

Holy Reading to Renew the Soul

Planting Seeds, Watching for Harvest

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There are many different ways to study the Bible, but how do we study the Bible so that it shapes and forms us? Many have learned to read the Bible for information, but Holy Reading is a method that helps us to understand and hear God's word in a way that can be transformational. Through this approach, we discover an increasing ability to respond to what God has said to us as we offer ourselves and our relationships to God.

The Process

There are four steps in the process of Holy Reading, whereby we begin by reading the text and conclude with prayer.

Reading and Listening

The practice of Holy Reading requires that we develop the ability to hear what God is saying to us as we read the scriptures. Find an inviting place where you will not be disturbed, take a few moments to become still, and then offer a prayer asking God to speak into your life from his word. Read a short passage of scripture, and as you are reading listen for a word or phrase or concept that captures your attention. Some will find it helpful to read out loud. This helps to slow down the pace and it will keep your mind from wandering.

Meditation

The second step is meditation. Having read the text and listened for a word or phrase or concept that speaks to you in a personal manner, take a few minutes to meditate upon this. Meditation is more than thinking about an idea; to meditate means to ponder or to mull over in your mind a thought or concept. An example of meditation is found in Luke's gospel, when the shepherds came to Mary and Joseph and told them what the angel of the Lord had spoken: "Do not be afraid; for see

- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). Then we are told that Mary "pondered" all of this in her heart. In other words, she thought about what they said and the implications for her life, for her child and ultimately for the world. Meditation involves taking in the word of God and allowing it to interact with our thoughts and hopes and dreams.



Prayer

The third step is prayer. God has spoken to us through the Bible and we have meditated upon what he has said; now we speak back to God. This reinforces the concept that prayer is a dialogue and not a monologue. God speaks and we speak. Because God addresses different issues in each person's life, each of our prayers will be quite different. Your prayer might focus on thanking God for some insight he has given to you, or you might seek guidance from him, or you

might ask God for forgiveness, or your prayer might be one of adoration and praise. Do not try to censor your prayer, that is, speaking what you think God wants to hear rather than speaking from your heart. Speak plainly and directly. What you will discover is that God's word speaks powerfully into your life, and from that place you speak back to God.

Contemplation

The final movement of Holy Reading is to simply rest in the presence of God. There is no agenda. You have read God's word, meditated upon it, and as God has spoken into your life, you have spoken back to God. Now you simply wait in God's presence. For some this will be difficult, especially if you are an activist. If you find your mind wandering, simply go back and read the text, meditate on it, and rest in the presence of God.

The Practice of Holy Reading

If you are engaging in this practice for the first time, there are a few simple guidelines to follow that may be helpful.

Listen to the word of God

- Sit in silence for a few minutes.
- Read the passage slowly and possibly out loud.
- Listen for a word or idea that captures your attention.
- Say the word or idea over in your mind.
- Remain silent for two minutes following the reading as you meditate.

Ask: How is my life touched by the word of God?

- Read the passage a second time.
- After reading the text, sit in silence for two minutes and meditate upon this question.
- Write down any insights that you might have received.

Ask: What does God want me to do with this?

- Read the passage a third time.
- After the reading, sit in silence for two minutes and meditate upon this question.
- Write down what you discern God wants you to do.



- Pray according to what God has spoken into your life. You may find it helpful to write out the prayer. You can go back at a later date and reflect on what you have written.

Rest in God

- When you conclude your prayer, simply rest in God's presence.
- You might write in your journal any thoughts that could be helpful to keep as a reminder throughout the day.
- Conclude this time with a short prayer of thanksgiving.

Group Setting

Holy Reading can be done by individuals or in groups. Perhaps you might try this with your family or with a small group. In a group setting there will be a leader who will lead the group through the four stages, reading the chosen text and asking the reflection questions. However, there are some different steps to take when you read as a group as compared to reading the passage on your own.

First, the leader reads the passage out loud, and participants listen for a word or concept that speaks to them. In the silence, they meditate upon that word or concept. Then the reader will invite each person to briefly share this with the group without any further comment.

Second, the scripture is read again. In the silence, participants meditate upon the word or concept they've chosen and how it speaks to their lives. The reader will invite each person to share with the group, in a sentence or two, the connection between the word and their life.

Third, the scripture is read again. In the silence, participants meditate upon their word or concept and what God is inviting them to do in response. This is now shared with the group.

Fourth, each person is prayed for by a member of the group so that they may respond to God's invitation.

In this group process, there are a couple of factors to note. In the third step, not everyone may know how God wants them to respond. There may be times when a person needs to process this information over a period of time. In group reading, there is no contemplation at the end of the third reading; we simply conclude with the prayers. We need to be

sensitive to people who may not feel comfortable sharing what they perceive to be personal. People always need to have the option of saying nothing. As a group grows in trust and commitment to one another, the depth of sharing will increase

If there are young children in the group, because it is a family setting, the passage needs to be very short and it is helpful if it is a story they can easily recall. Be attentive to their attention span. Two minutes of silence can be difficult for adults, let alone a child. Some families have found this to be an engaging way to have family devotions. Adapt as necessary.

Suggested Readings for a Week:

Day 1. Psalm 23

Day 2. Isaiah 40:25-31

Day 3. Matthew 6:25-34

Day 4. John 13:1-17

Day 5. Philippians 1:3-11

Day 6. Colossians 1:9-14

Day 7. Ephesians 1:15-21

Suggested Reading for Families with Young Children:

These readings are based on a theme 'Learning from Jesus'

Day 1. Mark 1:16-20

Day 2. Mark 2:1-12

Day 3. Luke 2:41-50

Day 4. Luke 8:5-8

Day 5. Luke 15:1-7

Day 6. Luke 15:8-10

Day 7. Luke 15:11-24

(This material is adapted from *Re:Connect: Spiritual Exercises to Develop Intimacy with God*, by David Sherbino. Available through The Book Room.)

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