

PRAYER

FINDING INTIMACY WITH GOD

LEADER'S RESOURCE GUIDE SESSION 3



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

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SESSION 3

LECTIO & MEDITATIO: CLIMBING THE FIRST RUNGS

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

The previous session used the narrative of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well to describe and emphasize that God initiates the encounter of prayer. It also briefly outlined Guigo the Carthusian's method of prayer, which he describes using the image of rungs on a ladder: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. While this method is merely a means to God and not an end in itself, following its steps in order can be a very useful tool—especially when one is still new to *lectio divina* or experiencing difficulty in prayer.

The first rung on the ladder is how we listen to God: *lectio*. *Lectio* involves a slow, careful reading of the Word of God. Our modern culture with its preference for video, short text messages, and speed-reading, can find this aspect of *lectio* difficult at first. But as we take time and pay closer attention, we will begin to notice how carefully specific words and descriptions are used in God's Word. We will also begin to recognize the different techniques, such as repetition and metaphor, that Scripture uses to get our attention.

The second rung on the ladder is *meditatio*, seeking a deeper understanding in reflection on the passage read in *lectio*. Once careful reading gets us to pay attention to the words God uses, *meditatio* calls us to dig deeper to understand “why.” Why is this person, place, or thing described in this way? Why is this word repeated? Why is this description or image used? This reflection will set the stage for a dialogue with God.

These two steps begin our ascent to God in prayer. In reading and meditation we listen attentively to what God says to us in Scripture and focus our minds on understanding his words as fully as possible.



CONNECT

*Begin this session by leading the **Opening Prayer**, and then read or summarize the **Introduction** for your group. Both can be found in the Study Guide.*

*If you have time, review the last session with your group. Can anyone can recite the **Memory Verse** (John 4:10) without assistance? Otherwise, look it up (page 22) and recite it as a group.*

*Also discuss any highlights or questions the group may have had from the last session's **COMMIT** reflections. Then continue.*

What is your favorite thing to talk about with your closest friend?

Topics of conversation with a close friend likely include things that are more personal and meaningful than just shared interests or activities. When talking with a close friend the conversation often becomes a way to share oneself with the other, not just share information. The conversation is motivated by true interest in and care for the other, and a desire to know the other more deeply. This is the type of conversation God wants to have with us in prayer—a deep, personal, sharing of ourselves with God.

What comes to mind when you hear the word “meditation”? Does this word have a positive or negative connotation for you? Why?

Some people may already have experience with the Christian tradition of meditation and so may associate “meditation” with seeking a deeper understanding of truth. However, many people will associate “meditation” with Eastern traditions of meditation that focus more on relaxation, self-awareness, altered consciousness, emptying the mind, etc. There may also be an association with specific postures or activities to aid meditation, such as yoga. For some people the Eastern traditions of meditation will have a negative connotation as they are often closely bound up with religious and philosophic principles not compatible with Christianity.



Play the video segment, which will last about 30 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching, along with the following discussion questions.



DISCUSS

After the video segment, discuss the following questions. Familiarize yourself with the comments after each question; these are meant to guide you in the conversation.

CLIMBING THE FIRST RUNGS

1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

The Christian tradition of meditation, of filling the mind with truth (as opposed to Eastern traditions which focus on emptying the mind) will likely be new for some participants. The importance of slow reading in lectio, the examples of different details to observe (such as nouns and verbs, repetition, etc.), and the importance of allusion in meditatio may also be new information for some participants.

2. How does *lectio* lead naturally into *meditatio*? How might prayer be especially fruitful with an ebb and flow between *lectio* and *meditatio*?

Observing details in the text (lectio) leads naturally into reflecting on the significance and deeper meaning of those particular words and the text as a whole (meditatio). Because lectio requires such slow, careful reading it is natural to stop and meditate at various points in the reading, and then to return to reading until a new point for meditation arises. This ebb and flow allows us to give our full consideration to each point as God draws our attention to it, rather than miss or forget something because we are so focused on reading an entire passage, or on following each step to the letter, that we fail to respond to the Spirit.

3. In the video Dr. Gray says that Jacob's wrestling with God is a metaphor for prayer. What does it mean to you to wrestle with God in prayer? Are you comfortable with this image of prayer? Why or why not? *Wrestling with God in prayer means persevering in prayer even when it is difficult, continuing to present a petition to God even when he does not seem to be answering, or even arguing with God when we are angry, hurt, confused, etc. We are called to be receptive to God, in order to engage him. Some participants may be comfortable with the image, others may feel it to be too strong or even disrespectful. But wrestling with God in prayer is not about trying to change God's mind/will, but about wrestling with (next to, in accordance with) God in prayer in order to come into line with him and his will for our life.*

*Direct participants to this session's **Memory Verse** in their Study Guides, and read it together. Then lead the **Closing Prayer**. Encourage participants to do the **COMMIT** reflections on their own before you meet again as a group.*



COMMIT

*Following are suggested answers to the questions participants will be asked in their daily **COMMIT** reflections.*



DAY 1 – LECTIO: CAREFUL READING

Participants will learn some tips for reading carefully and paying attention to detail during lectio.

Use the space below to take note of the nouns and verbs in this passage. Read the passage putting yourself in Abram's place. What do you notice based on your careful reading of the passage?

Nouns: word, LORD, man, heir, son, outside, heaven, stars, descendants, righteousness. Verbs: behold, came, shall [not] be, shall be, brought, said, look, number, are able to number, said, believed, reckoned. Additional things noticed: God is the one who is named (LORD); Abram is only referred to by the pronoun "he." God is the one performing the action until the very end, when Abram believed. The words of God's promise and his demonstration to Abram lead Abram to faith. Faith is a response to God.

How does this detail change your visualization and understanding of the passage?

Verse 12 tells us that Abram was told to number the stars while it was daytime, but in the daytime the stars are not visible. It isn't simply a matter of not being able to count high enough to number the stars/his descendants. Abraham can't see the stars in broad daylight, so too he cannot see his descendants—God's point is that Abraham must trust that God will bring his unseen descendants into being, just as the unseen stars will appear when the sun goes down.

Psalm 42:1–3 *Lectio*—Carefully read the passage. What do you note? What nouns and pronouns are used? What verbs and adverbs are used? What comparisons are made?

Nouns: deer, streams, God, face of God, soul, tears, food. Pronouns: "my" is used multiple times. Verbs: longs, thirsts, come and behold, say. Comparisons: my soul is compared to the deer, my longing and thirst compared to the deer's longing for water, my tears are compared to food.

Luke 9:23-26 *Lectio*—Carefully read the passage. What do you note? What nouns and pronouns are used? What verbs and adverbs are used? What comparisons are made?

Nouns: man, cross, life, world, Son, Father, angels, glory. Verbs: come after, follow, deny, take up, save, lose(s), profit, ashamed. Adjectives/Adverbs: not just “man” but “any man”; not just “take up his cross” but take it up “daily”; must lose life “for my sake” in order to save it. Passage also contrasts “profit/gain” and “loss/forfeit.”



DAY 2 – LECTIO: REPETITION AND METAPHORS

Participants will learn more tools for lectio by examining the importance of repetition and metaphors.

Read the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22:1-14. How many times is the word “son” used in this passage? How many times is “father” or “Abraham” (which means ‘father of many/multitude’) used in the passage?

In the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 we find the word “son” used eleven times in verses 1–14, emphasizing that Isaac was Abraham’s long-awaited and much-beloved son. We find the word “father” used two times (on the lips of Isaac, Abraham’s son) and the name “Abraham” used fifteen times. The theme of “son” foreshadows Jesus’ identity as the only begotten Son of God, sacrificed for our sins. The theme of “father” foreshadows God the loving Father who will offer his only begotten Son.

Look up Genesis 37:23-34. How many times “robe” is repeated in these verses. What is this repetition emphasizing?

The word “robe” is repeated seven times in this passage. In Genesis 37:3 we learn that the “long robe with sleeves” was a gift given to Joseph because his father Israel (Jacob) loved him. For Israel, the robe represents Joseph and the great love of a father for his son. When it reappears torn to pieces, it brings mourning to Israel’s heart. For Joseph’s brothers, it represents their resentment that their father loves Joseph more than them, and with it they deceive their father (just as Jacob once used the clothes of his brother to deceive his father Isaac—see Genesis 27).

Try it on your own using the passage from Psalm 23:1-3.

Lectio—What metaphor is used? What does it teach us about God?

Psalm 23 uses the metaphor of the LORD as a shepherd, showing that just as a shepherd leads his sheep to good places for their nourishment, so too the LORD leads us in ways of righteousness. As the sheep, I must follow and trust the shepherd.

Try it on your own using the passage from Isaiah 64:8.

Lectio—What metaphor is used? What does it teach us about God?

Isaiah describes God as a potter, and us as clay. In doing so, we come to understand in a deeper way how we must trust God to make each of us into a beautiful work of art. Just as a potter must push and pull on the clay to get it into the right shape, so too as God is working with us. It might not always feel good, but the end result is beautiful.



DAY 3 – LECTIO: JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

Participants will reflect on Jacob's wrestling match with God in Genesis 32:24–30 and how this relates to our own prayer.

LECTIO

Who is named in this passage (Genesis 32:24–30), and who is not? How many times is the word “name” used? How many mentions of each name are there?

Jacob is named, God is not. The word “name” is used four times. “Jacob” is used eight times, the “man” is mentioned twice, “Israel” is used once. Just as Jacob receives a name “Israel,” Jacob also names the place “Peniel.”

Which actions are attributed to Jacob? Which actions are attributed to God?

Jacob is the recipient of several actions (left alone, he is wrestled with, his thigh is put out of joint). Jacob speaks/asks, and names the place. The implied action is that he wrestles and perseveres. God (the “man,” God’s representative) is portrayed as more active: he wrestles, he sees that he does not prevail, he touches Jacob’s thigh and puts it out of joint, he speaks, he changes Jacob’s name, and he blesses Jacob.

What does Jacob want here? What does he receive?

Jacob wants a blessing. He receives both a blessing and a new name (and his life, even though he saw God face to face).

MEDITATIO

Knowing and addressing someone by their name indicates a certain level of relationship, and naming or renaming someone indicates having authority over that person. Why does Jacob ask his opponent’s name? Why does God, who certainly already knows Jacob, ask him his name? What is significant about the change in Jacob’s name?

Jacob doesn’t immediately recognize that he is wrestling with God, and so he asks his apparent opponent his name. Jacob is returning to “his country and his kindred” (see Genesis 32:9). When he left his country, he was fleeing for his life because he had hidden his identity and stolen the blessing from his brother Esau. Now as Jacob is about to return home, God asks Jacob, “What is your name?” to give Jacob the chance to be truthful in asking for a blessing. Jacob’s name change, from Jacob, which means “supplanter” or “deceiver,” to Israel, which means “he who prevails with God,” demonstrates the change in Jacob and reflects the change in his relationship with God. As we wrestle with God in our own prayer, God will also ask us questions that will likely reveal our sin so that we can receive his forgiveness, and he will also change us, making us more and more in his own likeness.

What does Jacob’s perseverance in his wrestling match teach us about prayer? Why might it be significant that the wrestling takes place at night and lasts all night, while the blessing comes with the dawn?

We should never give up in prayer—never give up due to difficulties, never give up seeking God and asking for his blessing. It also teaches us that sometimes getting an answer in prayer might take longer than we want or expect, but we should stick with it no matter how long it takes. Wrestling in prayer may feel dark and hopeless—like night—but blessing, clarity, and understanding will follow like the dawn. “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

Where else in Scripture do you see people wrestling with God in prayer? How do these various examples relate to your own experience in prayer?

We see this especially in the psalms, for example when the psalmist is crying out to God to help him in his distress (see for example, Psalm 38, 42, or 88). We see this when St. Paul several times requests that the “thorn in his flesh” be removed, but Christ says, “my grace is sufficient” (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

We also see this in Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus asks that this cup be taken from him. Seeing Jesus’ prayer in this light may make some people more comfortable with the idea of wrestling with God in prayer. It’s not about trying to change God’s mind/will, but about wrestling with (next to, in accordance with) God in prayer in order to come into line with him and his will for our lives.



DAY 4 – MEDITATIO: STEPPING UP FROM LECTIO

Participants will reflect on meditatio, Christian meditation.

Scripture frequently uses the repetition of a simple word or phrase to allude to an earlier narrative. For example, St. John begins his gospel with “In the beginning” (John 1:1). What do these words call to mind? What kind of tone does this set for the rest of St. John’s gospel?

These words call to mind the opening words of the Book of Genesis, which also begins, “In the beginning.” Genesis’ first chapters speak of the first creation of the world. The prophets foretold that God would bring about a new creation (see Isaiah 65:17, for example). By recalling Genesis’ opening words at the beginning of his gospel, St. John alludes to the “new creation” that is about to happen in Jesus Christ.

Try it on your own using the passage from Mark 2:1-5.

Lectio—Carefully read the passage. What do you note?

Nouns: Capernaum, home, many gathered, no room (even at the door), Jesus, paralytic, four men, roof, faith, child. Verbs: returned, reported, gathered together, preaching, carried, could not get near, removed the roof, made an opening, let down, saw their faith, sins forgiven.

Meditatio—Reflect on the meaning of what you noted during *lectio*.

The crowd gathers because of a report that Jesus is home—why? We don’t know why the crowd is there. But what Jesus does is teach—does this imply that what the crowd needs most is truth? The person in great need can’t even reach Jesus because of the crowds—they “could not get near.” Is there more than the crowd keeping the paralytic far from Jesus? The paralytic only reaches Jesus thanks to his friends. The friends are willing to do whatever it takes—remove the roof, make an opening, let down the pallet—to get the paralyzed man to Jesus. Does faith require such active and persistent work? Jesus sees both the physical and spiritual and addresses the spiritual first. It is a man on the pallet, but Jesus tenderly calls him a “child”—because with the forgiveness of sins he becomes a newborn child of God.

In using my imagination, I might put myself in the place of the friends. It’s hard work getting my friend to Jesus, why am I doing it? Or I might put myself in the place of the paralytic: What emotions do I feel for my friends? Am I scared to meet Jesus face to face? What do I think when he first says “your sins are forgiven” and not “walk”? What stirs up in my heart when Jesus addresses me as “child”?

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