

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina (pronounced, LEX-EE-O...DE-VEE-NA) is an ancient practice of praying the scriptures. The phrase means “divine/sacred reading.” This prayer form has found renewal in circles of spirituality today through the “Centering Prayer” movement that began in the early seventies. Although this form of prayer has ancient roots, it still tends to be viewed as a unique, new, meaningful, and non-traditional methodology for listening to and experiencing God.

The purpose of Lectio Divina (or, Lectio, as it is commonly called) is to experience the presence of God through the reading of God’s Word. The Bible is not read to seek ideas, concepts, or insights; to study the meaning of a text; or to be inspired, although that may occur. We come, in lectio, seeking God’s presence in the text—nothing less. We come seeking to experience the living God—to be with him—and to allow him to be with us in whatever way he wishes. It is the experience of sitting in the presence of our most Intimate Friend. Jesus said, *“I no longer call you servants, but friends, because I make known to you all that I have received from the Father... You have not chosen me, no, I have chosen you.”* (John 15:15)

Lectio involves a process or way of spirituality. It is a journey into God consisting of four parts---lectio (acquaintanceship), meditatio (friendly companionship), oratio (friendship), and contemplatio (union).

Keating sees our relationship with Christ going through four stages of increasing intimacy: from acquaintanceship, to friendliness, to friendship, to union. Thomas R. Ward summarizes Keating saying, “We begin by meeting another (acquaintanceship). If we sense an attraction and commonality, we might spend more time together (friendliness). Should we find an ever deeper pull, we might commit ourselves to a relationship of fidelity over time (friendship). Then, if this commitment deepens, we might find this commitment to be the center of our world, so much so that we find ourselves at one with the other (union).” Movement through this process can happen at any sitting with God’s word and this practice leads to one’s union with God in daily living.

Lectio (lection) is reading the Sacred Text repeatedly and taking a word or phrase from it that we will use all day to remember God’s message to us. Meditatio (meditation) is pondering the text, listening for a message from God in it. Oratio (oration) is our response in prayer to God. Comtemplatio (contemplation) is resting in the presence of God in the experience—spending time with a friend.

This method of prayer is simple and practical and can be put into practice instantly. The four elements of lectio divina are as follows:

1. Come into the Presence of God and call upon the Holy Spirit.
2. Listen for ten minutes to the Lord speaking to you through repeated reading of a portion (10 verses or less) of the Bible.
3. Thank the Lord for being with you and take a “word.”
4. Reflect on this word or phrase throughout the day.

Sometimes God will give us a word through our reading. It will be a message for the day. Sometimes a word will not come, so we take a word and let God speak to us through that word during the day. The result of the practice of lectio is twofold: 1) *Compassio* (compassion) as we become more sensitive to the brokenness of creation and, 2) *Operatio* (action) a heart of self-giving love to others which becomes our spiritual practice. But more importantly, through the practice of Lectio, we will experience union with God in Christ—what is referred to theologically as the *Diving Dwelling*.