lord, as our beginning and our final end, our final goal.

### **6. Main Points for Meditation**

Imagine if someone was asked, "What's your father like?" and they replied, "We're close, he's a great dad," but then they begin describing the characteristics of a giraffe, not a human father. That would imply a deeply flawed vision of human fatherhood, and that confusion would distort the person's understanding of their own nature and how they ought to live.

Something similar has happened in our culture, even among Christians. We have absorbed moral relativism, the idea that each of us has their own truth. The philosophical root claim of this vision of the world is that reality is defined by our subjective experience, by our mind. George Berkeley, the philosopher for whom the University of Berkeley is named, held that only minds exist and that perception constitutes reality- an outlook that, taken fully, makes human consciousness into God. In this view, if a tree falls and no one hears it, it makes no sound; indeed, it doesn't exist. Extreme as it is, this mindset has shaped our culture, enabling us to compartmentalize life and confine God to a small religious corner, while living our or practical lives as though He did not exist.

At the outset of these exercises, then, we should purify our idea of God. Not that understanding alone suffices- many saints were very simple people who knew little theology. But Jesus says, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free," and "I am the way, the truth, and



the life.” Our beliefs about God shape how we relate to Him and use our freedom. So let’s set down some basic truths about God:

Firstly, God is spirit (Jn 4:24): wholly beyond matter and not part of the universe. He is transcendent. Any blending of God with the world or with finite souls (pantheism) contradicts Catholic teaching (“My thoughts are not your thoughts,” Is 55:8).

Secondly, God has an intellect and will; He is personal, not an impersonal force. Though infinitely perfect and never fully comprehensible, His knowing and willing are analogously reflected in ours, and we are thus made for relationship with Him.

Thirdly, God is supremely free. Creation was a free, loving choice; nothing compelled Him to create.

If we remove any of these truths from our notion of God, we’re really speaking of a different “god,” a “lower-case g” god. The Catholic philosopher Cornelio Fabro goes so far as to say that if we remove any of these characteristics from God, we are, on a practical level, atheists.

To grasp the Principle and Foundation- that God is our origin and end- we need a true idea of Him, found above all in the Incarnate Word, Jesus. This is primarily gleaned by encountering Him in Scripture and prayer, guided by Magisterium of the Church and the theology of the Church Fathers.

God is good (“only God is good,” Mk 10:18), wise and omniscient (“in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom,” Col 2:3), almighty (“nothing will be impossible with God,” Lk 1:37), provident (“you have arranged all things by measure and number and weight,” Wis 11:20), omnipresent (“in him we live and move and have our being,” Acts 17:28; present by grace in those who love Him, Jn 14:23), and perfect (“his greatness is unsearchable,” Ps 145:3).

Theologically, we speak of God by three steps: affirmation, removal, eminence. We affirm perfections (goodness, beauty), remove creaturely limits, and elevate them to the highest degree. God possesses every perfection without limitation and in superabundance. Yet even purified language falls short; our ideas are not God. His reality is infinitely beyond our words. Still, striving to know Him deepens the force of the Principle and Foundation: this Infinite God created me from nothing for a purpose.

Saint John of the Cross compares creatures to God: all their being, beauty, goodness, and wisdom are as nothing beside His infinity. He does not call creation evil, but insists that when truly compared to God, all creatures are infinitely lesser than He. To love a finite thing for its own sake alongside God is self-deception; it diminishes Him by placing the creature on His scale.

## 7. Colloquy



Enter into a moment of colloquy with our Lord, based on whatever moment of this meditation strikes you most. Speak to Him, listen to Him. Close with a **Glory be**.