

How might I lead and experience *Lectio Divina*, the devotional reading of Scripture, in a group setting?

I was introduced to the practice of *Lectio Divina* in a group setting as a part of what was described as “Morning Prayer”. Morning prayer utilized a liturgy, which was recited in unison by all the participants as a means of corporate prayer. Mid-way through this prayer liturgy we were invited to listen to the Scriptures being read. The text was the Gospel reading from the lectionary of the Book of Common Prayer. Though all the readings are valuable, I have found that using the Gospel reading in a regular way keeps me rooted in the Jesus story. One of my desires is to always be centered in Christ Jesus; the way, the truth, and the life.

In leading *Lectio Divina* in a group I have found the liturgy helpful in encouraging the attitude of prayer and meditation on the Scripture. Here is the liturgy I have followed to encourage and stimulate focus on the Lord.

**Morning Prayer Liturgy
(compiled by Dr. Craig Babb)**

**In the name of the Father and the Son
and the Holy Spirit, Amen**

Opening Prayer (Psalm 27:4)

**One thing I have asked of the Lord, this is what I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple.**

Silent prayer of seeking

**Declaration of faith
To whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life,
And we have believed and have come to know
That You are the Holy One of God.**

Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ, King of endless glory.

**Gospel Reading & Meditation For The Morning
(from the Lectionary)**

Canticle (Adaptation of St. Patrick’s Breastplate)

**Christ, as a light illumine and guide me.
Christ, as shield overshadow me.
Christ under me; Christ over me;
Christ beside me; on my left and my right.
This day be within and without me,
lowly and meek, yet all powerful.
Be in the heart of each to whom I speak;
In the mouth of each who speaks unto me.
This day be within and without me,
lowly and meek, yet all powerful.
Christ, as a light; Christ as a shield;
Christ beside me on my left and my right.**

Silent prayer for those on your left and your right

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen

The following then, are instructions on how I might lead such a group.

1. Make sure everyone has a copy of the common liturgy and explain that it is spoken out loud together except where otherwise indicated.
2. Begin with a few moments of silence.
 - Often I will ask those present to identify and lay aside (or before Christ) other distractions that might keep them from listening and paying attention to Jesus.
 - At times I will ask them to meditate on a phrase from scripture such as “Be still, and know that I am God”, “I waited for the Lord”, “I am with you always”, etc.
3. Begin the morning prayer liturgy together
 - “In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Then just follow the liturgy.
4. The Gospel reading is taken from the lectionary (the back section of the book of common prayer) The lectionary typically is an ordered reading through the Bible following a traditional church calendar (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost) . It includes daily readings from Old and New Testaments. I choose to primarily use the Gospel readings for each day in our contemplative prayer experience. The Gospel narrative seems to be more accessible to some in a group setting, but all the Bible readings are beneficial.

Explain briefly the idea of Lectio Divina (devotional reading; prayerfully listening/reading the scripture in a way that seeks to allow the formation of the soul into Christ-likeness). Each of the three readings of the text have a different emphasis.

The scripture will be read three different times out loud. Encourage those present to listen. (following along in their Bible is fine, but encourage them especially to listen)

Before each reading you will invite them to listen for a particular thing.

* **The first reading**: “Listen for the word or phrase from the text that Jesus would give you as a gift this morning”

This first time, listen for a word or phrase from the text that the Lord would give you as His gift to you. What is a particular word or phrase that stands out to you from the text? Some word or phrase may catch your attention as you listen to the reading. Pay attention to that word or phrase and let the Lord meet and minister to you there.

After this reading they will have a few moments just to meditate on that word or phrase and then you will invite them to share just the word or phrase they heard from the text without editorial comment. At this time it is also good to remind them that as you go around the circle they have the option to pass if they like (they just say “pass”)

* **The second reading**: “Listen for the feeling or emotion that the text reveals to you and in you”

What particular emotion or feeling does this passage provoke in you?

Encourage them to try to articulate that feeling in a word if they can.

It may be helpful to encourage them to imagine themselves in the story as one of the characters (Ignatius of Loyola is credited with the emphasis of using the imagination to connect with God’s Word), or as one seeing as a director of those in a play helping them bring out the feeling of the part. All this hopefully helps them to identify their feelings as well in relation to the Word. As they articulate an emotion it may be helpful to consider where presently in their life situation that same emotion or feeling is being experienced.

After this reading they will again have a few moments to meditate on their feeling or emotion and then a chance to share. This time you can encourage them to elaborate briefly on that feeling or emotion.

* **The third reading**: “Listen for the invitation from Christ to you this day from the text”

What particular invitation are you hearing from the Lord today? What action may God be leading you to take in response to His invitation?

Encourage them to think about “this day” and not necessarily four weeks from now.

Also it may help to encourage them that their invitation might be related to the word or phrase, or the emotion or feeling they sensed from the text.

After this give them time to meditate again on their invitation and then allow them to share the Lord’s invitation to them.

5. Finish the time using the liturgy: praying the canticle out loud and praying silently for the person on their left and right.
6. Close as you began: In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.