

A Query Method of Reading Scripture for Individual Reflection (for individuals and small groups)

This method is an adaptation of *lectio divina*, a method used for many centuries in the monastic Christian tradition. Below is an outline of this adaptation. Using this method takes about 15 to 30 minutes for an individual, or 30 to 50 minutes for a group. Groups should probably be no larger than a dozen people; divide as needed. If using this method with a group, a facilitator will need to be timekeeper and guide throughout the process.

1. Spend three to five minutes, alone or in a group, in expectant silence or in silent prayer. Settle, or center down, letting go of all distractions. If time allows, you may want to remain longer in silence so that you begin to approach that inner “place” you are in when you are in deep worship. The goal is to read scripture in the light of that same Spirit that inspired the authors who wrote it. That same Spirit is available to us today. In like manner, the human conditions the authors were in when they wrote the words are experientially understandable to us. When we are in a place of spiritual receptivity we are more likely to hear what the Spirit may want to say to us through the words of scripture.
2. Read a passage of scripture out loud. (In a group, one person can read the passage out loud, perhaps twice. The passage should be one to ten verses long, not too lengthy.) For the next four to six minutes reflect and pray in silence. (If working in a group, participants may want to move to another part of the room where there is greater privacy and quiet.) What word, phrase or image has particular energy for you? What do you keep coming back to? Sit “in the Light” with that word, phrase or image. In other words, pray it, or allow it to work in you as the Spirit wills. Spend time with whatever it is in the passage of scripture that holds your attention or that troubles you. Be willing to let go of any “issues” you may have with the passage.
3. Reread the whole passage either silently or out loud. Gently listen for what the Spirit may be inviting you to, or working in you, through the passage. Spend more time in expectant silence (about five to ten minutes). Words or images may come up. Take note of them and gently let them go unless they have particular life and power for you. Allow the Spirit to be in charge of the process. You may or may not want to read the passage yet again.
4. Having noted how the Spirit is working in you through the passage, write one or more queries for yourself that seem to pull you deeper into the place(s) the passage takes you to. These may be things God is asking of you in your reflection on the scripture. They may be queries that invite you to go deeper into an area of your life that the Spirit, working through the passage, invites you to explore. They may be queries that serve to focus your attention. Your life circumstances change, your mood and spirit vary, and the Spirit is never static, so the queries that arise may be different than those that may have arisen in the past, or that may arise in the future, after reading the same passage of scripture. Don’t try to come up with a definitive interpretation of the passage. Interpretation is not the goal. The queries are to help you remember where you are being led, and to facilitate responding to that divine prodding with faithfulness. It is possible to feel no movement of the Spirit after reading a passage of scripture. If this happens, sit with this experience, remaining as open as possible. A query may yet arise. This step may take five minutes, more or less.
5. If working in a group, return to the group and, if you are comfortable doing so, share any insights or openings that came to you through your praying of the scripture passage or through the process itself. Listen to what others’ share without offering any critique. Listen as deeply as possible. The same Spirit might well be at work in surprisingly diverse ways. This part may last ten to twenty minutes. If working alone, you could journal at this point if you like.
6. Close with a period of silence or a spoken prayer. Carry something from the passage of scripture with you throughout the week. Pray it. Turn it over. Ponder it. Be open to the Spirit continuing to work in you through it. During the week, you may want to revisit the query or queries you wrote, or you may feel led to write a different query.

Below are five passages of scripture that include questions in them. Following each citation are examples of queries and questions that arose for one Friend while praying the passages. These are given as examples of how the Spirit may work in an individual; they are not models. The Spirit will work as the Spirit will work. While scripture passages read using this method need not contain questions themselves, those that have questions within them may be helpful when initially practicing this method. Before trying this method for the first time, it might be helpful to read one or two of the examples given below. In a group setting, the facilitator might read one or two examples out loud slowly and deliberately.

1. *Genesis 3:8–9*

In the Garden of Eden, God asked of Adam and Eve, “*Where are you?*” Indeed, where am I? Literally, I am in the world’s most powerful country. What are the implications of that reality? Spiritually, am I in a place of receptivity, wonder, awareness, presence and appropriate vulnerability, or am I in my own self-protected world of me? God wanted nothing less, it seems, than simply to walk with Adam and Eve in the garden. Might God want to walk with me? Am I hiding? preoccupied? to busy being bored or anxious? God is present everywhere, at all times, but am I aware and present to that Life and Power that is always available to me and that can turn the world upside down? What might it mean for me to be present to God in all simplicity and truth? How might I observe the sacrament of the present moment?

2. *Genesis 4:8–9*

When Cain killed Abel, God asked, “*Where is your brother?*” Indeed, where is my neighbor, and how are things with him or her? Am I in right relationship with members of my family, people in my neighborhood and my faith community? Am I aware of the needs around me, or have I cocooned myself in relative comfort and privilege? Am I in right relationship with creation? Do I care for the earth? What are my responsibilities toward creation? toward building and maintaining human community? How might I optimally relate to others with harmony and cooperation? Is there anything holding me back from relating as wholly as I would really like? Who or what holds me accountable for my actions in human community?

3. *I Kings 19:11–13* (for full narrative see *I Kings 19:1–21*)

When Elijah encountered God in the “sound of sheer silence” or the “still small voice,” God asked, “*What are you doing here, Elijah?*” Indeed, what am I about? How often am I aware of what I am really doing? When I say I am doing one thing, I may actually be doing another, depending on my own motives and agendas that may be partially or completely hidden from me. When I worship or commune with God in prayer, do I always know what I am doing? I may tell myself I am seeking faithfulness, but I might really be seeking comfort, warm fuzzy perks, affirmation, or something else. When I act in kindness towards another, are guilt and a nagging sense of obligation the primary motivating forces? I am seldom or never completely altruistic. Does this matter? Does it make any difference to God? Does God love me any less when my heart is not pure? How can I forgive myself and still hold myself accountable so that I do not lack integrity?

4. *Isaiah 6:1–8*

When Isaiah had his vision of God and one of the seraphs touched his lips with a live coal, Isaiah was humbled. Then God asked, “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*” [Here “us” may be the royal “we.”] Has the Spirit touched my mouth? What was my response? Was I faithful? What does it mean for me to be faithful today? What might it mean for me to say “here am I, send me?” Through whom might God be trying to speak to me today? Have I been mindful that the Holy One is at work in every creature? How well do I recognize God’s presence in others? To whom am I asked to go, or to what work am I called? To what is our faith community called, and what is my role in the living out of this calling?

5. *Isaiah 58:1–11*

The people complain that God ignores their pious fasting, and God asks, “*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*” We read in verse eleven that when we so live in justice, peace, and love we “shall be like a watered garden.” How does my garden grow? Are my intentions and actions in harmony with God’s dream of the peaceable kingdom? What am I doing for justice and peace? How might I live more simply than others might simply live? Am I fully present in love to those closest to me, or do I hide myself for some reason? What does it mean for me to be present to and for others? It seems clear from this passage what God chooses; what then do I choose? What does it mean for me to trust God to help me in this?

This variation on lectio divina was developed by Michael Gibson, 2008.

