

# Visio Divina

## Let the visual draw you closer to God.

In his book, *Spiritual Formation*, Henri Nouwen reminds us of the power of prayer, stillness, and awareness:

*"Contemplative prayer often brings us to an intimate encounter with the love of God, revealed to us in Jesus. In such an experience, we come to know ever more deeply that God is not against us, but for us; not far from us, but with us; not outside of us, but deeply within. As we take a quiet moment to reflect in a peaceful place, our minds and hearts become still and, in this stillness, become deeper and wider, inviting/unbinding the eternal quality of life in all its fullness. It is in the growing inner awareness of the eternal embrace of God that we find our true freedom."*

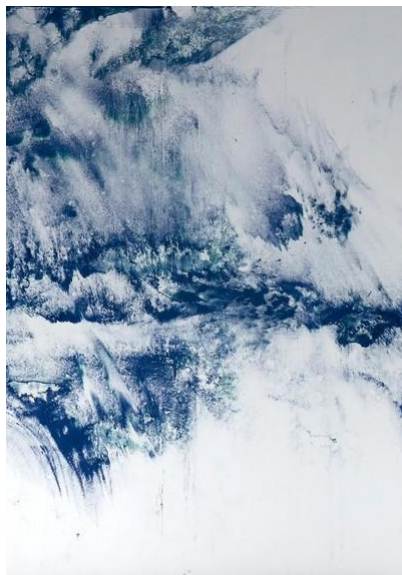
Though this passage is about contemplative prayer, the words sum up the artistic spiritual formation practice called Visio Divina. Visio Divina means sacred or divine seeing and is an ancient form of prayer. When practicing Visio Divina, art (or anything visible) can act as a gateway to hearing the Spirit. As a way of intentionally seeing, reflecting, and listening, Visio Divina sets the stage for connecting with God.

Often when we look at art, we ask: "What does it mean?" When practicing Visio Divina, a better question may be: "What is this pulling out of me?" Here, God may speak to us through what we encounter, what we see. By practicing Visio Divina, we find that all of life has the potential to be a sacred encounter with God. Anything can bring about a holy moment if we have open eyes and a willing heart.

Example Artworks for Reflection



"Awaken O Sleeper"  
Scott Erickson



"Walking on Water - Azurite II" (2016)  
Makoto Fujimura

## Steps for Visio Divina

1. Set aside 10-20 minutes for your practice. Pick an artwork or something else to look at (like a space outside) for reflection.

2. Relax here and close your eyes for a few moments. Focus on your breath and calm your mind. Repeating a centering prayer ("God, open my eyes") may help.

3. Open your eyes and begin with silence - simply gaze. Notice the colors, shapes, figures... take it all in without judgment. Remember: the goal here is not to critique.

4. As you look, ask yourself the following questions. Spend 1-2 minutes per question:

- How do you feel looking at this?
- If you had to title this piece, what would you call it?
- What stands out to you most?
- What are you drawn to? Why is God drawing your attention to this?
- How is God speaking to you right now?
- If you were in this image, what or where would you be?
- If God was in this image, what or where would God be?
- Is there a single word for what you are thinking or feeling right now?

5. Enter into a time of prayer

6. End with silence. Simply abide in God's presence.