

Lectio Divina: A Biblical Meditation Practice

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | May 25, 2023



I recently attended a Christian mental-health conference in which one of the speakers, [Gary Oliver, ThM, PhD](#), led the group in a form of Christian meditation called *Lectio Divina*.

Translated literally as “divine reading,” *Lectio Divina* is an ancient Christian practice that goes all the way back to Origen of Alexandria in the third century. The intention of the practice is to help the Christian internalize the Scripture beyond mere fact or head knowledge to a deep experience, heart appreciation, and practical living out of the things of God. This style of meditation is designed to help the believer in Christ engage in purposeful practices that cooperate with God for the healing of their entire being—spirit, soul, and body.

At the conference, Dr. Oliver gave each attendee a handout that included a brief history of *Lectio Divina*, some instructions, and a copy of Psalm 1:1-3 from four different versions: King James, New Living Translation, *The Message*, and *The Remedy of the Lord in Song: The Psalms*.

I did not know that Dr. Oliver was going to speak or that he was going to lead the entire group in a thoughtful, hour-long reflection of one of the psalms, especially not one that included *The Remedy* paraphrase. But it just so happened that Come and Reason Ministries was offering free copies of *The Remedy of the Lord in Song: The Psalms* for the participants, and many attendees, who came from all over the country, took one. Many personally thanked me for the paraphrase, telling me how much they

were blessed from meditating upon *The Remedy* version.

In the aftermath of that meeting, I decided to research *Lectio Divina* more and then share this method of Christian meditation with you.

Lectio Divina has four distinct actions or steps:

- Bible reading
- Meditation upon the passage read, which means reflecting on its meaning
- Prayer (conversation with God) about the passage
- Contemplation or experiencing its application to the inner workings of one's heart, attitudes, motives, and affections—i.e., abiding in and experiencing the Holy Spirit applying the truth to the heart.

A couple of important points about *Lectio Divina*: First, this form of meditation always starts with the inspired Word of God. If one replaces Scripture with other writings, then the meditation will serve to strengthen those writings' ideas into one's being rather than God's Word.

A second point is that this form of meditation requires deep thinking, reflection, active thought, and communion/prayer with God. It is *not* an emptying of the mind, nor is it a repetitive mantra. The goal is to expand our finite awareness, both cognitively and experientially, of our knowledge of God, so that we may *know* God for ourselves just as Jesus prayed that we would (John 17:3).

As we engage with God, actively connecting with Him and applying His methods to our lives, we experience healing, cleansing, recreation, renewal, transformation, which is also known as sanctification:

May God himself, the God of peace, **sanctify you** through and through. May your whole **spirit, soul and body** be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23 NIV84).

God wants to sanctify, heal, make us holy in spirit, soul, and body.

Lectio Divina meditation engages all aspects of our being. We engage our body when we disengage from the daily activities of life, put down the digital devices, and sit quietly with God, often in nature—breathing in the fragrance of the flowers, hearing the songs of the birds, appreciating the beautiful rainbow, feeling the warmth of the sunshine, being caressed by the gentle breeze. Our experience in the natural world that God has created stimulates our senses and turns our minds toward our Creator in awe and appreciation.

In such a state of reverence, we turn our attention to the written word, focusing upon a specific passage of Scripture, and in that place of natural quiet, we meditate deeply upon the message of God. We reach out to God with our heart, reflecting upon the meaning, asking Him for greater insight, understanding, and wisdom. We praise God for His providence, presence, faithfulness, and goodness and for connecting the truths in Scripture in our minds and for its application to our life at that moment in time.

And then we pour out our affection, love, appreciation, and adoration to God, inviting His Spirit to cleanse and purify our attitudes, feelings, and longings to be ever more united with His so that we

experience the joy, love, and presence of God in our inmost being.

I hadn't heard the term *Lectio Divina* before Dr. Oliver introduced me to it. But as I studied out what this method of meditation was functionally doing, I realized that its steps are the very practices I had been doing throughout my Christian journey because I had read other Christian writers who described these very things without using that Latin term.

Most interesting, I found that one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church advocated these very same practices, also without ever using the term *Lectio Divina*. Consider the following historical quotes, keeping in mind the four components of *Lectio Divina*: Bible reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation.

Merely to hear or to **read the word** is not enough. He who desires to be profited by the Scriptures **must meditate upon the truth that has been presented to him**. By earnest attention and **prayerful** thought he **must learn the meaning of the words of truth**, and **drink deep of the spirit** [contemplation] of the holy oracles (*Christ's Object Lessons*, 59).

It would be well for us to spend **a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ**. We should take it point by point, and **let the imagination grasp each scene**, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, **our confidence** in Him will be more constant, **our love** will be quickened, and we shall be more **deeply imbued with His spirit**. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross (*The Desire of Ages*, 83).

We are living in the most solemn period of this world's history. The destiny of earth's teeming multitudes is about to be decided. Our own future well-being and also the salvation of other souls depend upon the course which we now pursue. We need to be **guided by the Spirit of truth**. Every follower of Christ should earnestly inquire: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" We need to humble ourselves before the Lord, with fasting and **prayer**, and to **meditate** much upon **His Word**, especially upon the scenes of the judgment. We should now seek a **deep and living experience in the things of God** (*The Great Controversy*, 601)

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." If Christ is our personal Saviour, we shall be **meditating** upon his goodness and mercy and love. His presence will be with the believing, **praying soul**. If the believer has an **intelligent knowledge** of what prayer means, he will not only have stated **seasons of prayer**, and, after engaging in prayer at these seasons, think that his duty is done, but he will understand by **experience** what the Scripture means when it says, "Enoch walked with God." He will continually keep his mind uplifted toward God, and **communion with God** will give more and more desire for God, and the mind will be enlarged by **contemplating** the character of God. Thus he will be

feeding on the flesh and blood of the Son of God, who declares that he is the bread of life sent down from heaven (Sabbath School Worker, April 1, 1895, par. 1).

Regardless of what you call it, I encourage you to take time daily to be apart from this busy world in order to spend time with God, to read His Word, meditate deeply upon its meaning, talk to God about it, and invite the Holy Spirit into your heart to bring the truths home to your inmost experience.