

Session 3: God will offer us guidance through prayerfully reading Sacred Scripture.

I. Opening Prayer

The passages that will be prayerfully read as part of the opening prayer are the Scriptural foundation for this teaching.

- “Thy Word (in the Bible) is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path.”
(Psalm 119:105)
- “All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching – for reproof, correction, and training in holiness so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- “Don’t lose sight of My words. Let them penetrate deep within your heart, for they bring life and radiant health to anyone who discovers their meaning.”
(Proverbs 4:21-22)

II. The TEACHING for Session 3: God will offer us guidance through prayerfully reading the Sacred Scripture.

A key point to remember from session 2 – “God will offer us guidance in answer to our personal prayer” – is that it is essential that we not only speak with God but that we also allow time to listen to Him during our quiet time of prayer.

One of the most concrete ways that God will give us guidance is through the Scriptures. The incredible gift of the Scriptures is that we can so readily receive the God’s Word in the Bible as He speaks directly to us.

Note: The phrase God’s Word, also stated as the Word of God, refers to both Scripture and the person of Jesus. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh.

Above all, we are able to receive God’s guidance in our lives through prayerfully reading and pondering a passage in the Bible. When we pray with a Scripture passage, we can encounter the Person of Jesus Christ by becoming engaged with Him as He speaks to our hearts through His Word. The Catholic Church refers to “praying with Scripture” as *lectio divina*, which is Latin for Divine Reading. (See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1177, 2708) It is a way of praying with a Scripture passage in which the Holy Spirit makes a connection between the passage and a personal situation in our own life. That connection, whether it be from a very long time ago or more recently, is somehow related to our spiritual journey. That link between the Scripture passage and our own life may provide a small, helpful piece of assistance, or a more significant piece of spiritual guidance for an important decision in life. The proper name for this spiritual guidance is discernment, which refers to the process of discovering or determining God’s will in any given situation.

As we ponder a Scripture passage, we enter the time of prayer with a focus on God's words, and where He desires to take us. There is always time for conversation with Jesus as we come with life's issues and worries but we want to open our hearts and follow His lead as we come to understand His guidance. God will guide us. He cares about every minute detail in our lives; we don't want to eliminate bringing to Him those everyday questions of life that might not seem monumental, but to Him and to us are important, such as, "Should I hang out with these people?" "What should I say to my teacher or parents?" "Do I need to apologize to this person?"

We also might have to make a decision such as "Which of two good classes will be best for me?" This is a question between two good things. God cares about every choice we make, no matter how small, and wants to be a part of that choice if we will allow Him. He knows our personality and how He has wired us with certain gifts and characteristics. God wants us to become who we were created to be, which is where we will find fulfillment and joy. Isn't that a comforting truth?!

The time of prayer with Scripture may bring guidance as well as healing, conviction about sin or other important answers for times of crisis. If we are open, the Holy Spirit brings counsel and understanding to us at that time: always loving, always helpful and always from God.

On any given day, as we come to the Holy Bible, that Word is always fresh, alive and new for us and it has the power to be "spot on" to what is happening in our life at that moment. It is important to note that receiving guidance in answer to a specific response will not happen every time. Our faithfulness is what is important and when we need to hear from God, He knows how to get through to us.

We don't want to just seek God's guidance through the Bible during times of crisis. Allow God to be involved in every aspect of life. This is what it means to have Jesus at the center of our lives.

We might be thinking, "Well, where do we begin to read the Bible?" It is best to start with one of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Each of the Gospel writers describes the life of Jesus: how He healed people's bodies and souls, the teachings that He gave regarding the truth about life, both here and the hereafter, and the way to live in order to remain close to our loving Father, which brings real peace and joy.

The Old Testament provides details about key biblical figures: what life was like when they followed God's ways and what life was like when they separated themselves from God by placing things or persons at the center of their lives before God. This led to misery, over and over again, because things or people cannot ultimately satisfy, or bring true happiness. Only God can fulfill the longing of our heart for deep interior peace and joy, which we can begin to experience here on earth and forever in Heaven.

It is not advised to open the Scriptures randomly and put your finger down on the page, hoping that God will provide the exact direction that you need at that point. This is commonly referred to as “Bible roulette.” A more prayerful reading that is geared toward encountering the Person of Jesus, the Father or the Holy Spirit is what is needed. The Bible is about persons, and so we want to keep it personal, not game playing.

The Bible is a library of books: it contains historical books that reveal how God desires to lead us to union with Him here, and forever in Heaven. It provides understanding for solving the problems of life and it teaches about daily living. But most importantly, we will encounter the Persons of the Blessed Trinity through the different ‘books’ of the Bible. God’s Word is a great gift and miracle to each and everyone one of us.

The Bible is our two thousand year heritage of God’s Word to us. The inspired Word of God reveals who God is by what He has told us about Himself; what He wants; how much He loves us as shown through His actions of mercy and forgiveness; who we are and how we are to respond to Him in order to live a fulfilled, joyful life. Is there any Book in the entire world that is more important? No! There is no other book that can have more impact on our lives:

- to deepen our love for God by recognizing, more profoundly, His love for us
- to strengthen our faith in God and hope in His promises that He has always kept
- to draw us to live with greater charity toward others
- and, of course, to provide guidance to each of us sinners to stay on the right path to Heaven.

When we read the New Testament we recognize that Jesus calls us to an amazingly high standard in our relationships with other people in ordinary Christian living.

- Love your enemies.
- Pray for those who persecute you.
- Judge not.
- Forgive those who have sinned against you.

These teachings are short and to the point but very difficult to live by on a daily basis. Jesus raised the standard above what we are capable of with only human strength, but He knew that He was going to give us the strength to live this high calling through the gift of His Holy Spirit. Jesus gave us seven Sacraments so that we could receive the grace of His Holy Spirit - His Divine Life within us - so that by cooperating with this grace, we can live as His committed disciples. With the help of His grace, we can also be strengthened to follow through on His guidance that He gives us in the Scriptures. Just think how much can be accomplished when we hear God’s Word and then act on what He’s told us!

What is the best way to prayerfully read the Bible if the goal is to understand God’s will? We will want to spend time reading His Word every day, maybe starting with 5 minutes, or even 3 minutes, a day. It is best to start with one of the four Gospels, preferably the Gospel of Luke. Begin by prayerfully reading a small amount: beginning with Chapter One and reading one passage, (not the full chapter but one story or teaching) so that it can be read over again.

Then take the next passage of Chapter One the next day and so on, reading that book straight through, even if it takes a few weeks. It is also best to follow a set schedule, of reading Scripture at the same time each day. That way it will not become just a “hit or miss” commitment.

Sometimes as we are reading, the Lord will “quicken” or “highlight” a verse or passage in our heart—it will speak to us personally and help us to know our next step in His way for us. To begin the time of prayerfully reading the Bible, ask God what He would like to teach or reveal today. Ask the Holy Spirit to help understand what is being read and how it applies to life.

When we come to understand how God offers us His guidance through prayerfully pondering His Word, how can we not be committed to taking time each day to contemplate passages from the Bible? Further, our mind and heart will gradually be renewed by “taking in” God’s truth.

A key take-away from this session is that a great deal of God's guidance is given to us in the Scriptures. In the regular course of our daily reading of God's Word (*logos*), **we need to ask God to speak to us through His Word and give us personal insight into it.** The Holy Spirit can cause a certain word or a phrase or even a passage to stand out with significant meaning or application for our lives (*rhema*). These words of Scripture (*rhema*) will become a part of our daily thoughts and actions. When we receive these very personal words (*rhema*) from God, we are energized, encouraged and strengthened by them.

A simple “Praying with Scripture” prayer worksheet is available for download by returning to the webpage, and is listed under Session 3: diolc.org/catechesis/deeper.

Discussion questions for small groups

In response to the teaching that God will offer us guidance through prayerfully reading the Bible, respond to the following questions.

Question 1. What stood out for you? or What resonated most with your personal situation currently? Why? Summarize below.

Question 2. Why is taking time each day to prayerfully read the Bible so important?

Question 3. Summarize in one or two sentences what your takeaway is from this section.

Question 4. If you were going to relate something from “God will offer us guidance through prayerfully reading the Bible” to your family tonight at the dinner table, what would you tell them? Would you

- 1) share the story with them or
- 2) mention something that was helpful to you from the teaching or
- 3) bring up something that resonated with you in connection with your own life experience?

III. Helpful Scripture passages about God's guidance through Sacred Scripture

God has revealed to us in the Sacred Scripture that He will us guide us through prayerfully reading His Word. Read the following Scripture passages below.

- Jesus said, “If you live according to My teaching [His Word in the Sacred Scripture], you are truly My disciples; then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”
(John 8:31-32)
- “All Scripture is inspired of God and is useful for teaching – for reproof, correction, and training in holiness so that the man of God may be fully competent and equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- I will instruct you [with My Word] and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.” (Psalm 32:8)
- “Finally, brethren, whatever is true [the inspired Word of God in the Scriptures], whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”
(Philippians 4:8)
- “O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.” (Isaiah 25:1)
- “Thy word [in the Scriptures] is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path.” (Psalm 119:105)
- “Is not My word like fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29)
- “Don’t lose sight of My words. Let them penetrate deep within your heart, for they bring life and radiant health to anyone who discovers their meaning.” (Proverbs 4:21-22)

Question 1: Choose one of the passages above that interests you or moves you in some way. What interests you about this passage?

Question 2: What particular word or words stands out for you most directly?

Question 3: As you take some quiet time to read over this passage 3 or 4 times, is there something in the passage more specific that relates to you personally?

Question 4: Would you describe this experience from question 3 as something encouraging or hopeful or consoling or comforting or energizing? These would be the hallmarks that identify it as coming from God.

Discuss your responses with another person or a small group.

IV. True, modern-day stories that relate how God offers us guidance through prayerfully reading Sacred Scripture.

Read both stories below, one written by a man and the other written by a woman, regarding their reception of God's guidance through prayerfully reading the Bible. These stories reveal how the Holy Spirit still gives guidance through prayerfully reading the Sacred Scriptures.

Story 1

'Feeding the Angels' by Keith Miller

A friend of mine seemed so serene in the face of dragons (the problems and pains) of life. “I quit feeding them!” she told me. “I quit nursing the lizards (my doubts and fears) while they’re small and it keeps them from becoming those huge, fierce dragons.”

I made a conscious effort to do the same, and it helped. But from time to time an emotional lizard would appear that I couldn’t seem to avoid feeding. Finally, one sleepless night, I cried out to God, and a memory came into my mind. I was a boy, and my mother was telling me, “What you put in your mind on a regular basis is what you will become in a few years, or even a few months.”

So I began to memorize Bible passages that would, if I really lived them, change me into a strong, confident man of God. One was Paul’s admonition from Philippians 4:8. I added the Twenty-third Psalm, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, the Beatitudes and others.

Yesterday someone in our prayer group asked me, “What are you feeding the lizards these days?”

I smiled and said, “You’ll never believe it, but the ‘food’ I’m putting in my mind now is the Word of God.”

“Do the lizards eat it?”
“Gosh, no, they *hate* it.”

My friend smiled and asked, “Then to whom are you feeding the Word?”

"Um, "I said, thinking about that, "I guess I'm feeding the angels God sent to free me from my fears."

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Story 2

'Bless Them That Curse You' by Louise Majors

During the summer, before our children went off to elementary school, I started looking for a job. I pounded the pavement unsuccessfully for weeks. Then I answered an ad placed in the *Los Angeles Times* by the California Institute of Technology.

The opening turned out to be for an accounting clerk at the Cooperative Wind Tunnel facility, which tested aircraft parts for strength and wind resistance. Carl Jorgensen, who headed the finance department, was a matter-of-fact man who peered kindly through his black-rimmed eyeglasses and said, "Louise, you have excellent qualification. If you are willing to start at minimum wage, a dollar and nineteen cents an hour, you can begin next Monday."

I gulped. In my previous job, before I took years off to rear our children to school age, I'd made in a day almost as much as he was offering for a week. But I'd already been turned down for six other jobs. "Thank you, Mr. Jorgensen," I replied. "I want the job very much."

Come Monday morning I went directly to Carl Jorgensen's office. His cheeriness put me at ease, and I followed him as he introduced me to the office staff. "Everyone here goes by first names," he said. He stopped at the first desk. "Hildur is our payroll clerk. Hildur, this is Louise, our new accounting clerk."

I smiled, "I'm glad to meet you Hildur."

She was grandmotherly with soft, wavy white hair, rimless eyeglasses, smooth fair complexion-pleasant looking. She looked me up and down, then her expression changed. Getting up, she railed, "We don't need an accounting clerk. I don't know why you were hired!" She slammed shut the record book she'd been posting, snatched up her purse and stomped out the door.

Everyone's mouth dropped open. I stood stupefied, feeling the blood surge to my neck and face. This was awful!

Carl Jorgensen was quick to regain his composure and started more introductions: "Bernice, Manna and Esther, the last desk on the right, are members of the steno pool. Joy is our mail clerk and relief switchboard-operator. Please welcome Louise."

It didn't take long to be welcomed. The "girls" (as even we called ourselves back in the forties and fifties) were very kind and helpful, and they asked me to have lunch with them later.

I'd just returned from Carl's office with my first assignment when Hildur appeared. She ignored everyone, slammed drawers, and was testy on the telephone and to people stopping at her desk. There was no conversation in the office until shortly before noon.

"Did you bring your lunch today, Hildur?" Bernice asked.

Hildur looked up warily. "Is she going to lunch with you?"

"Yes"

"I'm working." Hildur snapped."

I liked the "girls"; they were relaxed and friendly. But I was troubled by Hildur. On the way back to the office I mentioned I was going to bring my lunch and study in my car, starting tomorrow. I didn't want to be the reason for Hildur not eating with the others. She would soften up after a bit, I reckoned.

Meantime, I was enjoying the bustle of the Wind Tunnel facility – the Tunnel" as we called it. Four or five times a day the warning bells would go off, and we'd hear the high whine of the turbines that generated the air flow in the test chamber. I loved the family atmosphere in the halls and offices. No matter whether you were greeting a hard hat or a world-famous scientist, it was "Hi, Ted" or "Hi, Fred," with a genuine friendliness and a shared sense of mission.

Yet Hildur didn't mellow. Weeks passed, and the tension only worsened. When I was out of the office, the other women said Hildur was congenial and talkative. The minute I walked in, she fell glaringly silent. Each morning she would ignore my cheery greeting.

I searched the Bible and ended up by pasting my mother's favorite Scripture in my middle desk drawer. As Hildur rebuffed each of my advances, I referred to it: "Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you" (Matthew 5:44, KJV). I nearly wore out that drawer as the weeks went by.

A couple of months passed. One of the women I'd come to know in the next office was retiring. We all chipped in for a little afternoon send-off party that I looked forward to. Maybe I could get an opportunity to talk with Hildur in this kind of a setting.

I was just getting ready to go when Bernice called over to Hildur, "Aren't you going to the party?"

Hildur glared over at me, then at Bernice. "Is she going?"

"Well, of course," Bernice said, "we're all going."

"Then I'm not."

I gritted my teeth and then said as evenly as I could, “Oh Bernice, you all go on without me. I’ve some catching up to do. Maybe I’ll come in later.”

But after they’d gone, I brooded. I pulled open my drawer, and there was the message. “Do good to them that hate you,” I read aloud. Then I said, “Lord, You know I’m doing that. My question is: How long must this go on?”

As if by answer, I recalled a scene of twenty years before, when I’d had a falling-out with an adolescent friend. I was back in Mother’s kitchen and she was telling me, “Seventy times seven, that’s how often Jesus told us to forgive. Remember, Louise, the only way to destroy an enemy is to make a friend of him.”

I shut my drawer gently. “Thank You, Lord,” I whispered.

A couple of months later, on a windy March day, we had a torrential rainstorm. Creeping along in our old green Pontiac coupe on my way home, windshield wipers batting furiously, I spotted Hildur standing at a bus stop, huddled under an umbrella. I stopped and flipped open the passenger door.

As kindly and as firmly as I could, I said, “Hildur, get in.” She hesitated a second and then lowered her umbrella and scrambled in. Water dripped from her hair and she looked soaked through. I turned up the heat. “Hildur, please give me directions as we go,” I asked.

Except for directions, she was silent all the way to her apartment in East Pasadena. Before dropping her off, I asked her if there was anything I could do. She said, “No, but thank you very much.”

After I had watched her disappear into her apartment, I exulted, “Well, praise the Lord, at least she talked to me!” All the way home I felt elated, singing the old hymn “Love Lifted Me.” Hildur may not have changed, but at last I felt better.

The next morning was bright, crisp and clear. “Good morning, Hildur!” I said when I got to the office.

“Good morning, Louise,” Hildur said with a shy smile. The whole office seemed to give a collective sigh of relief. The harmony was instant; it was as if someone had let the sunshine and singing birds right into the office.

That Friday Hildur and I went out to lunch. She admitted her job was her love, and that she had felt threatened when I was hired. She thought management intended to replace her with me. But over lunch we became friends.

On the way home from work I stopped in Pasadena, had my hair cut and styled, bought a geranium-red dress, patent leather shoes with a pocketbook that matched, and a nifty wide-brimmed straw hat. Mac and the kids went into shock when the “new me” walked in that night. “Wow,” Mac said, “I thought your job was getting you down!”

“That was last week,” I said. “Now it’s getting me up!”

And it stayed that way. Making a friend of Hildur was one of the hardest things I ever did, yet one of the most rewarding. It was wonderful to have her as a friend, and I have Jesus to thank for that.

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Discussion questions

Question 1: Underline the places where the persons received guidance. Briefly describe how the individuals received guidance from God from the Bible.

Question 2: How did these stories affect you?

Question 3: Do one or both of these stories or anything about them remind you of something in your own life?

Question 4: Did you find one or both of the stories consoling, challenging, comforting? Why?

Question 5: In reflecting on one of these true, modern-day stories, what is the take-away for you?

V. Closing Prayer: The 12th Grade Prayer Card

Using the “Seeking God’s Guidance” Prayer Card, pray the front side.