

Imago Dei

A Bible Study of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



5 Week Bible Study Using Lectio Divina



RELIGION & RACE
The United Methodist Church

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INTRODUCTION

The Imago Dei (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) Bible Study is a five week study written in the style of Lectio Divina. In this form of Bible study all participants are equal, all insights are of equal value, and there are no wrong answers to correct.

This form of Bible study is built upon prayerful listening to the Holy Spirit and to each other. Each person is to take turns sharing by mutual invitation. In this Bible study we seek to share with one another the image of God, celebrating our diversity, our equity and our inclusion.

During the study we are looking for the same image of God displayed in the lectionary text with the hope that the use of this model might facilitate our ability to live in the image of God and to perceive that same sacred image in others.

LECTIO DIVINA: WHAT IS IT?

“Read with a vulnerable heart. Expect to be blessed in the reading. Read as one awake, one waiting for the beloved. Read with reverence.”

Macrina Wiederkehr ¹

Our Christian discipleship is formed and informed by our engagement with the Word. The practice of reading the Holy Text as a spiritual reading is referred to as Lectio Divina. This monastic practice started in the 6th century. It developed into a four-step process - read, meditate, pray, and contemplate, specifically for a community setting. We can imagine these four movements as dance steps we engage in between the phases.

According to the Anglican Communion, “the practice understands Scripture as a meeting place for a personal encounter with the Living God. It is a practice we come to with the desire to be changed at all sorts of levels. It operates very much on the emotional rather than the purely cerebral level. It is perhaps hearty rather than heady. Through it, we allow ourselves to be formed in the likeness of Christ; it is about formation rather than instruction. When undertaken in a group setting, Lectio is about listening to the experience of others and how that might inform your experience. It is never about pushing a particular view and is certainly not competitive.” (www.anglicancommunion.org)

An example of a community process:

As we engage in this ancient practice, we come to it with an open heart and without an agenda.

Read - Ask the participants to be in a comfortable position - to be still and calm. The leader will read the passage and may read the passage three

¹ Marjorie J. Thompson, 1995. Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life. John Knox Press: Louisville, KY

times. The premise is that God is present in the Scriptures, and by reading the Scriptures, God speaks to each of us. The participants are to listen to the Word of God.

Meditate - Participants will then meditate on the Scripture they heard. This is not about seeking biblical truth or history; it is focused on what the Holy Spirit communicating with you. What part of the Scripture is speaking to you?

Prayer - Prayer is communication with God, God is communicating with us, and we are communicating with God. What is our response to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us?

Contemplation - Rest with God. In some practices, this is believed to be in silence. In a community setting, people may share what God is saying to them. It is the belief that God communicates with us through others. There needs to be no discussion on what others share; it is only received.

Remember: this method is about God living in the Scriptures, and we have a relationship with God through the Scriptures and with each other. Lectio Divina is not a Bible Study; it is not learning and analyzing context and culture.



TIPS FOR SMALL GROUP USE

This Lectio Divina study experience is designed primarily for use in small groups. The ideal size for a small group is five to six people, allowing each person the time and space needed for full participation. Choose a facilitator before meeting each week to guide mutual invitation and the Lectio Divina format. Other helpful tips for small group engagement are below:

- Use the tool of mutual invitation each week to guide small group discussion and participation.
- Not all group members need to answer Lectio Divina's questions. Be comfortable with silence.
- Take time to engage in the breath prayer and times of silence each week in the study.
- When serving as a group facilitator, do not rush your time with the Lectio Divina process for the sake of completion. Instead, trust the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the process of Lectio Divina.
- Attend each week's session with an open mind, heart, and spirit. Attend expecting to encounter the image of God in other group members and yourself.

This experience is created so that those who engage meet the Spirit of God, the image of God, and the image of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the group and those present. So may all who encounter the image of God over these five weeks - in their group members, families, and lives - be transformed to the glory of God.

MUTUAL INVITATION

To ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way:

The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, they then invite another to share. Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is allowed to invite another to share.

If you are not ready to share yet, say, “I pass for now,” and we will invite you to share later. If you don’t want to say anything, say “pass” and ask another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

We invite you to listen and not immediately respond to someone’s sharing. Instead, there will be time to respond and to ask clarifying questions after everyone has had an opportunity to share.

(From *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb* by Eric H. F. Law)

The following video provides more information about Mutual Invitation and can be used in your session to teach people the process.

[An Introduction to Mutual Invitation - https://youtu.be/jfDMC9PH3YQ](https://youtu.be/jfDMC9PH3YQ)

A note on having an intercultural competence mindset.

Whether you are a facilitator or participant engaging in this Lectio Divina study, cultural perspectives, life experiences, and Biblical interpretations will likely differ among the participants. Yet, as diverse cultural beings created in the Imago Dei – God’s image, we must be open to ponder what is shared by each other without judgment. We encourage you to recognize that our lived experiences are not the same and come to this space with curiosity – which fosters our ability to be interculturally competent people. Intercultural curiosity allows us as Christ’s disciples to gain an appreciation for the cultural differences that exist and to view those differences as assets to strengthen our witness and serve more people in Jesus’ name. Let us remember all of us are affected by our cultural identity, social locations, and heritage. These assets allow Christians to create space where every voice is heard, every

story is honored, and every cultural expression is respected. Intercultural competence begins with embracing the idea that we are not always aware of how our frames of reference, families of origin, national identity, tribal-cultural affiliations, ages, identity, etc., shape who we are, how we live our lives and influence how we understand God and interpret the scriptures.

Additional Resources on Lectio Divina

The Upper Room

Articles for guidance in the sacred reading of Scripture

URL: <https://www.upperroom.org/resources/category/lectio-divina>

A Guide to Lectio Divina: What it is and whether it helps prayer life!

SpiritualDirection.com

URL: <https://spiritualdirection.com/2021/11/09/lectio-divina-a-guide-what-it-is-how-it-helps-prayer-life>

Praying with Scripture - Lectio Divina & Gospel Contemplation

IgnatianSpirituality.com

URL: <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-what-how-why-of-prayer/praying-with-scripture/>

Week 01

First Reading

Breath Prayer: “Use my temptations.”

During the first reading: prayerfully listen for a word or phrase that stands out to you. Think about why God might be highlighting that word or phrase to you.

Matthew 4:1-11 (*New Revised Standard Bible updated edition*)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, “If you are the Son of God throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Silence (about 2 minutes)

Share a word or phrase that the Spirit brought to your mind, one at a time. Do not elaborate, others are not to respond only listen. When you have

shared your word, invite the next person to share, until all have shared.

Second Reading

During the second reading: use your holy imagination to join Jesus in the wilderness. You may wish to share with Jesus how you have been tempted to move away from the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion). You may want to talk with Jesus about how you too are tempted to use your privilege to serve your own hungers. You may want to talk with Jesus about how you too are tempted to manipulate scripture to justify your discrimination, your exploitation, or your privileged status. You may want to talk with Jesus about how you too are tempted to seek personal advantage over others even at the cost of obscuring the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) in your own life.. In your imagination listen to what Jesus has to say about the struggle to keep the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) that God has created us to be.

Second reading.

Silence (about 10 minutes)

Share what you have learned while being in conversation with Christ. Share briefly your insights, one at a time. Do not interrupt, but prayerfully listen to what God has revealed to each other. After you have shared, invite another to share. No one must share, you may pass if you wish, and another can be invited. Remember there are no wrong answers, only your valid shared experience. Those who may have passed will be invited again to share after all have had their opportunity to speak. Allow God to use your experience to bless others.

Third Reading

During the third reading: listen for what God is seeking to say to you about your life. What temptations seem to lure you to act in ways that may diminish the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) in your life? Where may God have revealed areas in the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) that God wants you to work on? What has God's prayer been for you as you have sat together with this scripture together?

Third reading.

Silence (about 10 minutes)

Share what you believe may be the next steps for your life. Share briefly, one at a time, then invite another member of the circle. As always you may pass and after all have shared you may still add your thoughts. Remember, where God is leading you may help others discern what the Spirit may be seeking to reveal to them. There are no wrong answers and you do not have to have perfect clarity, at this point you may be discerning just a gentle nudge or a holy whisper in your soul.

Pray for each other. You have been vulnerable with each other. Pray for healing. Pray for the strength of the Holy Spirit. Pray that each of you may shine more brightly with the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion).

Week 02

First Reading

Breath Prayer: *“Allow me a do over.”*

During the first reading: prayerfully listen for a word or phrase that stands out to you. Think about why God might be highlighting that word or phrase to you.

John 3:1-17 (*New Revised Standard Bible updated edition*)

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus in the night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person.” Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of the water and the Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things, and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. Indeed God did not send his the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Silence (about 2 minutes)

Share a word or phrase that the Spirit brings to mind, one at a time. Do not elaborate, others are not to respond. When you have shared your word, invite the next one to share, until all have shared.

Second Reading

During the second reading: use your holy imagination to be present with Jesus and Nicodemus. As we reflect on the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) who is to be born of the spirit? What does it mean to believe in Jesus? Where do you believe people see Jesus the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) reflected in your life and where do you believe you see Jesus the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) in the lives of the people you meet? You may want to explore with Jesus what it means to be saved by him; how does the Imago Dei, reflected in your relationship with Jesus, free people from the sins of racism, colonialism, ethnocentrism?

Second reading.

Silence (about 10 minutes)

Share what you have learned while being in conversation with Christ. Share briefly your insights, one at a time. Do not interrupt, but prayerfully listen to what God has revealed to each other. After you have shared, invite another to share. No one must share, you may pass if you wish and another can be invited. Remember there are no wrong answers, only your valid shared experience. Those who may have passed will be invited again to share after all have had their opportunity to speak. Allow God to use your experience to bless others.

Third Reading

During the third reading: listen for what God is seeking to say to you about your life. How is the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) helping you to see the lives of others differently? How might God be wanting you to expand your understanding of salvation? What do you believe has been God's prayer for you as you have sat with this passage?

Third reading.

Silence (about 10 minutes)

Share what you believe may be the next steps for your life. Share briefly one at a time, then invite another member of the circle. As always you may pass and after all have shared you may still add your thoughts. Remember, where God is leading you may help others discern what the Spirit may be seeking to reveal to them. There are no wrong answers and you do not have to have perfect clarity. At this point you may be discerning just a gentle nudge or a holy whisper in your soul.

Pray for each other. You have been vulnerable with each other. Pray for healing. Pray for the strength of the Holy Spirit. Pray that each of you may shine more brightly with the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion).

Week 03

First Reading

Breath Prayer: *“You are Spirit and Truth.”*

During the first reading: prayerfully listen for a word or phrase that stands out to you. Think about why God might be highlighting that word or phrase to you.

John 4:7-26 (*New Revised Standard Bible updated edition*)

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well and with his sons and flocks drank from it?” Jesus said to her, “Anyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water I will give will become a spring of living water gushing up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.” Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come back.” The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband, for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!’” The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worship on this mountain, but you say the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is

Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.” The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is the Christ). “When he comes he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Silence (about 2 minutes)

Share a word or phrase that the Spirit brings to mind, one at a time. Do not elaborate, others are not to respond. When you have shared your word, invite the next person to share, until all have shared.

Second Reading

During the second reading: use your holy imagination become the Samaritan woman as she talks with Jesus. Where do you experience the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion)? How does Jesus help you feel included? How does Jesus treat you with equity? Where do you experience diversity in this relationship?

Second reading.

Silence (about 10 minutes)

Share what you have learned while being in conversation with Christ. Share briefly your insights, one at a time. Do not interrupt, but prayerfully listen to what God has revealed to each other. After you have shared, invite another to share. No one must share, you may pass if you wish and another can be invited. Remember there are no wrong answers, only your valid shared experience. Those who may have passed will be invited again to share after all have had their opportunity to speak. Allow God to use your experience to bless others.

Third Reading

During the third reading: listen for what God is seeking to say to you about your life. Where might God be inviting you to see the Imago Dei (diversity,

equity, inclusion) in someone estranged from you? Where might God be revealing a commonality reflected in the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) in someone you were taught that you had none? What might have been God's prayer for you as you joined together with this passage of scripture?

Third reading.

Silence (about 10 minutes)

Share what you believe may be the next steps for your life. Share briefly, one at a time, then invite another member of the circle. As always you may pass and after all have shared you may still add your thoughts. Remember, where God is leading you may help others discern what the Spirit may be seeking to reveal to them. There are no wrong answers and you do not have to have perfect clarity. At this point you may be discerning just a gentle nudge or a holy whisper in your soul.

Pray for each other. You have been vulnerable with each other. Pray for healing. Pray for the strength of the Holy Spirit. Pray that each of you may shine more brightly with the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion).

Week 04

First Reading

Breath Prayer: “*Open my eyes.*”

During the first reading: prayerfully listen for a word or phrase that stands out to you. Think about why God might be highlighting that word or phrase to you.

John 9:1-21 (*New Revised Standard Bible updated edition*)

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s work might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who use to sit and beg?” Some were saying, “It is he.” But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.” They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was th Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can this man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.” The Jews did not believe that he had been born blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the

man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, but we do not know how it is that he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.”

Silence (about 2 minutes)

Share a word or phrase that the Spirit brings to mind, one at a time. Do not elaborate, others are not to respond. When you have shared your word, invite the next person to share, until all have shared.

Second Reading

During the second reading: use your holy imagination to become a disciple or the blind man. Where do you see the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion)? Where do you find diversity being revealed? Who is being treated with equity or not? Who is being included or excluded in this story. Who do you have questions for? When you ask them, what kind of answers do you receive?

Second reading.

Silence (about 10 minutes)

Share what you have learned while being in conversation with Christ. Share briefly your insights, one at a time. Do not interrupt, but prayerfully listen to what God has revealed to each other. After you have shared, invite another to share. No one must share, you may pass if you wish and another can be invited. Remember there are no wrong answers, only your valid shared experience. Those who may have passed will be invited again to share after all have had their opportunity to speak. Allow God to use your experience to bless others.

Third Reading

During the third reading: listen for what God is seeking to say to you about your life. Who might you be treating as less than the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion)? Where might you see the Imago Dei (diversity, equality, inclusion) when there is a difference of opinion? What might God's prayer have been for you as you listened to this gospel story together?

Third reading.

Silence (about 10 minutes)

Share what you believe may be the next steps for your life. Share briefly, one at a time, then invite another member of the circle. As always you may pass and after all have shared you may still add your thoughts. Remember, where God is leading you may help others discern what the Spirit may be seeking to reveal to them. There are no wrong answers and you do not have to have perfect clarity. At this point you may be discerning just a gentle nudge or a holy whisper in your soul.

Pray for each other. You have been vulnerable with each other. Pray for healing. Pray for the strength of the Holy Spirit. Pray that each of you may shine more brightly with the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion).

Week 05

First Reading

Breath Prayer: “Come Spirit of peace and life.”

During the first reading: prayerfully listen for a word or phrase that stands out to you. Think about why God might be highlighting that word or phrase to you.

Romans 8:6-11 (*New Revised Standard Bible updated edition*)

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law – indeed, it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Silence (about 2 minutes)

Share a word or phrase that the Spirit brings to mind, one at a time. Do not elaborate, others are not to respond. When you have shared your word, invite the next person to share, until all have shared.

Second Reading

During the second reading: use your holy imagination see the death and destruction in the lives of people touched by the sins of our culture, but also seek to see the life and peace brought to the lives of others because of the righteous transformation of our lives in Christ. Sin is anything that obscures

the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion), how do you see it living out in your life? The Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) shines with life and peace, how do you see that new reality expressed in your life?

Second reading.

Silence (about 10 minutes)

Share what you have learned while being in conversation with Christ. Share briefly your insights, one at a time. Do not interrupt, but prayerfully listen to what God has revealed to each other. After you have shared, invite another to share. No one must share, you may pass if you wish, and another can be invited. Remember there are no wrong answers, only your valid shared experience. Those who may have passed will be invited again to share after all have had their opportunity to speak. Allow God to use your experience to bless others.

Third Reading

During the third reading: listen for what God is seeking to say to you about your life. Where has the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) revealed the mind of the flesh still at work in your life? Where has the Imago Dei (diversity, equity, inclusion) revealed where the spirit is giving you a new way of looking at others in your life? What is God's prayer for you as you have held this passage of scripture together?

Third reading.

Silence (about 10 minutes)

Share what you believe may be the next steps for your life. Share briefly, one at a time, then invite another member of the circle. As always you may pass and after all have shared you may still add your thoughts. Remember, where God is leading you may help others discern what the Spirit may be seeking to reveal to them. There are no wrong answers and you do not have to have perfect clarity. At this point you may be discerning just a gentle nudge or a holy whisper in your soul.

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