

Prayer Gathering Two

Lent 2020
Cooks Creek Presbyterian Church

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is Latin for “sacred reading” or “divine reading” and has been practiced by followers of Jesus for 1,800 years. Essentially, it is a way of prayerfully reading and experiencing Scripture. In our time and in our tradition, it is all too easy to read the Bible to try to suck as much data and information out of it as we possibly can. We don’t simply read, we must study, to pass the test of the next day. While this isn’t wrong, this isn’t the only way to read Scripture. The Bible is far more lifegiving than we treat it. Our practice of Lectio Divina can help us counter the tendencies we have when we approach Scripture and can open us to connecting with God prayerfully and contemplatively through reading and reflecting upon God’s Holy Word.

To get the full flavor of an herb, it must be pressed between the fingers, so it is the same with the Scriptures; the more familiar they become, the more they reveal their treasures and yield their indescribable riches.

-- St. John Chrysostom

Lectio Divina can be done alone or in a group. I will try to give steps for both as the practice is described below:

1. Find the right setting

Find a quiet, solitary space in which you can be comfortable but not overly relaxed – the recliner you tend to fall asleep in isn’t your best bet. Don’t obsess over finding the perfect space and time, go with what you’ve got. If you remember the fellowship hall padded chairs, these are almost ideal – they are comfy and facilitate a good, relaxed posture.

2. Choose a passage of Scripture

There is no right or wrong passage to choose for this practice, but some lend themselves to beginning to experience *lectio* more easily than others. I would suggest a parable of Jesus or a psalm. The passage should be a paragraph or two. Don’t obsess over finding the right passage. There is no wrong passage of Scripture with which to practice *lectio*.

3. Allow yourself to become silent

Close your eyes. Relax your body (one body part at a time, if that helps) but not in a way that leads you to a nap. Give yourself the space to let go of all the pending tasks, tensions, stressful thoughts, and begin to rest in the love of God. A good way to do this is to focus on your breathing. As you increasingly focus on your breathing, allow everything else to subside. When you feel relaxed, move to the next step.

4. Encounter the passage (lectio – read)

Read the passage slowly to yourself or aloud. If you are in a group, one person should read the passage slowly, calmly, and in an even tone. As you read or listen to another’s reading, listen for a word or phrase from the passage that is speaking to you in the moment. Don’t seek out a word or phrase, but allow yourself to receive a word or phrase from the text to hold on to in this time.

(If in a group, briefly share the word or phrase. Just share the word or phrase. This isn’t chit-chat time for the sharing of stories or rationales... just the word or phrase.)

Rest for a moment. Then read the passage again nice and slow. Be waiting for that word or phrase.

(If in a group, briefly share what you have heard, seen, or experienced in the time of silence.)

Rest for another moment. Then read the passage again nice and slow - there's no rush. Wait for that word or phrase.

(If in a group, briefly share how Jesus Christ is calling you forth into the world to be and to do. This can then end the time or the group can proceed with the following steps.)

5. Reflect (meditatio)

If a word or phrase has come to you in that scripture, slowly repeat it to yourself and allow it to interact with your inner world. Relish the words. Let them resound in your heart. Let an attitude of quiet receptiveness permeate this time.

6. Respond (oratio – speak/pray)

As you continue to interact with the word or phrase, respond if you feel led to respond. Pray to God (silently, if in a group) whatever prayer comes to you. Express yourself. Then return to the word or phrase.

7. Contemplation/Rest (contemplatio – rest)

Rest in God. Simply be with God's presence. As you open yourself to a deeper hearing of the Word of God. If you feel drawn back to the passage, follow the leading of the Spirit.

How long are these times of silence and how long does each step take?

As my high school English teacher would say when asked how long our papers were supposed to be, "How long is a river?" As you practice well, you will naturally extend each time longer. At the outset, take a risk. If it helps, set a timer for a certain number of minutes each time to be able to let go of "how much time?!?" and simply be present with God and His Word.

II. Individual Prayer Development Time

We are spending several minutes in individual prayer. I'd encourage you *not* to spend it analyzing your *lectio divina* time... let that time exist as it was. Instead, reflect on these questions:

How have I experienced God in the past week?

What are the qualities of Jesus Christ that I need to pursue in this unique time?

What do I need to pursue in prayer this week?

III. Group Prayer Time

We are closing with a time of group prayer. Before we enter that time, take a moment to reflect upon who/what should be lifted up in prayer today: