

RESOURCE J

Bible Study

This resource also available in the book.

Lectio Divina

For centuries—probably dating back to the twelfth century—Christians have practiced a unique form of biblical study and reflection known as *lectio divina* (divine reading). This technique is a slow, contemplative reading of Scripture that allows the individual or group to come into union with God. As we move deeply into the study/prayer of the Word of God “with the ear of our hearts,”¹ we are tuned to the ways of God, discovering the rhythm of the movement of the Holy Spirit. This discovery builds the ability to offer ourselves in mission.

The first step is reading or listening (*lectio*) to the Scripture, slowly and purposefully. The intent in this stage is to listen for the voice of God to speak personally, pressing to hear the phrase or word God is offering for the day. Upon finding the word or phrase, meditation (*meditatio*), the second step, begins. The practitioner follows the example of Mary “pondering in her heart” the news of Jesus’ birth by letting the given word or phrase interact with our thinking and feeling at our deepest level. Prayer (*oratio*) is the third movement. In this step the presence of the living God is sought conversationally (silently or aloud). The final movement is resting in the presence of God, the one who invites us into God’s transformative, loving embrace. In this step, called contemplation (*contemplatio*), words are unnecessary.

Lectio divina is a spiritual practice. It is an inward activity, not an outward one, taking the student to the depths of the human encounter with the God of transformation. We may begin with doing an exercise, but as we arrive in the fourth movement of contemplation, we have arrived at a place of being. This resting in the Presence grounds and sustains our identity as God’s sons and daughters.

Solitary Use of *Lectio Divina*

Choose a biblical text that you wish to read/pray. The daily lectionary is a good source for ideas. God will lead to an alternative, if needful. Locate a place of comfort and quiet. Begin with a time of centering and then read the text slowly. God will give you a word or phrase upon which to focus. Meditate upon the word or phrase. Then speak to God in prayer. Finally, rest in God’s love. This private form is the traditional use of *lectio divina*.

1. Prologue to the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Group Use of *Lectio Divina*

There has grown up a corporate use of the practice of *lectio divina* in the last few decades. This method uses a facilitator. The text is read three times, each time by a different person. The reading is followed by silence. During the first reading, a word or phrase comes to rest in the heart of the hearer. After the silence, just that word or phrase is shared. The second reading is offered as the hearers “hear” or “see” Christ in the text and how he is touching their life that day. This experience of Christ is shared after the silence. The third reading is a “calling forth” listening. After the silence following the reading, hearers share what they believe they are being called to do or become. The exercise is concluded by each person praying for the person on their right.

Lectio divina, an ancient spiritual practice, teaches us about the God who loves us and consecrates our life and times in the service of that love. We learn who we are at the deepest levels of our lives—members of the household of God.

African Bible Study

The African Bible Study method is intended to create space to hear the voice of God. Any Scripture may be the subject of study. As God speaks and direction is perceived, participants discern what God is calling them to be and sending them to do. In a group context, the discernment is mutually edifying and encouraging. Here are the steps:

- Open with simple prayer.
- Ask everyone to *listen for a word or phrase that catches his or her attention*.
- Read the selected text.
- Ask each participant to share their word or phrase. Discussion may follow the sharing.
- Suggest that everyone consider *where the text touches his or her life* before the reading of the passage a second time by another person.
- Give participants a chance to share their reflections; discussion may follow.
- Present the third direction for reflection: *“How is God calling me to respond?”*
- Another person reads the text a third time.
- Give each person time to share his or her reflection and allow for group discussion to follow.
- Close with prayer so that intentions may be lifted to God.

The African Bible Study method requires no special theological skills. It honors the truth that all the baptized have access to the wisdom and guid-

ance of God. Allow everyone to participate at a level that is appropriate and comfortable; anyone may pass at any time. Active, nonjudgmental listening is expected. As well, we are not present to solve problems for anyone else. The flow of the study allows for a godly oscillation between what is being heard deep within and what is happening in our engagement with the world.

Dwelling in the Word²

This method spends half an hour or more dwelling within a particular biblical passage. Any passage or the daily lectionary may be used. The invitation is for the text to expand thinking, open new pathways, encourage creativity, and make way for the Holy Spirit. A passage may be dwelt upon for weeks and months.

Here is the method. Begin with prayer. Choose a text and read it. Sit together with the passage, in silence and in conversation. After considering these missional questions, close with prayer.

- What did you notice as you read the passage?
- What is the context, based on what the passage says? How is that like or unlike the way we live today?
- What is God doing in this passage? What is God doing here and now that is similar?
- How is God sending you in this passage? How is the church being sent in this passage?

Gospel Based Discipleship

from the Native American *A Disciple's Prayer Book*³

- The Gathering Prayer (unison)
Creator, we give you thanks for all you are and all you bring to us for our visit within your creation. In Jesus, you place the Gospel in the center of this sacred circle through which all of creation is related. You show us the way to live a generous and compassionate life. Give us your strength to live together with respect and commitment as we grow in your spirit, for you are God, now and forever. Amen.
- The Gathering Psalm of Praise *from Lectionary or a canticle from the Daily Office*

2. See a variation on Dwelling in the Word in Alan Roxburgh's *Practicing Hospitality—The Workbook* from Missional Network, available for download at www.roxburghmissionalnet.com

3. "A Disciple's Prayer Book" Native American Ministries, Episcopal Church Center, 1999. This booklet is out of print. A PDF is available at http://archive.episcopalchurch.org/documents/NAM_a_disciples_prayer_book.pdf. The PDF version uses of above outline within the context of each season of the Church Year.

- Gospel of the Day *from the Lectionary*
- Response: *Reflect and Respond to the Gospel of the Day*
 - What word(s), idea(s), or sentence(s) stand out for you in the Gospel of the Day? (Reread the Gospel.)
 - What is Jesus (the Gospel) saying to you ? (Reread the Gospel.)
 - What is Jesus (the Gospel) calling you to do?
- Apostles' Creed
 - I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
 - I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
 - who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary,
 - suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;
 - he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again;
 - he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
 - and he will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in
 - the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
 - the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
 - the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.
- Prayers
 - Individual and Group Prayers of **A**doration, **C**onfession,
 - T**hanksgiving, **S**upplication (ACTS)
- Collects *from the Daily Office or other sources*
- The Lord's Prayer
 - on occasion a Rule of Life is recited:*
 - Creator God we acknowledge and give thanks that:
 - In Jesus we know we belong to a Sacred Circle
 - with the Gospel and Baptismal Covenant in the Center.
 - In this Sacred Circle:
 - We are all related;
 - We live a compassionate and generous life;
 - We respect all life, traditions, and resources;
 - We commit ourselves to spiritual growth, discipleship
 - and consensus.



Please note: Inductive Bible Study must always be a component of a larger context of practicing the faith. That larger dimension is the corporate nature of our faith. As we move within all the modes (individual, household, small group, larger community) of our lives as disciples of Christ, the mutually interdependent nature of that experience both informs and corrects us in our hearing and service.