

We are in the middle of an 8 week series exploring Paul's letter to the Christian church in the town called Corinth. We have learned that this church is struggling due to lots of conflict among these early Christians. We have learned that Paul started this church and left and that a letter had been sent to him detailing the problems within the church. First and Second Corinthians are Paul's letters to the church trying to give them guidance in ways to be church.

One of the things that Paul instructs them about is the importance of nurturing their spirituality. That at the core of church revitalization must be a foundation built on seeking to be connected to God. And for Paul, this foundation is built on an active and engaged life of prayer.

Typically Presbyterians talk about prayer but we don't usually do a very good job of teaching one another to pray and of holding one another accountable to pray. So this morning, you are going to get both. You are going to receive some instruction on one model of prayer and then we will be invited to pray in this way.

There are lots of ways to pray. Some of us set aside time each day or on a regular basis to meditate and listen through prayer. When we sing Christian songs, we pray. When we sit quietly in a room and reflect, we pray. When we write down our deepest thoughts, we pray. When we gather to eat a meal, many of us ask someone to pray.

When our favorite team is trying to win a game, we pray. We gather in worship on Sunday morning and we are led in prayers of confession and prayers of the people. We lift up the names of people and places and we speak to God. So for many of us, we have lots of opportunities to pray. Some of us find prayer quite easy, others of us, not so much.

This morning I am going to invite us to pray through reading God's word. This form of prayer is called Lectio Divina. Lectio Divina is Latin for divine reading, spiritual reading, or holy reading. It seeks to help us commune with God and to connect in a deep way to God's Word. It is a way of praying with Scripture that calls one to study, ponder, listen and, finally, pray and even sing and rejoice from God's Word, from within the soul.

The founders of the medieval tradition of *Lectio Divina* were Saint Benedict and Pope Gregory I. It is based on biblical texts like Romans 10:8 where Paul refers to the presence of God's word in the believer's "mouth or heart".

In September 2005, Pope Benedict XVI stated this: "I would like in particular to recall and recommend the ancient tradition of *Lectio Divina*: the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to God with trusting openness of heart." Pope Benedict went on to say, "If it is effectively promoted, this practice of *Lectio Divina* will bring to the Church a new spiritual springtime."

So, yes, *Lectio Divina* is rooted in the Catholic Church. But prayer is rooted in the Bible. And finding ways to pray for us is essential to renewal within any of us and within all of us.

*Lectio Divina* consists of four parts assembled like a ladder. These four stages on this ladder of prayer are the Latin terms *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*.

In the *lectio* stage, we will read the scriptural passage slowly. You will then be invited to think in your mind a particular word or phrase that grasps your attention.

In the second stage, called *Meditatio*, you take your word or phrase that jumped out to you and you meditate on what this word means to you. Here you open yourself up to benefits from the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination.

In the third stage, called *Oratio*, prayer is understood both as dialogue with God and as offering of ourselves to God. In this stage of prayer we allow the word or phrase that we have taken in and on which we are pondering to touch and change our deepest selves.

Finally, in the fourth stage or *Contemplatio*, this moment is characterized by a simple, loving focus on God. In other words, it is a beautiful, wordless contemplation of God, a joyful rest in God's presence.

Read I Corinthians 3: 10-17

Think of a word or phrase that touches you for some reason. Write it down if you are able.

Read I Corinthians 3: 10-17 again.

Now reflect on that word or phrase. What does it mean to you? Why is it sticking with you? What is it leading you to do or to be? How does this word or phrase change something about you or your life?

Continue to contemplate this word or phrase as we read the text one last time.

Read I Corinthians 3: 10-17

Continue to ponder your word or phrase as we sing "Spirit." AMEN.

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-Information gleaned from Wikipedia found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio\\_Divina](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio_Divina)

-Text: I Corinthians

-Given: Feb. 6, 2011 in Allison Creek Presbyterian Church (York, SC)

## Prayer of Confession:

We humbly come before you, O God, and admit that we have not been faithful prayer warriors. We have allowed our spirituality to weaken. We have sought all sorts of ways to find strength rather than in your life giving word. Renew us, O God, and restore a right spirit within us. Guide us to seek after you and no other.

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## Prayers of the People:

We come before you and lift up ourselves. When we have encountered huge problems, we have sought our own solutions rather than yours. We have been quick to action and slow to contemplation. We are people who are quick to voice answers but slow to listen to a word of guidance.

Show us, once again, the power of your Holy Spirit. Renew our faith in you when it is weak. When we wander, show us the way back to you. When we are foolish, show us your wisdom.

Many of us feel quite dry in our prayer life. Provide us new avenues to grow deeper into you. Provide prayer partners who can help us to be accountable to one another for our spiritual growth.