

The Practice of *Lectio Divina* by Temperament

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This series of "Prayer Exercises by Temperament" is designed to order and balance our prayer life, so that we may offer ourselves more wholly to God through varied approaches to prayer. This series serves to provide more variety in our prayer life, in order to deepen our receptivity to God through His Word. Knowledge of our temperament type or theory is not necessary to benefit from these exercises. By applying the understanding of temperament types to our prayer life, these exercises will help expand our experience of God in prayer beyond the confines of our own personality preferences.

The basis for these Prayer Exercises is an adaptation of *Lectio Divina*, an ancient form of prayer, which in Latin means "divine" or "spiritual reading."¹ While all of the components of *Lectio* are mentioned in Scripture, and in various formats throughout Church History, the term "*Lectio Divina*" was first used in the 12th century. But its roots as a unified practice can be traced back further to the early monastic tradition in the 4th century, and to Scripture itself. Allowing the Word of God to form our minds, our hearts and our prayers is something that a number of biblical authors both exemplify and exhort us to do. The references after the description of each step of *Lectio* below illustrate their basis in Scripture.

While the particular adaptation of *Lectio Divina* being suggested here can be used on its own, it forms the basic structure for the series "Prayer Exercises by Temperament." *Lectio Divina* is traditionally comprised by four steps: Reading, Meditation, Response, and Contemplation. Following M. Robert Mulholland's example we will add two more steps: Silence to get us started, and Incarnation to finish out our prayer with the resolve to follow the promptings we experienced during prayer.²

- **Silence:** We start with a whole minute of silence to calm our heart and prepare ourselves for a spiritual meal. We are easily tempted to skip this step, and just dive into the reading. Be intentional to take the time to set aside any preoccupations that will detract our focus from the Word of God. Come with a heart open to meet Jesus in the reading. (cf. Ps 4:4b; 46:10; Hab 2:20; Jn 15:4a, 9.)
- **Reading:** One of the most unique aspects of *Lectio Divina* is this manner in which you read – slowly, repetitively, and prayerfully. Rather than breezing over the passage and reaching for a journal to record our insights, rather than moving straight to applications and requests, take time to "eat a relaxed meal" with the Lord. When we read the Word of God

¹ A recent book outlining the history and revival of this practice that can be viewed on Google Books is by Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live: the Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009).

² M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 112 ff.

not simply to find a behavior to change, but we read to be changed by the Word, then we find that Christ is formed in us. When we read not only with a mind eager to collect facts and insights, but with a heart eager for its Truth, then we are more receptive to the Spirit's attempts to give us the mind of Christ. When we read with a heart desiring to not only know God, but to love Him, then the Scriptures become the context for a more intimate communion with our God through the Holy Spirit. (cf. Deut 8:3; Ps 119:103, 131.)

- Meditation: This is simply another biblical word for ruminating or thinking over, but in a way that the Spirit can guide our thoughts. This is where we will use various approaches and questions in the "Prayer Exercises by Temperament" in order to guide our thoughts outside the normal pattern shaped by our personality. It is so easy for our scripture meditation to begin and end in our minds, and not break through to our heart and will. Chew on each word, and notice what begins to stand out to you under the direction of the Spirit. We will be inviting the Spirit to lead our meditation through a variety of different approaches that coincide with the preferences of the temperaments, in order to lead us to a deeper experience of God in the text. In this way our meditation also becomes a form of prayer. (cf. Josh 1:8; Ps 1:2; 119:97, 99; Heb 12:3.)
- Response: This is where we can use the well-known ACTS acronym: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. Once we have seen how God revealed Himself in His Word, we can now worship God according to the pattern, or characteristics, revealed in the reading (Adoration). Then we acknowledge and repent of the many ways we have not followed in His steps (Confession). Next we thank Him for His forgiveness and the way His Spirit lead us to see what we might not have acknowledged on our own; we thank him for what He has done and provided in direct regard to the theme of the passage (Thanksgiving). Now we are in a place where our requests can be made in a more pure way that is in concert with God's will (Supplication). For some personality types the prayer of response may be an active, thinking and processing type of prayer. For others this responsive prayer can also be less structured, or a simply a pouring out of your whole heart and soul out to God. Maintaining the ACTS components will help us leave our well-worn paths of prayer and enter into the expanses of other patterns of relating to God. (cf. 2Sam 7:18-26; Rom 11:33-36; Col 3:16, etc.)
- Contemplation: Next we move to a more passive listening posture in prayer. Like being dumbstruck or truly awestruck, whether at a sunset, a painting, or a profound truth that leaves us speechless, often words don't suffice, when our hearts are full of joy and wonder. Sometimes we share an experience so intimate that words would only spoil it; we just savor the moment together. Contemplation is merely focusing on God as revealed in

His Word in a way that opens up this “holy hush” in our soul, and then staying there for a while. This may be an unfamiliar step for many of us. Our monologue, or even Spirit-inspired dialogue, stops, and we simply “wait on the Lord” in expectancy. In Contemplation we are moved primarily by the desire to listen to God, or simply to enter the communion of hearts with Him. We stop telling God how much we love Him and simply love God and let Him love us. After we have been inspired in our meditations, and after we have expressed our responses, we now need to give the control of the conversation completely over to God, and simply listen while focusing on Him. This is the place where our heart is most open to what the Holy Spirit wants to tell us, where we are most open to the transformation He longs to work in us. (cf. Ps 27:4; 131:2; 139:23-24; Rom 8:26-27; 2Cor 3:18; Eph 1:19-20; Col 3:1-3.)

- Incarnation: Now is the appropriate time to ask the Lord what He is calling us to “do” about the truth that He has implanted in our hearts. Perhaps the application is patently clear and we simply need to commit ourselves to carry it out. What sort of response is required now, in light of our experience of Jesus in the Word? What concrete measures can be offered to Him in obedience to His call? (cf. Matt 7:24; 12:50; 28:20; Jn 13:17; Jas 1:22.)

It is a good discipline to keep a journal of your practice of "Prayer Exercises by Temperament" that you can refer back to. People relate to journaling differently, depending on their temperament and experience with it. If you have never journaled your prayers, you may indeed benefit greatly from putting pen to paper, and slowing down your thoughts as you write. Early in the process of using *Lectio Divina*, journaling helps to keep you “in the groove” of the prayer outline. If on the other hand you have been journaling for many years, you may need a break from the “need to record everything,” so that you can experience it more fully. You can journal during the exercises, or as a review at the end of your prayer, but of course you don’t have to journal at all!

The more you utilize this pattern of scriptural prayer, the more naturally disposed you will be to follow the Spirit into the depths of Scripture’s truth. The more facility you have with the various approaches to prayer, the more open you will be able to distinguish your own natural inclinations from the leading of the Spirit, and the greater receptivity you will have to the variety of ways that God communicates. As your prayer life becomes more focused, balanced and varied, your experience of God will deepen, and you will find that you are more open to His transforming work.

[Please go on to the resource: “Prayer Exercises by Temperament.”]