

## HOLY READING (LECTIO DIVINA)<sup>1</sup>

There are many different ways to study the Bible, but how do we study the Bible so that it shapes and forms us? Many have learned to read the Bible for information, but Holy Reading is a method that helps us to understand and hear God's word in a way that can transform us. This is a contemplative way of reading and praying through the Scriptures that is traditionally called Lectio Divina. 'Lectio' means to read and listen. So this practice could also be called 'Listening for God'.

### The Process

There are four steps in the process of Holy Reading, whereby we begin by reading the text and conclude with prayer.

#### 1. Reading and Listening

To practice Holy Reading we learn to develop the ability to hear what God is saying to us as we read the scriptures. Find a quiet place you enjoy, take a few moments to become still and then pray, asking God to speak into your life from his word. Read a short passage of scripture, and as you are reading listen for a word or phrase or concept that catches your attention. Try not to focus too much on trying to understand the passage with your mind, but listen to what speaks to your heart. You may find it helpful to read out loud. This helps to slow down the pace and may keep your mind from wandering.

#### 2. Meditation

The second step is meditation. Having read and listened for a word or phrase or concept that speaks to you in a personal way, take a few minutes to meditate upon this. Meditation is more than thinking about an idea; to meditate means to ponder or to mull over in your mind a thought or concept. Meditation involves taking in the word of God and allowing it to interact with our thoughts and hopes and dreams.

#### 3. Prayer

The third step is prayer. God has spoken to us through the Bible and we have meditated upon what he has said; now we speak back to God. This reinforces the concept that prayer is a dialogue and not a monologue. God speaks and we speak. Because God addresses different issues in each person's life, each of our prayers will be quite different. Your prayer might focus on thanking God for some insight he has given to you, or you might seek guidance from him, or you might ask God for forgiveness, or your prayer might be one of adoration and praise. Do not try to censor your prayer by speaking what you think God wants to hear rather than speaking from your heart. Speak plainly and directly. What you will discover is that God's word speaks powerfully into your life, and from that place you speak back to God.

#### 4. Contemplation

The final movement of Holy Reading is to simply rest in the presence of God. There is no agenda. You have read God's word, meditated upon it, and as God has spoken into your life, you have spoken back to God. Now you simply wait silently in God's presence. For some this will be difficult, especially if you are an extrovert. If you find your mind wandering, simply go back and read the text, meditate on it, and rest in the presence of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from "Holy Reading to Renew the Soul" by Rev. Dr. David Sherbino, available at: <http://presbyterian.ca/resources-ef/>

## Holy Reading on Your Own

If you are engaging in this practice for the first time, there are a few simple guidelines to follow that may be helpful. You may find it useful to write down this exercise in a prayer journal.

1. **Listen for the Word of God**
  - a. Sit in silence for a few minutes.
  - b. Read the passage slowly and possibly out loud.
  - c. Listen for a word or idea that captures your attention.
  - d. Say the word or idea over in your mind. If you are journaling, write it down.
  - e. Remain silent for two minutes following the reading as you meditate.
  
2. **Ask: How is my life touched by the Word of God?**
  - a. Read the passage a second time.
  - b. After reading the text, sit in silence for two minutes and meditate upon this question.
  - c. Write down any insights that you might have received.
  
3. **Ask: What does God want me to do with this?**
  - a. Read the passage a third time.
  - b. After the reading, sit in silence for two minutes and meditate upon this question.
  - c. Write down what you discern God wants you to do.
  - d. Pray based on what God has spoken into your life. You may find it helpful to write out the prayer. You can go back later and reflect on what you have written.
  
4. **Rest in God**
  - a. When you conclude your prayer, simply rest in God's presence.
  - b. You might write in your journal any thoughts that could be helpful to keep as a reminder throughout the day.
  - c. Conclude this time with a short prayer of thanksgiving.

## Holy Reading in a Group

Holy Reading can be done by individuals or in groups. This might include your family, church members, friends or some other small group. In a group setting there will be a leader who will lead the group through the four stages, reading the chosen text and asking the reflection questions. However, there are some different steps to take when you read as a group as compared to reading the passage on your own.

**First**, the leader reads the passage out loud, and participants listen for a word or concept that speaks to them. In the silence, they meditate upon that word or concept. Then the reader will invite each person to simply share this word or concept with the group.

**Second**, the scripture is read again. In the silence, participants meditate upon the word or concept they've chosen and how it speaks to their lives. The reader will invite each person to share with the group, the connection between the word and their life.

**Third**, the scripture is read again. In the silence, each person meditates upon their word or concept and what God is inviting them to do in response. This is now shared with the group.

**Fourth**, the group takes a time of silence to rest in God's presence. Then each person is prayed for by a member of the group so that they may respond to God's invitation.

In a group, there may be times when a person needs to process this information over a period of time. We also need to be sensitive to people who may not feel comfortable sharing what they feel is personal. People always need to have the option of saying nothing. As a group grows in trust and commitment to one another, the depth of sharing will increase.

## **Holy Reading Passages**

Any passage from the Bible may be useful for Holy Reading, but here are a few to get you started

### **The Sermon on the Mount**

Matthew 5:1-12  
Matthew 5:13-16  
Matthew 5:17-20  
Matthew 5:21-26  
Matthew 5:27-30  
Matthew 5:31-37  
Matthew 5:38-42  
Matthew 5:43-48  
Matthew 6:1-4  
Matthew 6:5-8  
Matthew 6:9-15  
Matthew 6:16-18  
Matthew 6:19-24  
Matthew 6:25-34  
Matthew 7:1-6  
Matthew 7:7-11  
Matthew 7:12-14  
Matthew 7:15-23  
Matthew 7:24-29

### **The Sermon on the Plain**

Luke 6:17-19  
Luke 6:20-26  
Luke 6:27-31  
Luke 6:32-36  
Luke 6:37-38  
Luke 6:39-42  
Luke 6:43-45  
Luke 6:46-49

### **Other Passages**

Matthew 16:13-20  
Matthew 16:21-28  
Matthew 18:1-5  
Matthew 22:34-40  
Matthew 19:13-15  
Matthew 19:16-26  
Matthew 19:27-30  
Matthew 20:20-28  
Luke 9:18-22  
Luke 9:23-27  
Luke 9:46-48  
Luke 10:25-28  
Luke 10:29-37  
Luke 10:38-42  
Luke 12:13-21  
Luke 12:22-34  
Luke 13:1-5  
Luke 18:9-14  
Luke 18:15-17  
Luke 18: 18-30  
Luke 19:1-10  
Acts 2:35-42  
Acts 2:43-47  
Romans 12:1-3  
Romans 12:4-8  
Romans 12:9-13  
Romans 12:14-21  
1 Corinthians 9:21-27