

MEDITATION FOR A PUBLIC PARK

BY KEVIN McGINNIS

Every public park is different, but they all serve one purpose—recreation. For this meditation, you will select different elements that are common to most parks, and they will serve as your stopping points for meditation and prayer. Don't worry if one of the elements is missing—simply use your imagination and improvise or substitute, or just skip to the next station.

The goal of this set of meditations is to turn this space designed for recreation into sacred space designed for re-creation. By reminding ourselves of God's presence, we see fields of grass, swing sets, water, and other elements as the tools God uses to re-create His image in us and remind us that we are His.

If at all possible, find a park that has a pond, lake, or pool. You may wish to bring your Bible, some blank paper, a pen, and some sort of towel or blanket as well.



STATION I—BEGINNINGS: REMOVING DISTRACTIONS

We want the Holy Spirit to lead us through this prayer path. Sometimes the first step to hearing God's Spirit speak to us is to shut out all the other voices that seek our attention. Begin your time in the park by shutting out distractions and slowing down enough to give your soul a chance to catch up with your body.

ACTION: *Take a moment and look for the most relaxing and highest spot in the park, a place that can give you a good view of the area*

(even if that is a bench or a table). Sit down and relax. Get comfortable. Spend the next few minutes here.

Take out a blank piece of paper. Write down everything that is racing through your head that could be a distraction to you during the path. Wad it all up into a ball. While holding your new paper ball, take the next few moments to meditate on a scripture from “Scripture Reading Options.” Allow every distraction between you and God to become quiet. Find the nearest trash can and throw away your paper ball—if any distractions come back to your mind, remind yourself that you have thrown those away for now, and turn your attention back to God.

Scripture Reading Options

PSALM 46:10

Be still, and know that I am God.

PSALM 86:11

Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

GO DEEPER—ROMANS 12:1-8

Prayer Options

PRAYER OPTION 1:

Lord Jesus, I pray that Your Holy Spirit would meet me here. Take these distractions and quiet them. I am here waiting to hear from You. Grant me peace as I journey with You. Amen.

PRAYER OPTION 2:

(Take time to pray over your list of things that are on your mind. One by one, give them to God, and as you hand them to God in your prayer, say “Lord I trust You to handle this for the next hour so that I may worship You.”)

Key/Memory Verse

HEBREWS 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus,

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the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.



STATION 2—PATHS

Some paths are put in place on purpose—they are paved with gravel, stones, or just intentionally marked in the dirt. Some paths are formed accidentally because enough people who were going the same direction wear the ground until a path is formed. Some paths are unmarked. We find our way as we go. The path becomes our symbol for our journey through life. For this meditation, we are going to walk a path of praise, and enjoy our Maker and His creation.

ACTION: *Find the best path that will take you through the center of the park, if possible. (If there is not a designated path, create your own! Just find your way as you go.) Walk the path you have chosen around the park. Take your time. Let your senses take in God's creation—the trees, birds, grass, rocks, and sky—everything He has made. Think of words that describe our Creator as well as other names of praise attributed to Him. Try to think of as many as you can while you walk slowly, observing what He has made. When you have a list of names of praise, stop and write them down, or select one to keep in mind as you walk. Worship the Lord by giving Him praise for His wonderful works.*

Scripture Reading Options

PSALM 145:1-4

I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.

PSALM 145:6-9

They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

GO DEEPER—PSALM 145:1-21

Prayer Options

PRAYER OPTION 1:

My Father in heaven, praise Your holy name! You are wonderful. Your creation displays the loving care You have for us. I just wanted You to know I love You for who You are, and not just for what You have done for me. Amen.

PRAYER OPTION 2:

God, no matter where my paths may wind, I will praise You. No matter where I go, You are with me, and I will give You thanks. Even when I stray from Your ways, You gently guide me back to the good paths—I praise You for Your compassionate heart. Your creation is all around me, Your love surrounds me, I can see Your wonderful works everywhere I go. God of all creation, may Your name be praised.

Key/Memory Verse

PSALM 145:5

They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works.



STATION 3—BOUNDARIES

“God is a killjoy; He doesn’t want you to have any fun. The more boring your life, the happier God is. Everything that is fun, God made off-limits.” If we were honest with ourselves, most of us would admit we have had thoughts like these.

The truth is that the boundaries and limits God has set before us have a good purpose—to keep us from harm. A good father sets limits for his children to protect them. We can be thankful for a God who has created boundaries for us.

ACTION: *Move to a fence that separates one area from another, or a sidewalk that separates the park from the street. Walk along this barrier. Consider why the barrier was put there. Why does it exist? Is it for safety? What would happen if it wasn’t there? Next, begin walking around the perimeter of the park. Make a note of all of the rules you see posted. (For example: “No glass containers,” “Throw away your trash,” etc.) Think for a moment of some of the rules of the park that are not*

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posted. Then think about your life. What God-given boundaries have been protecting your heart, your future, and your body? Why do you think God made those rules and laws? What would happen if they weren't there? Sit for a moment by one of these boundaries and humbly talk to God about the boundaries He has put around your life to guard you. Give thanks to God for caring enough to protect you.

Scripture Reading Options

PSALM I:2-3

But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

PSALM II9:23-24

Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.

GO DEEPER—PROVERBS 2:I-22

Prayer Options

PRAYER OPTION I:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for boundaries. Thank You for knowing what is best for me. I thank You for Your Word. Help me as I hide it in my heart, so that I might not sin and that I may live for You. Amen.

PRAYER OPTION 2:

Lord, thank You for loving me so much. I appreciate the boundaries You have set for me. Give me discernment to recognize lies that would trap me. Help me as I pursue the truth and live by Your Spirit. Keep me from trying to “walk the fence,” with one foot standing on Your truth and another in a place of danger. Protect me from crossing lines that would place me in harm’s way. I seek to look to You and follow only Your ways.

Key/Memory Verse

PSALM II9:23-24

Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees. Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.



STATION 4—ATHLETIC FIELD

Sports are a big part of recreation. They are a fun way to challenge ourselves to do better. Sometimes we can get overwhelmed by competition and become consumed by it. But if we can lay aside the competition, athletics can help us grow and inspire us to be the best we can be.

ACTION: *Walk (or if you wish, run) to an athletic field—soccer field, baseball diamond, basketball court—or even to a group of people throwing a Frisbee. Walk around the area, and think through the rules for that sport. Stop for a moment to consider all of the training that goes into a sport. Prayerfully reflect on how in athletics, people push each other toward excellence in pursuit of a common goal. Also remember the cutting edge of competition—when we become too obsessed with it, we stop treating others with love.*

Spend some time with the Lord evaluating your commitment to training to excel in your spiritual life. In prayer, talk to God about your willingness to play by the rules and pursue a common goal with your Heavenly Father.

Scripture Reading Options

2 TIMOTHY 2:5

Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules.

2 TIMOTHY 4:7-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

GO DEEPER—HEBREWS 12:1-13; 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

Prayer Options

PRAYER OPTION I:

Lord, I realize that there are many days that I do not push myself to excellence for Your kingdom. I run toward You at a pace I know I am comfortable with—I do not challenge myself. I know there are many days that I don't run this race to win. Forgive me, Father. Give

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me the heart of a true athlete—a spiritual athlete—that I may run to win. Amen.

PRAYER OPTION 2:

Lord Jesus, have mercy on me when I make competition an end in itself. Forgive me when I compare myself to others, instead of seeing myself as You see me. Give me a spirit of love for myself—that I may push myself to excellence without comparison. Give me a spirit of love for others, that I may see this spiritual race as a team effort, and so I may not leave my brothers and sisters behind, but carry them when they are weak. Give me a humble heart that I may receive their support when I need to be carried. Amen.

Key/Memory Verse

I TIMOTHY 4:8

For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.



STATION 5—WATER

We can't live without water. It is one of the most basic elements of life. Water is a vivid symbol in everyday life—it refreshes and cleanses. It reminds us of our baptism—immersing our life into the faith, burying the old life and rising to the new, Spirit-soaked life.

Jesus spoke of living water that would never run dry. We can have a life that springs up from His Spirit within us and overflows into every area of our life. And the best part is that this living water never runs dry—it eternally quenches our thirst.

ACTION: *If there is one located in this park, walk to a pond, waterfall, pool, or a drinking fountain—some place where you can see water. Find a place to sit nearby. Get close to the water. If you can, touch the water, reaching out to feel it on your hands. If you have some water to drink, take a good, long, cool drink. (If you have been baptized, spend some time remembering back to that moment.)*

Reflect on the image of water, and talk to God about your greatest need that His living water can fulfill—do you need to be cleansed? Refreshed? Are you longing to have your thirst for God satisfied? Tell God

about your need, and finish your time by affirming that you need God like you need water—without Him you cannot survive. If you can, as you leave this station, touch the water with your hand, and then touch it to your forehead. As you do this pray a one sentence prayer, something like, “Lord, I need Your living water today.” This is a physical gesture that serves to remind us of our daily need for Him.

Scripture Reading Options

PSALM 42:I-2

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

EZEKIEL 36:25

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.

MARK 1:9-11

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

GO DEEPER—JOHN 4:I-14

Prayer Options

PRAYER OPTION 1:

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for Your promise of eternal life. Fill me with Your living water. I pray that You would refresh my spirit today. Send Your life-giving Spirit like rain. I need Your touch—I need to drink from Your life-giving fountain. Fill me, Lord. Amen.

PRAYER OPTION 2:

Lord Jesus, I need to be cleansed today. My heart is dirty from the world, from my sin, and I need You to wash me today with Your cleansing water. Make me pure and clean by the power of Your Spirit. Take away my grime and guilt, and fill me with Your pure cleansing water. Amen.

Key/Memory Verse

HEBREWS 10:22

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, hav-

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ing our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.



STATION 6—SHADE

Shade blocks us from the hot harsh rays of the sun. It is a place where we can cool down and rest from working or playing. Shade means cover, protection, and rest.

ACTION: *Go to a comfortable shady place, under a tree or next to a wall and sit down. Practice finding rest in God. Relax, close your eyes, and talk to God. If you fall asleep, that's OK. In fact, if you can lay down, or bow your head and close your eyes, that is good too. Allow your body to slow down, and even drift off to sleep. Let Jesus be the last thing on your mind before you drift off to rest. If you brought a picnic blanket or a beach towel, find a nice shady spot to lie down for a while. Just rest in the comfort of the shade, and pray as you feel led. Reflect on the fact that God knows you and knows you need rest. Take a break from the heat of the sun, and the fast pace of life, slow down and just rest. If you fall asleep, give thanks to God as soon as you wake up for the rest He provides.*

Scripture Reading Options

PSALM 121:5

The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

ISAIAH 25:4

You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat.

MATTHEW 11:28

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

GO DEEPER—I KINGS 19:3-7

Prayer Options

PRAYER OPTION I:

Lord, when Elijah was tired and weak, fleeing from evil people, he found shade under a tree. You provided for him when he was afraid and tired. Life looked so dark that he wanted to quit and just die. But

You provided rest for the spiritual battle he was fighting. Lord, I need Your shade, I need Your strength. Come and give me Your rest.

PRAYER OPTION 2:

(Repeat one of the short verses from “Scripture Reading Options” for this station. Repeat it several times, slowly and prayerfully.)

Key/Memory Verse

PSALM 121:5

The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand.



STATION 7—PLAY

Just about every animal on the planet plays. God has built fun into us. Sometimes we forget this and we turn the Christian life into a serious, robotic exercise. But God has made us to enjoy life and the creation He has given us. If we don’t play, we become something less than human.

When we play, we are open to taking some risks. Climb to the top of the monkey bars. Jump from the highest diving board. Swing as high as you can on the swing set! This small element of risk reminds us that we are alive. For a little while, we forget about all the cares and burdens we carry. The schoolwork, the chores, our troubles . . . we need to remember that God is there with us all along, and we don’t need to be overwhelmed with the cares of life. God is with us, He loves us, and He has given us life—it is OK to enjoy it!

ACTION: *Make your way to a children’s playground, a swing set, or just find a group of people or children at play. Try to remember the last time you rode on a swing, went down a slide, or climbed the monkey bars. Then, go ahead! Play!*

Take a few minutes to play on the playground. Set this book down and go play on your favorite play equipment. Release your cares for the moment and allow God to see His child at play. (If there is not a place to play, walk around the park and sing to yourself and to God.)

Scripture Reading Options

PSALM 51:8

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

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I SAMUEL 16:23

Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

2 SAMUEL 6:14

David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might.

GO DEEPER—LEVITICUS 23:39-40

Prayer Options

PRAYER OPTION I:

Lord, thank You for opportunities to play. Show me ways that I can spend more time with You in Your presence. Speak to my heart and direct my mind to the places where I need to take some healthy risks for You. Grant me courage and wisdom and give me a sense of peace. Help me to keep my life balanced, Lord.

Key/Memory Verse

PSALM 96:11-12

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy.



STATION 8—RENEWED PRIORITIES

When we break our routine, and move from work, school, or home space to a re-creative space like a park, it gives us a new perspective on our daily world. By taking a deep breath in a park, we can get a whole new outlook on life and work. As we near the end of this meditation, take a few moments to walk and talk with God about the “space” where you will return to live.

ACTION: *Find a high point in the park where you can overlook as much of the park as possible (a hilltop, the top of some playground equipment, etc.) Take a moment to take in the view, and think about the difference between your view and God’s view.*

Find a place to sit and recall some of the “distractions” you wrote

down at Station 1, or review some of your current burdens and responsibilities. Bring them before the Lord and ask Him to help you rearrange the priorities of your life. Ask God to help you see all the areas of your life from His perspective. Bring Him any cares or concerns you have, and ask Him to help you handle them. Don't forget to include time with God as one of your top priorities.

Scripture Reading Options

PSALM 25:4

Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths.

PROVERBS 21:2

All a man's ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart.

GO DEEPER—MATTHEW 6:25-33

Prayer Options

PRAYER OPTION 1:

Lord, help me to order my life according to Your priorities. I take my life, and all responsibilities, and lay them at Your feet. Please take them, rearrange them, and turn them into something wonderful for Your kingdom.

PRAYER OPTION 2:

Lord, let me see with new eyes. Unstop my ears that I may hear You, open my eyes that I may see You, renew my heart that I may know You. I pray that You would give me the grace to see life differently. Don't let me get caught up in the spin of the world. Put my feet on solid ground, and give me peace. Amen.

Key/Memory Verse

MATTHEW 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.



STATION 9—THE JOURNEY TO COME

We're coming to the end of our prayer path. Spend these last minutes reflecting on where you've been and what you

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have seen. How did God speak to you today? What have you trusted Him with? How have your plans changed?

ACTION: *Head to the place you began your journey today (Station 1). Before you head back to the business of life, take time to commit your way to God. Use the Lord's Prayer as your closing prayer.*

Pick up a small stone to carry with you this week. Use it as a reminder of your experience here. Leave it in your pocket, and whenever you notice it, say a short prayer of thanksgiving and praise to Jesus that He has been and always will be with you.

Scripture Reading Options

MATTHEW 6:9-13

In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

(NKJV)

JEREMIAH 29:11

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Prayer Options

PRAYER OPTION 1:

(Say aloud the Lord's Prayer from Matthew 6:9-13, above.)

PRAYER OPTION 2:

Lord, thank You for taking a walk with me today in Your creation. I thank You for renewing me, refreshing me, and giving me peace. I love You, Lord. Amen.

Key/Memory Verse

PROVERBS 3:5-6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.