



HEARING GOD

By Dallas Willard

6 Lectio Divina Exercises

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In each of the following Lectio Divina exercises there is a preamble to the actual Lectio Divina reading taken from the book.

You may also be interested in the following:

[Rick Miller's Lectio Process](#)

[Journaling Sheets](#)

LD#1

Hearing God in Scripture 1 Kings 19:2-18

Preamble:

Guideline Two: Mere Humans Can Talk with God

A second truth that is preliminary to any successful attempt on our part to hear God's voice concerns the relationship of our personal experience to the contents of the Bible and, by extension, to the lives of the saints and heroes of the faith throughout the ages. When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted, . . .

“The gods have come down to us in human form!” . . . [A]nd the crowds wanted to offer sacrifice. . . . When the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they . . . rushed out into the crowd, shouting, “Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you.” (Acts 14:11, 13-15)

The above scene from the book of Acts portrays the common human response to people who are living in such a close relationship with God that special manifestations of his presence stand out in their lives. We immediately think, They just aren't human! By this we mean that their experience—including their experience of God—is not like ours and perhaps that they are even some special kind of people, so our experience of God could never be like theirs.

No doubt it is hard to believe that someone clearly manifesting a transcendent life could still be human. One of the most serious and severe doctrinal struggles in the early church was over the question of whether Jesus was authentically human. A primary function of the doctrine of the virgin birth, when first introduced, was to fix firmly in people's minds the fact that Jesus really did have a human body, since he was literally born of a woman. His body came forth from a womb.[2] Still earlier, in “the days of his flesh,” when his humanity was quite visible through his literal bodily presence and processes, his closest friends and associates apparently could not see his divinity. Philip, as the end drew near, said, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus could only reply, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:8-9).

Jesus was human, yet divine; divine, yet human. We must understand this precarious balance if we are to do justice to the realities of Jesus' redemptive presence in history. It is fairly easy to state, but only the gracious inward assistance of God will enable us to base our lives on it.

This problem of uniting the life of God with the life of humanity continued to bother the early believers. Elijah was cited by James, the Lord's brother, as a case well known in this respect, which could help the believers understand their own experience and its possibilities. The story of Elijah's terror before Jezebel, his running for his life and his dissolving into a mass of righteous self-pity (1 Kings 19), shows clearly that he really was human. He was, after all, “a human being like us” (Jas 5:17), regardless of his occasional fantastic feats in the power of God.

The humanity of Moses, David and Elijah, of Paul, Peter and Jesus Christ himself—of all that wonderful company of riotously human women and men whose experience is recorded in the Bible and in the history of the church—teaches us a vital lesson: Our humanity will not by itself prevent us from knowing and interacting with God just as they did.

How to Believe the Bible Stories

Conversely, if we are really to understand the Bible record, we must enter into our study of it on the assumption that the experiences recorded there are basically of the same type as ours would have been if we had been there. Those who lived through those experiences felt very much as we would have if we had been in their place. Unless this comes home to us, the things that happened to the people in the Bible will remain unreal to us. We will not genuinely be able to believe the Bible or find its contents to be real, because it will have no experiential substance for us.

Failure to read the Bible in this realistic manner accounts for two common problems in Christian groups that hold the Bible central to their faith. The first problem is that it becomes simply a book of doctrine, of abstract truth about God, which one can search endlessly without encountering God himself or hearing his voice. This same attitude led the religious authorities of Jesus' own day to use the Scriptures for the very purpose of avoiding him. They searched the Scriptures fervently, yet Jesus said of them, "you do not have his word abiding in you" (Jn 5:38). A. W. Tozer has pointedly remarked, in this connection, that

it is altogether possible to be instructed in the rudiments of the faith and still have no real understanding of the whole thing. And it is possible to go on to become expert in Bible doctrine and not have spiritual illumination, with the result that a veil remains over the mind, preventing it from apprehending the truth in its spiritual essence.[3]

The other problem is that we simply stop reading the Bible altogether when we do not understand the experience of biblical characters in terms of how we experience life's events. Or else we take it in regular doses, choking it down like medicine, because someone told us that it would be good for us—though we really do not find it to be so.

The open secret of many "Bible-believing" churches is that only a very small percentage of their members study the Bible with even the degree of interest, intelligence or joy that they bring to bear upon their favorite newspaper or magazine. In my opinion, based on considerable experience, this is primarily because they do not know and are not taught how to understand the experience of biblical characters in terms of how they experience life.

Perhaps they are even warned not to understand it in this way, told that it is dangerous to do so. But the Bible itself teaches that we are to understand it in terms of our own experience when it says that Paul, Barnabas and Elijah were human beings like us and that Jesus knows how we feel in our weaknesses because he himself "in every respect has been tested as we are" (Heb 4:15). It means that their experience was substantially like our own.

If we are to hear God's voice ourselves and on an individual basis, we must, above all else, observe how his word came to those people described in the Scriptures. How did they experience God's communication? What was it like for them to hear God? We must prayerfully but boldly use our God-given imaginations as we read the stories of people who encountered God. We must ask ourselves what it would be like if we were Moses standing by the bush (Ex 3:2), little Samuel lying in his darkened room (1 Sam 3:3-7), Elisha under inspiration from the minstrel (2 Kings 3:15), Ananias receiving his vision about Paul (Acts 9:11) or Peter on his rooftop (Acts 10:10). We must pray for the faith and for the experiences that would enable us to believe that such things could happen to us. Only then will we be able to recognize, accept and dwell in them when they come. This is our second general guideline.

Humble Arrogance: Who, Me, Lord?

Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. (Lk 10:20) Richard Attenborough's movie Gandhi has a scene set in South Africa where the young Indian lawyer and a white clergyman are walking together on a boardwalk, contrary to South African law at the time. They are accosted by some brutish-looking young white men who seem about to harm them. But the mother of the ringleader calls from an upstairs window and commands him to go about his business.

As they walk on, the clergyman exclaims over their good luck. Gandhi comments, "I thought you were a man of God." The clergyman replies, "I am, but I don't believe he plans his day around me!"

The audience laughs, of course. A cute point indeed! But beneath it lies an attitude and a set of beliefs that may make it impossible for us to take seriously the possibility of divine guidance. And if we do not take it seriously, then of course we shall not be able to enter into it.

We must think of ourselves as capable of having the same kinds of experiences as did Elijah or Paul.

To the statement made earlier—that we must think of ourselves as capable of having the same kinds of experiences as did Paul, Barnabas or Elijah—many will spontaneously reply, "But who am I to put myself in the place of these great ones? Who am I even to suppose that God might guide me or speak to me, much less that my experience should be like that of a Moses or Elisha?"

One who has such a reaction often presumes that it honors the greatness of God. In fact, it contradicts what God has taught about himself in the Bible and in the person of Christ. His greatness is precisely what allows him to "plan his day" around me or anyone and everyone else, as he chooses.

Those spoken to by God in the scriptural record, such as Moses or Gideon, often tried to plead unworthiness or inadequacy. While such responses are in a sense fitting, they are also beside the point. They are irrelevant, as God makes perfectly clear in the stories concerned.

We might even find it hard to believe it if we were told that a high government official or some other important, though merely human, dignitary had called to talk to us. We might think, on the one hand, that we are not that important and, on the other hand, that such a communication might seem to make us important. Similar thoughts may be stirred up at the suggestion of God's talking to us. But these thoughts are simply irrelevant to his purposes in dealing with us. Furthermore, they contain tragic misconceptions that have the power to shut us off from the individualized word of God.

In the first place, we are that important. We were important enough for God to give his Son's life for us and to choose to inhabit us as a living temple. Obviously, then, we are important enough for him to guide us and speak to us whenever that is appropriate.

In the second place, his speaking to us does not in itself make us important. Just as when he spoke to the ancient people of Israel, his speaking to us only gives us greater opportunity to be and to do good and to have greater responsibility for the care and guidance of others. But if we allow God's conversational walk with us (or anything else) to make us think we are people of great importance, his guidance will certainly be withdrawn. For we cannot be trusted with it. Under the kingdom of the heavens, those who exalt themselves will be abased, as Jesus taught, and pride is the condition that comes right before a fall.

Hearing God in Scripture 1 Kings 19:2-18

Before doing this lectio divina exercise, you might wish to review the last three sections about Elijah and his experience. (Begin at “Guideline Two: Mere Humans Can Talk with God” and skim up to this point.) This will help you enter into Elijah’s experience in an informed, picturesque way. To prepare to read this passage in order to receive from God, please set the book or electronic reader down for a minute. Close your eyes and breathe out slowly. Ask God to give you an openness to hear whatever the Spirit wishes to bring to you today.

Read—lectio

Read the passage slowly, considering the invitation that reading Scripture is “encountering God himself or hearing his voice.”

Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.” And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life. . . . [He] went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!”

Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, “Arise and eat.” Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, “Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you.” So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

So he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.”

Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

And he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.”

Then the LORD said to him: “Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (NKJV)

Now that the words are familiar to you, please read it again, remembering that “those who lived through those experiences felt very much as we would have if we had been in their place.”

Also, listen with the ear of your heart for one of the following:

A word or phrase, a detail or a special moment of the story that shimmers or stands out to you.

Where you find yourself in the passage: in the person of Elijah or Jezebel or the angel; perhaps you identify with the cave or the baked goods, or even the earthquake, wind and fire. That’s not silly or unusual. Just go with it.

In any case, do not choose this yourself. Let the Spirit bring it to you. Even if you don’t like it, try to welcome it with meekness and see what happens (Jas 1:21).

Reflect—meditatio

Read the passage again slowly. As you do so and for a few minutes afterward, reflect on one of the following:

The word or phrase that stood out to you. Why do you think these words resonated with you?

Who or what you found yourself to be in the passage. How does it feel to be this person or object? What draws you? What are you thinking or feeling about God?

Give yourself a few minutes to do this. Then ask God, How does this connect with my life today? What do I need to know or be or do?

Respond (Pray)—oratio

After reading the passage one last time, talk to God about what you think the Spirit might have said to you or what came to you. Pray in whatever way you are led. You might thank God for something or ask God for something.

Rest (Contemplation)—contemplatio

Do as you are led. You may wish to wait on God—to simply be with God. You may wish to pay attention to God, pondering especially, How did God seem in the passage? What about God makes you want to worship him, or at least be with him? Sit in the companionship of God—the one who invites you to come away and be with him.

LD #2

Hearing God in Scripture 2 Kings 6:11-17

Preamble:

Chariots of fire. The king of Syria was at war with Israel, but every time he laid his battle plans, Elisha would tell them to the king of Israel. The king of Syria naturally supposed that there was an Israelite spy among his confidants, but his aides all denied it.

The mind of the king of Aram was greatly perturbed because of this; he called his officers and said to them, “Now tell me who among us sides with the king of Israel?” Then one of his officers said, “No one, my lord king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber.” (2 Kings 6:11-12)

The king of Syria did believe this and went right to the heart of the problem: “Get Elisha!”

He said, “Go and find where he is; I will send and seize him.” He was told, “He is in Dothan.” So he sent horses and chariots there and a great army; they came by night, and surrounded the city.

When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, “Alas, master! What shall we do?” He replied, “Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them.” Then Elisha prayed: “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:13-17)

Hearing God in Scripture 2 Kings 6:11-17

Prepare yourself to receive from God. Close your eyes and breathe out slowly. Ask God to give you an openness to hear whatever the Spirit wishes to bring to you today.

Read—lectio

Before rereading the Scripture paragraphs about Elisha, consider Dallas Willard’s meditation on what happened to Elisha’s servant. What did the young man see? Spiritual or personal reality is a type of reality that does not necessarily reveal itself to good eyesight. This is also true in some measure of the spiritual side of you and me. God enabled the young man to see the powers of his realm that totally interpenetrated and upheld all the normal, visible reality around him (even the Syrian army itself). Every working of visible reality is a movement within the encompassing Logos, the sustaining Word of God, and it rests on nothing else but God through his Son, who was and is the “reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:1-3).

How we need our Elishas today who, by life and teaching as well as by prayer, might open our eyes to see the reality of God’s presence all around us, in every bit of matter as well as beyond!

Now reread 2 Kings 6:11-17 (p. 103), allowing yourself to be immersed in the situation. Remember that “those who lived through those experiences felt very much as we would have if we had been in their place” (see p. 44).

Also listen with the ear of your heart for

a word or phrase, a detail of the story that shimmers or stands out to you

where you find yourself in the passage: one of the Syrian soldiers coming after Elisha (perhaps watching the terrified servant), the servant, Elisha, one of the fiery chariots or horses, a fly on the wall watching it all happen

In either case, do not choose this yourself. Let the Spirit bring it to you.

Reflect—meditatio

As you reflect on this passage, consider one of the following:

The word or phrase that stood out to you. Why do you think these words resonated with you?

Who or what you found yourself to be in the passage. How does it feel to be this person or object? What draws you? What are you thinking or feeling about God?

Give yourself a few minutes to ponder all this.

Then ask God, How does this connect with my life today?

What do I need to know or be or do?

Respond (Pray)—oratio

Read the words in verses 15-17 one last time, preparing yourself for what you want to say to God about what you think the Spirit might have said to you or what came to you.

Pray whatever you need to pray. You might thank God for something or ask God for something.

Rest (Contemplation)—contemplatio

Do as you are led. You may wish to wait on God—to simply be with God. You may wish to pay attention to God, pondering especially, How did God seem in the passage to Elisha, to the servant, to you? What about God makes you want to worship him or at least be with him? Sit in the companionship of God—the one who shows up and can be seen.

LD # 3

Hearing God in Scripture Psalm 19:1-6; 119:89-91

Preamble:

This all goes to make the following point. Here, in this restricted range of direct action, God has given us a power that, so far as our conscious control is concerned, is as immediately creative as his own. A realization of how our own thoughts (inner words) translate themselves into an act of creation is absolutely vital if we are to gain any concrete sense of God's rule through his word. Only if we have some understanding of what it means for his word to act will we have any grounds for believing that God can have a personal, guiding relationship with us.

Returning to Genesis 1, we see God continuing to create by the direct action of his word on the results of his first creative word—the one that produced light and energy from itself alone, energy that we now know to be the substance of matter. Thus we read:

And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters. . . . Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place.” (Gen 1:6, 9)

He spoke and thereby formed these specific things into existence. And God said,

“Let there be lights in the dome of the sky. . . . Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures. . . . Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind. . . . Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.” (Gen 1:14, 20, 24, 26)

In all these cases, as God spoke the object concerned came into existence (whether in an instant or over a more or less extended period of time does not matter) in the same way that your hand moves in response to your thought and intention. That is the creative power of the word of God. With all this in mind you may wish to interrupt your reading here to undertake a meditative and worshipful study of Psalm 104!

The word of God—the thought and mind of God—continues its presence in the created universe, upholding it. “Lasting to eternity, your word, Yahweh, unchanging in the heavens: your faithfulness lasts age after age; you founded the earth to endure. Creation is maintained by your rulings, since all things are your servants” (Ps 119:89-91 JB).

What we call natural laws, then, must be regarded as God's thoughts and intentions as to how the world should run. Because of this, as the Christian philosopher and Anglican bishop George Berkeley said long ago, echoing Psalm 19, “God himself speaks every day and in every place to the eyes of all men.”[5] The events in the visible, material world—the unfolding of a rosebud, the germination of a seed, the conception and growth of a child, the evolution of galaxies—constitute a visible language manifesting not only a creative mind but, as Berkeley continues,

a provident Governor, actually and intimately present, and attentive to all our interests and motions, who watches over our conduct and takes care of our minutest actions and designs throughout the whole course of our lives, informing, admonishing, and directing incessantly, in a most evident and sensible manner.[6]

Before doing this *lectio divina* exercise, take a minute to review what was written in the previous seven paragraphs. The ideas in this chapter about the place that words and God's Word have in reality will help you settle into the passage in an informed, expectant way. To prepare to read in order to receive from God—to hear God— please set the book or electronic reader down for a minute. Close your eyes and breathe out slowly. Ask God to give you an openness to hear whatever the Spirit wishes to bring to you today.

Hearing God in Scripture Psalm 19:1-6; 119:89-91

Read—lectio

Read the passage slowly, considering the invitation that reading Scripture is “encountering God himself or hearing his voice.”

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat. (Ps 19:1-6)

Lasting to eternity, your word, Yahweh, unchanging in the heavens: your faithfulness lasts age after age; you founded the earth to endure. Creation is maintained by your rulings, since all things are your servants. (Ps 119:89-91 JB)

Now that the words are familiar to you, please read them again. This time, also listen with the ear of your heart for a word or phrase that shimmers or stands out to you. Do not choose this yourself. Let the Spirit bring it to you. Welcome it with meekness and see what happens (Jas 1:21).

Reflect—meditatio

Read the passage again slowly. As you do so and for a few minutes afterward, reflect on the word or phrase that stood out to you. Why do you think these words resonated with you? Give yourself a few minutes to do this. Then ask God, How does this connect with my life today? What do I need to know or be or do?

Respond (Pray)—oratio

Read the passage one last time, preparing yourself for what you want to say to God about what you think the Spirit might have said to you or what came to you. Pray however you are led pray. You might thank God for something or ask God for something. Or you might want to use the last four lines of the passage as your prayer.

Rest (Contemplation)—contemplatio

Do as you are led. You may wish to wait on God—to simply be with God. You may wish to pay attention to God, pondering especially how this passage adds to your wonder about God. What about him makes you want to worship him, or at least be with him? Sit in the companionship of God—the one who seeks you.

From Hearing God by Dallas Willard pg 165

The following starts at pg 162 the 7 paragraphs prior to lectio exercize.

LD #4

Hearing God in Scripture Proverbs 20:27; 1 Corinthians 2:9-13, 15-16

Preamble:

The human spirit or the “still, small voice.” The final means through which God addresses us is our own spirits—our own thoughts and feelings toward ourselves as well as toward events and people around us. This, I believe, is the primary subjective way that God addresses us. Of all the ways in which a message comes from within the experience of the person addressed (such as dreams and visions or other mental states), the form of one’s own thoughts and attendant feelings is the most common path for hearing God for those who are living in harmony with God. Of all the possible subjective routes, this mode is best suited to the redemptive purposes of God because, once again, it most engages the faculties of free, intelligent beings involved in the work of God as his collaborators and friends.

Thus the familiar King James Version of Proverbs 20:27 says, “The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly.” This is possibly better put in the Jerusalem Bible: “Man’s spirit is the lamp of Yahweh, searching his deepest self.”

In a passage of great importance to our exploration here, the apostle Paul makes a comparison between humans and God regarding self-knowledge: “For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God’s except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:11). Paul then points out that we have received the Spirit of God and concludes that we can therefore search out and know the very mind of God by means of his Spirit—in contrast to the proverb quoted earlier, which emphasizes the Lord’s use of our spirit. After quoting the question from Isaiah 40:13, “Who has directed the spirit of the LORD, or as his counselor has instructed him?” the apostle replies, “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).

So God uses our self-knowledge or self-awareness, which is heightened and given a special quality by his presence and direction, to search us out and reveal to us the truth about ourselves and our world. And we are able to use his knowledge of himself—made available to us in Christ and the Scriptures—to understand in some measure his thoughts and intentions toward us and to help us see his workings in our world.

Hearing God in Scripture Proverbs 20:27; 1 Corinthians 2:9-13, 15-16

Before doing this *lectio divina* exercise, take a minute to review what was written about this passage in the three previous paragraphs.

You may also recall from chapter three that a great part of having the mind of Christ is about working together with God in shared activity. Collaborators easily share thoughts with little effort because they’re focused on the same people, tasks and goals. These ideas about how the still, small voice works will help you settle into the Scripture passage in a simple, informed way.

To prepare to read in order to receive from God, please set the book or electronic reader down for a minute. Close your eyes and breathe out slowly. Ask God to give you an openness to hear whatever the Spirit wishes to bring to you today.

Read—lectio

Read the passage slowly.

Man's spirit is the lamp of Yahweh [candle of the LORD], searching his deepest self. (Prov 20:27 JB)

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him”— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ! (1 Cor 2:9-13, 15-16)

Now that the words are familiar to you, please read them again. This time, also listen with the ear of your heart for a word or phrase that shimmers or stands out to you. Do not choose this yourself. Let the Spirit bring it to you. Welcome it with meekness and see what happens (Jas 1:21).

Reflect—meditatio

Read the passage again slowly. As you do so, and for a few minutes afterward, reflect on the word or phrase that stood out to you. Why do you think these words resonated with you? Give yourself a few minutes to do this. Then ask God, How does this connect with my life today? What do I need to know or be or do?

Respond (Pray)—oratio

Read the passage one last time, preparing yourself for what you want to say to God about what you think the Spirit might have said to you or what came to you. Pray in whatever way you are led. You might thank God for something or ask God for something.

Rest (Contemplation)—contemplatio

Do as you are led. You may wish to wait on God—to simply be with God. You may wish to ponder, How did God seem in the passage? Close or distant? Caring or detached? What about God makes you marvel, or at least want to be with him? Sit in the companionship of God—the one who seeks you and is glad to do that.

LD # 5

Hearing God in Scripture Romans 5:10-11; 6:4, 8-11

Preamble:

Christ's Faith as My Faith

The faith by which Jesus Christ lived, his faith in God and his kingdom, is expressed in the gospel that he preached. That gospel is the good news that the kingdom rule of God is available to humankind here and now. His followers did not have this faith within themselves, and they long regarded it only as his faith, not theirs. Even after they came to have faith in him, they did not share his faith.

Once, in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, the disciples' boat was almost beaten under by the waves while Jesus slept calmly. His disciples woke him crying, "Lord, save us! We are perishing!" (Mt 8:25). Jesus reproachfully replied, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" (Mt 8:26). Now the disciples obviously had great faith in Jesus. They called upon him, counting on him to save them. They had great faith in him, but they did not have his great faith in God. It was because they did not have his faith that he spoke of how little faith they had.

Some Christians too commonly demonstrate that the notions of "faith in Christ" and "love for Christ" leave Christ outside the personality of the believer. One wonders whether the modern translations of the Bible are not being governed by the need to turn our weakened practice into the norm of faith. These exterior notions of Christ's faith and love will never be strong enough to yield the confident statement, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). They can never provide the unity of the branches with the vine, where the life that is in the branch is literally that which flows to it through the vine and is the very life of the vine to which it is attached (Jn 15:1-4).

Such exterior notions cannot provide the mutual abiding (Jn 15:5) that causes us branches to bring forth much fruit and without which we can do nothing.

Our additional life is also God's life in us: his thoughts, his faith, his love, all literally imparted to us, shared with us, by his word and Spirit.

It is as such abiding branches that we "were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, [so] much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life" (Rom 5:10).

Our additional life, though it is still our life, is also God's life in us: his thoughts, his faith, his love, all literally imparted to us, shared with us, by his word and Spirit.

Paul on Salvation

The substance of Paul's teachings about salvation is drained off when we fail to take literally his words about our union and identification with Christ. Without this his writings can be handily subjected to elaborate plans of salvation or made into a "Roman road" of doctrinal assents, by which we supposedly gain God's approval merely for believing what every demon believes to be true about Jesus and his work. James S. Stewart's profound book *A Man in Christ* deals with this tendency in interpreting Paul and forcefully corrects it:

Beyond the reproduction in the believer's spiritual life of his Lord's death and burial lies the glorious fact of union with Christ in His resurrection. "Like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Everything that Paul associates with salvation—joy, and peace, and power, and progress, and moral victory—is gathered up in the one word he uses so constantly, "life." Only those who through Christ have entered into a vital relationship to God are really "alive." . . . But what Paul now saw with piercing clearness was that this life into possession of which souls entered by conversion was nothing else than the life of Christ Himself. He shared His very being with them.[3]

Stewart points out how Paul speaks of "Christ who is your life" (Col 3:4) and of "the life of Jesus" being "made visible in our bodies" (2 Cor 4:10). He points to Paul's contrast of the law of sin and death with "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2). And he emphasizes that "this life which flows from Christ into man is something totally different from anything experienced on the merely natural plane. It is different, not only in degree, but also in kind. It is *kainotēs zoēs* (Romans 6:4), a new quality of life, a supernatural quality." [4] This is what Paul means when he says that if one is in Christ, one is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).

It is this identity between the additional life of the regenerate, or restarted, individual and the person and life of Christ himself that turns believers into "a colony of heaven" (as Moffatt translates Phil 3:20) and enables them to fulfill their call to be the light of the world, showing the world what it is really like to be alive.

Focusing on Our Aliveness to God

The person who has been brought into the additional life by the creative action of the word of God now lives between two distinct realms of life and power: that of the natural or fleshly and that of the supernatural or spiritual. Even while dead in our sins and unable to interact constructively with God, we are still capable of sensing the vacuum in the natural life apart from God and of following up on the many earthly rumors about God and where he is to be found. Once the new life begins to enter our soul, however, we have the responsibility and opportunity of ever more fully focusing our whole being on it and wholly orienting ourselves toward it. This is our part, and God will not do it for us.

We can see how this happens by looking in Romans 7. Here Paul speaks of a time when he found that the impulses of his personality, solidified through lifelong training in the ways of sin, continued to move in their old patterns and not in conformity with the new life that had entered his soul when he encountered Christ. In this condition, he said, "I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and I find myself doing the very things I hate" (Rom 7:15 JB).

This condition is rather like that of a boat traveling through the water. The boat does not immediately shift to the direction the pilot wants at the very moment he moves the rudder. And it may even continue moving forward for some time while the engine is in full reverse. The pilot must learn how to direct the boat partly in terms of powers that move independently of his will and do not as such represent his intentions.

Paul chooses to identify with his new life. He acknowledges, reckons and affirms his union with what in himself cleaves to the good:

When I act against my own will, that means I have a self that acknowledges that the Law is good, and so the thing behaving in that way is not my self but sin living in me. The fact is, I know of nothing good living in me—living, that is, in my unspiritual self—for though the will to do what is good is in me, the performance is not, with the result that instead of doing the good things I want to do, I carry out the sinful things I do not want. When I act against my will, then, it is not my true self doing it, but sin which lives in me. (Rom 7:16-20 JB)

Or, as the King James Version simply says, “It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom 7:20).

The “not I, but sin” of Romans 7 must be taken in conjunction with the “not I, but Christ” of Galatians 2:20. Of course some people might say such things and only be seeking to excuse themselves from responsibility for their inner sinfulness, as referred to in Romans 7, or from responsibility for their sinful actions, as referred to in Galatians 2. But not Paul. Speaking for hosts of men and women who have come to life in Christ throughout the ages, Paul is beyond the point of excusing or accusing. He has accepted the full measure of his guilt. He is now concerned with how to enter into the new life to its fullest.

This requires that we take a stand as to who we are in this new life, that we identify with the Christ-life in us and against the sin still present in ourselves, and that we settle in our will the question of who we intend to be. This is what it means to “consider” ourselves “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11).

As men and women of the additional birth, we stand at the intersection of the merely natural (fleshly) and the spiritual. St. Thomas Aquinas coined a word to express just this state: *aevum*, as distinct from *tempus* and *aeternitas*. *Aevum* is the mean between eternity and time, sharing in them both. It is two lives, two streams of awareness and power, mingling together in the individual who must choose which one he or she will truly be.

Our identification with the one life or the other is not a fact to be discovered by subtle examinations of theological treatises or of our soul-life and state of mind. It is a set of the will. Is it my will to be in the old, dead life of sin? Or is it my will to be in the resurrection life of Christ, which has entered into me through the impact of God’s word?

If you choose the latter, you still “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13). It is I. Yet it is not I but Christ. We move beyond mere communication and communion toward union with him, and we have the opportunity of progressively unifying all aspects of our personalities with him so that, literally, “to me, living is Christ and dying is gain” (Phil 1:21).

Hearing God in Scripture Romans 5:10-11; 6:4, 8-11

Before doing this *lectio divina* exercise, take a minute to review the ideas in the last three sections:

“Christ’s Faith as My Faith”: His thoughts, his faith, his love, all literally imparted to us, shared with us, by his word and Spirit.

“Paul on Salvation”: The new life is a new supernatural quality of life. It is a different kind of life.

“Focusing on Our Aliveness to God”: As we take a stand as to who we are in this new life, identifying with the Christ-life in us and against the sin, the “boat” of our life begins to turn around.

These ideas about our aliveness in Christ will help you settle into the Scripture passage in an informed way.

To prepare to read in order to receive from God—to hear God— please set the book or electronic reader down for a minute. Close your eyes and breathe out slowly. Ask God to give you an openness to hear whatever the Spirit wishes to bring to you today.

Read—lectio

Read the passage slowly.

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. . . .

We have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. . . .

If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Now that the words are familiar to you, please read it again. This time, also listen with the ear of your heart for a word or phrase, a detail of the story that shimmers or stands out to you. Do not choose this yourself. Let the Spirit bring it to you. Even if you don’t like it, try to welcome it with meekness and see what happens (Jas 1:21).

Reflect—meditatio

Read the passage again slowly. As you do so and for a few minutes afterward, reflect on the word or phrase that stood out to you. Why do you think these words resonated with you? Then ask God, How does this connect with my life today? What do I need to know or be or do? Give yourself a few minutes to do this.

Respond (Pray)—oratio

Read the passage one last time, preparing yourself for what you want to say to God about what you think the Spirit might have said to you or what came to you. Pray however you are led to pray. You might thank God for something or ask God for something.

Rest (Contemplation)—contemplatio

Do as you are led. You may wish to wait on God—to simply be with God. You may wish to ponder, How did God seem in the passage? How did Christ seem in this passage? Is there anything about Christ that makes you want his life in you, or at least want to be with him? Sit in the beauty and hope of that.

LD #6

Hearing God in Scripture 1 Chronicles 14:8-17

Preamble:

Not Mere Impressions

King David's own conversational interactions with God are documented at many points in the Bible, nowhere more graphically than in 1 Chronicles 14. After he had taken the throne of Israel, the Philistines came to war against him. David "inquired of God" (v. 10) what he should do. This was probably done by standing before the ark of God. The ark had been used earlier in the history of Israel for such inquiry, and it had been recently relocated by David in an effort to place it in Jerusalem, which he had chosen as his capital city (see 1 Chron 13). "David inquired of God, 'Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hand?' The LORD said to him, 'Go up, and I will give them into your hand'" (v. 10).

And so it happened. The Philistines then regrouped and later set themselves in array once more in the same valley. "When David again inquired of God, God said to him, 'You shall not go up after them; go around and come on them opposite the balsam trees. When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then go out to battle; for God has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines'" (vv. 14-15). It occurred just as God said.

One of the most interesting things about these cases and many other similar biblical passages is the specific information, the clear and detailed cognitive content, given in the movement of God on the minds of Samuel and David. What we have here are not mere impressions, impulses or feelings, which are so commonly thought to be what God uses to communicate with us. Rather, we have a specific and full cognitive or propositional content concerning what is the case, what is to be done and what will happen.

David and Samuel were not left to wonder about the meaning of their impulses to do this or that or their feelings about this or that. Nor did they have to test them against the Scriptures or circumstances. They were simply told. David did not have to speculate about the meaning of "the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees" (v. 14); he was told its meaning.

Hearing God in Scripture 1 Chronicles 14:8-17

Before doing this lectio divina exercise, take a minute to review what was written about this passage in the section above, "Not Mere Impressions." This will help you move into the passage in an informed, picturesque way.

To prepare to read in order to receive from God, please set the book or electronic reader down for a minute. Close your eyes and breathe out slowly. Ask God to give you an openness to hear whatever the Spirit wishes to bring to you today.

Read—lectio

Read the passage slowly, considering the invitation that reading Scripture is “encountering God himself or hearing his voice.”

When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over all Israel, all the Philistines went up in search of David; and David heard of it and went out against them. Now the Philistines had come and made a raid in the valley of Rephaim. David inquired of God, “Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will you give them into my hand?” The LORD said to him, “Go up, and I will give them into your hand.” So he went up to Baal-perazim, and David defeated them there. David said, “God has burst out against my enemies by my hand, like a bursting flood.” Therefore that place is called Baal-perazim. They abandoned their gods there, and at David’s command they were burned.

Once again the Philistines made a raid in the valley. When David again inquired of God, God said to him, “You shall not go up after them; go around and come on them opposite the balsam trees. When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then go out to battle; for God has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines.” David did as God had commanded him, and they struck down the Philistine army from Gibeon to Gezer. The fame of David went out into all lands, and the LORD brought the fear of him on all nations.

Now that the words are familiar to you, please read it again, remembering that “those who lived through those experiences felt very much as we would have if we had been in their place.”

Also listen with the ear of your heart for

a word or phrase, a detail of the story that shimmers or stands out to you

where you find yourself in the passage: David standing before the ark of the Lord (in all probability), the Israelite soldiers waiting and listening for the sound of God marching in the tops of the balsam trees, an Israelite soldier’s family listening later to the soldier tell the story, an Israelite commander wondering if David heard correctly, a Philistine soldier baffled at the sound and wondering what it might be. Or you might find yourself in the role of an object such as the trees themselves. That’s not silly or unusual. Just go with it.

In either case, do not choose this yourself. Let the Spirit bring it to you. Even if you don’t like it, try to welcome it with meekness and see what happens (Jas 1:21).

Reflect—meditation

Read the passage again slowly. As you do so and for a few minutes afterward, reflect on

the word or phrase that stood out to you. Why do you think these words resonated with you?

who you found yourself to be in the passage. How does it feel to be this person or object?

What are you thinking about the situation? What are you thinking about God, or maybe how God interacts with people?

what it would mean to be a person who is not left to wonder about the meaning of their impulses to do this or that or their feelings about this or that.

Give yourself a few minutes to do this. Then ask God, How does this connect with my life today? What do I need to know or be or do?

Respond (Pray)—oratio

Read the passage one last time, preparing yourself for what you want to say to God about what you think the Spirit might have said to you or what came to you.

Pray however you are led to pray. You might thank God for something or ask God for something, perhaps for help in believing that our life can have the same quality of life as those in Scripture.

Rest (Contemplation)—contemplatio

Do as you are led. You may wish to wait on God—to simply be with God. You may wish to pay attention to God, pondering especially, What sort of God is interested in communicating with humans so clearly? What about him makes you want to worship him, or at least be with him? Sit in the companionship of God—the one who seeks you.