

**Servants of Christ
And Stewards of the Mysteries of God**



*"Now I would remind you brethren, in what terms I preached to the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast – unless you believed in vain."
(I Corinthians 15:1-2)*

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Praying with 1 & 2 Corinthians
Lectio Divina – Sacred Reading

INTRODUCTION

The practice of Lectio in the Gospels allows us to enter into an intimate relationship with Jesus the Christ as we observe him, as he teaches us, as we experience what it is like to follow his life and ministry opening up ourselves to God’s grace that is revealed in him. We prepare ourselves to receive the forgiveness he makes possible and to participate in the resurrection with him. In Acts we have the opportunity, through lectio to experience the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit at work in individuals and the community of individuals we call “the Church”, the body of Christ.

Now we come to the Epistles. The practice of Lectio allows us to continue that interaction with Christ and the Spirit but to do it intimately alongside people like us as they try to work out the life of discipleship in the midst of a world that is seeking what the Gospel offers but yet remains suspicious and often hostile.

As we engage with the purpose, conflicts and determination of Paul we will recognize that the application of the Gospel is both future and present. I invite you to enter into Paul’s world and discover how it is our world also. I hope that you will keep the following questions prayerfully ever before you during the next weeks. **Where does it reflect issues that you face as you strive to be a faithful disciple? *Do you hear the Spirit speaking challenge and encouragement to you? *What do you hear and what response does it encourage you to make to the Spirit’s nudging.*

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina means “sacred reading.” It is different from other informational ways that we read scripture. Bible studies usually look at information about the scripture and include information from journals, commentaries, and scholars. They share their insight and opinion about what the scripture means. All of our “Bibles Study” is useless if all we do is leave that knowledge on the shelf or keep it in our heads. Informational Bible Study is not completed until it informs something deeper – when we ask the question, “So what?”

At that point scripture must become a conversation between God and us. It becomes the primary channel through which we can be in conversation with God. It takes time and space to develop a meaningful relationship with a friend; so too, we must devote both time and space to conversation with God in order to have a meaningful relationship. Jesus made a promise in John fourteen that God would send the Holy Spirit to remind us of that entire he has said and to teach us all things. It is the same Holy Spirit who not only inspired the writing of scripture but inspires the reading of scripture. We must place ourselves in the classroom of that teacher if we are going to learn from him.

Below you will find:

1. An outline for a personal daily discipline
2. An outline for our communal weekly discipline, the Group Meeting
3. Preparation and techniques for the practice of Lectio

+ Daily Individual Practice +

1. Covenant to set aside a sacred time of no less than thirty minutes a day for praying the scripture.
2. Guide to daily practice of Lectio
 - a. **A time of centering** – Spend five to ten minutes to simply be still and take your mind out of the “business mode.” A suggested psalm is provided to begin to focus your attention.
 - b. **Read through the passage** – let yourself be aware of anything in the passage that snags your attention – particularly if you don’t understand why.
 - c. **Meditate** – Read through passage again, reflect upon what you hear God saying to you, how it raises questions, brings new insights, challenges you etc. I find it helpful to write down the things that come to mind for later reflection.
 - d. **Prayer** – Read through the passage again, let it guide you in developing a prayer, what does it lead you to say to God. Once again I find it helpful to write down the prayer.
 - e. **Contemplation** – Read through the passage once more and then sit quietly in the presence of God. You may want to reduce to a one sentence breath prayer that you can repeat quietly to yourself if you find yourself becoming distracted.

- f. **Closing Worship** - End time with an affirmation, Lord's Prayer, benediction.

+ *Weekly Group Practice* +

1. Gathering and Worship Together
2. Group Lectio – Members will share reflections, observations, questions, insights and prayers that the passages have elicited.
3. Closing affirmation and prayer.

+ *Preparation & Techniques for Lectio Divina* +

Centering Preparation One obstacle to an effective prayer life is the fact that we rush into our sacred time and place and expect immediately be aware of the divine presence. Our mind is too scattered to be aware of that presence. The first act of prayer needs to be “centering” our selves. We will practice several techniques during the following weeks.

Some techniques are:

- *Body awareness – relaxation and posture
- *Breath-centering
- *Invoking the name of God
- *“The Jesus Prayer” or breath prayer
- *Biblical imagery – visualization of a scriptural image or theme
- *Reading a Psalm.

Seven Techniques

(A Note on techniques - These are only suggested methods, there are others and you may develop your own. We will practice each of these at least once during Community Lectio. You will be invited to practice it that week at home. If however it does not work for you always use the way that best puts you in conversation with the text – it is not about the method it is about the result!)

1. Entering into the Story

a. Spend some time centering. Use whatever ways work best for you to center yourself. Always adopt a position that is *comfortably* (you are not aware of discomfort caused by your posture) *alert* (you are not in a posture that will allow you to drift off to sleep).

b. Ask God to touch you through the passage – to be present as the comforter, teacher, helper (Holy Spirit). Tell God that you desire to be open to the word, the healing, the probing, and the consolation, whatever God knows you need in this time.

c. Read the passage slowly and carefully several times. Pause between each reading for a half minute or so to allow yourself to notice details. Let questions and insights occur as you notice more with each reading.

d. Set the Scripture aside and give your imagination free reign to bring the scene to life with yourself as a participant. Don't look at it as if it were a movie projected onto a screen. It is happening all around you. Feel absolutely free to smell the scents, hear the noises, and sense the movements. Let yourself become a figure in the story with whom you identify or with whom you feel at odds. What are your reactions?

Don't fall prey to the notion that there is a "right way" to perceive, understand or react to the story – rather allow the story to move you instead of you controlling the story. Don't moralize the story. Let it confront, challenge, puzzle and comfort you in whatever way it does.

e. How do you find yourself responding? Talk to Jesus about what you are experiencing – be honest!!!! Ask him questions. Ask for what you need to ask for, or if you need to just be silent in his presence. Write down in your journal what you are thinking and feeling. Write down the questions and even the complaints that come to mind. Compose these fragments as breath prayer. A breath prayer is a prayer that can be prayed in one breath. It is formed this way; Begin with the name for God with which you feel most comfortable.

Then state your feeling or desire in one word or short phrase.

For example, "Lord, a loving heart."

Remain a few minutes in silence using the breath prayer to center yourself.

The Lord's Prayer

Throughout the day come back to your breath prayer.

2. Feel for The Splinter:

When you are checking a piece of lumber to see if it is smooth you rub your hand across it until you pick up a splinter. In a sense that is what you do with the scripture – where does it "prick your consciousness?"

a. Centering: Pray that your heart may be open and receptive to the gift God knows you need today. Only the Breath, the Spirit of God, can bring the word to life. Let your own breathing become more deep-seated, gentler, from lower down, as you invite the Spirit to pray in you afresh.

b. Begin reading: Read very slowly with an open mind. Don't study the text, just read it slowly, aloud if you find that helpful. This is the "lectio" or reading.

c. The Splinter: When a particular sentence or phrase or single word "pricks" your consciousness "lights up" seems to be inviting you, put the Bible down. Resist the temptation to go on, and do not start thinking up reasons why the phrase has claimed your attention. Here the reading stops and the "meditatio" or meditation begins the absorption through repetition. So for example, you might be reading the tenth chapter of the Gospel of John where Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd. As you come to verse 14 these words seem to have a special allure, "I know my own, and my own know me."

That would be the "splinter" verse upon which you meditate/pray.

d. Hold the word or phrase in your consciousness: Gently repeat the word/phrase again and again within your heart, silently or under your breath. Let the repetition be gentle and not mechanical. Do not try to conjure up mental pictures or try to make yourself feel a particular way. Resist the temptation to force lessons or meanings. Gradually allow yourself to be absorbed in the word/phrase. After a time what impression has the

repetition made upon you when you are aware of those feelings or attitudes it is time for the “oratio” or prayer.

e. **Prayer:** Share your thoughts and feelings with God. Offer thanksgiving, and ask questions. Share your longings and needs.

Express to God in a breath prayer (see number one above) what you are thinking and feeling.

Remain in silence for a few minutes using the breath prayer to center.

The Lord’s Prayer

Throughout the day come back to your breath prayer.

3. Video Meditation:

View the text/story as you would a movie.

a. Centering: Use a centering method that is effective for you. Pray that the Holy Spirit will bring this story to life for you in powerful way.

b. What is the structure or plot of this “movie?” What is the theme of the story?

c. How does the story move forward? What are the conflicts and resolutions? Where is the energy in the story?

d. Claims: What important claims does the story make - The “so what” question?

e. Prayer: Name the claims this story makes. Talk to God about how these claims affect you, how they challenge you, excite you and make demands upon you.

What do you need to say to God about these thoughts and feelings? Put it into a breath prayer. (See number one above.)

Remain in silence using the breath prayer to center you.

Lord’s Prayer

Throughout the day come back to your breath prayer.

4. A Theological Meditation:

a. Centering: Use a centering method that is effective for you. Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal insights about your relationship with God and about God’s relationship with humanity and our relationships with one another.

b. What is the Spirit saying to you about God?

c. What is the Spirit teaching you about humanity?

d. What is the Spirit teaching you about God and humanity – “The so what?” question.

e. Prayer What do you wish to say to God about what you have heard in this passage, questions, doubts, fears, and thanksgivings.

Express a prayer as a breath prayer. (Number one above)

Remain in silence using the breath prayer to center yourself.

Lord’s Prayer

Throughout the day come back to your breath prayer.

5. Paraphrase the Scripture:

a. Centering: Use a method that is effective for you. Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you to find words that will cause the meaning for this text to come to life for you.

b. Use current language: Use terminology and current language that reflects your own life experiences to rewrite the scripture.

c. So what: Once you have paraphrased the text what do you hear it saying to you. This is the “so what?” question.

d. Prayer: What do you wish to say to God about what you have heard in this passage, questions, doubts, fears, and thanksgivings?

Express a prayer as a breath prayer. (Number one above)

Remain in silence using the breath prayer to center.

Lord’s Prayer

Throughout the day come back to your breath prayer.

6. Memorization:

Ugh! All right people hate to memorize. Now we have that out of the way. But sometimes it can be a good thing. You become your own portable Bible the word dwells in you and you can access it whenever or wherever you desire – more importantly when and where the Holy Spirit desires!

a. Centering: Use a method that is effective for you. Pray for the Holy Spirit to plant the portion of this scripture in your heart that you need. Pray that this will be more than a mental exercise that this word will take root in your soul and be with you always.

b. The Splinter: Read the passage, once again looking for that “splinter” that pricks your consciousness.

c. Memory: Commit that “splinter” to your memory. Do not try to figure out why it stands out just memorize it. (Hint – if you are like me and bad at this try to reduce the “splinter” to its essence so you can remember it. Also it is OK to put it on a note card that you can carry with you. Also it can be remembered in its simplest form as a breath prayer.

d. Call to mind the scripture throughout the day. If there seem to be particular times when it is especially significant call it to mind as a prayer.

e. Reflection: At the end of the day reflect on the times when it came to mind. What do you think the Holy Spirit was doing here?

f. Remain in silence using your breath prayer to center yourself.

g. The Lord’s Prayer

7. Gazing:

“Gazing is such a wonderful thing, about which we know little; in gazing we are turned completely outward, but just when we are so most, things seem to go on within us, which have been waiting longingly for the moment when they should be observed.”
(Rainer Maria Rilke, 1907)

When we live in and with the scripture long enough and learn to still ourselves there may come a time when the Holy Spirit gives the special gift of contemplation. It is not something we do it is a gift of the Spirit where our spirits experience that union with God that is our ultimate goal. While nothing we can do can make contemplation happen (because it is purely a grace) there are things that we can do that will open us up to such a gift if and when it is given. Hopefully there will be those times when you will know that you don’t want or need to do something with a scripture – you just want to sit with it. I heard somewhere that the most appropriate response to mystery is to shut up and be still!

a. Centering: Use a method that is effective for you. Pray for the Holy Spirit to still your mind and to open your being to the divine presence to help you to be still and know the Lord's presence.

If it is helpful use an image such as a candle or a painting of Jesus to quiet your thoughts.

b. Resting with the text: After reading through the text slowly and deliberately several times. Then close your eyes. Let the image or scene attract all of your senses and imagination. Do not try to do anything with the image. Do not try to seek any hidden meaning or come up with any lesson. Simply let your mind wonder over it.

c. Free Conversation: Whatever comes to mind let it be a conversation with God. Stay with it as long as you like or move on to other images. However – this is important – if you feel drawn into silence do not try to fight it. Simply be in the silence.

d. Do not be surprised if the image that has held your attention dissipates and you are only left with an obscure awareness of God's presence.

e. When this presence fades you can return to images in the passage that held your attention of you can quietly offer a thanksgiving