

Lectio Divina

A SIMPLE PRAYER EXERCISE

PSALM 85:8 (KJV)

**“I will hear what God
the Lord will speak:
for he will speak peace
unto his people, and to
his saints.”**

LECTIO DIVINA, A SIMPLE PRAYER EXERCISE

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“If I could go back in time and do only one thing differently in my walk with the Lord, it would be to have practiced a simple prayer exercise called Lectio Divina earlier.”

— KATHY PHILLIPS, FOUNDER OF PREPARE FOR LIFE

Lectio Divina has been a game changer in my spiritual life. By employing this exercise, I have learned how to meditate upon the living Word of God.

Lectio Divina is not “regular” Bible study where we dig into commentaries and dictionaries to better understand the context and narrative of a particular passage. I am all for regular Bible study. I have spent the last 25 years teaching a weekly class. I know that comprehension of the Word of God is vital to our faith. We need to be grounded in the Bible, we need to read it through and study its books in-depth. So I am all for Biblical exegesis and expository preaching and teaching.

But did you know that we might be diligent students of the Bible and still miss the Lord? The Pharisees knew the Scripture backwards and forwards but they missed the Lord! Jesus said to them, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life...it is these that testify about Me and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.”

— John 5 : 39 – 40

I remember times when I raced through my Bible study homework, looking up verses to find the right answers so I could cross “Bible Study” off my to-do list, while never even reading, carefully considering the passage we were addressing!

– YIKES!

I want to study the Word of God but I don't want to miss the Lord! How can we do this?

The Bible's answer is to meditate upon His Word. The Hebrew word for meditate is *hagah* and it means, to speak, imagine, groan, study, mutter, utter, roar and ponder. This is filling your mind with the Word of God, immersing your mind, savoring every word. This is not eastern religion meditation where you empty your mind and repeat a mantra.

Biblical meditation is commanded and commended in the Bible. There are numerous verses in the Bible that speak of meditation upon God's Word including Psalm 1:2 where, describing a godly person the psalmist says,

“But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in that law he meditates day and night.”

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA GIVES US A CLEAR COMMANDMENT
TO MEDITATE UPON THE WORD OF GOD,

“Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”

– JOSHUA 1:7-8

Lectio Divina offers a structure for meditating on the Bible. It is an unhurried approach.

Participants savor a few verses at a time. God's Word permeates your spirit. God relates to you as you wait on Him. The end result of this exercise is not more knowledge or information but communion with God through His living Word.

Lectio Divina is an ancient way of reading a passage in the Bible several times. It can be practiced alone or with a group. It includes four readings of the same passage, with an emphasis on **listening, meditation, responding and contemplation.**

“WE SPEAK TO GOD WHEN WE PRAY; WE LISTEN TO HIM WHEN WE READ THE SCRIPTURES.”

— ST. AMBROSE

I asked a group of friends who have gathered to do “Lectio’s” with me for the last fifteen years, “What benefits have you gained from practicing Lectio Divina?” Here are some of their answers...

...Through Lectio Divina, I have learned how I hear from God. Listening to the Lord through a Lectio has made me more sensitive to His voice and has spilled over into my daily life.

...I have never felt closer to the Lord than when I do a Lectio.

...Often when I do a Lectio, the Lord speaks to me about something going on in my life. He has brought specific guidance several times --- guidance that I acted on and now I can look back and see how important and timely it was.

...Once when I did a Lectio, the Lord brought me confirmation about a decision I needed to make. His confirmation gave me the confidence to stand firm as it was a difficult, important decision and I faced much opposition. Looking back that confirmation was pivotal and the reason I could stand firm.

...Biblical knowledge and studying the Bible are foundational but meditating on the Word of God through Lectio takes my growth in trusting and knowing the Lord to another level.

...Through Lectio Divina the Lord often speaks straight to me so that I can understand him. He gives me essential personal revelation in my place of need. I hear instruction, correction, direction, warning and personal encouragement through practicing Lectio. It's my favorite way to have a "quiet time".

...When I am participating in a Lectio I almost always feel the presence of the Lord...much more so than when I am praying. The Lectio just allows me to go deeper and I love this intimate time with the Lord. Sometimes I come away feeling encouraged, sometimes I come away feeling challenged and sometimes I come away with clear direction. And I always come away feeling very loved.

...Through Lectio Divina, the Lord gently put His finger on something in my life that needed to go. This may sound counterintuitive but His conviction of my sin was affirming and life-giving. There was no condemnation; He did not overwhelm me.

...For me Lectio provides a time to be with the Lord in a more personal way than when I pray or do Bible Study. I love this time with the Lord. It is during Lectio that I curl up in His lap and simply receive from the Lord.

...We did a Lectio for our three generational family devotional and it was amazing to watch the Lord touch so many individuals, including the children, with just what they needed. Our 11-year-old granddaughter heard the Lord say, "You get to be you!" That doesn't sound earth shaking, but it brought great freedom and joy to her little heart!

—REMEMBER...

You can see from these examples how specifically the Lord leads through a Lectio, although this leading may not be found verbatim in Scripture. The important fact is His leading in a Lectio will never conflict with the principles of the Word of God. You can test what you “get” to make sure that it is consistent with the Bible. You can also judge it by the fruit it produces, fruit of the Spirit such as peace and joy.

Through *Lectio Divina*, the Lord meets us in our daily lives in this present moment --- so a *Lectio* is very up to date, but it is an ancient practice that goes back as far as the early church fathers. Origen who lived in the 3rd century practiced *Lectio Divina* --- so did the Desert Fathers and Augustine of the 4th Century. Benedict made it a permanent part of the Benedictine order in the 6th Century --- where it is still practiced today. John Calvin*, the Moravians and the Puritans* all used this method of meditation. More recently Dietrich Bonhoeffer practiced *Lectio Divina*.

I was interested to read in *Bonhoeffer, Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy* by Eric Metaxas how Bonhoeffer used lectios to train his seminary students. One of the participants in a conference that he led said, “We started in the right atmosphere, for at our devotions on the first morning Bonhoeffer reminded us that our primary object was not to commend our own views, national or individual, but to hear what God would say to us.” Metaxas describes it this way, “When he said they needed to humble themselves and listen to God’s commands and obey them, he was not posturing. He wanted to impart this vision of God and was saying that one must utterly trust God now and must know that hearing him is indeed all that matters.” His dilemma was, “how could one hear the voice of God, much less obey God, when prayer and meditating on the Scriptures were not even being taught in German seminaries?”

Bonhoeffer corrected this situation by leading the seminarians in a daily lectio. He may not have called it *Lectio Divina*, but that is exactly what they did. Every morning they had a half an hour of meditation followed by a time when everyone went to their room in silence and thought about the passage until each man knew what it meant for him that day --- sometimes they considered the passage for one week before they moved on to the next. They were not allowed to look the verse up in the original language or to look at commentaries. “They must deal with the verse as though it was God’s word to them personally.” Bonhoeffer knew that these young men were headed into an uncertain future (many would be drafted into the German army) and he wanted to train them in how to hear God’s voice. **

— * THOMPSON, MARJORIE, J., AND HOWARD, EVEN B., SOUL FEAST: AN INVITATION TO THE CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL LIFE, WESTMINSTER JOHN KNOW PRESS, P. 24.

** BONHOEFFER PASTOR, MARTYR, PROPHET, SPY, ERIC MEAXAS, THOMAS NELSON, 2010, PP. 227,268-269.

Lectio Divina is a simple process of four readings and four responses.

- After you have settled down and removed all distractions, read the selected passage the **first time**.
- The **second time** as you read the passage begin by asking the Lord for a word or phrase. Read the passage slowly a second time, listening for the Lord to highlight a word or phrase for you. Wait on the Lord meditating on what He gives you.
- Before the **third reading** ask the Lord to amplify your word or phrase for you. Ask Him to show you more. This may be a picture in your mind's eye, a sense you feel, a memory or even a song. Read the passage the third time waiting to see how the Lord will enlarge your word or phrase.
- As you read the passage for **the fourth and final time**, ask the Lord for an invitation for how He wants you to carry your word into your life this week. Is there something you need to obey? Is there specific guidance to follow? Is there an encouragement for you? Has the Lord put His finger on something you need to deal with in repentance? Wait and see what the Lord has for you.
- As you finish your time, savor the passage and close by praying your invitation back to the Lord.

— IN 1 CORINTHIANS 2:10

Paul teaches, *“The Spirit searches all things and reveals the deep things of God to us.”*

Through Lectio Divina God wants your undivided attention because His Spirit wants to reveal deep things to you. Keep a journal; you don't want to miss a thing!

How to use as an individual

- Choose a short passage from the Bible. It should be no longer than 3-5 verses. Suggested passages are provided in this book.
- Find a space that is quiet for uninterrupted time with the Lord.
- Take a moment to settle down and remove all distractions. You may need to write down any thoughts you want to set aside but need to remember later.
- Follow the simple instructions for the four readings.

How to use as a group

- Works best when groups are small 3-7 people
- Select a group leader to facilitate the readings/responses.
- Begin with a time of silence or listening to worship music. (we can provide instrumental tracks)
- Follow the simple instructions for the four readings.
- If you don't “get” anything feel free to pass during the response time and know that time of listening to the Lord speak through His Word was not wasted, but has accomplished a clear unseen work in your spirit.

Trust in the Lord

Isaiah 26:4 instructs us to trust in the Lord forever, for in God the Lord we have an everlasting Rock. Today let's wait on the Lord, let's turn our focus to Him, let's listen with our hearts and see what He has for us.

Psalm 37:3-7 NASB

“Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God's personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

God is My Refuge

Psalm 91 talks about dwelling in the shelter of the Most High and abiding in the shadow of the almighty, that the Lord covers us with his pinions and there we find refuge under his wings. Today let's turn to that secret place where the Lord longs to gather us as a hen gathers her chicks. He is our refuge and dwelling place.

Psalm 32:6-7 NASB

“Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God's personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

Seek His Face

In Jeremiah 31 God promises that if we seek Him with all of our heart, He will be found by us. We have His word on this. So today, Lord, we ask you for undivided hearts as we seek your face through your Living Word.

Psalm 27:4, 7-9a NASB

“One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord. All the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple. Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice, and be gracious to me and answer me. When You said, “Seek My face,” my heart said to You, “Your face, O Lord, I shall seek. Do not hide Your face from me.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God’s personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

Comfort

Are you experiencing a season of grief or loss? Is there some sadness in your life that you are holding onto? You are invited through our reading to turn to the God of all comfort and see what He has for you today.

Isaiah 61:2c-3 NASB

“To comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God’s personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

Anchor of the Heart

Hope is the anchor of our soul. Our hope is rooted in the promises of God. These promises are certain and settled. We are confident that what He said, He will accomplish. His word is settled and sure. Our hope is secure.

Hebrews 10:22-24 NASB

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another to provoke to love and to good works.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God’s personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

Perseverance

Isaiah 40 promises that those who wait on the Lord will gain new strength, they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get weary, they will walk and not get tired. Today let's wait on the Lord, let's turn our focus to Him, let's listen with our hearts and see what He has for us.

Hebrews 12:1-2 NASB

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God's personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

Majesty of Jesus Christ

Jesus tells us in John 4 that His Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. This is astounding --- our heavenly father who is Lord of all, is seeking something or rather, someone! May we be those people today as we turn aside from all the activities of our busy lives and intentionally focus on the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 19:11-16 NASB

“And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God’s personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

Benediction

Psalm 19 teaches us that the Word of God is more desirable than gold, yes than much fine gold. His word is a treasure chest that we turn to again and again for invaluable gems of truth. We will never get to the bottom of this treasure! So, Lord today we seek you, the pearl of great price, we tune our hearts to your heart.

Jude 1:24

“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God’s personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

Compassion / Thankfulness

Give us this day our daily bread. These oh so familiar words may have become trite to our ears, but they are profound. God meets us day by day with His daily bread, His eternal word. He will meet you today with his fresh manna that will nourish, strengthen and encourage you. He's a personal God and He will meet you with just what you need for this day, this season.

Colossians 3:12-16

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God's personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

Mercy

Psalm 119 teaches that the entrance of Your Word brings light. Lord we are people who live in darkness and we want to abide and to walk in your light. Will you shine your light on us today as we consider your eternal Word? Will you bring your brilliance to any dark place in our souls?

Titus 3:5-7 NASB

“He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God’s personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

Abiding in Jesus

Jesus tells us in John 10 that His sheep follow Him and that they know His voice. This means we have the ability to discern His voice from all the other voices in our lives. We simply need to dial it down, turn off all the media that are shouting for our attention, and intentionally tune into the voice of God. Let's do that for these next few minutes as we consider this passage from the Living Word of God.

John 15:1,4,5,16 NASB

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God's personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

Peace

Peace be still. Jesus calmed the storm and He can calm our restless hearts. Lord, I invite you to quiet our hearts today, take us to that place deep within our spirits where you commune with us--- Let us leave aside the rush and strife of our daily lives and rest in the presence of the Living Lord. Let's join Mary as she sits at the feet of Jesus, just to be with him. God is inviting us to come away with Him.

Philippians 4:4-7 NASB

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

1st Reading: Scripture reading

2nd Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

3rd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

4th Reading: What is God's personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.

— SAMPLE INVITATION PRAYERS (PRAYING IT BACK)

If the Lord has given you guidance about a matter:

Lord, thank you for showing me you want me to _____ . I ask for your grace and strength as I follow this leading.

When the Lord has given you confirmation about a difficult decision:

Lord, thank you for showing me _____. Help me to stand firm as I make this decision.

When the Lord puts his finger on something that needs to go:

Lord, I repent of _____. Thank you for showing this to me Give me your strength to follow you in this area of my life.

Psalm 63:5-6 (NKJV)

My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness,
And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.
When I remember You on my bed,
I meditate on You in the night watches.

Psalm 77:11-13 (ESV)

I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.
I will ponder all your work,
and meditate on your mighty deeds.
Your way, O God, is holy.
What god is great like our God?

Psalm 143:5 (NKJV)

I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all Your works;
I muse on the work of Your hands.

Psalm 119:15 (NKJV)

I will meditate on Your precepts,
And contemplate Your ways.

Psalm 119:97 (NIV)

Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

— FINAL THOUGHTS

MY PRAYER IS THAT THE LORD WILL GIVE EACH ONE OF US SPIRITUAL EARS TO HEAR WHAT HE IS SAYING. “SPEAK, OH LORD, THY SERVANT IS LISTENING.”

— KATHY PHILLIPS

“The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts.”

“If you would follow on to know the Lord, come at once to the open Bible expecting it to speak to you. Do not come with the notion that it is a thing which you may push around at your convenience. It is more than a thing, it is a voice, a word, the very Word of the living God.”

— A. W. TOZER, THE PURSUIT OF GOD

— CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS INC, CAMPHILL, PA, 1982, A.W. TOZER, THE PURSUIT OF GOD, P. 9, 78.