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## ***The Lectio Divina?***

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Into Thy Word Ministries [www.intothyword.org](http://www.intothyword.org)

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16*

### **A Biblical Look into the Classic Discipline of Praying with the Scriptures and Reforming it.**

#### ***What is the Lectio Divina?***

Simply put, the *Lectio Divina* means to be praying in and with the Scriptures for understanding, worship, and intimacy in God's presence to benefit our faith, character, and spiritual growth. Thus, reading as a practice and a discipline means that as we read the Bible, we can and should be praying to our Lord, too. This combines two essential aspects of our Christian walk, Bible reading and prayer, used together for our personal impact of faith and synergy to impact our church. This is biblical and a must for spiritual discipline that will help us as well as our church significantly; however, it can also be misused and ignored. But, we can reform it back to its biblical call and use for our Lord's glory.

To incorporate the *Lectio Divina* into our "spiritual formation" (growing in Christ) simply means we internalize God's Word in our hearts and in our minds by combining our prayer life with Bible reading so we too can, as Colossians tells us, "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. "

#### **Praying in Scripture**

In Colossians three, Paul tells us to "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Paul's point here is that we should practice God's precepts by learning His Word and praying to Him. The context is that this will be exhibited as we are modeling our Christian community and unity by showing a broken world who our Lord is and what He can do for them! How we are face-to-face affected and impacted by God's Word affects how others are impacted through us, and how our church and community are affected. But, as this passage testifies, *something* must happen to us first before we can be effectively impacting to others. And, this *something* is the incredible and impacting experience of allowing Christ, His Word, and His Lordship to "dwell in you richly." This is a picture of our unity in Christ and His promise to reside in us that we have access to right now. Yet, so many of us ignore Him and thus, our significant impact becomes just the one we have on our seat cushion at church or in front of a TV, when we could have had so much more!

The background to this is that the Colossians had a skewed understanding of the goodness and sufficiency of Christ. They needed to have known, and we too must comprehend and apply, that Christ Himself is living in us right now! Imagine that! Just picture what your life would be like if you really took this seriously. We are actually *bearing* and *bringing* Christ wherever we go. When we are at church, at work, doing our shopping, or our devotions, He is with us; He is with you right now. This is a powerful conviction, motivation, and blessing. We also need to realize we are being guided and inspired by the Spirit (1 Chron. 25:1-6; 1 Cor. 14:15). We are to live out our Christian walk with the responsibility of His power, conviction, clarity, and truth, because Christ is not in heaven, aloof or just watching and not caring. He is residing in us now and we can commune and be impacted and empowered by Him now (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Col. 3:3)!

How is this done? Read His Word, the Bible, and pray to Christ as Lord simultaneously. Simply put by Paul, we allow the Word of Christ to “dwell” in us. This method used for our spiritual growth allows us to recognize and commune in His presence as we also learn His instructions and pray. It is a discipline, that when we read His Word, we are aware that He is there with us. The application is that we realize we carry Him and what we learned from His Word wherever we go so the peace of Christ rules our hearts and minds and translates into all of our actions and attitudes. It is all about our spiritual growth impacting us so it impacts our church and others positively and in love. This should be the prime goal of a mature Christian and of a church that desires to operate in God’s will with His Fruit and call.

### **The Endeavor to Become More Mature Christians**

One of the principle aspects of our ministry, *Into Thy Word*, is teaching people how to study God’s Word. Our call is to foster and teach a deep desire to learn as much as possible from our Lord so we can grow as much as possible in our Lord. And, we have found that being better able to grasp the wonders from His Word enables us to be better Christians and Church. Our focus in these endeavors is seeking Christ; in our study, we are to *center* ourselves in Jesus Christ as LORD. To accomplish this, we seek to teach ourselves and others how to best *mine* His precious precepts, and then be transformed and renewed by His Word and Spirit. One of the best ways I have personally found to do this is to use the Bible as a prayer book also. This means to pray as we read. As we read, we fill our minds with Him and His precepts; we commune and communicate with our Lord and thus, our growth increases further and more deeply in Christ as we apply His precepts and love. This is to allow the flow of His Word to not only be educational but also efficacious. Not just academic, but also a reality for our Christian lives and church. To go more deeply simply means to become better learners and appliers of His Word. This is how we become relevant, which is to incorporate our daily walk with Christ into our lives and relationships. In so doing, His most precious Word touches us ever so deeply as our guide for daily thought

and living. Incorporating our prayers with reading the Bible in our devotions will help enable us to grow deeper in Christ so we can be better servants of Christ.

Our goal should be to become more *Christ-like*; a good, classic, exceptional way to do this is learning how to pray in and with the Scriptures. This is done for our understanding of whom and what He has done, to worship Him, and to grow in our intimacy by being in God's presence. Using the Bible as a prayer guide is classically called the *Lectio Divina*.

### **Is the *Lectio Divina* Biblical?**

This *Lectio Divina* is classically defined from its Latin term meaning “reading the Divine” or more accurately applied as “praying in or with Scripture.” Basically simplified, this means as we read His Word, we also allow it to be planted in us and for Him to communicate with us through it. Thus, it has biblical roots. This is what James called the “Implanted Word” (James 1:18-22) which is the message of God conveyed through His Bible and our response to. In Stoic philosophy, this is called *innate reason*, meaning either we are born with it or we can reach within ourselves for it. In Revaluation chapter 10, John describes this as meaning to “devour,” a process of eating and digesting the Word, as he tells us to “take it and eat it,” meaning to *grasp* it as in taking in food for our pleasure and nourishment. However, before we can be nourished, we have to obtain it; then, we eat it and digest it. Applied to God’s Word, it means we have to get it, read it, understand it, and apply it (Psalm 119:103; Rev. 10:8-11).

As Christians, we all have His Word in our hearts and we reach (grasp) for it as it comes from God. We are to be receiving God’s Word of life like food that is necessary and instrumental for us to survive and thrive; it is for substance and joy, as His precepts are. God’s Word must first transform and affect us before we can be used to have an effect on others. His Word is convicting and will move us beyond what we think we can do and where we can go. The call is to take His Word, the Scriptures, and engage it through our study and prayer, thus allowing Christ to plant it in us just like a gardener would plant a tree. Then, we allow our prayer and efforts in Him and the work of the Spirit to grow the tree of our faith in order to produce the Fruit of the Spirit in our lives that will impact others around us (Psalm 119; John 17:17; Rom. 1:2; Gal 5:21-23; Eph. 1:11-14; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1: 3-11, 20-21).

This is not some scary catholic or mysterious, contemplative, esoteric, spiritual exercise. Nor, is it some cultic or aberrant teaching, although some have skewed it to be that way. Rather, it is simply using the Bible as a prayer guide. All you do is read the Bible and pray. This, in classic Christianity, has also been called *Meditatio Scripturarum* meaning “mediating on Scripture;” receiving and contemplating on the *Contemplatio Scripturarum* and the *Oratio Scripturarum* means pondering or reflecting on Scripture. These practices date back to the Early Church (at least 200 A.D. if not earlier) and became popular in the various

Catholic monastic movements. Unfortunately, some of these classic monastics have added some eastern religious thoughts to this exercise that are contrary to biblical precepts and have taken away the most impacting thing, which is our learning. Thus, as a reaction, some Protestants have rejected or ignored this practice or Discipline. But, literally all of the Early Church leaders who sought to grow spiritually, as well as our Reformers, Calvin and Luther, all considered this Discipline of praying in Scripture as essential along with academic study (Inductive Bible Study). Many of the great Christian teachers, including Calvin, pointed out that academic study moves the mind, and the *Lectio Divina* (prayer with the Bible) moves the heart, both being essential moves in God's direction. Praying in and with the Scriptures is meant to integrate what we have learned with a deeper, existential core of who we are so we become more about knowing and serving our Lord and less about just serving our own self interests.

### **The Problems with the *Lectio Divina***

Most of the New Age movement and many Emerging Church folks define the *Lectio Divina* as, "reading the Bible or other written material and waiting for God to speak to them through the words of the text. (from [religioustolerance.org](http://religioustolerance.org))." The problem with this is that our will and desires, and perhaps even a demon are giving us instruction. A divorce of Truth has taken place in this type of practice. The real biblical practice of the *Lectio Divina* is not an experience apart from learning, nor is it about gaining a spiritual feeling or experience that God never intended for us. Others have sought to remove the context and meaning from the passage and chop up small parts to read over and over like a chant, while others have sought to say analyses of the text is wrong because God can't speak to us when we reason. However, this is foolishness; faith and reason go together as both Paul clearly explained in his Epistles and Peter in his second letter. A separation of the two engages an emotional experience devoid of the substance of truth, and any learning or meaning is lost to us. If we think we can gain valid spirituality by ignoring His precepts, we will gain nothing. Just as if all we want to do is learn, yet we do not desire to seek Him, we will also not gain any substance. So, faith and reason, prayer and Bible learning are valued companions in our spiritual journey.

The *Lectio Divina* has had its problems, mainly because of its misuse and mispractice that has given some of its critics a misunderstanding that has caused an overreaction to it. For example, many have skewed the word "contemplative" to mean emptying our mind, chanting, or engaging in some obscure spiritual exercise that is aberrant at best and dangerous at worst. However, being contemplative is a call from our Lord. It really means being devoted with the purpose and intention of emptying our will over to His Will. Contemplative is also another word for meditation, and the Bible tells us to do that. To meditate which is to "contemplate" and "deliberate," basically means we are to focus, ponder, and reflect upon Christ. In so doing, we commit to pay attention to Him and give Him our total concentration as LORD over us. We are to put Christ at the center

of our attention and will by deliberating on His instructions, comparing them to what comes across our paths in life. So, we are to put Him and His ways first and foremost, from what we have read in His Word, as we pray, and as we do both (Jos. 1:6; Psalm 1:2; 19:14; 63:6; 77:10-12; 119:11, 17-18, 97-102, 148; Rom. 12:1-2; Philip. 4:8; 1 Thess. 5:17; Heb. 2:1).

I will admit, when I first started in this practice I was an Episcopal Youth Minister serving in a liberal “emerging church”. Once I became more Reformed, I left the Episcopal Church hard and fast and joined the Reformed Churches, Presbyterian, and then Christian Reformed. Thus, I abandoned all things confessional and contemplative. But the more I read on Calvin, the more I was struck that he and Luther practiced the *Lectio Divina* on a regular basis and that is what led them both to see the errors of the Catholic Church and start the Reformation. They allowed the Word to transform them and they prayed through His Word. If it was so important to them, perhaps it should be important to me, too. So, I have been revisiting some of these “contemplative practices,” seeing what is biblical and useful and what is in error and to be thrown out. The *Lectio Divina* definitely does not need to be thrown out. However, it does need to “reformed” or be taken away from some of the “Emerging Church” and Eastern Philosophical folks who bathe themselves in post modernity and thus have a disdain for biblical truth and sound doctrine, seeking only their will from their new/old skewed insights.

Some critics have pointed out that this reading and praying, sometimes called “prayer centering,” is focusing us on something outside of biblical principles. Yes, some do this, but that is not what it is meant biblically; rather, “centering” classically (another term hacked) means to center our spiritual and daily life upon Christ as LORD and not our will or trends, the world’s ways, or some distorted eastern mysticism (Matt. 6:33; John 3:30). More confusion has emerged from some psychologists, such as Jung, and *new-agers* who use some of this terminology. *Spiritual Formation* is meant to mean “growing deeper in Christ.” But, the *New Agers* use this term too; just about all our theological terms have been “hacked” by the cults. However, does this mean we give up our precious theology? No! We keep our definitions and explain them correctly and remain obedient to Christ, His precepts, and His call.

The misuses of praying in Scripture or prayer-centering have been many and tragic. Many present day monks and emerging churches see this practice as chanting and reciting meaningless repetitions, repeating a mantra (didn’t Jesus speak against this?), or entering some form of silence to listen for the “still, small voice” taking Psalm 46 and perverting it. “Be still” means to focus on God and surrender to Him, not to empty ourselves. Others see the *Lectio Divina* as some form of Eastern practice or breathing exercise, or a skewed, meditative vehicle that takes us away from Christ rather than bringing us closer. Thus, these skewed practices push us away from gaining good and biblical understanding and insight. The Bible is **the** source of knowledge so we can better know, fully

recognize, and comprehend our Lord. Praying in Scripture is meant to gain for us more from our exegesis and analysis, because with prayer we are convicted and better able, through the work of the Spirit, to apply to His truths. But, when we just seek an experience from this practice and not the reality and Truth that our Lord is, we will greatly miss its intent. It is like taking the engine out of your car and thinking the chassis will get you where you want to go. These practices that skew the veracity of the *Lectio Divina* have no value, and remove the key component that praying in the Scriptures is meant to do. That is removing the Scriptures, which is removing our learning of what God is saying from His revealed and clear precepts, and then applying them to our daily lives. This is not about seeking some kind mystical experience or some breathing exercise or whatever new or old will be brought to it. God intended that we center ourselves in Him and not in anything else; prayer-centering and praying in the Scriptures is meant to receive His inspired Word, and get to know and apply it.

### **Reforming the *Lectio Divina***

The biblical usage of the *Lectio Divina* is to engage the text and not push aside the academic study or *exegesis*. It is always good to do our study first and know the passage. But, the *Lectio Divina* emphasizes the internalizing of what the Bible is telling us by praying as we read. This is not some trendy way to find out something new from God that He has not revealed before. The primary purpose is to gain more from a passage with “reflective prayer.” When we engage the Bible just with the mind and close off the heart (intentionally or unintentionally), we will only develop liberalism (Christianity without meaning, power and purpose), cultism (Christianity skewed), or a coldness (Christianity as just academic) to whom and what Christ is. To be transformed, we must allow the renewal and work of the Spirit while praying in His Word; this is a crucial exercise to help us in this endeavor to achieve “Christian Formation” (growing in Christ). You may be doing this *Lectio Divina* and not know you are doing it, such as when you naturally pray as you read your devotions or when you are studying a passage and something “hits” you and you pray about it. You are doing the *Lectio Divina*! And, you are doing it biblically!

My point for this discipline is, be biblical and be practical; the Bible is to be our *textbook*, the place from which we get our facts and principles. We reform this classic discipline by taking it back to what it was meant to do and as the Bible has called us to do. We do not ignore it; rather, we show its real value by our faithful practice of it. Praying in Scripture will help center us on His path, the right path of learning about God and also experiencing God’s presence. We have to do both; we have to learn and we have to experience and do. This is what it means to be transformed—to allow His living Truth to inform and then touch and transform us deeply.

Are you beginning to see the value and impact of making a few minor adjustments in your devotional life? To be studying the Word and also see what

other Christians have learned too (what we do here at *Into Thy Word*)? This is all about how to engage the Bible so we can learn, listen and then live for Him. This means to be in prayer while we read His Word. We, as followers of Christ, need to grow up and mature in Him. This means becoming more and more like Him. So, what is in the way of your accomplishing this? If you want to be a good Christian, you have to do more than sit in a pew. To be an effectual, flourishing, and valuable leader or pastor, you have to engage the Scriptures beyond just study or sermon preparation, because reading the Bible means we are also learning how to live and grow closer to Christ. And, to do this more deeply, we should be also praying to and listening for God. We should all want to be mature Christians who are ready to grow so we can be able to teach and lead others to the deep pastures of His Life and Word.

This should be a *no brainer* for any serious Christian. A person who follows Christ, who wants to know and grow in God's Word and precepts, must be willing and able to move in the direction He has called and know what that direction is. We learn and grow from our understanding and knowledge of His Word. Praying in and with the Bible grows our understanding and obedience of His principles, call, and plan. It is our responsibility to make God's Word the primary focus of our lives and not just an afterthought or an "I'll do it when I have time to do it." It must be number one on our "to do" list.

### **Doing the *Lectio Divina***

How is this done? Simply put by Paul, to allow "the Word of Christ dwell in us" means that as we read, we pray. As we read, we fill our minds on Christ and His precepts, and commune and communicate with our Lord in prayer. We read the Bible and pray to Christ as Lord—and we can do this simultaneously. We seek to engage His presence in prayer, and study to learn His instruction and practice our faith in concert. In so doing, we allow the peace of Christ to rule our hearts and minds and that translates into our actions. It is all about our spiritual growth impacting us so it impacts others positively and in love.

Thus, to do this type of Bible Study, you choose a Bible verse, read it several times; ponder it over and over in your mind, then pray. As you read, communicate with the Father, listen to what He says through His Word to you (remember nothing He says will ever contradict what He has already revealed). You will be amazed at how much you will learn, know, and even memorize; then, you will see more real, authentic, spiritual growth in yourself. The Psalms and the Epistles of John are a good place to start with this.

### **Practicing the *Lectio Divina***

**Preparation:** To begin, pray so you are open to the Spirit and His work in you. The idea is to be attentive, to have an open heart and will, and a plan to proceed to succeed. As with any devotional endeavor, have a place, take the time, and be

willing to learn and grow and touched by Christ so you can be transformed by Him. Then select your passage. You can use whatever passage is at hand such as your current devotional, one of our Daily Bible Reading charts, the “One Year Bible,” or start going through the Psalms.

**Reading:** For your devotions, start slowly; this is not a time for quick study or rushing. Read a short passage, a verse or a few, no more than a paragraph. Then do so again at least four (4) times. If you are doing a larger passage such as reading through the Bible in a year, pay attention to any word or verse that grabs you. Mediate on it, ponder, reflect, allow God’s Word to be appreciated so you savor it, and see its riches and flavors flow on to you so you are drawn in. When something does “grab” you, this may be the work of the Spirit. Stop and reread that verse again and again, paying close attention to and pondering it. For your study, you can spend more time in your inductive analyses and examination while being sensitive to Christ and communicating with Him in prayer.

**Praying:** As you read, be in prayer. Begin, engage, and end the *Lectio Divina* with prayer. You are in a dialog with our Most Holy and Awesome God through His Word in your life. The experience of reading in and with the Scriptures is basically one of prayer and reflection in God’s Word. So slowly “chew” on His Word as you feast; take it slow so to grow. Delight in Him and enjoy this time; you are in communication with the Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign of the universe who has something to say to you!

**Reflecting:** Now is the time to become more active with your prayers by pondering on the words you are reading. The center of your attention is to be directly on Christ. Your goal is to pay attention to God, not your feelings. Center your feelings and thoughts on Him. This is also called *contemplation*, which means to focus and reflect on God and His institutions. When we focus our thoughts on who God is, we will know who God is, which will enable us to focus on our trust in and relationship with Him! This means we take His precepts seriously by making our time with Him more meaningful; this will allow us to praise Him more effectively! Then, as items come into your mind such as people, places, feelings, relationships, events, and past recollections, pray for them and what is hindering you, such as sin. Try not to be just self centered with your prayers; also have the view of intercession.

**Receiving:** This is where you receive not by force, but by relaxing in Christ and His embrace, then seeing what God has for you as you enjoy your time with Him and allow Him to nourish you. See His plan, comfort, and love upon you. Your prayer now develops into a two-way exchange; as you listen, you learn and as you learn, you listen. Then, contemplate what is at hand, what it is you need to learn from the Scriptures and prayer, taking in what He has for you. Look to what you need to hear, discover, and apply, how you can grow, and how to adjust your life to improve your relationship with Him and others.



**Responding:** This is where you respond to God with your open heart and surrendered will. Your emotions, attitude, and disposition will change to match the course from the precepts of His Scripture. Ask, *what is God saying to me?* What is in the way of your growth and spiritual development? What sins are you struggling with? What is hindering your spiritual growth? How is the Fruit of the Spirit indwelling and manifesting in and from you? What about love and joy, your relationships, and opportunities as well as conviction? Are they in line to what He has called you to concerning character and spiritual formation? If not, now is the time to confess and commit to change, to allow His transforming presence to guide and employ you deeper in the Christian life, and to remove any sin and wrong obstacle that is in the way of His Way!

**Studying:** Do the above steps as you study and follow the inductive process with the awareness that what you learned is to be connected with your prayers so it infuses your life to Christ. This means seeing God's viewpoint and principles so you can explore and learn from what is revealed from the Bible—what He is saying to you. If you get stuck, use some of the basic Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Try to start with *baby steps*—10 minutes a day for a month. Then, in the second month, increase it to 15 minutes, the third month, 20 minutes, and so on. Your goal is to spend at least one hour a day in devotions, Bible reading, and prayer—free from distractions and a wandering mind. If this is too much and your mind wanders, just remember to break the time up throughout the day—one-third in the morning, one-third during the midday, and one-third before bed.

Praying in Scripture is our intimate pursuit and practice of the personal communication we have available between God and us. It is the spoken and unspoken confession of our Christian faith by engaging and proclaiming our complete dependence upon Christ as Lord over our lives. Prayer is not just a selfish wish list to get God to cater to our needs and whims; rather, its true purpose (and why it is a discipline) is to shape us by what He has revealed, and to grow in faith, character, perseverance, and maturity. Attaching prayer to His Word is meant to line us up; it will conform us to Christ so we are built up in Him.

It makes us willing and able to express praise, worship, seek forgiveness from God, become more sensitive, confess sins, make petitions for one another, and help others to also be shaped.

Remember, true prayer comes from a sincere and humble Christian, offered with a merciful spirit, one who is not interested in making a public display for the sake of pleasing others or seeking prestige. It is our relationship with Him that is important, and that which we are to seek. We are to seek His provisions for every aspect of our lives, and work all we can to help fulfill it. If we do not pay attention to Jesus' teachings because we are too busy worrying, we may go through life on earth without His help. Do not let Jesus be a concept; let Him be your LORD (Phil. 4:6-7; Heb. 4:14-16)!

God speaks to us through His Word and the Holy Spirit teaches and convicts us through the Word. Thus, through our prayers, we can be taught, grow, and be convicted, so we can apply His precepts to our lives that will affect those around us. Prayers are not just selfish wish lists to get God to cater to our needs and whims; rather, their true purpose is for us to be shaped by what He has revealed, and to grow in character, perseverance, and maturity (Psalm 65:2; Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-14; Heb. 11:6).

Remember, we have access to God; we have permission to come to Him!  
Wow! What a privilege we have!

Principle passages on why we should be praying with the Scriptures: Psalm 19:14; 46:10; 62:1; 131:2; Jeremiah 33:3; Matthew 6:9, 33; John 15:5-16; Acts 17:26, 27; Romans 8:34; 12:6-8; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:15; 6:18; Philippians 3:8; Colossians 3:16; 1 John 1:3; 3:1; 5:14; Revelation 10:8-11

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