

Praying with Your Bible

Lectio Divina is a traditional form of praying with Scripture. The words are Latin for “divine reading” or “prayerful reading.” It’s an easy way to help the Scriptures come alive and for you to learn to listen for God’s voice speaking to you through Scripture. No, very few people actually hear an audible voice – if you’re hearing voices, talk to a trusted adult! But what we mean is that God *will in fact speak to you* – directly to you and with a message meant for you alone – through the words in the Bible. How you ask? Learn this three-step, simple process:

1. What is happening?
2. A word or phrase?
3. An action?

That's easy to remember. Of course, there's a bit more that goes along with it. Scripture is the Word of God, so God will speak to you through it. You just have to learn to listen for God's voice. What comes to mind in prayer, when entered in a humble spirit, are not random thoughts but God pointing things out to you. You just have to learn to listen.

This is similar to listening to your conscience; that voice is there inside your head, and sometimes you write it off as your own thoughts, but really it is the Holy Spirit speaking and guiding. Now go get your Bible or open your Bible app. And if you're a writer, this is a good time to grab your journal. You'll also need to pick a passage of the Bible to pray with – it is recommended that you begin with a passage from one of the Gospels, or perhaps one of the daily readings from today's Mass.

STEP 1: What is happening?

Begin the prayer with the Sign of the Cross, and say in your own words: "Lord, as I read this passage for the first time, please help me to understand what is happening: who are the main characters, what was it like for them to be there, what did they do, who said what to whom, what was the point of the story? Help me to just get a feel for what's happening in the passage." Then read it for the first time.

Then take at least 30 seconds of silence to process what you've heard. This is a great moment to journal what the main points of the story are, or any initial reactions to the story. If you do this with a friend or small group, this would be a good time to share with each other about the passage.

STEP 2: A word or phrase?

Then pray again: "Lord, as I read this passage for a second time, I ask that you reveal to me a word or phrase. Make something pop off the page or stick out to me. Catch my attention with just one word or small phrase, and help me begin to understand why that word or phrase stands out to me." Then read the passage a second time.

Then pray again, "Lord, help me to listen to your voice. Begin speaking to me through your Word. In this brief time of silence, help me to name the word or phrase that jumps off the page at me or that seems the most important to me. Make a word or phrase stand out to me, and help me begin to know *why* you are putting that word or phrase on my heart."

Then take at least 60 seconds of silence to think about what you've heard, and name the word or phrase, and also why they think it stands out to them. Then you could journal or share your answer.

STEP 3: An action?

Now for the third and final reading: "Jesus, now I ask you to speak and that your Holy Spirit help me to listen. As I read this passage a third and final time, I ask that you help me to know clearly what you are asking to me do. What is this word or phrase, which you have pointed out to me, calling me to do with my life? How are you asking me to be different or to change? What concrete action in my daily life are you asking me to make through this passage? Speak to me, Lord!" Then read it for the third time.

It helps to pray after each reading to help focus your reflection and keep it prayerful: "Lord, speak to me in this time of silence. Help me to become more like you, Jesus. What are you calling me to do differently in my life? How does this Scripture passage speak to my daily life? Are you calling me to change something in my life, or to add something new to it? What are you asking me to do?"

Then take a bit longer time, maybe 90 seconds of silence (more if you feel capable), to determine what God is calling you to do. Then share what they think God is asking of you in your journal or with your small group.

Thank God!

God has spoken to you! If you took it seriously and really prayed and reflected, whatever thoughts came to mind while you were reading those Scriptures, was the Lord speaking to you. Take this seriously – God wants to help you find true joy and happiness by living a life of virtue and holiness. Be sure to follow through with what you have heard, and be confident that you are doing the Lord's will.

It helps to thank God as a way to end your prayer: "Lord, thank you for speaking so clearly to me through today's Scripture reading. Help me to learn to listen more closely for your voice. That voice inside of me is not random; rather, it is your Spirit speaking to me. When I turn to you in prayer, you do speak in subtle ways. Help me to turn to you more often so that your voice and presence become more and more familiar to me. And help me to actually BE different, and to follow through on what you have called me to do. I ask this in your holy Name, Jesus. Amen."

Now you know how to pray with your Bible in the ancient manner called "Lectio Divina." This is a simplified version so that it's easy to remember. There are actually other, more challenging ways to pray Lectio Divina. But start here. Just use your Bible and remember the three easy steps: 1. What is happening? 2. A word or phrase? 3. An action? You can do it!

