

Lectio Divina (Divine Reading)

For centuries, Christians have read the Bible using Lectio Divina. Lectio Divina is a practice of reading a text several times and letting the meaning sink deep into the heart of the listener. It is not a study of the text in the traditional sense, but rather a form of meditation using sacred text as its starting point.

This practice involves four steps: lectio (read), meditatio (meditate), oratio (pray) and contemplatio (contemplate). Each step has a slightly different focus. Some have compared Lectio Divina to eating—in which the food is tasted, savored, digested, and then becomes a part of the body. Lectio Divina can be used with any sacred text that is significant to your family.

Designed for Ages 9+

Materials

Sacred text for reflection

Time Investment: 15–30 minutes

How To

Before Beginning

The leader of the practice should review the suggested texts and find one that will be appropriate for the family. Consider everyone's age, the complexity of the text, and the length of the passage. Part of the mystery of Lectio Divina is how passages that seem straightforward at first reveal new layers of meaning when they are read and meditated upon. Don't shy away from passages that seem too simple. Conversely, do not fear difficult passages. Sometimes things leap out of obtuse passages in unexpected ways.

For the practice of Lectio Divina

1. Choose a time for your family to give the Lectio Divina practice a try. Some Ideas: at a meal, first thing in the morning, just before bed.
2. The leader says, *“Today we have the opportunity to hear a passage in a new way. We will read through it four times. Four of us will read it out loud. Each time through we will focus on something different. The first time through we will focus on lectio, which means ‘read.’ Listen carefully for what this story is about.”*
3. One person reads though the text slowly and carefully. After reading it, the reader asks *“What would you say, in one sentence, this text is about? Don’t worry if your answer is different from my answer or other’s answers; it’s just what you are thinking and feeling.”*
4. After everyone has had a chance to answer if they wish, the leader gives the text to the next person and says, *“Now we will continue with meditatio, which means ‘reflect,’ and [name of person] will read the passage for us a second time, slowly and carefully. As [he/she] reads, we’ll wonder what the text means.”*
5. After the second reading, the leader says, *“We already talked about what this text is about; what do you think it means?”*
6. Allow all to offer their thoughts on the meaning of the text, and then say, *“Now we will move on to the third part, oratio, which means ‘prayer.’ [Name] will read the text this time, and as [he/she] does, we will think about how we feel when we hear this text.”*

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7. After the third reading, the leader asks all to explain how they felt when they heard the text. When everyone who wishes to speak has spoken, the leader says, *“Now we will move on to the last step, which is contemplatio, which means ‘contemplate.’ We will listen for what we want to do when we hear this text. [Name] will read it for us one last time.”*

8. After the final reading, everyone discusses what the text asks the reader to do.

9. When everyone has had a chance to respond to the fourth and final question, the leader closes by saying, *“We have had a chance to really think about this text and wonder about what it says, what it means, how we feel when we read it, and what we want to do because of it. It is so exciting that each of us can hear different things as we hear the texts together. Amen!”*

Notes

- The leader should guide family members in such a way that each person’s comments stand alone. That is, when one person offers thoughts or feelings, others shouldn’t add to them, question them, or dispute them, but should simply listen and wait for their turns to share. In this way Lectio Divina is a sharing, rather than a discussion, much like the practice of the Ignatian Examen. Each thought is valid.
- Practice makes perfect! I recommend families try Lectio Divina a few times before deciding if it’s a good practice for their family.

Variations

- Instead of vocalizing the answers to each question, ask each participant to write or draw answers, and then share all reflections at the end.
- Allow this to be a reflective process through journaling or silence rather than an out loud practice.
- Work through one section of a text over several weeks, or even the whole year.