

SPIRITUAL FORMATION TOOLS · NO. 5

Lectio Divina

“Sacred Reading” · Let one small passage read you back.

I can read three chapters of the Bible in fifteen minutes and remember almost none of it. Check the box, move on with my day. It's Bible reading the way I used to read a textbook the night before a test — fast, thorough, and gone by morning.

Lectio Divina — Latin for “sacred reading” — is the opposite of that. Monks have practiced it for close to a thousand years, and the shape of it comes from a Carthusian named Guigo II, who called it a ladder: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation, lifting a person from earth toward heaven, one rung at a time. The whole practice might cover four verses. Sometimes one.

This is the fifth tool in our spiritual formation series at Restoration Church. We've prayed the Lord's Prayer, started mornings well, examined our days, and kept Sabbath. This one is slower than all of them. It's not about covering ground in Scripture. It's about letting a small piece of it get all the way into you.

Four movements: Read, Reflect, Respond, Rest. Below, we'll walk through them using one short passage as an example — but the method works with any few verses you choose.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” — Matthew 11:28–30 (NIV)

HOW TO USE THIS

Choose a short passage — three to six verses is plenty. The one above works well to start. Read it slowly, four separate times, once for each movement below. Resist the urge to analyze it like a Bible study. You're not solving the passage. You're letting it sit with you until something in it finds you.

Give it fifteen to twenty minutes if you can. This isn't a practice you rush. The slowness is the point.

1. Read (Lectio) — What word or phrase catches me?

WHY

The first reading isn't for information. It's for attention. You're not trying to understand the whole passage yet — you're listening for the one word or phrase that seems to lift off the page toward you. Something will usually catch. Trust it.

HOW

Read the passage slowly, out loud if you can. Let your voice slow down naturally. When a word or phrase snags your attention — “weary,” “rest,” “gentle,” whatever it is — stop. Don't chase why yet. Just notice it and sit with it a moment.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, the word that's catching me is ____.”

2. Reflect (Meditatio) — Why does this word find me today?

WHY

This is where you let the word or phrase do its work. Not a Bible study, not cross-referencing commentaries — just honest reflection on why this particular word landed on this particular day. Scripture has a way of meeting you exactly where you are, if you give it the room.

HOW

Read the passage a second time. Ask yourself plainly: why this word, why today? Let your mind connect it to what's actually happening in your life right now — the thing you're tired of carrying, the burden you haven't named out loud.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, I think this word is finding me today because ____.”

3. Respond (Oratio) — What do I want to say back to God?

WHY

Reading becomes prayer here. Scripture isn't just something you study — it's God speaking, and this is your turn to answer. Let's be honest: most of us read the Bible and never actually talk back. This movement makes sure you do.

HOW

Read the passage a third time. Then speak honestly to God about what's surfaced — gratitude, a request, a confession, even resistance if that's what's true. Don't perform a tidy prayer. Say what's actually there.

PAUSE AND PRAY

“God, in response to this, what I want to say to you is ____.”

4. Rest (Contemplatio) — Can I just be still with God now?

WHY

The last movement has no task in it at all. No word to find, no question to answer, nothing to say. Just stillness, resting in God's presence the way you'd sit quietly with someone you trust completely. This is the rung most of us skip because it doesn't feel productive. It's often the one that matters most.

HOW

Read the passage one last time, then let the words go. Sit in silence for as long as you're able — even sixty seconds counts. Don't try to think about the passage anymore. Just be present with God, the way the passage itself invites you to.

PAUSE AND PRAY

Simply: "Here I am, God." Then let the silence answer.

This Week's Invitation

1. Practice Lectio Divina with Matthew 11:28–30 at least once this week, using the four movements above.
2. Pick one more short passage on your own — a psalm, a gospel story — and practice it a second time.
3. Write down whatever word or phrase caught you each time. Look for a pattern by week's end.

Start there.

A Simple Prayer

God, slow me down enough to actually hear you. I don't need to cover more ground in your word today. I need your word to cover more ground in me. Meet me in the reading, the reflecting, the response, and especially in the quiet after. Amen.