

Benedictine Prayer

*LECTIO DIVINA*¹

1. ***Lectio.*** After settling yourself before God (perhaps with the Breathing Prayer), begin with *reading (lectio)* a passage of scripture, one that is perhaps 10–20 verses long. Stop when a word or phrase really “shimmers,” becoming a vibrant transparency of God for you. The intent is not to get to the end of a passage but to the bottom of it in God, to the word through which God touches you now, the word that becomes an icon for you. This is not always a strong awareness. Sometimes a word may shimmer only faintly, but enough to give you an obscure sense of God’s presence through it.
2. ***Meditatio.*** Move toward an understanding of God in the word: the step of *reflection (meditatio)*. This step involves the use of your cognitive capacity to reflect on the possible spiritual meaning of the word for your life, and at times for the larger community’s life. Do not try to force a meaning. This may not be clear. God is at work in you at a deep precognitive level, and you do not have to understand clearly what is happening. This will emerge as it is really important for you to know. Your steady trust and openness to God is more fundamental.
3. ***Oratio.*** Move to active *prayer (oratio)*: for your heart to open to God through this word in direct communion, and for your will to open to God in responsive action, as may be called for. This may involve words, thoughts, feelings, desires, resolutions, commitments; sorrow, repentance, gratitude, praise, petition. Let this time be a dialogue, where you speak, and you continue to hear God speaking to you.
4. ***Contemplatio.*** Finally, move into a *still presence (contemplatio)* in the spaciousness of God. Seek to simply rest in your larger identity in God, through and behind the images and feelings that may arise.

Reflection Questions

1. What “word” stopped you and what happened through the *lectio divina* process? You should note that the four steps need not be rigid. They may naturally flow in a different order. The contemplative presence of step 4, for example, may come and go between the other steps.
2. How does the Benedictine method of *Lectio divina* differ from ways that you have previously *studied* Scripture?
3. What barriers to God’s presence do you find in praying with Scripture (in yourself and in the words?)
4. How has God’s presence surprised you through scriptural prayer?

¹ Adapted from Tilden Edwards, *Living in the Presence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), pp. 93–94.