

How to pray *lectio divina* with kids

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I first heard of *lectio divina* when I started graduate theological studies. Thankfully, I was blessed to study with the Benedictines, who are steeped in [this prayer practice](#) (which St. Benedict wrote about in his Rule dating back to 500). So I learned from wise sisters and brothers how to make this [“holy reading”](#) of scripture part of my prayer life. And I’ve been grateful ever since.

But here’s the thing about *lectio divina*. Actually, here’s the thing about 90 percent of traditional spiritual practices. They require

1. uninterrupted time
2. uninterrupted space
3. peaceful quiet

With three young kids? I have almost 0 percent of this. So I have to improvise. And after years of messy practice, here’s the way we pray *lectio divina* with the least among us. (In size, not wisdom!)

1. Learn the basics.

Lectio divina traditionally includes these four or five steps:

- *lectio* (read)
- *meditatio* (meditate)
- *oratio* (pray)
- *contemplatio* (contemplate)
- some practices add *imitatio* at the end (imitate or act)

Start by choosing a scripture passage to reflect on. Then read it slowly, over and over, allowing God’s word to sink into your mind and heart.

- **Read:** Read the passage out loud.
- **Meditate:** Read the passage a second time. Listen for a word or phrase that speaks to you.

- **Pray:** Read the passage a third time. Reflect on how God may be speaking to you through that word or phrase.
- **Contemplate:** Read the passage a fourth time. Reflect on how God may be calling you to act through the word or phrase that spoke to you.
- **Act:** Close with a prayer of gratitude and response to God’s invitation.

What I love about *lectio divina* is the way you can enter immediately into the word. You don’t need to know everything about the background or history or details of the scripture you are praying. You don’t need to figure out every theological meaning of the passage.

You simply open yourself up to let God’s word speak to your life, where you are right now. And I’m always amazed at what is revealed.

2. Adapt for age & attention span.

Kids are wriggly, whiny, wandering, wondering pray-ers. Like most humans, they find it difficult to concentrate while they pray. So if you want to pray *lectio divina* with kids, my advice is to start small.

Our family uses [this beautiful book](#) to pray a psalm or two with our kids at bedtime.

For the past few years, I’ve been praying a modified version of *lectio divina* with our oldest boys. They love it and—kid you not—request it most nights. (Thus putting *lectio* on par with dessert and Disney movies in their desires? Almost.)

We start by closing our eyes, folding our hands, and quieting our bodies down with deep breaths—to get out the sillies and make space for a little silence.

- **Read:** We start by reading one psalm slowly (three–five verses). Our oldest son and I alternate reading aloud, since it’s lovely to hear different voices as we pray.
- **Meditate:** I ask the kids what word or phrase “spoke to their heart.” They each speak it aloud. I share mine, too.
- **Pray:** We talk about how God might be speaking to us through their word or phrase.
- **Contemplate:** We read the psalm again. I ask the kids to think about how God may be calling them to act in a certain way. (This step sometimes veers into

questions about God, which is fine by me!)

- **Act:** We close with a simple prayer to say thank you to God and try to grow in love.

3. Learn from your kids!

Lately my sons have been wanting to spend time talking about the illustrations that go with each psalm. I had never thought to include them in our prayer, but now we do a form of [visio divina](#) with the pictures, too. I ask the kids what part of the illustration draws their attention, and then we talk about what it might say to us about God. I want to keep an open heart to how God is speaking to me through my children, too.

And their love for praying with the Psalms inspires my own practice of *lectio divina*. I want my kids to see me with my Bible—and not just my phone, gulp—so that they know what matters most to me.

So when my dear friends [Nancy](#) and [Nell](#) got inspired to write [an Advent devotional for busy moms \(based on lectio divina\)](#), I leaped at the chance to create this scripture study with them. Not only because I know so many friends who crave something like this, but because I need it, too.

I love knowing that my prayer practice for Advent is already planned out, and I'm inspired to fill a few moments each day till then with my practice of *lectio divina*.

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