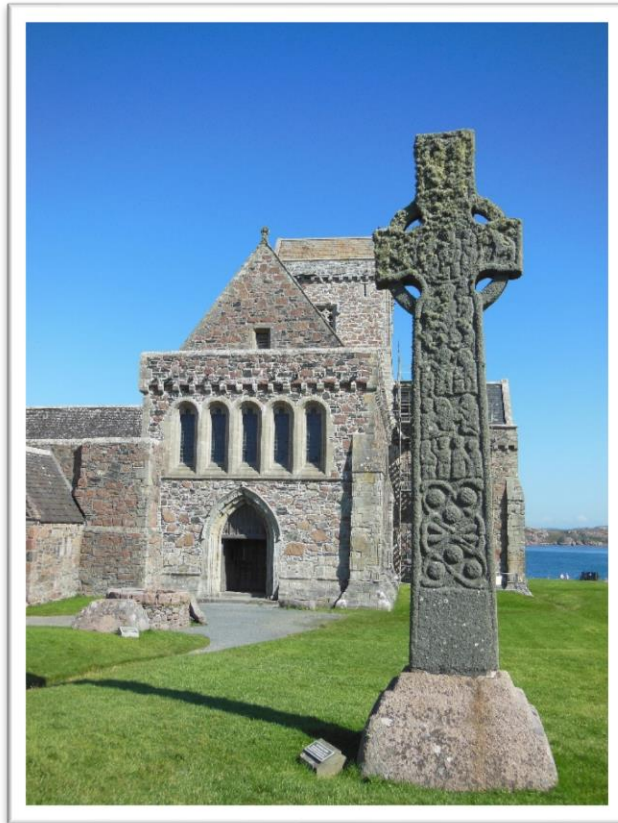


Lectio Divina: Hear Your Soul Speak



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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

| | |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Introduction | Page 3 |
| Lectio Divina | Page 5 |
| Lectio Terrestria | Page 7 |
| Visio Divina | Page 9 |
| Small Group Lectio Divina | Page 11 |
| Going Deeper | Page 12 |
| Conclusion and Resources | Page 13 |
| About the Author | Page 14 |



INTRODUCTION:

“People throughout the centuries, in diverse cultures, regularly experienced another realm that seemed to them more real, powerful, and fundamental than the world of our ordinary experience. Not only is there no intellectual reason to suppose the second world [the world of Spirit] to be unreal, but there is much experiential evidence to suggest its reality.” ~Marcus J. Borg¹

Dear Friend,

I believe, as have most people worldwide up until several hundred years ago, that the material world – our bodies, our Earth, our stuff – is interwoven with the Sacred. There is another world, the world of Spirit, underlying and interpenetrating this one. The Spirit world is as real as, if not more real, than this world we touch and weigh and measure.

Unfortunately for us and our health and wholeness, we live in a culture that has largely abandoned this foundational belief. Instead, many of us believe we’re separate, we’re unlovable, and we have got to fix ourselves and the world in order to feel safe and worthy.

We touch and feel the world of Spirit in various ways and various places. Our soul is the place within us where we connect to the Divine, to God, to Spirit, to Source, to Love – choose your word. They’re all the same experience, with different labels. Our soul is where we tap into the Spirit world that undergirds and infuses this material world. Our soul is the place within us that knows the truth of our lives – we’re deeply loved and part of everything, and we’re perfect just the way we are. So is the world. Our lives and hearts open up to freedom and healing when we notice and question our beliefs that we’re separate and unlovable, and that we and the world need to be different.

The good news is that your soul hasn’t gone anywhere. It’s been patiently waiting for you to return all this time. And beliefs are fixable, too. Healing our minds and brains, the source of the thoughts that cause us to suffer, takes consistent effort over time. Having a guide on this healing journey is helpful to many.

Choosing to become aware and tend to our deepest knowing is the first step. There are many ways to attend. Although some symptoms of soul disconnection are clear and compelling, including depression, anxiety, fatigue, chronic pain, and autoimmune diseases, our souls don’t usually scream and shout. So most methods require somehow getting quiet and listening deeply to the still voice within. Meditation, Centering Prayer, and mindful movement are three common ways to attend to God and ourselves.

This e-book introduces one easy, low-stress way to listen deeply to your soul, along with three variations. I’ll first describe an ancient practice called Lectio Divina, “Sacred

Reading,” which requires only a few words and a little time. Lectio Terrestria is a variation on Lectio Divina using the natural world. Visio Divina is a variation on Lectio Divina that uses an image as a text. Finally, I’ve included some instructions for practicing Lectio in a group.

One final note: It’s impossible to do Lectio Divina “wrong.” Relax, enjoy, and prepare to be astonished! Love and healing are waiting for you.

May you be blessed on your path. And may you bless our world with the gifts you find on your journey.

Love,
Barb



LECTIO DIVINA:

“I believe that God gives us our soul – our deepest identity, our True Self, our unique blueprint – already at our very conception. Our unique little bit of heaven is installed by the Manufacturer at its beginning! We are given a span of years to discover it, to choose it, and to live our own unique destiny to the full. The discovery of our own soul is frankly what we are here for.” ~Richard Rohr²

Lectio Divina (Latin for “Sacred Reading”) is an ancient Christian contemplative prayer practice. Its roots are in Judaism, and it was widely practiced by the Desert Mothers and Fathers. St. Benedict is credited with promoting Lectio Divina and refining it for use in monastic settings. Lectio is traditionally used with Scripture. It can also be a fruitful way to listen to God’s voice in music, poetry, the natural world, art, and our experiences. You don’t have to call yourself “Christian” to engage with sacred texts, as you will see.³

What follows is traditional Lectio Divina using the written word. Feel free to break these “rules” and make this method your own.

Before beginning, choose a text. This might be a Scripture passage, another piece of prose, or a poem. (It could be the dictionary or an encyclopedia.) The text should be short enough that it can easily be read in under a minute. You could let your intuition guide you, open a book to a random page, or use the daily lectionary readings, found at http://prayer.forwardmovement.org/daily_readings_anytime.php. Again, **you can’t do this wrong**. Any words you choose will be fruitful!

Give yourself at least twenty uninterrupted minutes, with four minutes for each step. Have your journal handy, or use the next page which is also available as a printable (<http://www.barbmorris.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Four-steps-of-Lectio-Divina.pdf>). You might want to light a candle, ring a bell, use incense, or consciously rest in your body before you begin. Experiment to find which rituals feed your Lectio practice and cue your soul that it’s safe to speak. If you have a time constraint, use a timer for each step or for the session as a whole.

(The Latin labels for each step are in parentheses.)

Four steps of Lectio Divina:

1. (*Lectio*) Read the passage slowly. As you read, note any words, phrases, or images that catch your attention. Try not to latch onto any one thing yet. What do you notice? Write down as many as you want to.

2. (*Meditatio*) Read the passage again. Which observation is calling for attention? Which word, phrase, or image feels more urgent, sounds louder, looks shinier? Don't think. Simply observe, trust, and choose one.

3. (*Oratio*) Read the passage a third time. What message does that word, phrase, or image have for you? What might God/Soul/Spirit be saying to you? How does that word, phrase, or image want to help you?

4. (*Contemplatio*) Read the passage a final time. Rest, breathe, feel your body, and sit with what you heard.

Is there an action you feel called to take in response to what you heard during Lectio? It's often helpful as embodied beings to take tangible action in response to what arises during Lectio or other forms of prayer. This gives our prayers "boots on the ground." If so, write the action down and schedule a time to do it.

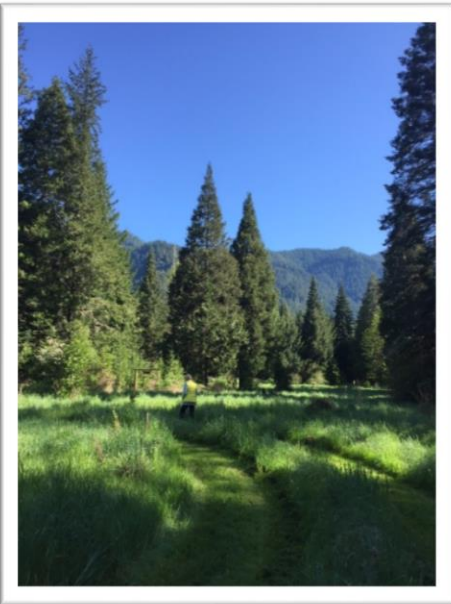
Action in Response:

LECTIO TERRESTRIA

*“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.”*

~Mary Oliver, Wild Geese

The world is us. We are the world. We are made of the same stuff as stars. The division between body and spirit, although it feels real, is actually nonexistent. Everything is holy now. God is interwoven throughout the Universe and in the spaces between our cells. All matter is holy. Creation has much to teach us, when we listen.



Lectio Terrestria, or “Earth Reading,” is simply applying the traditional Lectio Divina method to the natural world. You could practice Lectio Terrestria with an object you bring back from a walk, or you could practice lectio terrestria with a mountain range. Or a cloud. Or a star.

Here are the steps, also available as a printable (<http://www.barbmorris.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Four-steps-of-Lectio-Terrestria.pdf>).

Before beginning, choose a text. This time, your text will be an object in nature – a tree, a rock, a stick, a mountain, a river, a bird, your body – the possibilities are endless. You could walk a favorite trail and stop when your intuition tells you it’s time. You might already have something in mind, such as a favorite tree or a rose bush in your back

yard. You could go for a walk with the intention of identifying your lectio “text,” and simply carry it home with you. You might gather feathers, pine cones, seeds, leaves, flowers, rocks, or other objects and take them home for Lectio. If you choose this route, place the objects you gather in a basket or a bowl, or on a cloth. Then pick one object from your collection. **You can only do this right.** Every created thing has a gift for you.

Give yourself at least twenty minutes total, with at least four minutes for each step. Again, use a timer if you have a time constraint.

Four steps of Lectio Terrestria:

1. (*Lectio*) Study your chosen object. Touch, listen, look, smell, and taste if appropriate. Take your time. What do you notice? There might be a word, phrase, or image that arises. Capture your observations.

2. (*Meditatio*) Continuing to study the object, ask yourself which observation is calling for attention. Which observation from step one feels more urgent, sounds louder, looks shinier? Don't think. Simply observe, trust, and choose one.

3. (*Oratio*) Still studying the object, ask yourself what message the object has for you? What might God/Soul/Spirit be saying to you? How does your object want to help you?

4. (*Contemplatio*) Rest, breathe, feel your body, and sit with what you heard.

Is there an action you feel called to take in response to what you heard? Because we're embodied, it's often helpful to take tangible action in response to what arises during Lectio or other forms of prayer. If so, write the action down and schedule a time to do it.

Action in Response:

VISIO DIVINA

This variation of Lectio uses a visual text, such as a painting or a photograph. You could practice Visio Divina on a favorite painting, or you could gather a number of images from magazines, catalogues, or the internet, and choose one on which to focus. The possibilities are many.

Four steps of Visio Divina:

1. (*Lectio*) Study your chosen image. What do you notice? There might be a word, phrase, or image that arises. Capture all your observations.

2. (*Meditatio*) Continuing to look at the image, ask yourself which observation is calling for attention. Which observation from step one feels more urgent, sounds louder, looks shinier? Don't think. Simply observe, trust, and choose one.

3. (*Oratio*) Still looking at the image, ask yourself what message the image has for you. What might God/Soul/Spirit be saying to you? How does the image want to help you?

4. (*Contemplatio*) Rest, breathe, feel your body, and sit with what you heard.

Is there an action you feel called to take in response to what you heard? Because we're embodied, it's often helpful to take tangible action in response to what arises during Lectio or other forms of prayer. If so, write the action down and schedule a time to do it.

Action in Response:

SMALL GROUP LECTIO DIVINA

Practicing Lectio Divina in a group can be a deeply spiritual experience. When we hear what others have to share, our own holy reading of a text, an image, or an object from nature is illuminated. Identify a facilitator and set norms for the group before beginning Lectio. Here are basic guidelines for building trust and sanctuary for the soul.

- **Hold confidentiality.** – Group members do not share anything outside of the group. Members do not talk about another group member outside of the group when that group member is not present.
- **Share appropriately.** – Participants feel comfortable both speaking and staying silent. Participants give others a chance to speak once before speaking a second time. Participants share the group’s attention.
- **Refrain from giving advice.** – Participants ask for advice if they want it. Participants ask for permission before giving advice.
- **Use accountable language.** – Participants speak from their own experience using “I” statements.

Give the group at least 45 minutes. An hour is even better! A large group will take more time. If the group is larger than twelve, consider splitting the group into two. As in solitary Lectio, rituals help our souls to speak.

Consider lighting a candle, opening with prayer, ringing a bell to begin and end each step, and using incense. Copies of the Lectio printable could be used for collecting thoughts.

You might also want to create an altar.

Traditionally, an altar contains an object representing each of the four elements – earth, fire, air, and water – plus any other objects the group desires, such as an icon or a cross, laid out on a cloth. For example, your group’s altar could have a stone, a candle, a feather, a clear glass of water, and an icon of the Blessed Mother. Each participant could bring something for the altar, if the group desires.

Remember that Lectio is, at its heart, monastic simplicity and openness, so no need to get overly fancy. Trust your intuition and the movement of Spirit.



Four steps of Group Lectio Divina:

1. (*Lectio*) The leader says, “Note any words, phrases, or images that catch your attention. Try not to latch onto any one thing yet, and let observations flow. What do you notice? Write it down.”

After several minutes, the leader invites participants to share succinctly – one sentence at most.

2. (*Meditatio*) The leader asks, “Which observation is calling for attention? Which word, phrase, or image feels more important, sounds louder, looks shinier? Don’t think. Simply observe, trust, and choose one.” Another person reads the passage slowly.

After several minutes, the leader invites participants to share succinctly. These responses may be longer.

3. (*Oratio*) The leader asks, “What message does that word, phrase, or image have for you? What might God/Soul/Spirit be saying to you? How does that word, phrase, or image want to help you?” A third person reads the passage slowly.

After several minutes, the leader invites participants to share succinctly. These responses will likely be longer still.

4. (*Contemplatio*) The leader says, “Rest, breathe, feel your body, and sit with what you heard. Is there an action you feel called to take in response to what you heard during Lectio? If so, write the action down and schedule a time to do it.” A fourth person reads the passage slowly.

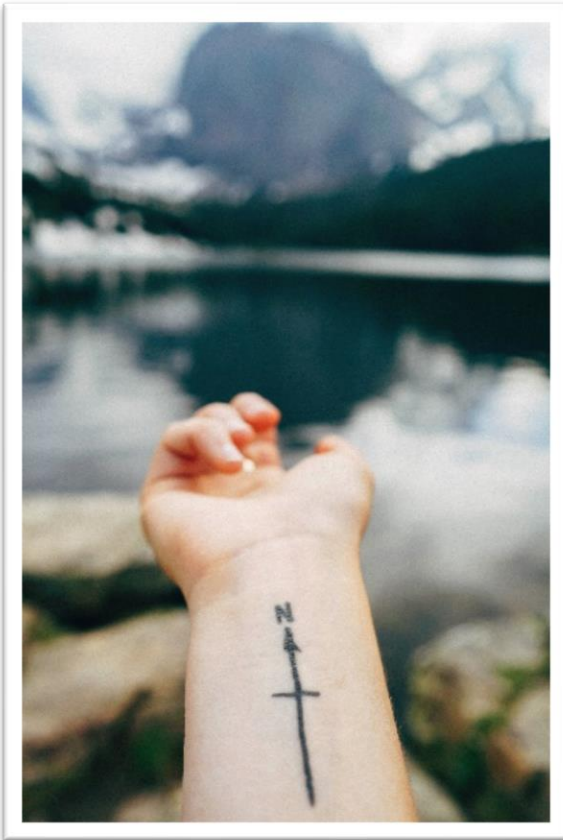
After several minutes, the leader invites any final thoughts. The participants might choose to share their action, if they have one.

GOING DEEPER:

You are a warrior. Possibly a weary warrior. A woman who's spent many years taking care of others – husbands and partners, kids and pets, mothers and fathers, employees and bosses, committees and classrooms and churches – and you're tired. Maybe you've hit a wall. You're probably wondering how you ended up here. Possibly you're wishing you could have a “do over.”

Oh, you love it. Parts of it, anyway. But, still... Is there more?

Is it too late to get back on track? To find your purpose? To feel strong, clear, focused, and motivated?



I'm here to tell you, from experience, that it's never too late. There is a road map to your true self. There's a step-by-step process you can follow to get clear on who you really are, what you really want, and how to get it.

Being who we are is Warrior Work. Reclaiming who we truly are, and living from that core, takes deep courage and belief in what we cannot see yet we know is nevertheless true. Faith in Soul. Faith in Spirit. Faith in Source and our connection to It.

I coach midlife women in transition. I work with women who are waking up to a life that doesn't fit them anymore, if it ever did.

My mission is to assist you in letting go of what you aren't, embrace who you are, live from your deepest and truest self, and

enjoy being the God-given gift you are! To go from frustration and confusion to clarity and confidence. To know what you want and begin moving toward it.

CONCLUSION:

Those words above might sound like “coach speak” or self-help jargon. They’re not. We are each born into this human life with a unique purpose and unique gifts. As Richard Rohr says, it’s our job in this life to reclaim our Spirit-sourced uniqueness – who we are at heart – and let our gifts flow freely into a thirsty world. When we live Soul-centered lives deeply embedded in Love, rather than striving to be loved, we are healed. Other people are healed, too, and so is our Earth.

Your authentic life will be different from anyone else’s. It’s there, waiting for you to come home to it. Lectio Divina can be a valuable tool for homecoming. Feel free to make it your own. Blessings on your journey!

I’d love to talk further about this e-book, or anything else! Contact me (<http://www.barbmorris.com/contact-me/>) or email me (barb@barbmorris.com).

RESOURCES:

¹*Days of Awe and Wonder*, by Marcus Borg (HarperOne, 2017)

²Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditations, Immortal Diamond, and Falling Upward
<https://cac.org/who-am-i-2017-08-06/>

³*Lectio Divina*, by Christine Valters Paintner (Skylight Paths, 2014)

Further Reading:

Dr. Christine Valters Paintner’s books, especially *Lectio Divina* and *The Artist’s Rule*.

Dr. Marcus Borg’s books, especially *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, *The God We Never Knew*, and *The Heart of Christianity*.

Dr. Martha Beck’s books, especially *Finding Your Own North Star*, *Steering by Starlight*, and *Finding Your Way in a Wild New World*. (I’m a graduate of Martha’s life coach training program.)

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Cover: Iona Abbey, by Jed Holdorph

Page 2: Autumn Leaf on Stone, by Barb Morris

Page 4: Candles at O’Cebreiro on the Camino de Santiago, by Jed Holdorph

Page 7: Labyrinth at St. Benedict Lodge, by Barb Morris

Page 10: Altar, by Christine Valters Paintner

Page 12: Arrow tattoo from unsplash.com

Page 14: Author and family photos by Jed Holdorph

Everything is Holy Now: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiypaURysz4>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

I'm Barb Morris. I'm a life coach, writer, teacher, and facilitator. I'm a wife and mom. I'm a sister and friend. I'm a runner, hiker, and gardener. I'm a naturalist, reader, and traveler. I'm an artist.

I'm a native Arizonan now living in Bend, Oregon, with stops in Massachusetts, New Mexico, Missouri, and Illinois in between.

I'm a clergy spouse. My husband has been an Episcopal priest for 30 years. (Clergy wives, I see you!)

I'm a former middle school teacher and federal employee. (<http://www.barbmorris.com/bio/>)

Here's the thing, though. I am not my labels. I am not my identities. Neither are you.

I am a shiny, priceless, infinitely beautiful child of God, and nothing can change that. You are, too.

I'm thankful for this journey.

I'm grateful for the trees and the mountains, the prairies and lakes and rivers. I thank God for all the people I've met along the way. I'm grateful for the twists and turns that have given me the skills to help women uncover their true selves and live from their heart. Thank you for joining me!

