



## What is Lectio Divina (Sacred Reading)?

Lectio Divina, (Latin for “sacred reading”) is a time-honored method for reading and engaging with a short passage of scripture as a contemplative practice.

For 1500 years Christian monks have followed this tradition with the intention to transcend common mental processing in favor of deeper spiritual ingestion, and into the knowing that comes from the heart. It is a simple yet profound way for prayerfully absorbing the written word into one’s being where, like food, it provides nurturance and the energy for growth.

Originally *lectio divina* was practiced as a solitary activity using selected passages of biblical scripture, providing a contemplative method to build on and illumine the cumulative wisdom of this tradition. In more recent times other spiritual texts or even sacred poetry is sometimes used for a *lectio divina* practice, engaging the selected content with the same step by step process.

The underlying premise of this practice is approaching the sacred writing as a living word, and even as a source of personal guidance. Using this practice, we are encouraged to reach far beyond the literal information-collecting or analytical processing commonly employed when reading. Instead, we are invited to enter into the sacred writing and open ourselves to receive the assistance and wisdom or deeper understanding or inspiration for conscious action.

Like other contemplative practices, *lectio divina* can be practiced alone or with a group, and essentially will follow the same four distinct, usually sequential, steps.

# The Steps of Lectio Divina<sup>1</sup>

## 1. **Lectio (reading)**

- Start by collecting yourself with a moment of silence or brief prayer.
- Read the selected passage slowly and attentively, and if possible, aloud. The passage should be brief enough to take in, ideally no more than a paragraph, but even as short as a sentence.
- Pause, and then read the same passage a second time.
- Allow yourself to be drawn to a sentence, phrase, or single word that engages your interest.
- If in a group, gently speak aloud the sentence, phrase, or word you were drawn to.
- The important movement at this stage is your willingness to trust that as you open to the passage in a deep listening and receptive way, something will be calling to you, and that you follow that lead.

## 2. **Meditatio (meditation)**

- Unlike the term meditation that usually implies an emptying or focused practice, at this stage of *meditatio* you quietly allow your faculties—including your reason, imagination, memory, and emotions—to begin to work with the passage.
- Whatever catches your attention, stay with it. Engage your imagination, perhaps visualizing the scene, or even imagine yourself role-playing a particular character in the reading.
- This is the time to allow the text to reach and resonate with the authority of your own heart.
- You might discover that the words exactly express your own deepest spiritual yearning.

## 3. **Oratio (prayer)**

- You may notice an arising sense of grace or thanksgiving, or sadness, grief or other emotions. Allow these responses from your heart-to-heart encounter with the sacred words to be present and acknowledged.
- If you are so moved, you can shape your experience into an inner prayer of sorts, even if the prayer is not formed into specific words but more a felt sense of relating to God.

## 4. **Contemplatio (contemplation)**

- At this stage you simply sit and “rest in God.”
- You may find yourself drifting back to the prior step of prayer, which is fine, or perhaps your experience opens to a more still or empty spaciousness.
- Nothing needs to be rejected or excluded in this experience of contemplatio.
- Many groups or individuals naturally flow from this stage into a period of Centering Prayer, or pre-determine an amount of time to sit together in silence or meditation.

## 5. **Action (act) –**

- What actions arise in you as a result of this practice, today?
- Actions may include “rest” or “reflect” or “share” or “be aware” or work for justice

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<sup>1</sup> Cited at Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault’s “Wisdom Way of Knowing” found at <https://wisdomwayofknowing.org/resource-directory/lectio-divina-sacred-reading/> on March 1, 2022