

Lectio Divina

Praying the Scriptures

The ancient practice of *lectio divina* invites us to listen deeply to the word of God in Holy Scripture, to “hear with the ear of our hearts,” as St. Benedict encourages. In stories and psalms, parables and prophecy, we listen for the still, small voice of God speaking into the silence of our hearts.

Lectio divina is not Bible study. It is not concerned with analyzing a passage of scripture, understanding its context, or applying it to our own contexts and ministries. Instead, with this practice we let go of our need to know and we simply receive the words of scripture as gift and invitation.

We can practice *lectio divina* in our own times of prayer and contemplation, but it is especially meaningful to practice it in community. Both the shared silence and the shared reflection help us listen more deeply for God’s word to us.

In *lectio divina*, a selected passage of scripture is read aloud slowly and deliberately four times, preferably by four different voices. Between each reading, everyone reflects silently on the passage for a time, and then may be invited to share aloud a simple word or phrase of their own heart’s response to the passage if they wish.

The leader in *lectio divina* is simply “holding the space”. This means that she or he will invite each reader when it is time to begin, keep time if necessary (for example, 30 seconds of silence or 1 minute of time for people to respond), and remind participants, if needed, to keep their responses to a simple word or phrase and to refrain from responding to one another.

It may be helpful, when introducing *lectio divina* to a congregation, to not offer too many directions at once; the leader can let the group know before each successive reading what to listen for in that reading.

The practice of *lectio divina* can transform the way in which we listen to scripture and other sacred writing. May the word of God begin to shimmer in your heart and invite you to hear how God is moving and calling in your life and in your community.

Practicing *Lectio Divina*

Encourage participants to sit comfortably. Begin with silence, in which participants might ask the Holy Spirit to open “the ears of their hearts” to hear the word of God speaking to them.

The First Reading - *Lectio*

As the passage is read aloud, listen for a word or phrase that “shimmers” for you. The word or phrase may touch your heart, catch your attention, or cause you to wonder about something. In the silence following the reading, stay with that word or phrase, allowing it to repeat itself in your heart. The leader may then invite people to share, if they wish, the word or phrase from the passage that spoke to them.

The Second Reading - *Meditation*

As the passage is read aloud again, ponder the word or phrase and how God might be speaking to you through it. Ask how or why it might be touching your heart on this day, in this moment. In the silence following the reading, stay with what God is saying to you through that word or phrase, allowing it to repeat itself in your heart. The leader may then invite people to share, if they wish, a phrase or single sentence about how or why the word is touch them.

The Third Reading - *Oratio*

As the passage is read aloud a third time, listen to how God may be extending an invitation to you through the word or phrase that spoke to you. Ask what God may be calling you to do or be on this day, or in the days ahead. In the silence following the reading, stay with that invitation, allowing it to grow in your heart. The leader may then invite people to share, if they wish, a phrase or single sentence about the invitation they are hearing.

The Fourth Reading - *Contemplatio*

As the passage is read aloud a final time, simply rest in the word of God, receiving it as a gift. In the silence following the reading, give thanks for this time of prayer and the presence of God in your heart.

When using lectio divina in worship, you might just do three readings, and close with a prayer of thanksgiving after the third. Also, the invitation to respond aloud can be to the group as a whole, or you can ask people to turn to their neighbor and share responses that way.