

Lectio Divina

The words of Sacred Scripture were not written to remain imprisoned on papyrus, parchment or paper, but to be received by a person who prays, making them blossom in his or her heart.

Pope Francis

Let [all the Christian Faithful] remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for “we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying.”

Dei Verbum, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Vatican II

It is one thing to study Sacred Scripture, it is quite another to pray with Sacred Scripture. It can be easy to study Scripture, learning names, dates, and historical or literary facts, without letting the Word of God affect your heart. The Word of God is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12), so we must approach it with an openness that allows us to encounter Jesus Christ in the written words of Scripture.

This Bible Study will give you the opportunity both to study the Bible and to pray with Scripture in order to allow God to speak to you. Every third session in this Study will be a guided *lectio divina* session during which you and your group will look back at passages that you have studied previously and give God the time to speak to you through them. *Lectio Divina* (Latin for “Divine Reading”) is a prayerful approach to reading the Bible that Christians have used to pray with Scripture for centuries. It was developed in the monastic tradition, but, particularly after the Second Vatican Council, all Catholics have been encouraged to pray *lectio divina* “which is truly ‘capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God’s word, but also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God.’”¹

Over the years, a simple outline for *lectio divina* has been adopted and it contains four key steps. For better guidance, we have added several additional steps to make this easier to pray as a group. This introduction will briefly review these steps and each *Lectio* session will provide guidance for a group leader to facilitate the session.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, 87

Preparation

- A. Before beginning *lectio divina*, select a passage that you will be praying with. It should not be too long, and it should be one that you are somewhat familiar with. For the *lectio* sessions in this Study, the passages have been selected based on readings you will have already done in the Study.
- B. When praying *lectio divina* in a group, choose a facilitator and assign people different reading roles. This is also a good time to indicate to the group what they should expect during this session and how this time of prayer will flow.
- C. Make sure that your group is in a comfortable space that is conducive to prayer. If it is an option and is not disruptive to others, it would be appropriate to do this in a chapel or church with your pastor's permission.

Lectio Divina

- A. Begin by placing yourself in the presence of God. Allow for the group to sit in silence before God. If it is helpful, focus on your breathing and allow distractions to pass out of your mind.
 - B. Ask the Holy Spirit to be present and to open your heart to the Word of God. Ask Mary, the Mother of the Word made flesh, to guide you to her Son who is made known to us in the Sacred Scriptures.
1. **LECTIO [Reading]** - Begin *Lectio Divina* with a slow, but natural, reading of the passage of Scripture. While the passage is being read, each person should be listening attentively and asking themselves, "What does the biblical text say in itself?" After a few moments of silence, the passage should be read a second time and even a third time if desired.
 2. **MEDITATIO [Meditation]** – During a period of silence, begin to ask yourself, "what does the biblical text say to *me*?" Is there a word or sentence that sticks out to you? Is God trying to say something directly to you as you are reading? It is important to remain faithful to the text itself and allow it to move and challenge you.
 3. **ORATIO [Prayer]** – This is your response to God's Word and to what was happening during the *meditatio* step previously. What do you have to say back to God? Words of petition, intercession, thanksgiving, praise? This too can be done in a period of silence with only limited guidance from the facilitator of the group.
 4. **CONTEMPLATIO [Contemplation]** – Allow God to show you his own vision and ask yourself, "What conversion of mind, heart, and life is the Lord asking of me?" Sit in silence and be open to how the Word of God can transform your life. Pope Francis describes this part of *lectio divina* by saying, "Words and thoughts here give way to love, as between lovers for whom sometimes it is enough to just look at each other in silence. The biblical text remains, but like a mirror, like an icon to be contemplated. And in this way, there is dialogue."² This period of prayer should be as long as needed for each individual.

² Pope Francis, General Audience, Wednesday 27 January 2021

Discussion



- A. Conclude your *lectio divina* with a prayer of thanksgiving, but do not lose the prayerful atmosphere of your group.
- B. Open up a period of time for sharing with one another what you experienced during prayer. Invite the members of your group to share what words or phrases stuck out during the *lectio* and *meditatio* parts of the prayer. If people are comfortable, invite them to share more of what God spoke to them in prayer and what they said back to God.
- C. Spend time discussing what concrete decision or action you will take in response to your time in prayer with God. Pope Benedict XVI tells us, “We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity.”³
- D. Conclude your discussion with a prayer.

In each *Lectio* Session in this Bible Study, these steps will be clearly identified, and there will be guidance for a facilitator to lead the group through *lectio divina*. If this is your first time praying in this way, it may at times feel awkward, especially with the amount of silence that is required. The more you pray with Scripture and as a group, the more comfortable you will be.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* 87