

What is the spiritual practice of Lectio Divina?

Lectio Divina, or the devotional reading of Scripture, is an opportunity to give regular attention to activities that have identified the people of God for centuries. In the history of the early church, much like the patterns that identified God's people in the Old Testament, the day was divided up into various occasions for pause that allowed intentional reflection on the scriptures and prayer. These were described as the daily offices and gave a particular rhythm to each day in the life of the believer.

The basic offices were defined as Morning Prayer, Mid-day prayer, and Evening prayer. To these other occasions often included were vespers and various "night watches". For the believer the day began reflecting and meditating on God and His word. This was often done in a corporate setting since early on there was not the availability of printed text. This put the emphasis on listening to the word as it was recited or read. It also required using the memory to retain what was heard.

The word "listen" in both Greek and Latin carries with it the idea of obedience, so that when the believers gathered to listen it was not just to understand more, but also to see their lives transformed by greater and greater obedience to what they heard of God's word. The prayers that they prayed were a reflection of this listening and, as Eugene Peterson puts it, were "answering speech to God's initiating Word".

Why might it be valuable to practice?

The discipline known as Lectio Divina, which translated means divine reading, is one of many spiritual disciplines practiced since the early centuries of the church. It is one way to meditate on the Word of God that encourages transformation. It is a way that we listen for the voice of God speaking personally to us through the Scriptures and then, having first listened, respond to His voice in prayer and obedience. It is based on the belief that God spoke in times past, is speaking now, and will continue to speak into this world His life-giving words of truth, love, and grace.

This method of enjoying the Scriptures seeks to keep the word of God in a relational context where dialogue takes place and relationship develops. It encourages listening to the Bible as more than just religious information or life principles. It encourages listening for God's voice, much like the prophet Samuel was encouraged to do in I Samuel 3 when he prayed "Speak Lord, for Your servant is listening".

Practicing Lectio Divina/devotional reading encourages our listening skills and calls for each of us to reverently observe silence before God's eternal Word. Too often we are consumed with our own inner monologue and our need to be heard. We are so filled with what we have to say and our comments on life that there is no room to listen. There often is no room in the soil of our lives in which the seed of God's word can find room to grow. The discipline of Lectio Divina encourages making space to listen for the voice of the Creator, sustainer, and redeemer of all life. It is transformative to our lives when we truly hear, as God intends, His word for our lives and respond obediently to that word.

How might one participate in this practice?

Within the church, and especially monastic life, this practice and form of prayer was used to further devotion to the Lord. Guigo II (1188 AD) systematized this monastic style of meditative scripture reading known as Lectio Divina. Though the classic practice of Lectio Divina utilizes four stages in the process of praying the Scriptures, I have enjoyed using a modified version of the practice, which uses three stages of reflecting upon God's Word. Each stage is identified by a particular prompt that precedes each of the three readings of the text. These three prompts help guide the listening experience.

This modified discipline of Lectio Divina is comprised of three readings, with prompts which includes:

1-The first reading: “Listen for the word or phrase from the text that Jesus would give you as a gift this morning.” What is a particular word or phrase that stands out to you from the text?

2-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? How does this passage, word or phrase make you feel? Where have you noticed this emotion in some other aspect of your life? What might the Lord be calling you to attend to in regards to this emotion or feeling?

3-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? How might the Lord be inviting you to join Him in His agenda this day? Your invitation may be related to your word or phrase, or to your emotion or feeling, so continue to meditate upon what you have heard.