

Lectio Divina (literally *divine reading*) is a way of becoming immersed in the Scriptures very personally. It draws on the way Jews read the Haggadah, a text read during Passover that retells the Exodus story. Haggadah means “telling” and along with being a physical text, the word captures the practice of telling and retelling a story. Hebrews 4:12 “Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart.”

The Christian form of Lectio Divina was first introduced by St. Gregory of Nyssa (c 330-395), and also encouraged by St. Benedict of Nursia (c 480-547), the founder of the Benedictine order. It’s a way of developing a closer relationship with God by reflecting prayerfully on His words. In Lectio Divina, the chosen spiritual text is read four times in total, giving an opportunity to think deeply about it and respond thoughtfully. When we practice Lectio Divina, we can imagine we’re actually involved in the events of Scripture — for example, hearing God’s words to the Israelites in the desert. It’s an intensely personal experience.

Fr. Keating describes the four stages of Lectio Divina as compass points around a circle, with the Holy Spirit moving seamlessly between them. As a beginner, I’ve found it helpful to follow the stages in order. Like learning an instrument, once I’ve learned the basics, I’ll be able to improvise! Here’s how to get started:

Prepare

Sign of the cross. Close your eyes. Focus on your breathing. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Plant your feet on the ground. Let Go of stress of the day with exhale, breathe in all that is good from God with your inhale.

I’d suggest 30 minutes to read, reflect, and respond to the Holy Spirit’s promptings in Lectio Divina. To tune in, I like to light a candle, not because it’s necessary, but because the flame and fragrance serve as gentle reminders when collecting my thoughts and calming my mind. I pray a prayer of invitation, saying something like, “God, let me hear from you,” and spend a few moments sitting quietly so my mind is open to hearing from God.

Lectio (Read)

My first reading is an opportunity to get to know the Scripture passage. I listen carefully for any words or phrases that seem to jump out. It's important not to force things, but wait patiently for God to give gentle guidance.

Meditatio (Reflect)

The second reading of the same passage focuses further on the points I become aware of during the first reading. Often I'll just re-read a few verses so I can reflect carefully on where God has nudged me.

Then I'll reflect on what I believe God is saying. I try not to analyze the passage. It's easy to slip into "study mode" and think about interesting points rather than listening to what God might be saying. It helps to ask God to make His focus clear.

Oratio (Respond)

After a third reading, it's time to respond. I like to record my thoughts by journaling because I know I'm very prone to forgetting what I've learned, even by the next day! We can respond in prayer too, which gives us the opportunity for a conversation with God.

Here I journaled my wonderings. If God is so powerfully committed to keeping His covenant with me, why do I sometimes lack the commitment to stay close to God? Often the events of the day crowd in, and I don't always make time to listen to God. I prayed that God would help me to prioritize spending time with Him.

Contemplatio (Rest)

After the final reading, I spend around 10 minutes in silent contemplation. This isn't a time of prayer or meditation — I just sit quietly and allow God to work. When my mind starts to wander and dart here and there, I bring it gently back to stillness again.

There are many sources of inspiration to help develop the practice of Lectio Divina. [Soul Shepherding](#) has a collection of downloadable guides. It's important to remember that Lectio Divina is not an end in itself or another spiritual practice to tick off our to-do list. It helps us hear specifically and individually from God through Scripture, guided by the Holy Spirit, and deepens our relationship with Him.