



Integrating Spiritual Formation  
and Leadership Development

## Lectio Divina

### Praying the Scriptures With Mind, Heart and Soul

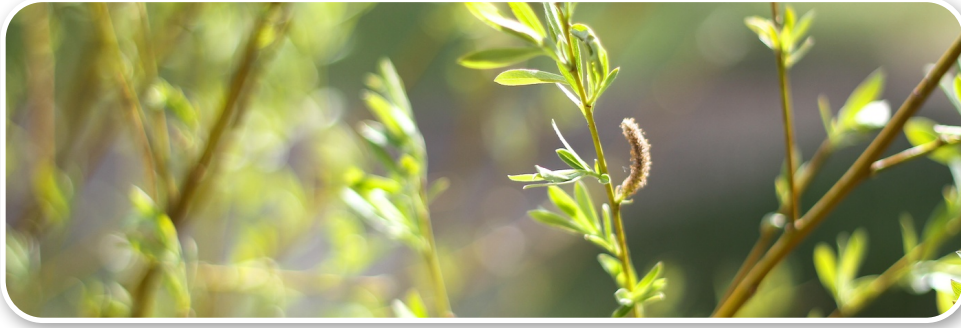
*The word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. — Hebrews 4:12 NLT*

Isn't this great news? When God speaks, there is life and power. His Word gets to the heart of things as they are and does remarkable work in our lives. But sometimes the way we engage the Scriptures does not open us to its transforming capacity.

Many of us have read and studied the Scriptures for accurate information about God for our lives, and this is helpful and good. But it is also helpful to engage the Scriptures with not only our thinking minds, but with our heart and our soul as well. The ancient practice of engaging the Scriptures more holistically like this is called *Lectio Divina*, a practice that enables Christ-followers even today to engage the Scriptures in a more transformative way. In his book *Shaped by the Word*, Robert Mulholland says that "with informational reading you can run in, sit down, pick up the book, and go at it. It doesn't require any prior preparation. Formational reading, however, requires time to 'center down,' to use the old Quaker phrase, to become still, to relinquish, to let go of your life in the presence of God" (p.57-58).

In our leadership training process called "[The Journey](#)," we begin each conference day by doing *lectio divina* as a group. Many participants share that it is among their most meaningful experiences in The Journey. (We'll share a bit about that group process near the end of this resource.)

The classic process of *Lectio Divina* has four phases. The Latin names for these four movements are *lectio* (read), *meditatio* (meditate), *oratio* (pray), and *contemplatio* (contemplate). A simpler, contemporary way to label these would be *read, reflect, respond, and rest*. In the light of our temptation to hurry, some have added a pre-step of *silencio* or a quiet prayer of preparation. In addition, to seek a greater integration of prayer and work, some have added the follow-up step of *incarnatio* (incarnation) as a way of being intentional about living out what we receive in the practice of *lectio*.



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### Praying the Scriptures With Mind, Heart and Soul

In the twelfth century, a monk by the name of Guigo used the analogy of eating to illustrate this practice:

Reading seeks for the sweetness of a blessed life, meditation perceives it, prayer asks for it, contemplation tastes it. Reading, as it were, puts food whole into the mouth, meditation chews it and breaks it up, prayer extracts its flavor, contemplation is the sweetness itself which gladdens and refreshes. Reading works on the outside, meditation on the pith: prayer asks for what we long for, contemplation gives us delight in the sweetness which we have found. (Guigo II. *The Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations*. Trans. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A. and James Walsh, S.J. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1978, 68-69.)

The four stages of *lectio divina* also seem to correspond to the holistic description of loving God given us in the Great Commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27 NIV).

When we read, we focus our strength to engage the passage. When we reflect and meditate, we love God with all our mind. When we respond, we engage God with our heart, with the feeling and choosing center of who we are. When we rest, we allow our soul to abide in the God who has spoken.

Contemporary	Traditional	Eating	Loving God
Read	Lectio	Biting	Strength
Reflect	Meditatio	Chewing	Mind
Respond	Oratio	Digesting	Heart
Rest	Contemplatio	Assimilating	Soul



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### The Practice

Limit the passage of Scripture with which you will practice *lectio divina* to five to ten verses. One of many online lectionary resources that make it simple to find appropriate passages is Reverend Ken Collins' website:

<http://www.kencollins.com/texts/daily/about.htm>

Here is a simple summary of each step:

1. Read the Scripture passage through one time without hurrying and without stopping. Consider reading the selection out loud. Doing so will help you hear it in a different way. Spend a few moments in silence after this first reading.
2. Reflect on what you have read. Pay attention to anything in the text that has attracted your attention. In these quiet moments, feel free to return, reread, and reflect on those lines, sentences, or verses that especially interest you.
3. Read the passage again, this time noticing what happens in your heart as you read. Do you feel encouraged, refreshed, or challenged by God? Do you feel resistant, afraid, anxious, or unresponsive? Let this moment of communion with God be a place of honest communication with Him about your feelings and desires.
4. Finally, take a few moments to simply be with God. Don't purposefully try to think about the passage or to feel anything. Simply offer God a few moments to be together. Let it be like a bride in her groom's arms or a child in his parent's arms. Let God enjoy your presence as you enjoy His.



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## Lectio Divina

### Group Lectio at The Journey

At the Journey, we begin each day with group *lectio divina* before breakfast. Because dozens of participants are present, we sit in clusters of three, and we use a simple liturgy adapted from the model of morning prayer found in the Northumbria Community's *Celtic Daily Prayer*, (HarperCollins, 2002). We pray all of the liturgical elements in unison as a group.

### **Morning Prayer**

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

### **Opening Prayer (Psalm 27:4)**

One thing I have asked of the Lord, this is what I 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 seek Him in His temple.

### **Silent Prayer of Seeking**

### **Declaration of Faith**

To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,  
and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ, King of endless glory.

### **Gospel Reading & Group Lectio for the Morning**

*(Group Lectio instructions below)*



## Lectio Divina

### Group Lectio at The Journey

#### **Canticle (Adaptation of St. Patrick's Breastplate)**

Christ, as a light illumine and guide me. Christ, as a shield overshadow me.  
Christ under me; Christ over me; Christ beside me; on my left and my right.  
This day be within and without me, lowly and meek, yet all powerful.  
Be in the heart of each to whom I speak; in the mouth of each who speaks unto me.  
This day be within and without me, lowly and meek, yet all powerful.  
Christ as a light; Christ as a shield; Christ beside me on my left and my right.

#### **Silent Prayer for Those on Your Left and Right**

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

After the opening liturgy, we practice group *lectio* with the following steps:

**FIRST** We read the passage aloud once through without hurrying and without stopping. We listen for a word or phrase that, for whatever reason, catches our attention. We take a minute or two to be quiet after this first reading.

**SECOND** We read the passage a second time, paying attention to anything in the text that is attracting our attention. In these quiet moments, we return, reread, and reflect on the lines, sentences, or verses that either interest us or prompt resistance in us. We allow a few minutes of silence again after this reading.

**THIRD** As we read the passage a third and final time, we listen for what might be God's invitation for the day ahead. Is there some next step God invites us to take? Is there some particular prayer we are drawn to offer? How do we want to respond to what we've read?





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### Group Lectio at The Journey

As a help for the second reading in the *lectio*, we have provided a list of “feeling” words. This list helps many of us recognize and identify our emotional receptivity—or our emotional resistance—to the passage.

### Feeling Words

#### happy

blissful  
delighted  
enthusiastic  
excited  
glad  
gleeful  
grateful  
joyful

#### afraid

anxious  
fearful  
horrified  
nervous  
panicked  
scared  
shaky  
terrified

#### playful

adventurous  
childlike  
creative  
free  
lighthearted  
lively  
spontaneous  
whimsical

#### sad

discouraged  
disheartened  
down  
gloomy  
hurt  
lonely  
melancholy

#### loving

affectionate  
compassionate  
friendly  
nurturing  
tender  
trusting  
warm

#### confused

ambivalent  
bewildered  
conflicted  
perplexed  
torn  
troubled  
uneasy

#### angry

agitated  
bitter  
enraged  
exasperated  
furious  
irritated  
mad  
resentful

#### depressed

burned-out  
dejected  
despondent  
helpless  
hopeless  
listless  
weary  
withdrawn

#### peaceful

calm  
contented  
relaxed  
quiet  
satisfied  
unhurried  
serene  
tranquil



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### Simple Descriptions of Lectio Divina

In her book *A Tree Full of Angels*, Macrina Wiederkehr says that in *lectio divina* you “read under the eye of God until your heart is touched, then give yourself up to love” (52).

Dom Marmion, a late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Benedictine monk, offered this way to define and remember *lectio*:

We read [*lectio*]  
under the eyes of God [*meditatio*]  
until the heart is touched [*oratio*]  
and leaps to flame [*contemplatio*]"

Finally, John Jaspers, an eighteenth-century slave preacher, said it very simply:

I reads myself full.  
I thinks myself clear.  
I prays myself hot.  
And lets myself go.

### Other Resources

Dysinger, Fr. Luke. "Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina".

**Valyermo Benedictine**. Spring 1990 (vol.1, no.1). (Available at <http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html>.)

Hall, Thelma. ***Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina***. New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

Mulholland, M. Robert Jr. ***Shaped by the Word*** Nashville: The Upper Room, 1985.

Peterson, Eugene. ***Eat This Book*** Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006.

Wiederkehr, Macrina. ***A Tree Full of Angels*** San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990.



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### Other Quotations

“If we fail to come to the scripture formationally, then the informational dynamics of reading that have so shaped our lives will exert their control. We will find ourselves holding the scripture at arm’s length and dealing manipulatively with the text in an objective, analytical manner which will reflect back to us our own conscious or unconscious agendas. We will find ourselves dealing with the surface of the text, rather than its depths; substituting quantity of reading for quality; addressing the text rather than being addressed by it; seeking to exercise our control over the text rather than allowing it to have control over us.” —Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word*. Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1985, p. 130.)

“Lectio Divina (Divine Reading) is far more than what we ordinarily understand as spiritual reading. It is reading with the divine, inner eye. It is reading with the eye of God, under the eye of God. It is reading with the desire to be totally transformed by the Word of God, rather than just to acquire facts about God.” — (Macrina Wiederkehr. *A Tree Full of Angels*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990, p. 50)

“Reading, he says, puts food whole into the mouth. Meditation chews it, digs for the treasure. Prayer extracts the flavor and helps us to get to know the treasure. Contemplation embraces and welcomes the thirsty soul. In contemplation nothing is left except being in God. The first three degrees work so beautifully together that it is difficult to tell where one degree begins and the other ends. It is all part of one process leading to contemplative union with God.” — (Macrina Wiederkehr. *A Tree Full of Angels*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990, p. 51)