

## Advent Contemplative Practice for Parents – Sacred Reading

This Advent season we invite you to journey with others from around the [Minnesota Conference UCC](#) through an ancient spiritual practice of sacred reading.

Lectio Divina, Latin for “divine reading,” is an experiential way of reading that engages the mind, heart, and imagination. This practice encourages participants to listen beneath and through the text rather than reading for comprehension or information – wandering unhurriedly through the passage or story, noticing what captures one’s attention and touches one’s soul.

Each week of Advent will feature a poem/blessing by the writer and artist, [Jan Richardson](#), and Christmas will offer reflections by the writer and UCC minister, David Butler.

We hope you can make space amid the chaos and clamor of your days to pause – if only for a few moments – to be still. To simply be. Perhaps you will hear the whisper of the voice deep within your soul calling you to reconnect with the Source of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love entering our lives in the most unexpected and surprising ways.



## The Practice

### PREPARE

Remember that this practice, like all spiritual practices, is an opportunity to experience grace not judgement. This is not a project to “get right” or a task to “get done” but a gift of time and space for listening to one’s self and the whisper of the Spirit.

For this practice you will need to find a quiet place where you will be (mostly) undisturbed. You will also need to have this practice available on your phone, tablet, or computer, or have a printed copy handy. You may want to gather a few additional materials to help you fully engage the practice: a journal or paper, pens/pencils with which to write or draw, and a single candle or an Advent wreath with candles.



### CENTER



Settle in and get comfortable in your quiet place. Light your single candle or Advent candles, if you have them. Spend a few moments looking into the flickering light. Be still and aware of the sacred breath within you. Take three deep, mindful breaths. Rest in the gift of this moment.

### READ & REFLECT: LISTEN

Read the week’s text, preferably aloud. Listen for a word or phrase that draws your attention. When you have finished reading the text, pause for at least a minute of silence. As you rest in the silence, repeat that word or phrase over and over again to yourself. You may find it helpful to write or draw the word repeatedly in a journal.



### READ & REFLECT: PONDER



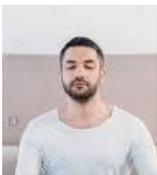
After holding the moment of silence, prepare to read the text again. Before you begin reading, ask yourself the question, “How does this text intersect or connect to my life?” Read the text slowly, preferably aloud. After you finish reading, spend 2-3 minutes (or more) of silence reflecting on how this text may be speaking to your life in this moment. If it is helpful for you, spend this time writing or drawing in a journal.

### READ & REFLECT: WONDER

As you prepare to read the text a final time, ask yourself the question, “What invitation is coming to me through these words?” Read the text slowly. After you finish reading, spend 3-4 minutes (or more) of silence listening to discover the Spirit’s invitation or encouragement for your life. You may choose to spend this time of reflection writing or drawing in a journal.



### PRAY



As you finish your time of reflection and/or journaling, allow yourself to once again become still and aware of the sacred breath within you. Take three deep, mindful breaths, and pause to rest in this moment. During these final moments of silence, you may want to offer a brief prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of this time.

## **Week 3 – Joy**

### **Blessing of Courage**

I cannot say  
where it lives,  
only that it comes  
to the heart  
that is open,  
to the heart  
that asks,  
to the heart  
that does not turn away.

It can take practice,  
days of tugging at  
what keeps us bound,  
seasons of pushing against  
what keeps our dreaming  
small.

When it arrives,  
it might surprise you  
by how quiet it is,  
how it moves  
with such grace  
for possessing  
such power.

But you will know it  
by the strength  
that rises from within you  
to meet it,  
by the release  
of the knot  
in the center of  
your chest  
that suddenly lets go.

You will recognize it  
by how still  
your fear becomes  
as it loosens its grip,  
perhaps never quite  
leaving you,  
but calmly turning  
into joy  
as you enter the life  
that is finally  
your own.

—Jan Richardson  
from *The Cure for Sorrow*

<http://adventdoor.com/2016/12/18/advent-4-blessing-of-courage/>

Used by permission of the author, Jan Richardson  
(<https://www.janrichardson.com>)