

GROWING Together

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LECTIO DIVINA

“I have been through the Bible forty times, and I never found what you have been preaching”, said a listener to the English evangelist Gypsy Smith. The evangelist replied: “That might easily happen. What makes the difference is not how many times you have been through the Bible, but how many times - and how thoroughly - the Bible has been through you”.¹

Lectio divina is a Latin phrase that means “divine reading”. Sometimes we read the Bible to know God in history. With *lectio divina*, the Bible is read to know God within our selves. It is a wonderful approach that countless Christians have been using since the fourth century. It is not complicated.



- Find a place where you feel at ease and a time in your day when you can be open for God.
- Centre yourself, shaking out tensions from the body; light a candle or play quiet music or read briefly from another book; breathe easily and slowly... until you feel the loving presence of God who waits so patiently.
- Read a passage from Scripture out loud so that your body is involved, as well as your heart and mind.
- As you read, listen for the ideas of the passage. Pause to ponder those ideas, possibly referring to a Bible dictionary or commentary.
- When you feel ready, read the same Bible verses again, this time slower than before. Read the passage repeatedly until a phrase or word strikes a chord within you or catches your attention.
- Let yourself be drawn by that word or phrase, repeating it reverently and expectantly as in a conversation or prayer with God.

Ideally, *lectio* is done for 30 minutes a day, but 5 or 10 minutes is a good start. The readings can be continuous from day to day. You might begin with the Book of Psalms or the Gospel of Luke and read it through over a period of weeks, months, years. You might stay with the same passage or Bible story for several days. The point is to let yourself be drawn into the text and then into the Divine.

The word or phrase that catches your attention may be something that at first repels or angers you. This kind of phrase can become a genuine spiritual gift. What new insight might the phrase be holding out to you about God? others? yourself? Being angry with the Bible is just as valuable as being comforted by it. All Biblical phrases have something important to teach.

Recording *lectio* experiences in a journal may be valuable. If *lectio* feels like lonely work, doing it occasionally with a spouse, close friend or small group might enrich the experience.

As it becomes part of the day's rhythm, *lectio divina* becomes a way of life. The phrase that moved us, when repeated frequently throughout the day, nourishes us in surprising ways. *Lectio divina* is “a prayer that begins as a dialogue and ends as a duet.”² It is the most wonderful way to let the Bible ‘get through us’ - thoroughly!

² G. O'Donnell O.P., “Reading for Holiness”, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, 48.



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¹ From *A Treasury of Sermon Illustrations*, Charles Wallis, ed., (Abingdon, 1950), 27.