

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina is a method of prayer from the monastic tradition of Christianity. The Rule of Saint Benedict makes reference to it, as do most traditions of Christian spirituality. It is translated as “holy reading,” “divine reading,” “meditative reading,” or “spiritual reading.” The method is divided into five steps with Latin names: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, *contemplatio*, and *actio*. To prepare yourself to use lectio divina, select a passage of Scripture you wish to pray with, assume a comfortable position, and allow yourself to become silent. Then follow these steps:

Lectio (lex-ee-oh). This word means “reading.” This step evolved from the practice of having a lector read and reread a passage to an assembly that listened. When you practice *lectio divina* by yourself, read slowly and allow God’s Word to wash over you and sink in. Pause for a minute or so after each reading. You will probably want to read the passage at least three times, each time listening carefully for a word or phrase that seems to stand out to you. You may even want to read the passage aloud. You may also listen for a word or phrase that speaks to you today.

Meditatio (med-it-tots-ee-oh). The word translates to mean “meditation” and describes the movement into thought that occurs in this step. In this step you engage your intellect, seeking to understand what God might be saying to you in the passage. You may wish to read a short commentary on the passage if you have a Bible commentary. Or if you have found a word or phrase that speaks to your heart, allow it to interact with your thoughts, hopes, memories, and desires. Try to understand: “What is God saying to me in this passage?” “Why does this particular word or phrase stand out?” “How does this passage relate to my current situation?” Probe these questions for a while.

Oratio (or-ot-see-oh). This is the Latin name for “prayer.” In this step you respond to what you have received. After reflecting in *meditatio*, you are drawn into conversation with God, following any of the prayer forms: blessing, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, or praise. Here you also make an offering to God of the parts of you that were touched by his Word in the previous step. In this way you acknowledge that you allow these parts of yourself to be changed by God’s Word.

Contemplatio (con-tem-plot-see-oh). *Lectio divina* closes in contemplation. In this step you simply rest quietly in the presence of the One who loves you. This is like the moment in a love relationship when no words are necessary.

Actio (ax-ee-oh). This word means “action.” This is not an actual step in the prayer, but it is a reminder that our time with God’s Word will have an effect on the way we live our lives. As you finish your prayer, you might want to consider if what you’ve heard is calling you to some action. Sometimes in *lectio divina*, you will return to a reading several times to savor the line or phrase that you have been given that day. Other times you may seek a new word or phrase. The purpose of *lectio divina* is to be in God’s presence praying with Scripture. Don’t worry about doing it well or experiencing deep insights and emotions. Think of it as a special moment with your best friend.