

# Next Generation Scripture Engagement

## The South Asian Experience

### LECTIO DIVINA

#### WHAT IS SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT?

Scripture engagement is a way of hearing and reading the Bible with an awareness that it is in the Bible that we primarily meet God. It is a marinating on, mulling over, reflecting on, dwelling on, pondering of the Scriptures, “until Christ is formed in you” (Galatians 4:19). Besides “Scripture engagement,” phrases that have been used to convey the same idea include “holy attention,” “spiritual reading,” “participatory reading” and “formative reading.”

Why is Scripture engagement important? In the book *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal About Spiritual Growth*, authors Hawkins and Parkinson describe research conducted on 250,000 people at 1,000 churches. The study looked at 50 different factors that impact spiritual growth (defined as loving God and loving others). Their findings? *“Nothing has a greater impact on spiritual growth than reflection on Scripture... If churches could do only one thing to help people at all levels of spiritual maturity grow in their relationship with Christ, their choice is clear. They would inspire, encourage, and equip their people to read the Bible – specifically, to reflect on Scripture for meaning in their lives... The Bible is the most powerful catalyst for spiritual growth. The Bible’s power to advance spiritual growth is unrivaled by anything else we’ve discovered.”*

#### DESCRIPTION OF LECTIO DIVINA

##### INTRODUCTION

Lectio divina (pronounced “lec-tsee-oh di-vee-nah”), Latin for “sacred reading,” “divine reading,” or “holy reading,” is a spiritual practice that has been in use for over a thousand years. There are four traditional stages of lectio divina. The stages are lectio (reading), meditatio (meditation), oratio (prayer), and contemplatio (contemplation). The steps were created simply to provide structure and guidance for people who wish to learn how to perform this practice.

##### READING (LECTIO):

Reading is the first and foremost part of lectio divina. Reading is to be done slowly and with focused attention. Lectio divina is best practiced with passages that you have at least some familiarity with. Lectio divina is not intended to introduce you to something new in the Bible; its purpose is to allow you to experience and feed on what you know.

##### MEDITATION (MEDITATIO):

In the meditation stage the goal is to pick out a word, idea, or phrase that strikes you in a personal way, and to repeat that idea in your mind, lingering over it and giving it your attention (some people even say the phrase out loud). In Biblical meditation (e.g., Genesis 24:63, Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:2, 48:9, 77:3, 119:15, 143:5) the objective is attachment to God and sustained focus on his Word. Have you ever noticed your mind center on something? You have a thought, often unhelpful, that repeats over and over? In Biblical meditation, we are retraining our thoughts to mull over whatever “is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable” (Philippians 4:8).

A word of warning is needed here. The purpose of meditation in lectio divina is not to make things up about the Bible. Christianity is a faith rooted in history, and we should be on guard against inventing biblical meanings for ourselves. Meditation allows the passage to penetrate our understanding with depth.

##### PRAYER (ORATIO):

The next step is to take all the thoughts, feelings, actions, fears, convictions, and questions you have meditated on and offer them to the Lord in prayer. Praise God for who he is. If you feel convicted about a poor relationship, simply apologize, request forgiveness, and ask for guidance on restoring the relationship. If you feel thankful for something that God has done for you, then pour out those feelings of thanksgiving. If you feel a specific anxiety about something in your life, present it to the Lord and pray for the guidance and peace to be able to submit to God’s will.

##### CONTEMPLATION (CONTEMPLATIO):

The “task” in this stage is to simply be silent in the presence of God (Psalm 46:10). This is one of the most essential aspects for building a growing relationship with the Lord. We don’t need to always be talking at God. In this stage we are to simply sit in the presence of God and feel his tender love and embrace. We are to continue to resist worrying about our cell phones, work, friends, illnesses, and whatever else holds us back from God and sit in the love that is shared between us and Jesus.

## DIRECTIONS FOR LECTIO DIVINA TABLE EXPERIENCE

### BACKGROUND ON PSALM 1

Psalm 1 serves as an introduction to the book of Psalms (the “hymnal” of the Bible). It is a “wisdom psalm,” contrasting to the reader the ways of the righteous and the wicked. The wicked person in this psalm increasingly engages with evil (walk, stand, sit) and ends up being blown away like chaff and not being able to stand in the judgment. The blessed person, however, finds delight in the law of the Lord, another way of saying “God’s Word.” The blessed person is compared to a tree, continuously being watered by streams of water and bearing fruit in season. What a powerful image of health!

Psalm 1 is a wonderful “Scripture engagement” psalm. The psalm teaches us that the way to become a blessed person is to delight in God’s Word (the “law”) and meditate on it day and night. The word meditate in Psalm 1 is the Hebrew word *hagah*, which means to “moan, growl or utter.” The idea is one of deep concentration that comes from the heart and from the mouth. Psalm 19:14 puts these ideas together, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.” As we delight in God’s Word, giving it our complete focused attention, pondering it with depth, we allow it to shape and mold us into the person God wants us to be.

### INSTRUCTIONS

The leader of this session will tell us when to advance through the following stages of the lectio divina process. Each table will also have a leader who will go over the specific instructions for each stage.

### SILENCE/PREPARATION (SILENCIO)

Each person is to be silent for a short period of time; we are going to do some listening to the Word of God. Prepare your heart to focus and listen. Tell God you want to learn what he wants to teach you from his Word. Only the Holy Spirit can bring the Scriptures to life. We are coming to God’s Word to listen to God. Prepare yourself as you see fit.

### READ (LECTIO)

Have someone at your table volunteer to read Psalm 1 out loud slowly. There is no rush in your reading.

Pause for just a moment as everyone reflects silently on the reading.

Have a second person read Psalm 1 again out loud (perhaps in a different translation)

### MEDITATE/THINK (MEDITATIO)

Silently read Psalm 1 a third time by yourself. This time, as you read, where do you naturally stop, what are you drawn to? Pick out a word, idea, phrase or metaphor that strikes you in a personal way, something that might jump out to you. You don’t have to finish reading the whole passage, just read to the point that something stands out to you.

Once you’ve found a word or phrase that catches your eye or moves your heart, slowly repeat it, linger over it, give it your full attention. Repeating it will be an act of memory and focus.

When told from the leader upfront, share with the people at your table the word or the phrase which caught your attention. Share briefly the story why you stopped where you did (there is always a story!). Do not elaborate too long. You can always “pass” if you’d prefer not to share.

### PRAYER (ORATIO)

The artists in our churches are a gift from God who can help us to see truth. Scriptural artwork can be a powerful tool to help us reflect on the meaning of a Biblical passage by slowing us down and allowing us to see the text in a new light.

### CONTEMPLATION (CONTEMPLATIO)

Now take any thoughts, feelings, actions, fears, convictions, and questions you have meditated on from Psalm 1 and offer them to the Lord in silent prayer.

The “task” in this stage is to simply be silent in the presence of God (Psalm 46:10).