

# Read, Think, Pray, Be: The Steps of *Lectio Divina*

*Lectio Divina*, or “Sacred Reading,” is a traditional Benedictine practice of scripture reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God. It approaches Scripture as a living Word, rather than simply as texts to study. *Lectio Divina* is essentially a “prayerful reading” that focuses on listening to God and living within his story. Use summary below to strengthen your personal devotional time or to introduce the practice to your group.

## **Lectio: Read (10 min)**

In contrast to most of the reading we do every day—casually or frantically—for pleasure or information, *lectio divina* is slow, quiet, and deep. Read the passage 5-10 times before writing down any of your own thoughts about it. When your thoughts wander, don’t beat yourself up about it. Just move back into reading gently and gradually, letting the words of the text be your response to any distractions. Let the reading be restful and unhurried. God’s Word is his gift to you. It is a blessing—so let it bless you. Experience it; enjoy the shape, sound, and beauty of the words.

## **Meditatio: Think (5 min)**

Joshua 1:8 says “Ponder and meditate on his word day and night.” The Hebrew word for meditate is *hagah*, also translated “growl” or “chew.” Early Christians used the word “meditate” to mean “memorizing Scripture.” Without a Bible of their own, they memorized a passage in the morning and then meditated on it all day. To meditate means to keep something in mind—to keep it “in the front” of your mind.

While reading the text repeatedly, a word or phrase may stand out and rise above the other words. In faith, we believe this is God’s word for us today. Shine a spotlight on the word from every angle. What does it mean? In your mind’s eye, what do you see or envision? Focus inward. Is it convicting or encouraging? What is it causing you to think about? Repeat the word or phrase over and over again, while also paying attention to the feelings or emotions it provokes. When your mind wanders, don’t beat yourself up, and don’t give up.

## **Oratio: Pray (10 min)**

Having read the selected passage and meditated to the point of awareness of some emotion or feeling, it is time to work out with God exactly what that means. First and foremost, *oratio* is a conversation. “God, why did you give me this word today? Why did I feel this when I meditated on it?” Perhaps there is something in relation to your given word to give thanks to God for, confess to him, or ask of him. God is not only transcendent and sovereign over us; he is also imminent and intimate with us. The Holy Spirit who lives within us will speak to us about why something is resonating from his Word. Take time to listen to his voice. Try to bring the word and your experience to the cross of Jesus; what truth does the gospel speak to you?

## **Contemplatio: Be (5 min)**

*Contemplatio* is an inner quietness, an active move into a Sabbath rest. In Latin, *contemplatio* means considering a concept with the heart or the mind. This is *being* versus *doing*. It is resting in God’s love. This final step of *lectio divina*, the comfort and silence that come as we rest in the arms of our loving Savior, is a wonderful gift, no matter how disturbing or shocking the word you received that day may have been. It is to be more Mary-like, stopping all activity and sitting at the feet of Jesus; simply feeling, noticing, and absorbing how much he loves you. Allow him to hold you—that is what *contemplatio* is all about. Facilitate reentry to your day by using a notebook to preserve the beauty of the experience and insights that God has given you for the day.