

This method of prayer has been used for centuries and it is thought first developed in monastic communities as a way of reflectively reading the scriptures. Where we read a book nowadays, we do so silently and at quite a speed; Lectio encourages us to read slowly and systematically, allowing the message to become clear through appropriate familiarity with the word. Think of a farmer or gardener taking a handful of the soil between their fingers and feeling its quality and texture assessing its suitability for growing a particular crop. If you are alone it is a good practice to read the text aloud at a speed somewhat slower than you may be used to. If using the scriptures, and if you find this method helpful, it might be worth taking one of the shorter books of the bible and, over several days, reading the whole book in short sections. In place of scripture a different text might be selected, or a poem; but whatever is selected it should not be too long.

Prepare to pray by sitting comfortably with your chose text close to hand. Spend a few moments in silence becoming aware of your breathing and allowing yourself to relax. Be aware of the presence of God within you.

Read (aloud if possible) the passage slowly and deliberately then place the text on your lap, allow a word or phrase to emerge from the text. You can look at the passage at any time giving yourself about 10 minutes for this process. If no word or phrase emerges at this stage, do not worry.

After 10 minutes, re-read the passage (aloud if possible) continue to allow a word or phrase to emerge, or if one has already emerged then hold that word or phrase in your mind, asking how God is present in that word or phrase.

After a further 5 minutes re-read the passage again (aloud if possible) and then reform that word or phrase, and your thoughts about it, into a prayer of thanksgiving and petition. Ask God to help you keep in your mind throughout the day the word or phrase you have reflected on.

End your time of prayer with a moment of silence in which you offer the experience of prayer to God.

Do not worry if, during this exercise, you find that a word or phrase does not emerge from the text; this is not uncommon. Sometimes we find words are not enough to express fully our feelings and emotions. However, you will have spent about 20 minutes in the presence of God who revealed himself to Elijah in the still small voice of calm; your effort will not have been wasted. Maybe tomorrow the Word will speak to you.