

MONUMENT

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



READING SCRIPTURE DEVOTIONALLY

LECTIO DIVINA
IMAGINATIVE PRAYER
& MEDITATING ON SCRIPTURE

Why Read Scripture Devotionally?



Scripture has the capacity to bring God into our lives the way lightning brings fire to the earth. It can be startling, beautiful, shocking, and powerful; at times it seems to burst from a clear blue sky with irresistible force.

This is hardly surprising. There is more here than simply ink on the page; this “word of the Lord” is able to bring us into the presence of the divine Word, the one who brought the spinning galaxies into being and whose nail-marked hands are stretched out towards us in love.

Other books may speak of God, but the Bible uniquely is able to become for us a holy ground on which we actually meet with God.

A Word-Centered Life, a life which is evangelical in the very best sense of that word—shaped by the Gospel, and passionately seeking to hear Christ, know Christ, share Christ with others—such a life must always be deeply grounded in Scripture. Psalm 1 offers a perfect description of a Word-Centered people:

“their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.

They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.” (v. 2–3)

Why Read Scripture Devotionally?

In just this way we need to come to Scripture not simply as a resource for preaching or theology, nor just as an inspiring devotional treasury, and especially not as a mine of proof-texts for perfecting our dogmas and defeating our doctrinal enemies. Instead we need to drive deep roots into the refreshing waters of the biblical text, so that we might become more deeply rooted and grounded in Christ. We need to learn to come to the Bible in order to meet Jesus.

From "Encountering Christ in all of Scripture" by Chris Webb

Our Encounter Practice for this season is Scripture.

How do we encounter Jesus in the scriptures? We approach them expecting to meet God in and through these ancient words. We must allow space for God to speak beyond the page into our hearts. That's why reading scripture devotionally with imaginative prayer, meditation or *lectio divina* are helpful tools in approaching the Bible. These practices might feel new or unfamiliar to you, you might like one more than the others. I encourage you to give them all a try. As you do, invite the Holy Spirit to speak. I can't wait to see what happens!

-Megan Babayco

Lectio Divina

What is it?

Lectio divina is an ancient method of reading Scripture that was developed by the desert mothers and fathers to allow God to address them directly through the biblical text. In this approach, we read a short passage of Scripture (no more than 6 to 8 verses) multiple times very slowly; for each consecutive reading there is a simple question designed to take us deeper and deeper into the layers of meaning.

Prepare

First, take some time in silence (five to ten minutes) to **prepare** yourself--to quiet your heart and invite God to speak.

First Reading

In the **first reading**, you are invited to listen for the word or phrase that strikes you. This word or phrase might come across as "louder" than the others, or it might resonate with other experience you've had with the same word. It might also bring tears to your eyes or even cause feelings of resistance. Many people read the passage twice in the first reading to give ample opportunity for receiving the word God wants to give. In the silence that follows, just savor the word or phrase without trying to figure it out or make application connections.

Second Reading

In the **second reading**, you are invited to listen for the way in which your life is touched by this word. In the silence that follows, listen to the questions. How is my life touched by this word? What in my life needs to hear this word today?

Third Reading

In the **third reading**, you are invited to listen for God's invitation to you. Is there an invitation--something that God is inviting you to do or to be--contained within his word to you? What is your response?

Resolve to live out or incarnate

The final move in the lectio process is **resolving to live out or incarnate** the word we have received. We ask, What will it look like for me or for us to "enflesh this world" and live it faithfully?

Take from *Pursing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups* by
Ruth Haley Barton

Imaginative Prayer

What is it?

In Imaginative Prayer you take a passage from scripture, usually one of the gospels, and immerse yourself in it imaginatively using all the senses. You feel the heat of the day, smell the livestock and clouds of dust on the road, listen to Jesus' words, watch his actions. It's a way to engage the gospel personally, with all of our faculties.

How to do it?

Visualize the event as if you were making a movie. Pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings of the event. Lose yourself in the story; don't worry if your imagination is running too wild. At some point, place yourself in the scene.

Contemplating a Gospel scene is not simply remembering it or going back in time. Through the act of contemplation, the Holy Spirit makes present a mystery of Jesus' life in a way that is meaningful for you now. Use your imagination to dig deeper into the story so that God may communicate with you in a personal, evocative way.

We might initially worry about going beyond the text of the Gospel. If you have offered your time of prayer to God, then begin by trusting that God is communicating with you. If you wonder if your imagination is going "too far," then do some discernment with how you are praying. Where did your imagining lead you: Closer to God or farther away?

Some people find imaginative prayer difficult. They may not be able to picture the scene easily, yet they may have some intuition or gut reaction to the story. Or they may hear or feel the story more than visualize it. In a spirit of generosity, pray as you are able; don't try to force it. Rest assured that God will speak to you, whether through your memory, understanding, intellect, emotions, or imagination.

Excerpt from *Ignatian Adventure*, by Kevin O'Brien, SJ

Suggested Stories to Try

I suggest starting with the stories of Jesus' birth in Luke and Matthew. Then try some of Jesus' miracles or Jesus calling the disciples. Stories rather than teachings are usually an easier first experience and there are many to choose from in the gospels.

Luke 1:5-25

Luke 1:26-38

Luke 1:39-56

Luke 1:57-79

Matthew 1:18-25

Luke 2:1-21

Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew 4:18-22

Luke 4:38-43

Luke 5:27-31

Luke 8:22-25

Matthew 9:18-26

Scripture Meditation

Where to start?

Begin by selecting a verse or phrase of Scripture. Be sure you have read the surrounding verses so that you can understand the verse or phrase in its context. It may be helpful to write the chosen verse on a 3" x 5" card or highlight it on your phone or electronic device.

Begin by reading it over several times, trying to memorize it as best you can. Then slowly contemplate the verse word by word, thinking about each word and what it conveys about God, his plan, and his work in your life. Do the words reveal something about God? About ourselves? How can we respond to or pray about what these words mean? As appropriate, pray as you ponder the words of this verse.

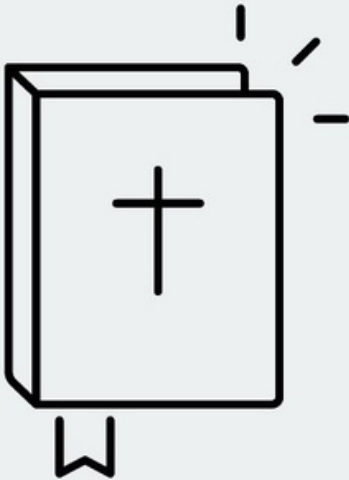
Let's Try It!

Let's begin with a well-known verse that you may have heard many times. The twenty-third psalm is often recited in churches and read at funerals, but meditation may help us more fully grasp its truths. Psalm 23:1 reads:

The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing

Scripture Meditation

With a prayer for guidance from the Holy Spirit, we begin pondering this verse word by word.



The Lord

God is revealing himself as the Lord. He is not one of many, but the only Lord and ruler over all. “Lord” reminds us of his great sovereignty, his authority, and his reign over all things.

Is my shepherd

Why has God chosen to reveal himself to his people as “shepherd”? This speaks to us of his care, guidance, and love. But God is not simply a shepherd; he is “my shepherd.” That means he cares for me. He is willing and able to guide me. He watches over me with concern for my well-being.

I lack nothing

What do these words of assurance mean? The Spirit might comfort my heart by reminding me that because the Lord who reigns over all is my shepherd, I can rest assured that he will provide everything I need in life. I will not lack anything needed to follow him and do his will. He is all-powerful. He cares for me and takes responsibility for guiding me, so I can rest in his care with confidence.

Scripture Meditation

What can I pray in light of Psalm 23:1? Do I need to ask for help trusting the Lord more? Do I need to pray about some situation in which I need his shepherd-like care? Should I thank and praise him for his care in the past as well as the future?

Other Passages to Try

Jude verses 24-25

Psalm 121

Philippians 2:1-11

From Our Daily Bread

