




# Lectio Divina

Lectio divina (lexeeo diveena) is Latin for "sacred reading." It is a slow and powerful reading with the heart, developed over the centuries. It was one of the primary ways the ancient church read Scripture. The method of lectio divina includes moments of reading (lectio), reflecting on (meditatio), responding to (oratio), and resting in (contemplatio) the Word of God with the aim of nourishing and deepening one's relationship with God. Lectio divina cultivates contemplative prayer, and is a silent prayer method that allows you to experience God's presence within you. You can do lectio divina alone or with others.



Choose a passage of Scripture 8-15 verses in length. Sit quietly for a few moments, being still and turning distractions that come to mind over to God. If something comes to your mind, acknowledge, then set it aside to sit with another time. Move through the following four phases:

1. **Lectio.** Read the passage very slowly, out loud. Reading out loud changes the way that you hear the passage. As you read, notice what word or phrase emerges from the text and catches your attention.
2. **Meditatio.** Reflect on the word or phrase that you noticed. What about it drew your attention? What does it mean to you? How is your life touched by this passage today? Read the passage again, noticing this word or phrase. Consider if God is offering you an invitation in this passage to do something in the next few days. What do you sense God inviting you to?
3. **Oratio.** Respond to God in prayer regarding the passage. Tell God about what you sensed (or didn't sense). Tell God what you most want to say at this time. You could ask him to show you how to do something, or thank him for something.
4. **Contemplatio.** Take a few minutes to sit in silence and enjoy God's presence. You can ask Him, "What is it you most want to say to me at this time?"



# Martin Luther's Four-Stranded Garland

Martin Luther is most known for his role in shaping the Protestant Reformation. Luther believed that our interaction with the Scriptures should be completely linked with our prayers, as reading the Word should lead us to prayer and prayer should lead us back to the Word. He described prayer as being "a garland with four twisted strands." Imagine a ribbon made of up four individual strands, all twisted together into one. The strands, he described, were made up of asking oneself the following questions:

1. What instruction is God teaching me about himself in this scripture?
2. What in this passage gives me a feeling of thanksgiving?
3. What causes me to feel a need for confession of a sin or a spiritual shortcoming?
4. What guidance do I now feel that I need from God?

This is how you could use Martin Luther's Four-Stranded Garland as a spiritual exercise, either on your own or with others:

- Free yourself from distractions by breathing in and out for a few moments.
- Choose a verse or a passage of Scripture.
- As you read each verse, ask yourself the following questions one by one, praying your response to each question directly to God. If you are doing it with others, consider taking turns responding to God in prayer after each question. After all four questions are asked and prayed, move on to the next verse.

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# Writing a Psalm of Lament

Poetry, writing, music, and art are all effective ways of engaging with and processing your emotions. We were all created to create, and creating in this way is one of the best tools for feeling and releasing strong emotions. Self-awareness comes from processing emotions, and poetry is helpful to bring new insights to a situation. Sharing your poetry with a friend is also part of the healing process.

Psalms of lament, specifically, are prayers for help coming out of pain, and are very common in the Bible. When we hurt physically, we cry out in pain; when we hurt emotionally or spiritually, we cry out in lament. A Psalm of Lament is an address to God: a complaint, a request, and usually an expression of trust. They are cries of despair, anger, protest and doubt.

This is how you can write a Psalm of lament:

- Start by reading a Psalm of lament from the Bible. This will help give you permission to feel strong negative emotions, and to express those emotions. (Consider Psalm 44, Psalm 60, Psalm 74, Psalm 79, Psalm 80, Psalm 85, or Psalm 90.)
- Spend a few minutes thinking about what it is that you are struggling with.
- Write out your honest, raw thoughts and feelings using the following 3-part format:

1. How long, O Lord... (your complaint)
2. Would you... (your request)
3. Yet you/But... (your reminder of God's character)

You can use as many words or lines as you need for each of the 3 portions. When you are finished writing, read your lament out loud as a prayer to God.




# Prayer of Indifference

When people hear the word "indifference," they typically think of it as a negative thing. Apathetic, maybe, or not caring. But in the spiritual life, it is actually very different than that, and very positive. Here, it means, "I am indifferent to anything but God's will." Ignatius of Loyola taught that our openness to any outcome or answer from God correlates with our willingness and ability to really hear what God has to say. If we are overly attached to one outcome over another, we won't hear God clearly. Ignatius believed that this spiritual indifference would lead to spiritual freedom. When we talk about praying a prayer of indifference, we mean a prayer where we are abandoning ourselves to God and his will. We surrender our own preferences, our own desires, our image, our comfort, and whatever else might be keeping us from choosing God's will in our lives. If we look in the Bible at examples of indifference, a striking one is Mary's response to what would take place in her life. She was willing to completely lay aside her own image, desires, and life in order to participate in God's will. Her response to the angel, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word," shows true indifference. Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, "Not my will but yours be done," is another example. Jesus asked if possible for the cup to be taken from him; it was not his preference, yet he was willing to participate in God's plan.

There are 2 different aspects to the prayer of indifference. First there is the prayer FOR indifference, when we pray for the indifference that we do not yet have, asking for God to grace our lives with it. Then there is the prayer OF indifference, which we are able to pray fully and honestly that we are indifferent to anything but the will of God. Charles de Foucauld, soldier and Catholic priest, wrote this Prayer of Abandonment that we can use as a model to spur us on toward a prayer life of indifference:

Father,  
I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you;  
I am ready for all, I accept all.  
Let only your will be done in me,  
and in all your creatures—  
I wish no more than this, O Lord.  
Into your hands I commend my soul:  
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,  
for I love you, Lord, and so need  
to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands without reserve and with boundless confidence, for you are my  
Father. Amen.

You can also pray a prayer of detachment, as you become aware of things that are keeping you away from God. Some examples are:

- Naming and confessing attachments that take priority over God
  - Naming and confessing the ways that you are trying to maintain a certain image
  - Naming and confessing the belief that your money and possessions belong to you
  - Naming and confessing ways in which you have been trusting in your own abilities and not in God
  - Naming and confessing the ways that you have been attempting to manipulate others.
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The Serenity Prayer was written by American Reformed theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) and has been most widely used in Alcoholics Anonymous and 12 step program circles. It is a great borrowed prayer (borrowed meaning written by someone else) that helps us lean into trusting who God is.

To do this exercise, either alone or with others, begin by slowly reading the Serenity Prayer:

God, grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference.  
Living one day at a time,  
enjoying one moment at a time;  
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace;  
taking, as Jesus did,  
this sinful world as it is,  
not as I would have it;  
trusting that You will make all things right  
if I surrender to Your will;  
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life  
and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.

Read each line individually, meditating on its words and festooning it with your own prayer. (Festooning, a method C.S. Lewis practiced, is a commonly known prayer with your own thoughts added throughout it. Festooning turns a borrowed prayer into a personal one.) Make two lists about the season of life you are in right now: "The things I can change" and "The things I can't change." Read the Serenity Prayer again slowly with these lists in mind, trusting that God will meet you where you are and help you to cultivate a posture of serenity in your life.



# Discernment Using Consolation and Desolation

Ignatius of Loyola offers great insight into the process of decision-making, or discernment. The reality is we have to make decisions all the time, both big and small, and this process of decision-making will never end. How do we do it? Do we choose the option that makes us happiest? The option that will give us the most money, power, fame? Ignatius encourages us to pay attention to our interior movements (that is, what is happening to us internally). He describes these movements as consolation and desolation.

The idea is that we examine the interior movements of our hearts closely and consider whether we are making steps toward or away from God. The movement toward God is consolation and the movement away from God is desolation. Keep in mind this is much more than just feelings of happiness and peace versus despair and sadness.

Consolation is when something causes your soul to become more in love with Jesus. When you are experiencing consolation, you can relate to and hear God clearly. You feel intimately close with him, and you desire to share that with others. Desolation is when something causes our soul to feel separated from Jesus. One reason this feeling might occur is because we are living in sin. Sometimes, though, God allows us to go through seasons of darkness so he can show us something that we wouldn't be able to see in the light. Desolation can still be God's gift to us; God may want to draw us deeper to himself when prayer is hard for us and when we don't sense his presence. In desolation, you might experience resistance to your faith because you are more sensitive to hearing the lies and accusations of the Enemy.

In seasons of desolation, it is important to make no major life decisions. Try to praise God even when it is hard. Try incorporating the Prayer of Examen into your daily routine to help you determine if there are any causes of your desolation that you could change. In discernment and decision-making, paying attention to these interior movements allows us to pay attention to our emotions in a safe, reliable way, as we are focusing not simply on how we feel, but on if we are moving toward or away from God. Day by day, through paying attention to these movements in the small areas of our lives, we are able to discern what to do. Clearly we want to do the things that will move us closer to God.



# Rhythm of Life

A rhythm of life, more commonly known as a rule of life, is making a commitment to live your life in a particular way. It is meant to be created with prayer and discernment, in partnership with God, as you consider the way God made you and the values He has given you.

The first example of a Christian rule of life came from the Desert Fathers, a monastic community of mystics living in Egypt around the third century AD. The most well-known rule of life is the Rule of St. Benedict, written fifteen hundred years ago, which was created to help his community of monks translate their faith into the habits and rhythms of their shared daily life. His famous rule has inspired many communities and individuals to develop their own rules with similar intentions.

The English word rule is derived from the Latin *regula*, meaning "a straight piece of wood," "a ruler," and, by extension, "a pattern, model, or example." The idea is that a rule of life, then, serves as a gentle guide that keeps you trained toward God.

In this way, a rule of life is different from the goals, intentions, or resolutions we tend to set for ourselves. These methods are task-based and measurable, and they're often focused on what we do. A rule of life, on the other hand, helps you become. It is more about being, and less about doing.

You can develop your rule of life slowly, over time. As you know yourself better year after year, you will be better able to discern what you need and what brings you closer to God. Keep in mind your rule might look completely different than someone else's, because God has made you each unique.

## How you can create a Rhythm of Life:

It is helpful to first identify the things in your life that destroy your faith, and then things that deepen your faith. Destroy might sound like a harsh word, and admittedly, it is. None of us deliberately engage in practices that destroy our faith overnight. But we do engage in practices that, over the trajectory of a really long time, actually do just that. If you are engaging in a practice that is bringing you away from God, then let's call it for what it is. Over time it will serve to DESTROY your faith. Make 2 different lists, titled "Things that destroy my faith" and "Things that deepen my faith." While making the lists, consider the following:

- When are a handful of specific moments in your life when you have felt closest to God, and most aware of his presence? Be specific, and see if there is a correlating theme. (Certain people? Being in nature? etc.)
- When are a handful of specific moments in your life when you have felt farthest from God and most aware of his absence? Again be specific and see if there is a correlating theme.
- Consider your average day and week. What are the moments in your day when you feel closest to and farthest from God?
- How do you feel that you connect with God the most? (Music? Study? Alone? With others? In nature?) Try to be specific.

Think in terms of a few different categories for your individual practices: Body/Physical, Mind/Mental, Soul/Spiritual, People/Relational.

Think in terms of a few different categories for your communal practices: Family, Community, Worship and Formation, Leadership.

After you have spent some time thinking through those things and making your lists, take a moment to see what really stands out to you. Perhaps circle the things that you need daily, and underline the things that you need less regularly, perhaps once or twice a month. You can mark an X by the things that you want to eliminate from your life altogether, or try to decrease the amount of time you spend doing them.

Finally, create something that will reflect the things that you wish to incorporate and avoid into your own rhythm of life. This could be in the form of a table or chart, or just a collage of words and invitations, or something more artistic.

When you are finished, try to follow great wisdom that was once shared with me: keep your Rhythm of Life ever before you. Keep it where you can see it, so that you glimpse it regularly. Carve time into your schedule to have the things that deepen your relationship with God.





# Chavruta

Chavruta (pronounced hahv-ROOT-uh) is a Hebrew word meaning "friendship" or "companionship." It is a Jewish tradition of studying the Scripture texts, specifically found in Jewish and Rabbi schools. With a partner, you will comb through a specific text, with the idea that you learn more with someone than if you were to study it alone.

The benefits of studying the Scriptures in this way are many. It cultivates an active posture of learning, as you are diving deep into the text and simply wondering. Wondering leads to learning. So often we go into a passage with preconceived ideas and understandings of what we think it means. We are intentional in sharing with other people everything that we already know about it. Chavruta question-asking is a deliberate way of halting that mindset. It provides the potential for the text to be read and understood and experienced in new ways, which leads to greater potential of transformation. It breeds a posture of curiosity, listening, and openness to one another and to the Word of God. That alone is worth cultivating this practice for!

For this specific method of Chavruta:

- Choose any passage of Scripture, find a partner, and read it aloud once through.
  - Go back through the passage phrase by phrase or line by line, reading it out loud, and ask as many questions as you can come up with together (shoot for at least 25-30 questions!) The hard part will not be coming up with questions, but in resisting the urge to answer them!
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# Walking Meditation

When Christians engage in meditation, it is not the same thing that a New Age follower or Buddhist would practice. In those religions, meditation is the idea of emptying yourself of any thoughts or feelings, in order to achieve some sort of inner peace. In Christianity, meditation is focused thinking with the heart on the teachings of God. The Bible mentions meditation 23 times, 19 of those in the Psalms. To meditate is to think deeply about what God has said to us in the Bible, and to prepare our minds and hearts for prayer. Christians can meditate to understand, to focus, to remember, to worship or to apply Scripture or truth to their own lives.

While most commonly meditation is done by being still, breathing slowly, and focusing on the things of God, this is not the only way Christians can practice meditation. Walking meditation can be just as powerful as sitting meditation, and is often more helpful if you tend to become distracted, as most people do. The practice of walking does something in your brain that helps you to focus more. Walking for 20 minutes (especially in nature) has been proven to relieve stress, lower blood pressure, lower cortisol levels (your stress hormones), alleviate anxiety and depression, improve digestion, and boost blood flow.

Walking meditation needs to be done outdoors, and is best done when you have at least 20 minutes. Walk at a relaxed, fairly slow but normal pace. It is recommended to bring a large-font printed passage from the Bible with you, so that you can easily glance at it. If you use your phone, you are more likely to be interrupted. (Put your phone on airplane mode or Do Not Disturb for the time that you go on your walk if you are using it to see your passage.)

As you walk, read a phrase or portion of the first verse from your passage, then just let it sit with you as you walk. What do the words mean? What do the words mean for you? For your life? What do they mean for your understanding of and relationship with God? What do you sense God wanting you to know, believe, do or understand? When you are ready, move on to the next portion of the verse. Meditate on each phrase or verse by asking these questions and seeing how it resonates inside you. Continue walking the entire time. When you are finished with the passage you have chosen, feel free to read the whole thing again, or circle back to a specific verse or phrase that really stuck out to you. You can also respond to God in prayer as you walk.



## The Colloquy at the Crucifixion

A colloquy is an intimate conversation between either you and God the Father or between you and Jesus. It often occurs at the end of a time of prayer, but it can take place any time. The idea is that you allow the conversation to naturally develop in your prayer. In the colloquy, we speak and listen as the Spirit moves us to be real and speak from the heart. As in any meaningful conversation, be sure to leave times of silence for listening.

The Colloquy at the Crucifixion is one of Ignatius of Loyola's Spiritual Exercises. For this colloquy, which is meant to be done alone, follow the following steps:

If you have not already spent time in the Word and prayer, and thus are ready to enter into the colloquy right away, spend a few moments to quiet yourself, breathing in and out deeply. Use your imagination to place yourself before Jesus on the cross, which is a reminder of God's faithfulness and mercy. Imagine Christ our Lord suspended on the cross before you, and you are there to have a conversation with Him. Ask Him the following questions, and when you see, sense, hear or feel something, move on to the next question.

How is it that You, Jesus, although you are the Creator, have come to make yourself a human being?

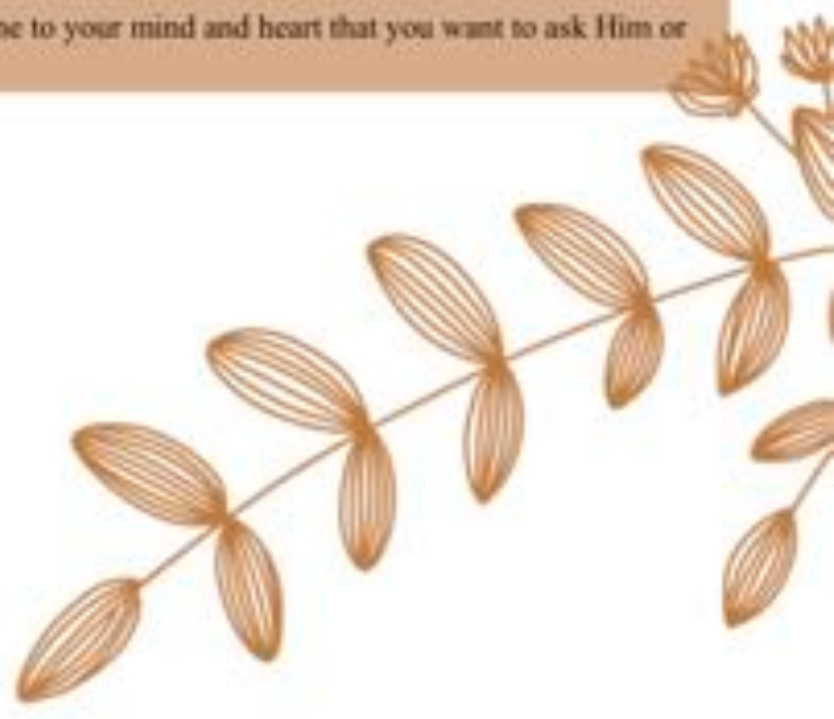
How is it that You have passed from eternal life to death here in time, and to die in this way for my sins?

As you are before Him, ask: What in my life have I done for You, Christ?

What am I doing in my life for You?

What ought I to do in my life for You?

You can also add any questions of your own that come to your mind and heart that you want to ask Him or talk to Him about.



# Understanding God's Character in Relation to Our Sin



It is tempting for most to attempt to "slap a Bible verse" on your sinful past, trying desperately to believe that the "old has gone and the new has come," that "you are a new creation," etc. While these things are undoubtedly true, why are we struggling to actually believe them? Consider that these verses we use are about us, and not about God's character.

Look at the Bible and consider God's character in relation to your sinful past:

1. Read Luke 7:36-50. After you read it once, read it again, placing yourself in the scene. Try on different characters, imagining yourself as one of the Pharisees, as the woman washing Jesus' feet, or as a random bystander. Notice how Jesus relates to the woman in her need. Notice how Jesus meets the woman where she is. What she is doing is indeed rather scandalous, but consider this: she is loving and worshiping Jesus in the best way that she knows how, and He accepts her love. He doesn't insist that she clean up first and change.
2. Read 2 Samuel 11:1-12:25. Prayerfully read the account of David and his sin. What do you learn about sin and its effects in this story? David is considered to be a great King, and Jesus was born into his family line. He is known to be a man after God's own heart. What does this tell you about God's abundant mercy? What does it tell you about the types of sins that God is willing to forgive? What does it tell you about God's willingness to use someone even though they have a sinful past? Are there particular parts of the story that you relate to?
3. Read Hosea 11:1-4, 8-9. How does God's compassion for Israel being like a loving parent impact you? Read the passage again, replacing "Israel" and "Ephraim" with your name. How does it feel to realize that God will not give up on you, even while you are still sinning? How does it feel to know that He cannot even think such thoughts, because abandoning you to your sin goes against his very character?

After reading and meditating on all of these passages, notice your responses to them. Do you have shame, gratitude, peace, sadness, confusion, hope? What does your response say about where your heart is regarding your sinful past, and how God sees you? What image do you have of God's compassion? The Bible is powerful, and will radically change our narratives because of its truth and ability to heal. As you read, look for God's character, rather than pull out individual verses that feel good in the moment, but don't spiritually form us.



# Living with Intentionality

(Adapted from Emily P. Freeman's *The Next Right Thing* podcast)

It is easy to haphazardly go through our moments, days, weeks and months, not paying much attention to the choices that we are making. We live each day, and the days connect to each other, and before we know it, an entire season has gone by, and we look back with varying levels of regret, remorse, or dissatisfaction with how we ended up living during that time.

What if, instead, we were to deliberately look ahead to our next season, choosing how we want to live it? We could start paying attention to the things that will catapult us further into our intentions as well as to the things that will become obstacles for us. This would help us to live with more intentionality, as it would mean that we take the time to ponder and choose how we want to live our lives.

Here are a few things that you can consider, as you purposefully lean into what your next season could look like for you:

1. Name your posture. Your posture is an intention toward, a direction, not simply a goal. As you name your posture, try to promote what you value. What do you want your posture to be for this next season? Do this seasonally, and revise as necessary.
2. Create space. What invisible thoughts or beliefs will keep you from leaning into your posture? These are often things that you need to let go of, such as fears, shame, etc. Pay attention to what is going on inside of you that is going to impact your posture. Follow the shame—where is shame showing up in you? It is helpful to find 5 minutes of silence in the day, to slow down, reconnect with God and reset. Pay attention to what it is that might be keeping you from leaning into your named posture. Do this regularly, to assess those invisible things.
3. Listen. Listen to what may need your attention. Look at your inner life, and the inner lives of people you love and ask, "What needs my attention?" Is there something you are carrying inside of you that you keep tripping over? (A hard and dreaded conversation, forgiveness, anxiety of the future, etc.)
4. Choose your absence. What can you skip? This is an invitation to ask yourself honestly if there is something in your life that is causing you unnecessary stress or anxiety. It can also mean choosing your absence from a specific mindset. Choose your absence so that your presence has more impact.
5. Plan your presence. What would be inner life-giving for you? What would be life-giving to your life with God? What would be life-giving to your mind and emotional well-being? What would be life-giving to your body? Where will you look for God?