

PRAYER

FINDING INTIMACY WITH GOD

LEADER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

INTRODUCTION



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

Nihil Obstat: Tomas Fuerte, S.T.L., *Censor Librorum*

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WELCOME TO LECTIO

Welcome to the *LECTIO* Study Series. In these sessions of *LECTIO*, your participants will begin to discover the profound importance, meaning, purpose, and beauty of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, as seen through the eyes of the Church.

LECTIO studies are designed for adult faith formation, to help unveil both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The Latin word *lectio* means “reading,” and often refers to a careful and prayerful reading of Scripture. These studies cover a wide variety of topics, including individual books or letters of the Bible, the lives and writings of the saints, Church teaching, and topics to help serve the formation of Catholics living out the call of the New Evangelization.

The Leader’s Resource Guide, Study Guide, and Session Videos are the three components you will be using for each *LECTIO* session. All three work together to enable a small group to receive the truth of the Catholic Faith and apply it to their everyday lives. We’ve found that when these resources are used along with your personal witness to the faith, you and your participants can better grow together in knowledge of the Faith and in relationship with Jesus Christ. By leading a *LECTIO* study, you can help participants encounter Jesus Christ and his Church in their own lives, and help them share the faith in the lives of others.

SOME OF THE WAYS TO USE LECTIO

- **Men’s & Women’s Groups:** For groups of men and women within the parish to grow in the faith through study, discussion, prayer, and service
- **Bible Study Groups:** To explore the profound connections between the Sacred Scriptures and the teachings of the Catholic Church
- **Before/After Mass:** To enrich Catholics’ understanding of the Faith and the mysteries of the Liturgy
- **Advent & Lent:** To enhance efforts for ongoing conversion, especially during the seasons of Advent and Lent
- **Catechist Training:** To give those who teach the faith in the parish a more complete and cohesive understanding of the Catholic Faith and to help them express the faith more clearly to those whom they teach
- **Small Christian Communities:** To deepen the growth of parishioners as they participate in a variety of subgroups and apostolates within the parish
- **Families:** As an in-home tool to help parents raise their children to be lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ
- **Individuals:** As a resource for anyone who wants to better understand the Catholic Faith and be equipped to better live it out and explain it to others

LEADING A LECTIO SESSION

The Study Guide takes participants step by step through each session, both the small group gathering and video teaching, as well as five days of follow-up study. The resources are carefully crafted to lead participants through an opening of their hearts and minds to God's Word and the Traditions of the Catholic Church.

The Leader's Resource Guide begins with an introduction of the key points to be covered in each session and includes suggested answers for each of the discussion questions.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN EACH LECTIO SESSION:

CONNECT

- 1. Opening Prayer:** For this study on prayer, we have chosen specific psalms as a way to grow together in the practice of praying with Scripture. Pope Benedict XVI called the psalms the "prayer book 'par excellence'" and "a school of prayer" for the faithful, and so they are particularly fitting prayers for this study. The Opening Prayer is in the Study Guide, so participants can follow along.
- 2. Introduction:** This brief overview of the topic, including the key points for the session, is also located in the Study Guide and should be read aloud following the Opening Prayer. This helps contextualize the topic, show its relevance for daily life, and inspires participants to delve into the particular aspect of the faith that is being presented.
- 3. CONNECT Questions:** These first "ice-breaker" questions are provided to get your group talking. As participants watch the video teaching, they will soon find that these questions connect to a theme or topic of the current session.

VIDEO

- 4. Video Teaching:** The video segments present teaching that delves into and makes relevant the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church. The video teachings for the study on prayer are presented by Dr. Tim Gray, president of the Augustine Institute. The Study Guide includes a brief outline of the key points in the teaching.

DISCUSS

- 5. DISCUSS Questions:** Each video segment is followed by questions in the Study Guide to help participants discuss and apply what they have learned to their lives. If you have a large group, consider forming smaller groups for the discussion, with team members facilitating and keeping each small group on track.

We have included suggested answers for the DISCUSS Questions in this Leader's Resource Guide. Suggested answers can help to get a discussion started, bring greater clarity to the study topic, or answer a difficult question.

- 6. Memory Verse:** The participants are encouraged to memorize and reflect on a Scripture verse for every session so as to nurture the faith that has been deepened through your catechetical session.
- 7. Closing Prayer:** The Closing Prayer in your Study Guide has been chosen to reflect back to God an appropriate response to his loving action in the session.

8. For Further Reading: These additional resources will help participants to nurture their faith throughout the week.

9. Quotes, Tips, and Definitions: We have also included throughout the study additional Scripture passages, quotes from saints, and excerpts from other texts and documents such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to help further understanding of a particular topic. You can choose to share this information during the session or direct the participants to it after the session.

COMMIT

The Study Guide includes five COMMIT reflections that will help participants more deeply explore the main topics of each session—and more firmly commit to following Christ in their daily lives. These reflections include more information on Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, as well as topics such as geography, history, and art. These reflections will also include times of prayer, including the practice of Scripture meditation known as *lectio divina*.

AN OVERVIEW OF LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio divina is an ancient practice of enhancing one's prayer life through the power of God's Word. The term itself means "divine reading" of the Sacred Scriptures. It is our hope that by using these simple steps each day as they study Sacred Scripture in *LECTIO*, participants will develop an effective way to study and pray with God's Word and hear God's voice in their daily lives.

Here is a brief description of each step of *lectio divina* for your reference as you guide participants through the practice:

- **Sacred Reading of the Scriptures (*Lectio*):** The reading and rereading of the Scripture passage, with close attention to words, details, themes, and patterns that speak to you.
- **Meditation (*Meditatio*):** Meditating or reflecting on what you've read, to gain understanding. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide you as you spend time pondering what you have read and striving to understand it in meditation.
- **Prayer (*Oratio*):** A time to bring your meditative thoughts to God in prayer. Talk with God about how the connections and implications of your meditation on the Scripture affect your life and the lives of those around you.
- **Contemplation (*Contemplatio*):** A time of quiet and rest, when you become the receiver and listen to God's voice. Contemplation is a gift from God, not something we achieve on our own—so be patient as you practice this step and strive to be receptive to God's voice speaking into your life.
- **Resolution (*Resolutio*):** A call for resolution and action, inviting you to respond to the things you have read in Scripture and have prayed about and to put them into practice.

To learn more about *lectio divina*, refer to Dr. Tim Gray's book *Praying Scripture for a Change*, available at www.AscensionPress.com.

HOW TO LEAD SMALL GROUPS

The *LECTIO* Study Series Leader's Resource Guide provides opportunities for small group discussion. Leading a small group discussion does not mean you have to lecture or teach—a successful small group leader facilitates, getting group participants to interact with each other as they make new discoveries. Here are some tips to help you get started as you lead and facilitate your small group:

ENVIRONMENT

- **Make It Friendly:** Set up your meeting space so discussion and conversation happen naturally. Avoid sitting at tables or desks; instead arrange chairs in a circle or meet in a living room environment that encourages casual, friendly conversation. Choose a meeting space that's free of distractions and that offers a fair amount of privacy.
- **Be Tech-Ready:** Make sure you have WiFi or other technology requirements available in your chosen space. Set up and test your audio/video equipment in advance. Queue up videos so they're ready to go to avoid losing valuable discussion time.
- **Consider Refreshments:** Depending on your meeting time, consider offering a light snack so participants won't be distracted by a growling stomach. Even if you don't offer any food items, always have water available for participants.

LOGISTICS

- **Provide Name Tags:** Especially when you first begin meeting, have participants wear name tags so you can easily address them by name and other participants don't have to worry about trying to remember everyone's names.
- **Bring Supplies:** Always have extra pens on hand for people to take notes. Also consider having highlighter pens, paper, and extra materials or Bibles available for participants to use.
- **Be Prompt:** While you can encourage a time to mingle at the beginning of your meeting time, don't let it get out of control so you have to rush through materials and discussion. If people know you're dedicated to starting on time, they'll begin to arrive a bit early to socialize. Likewise, reserve your meeting space for 30 minutes after you're scheduled to end so people can mingle afterward. Be diligent in starting and ending on time.

BEFORE YOU MEET

- **Prepare:** Look over discussion materials and preview video segments before your meeting time. Go through the questions to make discoveries about how they apply to your own life—this will help you to be more credible as a leader.
- **Pray:** Take time to pray for group members individually and lift up any needs they've expressed during previous meetings. Pray specifically for the Holy Spirit to open the participants' hearts to spiritual growth, renewal, and new discoveries.
- **Evaluate:** As you get to know the needs of individuals and your group's dynamics, evaluate your discussion materials and highlight information or questions that you think would be particularly helpful and insightful for your group.

DURING THE MEETING

- **Set the Tone:** Let group members know from the beginning that your time together is meant to be for discussion and discovery, not lecture. Also remind participants that every question is welcomed and worthy of discussion.
- **Encourage Involvement:** Work to invite all participants to engage in discussion. Don't be afraid of periods of silence, especially during your first few meetings. If one person begins to dominate the discussion time or gets off track, kindly acknowledge the person and invite him or her to explore that topic more after your group time. Ask questions such as "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anyone else?" to encourage several people to respond.
- **Use Open-Ended Questions:** Use questions that invite thought-provoking answers rather than "yes" or "no," "true" or "false," or a one-word, fill-in-the-blank answers. As a leader, your job is to get participants to think about the topic and how the Scriptures and reflections can be relevant and applicable to their daily lives.
- **Affirm Answers:** People are often reluctant to speak up for fear of giving an incorrect answer. Affirm every participant by saying things such as "Great idea," "I hadn't thought of that before," or "That's a great insight." These types of phrases communicate that you value everyone's comments and opinions.
- **Avoid Advice:** Remember, you're acting as a facilitator—not a college professor or counselor. Instead of giving advice or lecturing, when appropriate offer how a Scripture passage or something in the video spoke to you personally, or give an example of how you've been able to apply a specific concept in your own life.
- **Be Flexible and Real:** Sometimes your group time may veer off-track due to something that's going on in our culture or your community (for example, a natural disaster strikes your area or a group member is experiencing a family tragedy). Use relevant topics as a time to model for participants how God is always with us and that we can seek guidance from Scripture, the Church's teachings, and the Holy Spirit in every situation. If you model relevant discussion and transparency, your group participants are more likely to do the same.
- **Transition to Life:** Toward the end of each session, transition discussions toward sharing how participants will apply what has been discussed to their lives in the upcoming week. Close your time together in prayer each time you meet. Invite participants to share requests, either verbally or in writing, so you know how you can pray for them throughout the week.

AFTER THE MEETING

- **Stick Around:** As the leader, make yourself available after your meeting time for questions, concerns, or further discussion on a topic that a participant may have been hesitant about during the scheduled time. If a question arises that has you stumped, admit that you don't have the answer and offer to contact someone who may be able to provide one, such as your parish priest, deacon, or someone else in your diocese.
- **Follow Up:** Making contact with group members during the week will strengthen your relationship. Call or email to see how they're doing at making lessons relevant in their own lives, give a quick encouragement to engage in daily Scripture reading and prayer, or recognize a birthday or anniversary.

SAMPLE 60-MINUTE SESSION

Below is the suggested outline for an hour *LECTIO* session. Use the time allotments as a guideline; the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

	TIME	STEPS	OVERVIEW
CONNECT	2 minutes	Opening Prayer and Introduction	Begin with the Opening Prayer, then go over the Introduction of the session's key points.
	5 minutes	Review	Go over any follow-up questions that participants might have from the previous session's daily COMMIT reflections.
	10 minutes	CONNECT Questions	Present questions to introduce the topic for the current session.
VIDEO	30 minutes	Video	Play the video segments and then facilitate the DISCUSS questions that follow.
DISCUSS	10-15 minutes	DISCUSS Questions	After each video segment, facilitate discussion of the DISCUSS questions in large or small groups.
COMMIT	2 minutes	Summary and Closing Prayer	Summarize the main points from the study, and encourage participants to complete the daily COMMIT reflections.

SAMPLE 90-MINUTE SESSION

Below is the suggested outline for a hour-and-a-half *LECTIO* session. Use the time allotments as a guideline; the length of time spent on each section will vary from group to group.

	TIME	STEPS	OVERVIEW
CONNECT	5 minutes	Opening Prayer and Introduction	Begin with the Opening Prayer, then go over the Introduction of the session's key points.
	10 minutes	Review	Go over any follow-up questions that participants might have from the previous session's daily COMMIT reflections.
	10 minutes	CONNECT Questions	Present questions to introduce the topic for the current session.
VIDEO	30 minutes	Video	Play the video segments and then facilitate the DISCUSS questions that follow.
DISCUSS	20-30 minutes	DISCUSS Questions	After each video segment, facilitate discussion of the DISCUSS questions in large or small groups.
COMMIT	5 minutes	Summary and Closing Prayer	Summarize the main points from the study, and encourage participants to complete the daily COMMIT reflections.

PRAYER

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SESSION 1



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SESSION 1

PRAYER: AN INTIMATE DIALOGUE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

Prayer is fundamental to the Christian life because we are created by God for an intimate and everlasting relationship with him. But a relationship can't be built or maintained without ongoing conversation with the other person. Despite how basic prayer is to a life of faith, it is not always easy. This session will explore the difficulties we experience in prayer and point us in the right direction of approaching prayer as a conversation.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that all prayer is a response to God's desire for us—prayer is an encounter that God initiates. When we experience difficulty and dryness in prayer, it's often a result of approaching prayer as a monologue rather than a dialogue. It's important to open our hearts and express our thoughts and feelings in prayer, but if we're only talking and not listening, then prayer cannot be a conversation. We speak to God in prayer, but we must also learn to engage God in silence, especially through the Scriptures. Listening to God speak through the Scriptures is the secret of the saints who mastered the art of prayer.

This session establishes the importance of approaching prayer as a dialogue and emphasizes that Scripture is the normative way in which God speaks to his people. These principles set the foundation for our study.



CONNECT

*Begin this session by leading the **Opening Prayer** and reading aloud the **Introduction**, both found in the Study Guide. Then discuss the following questions.*

What is your earliest memory of praying?

Memories might be from childhood, such as learning a formal prayer like the Our Father, listening to a parent pray out loud at mealtime or bedtime, or being encouraged to talk to God in their own words. Memories might also be from later in life, such as hearing someone else pray and feeling moved, reaching out to God (maybe even before really believing he exists), learning formal prayers, experiencing the Mass for the first time, etc.

If you had to define prayer for someone who had never heard of it, how would you explain it?

Explanations might include defining prayer as an encounter or a conversation with God, thinking of it as talking to a friend. Some might include explanations of formal prayers as both teaching us about God and as articulating our relationship with God. They also might include the rationale behind why we pray—to deepen our relationship with God and to seek and understand his will for our lives.



Play the video segment, which will last about 29 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching, along with the following discussion questions.



DISCUSS

After the video segment, discuss the following questions. Familiarize yourself with the comments after each question; these are meant to guide you in the conversation.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

Participants might not have realized that finding prayer to be difficult or even a somewhat unpleasant obligation was a common experience. They might not have realized they were treating prayer as a monologue rather than a dialogue. They might not have realized that when they read Scripture, God is speaking to them directly and personally.

2. What obstacles to prayer do you experience? How have you dealt with these in the past? How might approaching prayer as an encounter and a dialogue affect your experience?

There is no end to the obstacles we encounter in prayer: laziness, feeling like it isn't doing any good, simply being busy, setting unrealistic or unsustainable goals and giving up, feeling like we don't know how to pray and not knowing where to start, getting into a rut and not knowing how to get out, etc. Participants may have dealt with these by establishing a set time for prayer, by starting small in the amount of prayer time and in their expectations and increasing these over time, and by reading books or writings on prayer. Approaching prayer as a dialogue can change our focus from “prayer is my job/work” to “prayer is a relationship.”

3. Do you feel it is easy or difficult to hear God speaking directly to you in Scripture? Why?

Some participants may have grown up with the understanding that Scripture is meant to be personal—God's love letter to each of us—and so the idea of God speaking to them personally isn't new and may be easier. Others may be used to viewing Scripture as an ancient text and not taking it personally. Some may even feel it is presumptive to read Scripture as God's words directed to them. Some may get hung up on passages that don't seem to apply to them (like laws or genealogies in the Old Testament) and that might get in the way of hearing God in other passages.

*Direct participants to this session's **Memory Verse** in their Study Guides, and read it together. Then lead the **Closing Prayer**. Encourage participants to do the **COMMIT** reflections on their own before you meet again as a group.*



COMMIT

*The following are suggested answers to the questions participants will be asked to reflect upon in their daily **COMMIT** reflections.*



DAY 1 – THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

Participants will explore the importance of prayer as seen in its repeated appearance throughout the Bible.

How do you keep Sunday, the Lord's Day, as a day of prayer? How does this influence the rest of your week?

The first way we keep Sunday as a day of prayer is by participating at Mass—we pray together with the rest of the Church to mark the day as holy and a day of prayer. Other ways may include special family prayer (perhaps a Rosary) or Scripture reading times on Sunday to foster the habit of prayer together. Keeping Sunday a restful day free from unnecessary work or busyness also makes space for prayer and for a spirit of restfulness and quiet that is more conducive to hearing God speak. Hopefully the prayers and readings of the Mass stick with us throughout the week, continuing to bear fruit—and perhaps prompting us to attend daily Mass if possible. Being especially aware of God and the importance of prayer on Sunday can help us improve our habit of prayer throughout the week.

Look up the following psalms: Psalm 73:28 and 105:1–4. Take a moment to recall and praise God for his many works in your own life.

In both these psalms, and many others, the psalmist exhorts us to “tell of all [God’s] wonderful works” and to give God thanks. In the monotony of daily life, we can forget the many blessings of God. Remembering these things, small and great, renews in us a spirit of joy and thanksgiving and draws us nearer to God.

What does your life of prayer have in common with prayer as lived throughout Salvation History?

Mass on Sundays and other Holy Days of Obligation corresponds with Israel’s liturgical feasts: worshiping God in community and responding together to his invitation to encounter him in prayer. As Catholics we pray the psalms in the Mass and in the Liturgy of the Hours and in many hymns and songs; this unites us with a tradition of prayer that is 3,000 years old. We also face many of the same challenges and difficulties that the Israelites faced in being faithful to God in prayer—and when we fail, as they did, God also calls us back to faithfulness.



DAY 2 – THE PROBLEM OF PRAYER

Participants will look at some of the things that make prayer difficult—especially too much talking on our part and not knowing how to listen.

What are some activities you know to be good and important, but that you simply don't like to do—the ones that always seem to get moved to the bottom of your “to do” list?

Some examples might include: flossing my teeth, going to the dentist, exercising, chores around the house such as vacuuming, folding laundry, or cleaning out the gutters, etc.

What is your greatest struggle with prayer right now?

Struggles might include being so busy that it's difficult to find time for prayer, not knowing how to pray, not feeling like it does any good, or even doubting the efficacy of prayer. When we encounter struggles in prayer, it's important to remember that a difficulty or struggle is not a defeat or failing—in fact, persevering through doubt, difficulty, etc. is virtuous, proving our love and faithfulness.

What are some things you can do to cultivate a habit of exterior and interior silence, and practice the art of patient listening?

Some ideas include setting limits on background noise—both audio and visual. Consider committing to a “media fast”—don't listen to the radio on your drive to work for a few days, or limit the time spent watching movies and videos, etc. Practice giving your full attention to whatever you are doing (no multitasking or daydreaming), and practice active listening in your conversations with friends and family (if you aren't really listening to God, maybe you're not listening 100% to others either). When thoughts or “to do's” interrupt your interior silence, practice setting those aside, maybe by writing them down so that you aren't anxious about forgetting them after your prayer time. Begin by setting small goals for silence and listening in prayer to start and increase slowly over time.



DAY 3 – LECTIO: “I THIRST”

Participants will reflect on Jesus' words from the cross, “I thirst,” and how they relate to prayer.

LECTIO

What need or desire does Jesus express in this passage? What does he receive?

Jesus expresses his thirst—both a need for something to satisfy his physical thirst and a passionate desire for each and every one of us. He receives vinegar or sour wine to drink.

What does Jesus give in this passage?

Jesus gives his life, and he gives up his Spirit. He also gives forth water and blood from his side (symbolizing the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, which are received in Christ's Church; the water and blood are also proof that he really died, etc.).

What reason does St. John offer for presenting his testimony in this passage?

St. John says that his reason is “that you also may believe.” His whole account of the crucifixion is directed toward inspiring faith—inspiring us to respond to Christ's thirst for us.

MEDITATIO

From the cross Jesus said, “I thirst,” and in response he was given vinegar or sour wine—a common drink of the lower classes that, although cheap, was considered refreshing. What does Christ thirst for from you? What can you offer him on a daily basis? Weekly? Over the course of your whole life?

What Christ desires from each of us is our total gift of self to him. We may need to be offering Christ things such as our pride or will so as to conform these more to God’s will. Daily we can offer Jesus time in prayer, our love for him lived out in service to others, etc. Weekly offering should include Mass. Long term we can offer Christ ourselves without holding anything back.

The *Catechism* states: “Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him. . . . Prayer is . . . a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God” (CCC 2560–61). Why is it important to understand prayer as a response to God rather than something we initiate? What effect might this view have on your prayer life?

If God initiates prayer, then we need to be listening and responding, not setting our own terms for the encounter. It also takes away some of the burden of prayer being difficult (for example, “It’s okay if I’m ‘bad’ at prayer right now because it doesn’t totally depend on me.”) But it also lays on us the responsibility to be available to God, to respond to his call to conversation. We might think of prayer as less of something that we have to decide/choose to do, and more of an appointment that has already been set up by God and we just have to show up.

In John 19:28–35, God thirsts for us, but we cannot even respond to him in prayer without his help. From the cross Jesus gives up his Spirit (verse 30), and blood and water flow from his pierced side (verse 34). How do the Holy Spirit and the life of the Church (symbolized by the blood and the water) enable us to respond to God in prayer?

The Holy Spirit teaches us to pray, and the Holy Spirit prays through us (see Romans 8:26). The Church also teaches us to pray by giving us formal prayers to learn and formats for prayer to follow (liturgies).

The Church leads us in prayer by drawing us into her liturgies and her communal life of prayer, as well as providing us a community to encourage and help us along in our journey of prayer.



DAY 4 – GOD SPEAKS

Participants will explore the importance of listening to God speak to them personally in Scripture.

Is there a Scripture verse that is particularly meaningful or applicable to your life right now? (It might be something you have memorized, something you heard or read recently, or even something that made an impression but you can’t remember the exact verse.)

If participants do not have a passage in mind for this question, here are some passages that may resonate with them:

Psalms 118:24 – “This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Proverbs 3:5–6 – “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

Jeremiah 29:11 – “For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Matthew 6:34 – “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.”

1 Corinthians 13:7 – “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Timothy 4:12 – “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”

Consider your current habits for reading Scripture. Do you read from the Bible on a regular basis? Is it for prayer or for study? What are some steps you can take this week to begin praying with Scripture or to increase the time you spend praying with Scripture?

Some participants may already pray with Scripture on a regular basis; others may not have considered the distinction between praying with Scripture and studying Scripture (although both are important and one enhances the other). Concrete steps to take include setting a specific time aside for prayer with Scripture, increasing the existing time, choosing a set place and making it conducive to prayer, possibly getting a Bible without commentaries so as not be distracted when trying to simply pray with the text, picking a specific book of the Bible and reading through it completely rather than skipping around each day, starting the habit of underlining parts of verses in your Bible that touch your heart as you read, etc.



DAY 5 – TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Participants will reflect on Fra Angelico's Annunciation, c. 1450 in the Convent of San Marco, Florence.

Look up Luke 1:26–38. In this conversation between God (through his messenger Gabriel) and Mary, who initiates? Is this a monologue, or a dialogue? How does Mary's interaction with Gabriel change over the course of the conversation?

God initiates the conversation by sending Gabriel to Mary and with Gabriel's words, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” (Luke 1:28). The conversation is a dialogue as both Gabriel and Mary speak to one another. At first, Mary is perplexed by Gabriel's greeting and considers it in her mind. As Gabriel continues, she dialogues with him, asking him questions about just how God's plan is to come to fruition. As Gabriel continues and she gains understanding, she is able to respond to God's invitation and will for her life. This response comes both in words, “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38a), and also in deeds, as she departs to help her elderly kinswoman, Elizabeth (Luke 1:39–40).

NOTES

PRAYER

FINDING INTIMACY WITH GOD

LEADER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

SESSION 2



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

Nihil Obstat: Tomas Fuerte, S.T.L., *Censor Librorum*

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver, November 2015

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SESSION 2

GUIGO'S LADDER: A WAY OF ASCENT

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

In the last session, prayer was described as a conversation that has to go both ways: we not only speak to God in prayer, but we must also listen to God speak to us, especially as we read his Word in Scripture. Much of the difficulty of prayer comes when we make prayer into a monologue and neglect to listen.

St. John's account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (see John 4:1–43) provides us a model of prayer. This narrative teaches us that God initiates the encounter of prayer and guides us through it. When the Samaritan woman approaches the well, Jesus is already there, and it is he who initiates the conversation. This order recalls the Jewish prayer of the *Shema*—"Hear, O Israel" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). God speaks, and Israel is to listen. Our first position in prayer is to be the one who listens. If we approach God with humility and listen, then we can ask for what God already knows we need.

As Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman continues, Jesus speaks of "living water" (see John 4:10, 14). Here Jesus draws on the words of the prophet Jeremiah, who in telling of Israel's unfaithfulness describes God as the "fountain of living waters" (see Jeremiah 2:13). When we understand this background, we realize that the living water that Jesus promises is his very self.

Dr. Gray closes this session speaking about the twelfth-century monk, Guigo the Carthusian. Guigo describes the order of prayer we call *lectio divina*, the divine reading, as a ladder with four rungs, with each rung carrying us closer to God. The four rungs of the ladder of prayer are: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. This well-worn and established order of prayer helps facilitate our interaction with, and our response to, God. God is ready and waiting for us to meet him in prayer, and Guigo's ladder offers us a clear path from the noise and concerns of our daily lives to communion with God in prayer. With practice we can ascend the ladder with greater ease and more fully reap the fruits of our time with God.



CONNECT

*Begin this session by leading the **Opening Prayer**, and then read or summarize the **Introduction** for your group. Both can be found in the Study Guide.*

*If you have time, review the last session with your group. Can anyone can recite the **Memory Verse**, Song of Solomon 3:2, without assistance? Otherwise, look it up (page 6) and recite it as a group.*

*Also discuss any highlights or questions the group may have had from the last session's **COMMIT** reflections. Then continue.*

Think of a time you felt incredibly thirsty. What quenched your thirst and refreshed you? Describe the experience.

Sample answers include: finding refreshment in a drink of water after a long hike; a cold beer after mowing the lawn on a hot day; etc. There will likely be a common theme of heat and labor causing thirst, followed by a drink that is cool, refreshing, and satisfying. This conversation sets the stage for the story of Jesus asking the Samaritan woman for a drink of water, as well as the contrast between the image of God as “living water” (fresh, flowing water) and the dryness of a broken cistern of our own making (Jeremiah 2:13).

How do you show others that you are listening attentively to them?

Active listening often includes eye contact, responsive motions (nodding the head, facial expressions reflecting what the speaker is talking about, etc.), “listening sounds” such as “mm-hmmm” or other short responses: “Yes, I know what you mean,” etc. Answers may include any other aspects of giving someone your full attention, such as putting your phone away, not looking at your watch, asking questions to clarify or continue the conversation on a deeper level. This session focuses on God initiating the conversation of prayer, and so our prayer starts with us listening to God speak—we have to give him our full attention if we want a fruitful conversation.



Play the video segment, which will last about 29 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching, along with the following discussion questions.



DISCUSS

After the video segment, discuss the following questions. Familiarize yourself with the comments after each question; these are meant to guide you in the conversation.

THE LADDER OF PRAYER

1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

Some new or particularly striking ideas might include: the comparison between “living water” and a broken cistern, that God is the one who initiates prayer, or the four rungs of the ladder of prayer and why it is important that they proceed in that particular order.

2. How does the account of the Samaritan woman at the well model an encounter with Christ in prayer? How do you relate to this account?

It is a model of prayer because Christ initiates the conversation and the woman responds. There is dialogue. Christ offers living water (the Spirit), and we receive the gift of God in prayer. The conversation opens the eyes of the woman and leads her to a deeper understanding of truth. The encounter changes her. Participants will relate in different ways—some may identify closely with the woman, feeling surprised at God speaking to them, coming to prayer with specific concerns, and leaving with a different understanding of what they really need, etc.

3. Have you ever tried to go straight to the top of the ladder of prayer without making use of the different rungs? Did it work? Do you feel the rungs are evenly spaced (equally easy or difficult to move between each step), or is there one step on the ladder that is particularly hard for you? Why?

The ladder of prayer will be new to some and may be familiar to others—experience in using the multiple rungs of prayer will vary. Most of us have probably tried, at some point or another, to achieve contemplation without going through the other steps, and without a great deal of practice this usually doesn't work very well. Encourage participants to share which rungs they find easy or difficult—lectio and oratio may seem to come naturally, but being still and listening in meditatio and contemplatio may be much harder. Or some may find it difficult to focus during lectio or know what to say during oratio. A particular rung may be extra difficult because we usually skip it and are out of practice.

*Direct participants to this session's **Memory Verse** in their Study Guides, and read it together. Then lead the **Closing Prayer**. Encourage participants to do the **COMMIT** reflections on their own before you meet again as a group.*



COMMIT

*Following are suggested answers to the questions participants will be asked to reflect upon in their daily **COMMIT** reflections.*



DAY 1 – HEAR, O ISRAEL

Participants will examine the Shema, the ancient prayer of Israel, and the importance of listening to God in Israel's theology of prayer.

God won't let anything get in the way of drawing close to us in prayer. What is getting in your way of listening and responding?

Both internal and external factors get in the way of listening and responding to God in prayer. We might be distracted with our own thoughts; struggling with fear or anger or doubt, which can get in the way of prayer; or letting pride get in the way by relying on ourselves too much when it comes to prayer. We may simply not be giving prayer enough time each day.



DAY 2 – LIVING WATER

Participants will explore the imagery of water as it relates to God in Scripture and study the gift of himself that God offers in prayer.

Look up the following passages: Psalm 65:9; Isaiah 12:3; Isaiah 44:3; Revelation 21:6; Revelation 22:1-2. What do these passages have in common? Why do you think Scripture uses water as an image of God?

In each of these passages, God is described as a life-giving source of water—watering crops (Psalm 65:9); providing salvation as one draws water (Isaiah 12:3); watering the dry ground and pouring out his Spirit (Isaiah 44:3); satisfying thirst, offering forgiveness/eternal life (Revelation 21–22), etc. Water is essential for life, and this fact is particularly well-appreciated in an arid climate such as that of the Holy Land. The image of a life-giving water source communicates God's abundant generosity as well as his sustaining love.

When it comes to prayer, are you actively seeking to receive God's free gift or do you build your own cistern? Do you try to make fruitful prayer happen on your own, or do you let God lead? How can you be more aware of prayer as a gift from God?

We all have experiences of relying on ourselves too much, even in prayer. It may still be a very strong struggle, or it may be something we have largely overcome. Regularly thanking God for the gift of prayer and the gift of himself offered in prayer can be a good reminder that we are receiving his free gift rather than accomplishing something on our own power. Reflecting on and perhaps memorizing one of the Scriptures above about God as living water may also be a useful tool.



DAY 3 – LECTIO: JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

Participants will reflect on the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well.

LECTIO

How many times are “Samaria” and “Samaritans” mentioned in this passage?

Six times (all in the first half of the reading).

How many references are there to thirst or drinking or water in this passage?

Nineteen times (including each reference to the well).

What does the physical setting of this encounter tell you about how Jesus was likely feeling?

The Samaritan woman?

The sixth hour means it was noon—heat of the day, no shade. Jesus is weary from his journey, and presumably hungry and thirsty (based on the mention of the disciples going to get food and his request for a drink). The woman is likely hot and tired from her walk to the well. She comes in the heat of the day, alone, so she is isolated from the other women of her village. She may be surprised to find someone else at the well, and perhaps uncomfortable that he speaks to her.

MEDITATIO

Why is the Samaritan woman surprised that Jesus asks her for a drink? What does Jesus' willingness to talk to this woman and St. John's comment on the “necessity” of Jesus passing through Samaria teach us about prayer?

Jews and Samaritans didn't mix, and furthermore Jewish men did not speak to unfamiliar women in public. The Samaritan woman is surprised because “Christ's way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women” (St. Pope John Paul II, Mulieris Dignitatem, 15) against whatever offends the dignity of his sons and daughters. Jesus' words and actions tell us that God wants to reach out to each of us, despite our sin and brokenness. We can't bridge the gap between ourselves and God on our own, but he can and will.

What is unique about the water that Jesus offers? What do you think it means to never thirst after receiving the living water?

Several things are unique about the water that Jesus offers: it is a gift of God, it is sufficient to satisfy our longing (other things will leave us longing once again), it brings eternal life, etc. One meaning of never thirsting again is that we are created for union with God, and only once we have that relationship will we be satisfied. In the words of St. Augustine: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that she would respond differently if she knew who it is that is speaking to her (verse 10). When you pray, are you mindful of “who it is” that is speaking to you? What difference does it make to approach prayer with humility and reverence rather than as something casual and routine?

God is our Father; Jesus is our Lord and our Brother—so there are multiple factors at work in how we approach prayer. It is good to approach God in prayer with both a confidence and a familiarity, but also with an appropriate reverence. Making prayer a priority and remembering to praise and adore God and thank him for his gifts before making requests of him are two ways to practice mindfulness in prayer. Approaching prayer with humility and reverence is crucial because in order to have an intimate conversation and form that close relationship, we have to be honest about who we are in relation to God and be mindful of who God is.



DAY 4 – GUIGO AND THE LADDER OF PRAYER

Participants will explore the four rungs of Guigo's ladder of prayer.

Why must the ladder of prayer begin with Scripture? How might the practice of praying with Scripture help you to fulfill St. Paul's exhortation to “pray constantly” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)?

Prayer begins with Scripture because it is God's Word. It gives us the guidance we need (especially when we are just beginning) to learn how to listen. It gives us something outside of ourselves to focus on and reminds us that we don't accomplish prayer on our own. Praying with Scripture helps us pray constantly by embedding in our hearts and minds a “vocabulary of prayer”—in becoming more familiar with Scripture and how it applies to us specifically, we are more readily able to call it to mind in various situations, which in turn calls us to prayer.



DAY 5 – TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Participants will reflect on Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well, Byzantine Mosaic, Basilica of San Marco, Venice, Italy.

Rather than presenting us with a single scene, the mosaic is divided into two parts, providing a pictorial narrative. Recall John 4:1-43. What two events are depicted in the mosaic?

The left side of the mosaic depicts Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, including when the Apostles return and unexpectedly find him talking with a woman. The right side of the mosaic recalls how the Samaritan woman goes back to share with her townsfolk the encounter she has had, and to proclaim “the Christ.”

PRAYER

FINDING INTIMACY WITH GOD

LEADER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

SESSION 3



LECTIO™

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TIM GRAY

Nihil Obstat: Tomas Fuerte, S.T.L., *Censor Librorum*

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SESSION 3

LECTIO & MEDITATIO: CLIMBING THE FIRST RUNGS

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

The previous session used the narrative of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well to describe and emphasize that God initiates the encounter of prayer. It also briefly outlined Guigo the Carthusian's method of prayer, which he describes using the image of rungs on a ladder: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. While this method is merely a means to God and not an end in itself, following its steps in order can be a very useful tool—especially when one is still new to *lectio divina* or experiencing difficulty in prayer.

The first rung on the ladder is how we listen to God: *lectio*. *Lectio* involves a slow, careful reading of the Word of God. Our modern culture with its preference for video, short text messages, and speed-reading, can find this aspect of *lectio* difficult at first. But as we take time and pay closer attention, we will begin to notice how carefully specific words and descriptions are used in God's Word. We will also begin to recognize the different techniques, such as repetition and metaphor, that Scripture uses to get our attention.

The second rung on the ladder is *meditatio*, seeking a deeper understanding in reflection on the passage read in *lectio*. Once careful reading gets us to pay attention to the words God uses, *meditatio* calls us to dig deeper to understand "why." Why is this person, place, or thing described in this way? Why is this word repeated? Why is this description or image used? This reflection will set the stage for a dialogue with God.

These two steps begin our ascent to God in prayer. In reading and meditation we listen attentively to what God says to us in Scripture and focus our minds on understanding his words as fully as possible.



CONNECT

*Begin this session by leading the **Opening Prayer**, and then read or summarize the **Introduction** for your group. Both can be found in the Study Guide.*

*If you have time, review the last session with your group. Can anyone can recite the **Memory Verse** (John 4:10) without assistance? Otherwise, look it up (page 22) and recite it as a group.*

*Also discuss any highlights or questions the group may have had from the last session's **COMMIT** reflections. Then continue.*

What is your favorite thing to talk about with your closest friend?

Topics of conversation with a close friend likely include things that are more personal and meaningful than just shared interests or activities. When talking with a close friend the conversation often becomes a way to share oneself with the other, not just share information. The conversation is motivated by true interest in and care for the other, and a desire to know the other more deeply. This is the type of conversation God wants to have with us in prayer—a deep, personal, sharing of ourselves with God.

What comes to mind when you hear the word “meditation”? Does this word have a positive or negative connotation for you? Why?

Some people may already have experience with the Christian tradition of meditation and so may associate “meditation” with seeking a deeper understanding of truth. However, many people will associate “meditation” with Eastern traditions of meditation that focus more on relaxation, self-awareness, altered consciousness, emptying the mind, etc. There may also be an association with specific postures or activities to aid meditation, such as yoga. For some people the Eastern traditions of meditation will have a negative connotation as they are often closely bound up with religious and philosophic principles not compatible with Christianity.



Play the video segment, which will last about 30 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching, along with the following discussion questions.



DISCUSS

After the video segment, discuss the following questions. Familiarize yourself with the comments after each question; these are meant to guide you in the conversation.

CLIMBING THE FIRST RUNGS

1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

The Christian tradition of meditation, of filling the mind with truth (as opposed to Eastern traditions which focus on emptying the mind) will likely be new for some participants. The importance of slow reading in lectio, the examples of different details to observe (such as nouns and verbs, repetition, etc.), and the importance of allusion in meditatio may also be new information for some participants.

2. How does *lectio* lead naturally into *meditatio*? How might prayer be especially fruitful with an ebb and flow between *lectio* and *meditatio*?

Observing details in the text (lectio) leads naturally into reflecting on the significance and deeper meaning of those particular words and the text as a whole (meditatio). Because lectio requires such slow, careful reading it is natural to stop and meditate at various points in the reading, and then to return to reading until a new point for meditation arises. This ebb and flow allows us to give our full consideration to each point as God draws our attention to it, rather than miss or forget something because we are so focused on reading an entire passage, or on following each step to the letter, that we fail to respond to the Spirit.

3. In the video Dr. Gray says that Jacob's wrestling with God is a metaphor for prayer. What does it mean to you to wrestle with God in prayer? Are you comfortable with this image of prayer? Why or why not? *Wrestling with God in prayer means persevering in prayer even when it is difficult, continuing to present a petition to God even when he does not seem to be answering, or even arguing with God when we are angry, hurt, confused, etc. We are called to be receptive to God, in order to engage him. Some participants may be comfortable with the image, others may feel it to be too strong or even disrespectful. But wrestling with God in prayer is not about trying to change God's mind/will, but about wrestling with (next to, in accordance with) God in prayer in order to come into line with him and his will for our life.*

*Direct participants to this session's **Memory Verse** in their Study Guides, and read it together. Then lead the **Closing Prayer**. Encourage participants to do the **COMMIT** reflections on their own before you meet again as a group.*



COMMIT

*Following are suggested answers to the questions participants will be asked in their daily **COMMIT** reflections.*



DAY 1 – LECTIO: CAREFUL READING

Participants will learn some tips for reading carefully and paying attention to detail during lectio.

Use the space below to take note of the nouns and verbs in this passage. Read the passage putting yourself in Abram's place. What do you notice based on your careful reading of the passage?

Nouns: word, LORD, man, heir, son, outside, heaven, stars, descendants, righteousness. Verbs: behold, came, shall [not] be, shall be, brought, said, look, number, are able to number, said, believed, reckoned. Additional things noticed: God is the one who is named (LORD); Abram is only referred to by the pronoun "he." God is the one performing the action until the very end, when Abram believed. The words of God's promise and his demonstration to Abram lead Abram to faith. Faith is a response to God.

How does this detail change your visualization and understanding of the passage?

Verse 12 tells us that Abram was told to number the stars while it was daytime, but in the daytime the stars are not visible. It isn't simply a matter of not being able to count high enough to number the stars/his descendants. Abraham can't see the stars in broad daylight, so too he cannot see his descendants—God's point is that Abraham must trust that God will bring his unseen descendants into being, just as the unseen stars will appear when the sun goes down.

Psalm 42:1–3 *Lectio*—Carefully read the passage. What do you note? What nouns and pronouns are used? What verbs and adverbs are used? What comparisons are made?

Nouns: deer, streams, God, face of God, soul, tears, food. Pronouns: "my" is used multiple times. Verbs: longs, thirsts, come and behold, say. Comparisons: my soul is compared to the deer, my longing and thirst compared to the deer's longing for water, my tears are compared to food.

Luke 9:23-26 *Lectio*—Carefully read the passage. What do you note? What nouns and pronouns are used? What verbs and adverbs are used? What comparisons are made?

Nouns: man, cross, life, world, Son, Father, angels, glory. Verbs: come after, follow, deny, take up, save, lose(s), profit, ashamed. Adjectives/Adverbs: not just “man” but “any man”; not just “take up his cross” but take it up “daily”; must lose life “for my sake” in order to save it. Passage also contrasts “profit/gain” and “loss/forfeit.”



DAY 2 – LECTIO: REPETITION AND METAPHORS

Participants will learn more tools for lectio by examining the importance of repetition and metaphors.

Read the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22:1-14. How many times is the word “son” used in this passage? How many times is “father” or “Abraham” (which means ‘father of many/multitude’) used in the passage?

In the story of the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 we find the word “son” used eleven times in verses 1–14, emphasizing that Isaac was Abraham’s long-awaited and much-beloved son. We find the word “father” used two times (on the lips of Isaac, Abraham’s son) and the name “Abraham” used fifteen times. The theme of “son” foreshadows Jesus’ identity as the only begotten Son of God, sacrificed for our sins. The theme of “father” foreshadows God the loving Father who will offer his only begotten Son.

Look up Genesis 37:23-34. How many times “robe” is repeated in these verses. What is this repetition emphasizing?

The word “robe” is repeated seven times in this passage. In Genesis 37:3 we learn that the “long robe with sleeves” was a gift given to Joseph because his father Israel (Jacob) loved him. For Israel, the robe represents Joseph and the great love of a father for his son. When it reappears torn to pieces, it brings mourning to Israel’s heart. For Joseph’s brothers, it represents their resentment that their father loves Joseph more than them, and with it they deceive their father (just as Jacob once used the clothes of his brother to deceive his father Isaac—see Genesis 27).

Try it on your own using the passage from Psalm 23:1-3.

Lectio—What metaphor is used? What does it teach us about God?

Psalm 23 uses the metaphor of the LORD as a shepherd, showing that just as a shepherd leads his sheep to good places for their nourishment, so too the LORD leads us in ways of righteousness. As the sheep, I must follow and trust the shepherd.

Try it on your own using the passage from Isaiah 64:8.

Lectio—What metaphor is used? What does it teach us about God?

Isaiah describes God as a potter, and us as clay. In doing so, we come to understand in a deeper way how we must trust God to make each of us into a beautiful work of art. Just as a potter must push and pull on the clay to get it into the right shape, so too as God is working with us. It might not always feel good, but the end result is beautiful.



DAY 3 – LECTIO: JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

Participants will reflect on Jacob's wrestling match with God in Genesis 32:24–30 and how this relates to our own prayer.

LECTIO

Who is named in this passage (Genesis 32:24–30), and who is not? How many times is the word “name” used? How many mentions of each name are there?

Jacob is named, God is not. The word “name” is used four times. “Jacob” is used eight times, the “man” is mentioned twice, “Israel” is used once. Just as Jacob receives a name “Israel,” Jacob also names the place “Peniel.”

Which actions are attributed to Jacob? Which actions are attributed to God?

Jacob is the recipient of several actions (left alone, he is wrestled with, his thigh is put out of joint). Jacob speaks/asks, and names the place. The implied action is that he wrestles and perseveres. God (the “man,” God’s representative) is portrayed as more active: he wrestles, he sees that he does not prevail, he touches Jacob’s thigh and puts it out of joint, he speaks, he changes Jacob’s name, and he blesses Jacob.

What does Jacob want here? What does he receive?

Jacob wants a blessing. He receives both a blessing and a new name (and his life, even though he saw God face to face).

MEDITATIO

Knowing and addressing someone by their name indicates a certain level of relationship, and naming or renaming someone indicates having authority over that person. Why does Jacob ask his opponent’s name? Why does God, who certainly already knows Jacob, ask him his name? What is significant about the change in Jacob’s name?

Jacob doesn’t immediately recognize that he is wrestling with God, and so he asks his apparent opponent his name. Jacob is returning to “his country and his kindred” (see Genesis 32:9). When he left his country, he was fleeing for his life because he had hidden his identity and stolen the blessing from his brother Esau. Now as Jacob is about to return home, God asks Jacob, “What is your name?” to give Jacob the chance to be truthful in asking for a blessing. Jacob’s name change, from Jacob, which means “supplanter” or “deceiver,” to Israel, which means “he who prevails with God,” demonstrates the change in Jacob and reflects the change in his relationship with God. As we wrestle with God in our own prayer, God will also ask us questions that will likely reveal our sin so that we can receive his forgiveness, and he will also change us, making us more and more in his own likeness.

What does Jacob’s perseverance in his wrestling match teach us about prayer? Why might it be significant that the wrestling takes place at night and lasts all night, while the blessing comes with the dawn?

We should never give up in prayer—never give up due to difficulties, never give up seeking God and asking for his blessing. It also teaches us that sometimes getting an answer in prayer might take longer than we want or expect, but we should stick with it no matter how long it takes. Wrestling in prayer may feel dark and hopeless—like night—but blessing, clarity, and understanding will follow like the dawn. “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

Where else in Scripture do you see people wrestling with God in prayer? How do these various examples relate to your own experience in prayer?

We see this especially in the psalms, for example when the psalmist is crying out to God to help him in his distress (see for example, Psalm 38, 42, or 88). We see this when St. Paul several times requests that the “thorn in his flesh” be removed, but Christ says, “my grace is sufficient” (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-9). We also see this in Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus asks that this cup be taken from him. Seeing Jesus’ prayer in this light may make some people more comfortable with the idea of wrestling with God in prayer. It’s not about trying to change God’s mind/will, but about wrestling with (next to, in accordance with) God in prayer in order to come into line with him and his will for our lives.



DAY 4 – MEDITATIO: STEPPING UP FROM LECTIO

Participants will reflect on meditatio, Christian meditation.

Scripture frequently uses the repetition of a simple word or phrase to allude to an earlier narrative. For example, St. John begins his gospel with “In the beginning” (John 1:1). What do these words call to mind? What kind of tone does this set for the rest of St. John’s gospel?

These words call to mind the opening words of the Book of Genesis, which also begins, “In the beginning.” Genesis’ first chapters speak of the first creation of the world. The prophets foretold that God would bring about a new creation (see Isaiah 65:17, for example). By recalling Genesis’ opening words at the beginning of his gospel, St. John alludes to the “new creation” that is about to happen in Jesus Christ.

Try it on your own using the passage from Mark 2:1-5.

Lectio—Carefully read the passage. What do you note?

Nouns: Capernaum, home, many gathered, no room (even at the door), Jesus, paralytic, four men, roof, faith, child. Verbs: returned, reported, gathered together, preaching, carried, could not get near, removed the roof, made an opening, let down, saw their faith, sins forgiven.

Meditatio—Reflect on the meaning of what you noted during *lectio*.

The crowd gathers because of a report that Jesus is home—why? We don’t know why the crowd is there. But what Jesus does is teach—does this imply that what the crowd needs most is truth? The person in great need can’t even reach Jesus because of the crowds—they “could not get near.” Is there more than the crowd keeping the paralytic far from Jesus? The paralytic only reaches Jesus thanks to his friends. The friends are willing to do whatever it takes—remove the roof, make an opening, let down the pallet—to get the paralyzed man to Jesus. Does faith require such active and persistent work? Jesus sees both the physical and spiritual and addresses the spiritual first. It is a man on the pallet, but Jesus tenderly calls him a “child”—because with the forgiveness of sins he becomes a newborn child of God.

In using my imagination, I might put myself in the place of the friends. It’s hard work getting my friend to Jesus, why am I doing it? Or I might put myself in the place of the paralytic: What emotions do I feel for my friends? Am I scared to meet Jesus face to face? What do I think when he first says “your sins are forgiven” and not “walk”? What stirs up in my heart when Jesus addresses me as “child”?

PRAYER

FINDING INTIMACY WITH GOD

LEADER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

SESSION 4



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

Nihil Obstat: Tomas Fuerte, S.T.L., *Censor Librorum*

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver, November 2015

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SESSION 4

ORATIO: CONVERSATION WITH GOD

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

In the previous session we began to ascend the ladder of *lectio divina* by studying the first two rungs: *lectio*, reading, and *meditatio*, meditation. These first two steps establish the subject matter of prayer with careful reading of and reflection on Scripture.

In this session we move on to the third rung of the ladder, *oratio*. Although this word is often translated as “prayer,” a better translation would be “conversing” or “conversation.” Often we are tempted to begin with *oratio*, with our own thoughts and words. But Guigo the Carthusian in his ladder of prayer teaches us that if our conversation is to be fruitful, the place to begin ascending the ladder is on the first rungs. Having heard God speak to us in his Word on the first two rungs, we are able to respond on the third rung of *oratio*.

Dr. Gray will spend time looking at St. Augustine as a model of prayer. In his *Confessions*, we see St. Augustine recounting the episodes of his life and understanding them in light of God’s Word, just as we are invited to do in *oratio*. From the *Confessions* we also learn that when we do not walk according to God’s will and let sin “set up shop” in our lives, we put up barriers that disrupt our prayer. Reconciliation and obedience to God break down these barriers, opening the way for intimate conversation.

Oratio is simply a heart-to-heart conversation with the friend who is “more inward than my innermost self” (St. Augustine), but it still takes practice. This session offers not only the writings of St. Augustine, but also the Lord’s Prayer and the Psalms as our guides for growing in our ability to converse deeply with God.



CONNECT

*Begin this session by leading the **Opening Prayer**, and then read or summarize the **Introduction** for your group. Both can be found in the Study Guide.*

*If you have time, review the last session with your group. Can anyone recite the **Memory Verse** (Psalm 84:4-5) without assistance? Otherwise, look it up (page 38) and recite it as a group.*

*Also discuss any highlights or questions the group may have had from the last session’s **COMMIT** reflections. Then continue.*

What makes it easy to have a deep, meaningful conversation with a close friend?

Having a close, healthy relationship makes it easier to have a deep conversation. It's often awkward to try to talk about something intimate or important with a friend who we do not know well. It's also helpful to have time and space set aside for the conversation—have it be intentional rather than random. And there must be an actual topic of conversation; it's hard to have a deep conversation about nothing in particular. In this session we will be looking at how to make the most of our time conversing with God in oratio.

Think of a time when you felt distant from a friend and had a hard time talking with that person. What was getting in the way of conversation?

Answers may be very personal. The details aren't necessary, so encourage participants to share their experiences in general, to help them feel comfortable. A disagreement or a fight can put distance in a relationship and make conversation difficult at best, sometimes leading to a complete breakdown in communication. This question sets the stage for understanding how moral barriers that disrupt our relationship with God also become major barriers to conversing with God in prayer. Just as a fight with a friend or spouse makes it hard to talk with him/her easily, so also our sin makes it hard for us to hear and talk to God.



Play the video segment, which will last about 31 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching, along with the following discussion questions.



DISCUSS

After the video segment, discuss the following questions. Familiarize yourself with the comments after each question; these are meant to guide you in the conversation.

CONVERSATION WITH GOD

1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

St. Augustine's Confessions and the model of prayer as a dialogue in that work may be new or particularly striking to some participants. The idea of moral barriers disrupting both our relationship with God and our conversation in prayer make another striking point, as well as the connection between almsgiving, fasting, and fruitful prayer.

2. What are some examples of moral barriers to prayer (either general or from personal experience)?

What are some specific ways to overcome these particular barriers?

Encourage participants to share general examples if they are not comfortable sharing from personal experience. Some examples of moral barriers: addiction to pornography, abuse of alcohol or drugs, sloth (e.g., too great an attachment to sleep), excessive time spent watching TV or playing online games, etc. For any habitual sin or attachment to things of this world that is brought up as an example, participants can find a virtue to help overcome that barrier. Practicing temperance with food, drink, or time spent with technology (or fasting from something to which they are too attached) would be one example. Making a point of getting to Confession would be a great place to start.

3. What is your experience with praying the psalms? What is your favorite psalm? Why?

Encourage those with experience praying the Liturgy of the Hours to talk about that. Others may pray with some favorite psalms or use hymns and songs based on the psalms in their personal prayer. Everyone who attends Mass has experience with praying the Responsorial Psalm during the liturgy. If participants don't have a specific favorite psalm, encourage them to share what type of psalm they prefer—praise, thanksgiving, lament, or happy, sad, in danger, etc.

Direct participants to this session's **Memory Verse** in their Study Guides, and read it together. Then lead the **Closing Prayer**. Encourage participants to do the **COMMIT** reflections on their own before you meet again as a group.



COMMIT

Following are suggested answers to the questions participants will be asked in their daily **COMMIT** reflections.



DAY 1 – ST. AUGUSTINE: MODEL OF PRAYER

Participants will look at St. Augustine and his Confessions to find a model of prayer as dialogue and prayer using the words of Scripture.

What questions does St. Augustine have for God in this passage?

St. Augustine wants to know whether knowledge and understanding of God come first followed by prayer, or whether praying to God comes before knowledge and understanding.

Look up the following verses. What answer does St. Augustine find from God in Scripture?

Romans 10:14 – We can't pray to God if we don't know him or believe in him. To know and believe in him we must have heard about him from someone. (Prayer requires some level of understanding.)

Psalms 22:26 & Jeremiah 29:13 – If we seek God, we will find him and praise him. (Seeking leads us to prayer.) St. Augustine finds that the answer is "both." God will reveal himself to all who seek—we can pray (seek) and understanding will follow; but we cannot truly pray to God if we don't know him, so understanding will lead us to better prayer. It is a cycle. Each continually leads to the other.

Try it on your own using the passage from John 5:2–9.

Lectio—Carefully read the passage. What do you note?

The detailed location of this miracle: Jerusalem, Sheep Gate, Bethesda pools. Passage gives detail of the "multitude"—invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed—and notes the "one man." This "sick man" has been "ill" a "long time"—thirty-eight years. Jesus asks the man if he wants to be healed even though his illness is readily apparent and Jesus already knows that he has been there a long time. Jesus gives direct, active instructions to the man—"rise," "take up," "walk." The man was healed "at once."

Meditatio—Reflect on the meaning of what you noted during *lectio*.

The detailed/specific location reminds us that God enters into human history—any first-century Christian could go to the location of this miracle, and even today it is possible to visit the location on a pilgrimage—and God wants to enter into “my” history. The details about the individual ailments of the multitude, and the “one man,” remind us that God also knows our exact needs. Jesus asks if the man wants to be healed. He doesn’t go against our free will, but rather invites us. Jesus starts the conversation with this question. We might reflect on whether the man’s response is an excuse, blaming others, or an honest assessment of his troubles. Even though the passage doesn’t record the man’s “yes, I want to be healed” or any verbal response to Jesus’ question, this man must have responded immediately in his heart because “at once” he is healed.

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

The reflections above might lead participants to journal about these types of questions and responses: I thank God for his intimate and personal love for me. I ask God to open my eyes to the things of which I need to be healed. Even though God knows what I need, I still need to ask him for it in prayer. Asking God for what I need helps me become more aware of what my real needs are and reminds me that it is God who meets my needs. Even though I might have had an infirmity or trouble for “a long time,” do I still trust that God can heal me? That God loves me? I might take stock of whether God is giving me direction in my life. Am I responding to this direction? Am I responding honestly? Or am I making excuses?



DAY 2 – BARRIERS TO CONVERSATION

Participants reflect on what gets in the way of conversing with God in oratio.

Read Psalm 32. How do we break down the barrier of sin and repair our relationship with God?

In Psalm 32 the psalmist says, “I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’; then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin” (verse 5), and with forgiveness comes instruction, teaching, and counsel from the Lord.

What attachments might be hindering your *oratio*? What steps can you take this week to cultivate a deeper intimacy with God and break down any moral barriers to prayer?

This is a chance to take a more personal look at what was discussed in general after watching the video. Personal sins, attachments to things that may be good in and of themselves but still distract us from God, or frustration with God over an unanswered prayer or difficult situation—all of these can disrupt our prayer. Confession, time in Adoration, and fasting from something are examples of steps to take to break down these barriers. Simply recognizing and acknowledging the existence of a barrier is an important first step!

Practice *lectio*, *meditatio*, and *oratio* using the passage from Psalm 139:1–6.

Lectio—Carefully read the passage. What do you note?

Participants might note the primary theme of “knowing”: “All my ways” are known—when I sit, when I rise, my path, my lying down. God searches, knows, discerns, is acquainted...knows it “altogether”...and such knowledge is described as “too wonderful.”

Meditatio—Reflect on the meaning of what you noted during *lectio*.

Reflections on the careful reading might include: The psalm’s repetition and numerous examples emphasize how deeply and intimately God knows me. There is nothing I can hide from God. If God knows a word before I speak it, then he must know me better than I know myself!

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

Participants might journal on any of the following: I can't hide anything from God, so I might as well stop trying. If I don't recognize something that is going on in my own heart, I need to ask God to reveal it, because he sees it before I do. God lays his hand upon me...does this bring me comfort, safety? Or is there sin in my life that makes me want to pull away from God's hand? God's intimate knowledge of me is "wonderful"—does this intimacy bring me wonder at how the God of the universe knows me? Or is this maybe intimidating ("too wonderful")?



DAY 3 – LECTIO: LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Participants will reflect on Jesus teaching his disciples to pray the Lord's Prayer.

LECTIO

What instructions does Jesus give concerning prayer (place, manner, how we address God, etc.)?

Pray in secret, do not use more words just for the sake of a longer prayer, address God as Father, forgive others so that our prayers for forgiveness will be heard and answered.

Look for the verbs used in the Our Father. What is the first thing we ask for in this prayer? How do the petitions progress? Is there a pattern?

We first ask for God's name to be hallowed (made holy or recognized as holy). The petitions progress from a focus on God in heaven to his kingdom and will being manifest not only in heaven but in us, to provision for us on earth, and to our relationships with others.

What is required of us in order for our prayer for forgiveness to be heard and answered?

We must first forgive others.

MEDITATIO

What is the significance of beginning prayer by addressing God as "our Father"? What does this teach us about prayer in general?

God truly loves us and cares for us—we can trust him to answer our prayer because he is our Father. It also means we approach him in boldness as sons and daughters, rather than as mere servants or slaves.

Which of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer stands out the most to you? Why?

A particular petition may stand out because a person understands it in a new way after the meditation (e.g., understanding why we ask for God's name to be hallowed when he is holy in and of himself without our help), or it may stand out because that need is particularly strong right now (e.g., "thy will be done" because I am struggling to align my will with God's over something in particular).

In Matthew's gospel, the Lord's Prayer is framed by instructions concerning almsgiving (Matthew 6:1–4) and fasting (Matthew 6:16–18). What relationship do these two practices have to prayer? Why are they so important?

We must learn how to live lives of love if we want to have intimate conversation with the God who is Love. Almsgiving and fasting teach us love for neighbor and detachment from self, and they therefore bring us into closer relationship with God, making prayer more intimate and more effective.



DAY 4 – PSALMS: A SCHOOL OF PRAYER

Participants will look at the psalms as a model of prayer as well as a crucial element of the prayer life of the Christian in union with the whole Church.

Read Psalm 28. According to this psalm, how do we avoid wickedness? How do we live righteously? The wicked “speak peace with their neighbors, while mischief is in their hearts”; they work evil deeds and “do not regard the works of the LORD.” So we must be honest in our dealings with others, do good and not evil, be mindful of God and his works, and trust in God as our strength and shield, in order to live righteously.

Look up the following psalms. What is going on in David’s life when he writes each psalm?

Psalm 3 – Written when David had to flee Jerusalem because his son Absalom was leading a coup to take over the throne of David, his father.

Psalm 51 – Written after David sinned with Bathsheba.

Psalm 57 – Written when David was hiding from Saul because Saul sought his life.

Now try it on your own using the passage from Psalm 130:1–8.

Lectio—Carefully read the passage. What do you note?

Participants might note any of the following: repetition of the divine name (LORD), repetition of the plea to be heard and forgiven, expression of trust that God will forgive, and comparison of the soul’s waiting to the watchman.

Meditatio—Reflect on the meaning of what you noted during *lectio*.

Psalmist doesn’t just cry out to God, but cries “out of the depths.” The watchman watches for morning, day, and light; he doesn’t leave his post until his time is over—just as my soul “watches” and “waits.” While the psalmist talks about God being feared, he also speaks of hoping in the Lord and finding mercy and plenteous redemption, so the fear of God is not something that keeps us away, but draws us to God in wonder. Psalmist speaks of “plenteous redemption”—God’s mercy is not sparse or limited, but full and abundant; it redeems “all” iniquity.

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

Some examples of what participants may journal: I am drawn to heartfelt expression of my contrition, my need for forgiveness, and my trust that God will forgive and heal. I feel anew the truth that God will lift up my soul from the depths of sin to the bright morning of his forgiveness and redemption. I have a new understanding that God can forgive “all” my iniquity. I share with God my joy in a new understanding of the hope I have in his mercy. I challenged to be like a watchman, in the sense that I am on the watch for occasions of sin so as to do better at avoiding them.

PRAYER

FINDING INTIMACY WITH GOD

LEADER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

SESSION 5



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

Nihil Obstat: Tomas Fuerte, S.T.L., *Censor Librorum*

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SESSION 5

CONTEMPLATIO: THE GAZE OF LOVE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

We have examined the way in which climbing the ladder of prayer requires us to use the full powers of our minds and hearts to read, reflect, and respond in *lectio*, *meditatio*, and *oratio*. Although God always initiates the encounter of prayer, success in climbing these first three rungs of the ladder is also dependent on the effort we put forth.

The fourth rung of the ladder is entirely different. In *contemplatio* we cease to be the ones acting in prayer and we simply receive the gift of contemplation God offers to us. This encounter with God is very difficult to define or explain. Instead, contemplation is most often described using analogies—tasting, seeing, etc.—showing rather than explaining or defining. One way to describe *contemplatio* is as a gaze of love: we gaze upon Love himself and rest in his loving embrace.

Whether fleeting moments or extended periods of time in the presence of the Beloved, these encounters are to be remembered. God's people remembered their encounters with God in the Torah, and celebrated them in their annual feasts. We do this remembering of special encounters in our temporal life when we celebrate anniversaries and birthdays, when we take pictures of favorite vacations or trips. In our spiritual life we too need to remember our encounters with God, these pearls of great price, so that when trial and dryness arise in our prayer and our life, we can recall God's love and remember Love's presence even in the midst of what appears to be his absence.

Contemplatio is the pinnacle of the ladder of prayer. We begin by seeking the face of God, like Moses on Mount Sinai, and David in Psalm 27:8. After the arduous work of ascent, we rest in the peace of this supernatural encounter with God. The key to *contemplatio* is love—in seeking God's face, we must also seek to love ever more perfectly in order to be prepared to receive and return this gaze of God's perfect love.



CONNECT

*Begin this session by leading the **Opening Prayer** and reading aloud the **Introduction**, both found in the Study Guide.*

*If you have time, review the last session with your group. Can anyone recite the **Memory Verse** (Luke 11:1) without assistance? Otherwise, look it up (page 56) and recite it as a group.*

*Also discuss any highlights or questions the group may have had from the last session's **COMMIT** reflections. Then continue.*

Describe a time when you were completely caught up in gazing at someone you love or something you thought was beautiful. What did you feel in that moment? Is what you felt easy to describe?

Some examples may include seeing your spouse on your wedding day, watching your child sleep, or meeting up with a dear friend after a long absence. Other examples could include being lost in wonder at a beautiful sunrise, a majestic mountain view, or a magnificent work of art. These moments, while they mark our heart and memory in profound ways, are often hard to put into words. Contemplatio is a gaze of love exchanged with God—we can begin to describe this in terms of how we experience a “gaze of love” in human relationships and the natural world.

What is something that you really want but can't work for or achieve on your own? Think of something you can prepare for but have to wait to receive from someone else.

We prepare ourselves to be properly disposed to receive the gift of contemplation, but it is not something we can make happen on our own—it is a gift from God. Some other gifts we can prepare for but not make happen by our own effort might include maintaining good health (to do everything right, but having to wait patiently for healing), having children, waiting for a vocation to be revealed, waiting for a marriage proposal, etc.



Play the video segment, which will last about 28 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching, along with the following discussion questions.



DISCUSS

After the video segment, discuss the following questions. Familiarize yourself with the comments after each question; these are meant to guide you in the conversation.

THE GAZE OF LOVE

1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

Some new or particularly striking ideas may include the description of contemplation in terms of tasting or seeing, the fact that contemplation is a gift and not something we can achieve if we just try hard enough, Blaise Pascal's description of his encounter with God, etc.

2. What do you think it means to look at God and have him look at you, and for that to be “enough,” as the man in St. John Vianney's parish described?

One possible answer: The idea of looking at God and being looked at by him is an encounter of simply being present—you don't have to say anything or figure anything out; it is just an awareness of God's love for you and your love for God. It is peaceful and restful, not demanding. An analogous experience might be a couple married many years who are happy just being together with no need to speak.

3. Why is it so important to remember our encounters with God, both personally (like Pascal) and communally (like Israel)? How do you do this?

Scripture sets the example for remembering and celebrating our encounters with God. The memory can sustain and encourage us through difficult times. Remembering God's encounters with his people communally (as a Church, as Israel did) builds faith and a sense of community. Some people may use words to remember (like Pascal's note), while others may use art or music to commemorate the encounter. Journaling about our prayer time is a wonderful way to keep an ongoing remembrance of our encounters with God in prayer—both the words and direction we receive in lectio/meditation/oratio, and also any encounters of contemplatio.

*Direct participants to this session's **Memory Verse** in their Study Guides, and read it together. Then lead the **Closing Prayer**. Encourage participants to do the **COMMIT** reflections on their own before you meet again as a group.*



COMMIT

*Following are suggested answers to the questions participants will be asked in their daily **COMMIT** reflections.*



DAY 1 – CONTEMPLATION: THE GAZE AND FRUIT OF LOVE

Participants will explore contemplation as a gaze of love and the fruit of the labor of lectio/mediatio/oratio.

What can you do to increase your love and virtue and make yourself ready for *contemplatio*? Where do you feel your efforts stop and God's gift begins?

Anything we do to deepen our love for God helps prepare us to receive the gift of contemplation. Some specific examples would be to go to Confession, to work to root out sin in our lives, and to love those around us more perfectly. We should especially prepare for contemplation by working diligently and faithfully at prayer through lectio, meditatio, and oratio. There may not be a clearly perceived line between our own efforts and God's gift because prayer is itself a gift that requires our effort in response. God initiates, we work at it, and sometimes we also receive the gift of true contemplation. All of our hard work should serve to remind us that it is God who works first and who works in and through us even in our work.

Spend some time in *lectio divina* today reflecting on God's love and his invitation to "come away" in the passage from Song of Solomon 2:10–13.

Lectio—Carefully read the passage. What do you note?

The bride (my soul) is twice described using the words "my love" and "my fair one." Images of springtime include flowers, blossoms, fragrance, birds, new birth/growth, freshness, fruit, a sense of readiness and anticipation, but also pruning. The call from the Bridegroom (Christ) is to "arise" and "come away."

Meditatio—Reflect on the meaning of what you noted during *lectio*.

This is an invitation to an intimate encounter with the Beloved. The time of sitting and waiting is over, and we are called to "arise" and "come." The signs of spring alert our senses—sight (seeing flowers), smell (smelling the fragrances), and taste (anticipating the figs of the tree and the wine from the vines).

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

My Beloved is calling me—will I respond? Will I arise eagerly and go, or will I hesitate? Why do I hesitate? Is it out of fear? Pride? Distrust? Is there pruning needed for a more fruitful harvest in my soul? Do I recognize that everything in the passage (signs of spring, etc.) point me to my Beloved? Do I see these same signs in my day-to-day life? Where? Give God thanks for the many signs of his love.

Contemplatio—Take time to simply rest in God’s presence.



DAY 2 – ADORATION: AN ENCOUNTER OF THE BELOVED

Participants will reflect on how Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament helps us practice and prepare for an experience of contemplation.

When is the last time you went to an adoration chapel? Or stopped by a church to visit our Lord in the tabernacle? What was your experience of prayer during that time?

Some participants may not have much experience at all with Adoration; others might make a regular Holy Hour. Anyone who has experienced Adoration multiple times is likely to have had a wide range of experiences—from initial distraction due to the quiet, to deep, fruitful prayer.

Make time this week to visit our Lord in the tabernacle or adoration chapel, and, as you join the Beloved Disciple close to Christ’s heart, practice the “art of prayer” using the passage from Psalm 24:3–6.

Lectio—Carefully read the passage. What do you note?

Themes include: purity/worthiness—clean hands, pure heart; seeking God’s face, seeking his dwelling ascending, standing, lifting up; and God described as Lord, God of Jacob, and God of [my] salvation.

Meditatio—Reflect on the meaning of what you noted during *lectio*.

Themes of purity and worthiness are contrasted to what is “false” and deceitful...these are two different options/paths, and we must choose one. If we strive to be worthy and “seek” God faithfully, then we will receive blessing, vindication, and “see” God, and not only see but also “stand” in his presence. Who stands in the presence of a king? God is personal, he is Lord, he is Jacob’s God.

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

How do I prepare myself for an encounter with God? Do I go into it aware of my sin and my need for forgiveness? How do I approach God with clean hands and a pure heart? Are there false things to which I lift up my soul instead of to God? Is God, “my” God, the God of “my salvation,” lord of my life, my whole life? Can I put my name in the place of Jacob: the God of _____? How much effort do I put into seeking his face? How can I seek him more diligently? How do I feel God drawing me upward, toward himself?

Contemplatio—Take time to simply rest in God’s presence.



DAY 3 – LECTIO: ELIJAH AND THE STILL SMALL VOICE

Participants will reflect on Elijah fleeing from Jezebel and encountering God at Mount Horeb.

LECTIO

What is God's question for Elijah? Look at 1 Kings 19:7–8. Why is this question unexpected?

God asks Elijah, "What are you doing here?" In verses 7-8 it is the angel of the Lord who speaks of "the journey," so it is God who directed Elijah to Mount Horeb.

How is the voice of God's presence described? What adjectives are used? Look up the definitions for these words.

God's presence is described as a "still small voice."

Still – remaining in place, at rest; free from sound or noise; subdued or low in sound; free from turbulence or commotion; peaceful; tranquil.

Small – of limited size, not big, little; not great in amount, degree, extent, duration, value, etc.

What is the major repetition in this passage? What is framed by the repetition?

God asks Elijah, "What are you doing here?" Elijah repeats that he has been jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, and faithful to the Lord, while Israel has forsaken God—that he is the only faithful one left, and his life is in danger because of it. God responds with "Go"—first directing Elijah for his encounter on the mountain, and then directing him to his next mission.

This repetition of Elijah's faithfulness and his despair (because he appears to be the only faithful one) frames his encounter with God in the still small voice.

MEDITATIO

Elijah's joy at following God no matter the consequences has been lost, and instead there is despair. How does God put Elijah back on track?

Most of us have probably felt overwhelmed by what God is asking of us at some point, even if we haven't felt specifically that the benefits don't match up to the cost. If we pay attention, God puts the same question to us as he did to Elijah: "What are you doing here?" It's a time for us to step back and reflect on whether our focus is still on God, or on us. Is our faithfulness because of love, personal love of God? God puts Elijah back on track with a personal, profound encounter with himself. When discouragement and despair come, we too need to return to God in a deeper way and meet him in Scripture and spiritual reading as well as in friends or mentors, so that we return to the joy we can only find in God.

Once Elijah recognizes God's presence, what does he do? Why?

When Elijah hears the still small voice and recognizes God's presence, "He wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave." Elijah recognizes the God whom he loves and cannot remain in the cave. In humility he covers his face before the God of heaven, but he "went out"—to be as close as possible to the Lord.

What does it mean that Elijah is “jealous” for the Lord? How do his jealousy and faithfulness open the door to his encounter with God at Mount Horeb? What does the framing of Elijah’s encounter with the repetition noted above teach us?

Elijah recognizes that worship belongs rightfully to God alone, and he wants God to have what is his—he doesn’t want Israel to chase after false idols. Even in the midst of his despair, Elijah is a man who seeks God diligently and loves God faithfully, and this prepares him for the encounter at Horeb. If he did not already love God and desire God, he would not be so quick to recognize God. You have to be listening already to hear the still small voice. The repetition reminds us of this, and also that God sends us out to witness to him—“Go”—but that mission always starts, and re-starts, with our personal encounter with God.



DAY 4 – REMEMBERING THE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Participants will examine the importance of remembering and celebrating our encounters with God.

What are some ways you remember and celebrate important moments of your life?

Some examples are journaling, pictures, birthday parties, blog posts, anniversary celebrations, etc.

Read Psalm 77. How does calling to mind Israel’s past encounters with God shape the psalmist’s prayer?

The psalmist has an idea of what God should do because he remembers what God has done. His perception is that God has changed—in the past he rescued Israel, but now he seems distant (this is his emotion/perception, not a claim that God does change). But instead of despairing, the psalmist chooses to “call to mind the deeds of the LORD” (v. 11), and so his prayer of sorrow and lament turns to a prayer of praise as he recalls Israel’s encounters with God in the past and is renewed in his trust that Israel will again encounter God in his mighty power.

Spend some time in *lectio divina* today, joining the psalmist and his exhortation to “remember the works” of the Lord using a passage from Psalm 105:1–6.

Lectio—Carefully read the passage. What do you note?

Psalmist uses strong action verbs in his exhortation—give thanks, call on, make known, sing, sing praises, tell, glory, seek, remember. Notice the object of all these actions—either it is God (i.e., it is the Lord/his name that receives our thanks, calling, singing, glory) or it is his actions (i.e., it is the Lord’s deeds/works/miracles/judgments that are to be told of, made known, or remembered).

Meditatio—Reflect on the meaning of what you noted during *lectio*.

In order to give thanks/make known/sing of God’s deeds, we must first remember them. But remembering should then lead to thanking/praising/singing/glorying in God. Part of remembering is telling others what God has done. All of this leads to seeking God yet again—one encounter leads to another. Identity is in terms of encounter (we are “offspring” of “Abraham his servant” and his “chosen ones”).

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

Talk with God about the deeds and works that I remember. To what does my remembering lead? Am I led to praise and give thanks? Am I led to singing and giving glory to my Lord? Am I led closer again to God by remembering previous encounters with him? When I call to mind God’s gaze of love, does it lead me to share his love with others?

Contemplatio—Take time to simply rest in God’s presence.



DAY 5 – TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Participants will reflect on St. Augustine and his mother St. Monica, Ary Scheffer, c. 1846, Louvre Museum, Paris.

(No questions this Commit Day.)

PRAYER

FINDING INTIMACY WITH GOD

LEADER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

SESSION 6



LECTIO™

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

Nihil Obstat: Tomas Fuerte, S.T.L., *Censor Librorum*

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SESSION 6

RESOLUTIO: PUTTING LOVE INTO ACTION

SESSION OVERVIEW

Read this overview in advance to familiarize yourself with the session.

In the last session we examined the fourth rung of Guigo’s ladder, *contemplatio*. Unlike the earlier rungs, *contemplatio* is not something we achieve simply by our own efforts. We prepare carefully in order to properly dispose ourselves for it, but this “gaze of love” is completely God’s gift.

Dr. Gray will begin this last session with a beautiful image/analogy of the vineyard of *lectio divina*. *Lectio* is like plucking the grapes in the vineyard—we read carefully and pluck the words and images from the vine of the text. *Meditatio* is like squeezing the juice out of the grape—peering more deeply into what we have read, we see and understand more clearly its meaning. *Oratio* is like the fermentation period—our conversation bubbles up from our *lectio* and *meditatio*. *Contemplatio* is the last step, where we enjoy the aged, fine wine in our *lectio*, *meditatio*, and *oratio*; this step takes time, but is worth the wait. Dr. Gray reminds us that sometimes we are tempted to stop at meditation, but if we do this, then according to this analogy, we can only drink grape juice. *Lectio* and *meditatio* are to lead us to the more intimate encounters of *oratio* and *contemplatio*.

The four traditional steps of *lectio divina* lead naturally to a fifth step: *resolutio*, the resolution to put our prayer into action. Following *contemplatio*, the peaceful rest in God’s loving gaze, *resolutio* allows God to teach us how to extend that gaze of love to our neighbor. Without resolution and action, prayer runs the risk of increasing our pride rather than our virtue, as St. Francis de Sales and other great saints so clearly remind and exhort. After encountering the God of Love in the dialogue of prayer, we must take action to allow God’s love to transform our lives. While making a resolution and putting it into practice sounds straightforward, it can often prove the most difficult part of prayer. For this reason, our resolutions should not be general goals, but small, particular actions so that we can make and measure our progress.

Dr. Gray closes this last session with some practical notes for making *lectio divina* part of our prayer lives. The Church gives us a ready-made plan in the Mass and its daily readings, as well as the Liturgy of the Hours. Any of the books of the Bible can be used, but especially the psalms and the gospels, both of which the Church puts before us in her liturgy each day.



CONNECT

*Begin this session by leading the **Opening Prayer**, and then read or summarize the **Introduction** for your group. Both can be found in the Study Guide.*

*If you have time, review the last session with your group. Can anyone recite the **Memory Verse** (Psalm 27:8) without assistance? Otherwise, look it up (page 74) and recite it as a group.*

*Also discuss any highlights or questions the group may have had from the last session’s **COMMIT** reflections. Then continue.*

Do you think there are any risks or potential dangers associated with prayer? What might they be?

Most of us probably don't think of prayer as being risky or dangerous—but if our prayer is not what it is supposed to be and we don't realize that, then we will fall into a trap of empty, unproductive prayer. In this session we will examine a quote from St. Francis de Sales, warning that prayer that does not lead to action runs the risk of puffing us up with pride.

Do you find it easier to keep broad, sweeping resolutions (e.g., “Be a better person”) or smaller, specific resolutions (e.g., “Make my bed first thing every morning”)? Why?

It is typically easier to follow through on a small, specific resolution. We don't lose sight of the goal in trying to figure out a strategy to accomplish it because the plan for action is obvious when the resolution is specific. If we aim too broad, we often get mired down in all the options for how and where to start, and all too often we either never start, or we start and then quit due to discouragement at the slow rate of progress. Resolutio in prayer should be small and practical in order to be fruitful.



Play the video segment, which will last about 31 minutes. The Study Guide provides participants with a brief outline of the topics covered in the video teaching, along with the following discussion questions.



DISCUSS

After the video segment, discuss the following questions. Familiarize yourself with the comments after each question; these are meant to guide you in the conversation.

PUTTING LOVE INTO ACTION

1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an “aha” moment for you?

Some new or remarkable ideas may include: the process of wine-making as a metaphor or analogy for prayer, that prayer can make us like the Pharisees if we don't put it into action, or prayer not being an end in itself but rather a means to an end.

2. Why is it so important to put prayer into action? What do you think would happen to a prayer life that didn't regularly include *resolutio*?

Meditating on God's Word, on truth and holiness, is wonderful. But without action, we can easily deceive ourselves that we are just as good and holy as what we read, without the reality existing in our lives. This could lead to complacency, pride, etc. If our prayer life is to bear abundant fruit, we need to make a concrete resolution each day and then follow through and act on that resolution.

3. What is your favorite reading material to use for prayer? Why?

Lectio divina might still be new enough to some participants that they don't have a favorite resource yet. Others may prefer the psalms or the gospels, as Dr. Gray recommends. Some participants may already be in the habit of praying all or part of the Liturgy of the Hours and using that for lectio; others may attend daily Mass or regularly read the daily readings for prayer. This is a good time for participants to share favorite resources such as Magnificat, websites, or apps to help with prayer such as iBreviary, Divine Office, Laudate, etc.

*Direct participants to this session's **Memory Verse** in their Study Guides, and read it together. Then lead the **Closing Prayer**. Encourage participants to do the **COMMIT** reflections on their own before you meet again as a group.*



COMMIT

Following are suggested answers to the questions participants will be asked in their daily **COMMIT** reflections.



DAY 1 – IMPORTANCE OF A RESOLUTION

Participants will look at why *resolutio* is so important to prayer and what St. Francis de Sales warns about prayer without action in his Introduction to the Devout Life.

What does our Lord's model of prayer in Gethsemane teach us about the importance of *resolutio*?

Jesus shows us how to submit our will to God's. In his prayer we find permission to not want to suffer, but we also find strength and encouragement for choosing to accept whatever God wills. Jesus makes his submission to the Father's will explicit in his *resolutio*: "Not as I will, but as you will." This shows us that we shouldn't just give an easy and quick general resolution, but rather we should make our submission clear and specific, in order that we may be strengthened by God's grace for the specific work ahead.

Spend some time in *lectio divina* today reflecting on St. James' exhortation to put our prayer into action using the passage from James 1:19–25.

Lectio—Carefully read the passage. What do you note?

Quick to hear versus slow to speak or anger. Sin is described "ugly" words, such as "filthiness" and "rank growth." God's Word is described as "implanted." Repetition of "hearer" and "doer." Image of face in a mirror. Law, described with "perfect" and "of liberty." "Doer/doing" strengthened with "perseveres." We must also act—to obey. To hear is to obey/do and then to be blessed.

Meditatio—Reflect on the meaning of what you noted during *lectio*.

We should listen more ("be quick") than we talk ("be slow")—especially in prayer, but also in our relationships with others. How is the "anger of man" in opposition to the "righteousness of God"? Rather than "growth of wickedness," it is the "implanted word" that needs to grow in me, and if I let this grow it can "save my soul." If we are attached to sin, we won't be able to hear God in prayer, and his Word won't be active in our souls. To hear without doing is to not perceive reality clearly (see in a mirror and then forget immediately).

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

How much do I listen? Does my pride make me want to do all the talking and take center stage? Bring to God any relationships that I need to reorder. In prayer, am I afraid to be quiet and wait for God's direction? I might share with God my current struggles in prayer. How many times has my anger worked against God's will or God's love for me and for others? What sins have I chosen to not see as they truly are—filthy and rank? Ask God to open my eyes to new ways he wants me to reform my life with his grace. What do I "hear" God directing me to "do"? Reflect on how God's laws and ways, his perfect law, offers liberty, freedom, and peace in my life.

Contemplatio—Take time to simply rest in God's presence.

Resolutio—What small thing can you do today to put your prayer into action?

I might make a resolution to listen to a particular friend more diligently. I might resolve to make my first words in conversation those of a question or two, which allows the other person to speak. I might resolve to go to Confession as a result of God opening my eyes to a particular sin. I might resolve to study Scripture more purposely so that I can more diligently "look into" God's "perfect law."



DAY 2 – ACTION AS THE FRUIT OF PRAYER

Participants will reflect on how action flows naturally out of prayer and how St. Teresa of Avila describes prayer as ordered toward works of service.

If prayer is a means to an end, does that make it more or less important? Why?

As important and essential as prayer is, it is not the most important thing, in as much as it is not the “end” or ultimate goal. But this does not mean that prayer is not important; in fact, if we are to obtain the ultimate goal of love—love of God and love of neighbor—prayer is vital. The goal of love makes prayer that much more important because in spending time with Love himself in prayer, we learn better just how to love and are strengthened to act in love.

Look up James 2:14–26. How does the relationship between faith and works, as described by St. James, shed light on the relationship between prayer and action?

Faith without works is dead, and prayer without action is empty or dead as well. The relationship is very similar. We can be tempted to see both faith and prayer as something mental/interior, and to separate them from exterior action—but this is a great error, as both faith and prayer must lead to action.

Spend some time in *lectio divina* today reflecting on how Jesus himself emphasizes the importance of action as the fruit of our prayer using the passage from Matthew 25:31–40.

Lectio—Carefully read the passage. What do you note?

A table of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold, with rings and poles by which it was to be carried. Plates, dishes, flagons, and bowls all made of gold to be used on the table. Twelve cakes of bread were put on the table in two rows of six.

Meditatio—Reflect on the meaning of what you noted during *lectio*.

Note the time of what is described: the end times. Gathering versus separating. Jesus is not named but described as Son of man and King. Repetition of the list of works of mercy. Pattern of need followed by action. Those who are righteous act, they did these things. The king speaks of “my brethren.” The righteous on Jesus’ right repeatedly ask “when?”

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

Do I see Jesus Christ as the King of my life? King of my actions? Do I see Christ in others? Do I see others as the brothers and sisters of Christ (his “brethren” as Jesus calls them)? Do I see others as “my” brothers and sisters in Christ? Am I willing to love others, even if I might not “like” them at the moment? Where do I see these needs described by Jesus around me—friends, children, co-workers, the poor? Am I already doing some of these works of mercy regularly? Am I doing these works with true love and charity? Which can I do more diligently? If I am not doing any of these works, what is God calling me to?

Contemplatio—Take time to simply rest in God’s presence.

Resolutio—What small thing can you do today to put your prayer into action?

A few ideas: I might resolve to do one work of mercy mentioned in the gospel passage today or this week. I might recognize the humility of the righteous and resolve to grow in humility by doing one kind act anonymously today.



DAY 3 – LECTIO: OVER ALL THESE PUT ON LOVE

Participants will reflect on St. Paul's exhortation to the Colossians to put to death what is earthly and fix their minds on what is of Christ.

LECTIO

What does St. Paul contrast in the first section of this passage (verses 1-5)?

Participants may note the following: Dying/death and being raised/having life with Christ, the things that are above and the things on earth.

What are we to take off or get rid of (“put to death”), and what are we to “put on”?

Get rid of anything earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, idolatry, anger, wrath, malice, slander, foul talk, lying, and division.

Put on: compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, patience, forbearing, forgiveness, and love. Let peace rule your heart, let God's Word dwell in you, and have thankfulness in your hearts.

In the last section of this passage there is a repetition of the command “let” (verses 15 and 16). What are we to let Christ give us? What are these two gifts supposed to accomplish in us?

Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, and let the word of Christ dwell richly in us. Together Christ's word and his peace lead us to do all things in his name for the glory of (giving thanks to) God the Father.

MEDITATIO

What is the relationship between the “peace of Christ” (verse 15) and the “word of Christ” (verse 16)?

How does this passage encourage us in both contemplative prayer and active love?

Peace is experienced internally, like contemplative prayer, but it will have an outward effect (also like prayer).

The word of Christ is related in this passage to teaching and worship—it is more like active prayer/love.

Contemplative prayer leads to active love. These two are brought together in the last verse, where “whatever you do, in word or deed” (action) is to be united with “giving thanks to the Father through [Jesus]” (prayer).

What does it mean to “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (verse 17)?

Always be mindful of Jesus, do everything prayerfully, remember that we do everything by God's grace and not our own power, be aware that we are ambassadors of Christ acting in his name, strive to do only his will, etc.

St. Paul gives a very similar exhortation in Ephesians 4:25–5:1, ending with “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.” What specific things does St. Paul expect us to do in imitation of God? How does prayer prepare us to be imitators of God?

Some specific expectations are forgiving others, speaking the truth, having patience, showing kindness and compassion, etc. These are all ways that we show our love for God by treating one another in accord with God's will. We cannot imitate God if we do not know him (set our minds on him), and we cannot know him without encountering him in prayer.



DAY 4 – PARTICULAR VS. GENERAL

Participants will examine the importance of forming a small, particular resolution.

Is there someone in your life that is difficult to love, or a situation where you find it especially challenging to serve others? What causes this difficulty?

There might be someone we find somewhat annoying, like in the anecdote Dr. Gray shared about St. Therese of Lisieux and the sister who got on her nerves. Or it might be someone who has hurt us and we have difficulty loving him or her in spite of the hurt. Or we may be struggling with a particular way we are called to love and serve others—cleaning up after kids, an unenjoyable task at work, etc. Although we may initially focus on the situation or the other person as being the source of the difficulty in love, the deepest difficulty lies in our own pride and imperfect love.

Consider some of the following resolutions that might flow from prayer. How are the particular resolutions more practical than the general ones? Complete the chart by providing examples of specific resolutions to replace the general ones.

General Resolution	Particular Resolution
I will be kind to strangers.	I will smile at and try to make eye contact with each person I see today.
I will be more considerate of others' time.	I will be on time for my appointments today.
I will be more generous with my time.	I will read two bedtime stories to my child instead of rushing through one.
I will not be wasteful.	<i>I will take smaller portions of food and not throw any food away today.</i>
I will be more forgiving.	<i>I will choose to forgive my friend/co-worker/spouse for this specific wrong which still bothers me.</i>
I will be patient.	<i>I will respond with a charitable tone of voice in a difficult conversation.</i>
I will take better care of myself.	<i>I will go to bed at 10pm tonight.</i>

Spend some time in *lectio divina* today reflecting on St. John's exhortation to love one another using the passage from 1 John 4:7–12, 20–21.

Lectio—Carefully read the passage. What do you note?

Reader addressed as “beloved” and repeated. Repetition of “love,” “God,” “one another,” “brother.” Loving related to being “born of God” and “knowing God.” Strong verbs: “manifest,” “sent,” “loved,” “abides,” “perfected,” “seen”...several repeated. Passage ends with “this commandment.”

Meditatio—Reflect on the meaning of what you noted during *lectio*.

St. John's address of his reader as “beloved” models the love he is preaching. Use of “only” to describe the Son reminds us of the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, and how much Abraham loved Isaac, and the more perfect love of God the Father for the Son. God the Father “manifests” his love in action (sending the Son). Is “not loving my brother” being equated to “hating my brother”? Loving my brother is a commandment, not just a nice idea.

Oratio—Journal your conversation with God.

I might thank God that he sees me as “beloved.” Recalling that God sees my brothers and sisters as “beloved” also, I reflect that it is truly not an option to ignore the call to love my neighbor as myself. I might sense God challenging me, asking me “How seriously do I take loving my brother?” I might be directed to reflect that the two greatest commandments cannot be separated: If I do not love my neighbor then that is proof that I do not love God. Why do I try to love God without trying to love my neighbor better? I might talk with God about specific brothers and sisters. God the Father “manifested” his love in action (sending the Son); I might reflect on how I can better manifest my love for God.

Contemplatio—Take time to simply rest in God's presence.

Resolutio—What small thing can you do today to put your prayer into action?

Offer ideas such as the following: I might resolve to do a specific act of kindness for someone, like writing a short note, letter, or card.



COMMIT DAY 5 – TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Participants will reflect on Clothing the Naked, Works of Mercy—Giving Drink to the Thirsty and Food to the Hungry, and Visiting the Sick, Domenico Ghirlandaio, three of several frescoes in the Oratory of San Martino dei Buonomini, Florence, Italy.

Look up Matthew 25:31–46. What are the works of mercy that Jesus describes?

Jesus notes the following, beginning in verse 35: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, giving shelter to the homeless (i.e. welcoming the stranger), clothing the naked, visiting/caring for the sick, visiting prisoners. Along with these six, the Church also includes burying the dead, which is specifically mentioned in the Old Testament Book of Tobit (see Tobit 1:16–17). Along with these “corporeal” works of mercy, the Church also notes seven additional “spiritual” works of mercy, which include: instructing the ignorant, counseling the doubtful, admonishing sinners, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offences willingly, comforting the afflicted, and praying for the living and the dead.



LECTIO

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION



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- ▶ In the Shadow of the Galilean: Peter's Rising Leadership
- ▶ Discipleship at a Distance: Peter and the Passion of Christ
- ▶ Peter and Pentecost: The Transforming Power of the Holy Spirit
- ▶ Peter bar Jonah: How Peter Came to Rome
- ▶ *Quo Vadis?*: Peter's Way of the Cross

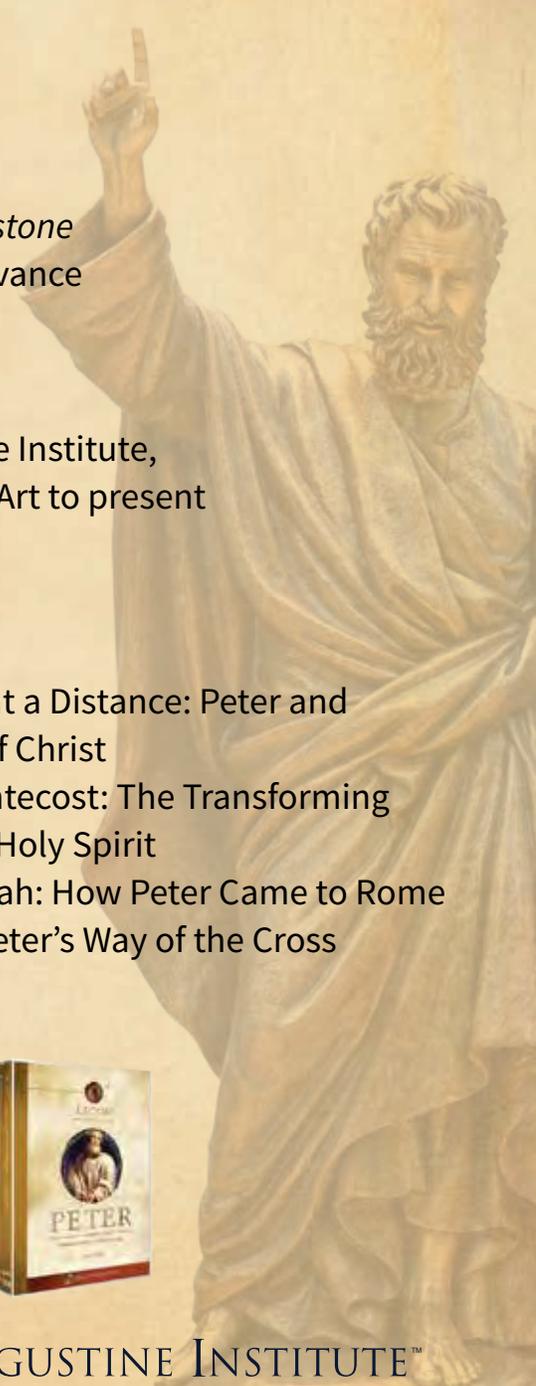
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Eucharist: Discovering the Mass in the Bible

Jesus said, “This is my Body,” and, “This is my Blood.”

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- ▶ Bread of the Presence: Mysteries of the Tabernacle
- ▶ Miracles of Jesus: The Wine of Cana and the Loaves and Fishes
- ▶ Bread of Life: John 6 and the Real Presence
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