

Prayer: Finding Intimacy with God

Session 4: Oratio: Conversation with God

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

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, scroll to the right & select ‘Session 4’ (30 mins)

✦ Prayer

The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein;
For he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers.
Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false,
and does not swear deceitfully.
He will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of his salvation.
Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.
Amen. – Psalm 24:1–6

✦ Introduction

Can prayer be as easy as having a great conversation with your best friend? Prayer can be that simple, but neither prayer nor any other meaningful conversation is necessarily easy. Even among friends, deep conversations take work – a good relationship, a topic of conversation to share, and effort to listen & reflect before we speak. These are precisely the elements that make for a fruitful conversation in *lectio divina*. After carefully reading (*lectio*) and thoughtfully reflecting (*meditatio*), we are ready to converse deeply with God in *oratio*.

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

I. Review

- A. Samaritan Woman – “If you knew the gift of God...” – the gift is the Word of God
- B. First Steps of Guigo’s Ladder
 1. *Lectio* – reading; *meditatio* – breaking open
 2. *Oratio* – conversation (don’t start here, need first steps)

II. Oratio – Prayer, Conversation

- A. St. Augustine as a model of prayer
 1. In *Confessions* we overhear St. Augustine’s prayer with God
 2. St. Augustine recounts an episode from his life, then a Scripture passage, which is God responding to St. Augustine
 3. St. Teresa of Avila – St. Augustine’s *Confessions* teaches her how to pray
- B. Barriers to Prayer – *Confessions* Book 9
 1. Psalm 116:16–17 – “O Lord... You have loosed my bonds.”
 2. Once St. Augustine turns from his anxieties, passions, lusts, etc., his mind is free – “I began to speak freely to you O Lord, my God”
 3. Two barriers to *oratio*/conversation with God
 - a. Skipping *lectio* and *meditatio*
 - b. Moral barriers – Not walking in God’s will leads to disruption in relationship/conversation
 4. Obedience breaks down these barriers
- C. Psalms as a School of Prayer – CCC 2587
- D. Luke 11
 1. “Our” Father – intimate conversation
 2. “Thy will be done” – greatest hindrance to prayer is our ego/pride
 3. *Our Father* placed between almsgiving and fasting in Matthew 6
 4. To converse with love, we have to learn to love

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

Referenced Scriptures are on the pages that follow.

1 *St. Augustine: Model of Prayer* “Grant me, Lord, to know and understand...” – *The Confessions of St. Augustine*

The goal of *oratio* is an honest, heartfelt conversation with God over the subject discovered in *lectio* and reflected upon in *meditatio*. This is a time to pour out our thoughts in response to what God has said in his Word. We continue to listen and meditate as we speak to God. St. Augustine learned to hear God’s voice in Scripture. See an example of his dialogue and search for answers in the supplemental pages attached for Exercise 1; and sources for Scriptural answers he received in Psalm 22:26, Jeremiah 29:13 and Romans 10:14. We should strive to bring our thoughts and questions to God and listen for his Word in Scripture as St. Augustine did. Try *lectio – meditatio – oratio* using Psalm 42:1–3.

- ✦ What parts of the text stand out in our reading? This will provide the material for *meditatio*.
- ✦ During *meditatio*, one might be struck by the repetition of “my,” inviting me to reflect on the personal relationship God desires with me, with “my soul.” The verbs regarding “my soul” are not passive or calm, but alert and achingly active – “longs,” “thirsts,” each speak about a soul that is restless and searching. This leads us to conversation.
- ✦ What am I, in my deepest heart, most “longing” for? For what or whom do I search? Can I speak to God about my restless heart and honestly tell him about my deepest desires and recognize them in my own search for God? Can I come to terms with the difficult yet hard-to-avoid question at the end, “Where is my God?” Feel free to modify the language of the text in your open conversation with God, changing “your” to “my” God, for example. Let this lead to an encounter with God.

2 *Barriers to Conversation.* “O Lord, you have searched me and known me!” – Psalm 139:1

When we begin at the beginning with *lectio* and *meditatio*, we are less likely to have nothing in particular to say when we speak to God in *oratio*. Lack of something to talk about is one barrier to meaningful conversation. Another barrier is when there is a problem in the relationship. Just as a conversation with a friend or spouse becomes difficult when there is conflict in the relationship, the same happens in our relationship with God when we sin and do not repent. Sin puts a barrier between us and God, our relationship becomes strained and it is difficult for us to hear God speak. Isaiah 59:1–2 describes the situation (and examples flow in the succeeding verses). How can we have a close sharing with God in prayer when we let something damage the intimacy of our relationship with him? Whenever we place something else before God, we disrupt the close relationship we seek to nurture in prayer: our sins, our attachment to things of this world, our insistence on our own will rather than obedience to the will of God, etc.

- ✦ Read Psalm 32 and James 4:8. How do we break down the barrier of sin and repair our relationship with God?
- ✦ What attachments might be hindering your *oratio*? What can we do to break down any moral barriers to cultivate a deeper intimacy with God?
- ✦ Practice *lectio, meditatio* and *oratio* with Psalm 139:1–6.

3 *Lectio: Lord Teach Us to Pray.* “But when you pray... shut the door and pray to your Father...” – Matthew 6:6

The disciples often witnessed Jesus going off alone to pray. After one of these times they asked, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Writing on the Lord’s Prayer, St. Thomas Aquinas notes: “Prayer interprets our desires, as it were, before God... Now in the Lord’s Prayer not only do we ask for all that we may rightly desire, but also in the order wherein we ought to desire them, so that this prayer not only teaches us to ask, but also directs all our affections” (*Summa Theologica II-II, Q83, A9*). Practice *lectio, meditatio* and *oratio* with Matthew 6:6–15.

- ✦ What instructions does Jesus give concerning prayer (place, manner, how we address God, etc.)?
- ✦ Consider the verbs: what is the first thing we ask for in this prayer? How do the petitions progress? Is there a pattern?
- ✦ What is required of us in order for our prayer for forgiveness to be heard and answered?
- ✦ What is the significance of beginning prayer by addressing God as “Our Father”? What does this teach us about prayer in general? Which of the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer stands out the most to you? Why?
- ✦ Consider the insights of St. Augustine in his *Letter to Proba* (see attached pages for a section of the *Letter to Proba*.)

4 *Psalms: A School of Prayer* “[psalms] an essential and permanent element of the prayer of the Church” – CCC 2597

The psalms are not only the prayer book of Israel under the Old Covenant – they also play a central role in the prayer life of the New Covenant. Every Mass includes a reading from the psalms. The Responsorial Psalm invites us to respond in prayer to what we hear in the first reading. They also unite us in praying with one voice the prayers that God’s people have been offering him for millennia. In the psalms we are confronted with ways in which we are like the wicked, and we learn

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Referenced Scriptures are on the pages that follow.

4 Continued

what we must do to be like the righteous. Consider Psalm 28 – how do we avoid wickedness? How do we live righteously? Although they have been prayed in community since they were first written, the psalms are intensely personal prayers. They teach us to pray with complete openness, no matter what we are going through, and they offer examples of prayer arising from a wide range of human emotions and experiences. Mixed in with psalms of adoration, praise, and thanksgiving are psalms of contrition, lament, and even desolation. The psalms teach us not only to pray in every circumstance of our life, but they teach us that even in the midst of trials we can still praise God and his mighty works. Many of the psalms are written by David and are related to different events of his life – they are personal prayers calling out for God’s help in the midst of very real events of David’s life.

✦ Consider Psalm 130:1–8 using *lectio, meditatio* and *oratio*.

5 Truth and Beauty. “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy...” – Psalm 32:11

When we think of David in the Old Testament, often the first things that come to mind are shepherd boy, military warrior, and king of Israel. But we must also add musician and poet. How is David described in the following verses? 1 Samuel 16:16–23, 2 Samuel 6:5, 1 Chronicles 16:4–9. Of the total 150 psalms in the psalter, more than 70 are attributed to David. The New Testament writers also attest to David’s authorship of various psalms.

See the picture *King David Playing the Harp* below. In Domenichino’s painting we do not see the young boy looking after his father’s sheep, or the victorious military commander, but the crowned king who finally has rest from his enemies. Having set down his sword, he is able to return to the instrument closest to his heart. While Domenichino puts a crown on David’s head, he is not seated on the royal throne. Here the emphasis is not on David’s kingship, but on the King of kings to whom David sings his praises. David no longer plays on the small lyre or harp that he might have carried with him to the shepherd fields; instead he pulls the strings of a magnificent harp whose resounding melodious notes would have overflowed the room in which he sits and stirred the hearts of those outside the room’s open window.



Scripture describes David as “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). Domenichino has turned David’s face and eyes heavenward, to the Lord who has been his strength and shield and to whom David has directed all his prayers. Domenichino places two small angels or cherubs on either side of David. The one in front holds an open book, likely the musical score of David’s song. The one behind has a quill pen and paper and appears to write the words that pour forth from David’s heart. These two muses of David’s heavenly music express the Divine inspiration of David’s psalms. The painter uses the view out the window to portray the beauty of God’s creation, a beauty of which David’s psalms often sang: “*The hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy*” (Psalm 65:12–13). Just as all of God’s creation sings in praise of the Creator, so too David’s psalms call each of us to offer a continual song of praise to God in our words and deeds. Domenichino’s painting draws us into David’s song of praise, and as we enter into the scene, David’s words can become the words of our own joyful heart by which we praise the Lord of our salvation.

✦ Consider David’s life – his challenges, successes, faults and his outreach to God in the psalms. What can you learn about his prayer and apply to your own?

References from DVD Outline on Page 1 of this Study Guide

Psalm 116:16–17

O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your housemaid. You have loosed my bonds.
I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord.

CCC 2587

The Psalter is the book in which The Word of God becomes man's prayer. In other books of the Old Testament, "the words proclaim [God's] works and bring to light the mystery they contain." The words of the Psalmist, sung for God, both express and acclaim the Lord's saving works; the same Spirit inspires both God's work and man's response. Christ will unite the two. In him, the psalms continue to teach us how to pray.

Luke 11 and Matthew 6

Due to the length of these chapters, please refer to the Bible.

References Supporting Exercise 1:

The Confessions of St. Augustine, Book I, Chapter 1 (from E. B. Pusey's translation)

"Grant me, Lord, to know and understand which is first, to call on Thee or to praise thee?
and, again, to know Thee or to call on Thee? for who can call on Thee, not knowing Thee? for he that knoweth Thee not,
may call on Thee as other than Thou art.
Or, is it rather, that we call on Thee that we may know Thee? but how shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?
Or how shall they believe without a preacher? and they that seek the Lord shall praise Him: for they that seek shall find Him,
and they that find shall praise Him."

Psalm 22:26

The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord!

Jeremiah 29:13

I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you to exile.

Romans 10:14

But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?

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?"

References Supporting Exercise 2:

Isaiah 59:1–2

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.

Psalm 32

Due to the length of this psalm, please refer to the Bible.

James 4:8

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts you men of double mind.

Psalm 139:1–6

O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You beset me behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.

References Supporting Exercise 3:

Matthew 6:6–15

But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Letter to Proba (St. Augustine)

“We need to use words so that we may remind ourselves to consider carefully what we are asking, not so that we may think we can instruct the Lord or prevail on him.

Thus, when we say: ‘*Hallowed be your name,*’ we are reminding ourselves to desire that his name, which in fact is always holy, should also be considered holy among men. I mean that it should not be held in contempt. But this is a help for men, not for God.

And as for saying: ‘*Your kingdom come,*’ it will surely come whether we will it or not. But we are stirring up our desires for the kingdom so that it can come to us and we can deserve to reign there.

When we say: ‘*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,*’ we are asking him to make us obedient so that his will may be done in us as it is done in heaven by his angels.

When we say: ‘*Give us this day our daily bread,*’ in saying ‘this day’ we mean ‘in this world.’ Here we ask for a sufficiency by specifying the most important part of it; that is, we use the word ‘bread’ to stand for everything. Or else we are asking for the sacrament of the faithful, which is necessary in this world, not to gain temporal happiness but to gain the happiness that is everlasting.

When we say: ‘*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,*’ we are reminding ourselves of what we must ask and what we must do in order to be worthy in turn to receive.

When we say: ‘*Lead us not into temptation,*’ we are reminding ourselves to ask that his help may not depart from us; otherwise we could be seduced and consent to some temptation, or despair and yield to it.

When we say: ‘*Deliver us from evil,*’ we are reminding ourselves to reflect on the fact that we do not yet enjoy the state of blessedness in which we shall suffer no evil. This is the final petition contained in the Lord’s Prayer, and it has wide application. In this petition the Christian can utter his cries of sorrow, in it he can shed his tears, and through it he can begin, continue and conclude his prayer, whatever the distress in which he finds himself. Yes, it was very appropriate that all these truths should be entrusted to us to remember in these very words.”

References Supporting Exercise 4:

CCC 2597

Prayed and fulfilled in Christ, the Psalms are an essential and permanent element of the prayer of the Church. They are suitable for men of every condition and time.

Psalm 28

To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the Pit. Hear the voice of my supplication, as I cry to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary.

Take me not off with the wicked, with those who are workers of evil, who speak peace with their neighbors, while mischief is in their hearts. Repay them according to their work, and according to the evil of their deeds; repay them according to the work of their hands; render them their due reward. Because they do not regard the works of the Lord, or the work of his hands, he will break them down and build them up no more.

Blessed be the Lord! for he has heard the voice of my supplications. The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

The Lord is the strength of his people, he is the saving refuge of his anointed. O save your people, and bless your heritage; be their shepherd, and carry them for ever.

References Supporting Exercise 4: continued

Psalm 130:1–8 *Waiting for Divine Redemption – A Song of Ascents*

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

References Supporting Exercise 5:

1 Samuel 16:16–23

“...Let our lord now command your servants, who are before you, to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well.”

2 Samuel 6:5

And David and all the house of Israel were making merry before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

1 Chronicles 16:4–9

Moreover he appointed certain of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel. A'saph was the chief, and second to him were Zechari'ah, Je-i'el, Shemir'amoah, Jehi'el, Mattithi'ah, Eli'ab, Bena'iah, O'bed-e'dom, and Je-iel, who were to play harps and lyres; Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and Bena'iah and Jaha'ziel the priests were to blow trumpets continually, before the ark of the covenant of God.

1 Samuel 13:14

“...But now your kingdom shall not continue; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart; and the Lord has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”