

Prayer: Finding Intimacy with God

Session 3: *Lectio & Meditatio*: Climbing the First Rungs

HOME STUDY: our program is on FORMED: www.formed.org – Sign-up then Sign-in.

To sign-up for a FORMED account, use our SJN Parish subscription code: FPVD8M (all CAPS); set email & password.

- Locate our Study Program, “Lectio: Prayer”, one of these ways: 1) type “Lectio: Prayer” in the Search field then click on the result, or 2) click on the *Study tab*; then on *Bible Studies*; click on “Lectio: Prayer”.
- After arriving at “Lectio: Prayer”, scroll down & select ‘Session 3’ (29 mins)

★ Prayer

How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young, at thy altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God.
Blessed are those who dwell in thy house, ever singing thy praise!
Blessed are the men whose strength is in thee, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.
Amen. – Psalm 84:1–5

★ Introduction

An ancient Chinese proverb: ‘A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.’ And the ascent to God in prayer begins with reaching out for the first rung of the ladder – Guigo the Carthusian’s ladder of *lectio divina* has four rungs: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. We’ll take a closer look at the first two and some opportunities to practice them... we might just need to unlearn some old habits.

★ An Encounter with God – an Outline of the Video Discussion on FORMED:

I. Guigo’s Ladder

- A “method” of prayer is just the means
- The goal is the encounter with God
- “Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you by contemplation.” – CCC 2654, quoting Guigo the Carthusian

II. Four Rungs

- Lectio* (Reading): “careful study of the Scriptures, concentrating all one’s powers on it”
- Meditatio* (Meditation): “busy application of the mind to seek with one’s reason the knowledge of the hidden truth”
 - Eastern meditation tradition focuses on emptying the mind
 - Christian meditation is the mind focused on and filling itself with truth
 - Example of Psalm 1 – *lectio* might focus on the pattern of the verbs (walks, stands, sits) and the *meditatio* might reflect on how the verb progression relates to the progression of sin
- Oratio* (Prayer)
- Contemplatio* (Contemplation)

III. Lectio – A Closer Look

- Slow down; speed reading is not for lectio
- Give attention to grammar (verbs, nouns, etc.)
- Watch for metaphors
- Lectio* and *meditatio* lead to *oratio* (prayer)
 - Meditation leads to a conversation with God; prayer flows out of meditation
 - Ebb and flow, back and forth from lectio

IV. Example of Genesis 28 – Jacob’s Dream

- Ladder between heaven and earth; angels ascending/descending upon the ladder
- Jacob names the place “house of God,” Bethel; ladder becomes image of prayer
- John 1:51: “angels... ascending and descending upon the Son of Man” – Jesus is the new ladder, the way by which we reach God
- Wrestling as a metaphor for prayer, to persevere in prayer is to not let go of God

✦ Being Open to God This Week: Focus on One Item This Week ✦

Referenced Scriptures are on the pages that follow.

1 *Lectio: Careful Reading.* “And whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it.” – Luke 9:24

Our rush to accomplish as much as possible, as quickly as possible, makes it difficult to slow down. But that is exactly what we need to do when we practice *lectio*. The goal is not to read as much as possible, but to notice as much as possible, trusting that God will direct us to notice what he wants to say to us. Slow and careful reading. Ancient authors didn't include unnecessary words or gratuitous description, since materials were expensive; words were chosen deliberately and carefully. Thus, every word should be read so to appreciate the full meaning of the passage. Possible techniques: read at normal pace to get the big picture then re-read at a slower pace to allow for focus on a word or detail. Consider grammar – nouns and verbs provide basic information of who is doing what. Then attention to the adjectives chosen to describe people, places and things – or to the effect that adverbs give to the words they modify. Next, we can begin to visualize what is going on and imagine ourselves in the passage – consider the surroundings, the environment (weather, time of day...), who is in the passage, what are they thinking and feeling? There is much that is being communicated to us. This method of using the imagination was a favorite tool of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

- ✦ Consider Genesis 15:4–6. Write down separate lists of nouns, verbs and additional things noted. What do you notice based on your careful reading? Consider the use of descendants numbered as the ‘stars’ vs. using the word ‘many’...
- ✦ Now consider context. Read Genesis 15:12. “As the sun was going down...” God’s words in 4–6 were spoken in daylight, how does the detail from 4 – 6 and 12 change our visualization of the passage?
- ✦ Do the same exercise with Psalm 42:1–3, Luke 9:13–17 or Luke 9:23–26

2 *Lectio: Repetition and Metaphor.* “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress...” – Psalm 18:2

To express emphasis when writing, you might make the text bold, use italics or different colors. But what if speaking? Repetition is the key. Many parts of the Bible were passed on as oral tradition before ever being written down. Other parts, though written down, were intended to be read aloud and taught verbally. Hand-written Bibles were not conducive to our modern forms of emphasis. Repetition in the Bible matters. Consider Genesis 22:1–14 and the use of ‘son’, ‘father’, ‘Abraham’ (which means “father of many/multitude”). As each is mentioned, we are reminded of the great sacrifice Abraham is asked to offer, considering that Isaac is his *only* son. It should foreshadow for us the great sacrifice that both Jesus and God the Father make for our salvation. Repetition occurs with words, phrases (“It is good” in the story of creation) and are like “rumble strips”: they should wake us up so that we don’t miss what God is trying to say.

- ✦ Read Genesis 37:23–34. How many times is ‘robe’ repeated – what is this repetition emphasizing?

In addition, metaphors are another tool. Metaphors equate two items, showing their similarities to create a lasting impression.

- ✦ Read Psalm 18:2. How does this metaphor leave a different impression than if words such as “security” or “defense” were used? Consider also Psalm 23:1–3.

3 *Lectio: Jacob Wrestles with God.* “And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.” – Genesis 32:24

We have described prayer as a dialogue, but sometimes rather than a peaceful conversation, that dialogue can look more like a wrestling match between ourselves and God, especially when we are struggling with a particular issue or grappling with the difficulty of prayer itself. The story of Jacob wrestling with God in Genesis 32 can encourage us in our own wrestling matches with God. *Knowing and addressing* someone by his/her name indicates a certain level of relationship, and naming or renaming someone indicates having authority over that person. Read Genesis 32:24–30.

- ✦ Who is named and who is not? How often is “name” used; mentions of each name? What actions are attributed to Jacob, which to God? What does Jacob want to hear; what does he receive?
- ✦ Why does Jacob ask his opponent’s name? Why does God, who certainly already knows Jacob, ask his name? What is significant about the change in Jacob’s name?
- ✦ What does Jacob’s perseverance in his wrestling match teach us about prayer? Why might it be significant that the wrestling takes place at night and lasts all night, while the blessing comes with dawn?

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4 *Meditatio*: Stepping Up from Lectio. Meditation is above all a quest – CCC 2705

In lectio we carefully study a passage of Scripture in order to hear the word of God. As we step onto the next rung of Guigo's ladder, meditation, we apply our minds to thorough reflection on what we have read in God's Word. We seek a deeper understanding of the text – we explore the “why”. Reading gives us the raw material; meditation breaks it open to find the treasure inside. Unlike Eastern traditions of meditation, the goal is not to relax or achieve some different level of consciousness or to empty oneself. Christian meditation is vigorous and active – it seeks to hear and understand God's Word; it renews and fills the mind. Read Philippians 4:8 – what does St. Paul compel us to do? Consider also the Catechism's guidance on meditation (CCC 2705 – 2706). Why is the author sharing this information with us? What is God saying to us? Why are the specific nouns and verbs used?

- ✦ Read Hebrews 4:12. Why living *and* active? (Some things can live and be quite passive, but not the Word of God.) Why a two-edged sword? (Multidirectional work.) Why the image of joints and marrow? (Joint is where two bones meet and move; marrow is the inmost art of the bone.) Why piercing and discerning? (Must discernment go deep?) Why thoughts and intentions, and not actions? (Must discernment of thoughts come first so that actions are also good/true?)

Imagination is another important tool for meditation. CCC 2708. Placing ourselves in the passage or taking part in it through various roles in the story, often yields a new appreciation for the passage and reminds us that Scripture is really directed at each of us personally.

- ✦ Practice this with the passage from Mark 2:1–5

5 Truth and Beauty. “[Mary] sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching” – Luke 10:39

See the picture Christ in the House of Mary and Martha below. The painter, Alessandro Allori, brings to life a scene that St. Luke only spends five verses describing (Luke 10:38–42). Instead of enclosing in a room, he places Jesus and the two sisters outside and bathes them in the luminous light of day, which we see reflected in the faces, garments and landscape. While the

gaze of the sisters automatically directs our attention to Jesus.

- ✦ Allori includes several other symbols in his painting that remind us of Christ. What are they?

St. Luke tells us that Mary “sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching”. As we carefully read God's Word, we too sit at the Lord's feet with Mary. Mary is kneeling before Jesus with a heart so drawn to her Lord and listening so intently to his words that she ever so slightly begins to lean closer so as not to miss a word, a syllable, a repetition, or an emphasis in his teaching. To steady herself, she rests her hands on a book, presumably the Scriptures – a reminder to those viewing his work that the word and teaching that Mary hears audibly in her home, the painting's viewer can also hear for themselves in God's Word.

Mary's whole attention is focused on Jesus – so much so that she seems unaware of Martha's work to provide the feast that lades down the table behind Jesus. While Martha has been the one who “received [Jesus] into her house,” she is soon “distracted with much serving” (Luke 10:38). The water that we see her drawing from the well in the paintings right background, she brings to Jesus in a glass pitcher with three various shaped and filled water glasses. Martha stops short of stepping into or blocking the dialogue between Mary and Jesus, and instead stand with her own attention fixed on Jesus' face. Allori's rendition of the scene portrays the complementarity between Mary, who is contemplative and Martha who is active – both of which are necessary for the disciple of Christ.



Christ in the House of Mary and Martha / Erich Lessing / Art. Boston, NY

References from DVD Outline on Page 1 of this Study Guide

CCC 2654 – The Word of God

The spiritual writers, paraphrasing Matthew 7:7, summarize in this way the dispositions of the heart nourished by the word of God in prayer: “Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you by contemplation.”

Psalm 1: The Two Ways

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, his prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Genesis 28:10–17 Jacob’s Dream

Jacob left Be’er-she’ba, and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place, and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And, behold, the Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your descendants; and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you.” Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it.” And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

John 1:51

And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”

References Supporting Exercise 1:

Luke 9:23-26

²³ And he said to all, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it. ²⁵ For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? ²⁶ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him with the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Genesis 15:4–6

And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, “This man shall not be your heir.” And he brought him outside and, “look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Genesis 15:12

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and behold, a dread and great darkness fell upon him.

Psalm 42:1–3

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me continually, “Where is your God?”

Luke 9:13–17

But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish – unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in companies, about fifty each.” And they did so, and made them all sit down. And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were satisfied. And they too up what was left over, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

References Supporting Exercise 2:

Psalm 18:2

The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Genesis 22:1–14 God Tests Abraham

Due to the length of this passage, we ask that you refer to the Bible.

Genesis 37:23-34 Excerpt from Joseph is Sold by His Brothers

Due to the length of this passage, we ask that you refer to the Bible.

Psalm 23:1–3

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

References Supporting Exercise 4:

CCC 2705

Meditation is above all a quest. The mind seeks to understand the why and how of Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking. The required attentiveness is difficult to sustain. We are usually helped by books, and Christians do not want for them: the Sacred Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, holy icons, liturgical texts of the day or season, writings of the spiritual fathers, works of spirituality, the great book of creation, and that of history – the page on which the “today” of God is written.

CCC 2706

To meditate on what we read helps us to make it our own by confronting it with ourselves. Here, another book is opened: the book of life. We pass from thoughts to reality. To the extent that we are humble and faithful, we discover in meditation the movements that stir the heart and we are able to discern them. It is a question of acting truthfully in order to come into the light: “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

CCC 2708

Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ. Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lectio divina* or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Mark 2:1–5

And when he returned to Caper'na-um after some days, I t was reported that he was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door; and he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near h im because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Child, your sins are forgiven.”

References Supporting Exercise 5:

Luke 10:38–42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, “Lord do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” but the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.