

INTRODUCTION TO LECTIO DIVINA

Bible meditation practice that helps us to slow down, enjoy God's presence, and hear his particular, loving word to us at a particular moment in time.

PART 1 - VISION FOR SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

SCRIPTURE | JOHN 15:1-11

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

READ

It is our prayer that we would be abiding missionaries – that we would know how dearly beloved we are by the Father and remain (abide) in that love throughout our days. Then, from a place of deep restedness in the Father's love, that we would be motivated to share the good news of his love in word and deed with our friends, neighbors, and coworkers.

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:10-11)

This is the premise for spiritual practices (aka spiritual disciplines). Practices to foster a deeper life with God so that we can enjoy greater intimacy with God and from that place engage in life on mission. As a church and as a community, we are going to

collectively engage several spiritual practices this year. We'll engage the practice of Bible Reading this quarter and then Service next quarter.

PART 2 - BIBLE READING¹

This quarter, we will focus on deepening our life with God through the intentional practice of Bible reading and meditation. For some of us, reading our Bible may seem like one of the most basic spiritual practices. Maybe you grew up hearing that you needed to “read your Bible and pray every day.” Yet, it has become like flossing; you know it's good for you, but you don't particularly look forward to it (or take the time to do it).

In his book, *The Attention Merchants*, author Tim Wu writes, “when we reach the end of our days, our life experience will equal what we have paid attention to, whether by choice or default.” To put it another way, our lives and character will be shaped by what, or who, we give our attention to. This is why discipleship starts with *being with Jesus*. We will not live on the mission of Jesus unless we give our attention to Jesus. And we cannot give our attention to Jesus, the Word made flesh, if we are not paying attention to Him in the Bible, God's written Word.

When we come to meet with God in His Word, we must be careful that our primary aim is to know God and be with Him; not merely to gain information. As one author writes, “Our desire to know more, read more, and study more can be another expression of our culture and its acquisitive nature. Knowing God, not knowing more, is the goal.” We can easily approach Scripture with the goal of gaining knowledge and knowing more, but without a desire to know God. Filling our minds with more truth, but not submitting to God in the process is incredibly dangerous. It's possible for Scripture reading to become a way of “doing something” so that we don't make space to actually “be with Jesus.”

German pastor, theologian, and anti-Nazi dissident Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Just as you do not analyze the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all. That is meditation.” This way of meditating on Scripture has been practiced by Christians for centuries. Often referred to as “Lectio Divina” or “Divine Reading”, this practice of Scripture reading “invites us into God's presence to listen to His particular, loving word to me at this particular moment in time.” (Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*).

The first 1,500 years of church history were characterized by this kind of Scripture reading. Because most people did not have their own personal Bible or could not read, they relied on learning to listen to Scripture read with an ear bent toward hearing from God. While we need to take time to study our own Bible; we can benefit from this ancient practice of learning to hear Scripture and receive it as God's specific Word for us in that moment.

Jesus told His disciples, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (Jn. 15:7) For us to learn to abide in Jesus, His words must abide in us. We are invited to let His words abide in us through the practice of personal, devotional reading and meditation on Scripture as we meet with Him regularly. No matter where you are in your Bible reading journey, we hope to engage or re-engage with this ancient practice and hear from God through His Word.

PART 3 - LECTIO DIVINA

This week, commit to a daily time when you will read and meditate on God's Word. You may find it helpful to do this first thing in the morning. Rather than giving your attention first to the news, social media, or email, give your attention to Jesus through His Word. Or, maybe you want to set aside time on your lunch break or in the evening before bed. Whatever you choose, set aside at least 20 minutes to be with Jesus in His Word.

There are many ways to engage with Scripture. Sometimes, it can be helpful to cover a lot of ground and read more broadly. However, the goal of this individual practice is to help you learn to read Scripture not primarily as a study, but as a way to meet God and hear from Him. The method, called Lectio Divina ("Divine Reading"), was developed by Christians in the early church and has been used for centuries.

Before you start, pick the passage you will read. Many people follow plans like the Revised Common Lectionary to tell them where to read each day (see DailyLectio App). Others pick a book of the Bible to read through. If you're not sure what to read, start with a Psalm or a Gospel passage. Make sure you pick a shorter passage (one or two paragraphs) for this exercise. You can remember the flow for Lectio Divina through the acronym: BREAD.

1. Be Still (Silencio)

Find a place where you can encounter God and then take a minute in stillness. Come into God's presence, turn off your phone, breathe, and intentionally release the chaos and noise in your mind to Him. Take a few minutes to settle into this silence. As internal noise rises in your heart (ex. anxiety, your todo list, etc), entrust it to your Father. Ask the Spirit to open your eyes and speak through His Word.

2. Read (Lectio)

Read a Bible passage slowly (out loud, if possible). As you read, when a word or phrase catches your attention, don't keep reading. Stop and attend to what God is saying to you. Be open to the word. Don't analyze it or judge it. Listen and wait. If desired, write a verse or phrase down that catches your attention.

3. Encounter (Meditatio)

Read the passage a second time out loud. Savor the words. Imagine that you are encountering Jesus through it. If you're reading the Gospel, imagine yourself on the scene, seeing what Jesus is saying or doing first-hand. If you're reading poetry like the Psalms, imagine yourself feeling what the writer is expressing to God. You get the idea. Your goal is to look at God first-hand through the passage.

4. Apply (Oratio)

Read the passage slowly a third time, asking the Spirit to reveal what He wants you to see or hear from God. If you encounter silence, that's okay. The Spirit may bring gentle conviction, encouragement, hope, or even an invitation to action. Is there something the Spirit wants to say to encourage you?

5. Devote (Contemplatio)

Rest, and Wait in the Presence of God. Allow some time for the word to sink deeply into your soul. Yield and surrender yourself to God.

End your time in prayer, devoting yourself and your day to God. Ask for the Spirit's power to live in light of His Word. Consider writing a word or a phrase down to carry with you during the day as a reminder to your busy (forgetful, and/or easily distracted) heart and mind. Consider who you might share this with, whether your Huddle, spouse, children, or someone else.

¹ Note: Part 2 & Part 3 are adapted from spiritual formation guides written by Ken Flower & Amy Lathrop at Doxa Church