

PRAYER

FINDING INTIMACY WITH GOD

LEADER'S RESOURCE
GUIDE

SESSION 6



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

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SESSION 6

RESOLUTIO: PUTTING LOVE INTO ACTION

SESSION OVERVIEW

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

In the last session we examined the fourth rung of Guigo's ladder, *contemplatio*. Unlike the earlier rungs, *contemplatio* is not something we achieve simply by our own efforts. We prepare carefully in order to properly dispose ourselves for it, but this "gaze of love" is completely God's gift.

Dr. Gray will begin this last session with a beautiful image/analogy of the vineyard of *lectio divina*. *Lectio* is like plucking the grapes in the vineyard—we read carefully and pluck the words and images from the vine of the text. *Meditatio* is like squeezing the juice out of the grape—peering more deeply into what we have read, we see and understand more clearly its meaning. *Oratio* is like the fermentation period—our conversation bubbles up from our *lectio* and *meditatio*. *Contemplatio* is the last step, where we enjoy the aged, fine wine in our *lectio*, *meditatio*, and *oratio*; this step takes time, but is worth the wait. Dr. Gray reminds us that sometimes we are tempted to stop at meditation, but if we do this, then according to this analogy, we can only drink grape juice. *Lectio* and *meditatio* are to lead us to the more intimate encounters of *oratio* and *contemplatio*.

The four traditional steps of *lectio divina* lead naturally to a fifth step: *resolutio*, the resolution to put our prayer into action. Following *contemplatio*, the peaceful rest in God's loving gaze, *resolutio* allows God to teach us how to extend that gaze of love to our neighbor. Without resolution and action, prayer runs the risk of increasing our pride rather than our virtue, as St. Francis de Sales and other great saints so clearly remind and exhort. After encountering the God of Love in the dialogue of prayer, we must take action to allow God's love to transform our lives. While making a resolution and putting it into practice sounds straightforward, it can often prove the most difficult part of prayer. For this reason, our resolutions should not be general goals, but small, particular actions so that we can make and measure our progress.

Dr. Gray closes this last session with some practical notes for making *lectio divina* part of our prayer lives. The Church gives us a ready-made plan in the Mass and its daily readings, as well as the Liturgy of the Hours. Any of the books of the Bible can be used, but especially the psalms and the gospels, both of which the Church puts before us in her liturgy each day.



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 recite the **Memory Verse** (Psalm 27:8) without assistance? Otherwise, look it up (page 74) 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.*

Do you think there are any risks or potential dangers associated with prayer? What might they be? *Most of us probably don't think of prayer as being risky or dangerous—but if our prayer is not what it is supposed to be and we don't realize that, then we will fall into a trap of empty, unproductive prayer. In this session we will examine a quote from St. Francis de Sales, warning that prayer that does not lead to action runs the risk of puffing us up with pride.*

Do you find it easier to keep broad, sweeping resolutions (e.g., “Be a better person”) or smaller, specific resolutions (e.g., “Make my bed first thing every morning”)? Why?

It is typically easier to follow through on a small, specific resolution. We don't lose sight of the goal in trying to figure out a strategy to accomplish it because the plan for action is obvious when the resolution is specific. If we aim too broad, we often get mired down in all the options for how and where to start, and all too often we either never start, or we start and then quit due to discouragement at the slow rate of progress. Resolutio in prayer should be small and practical in order to be fruitful.



Play the video segment, which will last about 31 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.

PUTTING LOVE INTO ACTION

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

Some new or remarkable ideas may include: the process of wine-making as a metaphor or analogy for prayer, that prayer can make us like the Pharisees if we don't put it into action, or prayer not being an end in itself but rather a means to an end.

2. Why is it so important to put prayer into action? What do you think would happen to a prayer life that didn't regularly include *resolutio*?

Meditating on God's Word, on truth and holiness, is wonderful. But without action, we can easily deceive ourselves that we are just as good and holy as what we read, without the reality existing in our lives. This could lead to complacency, pride, etc. If our prayer life is to bear abundant fruit, we need to make a concrete resolution each day and then follow through and act on that resolution.

3. What is your favorite reading material to use for prayer? Why?

Lectio divina might still be new enough to some participants that they don't have a favorite resource yet. Others may prefer the psalms or the gospels, as Dr. Gray recommends. Some participants may already be in the habit of praying all or part of the Liturgy of the Hours and using that for lectio; others may attend daily Mass or regularly read the daily readings for prayer. This is a good time for participants to share favorite resources such as Magnificat, websites, or apps to help with prayer such as iBreviary, Divine Office, Laudate, etc.

*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 – IMPORTANCE OF A RESOLUTION

Participants will look at why *resolutio* is so important to prayer and what St. Francis de Sales warns about prayer without action in his Introduction to the Devout Life.

What does our Lord's model of prayer in Gethsemane teach us about the importance of *resolutio*?

Jesus shows us how to submit our will to God's. In his prayer we find permission to not want to suffer, but we also find strength and encouragement for choosing to accept whatever God wills. Jesus makes his submission to the Father's will explicit in his *resolutio*: "Not as I will, but as you will." This shows us that we shouldn't just give an easy and quick general resolution, but rather we should make our submission clear and specific, in order that we may be strengthened by God's grace for the specific work ahead.

Spend some time in *lectio divina* today reflecting on St. James' exhortation to put our prayer into action using the passage from James 1:19–25.

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

Quick to hear versus slow to speak or anger. Sin is described "ugly" words, such as "filthiness" and "rank growth." God's Word is described as "implanted." Repetition of "hearer" and "doer." Image of face in a mirror. Law, described with "perfect" and "of liberty." "Doer/doing" strengthened with "perseveres." We must also act—to obey. To hear is to obey/do and then to be blessed.

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

We should listen more ("be quick") than we talk ("be slow")—especially in prayer, but also in our relationships with others. How is the "anger of man" in opposition to the "righteousness of God"? Rather than "growth of wickedness," it is the "implanted word" that needs to grow in me, and if I let this grow it can "save my soul." If we are attached to sin, we won't be able to hear God in prayer, and his Word won't be active in our souls. To hear without doing is to not perceive reality clearly (see in a mirror and then forget immediately).

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

How much do I listen? Does my pride make me want to do all the talking and take center stage? Bring to God any relationships that I need to reorder. In prayer, am I afraid to be quiet and wait for God's direction? I might share with God my current struggles in prayer. How many times has my anger worked against God's will or God's love for me and for others? What sins have I chosen to not see as they truly are—filthy and rank? Ask God to open my eyes to new ways he wants me to reform my life with his grace. What do I "hear" God directing me to "do"? Reflect on how God's laws and ways, his perfect law, offers liberty, freedom, and peace in my life.

Contemplatio—Take time to simply rest in God's presence.

Resolutio—What small thing can you do today to put your prayer into action?

I might make a resolution to listen to a particular friend more diligently. I might resolve to make my first words in conversation those of a question or two, which allows the other person to speak. I might resolve to go to Confession as a result of God opening my eyes to a particular sin. I might resolve to study Scripture more purposely so that I can more diligently "look into" God's "perfect law."



DAY 2 – ACTION AS THE FRUIT OF PRAYER

Participants will reflect on how action flows naturally out of prayer and how St. Teresa of Avila describes prayer as ordered toward works of service.

If prayer is a means to an end, does that make it more or less important? Why?

As important and essential as prayer is, it is not the most important thing, in as much as it is not the “end” or ultimate goal. But this does not mean that prayer is not important; in fact, if we are to obtain the ultimate goal of love—love of God and love of neighbor—prayer is vital. The goal of love makes prayer that much more important because in spending time with Love himself in prayer, we learn better just how to love and are strengthened to act in love.

Look up James 2:14–26. How does the relationship between faith and works, as described by St. James, shed light on the relationship between prayer and action?

Faith without works is dead, and prayer without action is empty or dead as well. The relationship is very similar. We can be tempted to see both faith and prayer as something mental/interior, and to separate them from exterior action—but this is a great error, as both faith and prayer must lead to action.

Spend some time in *lectio divina* today reflecting on how Jesus himself emphasizes the importance of action as the fruit of our prayer using the passage from Matthew 25:31–40.

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

A table of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold, with rings and poles by which it was to be carried. Plates, dishes, flagons, and bowls all made of gold to be used on the table. Twelve cakes of bread were put on the table in two rows of six.

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

Note the time of what is described: the end times. Gathering versus separating. Jesus is not named but described as Son of man and King. Repetition of the list of works of mercy. Pattern of need followed by action. Those who are righteous act, they did these things. The king speaks of “my brethren.” The righteous on Jesus’ right repeatedly ask “when?”

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

Do I see Jesus Christ as the King of my life? King of my actions? Do I see Christ in others? Do I see others as the brothers and sisters of Christ (his “brethren” as Jesus calls them)? Do I see others as “my” brothers and sisters in Christ? Am I willing to love others, even if I might not “like” them at the moment? Where do I see these needs described by Jesus around me—friends, children, co-workers, the poor? Am I already doing some of these works of mercy regularly? Am I doing these works with true love and charity? Which can I do more diligently? If I am not doing any of these works, what is God calling me to?

Contemplatio—Take time to simply rest in God’s presence.

Resolutio—What small thing can you do today to put your prayer into action?

A few ideas: I might resolve to do one work of mercy mentioned in the gospel passage today or this week. I might recognize the humility of the righteous and resolve to grow in humility by doing one kind act anonymously today.



DAY 3 – LECTIO: OVER ALL THESE PUT ON LOVE

Participants will reflect on St. Paul's exhortation to the Colossians to put to death what is earthly and fix their minds on what is of Christ.

LECTIO

What does St. Paul contrast in the first section of this passage (verses 1-5)?

Participants may note the following: Dying/death and being raised/having life with Christ, the things that are above and the things on earth.

What are we to take off or get rid of (“put to death”), and what are we to “put on”?

Get rid of anything earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, idolatry, anger, wrath, malice, slander, foul talk, lying, and division.

Put on: compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearing, forgiveness, and love. Let peace rule your heart, let God's Word dwell in you, and have thankfulness in your hearts.

In the last section of this passage there is a repetition of the command “let” (verses 15 and 16). What are we to let Christ give us? What are these two gifts supposed to accomplish in us?

Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, and let the word of Christ dwell richly in us. Together Christ's word and his peace lead us to do all things in his name for the glory of (giving thanks to) God the Father.

MEDITATIO

What is the relationship between the “peace of Christ” (verse 15) and the “word of Christ” (verse 16)?

How does this passage encourage us in both contemplative prayer and active love?

Peace is experienced internally, like contemplative prayer, but it will have an outward effect (also like prayer).

The word of Christ is related in this passage to teaching and worship—it is more like active prayer/love.

Contemplative prayer leads to active love. These two are brought together in the last verse, where “whatever you do, in word or deed” (action) is to be united with “giving thanks to the Father through [Jesus]” (prayer).

What does it mean to “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (verse 17)?

Always be mindful of Jesus, do everything prayerfully, remember that we do everything by God's grace and not our own power, be aware that we are ambassadors of Christ acting in his name, strive to do only his will, etc.

St. Paul gives a very similar exhortation in Ephesians 4:25–5:1, ending with “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.” What specific things does St. Paul expect us to do in imitation of God? How does prayer prepare us to be imitators of God?

Some specific expectations are forgiving others, speaking the truth, having patience, showing kindness and compassion, etc. These are all ways that we show our love for God by treating one another in accord with God's will. We cannot imitate God if we do not know him (set our minds on him), and we cannot know him without encountering him in prayer.



DAY 4 – PARTICULAR VS. GENERAL

Participants will examine the importance of forming a small, particular resolution.

Is there someone in your life that is difficult to love, or a situation where you find it especially challenging to serve others? What causes this difficulty?

There might be someone we find somewhat annoying, like in the anecdote Dr. Gray shared about St. Therese of Lisieux and the sister who got on her nerves. Or it might be someone who has hurt us and we have difficulty loving him or her in spite of the hurt. Or we may be struggling with a particular way we are called to love and serve others—cleaning up after kids, an unenjoyable task at work, etc. Although we may initially focus on the situation or the other person as being the source of the difficulty in love, the deepest difficulty lies in our own pride and imperfect love.

Consider some of the following resolutions that might flow from prayer. How are the particular resolutions more practical than the general ones? Complete the chart by providing examples of specific resolutions to replace the general ones.

General Resolution	Particular Resolution
I will be kind to strangers.	I will smile at and try to make eye contact with each person I see today.
I will be more considerate of others' time.	I will be on time for my appointments today.
I will be more generous with my time.	I will read two bedtime stories to my child instead of rushing through one.
I will not be wasteful.	<i>I will take smaller portions of food and not throw any food away today.</i>
I will be more forgiving.	<i>I will choose to forgive my friend/co-worker/spouse for this specific wrong which still bothers me.</i>
I will be patient.	<i>I will respond with a charitable tone of voice in a difficult conversation.</i>
I will take better care of myself.	<i>I will go to bed at 10pm tonight.</i>

Spend some time in *lectio divina* today reflecting on St. John's exhortation to love one another using the passage from 1 John 4:7–12, 20–21.

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

Reader addressed as "beloved" and repeated. Repetition of "love," "God," "one another," "brother." Loving related to being "born of God" and "knowing God." Strong verbs: "manifest," "sent," "loved," "abides," "perfected," "seen"...several repeated. Passage ends with "this commandment."

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

St. John's address of his reader as "beloved" models the love he is preaching. Use of "only" to describe the Son reminds us of the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, and how much Abraham loved Isaac, and the more perfect love of God the Father for the Son. God the Father "manifests" his love in action (sending the Son). Is "not loving my brother" being equated to "hating my brother"? Loving my brother is a commandment, not just a nice idea.

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

I might thank God that he sees me as "beloved." Recalling that God sees my brothers and sisters as "beloved" also, I reflect that it is truly not an option to ignore the call to love my neighbor as myself. I might sense God challenging me, asking me "How seriously do I take loving my brother?" I might be directed to reflect that the two greatest commandments cannot be separated: If I do not love my neighbor then that is proof that I do not love God. Why do I try to love God without trying to love my neighbor better? I might talk with God about specific brothers and sisters. God the Father "manifested" his love in action (sending the Son); I might reflect on how I can better manifest my love for God.

Contemplatio—Take time to simply rest in God's presence.

Resolutio—What small thing can you do today to put your prayer into action?

Offer ideas such as the following: I might resolve to do a specific act of kindness for someone, like writing a short note, letter, or card.

COMMIT DAY 5 – TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Participants will reflect on Clothing the Naked, Works of Mercy—Giving Drink to the Thirsty and Food to the Hungry, and Visiting the Sick, Domenico Ghirlandaio, three of several frescoes in the Oratory of San Martino dei Buonomini, Florence, Italy.

Look up Matthew 25:31–46. What are the works of mercy that Jesus describes?

Jesus notes the following, beginning in verse 35: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, giving shelter to the homeless (i.e. welcoming the stranger), clothing the naked, visiting/caring for the sick, visiting prisoners. Along with these six, the Church also includes burying the dead, which is specifically mentioned in the Old Testament Book of Tobit (see Tobit 1:16–17). Along with these "corporeal" works of mercy, the Church also notes seven additional "spiritual" works of mercy, which include: instructing the ignorant, counseling the doubtful, admonishing sinners, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offences willingly, comforting the afflicted, and praying for the living and the dead.



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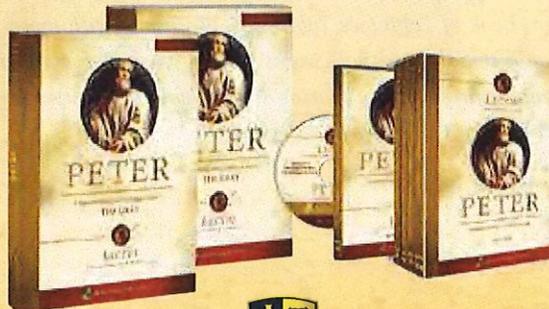
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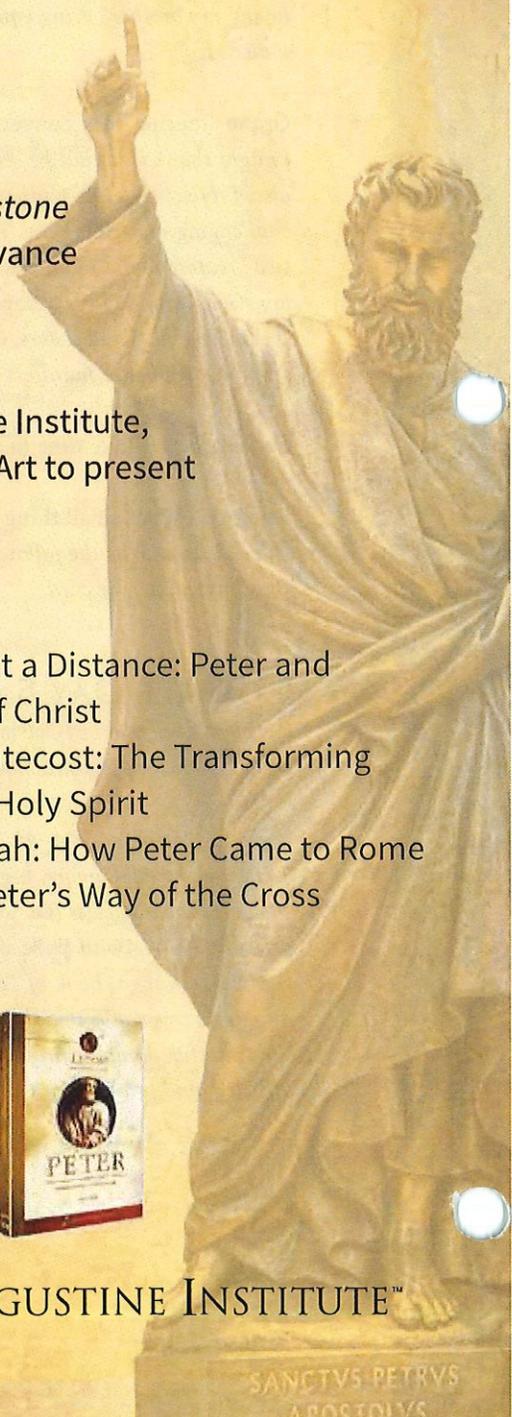
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