

8. Further Resources

Entering the silence

Anthony de Mello, *Sadhana: A Way to God* (Doubleday, 1984)

Prayer and Scripture

Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (IVP, 2005)

Lectio divina

Michael Casey, *The Art of Sacred Reading* (Dove Publications, 1995)

Enzo Bianchi, *Praying the Words* (Kalamazoo Cistercian Publications, 1998)

Thelma Hall, *Too Deep for Words* (Paulist Press, 1988)

Ignatian meditation

J S Bergen and Marie Schwan, *Praying with Ignatius of Loyola*

Willi Lambert, *The Sevenfold Yes*

Stefan Kiechle, *The Art of Discernment*

John Reilly, *Praying Matthew, Praying Mark, Praying Luke, Praying John*

Puritan Meditation

Joel R Beeke, 'The Puritan Practice of Meditation'

www.hnrc.org/files/PuritanMeditation.pdf

Scripture Union Method

www.scriptureunion.org.au



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PRAYING SCRIPTURE Leader's Guide



Anglican Diocese of Melbourne
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Download this resource free of charge from www.melbourne.anglican.com.au

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(source: www.annedroid-annedroid.blogspot.com)

Thomas Cranmer, 'A Fruitful Exhortation to the Reading and Knowledge of Holy Scripture', First Book of Homilies, 1547.

Quotes in the article on Puritan Meditation are from Richard Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, Part IV. They have been significantly abridged and the language modernized. They are based on the Christian Heritage Publications edition, (Fearn, Ross-shire: 1998), 454-672.

6. Now begin the reflective reading of Scripture, using either *lectio divina* or the Ignatian way.
7. If, after two or three weeks, it appears that the group is divided between those who relate to the Ignatian way and those who prefer *lectio divina*, a further modification is to invite people to use either way.
8. Proceed with:
 - **Read**, inviting people to either listen for a word or phrase, or place themselves with all their senses into the scene.
 - **Reflect** (spend time in quiet thought and prayer as they hear the word or phrase, or as they see themselves in the scene).
 - **Respond** (and share): what have they heard, or seen and discovered in this passage or scene? How is this passage/scene speaking into their life? What is the invitation for them from God here?
 - **Remain** – sit in prayerful thought, in silence or with music. Pray with and for each other in what God has revealed.
 - **Return** – to daily life, taking the word or image for further reflection.

7. Question and Reflection Method

Robyn Boyd

This alternate way of reflectively engaging with the Scriptures was adapted to help groups who are used to a cognitive approach to Scripture, focusing on interpreting the passage, rather than entering into it in either an Ignatian way or through *lectio divina*. It offers a two stage process which begins with a discussion of the meaning of the text before moving into a time of personal reflection and prayer.

1. Begin the study time by reading the passage twice, and inviting comments and questions. Spend 10-15 minutes discussing the background and context of the passage or reading the given reflection.
2. Now move the group to begin a reflective time. If possible, move to a different part of the room. Ideally move from sitting around a table to a comfortable setting. Light a candle. This movement can signify the shift from one mode of engagement to another.
3. As the group is used to a cognitive approach to scripture, explain this way of reflecting on the Scriptures is based on the understanding that God meets us through and in the Scriptures, and that we can hear God speaking to us in the matters of our lives, through our responsiveness to, and our attention being drawn to, words or images that emerge for us in reading his word. The objective of studying this way is not to add to our head knowledge or cognitive understanding of the passage of Scripture (i.e. the 'meaning' or intellectual study/interpretation), but to allow ourselves to hear God's voice into our lives.
4. Clarify what is expected in the reflective exercise. Have the 'instructions' printed so group members can refer to them. (When people aren't used to reflective ways of engaging with Scripture their anxiety about 'doing it right' or their default position of interpreting can get in the way.)
5. Allow a short time of silence, with background reflective music if desired.

Introduction

There are many ways to pray Scripture. This booklet offers guidelines for groups who would like to try silent communal reflection on Scripture followed by the sharing of insights and experiences. Unlike some Bible discussion groups, in these methods there is no comment or elaboration on each other's sharing.

This booklet contains suggestions for groups who are new to praying Scripture as well as various methods to try. You will find six methods of praying Scripture, from the twelfth century *lectio divina* method to the twentieth century 'African' method which was used by the Bishops of the Anglican Communion at the 2009 Lambeth Conference. Ignatian, Puritan and Scripture Union methods from the sixteenth, seventeenth and nineteenth centuries offer more ways to pray the texts. The 'Question and Reflection' method can be used by groups who are unfamiliar with a text. There is also a script to help group members to enter the silence which can be read aloud at the beginning of a session.



On Praying Scripture

Let us with fear and reverence lay up in the chest of our hearts these necessary and fruitful lessons.

Let us night and day muse and have meditation and contemplation in them.

Let us ruminare and as it were chew the cud, that we may have the sweet juice, spiritual effect, marrow, honey, kernel, taste, comfort and consolation of them.

Let us stay, quiet and certify our consciences with the most infallible certainty, truth, and perpetual assurance of them.

Let us pray to God, the only Author of these heavenly studies, that we may think, believe, live and depart hence, according to the wholesome doctrine and verities of them.

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1547.

4. The second reader reads the passage slowly. After about 1 minute, SAY: Now there is an opportunity to briefly share your response. Remember there will be no discussion or comment. (Allow time for all those who wish to share, about 5 minutes).
5. SAY: The passage will be read for a third time. After listening to the passage, you are invited to think out/write down:
'From what I've heard and shared, what do I believe God wants me to do or be?
Is God inviting me to change in any way?'
6. The third reader reads the passage slowly. Allow 3-5 minutes silence, while people think and write. SAY: Each person who so chooses now has the opportunity to speak their word or phrase, image or feeling. There will be no comment or discussion. (Allow time for those who wish to share, about 5-10 minutes).
7. SAY: We will now pray (aloud or in silence) for the person on our right, naming what was shared in the other steps (allow 3-5 minutes).
8. SAY: You may continue to pray this prayer daily until the group meets again. We will now conclude with the Lord's Prayer and a short silence (or, the Grace. Have the words available for those who would like them).

Ignatian style alternative for Step 3

At Step 3, SAY: The passage will be read again. This time, imagine yourself to be one of the characters, or a member of the crowd, in the story. Enter the experience of the text. You may speak with Jesus or another character in the text. (In Step 4, allow about 5 minutes silence after the reading)

Sources used to compile this guide to the African method include materials from the Catechumenate and a model published in 'Global Education for Mission' by Episcopal Parish Services. The assistance of Rachel McDougall is appreciated in locating these resources. Some wording is drawn from notes at www.takomaparkpc.org/AfricanBibleStudy.html

6. The African Bible Study Method

Jill Firth

This Bible study method was introduced by the African Delegation to the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church in 2008. It has been used in base Christian communities in South America. The method includes three readings of the Scripture text, interspersed with reflection, prayer and sharing. Group members have opportunities to share their responses in the group. Group members do not discuss each other's sharing. The group leader does not elaborate or build on what is said.

Before the group, ask three readers to be prepared to read the passage slowly, maybe from different translations.

Opening Prayer: O Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Welcome group members, and introduce a brief time of quiet.

1. SAY: A passage will be read slowly. Please listen for the word or phrase, image or feeling that catches your attention. After a short silence, you will be given the opportunity to speak that word, image or feeling without explanation or elaboration.
2. The first reader reads the passage slowly. Allow about 1 minute (use your watch). SAY: Each person who so chooses now has the opportunity to speak their word or phrase, image or feeling. There will be no comment or discussion. (Allow time for those who wish to share, about 3-5 minutes).
3. SAY: The passage will be read again. This time, you are invited to think or write down, 'Where does this passage touch my life (my community, our nation, our world today)? You will have a minute of silence after the reading to think out/write down your answer.

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1. Preparing to read and meditate on Scripture

Roland Ashby

This script can be read aloud at the beginning of a session to help group members to enter the silence. Allow some brief pauses where appropriate between each instruction:

Sit comfortably, but not slouched, with your back straight.

Become aware of your breathing, and begin to breathe slowly and deeply. Enjoy feeling the expansion of your rib cage and diaphragm as you breathe in. Enjoy the sensation of the breath as it enters your nose, and enjoy the sensation of release, and letting go, as you breathe out.

Give thanks to God for the simple joy of breath, and for the miracle of life he has breathed into you.

Praise God that we 'live and move and have our being' in him, in every moment of our lives.

Become aware of any tension in your body, particularly your neck, shoulders, back and head. Breathe into these areas of tension, and as you breathe out, release the tension.

Smile gently also as you breathe out, and enjoy the sensation of the muscles in your face relaxing, and letting go of the tension.

We respond in prayer, talking with God about the reading. We worship, we consider changes we might make or actions we might take. We ask for God's help for ourselves or others. We soak in God's promises. We put into action what we have read (James 1.22-25).

1. **Pray** that God will speak to you as you read his Word and that his Holy Spirit will help you to understand and respond to what you read.
2. **Read** or listen to the Bible passage, perhaps several times, listening for what God is saying to you.
3. **Reflect** on the meaning of the Bible passage, meditating on it. These questions may help you:
 - How does this passage help us to understand and relate to God?
 - How does this passage help us to understand ourselves, our situation, our relationships?
 - Is there some promise or warning or example we need to notice?

You may find it helpful to turn these questions into prayer. Here are some suggestions:

- Lord, show me yourself in your Word; help me to discover you in new ways.
- Lord, your Word is like a mirror in which we see ourselves. Show me myself in your Word today.
- Lord, help me to live by the truth you show me - to praise you, or trust you, to say sorry to you, to let you change me.

You may try writing down some of your reflections, prayers and insights.

4. **Respond in prayer** Respond to what God has shown you in his Word. This response may be worship or thanksgiving or repentance, a change of direction in your life, prayer for yourself or others.
5. **Return to daily life**, putting your prayer and insight into action. Look for opportunities to share your Bible discoveries in helpful ways with others. Source: www.su-international.org

5. Scripture Union Method

Jill Firth

The Scripture Union method began in 1878 when a teenager, Annie Marston, helped the girls in her Sunday School class to read a portion of the Bible each week and then to talk about it together on Sunday. Others asked to use her method, and Annie's friends helped her to write out the texts each week by hand. Demand continued to grow, and printed publication began with a distribution list of 6,000 readers in 1879. Over 100 years later, SU produces Bible reading notes for all ages in over 130 countries of the world.

The Scripture Union method encourages devotional, systematic, and comprehensive, Bible reading.

- **Devotional** –we read in an attitude of prayer, listening for God to speak to us through his word. We rely on the Holy Spirit to speak to us through the text. Prayer, reflection, and Scripture reading always go together, as the old jingle goes, 'Pray and read and think and pray, that's the Scripture Union way'.
- **Systematic** – we read a part of the Bible every day. Usually, we read through a whole book of the Bible or a section of a larger book.
- **Comprehensive** – we read the Old and New Testaments. We read our favourite parts and also the parts we find hard to read. All Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3.16).

We always begin with prayer, asking God to reveal himself through his word. We expect the Scriptures to be relevant to our daily lives. SU readers often pray using Psalm 119.105 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path'. After prayer and reading or listening to the text, we think prayerfully about the text and seek to understand it in its context. What does it tell me about God? About my own life? Is there a promise I can receive, an example to follow, something I can start or continue to do? Something to stop or avoid doing?

Next become aware of your anxieties, your anger and hurts, and any mental preoccupations. Gently smile as you breathe into them too, and as you breathe out, let them go. Do not push away your negative thoughts. Simply observe them, but do not identify with them. Release them on the outward breath.

Before opening the scriptures we should be like the Rich Young Man in the Gospel of Mark, who, the evangelist tells us, ran to Jesus and fell on his knees (Mark 10.17) seeking an answer to how he might find eternal life.

Pray that God will fill your heart with a passionate desire to hear his word of truth for your life, and ask his forgiveness for the many times you have not loved him or your neighbour with your whole heart.

Pray: 'Gracious and loving God, touch my heart and mind with your living word. Amen.'

Come before the Lord with humility, confessing your sins, and seeking to love and serve him with all your 'heart and mind and soul and strength.'

As you read the Scriptures, do not hurry. Read slowly and with reverence. Enjoy the sound of each word, as in poetry. Be mindful of your breath. Do not be afraid of silence. Allow pauses at the end of each verse.

Remain in silence as you listen to the Scriptures as they are read to you.

2. Praying with the Ear of the Heart

Margaret Crooks

Lectio Divina comes from the Benedictine tradition and means holy or sacred reading – but reading with a difference. *Lectio* is reading, listening to the Word of God with ‘the ear of the heart’ (St. Benedict) and responding to it both in our prayer and in the whole of our life. *Lectio* is not a preparation for prayer, but prayer itself, where we allow the Word of God to have the freedom of our minds and hearts. In *Lectio* we meet God in such a way that it will change us – if we allow it. As Abbot Stephen Ortiger said, ‘the text is both a mirror in which I see myself and a window through which I gaze on God.’

In today’s world we are overwhelmed with information and have learnt to read rapidly, selectively and critically, just to keep on top of it. *Lectio* shows us another way. *Lectio* offers us ‘holy leisure’, a space in the day for prayerful reading of the scriptures, where we read slowly, reverently and appreciatively. This is reading – not for the gathering of information or to study, but to interact with the Word of God and to respond to what God is offering us today. It is where we allow God to take control.

So how do we practise *Lectio Divina*?

First we must choose a text from the scriptures that we wish to pray with. The idea is not to cover or get through a certain amount of the text – the amount of material covered is in God’s hands, not yours.

1. Sit comfortably and relax, allowing yourself to become silent. Gently let go and relax, knowing that you are in the presence of God.
2. Now turn to the text and read it slowly and gently, savouring it, all the while listening for the word or phrase that is the Word of God for you today. God won’t reach out and shake you; God’s invitation is like that still small voice Elijah heard – an invitation to move more deeply into the Divine presence and perceive things more clearly.
3. Next, take the word or phrase and repeat it slowly to yourself, savouring it and allowing it to interact with what has been happening in your life. Ask yourself: How does this Word touch my life today? What does it mean for me today? Repeat the Word, listening with the ear of your heart, hearing the Word being addressed to you personally.

1. Read the text

A text may also be recalled from memory.

2. Reflect

a. **Consideration:** think about the text ‘to see how the matter stands between God and my own soul’ (Bishop James Ussher). Richard Baxter says: ‘Withdraw into a secret place, and set yourself wholly to the work. Take Isaac’s time and place if you can, who went forth into the field in the evening to meditate’ (Genesis 24.63).

b. **Soliloquy:** Dialogue with your own soul, as the Psalmists did (‘Awake, my soul’ Psalm 57.8; ‘Why are you cast down, O my soul?’ Psalm 42.5, 11; ‘Bless the Lord, O my Soul’ Psalm 103.1). Baxter says: ‘Urge your soul using comparisons of heavenly joys with earthly delights. Plead the case with your heart. Do not stir away, if possible, till your love flames and your joy is raised’.

3. Respond in Prayer

Meditation should include prayer, for ‘prayer is a tying a knot at the end of meditation that it doth not slip’ (Thomas Watson). ‘Call in assistance from God, mix prayers with your considerations and soliloquies, till having seriously pleaded the case with your heart, and reverently pleaded the case with God, you have pleaded yourself from a clod to a flame, from a forgetful sinner to a mindful lover,’ says Baxter.

4. Remain in God’s Presence

Take time to worship the Lord and remain in his presence. ‘Oh my Lord, while I have a thought to think, let me not forget you. While I have a tongue to move, let me mention you with delight. While I have a breath to breathe, let it be after you, and for you. While I have a knee to bend, let it bow daily at your footstool.’ (Richard Baxter)

5. Return to daily life

Consider what impact this text will have on your life. Meditation must lead to ‘particulars’ i.e. concrete changes in behaviour. (Edmund Calamy).

4. Puritan Meditation

Jill Firth

Well-known Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries include John Bunyan and Richard Baxter. Some Puritans remained inside the Church of England and some did not. Richard Baxter was Vicar of Kidderminster (south of Birmingham) in the seventeenth century. In his 600 page book, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1652), Baxter explains the method of Puritan meditation. Prayerfully reflecting on the application Scriptural truth, we seek to digest that truth and allow it to impact our own lives. 'Just as a sheep can bring up the contents of his stomach for rumination, you must use the power of choice to return to topics for further reflection', says Baxter. Meditation is reflection that employs the mind, heart and will:

I differentiate this from the common meditation of students, which is usually the mere employment of the brain. The stomach must prepare the food for the liver and spleen, which prepare for the heart and brain, and so the understanding must take in truths, and prepare them for the will, and it must receive them, and commend them to the affections. While truth is but a speculation swimming in the brain, the soul has not received it, nor taken hold of it. This is the great task in hand, to get these truths from your head to your heart.

Meditation follows Bible study, theological education or listening to sermons. After studying the Scriptures to understand God's truth, we meditate, seeking to digest that truth and allow it to impact our own lives. Prayer is threaded through all these steps.

In Psalm 1.2 the Psalmist 'meditates' (*hagah*) day and night on the instruction of God, murmuring a Scripture text aloud and turning it over in his mind. In Psalm 119, he deeply reflects (*syach*) on God's word (Ps 119.15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 148).

Personal application leading to transformation is the goal of Puritan meditation. Puritan meditation includes 'consideration' and 'soliloquy' followed by prayer. The following suggestions are based on the practice of Richard Baxter, with some additional comments from James Ussher, Thomas Watson, and Edmund Calamy.

Listen to your emotions. What are you feeling? Peacefulness, resistance, anger, sorrow? You may not like the way you are feeling, but that is all right. God is present with you in that feeling and will bring love and healing to that situation.

Explore how your life is touched by the Word. Listen to its invitation. What is God asking of you with the word? Is there some response you need to make? Ask – how can I hear what You are saying and allow it to shape my life? Speak to God. Speak as you would to someone you know who loves and accepts you. Use a journal if you wish and dialogue with God, with the Word.

4. Savour what has happened. Sit silently in God's Presence, allowing God to enfold and warm or stir your heart. Rest in God, letting the Word sink into you and receive what God is offering you.

With *Lectio*, we haven't finished when we put our book aside and leave the room. We carry the Word with us in our hearts throughout the day. God's Word continues to nourish us and to gradually reveal its meaning to us as we 'chew' or ruminate on it.

Like all prayer, *Lectio* requires discipline. We come consenting to be open and to hear God's call, and praying for strength to respond. We also come knowing that results aren't instant – it is in the waiting, the sitting with, the mulling over, that insights clearly emerge.

In his first paragraph in the Rule, St Benedict is telling us how important it is not to allow ourselves to become our own guides, our own gods; that we must be willing to listen to the voice of God in our lives and the wisdom of others. 'Benedict,' writes Joan Chittister 'says: Listen today. Start now. Begin immediately to direct your life to that small, clear voice within.' It is the voice of life, the call of love.

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3. Ignatian reflection

Alison Taylor

Have you ever taken part in a series of meditations during Holy Week, each day concentrating on one of the different people who played a close part in Jesus' passion and death – Judas, Peter, Pilate, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved', and his mother Mary? In my parish, we do this each year, and we imagine ourselves with those people, embedded right in the middle of the gospel stories of Jesus' last days. We imagine the setting of each story – whether it is the upper room of the Last Supper, or the garden of Gethsemane, or the wide public court of Jesus' trial, or the horror of Calvary hill. We try to see each scene with the eyes of God, seeing the drama of salvation, and our place in it. We ponder each person there, what they were like, how they knew Jesus, the choices they faced, how they heard or ignored the voice of God within them.

The method that my parish is using in these meditations was developed by a man called Ignatius Loyola, a Spaniard who lived in the sixteenth century and who founded the Society of Jesus. Ignatius outlined this distinctive method of prayer in his book called the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius' method for prayer is unabashed in its use of imagination. It's also important to know that much of what Ignatius taught about prayer, especially in the Spiritual Exercises, is designed to assist people in discerning God's will at important turning points in their lives. Ignatian prayer can therefore be especially helpful for someone seeking to discern their vocation in life, or – and this is saying the same thing in a different way – in discerning their part in God's mission in this world.

Before we begin a time of prayer in the Ignatian method, we make sure that we are in a quiet place, centred and calm, and then we slowly and deliberately say aloud a prayer that we know by heart. For example, we might say the Lord's Prayer.

Read

We use the gospel passage specified for that day in the Connecting with God through Prayer booklet. Gospel stories are especially valuable because we know that pondering the events of the life and ministry of Jesus, and especially his death, gives us deep nourishment for our faith. Most importantly, we are enabled to recognize the actions of Christ, as they are described in the gospels, when they occur in our own lives today.

To begin, I read the Bible story on which I am focusing, several times over. I start to imagine the story from God's perspective! I imagine how the Trinity of divine persons sees this world and its different people, some good, others bad. I imagine Jesus in the story, understanding his life as a mission from God to share with these different people the wonder of God's action in the world, to proclaim the kingdom of God.

I see in my imagination the particular scene in which the gospel story is set – a village with flat-roofed houses and dusty roads, or the Sea of Galilee, perhaps the wilderness or the hill country or the olive groves, or the narrow and winding streets of Jerusalem. I imagine the scene in as much detail as possible and I take in its sounds and smells too. I take lots of time, not rushing at all.

I now pause to bring to mind anything that I particularly desire from this time of prayer, and ask for God's grace for this. Perhaps I seek God's forgiveness or his peace or his guidance.

Reflect

I place myself in the scene that I have imagined. I may be one of the main characters in the story, or I may be in the crowd observing what is happening. I follow the dialogue and the action, perhaps being drawn to take part myself. Again, I take as much time as I need.

Respond in Prayer

When I am ready, I approach Jesus and I speak with him and listen to him. What do I say? What do I hear? This depends on my needs, my desires, and my concerns at that time. I have now entered into what Ignatius called a 'colloquy' with God, and this too is a distinctive feature of Ignatian praying – having a conversation with God, rather than simply speaking or listening to him. I may share with him intimately whatever it is I feel, seeking always to know Christ intimately and to follow him more closely in his mission.

Remain

When I have finished my colloquy, I sit in God's presence for as long as I need. I end my time of prayer by saying aloud the Lord's Prayer or another prayer that I know by heart.

Return

What is it that I will now do as a result of my prayer? I offer my intention to the Lord. I seek to walk with Jesus as I return to my everyday life.