

Lectio Divina

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Lectio Divina, which means “divine reading,” is an ancient form of praying with Scripture that is still practiced by many today. It originated with the Desert Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries. The Desert Fathers were some of the first monks, Christians who moved into the wilderness to devote themselves to a simple way of life of work and prayer. *Lectio Divina* is a slow, thoughtful encounter with the Word of God. One who practices *Lectio Divina* listens to the Word of God spoken in Scripture, considers how God’s Word applies to his life, responds to God in prayer, and then rests in silence in God’s presence and allows Him to speak to his heart. Although simple to do, *Lectio Divina* can lead to a rich and moving encounter with God.

There are four steps to *Lectio Divina*: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*, or reading, mediation, prayer, and contemplation. The goal of *Lectio Divina* is to encounter the Word of God and to be open to the Holy Spirit, to allow Him to guide one’s thoughts and inspirations. Let’s take a look at each step in more detail.

Lectio

Lectio translates as “reading,” but perhaps a better meaning would be “listening.” We often read to gather as much information from the page as we can, as fast as we can. This type of reading is more accurately called “skimming.” Instead, in the *lectio* step, we must read to listen. This means to read the words of Scripture slowly and intentionally. The goal is quality of reading, not quantity of words or pages. Therefore, a smaller selection from

Scripture is better than a larger one. A few verses are better than an entire chapter to allow for this kind of reading, and the Scripture should be read multiple times. It may be helpful to read out loud, or, if possible, to have someone read to you. It is easier to listen while actually listening. In the *lectio* step, we should strive to hear the words of Scripture as if God is speaking directly to us – because He is!

Meditatio

Meditatio translates as “meditation.” In this second step of *Lectio Divina*, we are called to imitate our Blessed Mother, Mary, who, after the shepherds visited her and her newborn Son, Jesus, “kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart” (Luke 2:19). We are also called to imitate the prophet Jeremiah who, when he found God’s Word, “devoured” it (Jer. 15:16). All of this is to say, in the *meditatio* step, we are actively engaging the Scripture we just read. Focus on a key word or phrase from the Scripture selection that stood out to you, for any reason. Perhaps it “spoke” to you, confused you, challenged you, filled you with hope, anxiety, or love. Whatever the reason, ask yourself why you responded in this way. What is God saying to you? What is He calling you to do or change? Maybe it’s something very small, or maybe it’s something life-changing. The only way you’ll know is to consider and reflect on it.

Oratio

Oratio translates as “prayer.” In this third step of *Lectio Divina* it is our turn to talk to God. In the *lectio* step, we heard God speak to us in

Scripture. In the *meditatio* step, we reflected on God's word and considered its meaning in our lives. In the *oratio* step, we should respond to what God has revealed to us, no matter how big or small, by having a conversation with Him about it. Talk to God about what you read, what you don't get, what is making you uncomfortable, what jumped out at you, and what the passage is calling you to do or change. Speak to God as if He were there having a conversation with you, because He is! Or, if you can't find the words, formal prayers such as the Lord's Prayer or the Hail Mary are perfectly fine. The goal is to talk to God no matter what form that takes.

Contemplatio

Contemplatio translates as "contemplation." This is perhaps the most difficult of the four steps of *Lectio Divina* because it requires silence. In the silence, rest for a moment in God and allow Him to move through you, to arrange your thoughts, and to speak directly to your heart. He began the conversation by speaking His Word, and He has allowed you to respond in prayer. Now it is time to pause and know that He is God and He is with you. It may seem as if there is little difference between meditation and contemplation, but in reality they are very different. In the *meditatio* step, we actively engage the Scriptures we have read and try to apply them to our own lives. In that step, we are doing something. In *contemplatio*, we must stop doing and learn how to be. In other words, we place ourselves in God's hands and allow Him to fill us with His love and mercy.

