
Visio Divina, latin for “divine seeing,” is a method of meditation, reflection, and prayer through a process of intentional seeing. Visio Divina extends the 6th century Benedictine practice of Lectio Divina by the use of visual imagery. Traditionally, Visio Divina was accompanied by Benedictine iconography and illuminations, however, different faith traditions have adapted the process over time, utilizing both secular and nonsecular images. Use this lesson plan to blend visual meditation with group discussion and bible study.

MATERIALS

- 1-3 visuals inspired by your focus scripture text(s) or theme
- Bibles or copies of the scripture
- A screen and projector for projecting the art OR prints of the art to distribute to participants
- Scrap pieces of paper and pencils

PREP

If you use a projector, arrange seats to make the screen easily visible. Distribute sheets of paper and pencils for participants to take notes throughout session. If you print the art, arrange seats in a circle or semi circle to foster group discussion.

Select 1-3 visuals for your study. Allow for 60-75 minutes to walk through and discuss 3 visuals. Choose fewer visuals if you have less time. If you are shaping the study around a particular theme, you can choose more than one scripture text to incorporate art inspired by multiple scriptures. *Note: If you incorporate art you find online (not from A Sanctified Art), please include the artist’s name and information in this study so that the artist is adequately credited.*

GETTING STARTED

To begin, introduce your participants to visio divina, inviting them to listen for the ways God might be speaking to them through their senses and imagination. If anyone is unfamiliar with meditation or is intimidated by studying art, you might offer three suggestions for them to consider throughout the visual meditation:

- 1) Focus on your breath. If your mind begins to wander, inhale and exhale slowly. Stay mindful of your breathing as a way to bring you back into the present moment.
- 2) When you listen to the scripture reading, hold onto a word or phrase that resonates with you. As you look at the art, consider repeating this word or phrase as a mantra in your head to help you stay focused.

GETTING STARTED (CONT.)

- 3) If you find yourself not knowing what to think, or trying to figure out what the art means, remember that you are invited to simply be an observer. As you look, jot down simple observations about what you see, or ask yourself questions such as, “Why did the artist choose that color?” or “Why did the artist portray the story in this way?” or “How does this art make me feel?” Perhaps your questions will lead to more questions and more observations and then you’ll be getting somewhere.

OPENING PRAYER

Begin with prayer, inviting all to open their hearts, minds, ears, and eyes to connect with God. You may consider reading the poem, “i thank You God for most this amazing” by e. e. cummings as the opening prayer.

LECTIO DIVINA

Invite participants to begin by engaging the visuals in their own imaginations. Invite them to close their eyes, imagining what they see as you read the focus scripture text aloud. If you have time, read the focus scripture 2-3 times.

Invite participants to open their eyes and take a few moments to write or draw any images, words, or colors that emerged for them during the scripture reading.

VISIO DIVINA

Project or show your first visual. Guide participants in silent meditation, using the following prompts:

Center yourself by taking a deep breath and relaxing your body as best you can. Allow your shoulders to lower away from your ears. Let your arms rest in your lap and let your feet be fully supported by the floor. Feel the weight of your body held by the chair. Spend this time in quiet. Open yourself up to God’s voice.

(pause)

Take a deep breath in and out. Continue breathing deeply as you read the image. In this moment, simply notice the visual qualities of what you see: colors, line, shape, form, space, and texture.

(pause)

Now, take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you quickly brush by or overlook?

(pause)

And now, use your imagination.

[Choose the prompt(s) that make the most sense for the visual]

Imagine yourself in this piece. Where would you be and how would you interact with what surrounds you?



VISIO DIVINA *(CONT.)*

OR

Look at the figure(s). What story do you assign to each of them? What emotions would you give to them?

(pause)

Finally, observe your own emotions. How does this image make you feel?

(pause)

FROM THE ARTIST

If applicable, read the artist's statement for this piece. Share the title of the art and the name of the artist. If you don't have any specific information about the art, share historical or biographical information about the artist that might help participants see the art in a new way.

RESPOND

Invite participants to take a few moments to write or draw any thoughts, ideas, or questions.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Using any of the following questions, guide participants in group discussion. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. Encourage participants to challenge what they see or hear in the scripture text. We are called to question and wrestle. Throughout the discussion, invite participants to think about how the art connects to the scripture.

- What do you see? What is most striking to you about this piece?
- What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to, and what parts did you quickly brush by?
- If you could stand in this scene, where would you stand and why?
- What emotions emerge for you when you observe this painting?
- What primary emotion would you assign to the person/subjects portrayed in the painting and why?
- Do you identify with the artist's reflections? How does hearing the artist's statement influence how you see the art?
- How is the imagery cohesive with the scripture?
- If you were to paint this text, what imagery, colors, and details might you include?

Repeat this process to walk through as many visuals and scripture texts you wish to include in your study.

