

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE
OF
SACRED READING

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DIV
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LECTIO DIVINA

(Sacred Reading)

Lectio Divina, (pronounced lex-ee-oh diveen-ah) is an approach to scripture that calls you to encounter God through a biblical text. It is an ancient practice of the early mothers and fathers of the Christian faith, which is tried and true. It causes the reader to slow down and be more reflective of God's Word and understand how it relates to him/her today.

Lectio Divina is a way to engage scripture for transformation. Your response to that last statement may be "of course!", but often we approach scripture for the gathering of information. Certainly, gathering biblical information is important; whether it be for collecting information for a Bible Study, Sunday School Class, etc. When we approach the Word on an informational basis, there is the possibility of missing out on the intimacy that God yearns to have with us.

Our western culture teaches us to obtain information to prove a point and churn out important information. This process has value, but the likelihood is that it only goes through our cognitive filter. Lectio Divina is a sacred rhythm that influences and engages every part of our being for the mind, body and heart.

A good example of the difference between the informational and transformational reading of the Word is like the different approaches to reading a love letter or a newspaper.

FOURTH READING:

Rest in the Word God has given you.

Don't be disturbed or try to force some message. Do not rush from one reading to the next. Only move on when you feel God releasing you from the present reading. After the final reading, hold the word given to you by God in your heart and continue to be open to how God wants to live this message out in your life.

CLOSE YOUR TIME IN PRAYER

Dear Jesus, this day, do not let me forget that I cannot live by bread alone that like you, I must have words from the mouth of the Father. Amen

The following has been provided for you to journal your responses to each step:

FIRST READING:

Listen. What word or phrase from the scripture has caught your attention?

SECOND READING:

How does this relate to me today?

THIRD READING:

What is God's invitation to me?

COMPARISONS

Take a moment to look at these comparisons. You may be able to add to the list below.

APPROACH/RESPONSE TO A NEWSPAPER

- Skim when reading
- Toss when finished
- Obtain just the facts
- No response necessary
- Engage only the mind

APPROACH/RESPONSE TO A LOVE LETTER

- Read slowly
- Save and savor
- Read over and over
- Desire to respond
- Engage fully (mind, will, emotions)

Now apply these comparisons to informational and transformational reading:

INFORMATIONAL READING

- Reader is in control (master of the text)
- Text – use for your own end
- Advance my own purposes
- Characteristics-analytical, critical thinking

TRANSFORMATIONAL READING

- God is in control (I release control)
- Text – instrument of God's control
- God's purposes are advanced in me
- Characteristics-open, teachable

Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and writer of several books on the contemplative life, shared that informational reading is like sitting on the front porch of a house. You are in the right neighborhood, at the right address, but have not entered the residence. In comparison, transformational reading is responding to the invitation to enter and spend time with the host in deep, intimate conversation.

"The Word of Scripture should never stop sounding in your ears and working in you all day long, just like the words of someone you love. And just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart as Mary did...Then ponder this word long in your heart until it has gone right into you and taken possession of you." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

LET'S BEGIN

Take a moment to become quiet. You may want to close your eyes as a way of eliminating distractions and focusing inward. Let your body relax and allow yourself to become consciously aware of God's presence with you.

Sit with both feet on the floor, back straight but not stiff or uncomfortable, and hands placed comfortably on your lap.

You may find that using a brief prayer such as **"Come Lord Jesus"** or **"Here I am"** or **"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening,"** helpful.

Select a portion of scripture. You should use a short portion of scripture, four to six verses to simplify the process. You are encouraged to read your selected portion of Scripture four times. Each time you read the Scripture, you are encouraged to listen in a slightly different way to the reading.

FIRST READING

Listen for the word or phrase that catches your attention. Do not try to figure anything out; simply hold that word or phrase within your heart.

SECOND READING

Listen to the way the passage relates to your life today.

THIRD READING

Listen for an invitation from God contained in the reading of the scripture – a response that flows out of your deepest longings and desires for God.

FOURTH READING

Rest in the word God has given you. Knowing that he who has called you will be faithful to bring it to pass. (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

The culmination of the practice of divine reading (Lectio Divina) is "resolve." Stay with the word that God has given to you. Commit to carry it with you into your everyday life and continue to discover what it means for you to live it out.