

Experimenting With Praying the Scriptures: *Lectio Divina*

Hebrews 4:12 says, “The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” In other words, the Holy Spirit can cause the words of the Bible to jump off the page and into our hearts.

How can we cooperate in that process? One way is to “pray the Scriptures”—an ancient Christian practice sometimes known as *lectio divina* (Latin for “sacred reading”). *Lectio divina* is based on the idea that God has something very personal and specific to say to each one of us when we read any Scripture passage.

When we read the Scriptures this way, we begin with a prayer that the Holy Spirit will guide us to recognize the precise message God has for us in the passage for this time in our lives. Then we read the passage, slowly, prayerfully, with expectation – waiting for a word, phrase, verse, or idea to jump off the page and grab our attention. Below are some steps to guide you.

Do you want to engage in deep communication with God? Why not set aside a few 15 minute segments this week to experiment with “praying the Scriptures”—just like ancient Christians did?

Step One

Make sure you are in a quiet place and ready to ignore any interruptions, including the phone. Take a few deep breaths, then say a prayer like this, “*God, please quiet my soul and prepare me to listen. Show me what you have for me today in your Holy Word.*”

Step Two

Select a brief passage, generally no more than about ten verses at a sitting. Any Bible passage will do. The Psalms and the Gospels can be especially powerful. Here are a few options to experiment with:

Psalms 1, 3, 4, or 16
John 4:1-15

Matthew 7:1-11
Luke 8:22-25

Read your passage out loud to yourself slowly, hearing and feeling each word.

Step Three

This is the heart of the process. Once you have finished reading the passage out loud slowly once, read it again (either out loud or silently, as most comfortable). This time, as you read, consider what word, phrase, sentence, or idea most grabs your attention.

- Copy down that word, phrase, sentence, or idea. Now you’re on to something!
- Then ask yourself why the Holy Spirit is calling your attention to that phrase. What might God want to say to me through this?
- Then consider: How should I respond to what God is saying?

Step Four

Now that God has said something important to you, you get the chance to respond. Spend a few moments talking to God about what God has said. What do you think? How do you feel?

Step Five

Let the word, phrase, sentence, or idea God has given you be a prayerful undercurrent that you carry throughout your entire day. Let it seep into the essence of your being.

Note

If you enjoy this way of communicating with God, try the devotional we offer on our web site, *Be Still and Know*, JesusMCC.org/BeStill

There, we specify a short Scripture passage each day. You can apply the steps above to that passage, then spend a couple minutes reading what someone else got out of the same passage.