

Lectio Divina Prayer

(Experiencing the Word through contemplation & reflection)

With roots in the Jewish practice of retelling the Exodus story every Passover, the Christian form of Lectio Divina was first introduced by St. Gregory of Nyssa (c 330- 395), and also encouraged by St. Benedict of Nursia (c 480-547), the founder of the Benedictine order. It is a way of developing a closer relationship with God by reflecting prayerfully on His words. In Lectio Divina, the chosen spiritual text is read four times in total, giving an opportunity to think deeply about it and respond thoughtfully. The focus of Lectio Divina is not a critical analysis of sacred text, but rather a more personal way of experiencing the word through contemplation and reflection.

To pray Lectio Divina, you will need a copy of Scripture. A pen and a notebook are also helpful to write down your thoughts, reflections and prayers. Find a place that is free from distractions. This prayer usually takes about half an hour.

- 1. Prepare.** Begin by quieting yourself and becoming aware of your breathing. Let go of the concerns of the day and invite the Holy Spirit to guide your reflection. You may want to repeat the verse from Psalm 46:10 over and over again: “Be still and know I am God,” or 1 Samuel 3:9, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”
- 2. Lectio (read).** In this first step, read the selected Scripture passage aloud slowly and intentionally, or use electronic devices to read the passage for you. Pay attention to the word or phrase that strikes you. You may want to underline or circle it. How is God speaking to you in this word or phrase? It might come across as “louder” than the others, or it might bring tears to your eyes or even cause feelings of

resistance. You might read the passage twice in the first reading to give ample opportunity for receiving the word God wants to give. Notice what you are experiencing. Take some time to pause and reflect; savour the word or phrase without trying to figure it out or make application connections. Take some time to write down your reflections.

- 3. Meditatio (reflect).** Read the passage aloud slowly again and open yourself to the Holy Spirit as you ponder the text. Listen for the way in which your life is touched by this word. Try not to analyze the passage. It is easy to slip into “study mode” and think about interesting points rather than listening to what God might be saying. Listen to the questions, How is my life touched by this word? What in my life needs to hear this word today? Take some time again to reflect and write down your thoughts.
- 4. Oratio (respond).** Read the passage aloud slowly once again and let the words be your prayer; allow the words to be a response to God for the particular situations in your life. Is there an invitation from God for you – something God is inviting to do or to be? What is your response? Pause again. You can write your own prayer to the Father.
- 5. Contemplatio (rest).** Read the prayer aloud slowly one final time. Listen to the words and rest in the love of God. Rest in God’s ability to bring about whatever it is he is inviting you to do or to be. Contemplative prayer leads us into silence so that we can listen to what God is saying.

The final move in the Lectio process is resolving to live out or incarnate the word we have received. What will it look like for me or for us to “enflesh this word” and live it faithfully?

Adapted from Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God’s Will Together* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), and <https://www.unleashthegospel.org/2020/07/a-guide-to-the-lectio-divina-prayer-style/>.