

PRAYER

FINDING INTIMACY WITH GOD

STUDY GUIDE SESSION 2



LECTIOTM

UNVEILING SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

TIM GRAY

Nihil Obstat: Tomas Fuerte, S.T.L., *Censor Librorum*

Imprimatur: Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, S.T.L., Archbishop of Denver, November 2015

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Formed.org

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-0-9966768-4-7

SESSION 2

GUIGO'S LADDER: A WAY OF ASCENT



OPENING PRAYER

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to thy word.
With my whole heart I seek thee;
let me not wander from thy commandments!

I have laid up thy word in my heart,
that I might not sin against thee.
Blessed be thou, O LORD;
teach me thy statutes!

With my lips I declare
all the ordinances of thy mouth.
In the way of thy testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.

I will meditate on thy precepts,
and fix my eyes on thy ways.
I will delight in thy statutes;
I will not forget thy word.
Amen.

—Psalm 119:9–16

INTRODUCTION

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). These well-known words from the book of Ecclesiastes have found their way into all sorts of places, from greeting cards to 1960s folk rock hits. The divine ordering of things is a truth that strikes a deep chord within us, no matter how much we like to be in control. This divine order is especially important when it comes to the divine encounter of prayer. As the author of Ecclesiastes continues in verse 7, there is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” In the last session we were reminded that prayer is supposed to be a dialogue. In this session we will examine the specific order to this dialogue, from God initiating the conversation through the stages of our response.



CONNECT

Think of a time you felt incredibly thirsty. What quenched your thirst and refreshed you? Describe the experience.

How do you show others that you are listening attentively to them?



DISCUSS



THE LADDER OF PRAYER

Watch the teaching on video. The following is a brief outline of the topics covered.

I. Order of Prayer—God Speaks First

- A. Two ingredients—Word of God and our response _____
- B. Woman at the well (John 4:1–43)—Jesus speaks first, “Give me a drink” _____
- C. *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4–5)
“Hear, O Israel . . .”—Israel is to listen _____
- D. Prayer requires a disposition of humility; the posture of a beggar _____
- E. God’s complaint to Israel is that they didn’t listen _____
- F. “You would have asked . . . [for] living water” (John 4:10) _____

1. God is the fountain of living waters
(Jeremiah 2:13) _____
 2. God's people chose broken, dry cisterns _____
 3. Samaritan woman leaves her water jar
because she has found the living water
in Jesus _____
 - G. Order matters—God speaks first in the
Scriptures, and then we respond _____
- II. Guigo the Carthusian _____
- A. *Lectio*—reading _____
 - B. *Meditatio*—meditation _____
 - C. *Oratio*—talking to God _____
 - D. *Contemplatio*—being with God _____
- III. The Ladder of Prayer _____
- A. We have to start at the first rung _____
 - B. "This ladder has few rungs, and yet its length
is immense and wonderful, for its lower end
rests upon the earth, but its top pierces the
clouds and touches the heavens."
—Guigo the Carthusian _____



DISCUSS

1. What was one thing you heard for the first time or that was an "aha" moment for you?

2. How does the account of the Samaritan woman at the well model an encounter with Christ in prayer? How do you relate to this account?

3. Have you ever tried to go straight to the top of the ladder of prayer without making use of the different rungs? Did it work? Do you feel the rungs are evenly spaced (equally easy or difficult to move between each step), or is there one step on the ladder that is particularly hard for you? Why?

MEMORY VERSE

"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.'"

—John 4:10



CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you continually invite us
into a deeper encounter with you.
May we always respond eagerly
to your invitation.
As we receive from you
the gift of living water in prayer,
may our hearts and our lives
be transformed to reflect your glory.
Amen.



Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well / Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

FOR FURTHER READING

Tim Gray, "Chapter 2: Lectio Divina: Stairway to Heaven" in *Praying Scripture for a Change* (Ascension Press, 2009)

Guigo the Carthusian, *Guigo II: Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations* (Cistercian Publications, 1979)

COMMIT—DAY 1

HEAR, O ISRAEL



The most important prayer in the Jewish faith begins not with a supplication directed at God, but with a command for his people: “Hear, O Israel”—in Hebrew, “*Shema Yisrael*.”

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

—Deuteronomy 6:4–5

Following Moses’ instructions in Deuteronomy 6:6–9, the *Shema* was the first prayer an Israelite child learned and the last prayer breathed as one approached death. The words of the *Shema* were the first syllables spoken at morning’s dawn and the last uttered before closing one’s eyes for sleep. Even today the words of the *Shema* are written on a small scroll and affixed to the doorpost of a Jewish home so that they can be recalled as one comes in and goes out. These words are even worn in small boxes or phylacteries on the arms and foreheads of Orthodox Jews. This prayer was, and continues to be, the foundational prayer of the Jewish faith. Rather than asking anything of God, it is a reminder to God’s people to *listen*.



Mezuzah © leospek / shutterstock.com

This call of the *Shema* to “listen” reminds us that God is the one who initiates the conversation of prayer. We can expect to encounter God in prayer because he comes looking for us and starts the dialogue, just as he did in the very beginning when he walked in the Garden of Eden looking for Adam and Eve and asking, “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:8–9). Just as he did when he set the burning bush ablaze, attracting Moses’ attention and calling his name, “Moses, Moses!” (Exodus 3:2–4). And just as he did when he woke Samuel in the middle of the night calling, “Samuel! Samuel!” (1 Samuel 3:3–4).

The prophet Samuel, whose name literally means “he who hears/listens to God” (*shema-el* = Samuel), is an important model for us as we redirect our understanding that in prayer God speaks first. Several times God called to Samuel, but Samuel did not recognize God’s voice. How often is that our experience? We sit down to prayer and our assumptions about what should happen next keep us from hearing God.

Finally, Samuel is given the direction he needs—he is told to listen. Eli tells Samuel to respond, “Speak, LORD, for thy servant hears” (1 Samuel 3:9). Several times Samuel had responded, “Here I am,” but it is when he stops to listen that he finally hears and recognizes God’s voice. We must be persistent in our prayer, because like Samuel it may take some time for us to recognize God’s voice. But in our persistence, we must not only show up, we must also listen.

We don't have to figure out how to make prayer happen—God is reaching out to us. This is precisely the model we find in the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. When the Samaritan woman approached the well, Jesus was already at the well waiting for her. And in that encounter, Jesus speaks the first words: “Give me a drink” (John 4:7). The Samaritan woman seems startled by Jesus’ initiation of the dialogue, saying, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (John 4:9). We often share her surprise. Her question is often our question, too: “How is it that the God of the universe would speak into my life, into my day-to-day circumstances?” But this is exactly what God desires to do, if we would but listen.

God won't let anything get in the way of drawing close to us in prayer. What is getting in your way of listening and responding?



Always Listen First (ALF) © Christin Chan / shutterstock.com

COMMIT—DAY 2

LIVING WATER



Early on in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus draws her attention away from her material needs and opens her eyes to her deeper spiritual needs. Jesus challenges: “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” (John 4:10). In the heat of the day, the Samaritan woman comes to draw water, but her physical thirst betrays a deeper spiritual thirst that she would rather overlook—a spiritual thirst, which only God can heal and quench.

Look up the following passages: Psalm 65:9; Isaiah 12:3; Isaiah 44:3; Revelation 21:6; Revelation 22:1–2. What do these passages have in common? Why do you think Scripture uses water as an image of God?

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah records God’s lament over the unfaithfulness of his people, Israel: “For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13). The people had forsaken God and his law. They had “changed their glory for that which does not profit” (2:11) and were worshipping false gods and not living according to God’s ways.



Water Flowing over Creek Rocks © Artistic Eye / shutterstock.com

The contrast between living water and broken cisterns is stark. God identifies himself as “the fountain of living waters”—a flowing spring of fresh water, never running dry. The words call up an image of cool, refreshing waters, of an oasis, of a fount that brings about and sustains abundant life wherever it flows. On the other hand, the water in a cistern is not fresh. It is rainwater that has been collected and stored for an indefinite period of time. The water is stagnant rather than flowing, and the supply is not continually replenished. And if the cistern’s protective coating cracks, the water will seep out, leaving the cistern dry and empty.

In our own lives, we too are often guilty of trying to replace the living water of God with cisterns of our own making. We build broken cisterns and cling to our meager supply of stagnant water rather than trusting “the gift of God” (John 4:10). Like the Samaritan woman, we prefer to direct the conversation of prayer to stay simply on a superficial level, afraid to let God’s living water into the depths of our heart. But Jesus challenges us: “If you but knew . . .” If we are used to thinking of prayer as being on our own terms, we may find the shift to seeing

God as the initiator, and ourselves as the respondents, to be less comfortable or convenient. As he leads our prayer, God will open our eyes to those areas of brokenness and sin, not to condemn us, but to set us free for a fuller relationship with him. But we must be willing to let him lead—and we must listen and follow him.

Prayer isn't always going to go as expected—just as the Samaritan woman didn't expect to meet Jesus at the well, or for him to tell her “all that I ever did.” Prayer is almost guaranteed to be inconvenient sometimes, and it may even be uncomfortable. But it is always worth it! In prayer God continues to pour out on us the abundant gift of his Spirit. Like living water the Holy Spirit is life-giving and refreshing, enabling us to thrive, not just survive.



Droplet falling in blue water © Nejron Photo / shutterstock.com

Jesus promises to satisfy the thirst of those who come to him.

“If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.’”

—John 7:37b–38

When it comes to prayer, are you actively seeking to receive God's free gift, or do you build your own cistern? Do you try to make fruitful prayer happen on your own, or do you let God lead? How can you be more aware of prayer as a gift from God?

COMMIT—DAY 3

LECTIO: JESUS AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN



The encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well tells us a great deal about what prayer is supposed to be. Jesus shows his love and concern in reaching out to this woman, and he demonstrates God's incredible generosity in the precious gift that he offers her. Each of us is invited to this same encounter. Jesus is waiting to speak to each of us and to satisfy our thirst with the living water of his Spirit.

LECTIO: The practice of praying with Scripture, *lectio divina*, begins with an active and close reading of the Scripture passage. Read the verse below and then answer the questions to take a closer look at some of the details of the passage.

"He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. He had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

"There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' For Jews have no dealings 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 nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?' Jesus said to her, 'Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

—John 4:3–14

How many times are "Samaria" and "Samaritans" mentioned in this passage?

How many references are there to thirst or drinking or water in this passage?

What does the physical setting of this encounter tell you about how Jesus was likely feeling? The Samaritan woman?

MEDITATIO: *Lectio*, a close reading and rereading, is followed by *meditatio*, time to reflect on the Scripture passage and to ponder the reason for particular events, descriptions, details, phrases, and even echoes from other Scripture passages that were noticed during *lectio*. Take some time now to meditate on the verse from page 27.

Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover. While there, he drove the moneychangers and those selling animals for sacrifice out of the Temple—the people responsible for caring for the Temple, God's house, were treating it as a house of trade rather than a house of prayer. The noise and concerns of this world had invaded the sacred space of encounter between God and his people.

As he left Jerusalem to return to Galilee, Jesus passed through Samaria. This was not a necessity of geography: a Jew would normally avoid Samaria when traveling between Judea and Galilee. But Jesus was going about his Father's business, and God's divine plan was that Jesus be at Jacob's well at Sychar in order to encounter a Samaritan woman in need of his gift of living water.

We let so many different things get in the way of our encounter with God in prayer. But God will stop at nothing to make himself available to us. He is waiting at the well, ready to quench our thirst with his living water.

Why is the Samaritan woman surprised that Jesus asks her for a drink? What does Jesus' willingness to talk to this woman and St. John's comment on the "necessity" of Jesus passing through Samaria teach us about prayer?

What is unique about the water that Jesus offers? What do you think it means to never thirst after receiving the living water?

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that she would respond differently if she knew who it is that is speaking to her (verse 10). When you pray, are you mindful of “who it is” that is speaking to you? What difference does it make to approach prayer with humility and reverence rather than as something casual and routine?

ORATIO, CONTEMPLATIO, RESOLUTIO: Having read and meditated on today's Scripture passage, take some time to bring your thoughts to God (*oratio*) and engage God in silence (*contemplatio*). Then end your prayer by making a simple concrete resolution (*resolutio*) to respond to God's prompting of your heart in today's prayer.



Jacob's Well, Holy Land © Augustine Institute photo. All rights reserved.

COMMIT—DAY 4

GUIGO AND THE LADDER OF PRAYER

We have established that prayer is a conversation, and so it must have two parts: listening and responding. But even this only offers minimal guidance. How do we listen to God? How do we respond? How do we progress and grow in prayer? What is the goal of the conversation?

The Church offers us an answer to this in the ancient tradition of *lectio divina* in which, as the *Catechism* says, “The Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer” (CCC 1177). For nearly a millennia *lectio divina* has been practiced according to the four simple steps of Guigo’s ladder.



Carthusian Monastery / Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY

Guigo II was a Carthusian monk in the twelfth century. He was the ninth prior of the Grande Chartreuse monastery, the famous Carthusian motherhouse north of the city of Grenoble in the French Alps. The Grande Chartreuse was the subject of the acclaimed 2005 documentary *Into Great Silence*. Guigo is best known for his classic work on prayer, *Ladder of Monks*, in which he lays out four simple steps for praying with Scripture.

The first rung of the ladder is *lectio*, or “reading.” God initiates the encounter with us, and so prayer begins with his Word. *Lectio* requires a careful reading of Scripture, paying close attention to patterns, repetition, key words, and other details of the chosen passage. This careful reading helps us to hear God’s initiating dialogue. This first step introduces the topic of our conversation with God.

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

—Psalm 119:103

The second rung is *meditatio*, or “meditation.” In this step we listen to what God is saying in the Scripture passage we read in *lectio*. We reflect on the words of the passage in order to understand what they mean. This provides the material for our conversation and guides us into our response.

“His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night”
—Psalm 1:2

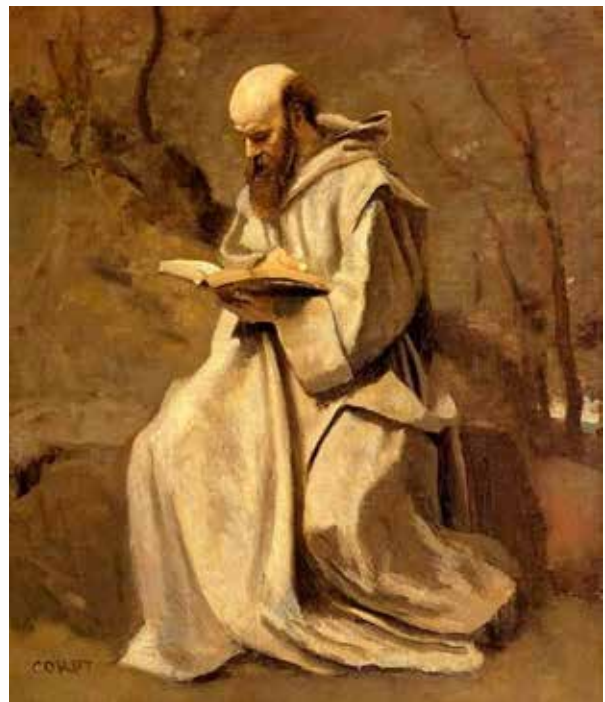
Oratio, or “prayer,” is the third rung of the ladder. After reading and meditation, we respond to God. We often think of this step—pouring out our hearts to God—as being the whole of prayer. But it is no accident that *oratio* comes only after hearing and reflecting on what God has said. First we listen and seek to understand; then we speak.

“Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.”
—Psalm 62:8

The fourth and final rung is *contemplatio*, or “contemplation.” We cannot accomplish anything in prayer apart from God, and contemplation is a special gift. The first three steps prepare us for this gift in which we are able to rest in God’s presence and experience the joy and peace that come from him.

“That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD.”
—Psalm 27:4

When tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus replied: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3). The psalmist sings, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (119:105). Why must the ladder of prayer begin with Scripture? How might the practice of praying with Scripture help you to fulfill St. Paul’s exhortation to “pray constantly” (1 Thessalonians 5:17)?



Photographic reproduction of “Monk Reading Book”
by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot

COMMIT—DAY 5

TRUTH AND BEAUTY

Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well,
Byzantine Mosaic, Basilica of San Marco, Venice, Italy



Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well / Cameraphoto Arte, Venice / Art Resource, NY

Located among the numerous golden scenes found in St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, Italy, this Byzantine mosaic depicts Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (see John 4:1–43). Its shimmering golden background highlights the importance of the conversation taking place between Jesus and the woman, which St. Pope John Paul II described, saying, "[Jesus] *discusses the most profound mysteries of God with her*. He speaks to her of God's infinite gift of love" (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 15, emphasis in original).

Rather than presenting us with a single scene, the mosaic is divided into two parts, providing a pictorial narrative. Recall John 4:1–43. What two events are depicted in the mosaic?

The narrative begins on the left with the encounter and conversation between Jesus and the woman. Two of the disciples stand behind Jesus. While not identified, we can discern St. Peter, with his curly white hair and beard, and St. John, whose gospel recounts this story, with his youthful clean-shaven face. Not wanting to inquire of Jesus, St. John directs his attention to St. Peter, “marvel[ing] that [Jesus] was talking with a woman” (John 4:27).

Jesus’ whole attention is directed toward the woman, as he extends his right hand in blessing. The woman had come to the well for water, but her pitcher appears empty, as if it is almost parallel to the ground. Instead of reaching her jar towards the well, she reaches out her opened right hand to receive something more precious than the water for which she came.

At the top of the scene, the Latin inscription “*Dat Potum Sane Fons Vivus Samaritine*” proclaims: “A living fountain gives a drink healthily to the Samaritan.” While the Latin “*sane*” could be translated as “discreetly,” which also applies as the Apostles were initially away when Jesus first encounters the Samaritan woman, “healthily” gives a sense of the healing and spiritual restoration that happens in the woman’s life as a result of her encounter with Jesus.



5th century remains of baptistery at Emmaus-Nicopoli

Most interesting about this scene is its portrayal of the well. Byzantine artistic style seeks to depict the reality of a scene more deeply than a literal photograph could ever picture, by showing the viewer the rich meaning inherent in a scene by employing iconic and allegorical symbols. Here, the well, with its four lobes, takes a cruciform shape and recalls the common shape of an early baptistery. Thus in the mosaic’s iconography, the well is given baptismal significance. Behind the well is a tree, a likely reminder that in Baptism we are given access to the Tree of Life, from which Adam and Eve and their descendants were cut off after Original Sin. The living waters welling up to eternal life that Jesus speaks of to the Samaritan woman are received at Baptism with the gift of the Spirit and the indwelling of the Holy Trinity in the soul of each of the baptized. Christians viewing this mosaic were to understand that the gift promised to the Samaritan woman had also been given to each of them.

The scene on the right shows the Samaritan woman a second time, but now she is back in the town speaking to its people. Sin had made her an outcast, having to draw water in the heat of mid-day. But after encountering Jesus at the well and receiving forgiveness and salvation, the Samaritan woman becomes a missionary. “Having received a greater and more important gift than mere water from a well, she leaves her jar behind (cf. John 4:28) and runs back to tell her townspeople that she has met the Christ (cf. John 4:29). Her encounter with Jesus restored meaning and joy to her life, and she felt the desire to share this with others” (Pope Francis, Homily, January 25, 2015). The smaller Latin inscription on the right, “*Venite Videte Hoem Quau Dixit Omia Que Fecit*”—“Come, see the man who said everything I have done”—recalls the woman’s words as she returns to the town.

Her words, “Come, see...” are also an invitation for us to encounter Jesus in prayer. And as we more deeply encounter Jesus, as we begin to hear and listen to him in our prayer, we too will know the joy of the Samaritan woman and want to share it with others.

Take a moment to journal your ideas, questions, or insights about this lesson. Write down thoughts you had that may not have been mentioned in the text or the discussion questions. List any personal applications you got from the lessons. What challenged you the most in the teachings? How might you turn what you've learned into specific action?

A close-up, slightly blurred image of a hand holding a pen, poised to write on an open book. The book's pages are filled with horizontal lines, suggesting it is a notebook or a ledger. The lighting is soft, and the overall tone is warm and focused.