

Sunday 2nd November 2025 - How To Read The Bible - Lectio Divina

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Preacher: Helen Emery

[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. So, some of you probably know that for nearly 25 years, I was a school librarian.

! Helping young people engage in reading, mainly of books, was my everyday job, the reality of which meant that I heard the phrase, reading is boring, on a daily basis. Mainly, it has to be said, from year eight or nine boys, the ones who probably felt more at home on the rugby pitch than in the library, but not exclusively them. Now, in the school librarian world, we'd often say the phrase, no child dislikes reading, they just haven't found the right book yet.

And things like, our job was to put the right book in the hand of a child at the right time. So, as we think about how we read the Bible, I believe we've already got the right book in our hands or on our phones, haven't we? It's the one and only collection of literature specifically compiled to point us to Jesus. However, I wonder, for you, what is your relationship with reading it? Do you ever feel a little bit like one of those year eight boys, and that reading the Bible just isn't for you? And there's plenty of other, much more fun ways to spend time with Jesus than sitting with this ancient text that you don't really understand a lot of the time. Or maybe you're quite an avid reader, you devour books as a favourite hobby, and you regularly sit with the Bible and read it in long sittings. Maybe you're the type of reader who prefers audio, so listening to words rather than using a printed copy. Maybe you're an occasional or holiday reader who dips into the Bible as and when you feel like it. Or maybe you're a little bit like me, and you have been all of those types of reader at some point in your

Bible reading journey. I think recognising what type of reader we are can be really useful when it comes to how we read the Bible. And hopefully helps us overcome barriers, we might feel, to establishing a really healthy, enjoyable, and beneficial way of reading it, which is right just for us. I know the guilt of I should read it more is real, but I think that's unhelpful, and it's not what God wants for us. So, back to my time in the library, what did I do? I found that when a book really resonated with a child, when they ran up to the issue desk to bring it back to me, saying, that was the best book I've ever read, Miss, it was usually because it connected with them personally somehow, that their reality was maybe mirrored in that book, that their experiences were there.

It maybe spoke to them about their identity, or maybe the emotions that they were going through at that time. It offered them a window to see the possibilities for their hopes and dreams.

[3 : 47] And that looked entirely different for every individual child at every point in their development in school. And I'd like to think that that could be true of our experience of reading the Bible, that the Bible can speak to us, that God can speak to us through the Bible into our own reality, to our own identity, and through the emotions that we're feeling.

So, for students in the library who really struggled to connect with books, I found that giving them some sort of scaffold or structure to use, instead of simply telling them to just read more, was helpful in supporting them to build up that habit or that rhythm of enjoying reading on a regular basis. So, a few weeks ago, Laura led us in a fantastic guided meditation on a Bible passage, which is one such structure. And so, this week, I'm going to share another practical technique, which hopefully you'll find helpful. Whilst the Ignatian imagination that Laura got us to try, encouraged us to put ourselves into the passage, if you didn't hear it, do listen back, it's really good.

This practice that I'm going to share with you today could be said to bring the passage into our current individual reality. Now, it might not be for everybody, so if you don't connect with this, then that's absolutely fine. But if we could give it a go, that'd be good. It is called Lectio Divina, and it is absolutely nothing to do with TV presenter Davina McCall, which is what my husband first thought.

Neither is it, as I thought for a short time, original to Lectio 365. That's a really popular daily devotional app produced by Pete Gregg, who does the 24-7 prayer ministry stuff. And Laura mentioned this app a few weeks ago. As an aside, I do actually find that really helpful in my regular routine of Bible reading, but this practice is not original to Lectio 365. It is, as a translation, holy reading.

That's what the translation of Lectio Divina is, holy reading. And it was passed down as a spoken tradition by monks. And until the 12th century, that process was put down in a publication called The Ladder of Monks by a guy in France called Gigo II, this monk. And he split this practice into four stages. It's read, then meditate, then pray, then contemplate. Or, if you like a bit of alliteration, which I do, you read it, you reflect, you respond, and then you rest. So, I could stand here and describe each individual stage to you. But I think the best way to experience this is if we actually do it.

[7 : 20] So, don't freak out. I'm not going to get you to do anything too weird. But if you want to engage in it, then fabulous. If it's not for you, then you can have some chill out time and zone out. And if somebody next to you is doing that, then let them be. But if you want to give it a try, I've got some willing volunteers who are going to give out a passage that I've chosen in print. I've chosen Psalm 23.

But you can use this in any passage at all. It's just quite short, and I just chose this one. It might be helpful if you've got a pen as well. You might want to use that as well. So, as they come round and you grab a pen, we'll go through together these four stages.

Thank you very much.

Right. Hopefully, everyone's got a copy. If you've all got sight of a copy, it will be on the screen as well. So, this read stage, the first stage, I'm simply going to read it aloud.

Follow along if you want to at your own pace with the printed words in front of you. But as I read, what I want you to do is look out for a particular word or phrase which just strikes you, that stands out to you, that stands out to you. And as I say, you might want to use a pen and underline it as we go.

[9 : 12] So, Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me. In the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

Surely, goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

[10 : 20] Amen. So, the next stage, after we've read that and maybe something has struck you and you've underlined that, is to reflect.

So, this stage, we're going to read the passage again. I'm going to let you do that individually this time. So, you can feel free to read it more slowly. Have a think about why the particular word or phrase might have stood out to you.

Just think, what might God be trying to say to you through this passage? Are there any ways the passage speaks into your life at this moment?

So, I'm going to give you a few minutes to do that. Thank you.

Thank you.

[12 : 18] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Okay, so the third stage is the respond stage. This time, we're going to think about if there's any particular call to prayer for you from that.

[14 : 37] Has the passage created any desire in you to ask God for something, to thank him for something?

We read the passage again for a third time. And it may be that you're prompted to an action or if you feel or think nothing at all, then maybe that's a prompt to ask for a deeper connection with God.

And this stage, you can do alone if you want to. But if you want to turn to the person next to you and have a prayer together, if that feels comfortable, then do that.

There are going to be people in the foyer later that will pray with you. But this response stage is about thinking how this passage, as you read it a third time, prompts any desire to pray, to ask, to thank.

So I'll give you another three minutes to do that. Thank you. Thank you.

[16 : 12] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[18 : 42] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[21 : 12] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[23 : 42] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.