

How We Meditate

Choose a quiet place that will be free of interruptions. Sit relaxed but alert in a comfortable upright position. I prefer to use a straight-backed, padded chair. Close your eyes lightly and sigh gently several times to start the relaxation response. Take several moments to get comfortable, so you can be as still as possible during your meditation. Now, take a single word or short Bible verse and say it silently and continuously in your heart for the entire period of your meditation. Say it in stillness without moving your lips or your tongue. The simple repetition of the word will lead you, gradually and imperceptibly, from distraction to silence, from anxiety to peace, from your mind to your heart. Use the same word or verse for the entire period of your meditation and from day to day. Staying with the same word will allow it to gradually take root and grow in the depths of your heart. Meditate in the morning and the evening for 20 to 30 minutes, as best as you can within your life circumstances.

Choosing your word or verse is of some importance. You could say the name *Jesus*, for example, or you could choose the words *Abba Father*, the beautiful and loving way that Jesus referred to His Father. *Amen* is also a good word to use. I like to say my word slowly, in syllables, and in time with my breathing. This helps the relaxation response, and for me, the breath is a metaphor for God's presence. (Genesis 2:7). I do not try to control my breathing. I just relax and breathe naturally. As you say your word or verse in your mind, it will eventually become rooted in your heart. Then, you can simply listen to it as a sound.

Now, say the first syllable of your word on the in-breath and the second syllable on the out-breath: *Je – sus . . . Ab – ba . . . Fa – ther . . . A – men*. Some people like to use the word *maranatha*. It is the Aramaic language that Jesus spoke, and it means *come Lord*. Paul used it to close his first letter to the Corinthians. Say it in four equally spaced syllables and two relaxed breaths - *ma – ra . . . na – tha*. The tempo should be relatively slow and rhythmical, but at a rate that is natural for you.

The Meditation Group

Typically, a meditation group will meet for less than an hour each week and consist of a short teaching (about 10 minutes), the meditation period (about 25 minutes), and a short after-period (about 10 minutes). It is a meditation group, not a discussion group or a therapy group. It is not a time for debate or controversy or even Bible study. It is a time for silence. This silence is not just the absence of sound. It is a silence that must be experienced to be understood.

The meditation group is a sacred time and place. As people arrive, they are greeted with quiet music and soft lighting, and gently reminded not to talk. Most people will feel they are being unfriendly or even antisocial if they do not talk. After all, church has always been that way. The short teaching is just that, a short teaching. It is not a sermon or lecture but a spiritual preparation for the meditation period to follow. It could be a live talk or prerecorded. It could be simply read aloud from a script. This is not a time for individual oratory. Listening to the teaching prepares the mind and heart. It is not just about believing in God with your mind, it is about knowing God in your heart. The teaching is followed by a moment of silence while the lights are dimmed. The group leader takes responsibility for timing the meditation period and signals the beginning and end with a soft chime. The after-period is for sharing and discussion, but this is optional. In peaceful fellowship, group members may decide to simply leave in silence.