



Lectio Divina

— Lectio Divina —

*I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and **to know this love that surpasses knowledge.***

— Ephesians 3:17-19

How can I “**know**” something that “**surpasses knowledge**”? How is this possible? Does Paul mean we should know something that is beyond knowing? Can we know something that cannot be known? Paul is attempting the almost impossible task of describing “*the love of Christ.*” And he uses this paradoxical language to describe a love that is so large and so vast that we can pursue it our entire lifetime and never finish knowing it!

We are designed with an inborn capacity to see, to sense, and to know God. We are given the gift of his “*image*” (Gen 1:26-27). His morality is built into our DNA, and we are attracted to the rhythm of his creation all around us. God gives us the ability to see, hear, taste, touch and smell all of it. God is everywhere. He is embedded in everything. There is no place I can go that he is not fully present. And knowing God is an adventure that will never end because there will always be more of him to know. As A. W. Tozer has written:

*To have found God and still to pursue Him
is the soul's paradox of love. ¹*

And so, there is always a choice before us — ignore the rhythm of creation, disregard the gift of God’s “*image*” — or step away from the busyness of life, take the time to sit quietly in God’s presence, with God’s word, allowing him to feed and nourish our souls as more and more we come to know him.

THE PURPOSE OF LECTIO DIVINA:

Lectio Divina is Latin for “*divine reading,*” “*spiritual reading,*” or “*holy reading,*” and it is one way to feed and nourish our knowledge and love of God. It is an ancient, contemplative Christian practice that combines a slow, mindful reading of the biblical text with careful reflection and silent prayer.

It is not the comprehensive, historical, theological study of scripture that we often undertake. ² As important as these in-depth studies are, we put

them aside for another time. The purpose of Lectio Divina is to hear, in silence, in this moment, through this reading, what God is saying to us right now. What do we hear that feeds and nourishes our faith right now?

THE PRACTICE OF LECTIO DIVINA:

Lectio Divina traditionally follows five simple steps or movements. The time spent on each step, and the total time devoted is determined by each person. For the first few experiences, take just a few minutes to work through the steps to familiarize yourself with the practice. Soon you will become comfortable with each step and can allow more time.

SIX MOVEMENTS:

1. READY (*silencio*)

- Prepare to hear from God with stillness, alertness, and openness.
- Choose a place where you can be quiet and undisturbed.
- Sit in a comfortable chair. Allow yourself to relax. Take slow, deep breaths.
- Become aware of yourself — your thoughts and your feelings.
- Picture yourself in God's presence, fully aware of his love for you.
- Express your willingness to hear from God by using a brief prayer such as "Here I am," or "Prepare my heart to hear your Word," or "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

2. READ (*lectio*)

- When you sense your heart is prepared, begin reading the scripture you have chosen.
- Read slowly, perhaps aloud or in soft whispers.
- Pause between words and phrases, allowing them to penetrate and resonate in you.
- Notice any word, phrase, or idea that catches your attention.
- Pause and repeat that word or phrase softly to yourself. Allow it to sit in your mind as you ponder its meaning.
- If it helps, write down the word, phrase, or thought that resonated with you.

3. REFLECT (*meditatio*)

- Continue to repeat and meditate on the word, phrase or idea that caught your attention.
- You do not have to know why it caught your attention. Simply sit in silence with it. Allow time to pass. Don't be in a hurry.
- If random thoughts enter your mind don't be discouraged. Simply

offer them to God and return to your word, phrase, or idea.

- What thoughts come to mind as you reflect on the word, phrase or idea? How might God be using it to bring about a positive change in you?
- Pay attention to your own thoughts, emotions, and imagination. What do you perceive and sense?
- If it helps, write down your reflections.

4. **RESPOND** (*oratio*)

- Now — begin to speak to God. With honesty and vulnerability pray to your Father.
- Tell God what word, phrase, or idea captured your attention and what came to mind as you reflected on it. Tell him what you were feeling and thinking about as you sat in silence listening and pondering.
- Respond from the word, phrase or idea — i.e. *“Thank you” “I’m sorry” “Please help me.”*
- If it helps, write down your prayer.

5. **REST** (*contemplatio*)

- Move from prayer back to a place of rest and to quiet stillness
- Focus on the fact that God is with you, allowing you to wait and rest in his presence, like a child quietly leaning against its mother or father.
- This is a posture of safety, security and calm.

6. **RESOLVE** (*Incarnatio*)

- Now you move from your encounter with God in his Word back out into your day-to-day world.
- Consider how you will use the Word God gave, how you can live it out in the company of other people.
- As you walk through your day continue to listen to the Word God planted in your heart. How can it equip you for life today? Will you encounter people or opportunities where you can share or act out the change God is bringing to your heart?
- Look for ways to act out the Word that God gave you.

Some might react to Lectio Divina fearing that it can replace an objective study of Scripture with a subjective style, causing us to stray from the original meaning of God’s Word. While this is a reasonable caution that needs to be seriously considered, both sides of the issue warrant careful, balanced thought. The need for careful Bible study is always important. In fact, it is the beginning point. As we approach God’s Word, the **first** question should always be, *“What did this passage of scripture*

mean to its original audience?" (objective) rather than, *"What does this passage mean to me?"* (subjective).

However, both subjective and objective approaches can become problematic. Sometimes Bible study can become an academic exercise that never moves beyond language, history, and grammar. We end up understanding more about the wording of a passage of Scripture than we do about the difference those words should make on the way we live our lives.

Spiritual Formation Professor, Richard Peace puts it this way —

The choice ought not to be between dry scholasticism and irresponsible subjectivism. We need both approaches to Scripture. We need analysis and application. We need knowledge and insight. We need to listen with our minds and with our hearts. If the Bible is, as we claim, the inspired Word of God, then we need to approach it so as to understand what God is saying to us, and to hear God say this to us in the context of our lives. ³

The practice of Lectio Divina is deeply rooted in the belief that the Holy Spirit is present in the Holy Scriptures — *"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints, and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12). Therefore, we can trust God Himself to be a part of Divine Reading, engaging us in "active" spiritual formation. We can trust God to do good work.

SUGGESTED SCRIPTURES FOR LECTIO DIVINA:

Psalm 23:1-6

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 121:1-8

I lift up my eyes to the mountains — where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not

let your foot slip — he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you — the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm — he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Matthew 5:3-10

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Mark 1:35

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Philippians 4:8

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.

Romans 12:18

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

2 Corinthians 5:21

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 A. W. Tozer, [The Pursuit of God](#) (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1982), p. 15.

2 David G. Benner, [Opening to God: Lectio Divina and Life as Prayer](#) (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2010), p. 48. Richard J. Foster, [Meditative Prayer](#) (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), pgs 24-25.

3 Richard Peace, [Contemplative Bible Reading](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998) p. 18.

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