INSTRUCTIONS FOR LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is an ancient spiritual practice from the Christian monastic tradition. In Lectio Divina, we seek to experience the presence of God through reading and listening, prayer, meditation and contemplation.

Lectio Divina can be done as an individual or as a group.

Practicing Lectio Divina Individually

Begin by choosing a section of scripture that you would like to read and pray. You can choose the text randomly or use one of the passages that are the focus theme for this weekend. The goal is to listen for God and experience his presence.

Next, do what you must to quiet and prepare yourself to hear from God. If you need to find a quiet place. Sit in silence for several minutes, or sit in a comfortable chair, take whatever posture will help you prepare to receive and experience God’s presence.

Reading/Listening (Lectio)
When you sense that your heart is prepared, begin by slowly reading the passage of Scripture that you have selected. Don’t move quickly through any sentence or phrase. As you read, pay attention to what word or phrase or idea catches your attention.

Meditation (Meditatio)
Next, begin to meditate on the word, phrase, or idea that captured your attention. Repeat it again and again. What thoughts come to mind as you meditate on this word, phrase or idea? What are you reminded of in your life? What does it make you hope for? Meditation is no easy task. As you try to concentrate, don’t be disappointed if random thoughts enter your head. As they do, offer them to God.

Prayer (Oratio)
Now begin to speak to God. Tell God what word, phrase or idea captured your attention and what came to mind as you meditated upon it. How is God using this word, phrase or idea to bless and transform you? Tell God what you have been thinking and feeling as you’ve listened and meditated. Tell God how you hope this word, phrase or idea will change your heart to be more like his.

Contemplation (Contemplatio)
Finish by focusing your attention on the fact that God’s presence is with you. If as you try to focus on God’s presence you sense a need to read the text again, or continue meditating, or to simply continue talking with God, allow yourself to do so. As you do, know that you are in the presence of God.
**Materials Needed for the Alpha and Omega Station**

This station is designed as an extended meditation on the letters and sounds of language. Minimally it should include paper, pens and pencils, a hard writing surface, and the printed prompt below. Magnetic words or letters or a pile of tiles/letters from something like Bananagrams (or Scrabble) and newspapers/magazines with scissors and glue for cutting out/making a collage acrostic would be lovely!

**Alpha and Omega Prompt**

In the Book of Revelation John gives “witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:2). This risen Jesus Christ then identifies himself to John alphabetically! “I am the Alpha and the Omega”—he is the alphabet, all the letters from A to Z, that is, the stuff, the vowels and consonants out of which all words are made. Jesus speaks in such ways that the brokenness of the world and our experience develop into a dazzling holiness that evokes worship on a grand scale, involving everything and everyone in heaven and on earth.

Meditate on what it means that Jesus “is the alphabet.” Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, is not just the meaning of words, nor the sound of words, but is every consonant, every vowel, every sound uttered and every letter printed. If nothing else, this means that words matter, and thus that letters matter.

To focus your attention on the letters and sounds of language, choose a word that is meaningful to you. You may choose a word that expresses a hope or longing, an area of pain or sorrow. Or you may choose a word of praise or blessing, or a word that represents a happy memory with God. Whatever your word, use it to form an acrostic.

Write the letters of the word vertically along the left margin of your page. If you prefer, use the magazines or newspapers provided to cut out the letters and glue them rather than writing them. Then, after each initial letter, write a word, phrase, or sentence that elaborates on some aspect of your word. Again, you can cut out letters/words to make a collage with the same result as manually writing the words.

Take your time and allow these beginning letters to prompt your imagination. Many psalms are acrostics (in the original Hebrew). This is an ancient tool for focusing attention on the God of the alphabet, using every “jot and tittle” (Matt 5:18, KJV) to direct our praises and petitions.
Materials Needed for Become Like a Child:
Illustrated children’s storybook Bibles and storybooks related to biblical topics, regular version of the Bible (any translation is fine). Blank paper. Crayons and markers. This station should be in a cozy spot, such as a sofa, bean bag chair, comfy armchair, or pile of floor cushions and blankets. It ought to mimic the childlike pleasure of curling up with a good book. This station should include a basket or two filled with children’s Bible storybooks. In addition, this station should include blank paper, an “adult” bible (e.g., ESV), pencils and crayons, and the printed prompt below.

Prompt for Become Like a Child
The Holy Scriptures are story-shaped. Reality is story-shaped. In fact, our lives are story-shaped. Our lives are part of the truest Story ever told. Sometimes children’s Bible storybooks help provide us with new insights, new images, fresh ways of imagining familiar scriptures.

You are invited to simply curl up with a children’s book and enjoy the fresh simplicity of the words and images. Look through them, find favorite stories, enjoy the illustrations, notice the details. After relaxing with several books, consider: what is your favorite Bible story? Read it in the provided “adult” Bible.

How might you illustrate this story? What colors, textures, shapes, and lines best convey the feel of this passage? Which characters ought to be prominent? Does a literal or abstract image best capture what is most meaningful to you in the passage? Sketch your illustration on a piece of paper. Use the crayons!

You do not need to be a talented artist to enjoy drawing/coloring a Bible illustration. This is not High Art, but creative expression designed to strengthen your own biblical imagination. When you are done, thank God for your imagination and ask him to enlarge it as you read scripture. If you enjoyed this exercise and are feeling brave, you may wish to show your image to a friend (no critiques allowed!). Or, if you’d prefer, you are free to tuck your picture away or simply toss it in the trash. You’ve done good work!
Materials Needed for Praying in Color with the Psalms

“Praying in Color” is an effective way to focus and engage the body in prayer, and is a method easily adapted to use with Scripture. This station needs a hard writing surface, plenty of blank paper, and colorful writing utensils: black pens, colored pencils (don’t forget the sharpener!), colored gel pens, and thin markers work well. It would be wonderful to have meditative music at a low volume as a welcome addition at this station, such as monastic chant (preferably not in English, so that the words are not distracting). A Bible or two open to the Psalms, or at least bookmarked for where the Psalms are, is important. I will also provide some premade coloring sheets of the Psalms. If you have a particular set of Psalms you’d like them to focus on, provide a copy/copies.

Prompt for Color with the Psalms

The Psalms remind us that we can pray for anything. The Psalms are an extended refutation that only proper prayer is “being nice” before God. NO! Prayer is an offering of ourselves, just as we are. The second thing we realize is that prayer is access to everything that God is for us: holiness, justice, mercy, forgiveness, sovereignty, blessing, vindication, salvation, love, majesty, glory. This station uses an unusual method called “praying in color” to access the “school of prayer” that the Psalms teach us.

Praying in color is, simply, praying while doodling. It is an active, visual, and meditative way to pray: active because you draw your prayers, visual because you see your prayers, and meditative because you revisit your prayers throughout the day. This method is particularly well suited to the imagery and expressiveness of the Psalms. It helps focus the mind in prayer when words elude you and distractions abound, and often allows a release of prayer for emotionally charged situations. Praying in this way is not about making something beautiful, nor about perfection or performance. It is simply a tool for focusing your thoughts and engaging your body in the prayer process.

Instructions for Praying in Color with the Psalms

1. Begin with the Psalms. Choose a familiar Psalm, or browse through the Psalms for a while until one speaks to you. Read the Psalm several times, noticing which words and phrases particularly resonate with you. If nothing resonates, choose an attribute of God from the Psalm. Write your word, phrase, or attribute from the Psalm on your paper. Draw a shape around it. This drawing becomes a prayer space, a small prayer closet.
2. Add marks, shapes, lines and patterns. Focus on the word(s) you chose. Ask God to be part of your prayer time, with or without words. If words come, pray them; if not, enjoy the silence.
3. The Psalms often pray to God about specific situations. To do so, write the situation on your paper, or name a person for whom you want to pray. Draw around it. Add shapes, patterns, and color if desired. Connect these words to your original words, if you’d like. Keep drawing as you release the situation or person into God’s care.
4. Add other people or situations to your drawing. Think of each stroke of the pen as a prayer for them. Take a breath or say “amen” between each one.
5. Release your prayer drawing to God’s care. Read your Psalm again and thank God for his faithfulness and presence with you no matter what is going on in your life.
Materials for Confession Station
Set up requires a large, attractive bowl, a pitcher of water, and either some disposable (but aesthetically pleasing) towels or several cloth towels neatly placed nearby. You could put a shell or shells in the bowl (or around the basin).

Confession Prompt
Reflect on the water for a while:
   How does water make you think about God?
   What does it remind you of?
The Samaritan woman had gone to get water when she met Jesus. Jesus was aware of the problems and sins in her life. In the same way, he knows our hearts. He has promised that if we confess the bad things we have thought and done, He will forgive us. Jesus spoke to the woman at the well by telling her that He was the source of streams of living water.

What do you think He meant by that?
What would it look like for you to have?

Spend a moment in silence, confessing to Jesus. Know that Jesus forgives you and wipes the slate clean.
As a symbol of being made clean, pour water from the pitcher into the basin. Then, dip your hands in the water.
As you gently dry your hands, think of how even the simple act of hand-washing can be a daily reminder of the Living Water of Christ in your life.
Materials Needed for Mirrors
Either several small mirrors or one larger one propped on a table or against the wall. If it is a decent sized mirror, perhaps letters along the top reading “The Mirror of Erised” in a spiffy font would be wonderful! Provide some glass cleaner and wipes.

James 1:22-25  But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

In the book, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone (which in England is entitled Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone), Harry comes across a fascinating mirror—the Mirror of Erised. The reason Harry is able to receive the precious stone that Voldemort so desperately desires is that what Harry’s heart most desires is his family. The clever word play that J. K. Rawlings uses in telling Harry’s story, is that “Erised” is “Desire” spelled backwards.

Sometimes our desires end up getting twisted around. Maybe we’re overthinking a situation. Maybe we’re truly stuck in our sins and vices. Maybe we just live entirely too much in our heads. James was the favorite epistle of a philosopher named Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). He took James’s parable of the mirror (1:23) as a sly expose of our strategies to avoid hearing Scripture as addressed to us—like squabbling over the most difficult passages or studying “ten dictionaries and twenty-five commentaries” to indefinitely postpone really hearing what God is saying to us (certainly nothing that ever happens to any of us here in a seminary setting!).

The fundamental purpose of God’s Word is to give us true self-knowledge. It is a real mirror. And, when we look at ourselves properly in it we see ourselves as God wants us to see ourselves.

To that end, take a look at yourself—primarily your eyes, in one of these little mirrors—reflect on what it is that you are becoming. What do you spend time contemplating (“you are what you contemplate”). Kierkegaard said, “Look at yourself in the mirror, not at the mirror.” In the same way, he strongly recommended that we not approach the Bible merely as a scholar, examining “thirty thousand different ways” of reading each passage. Kierkegaard says, “This makes Scripture so complicated.”

These are simple little mirrors—we can’t see ourselves fully with them. I Corinthians 13:12 reminds us: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known”.

When you are ready, use a little spritz from the cleanser and ask for the Lord to guide your thoughts and your affections that as you work and study that you may grow more and more in your faith and see yourself as the Lord sees you.
Materials for Letting Go
A pile of smooth stones (say from Michaels or Hobby Lobby), a pail partially filled with water. You may want a splat mat/drop cloth underneath!

**LETTING GO**

Take some slow deep breaths and relax.

Begin to let go of the tensions in your body.

Feel the pressure and busyness slip away.

Breathe in God…and breathe out your tension and worries…

In front of you is a pile of stones and a pail of water. Take a stone from the pile. Imagine that all your concerns and worries are held in the stone.

Hold the stone tightly and name the concerns and worries in your mind.

Hold the stone over the pail of water.
In your own time let it go.

Watch your concerns and worries fall.
Imagine the Lord receiving each stone.

Cast your cares upon Him as you release your stone…your concern…your worry.