

## **A Prayerful, Reflective Approach to Scripture**

God has given us His Word not simply as a way to know about Him, but primarily as a means of knowing Him. God did not merely give us a book of truth. He breathed life into it. In Genesis 1:26, God formed Adam from clay and breathed life into Him. Paul paints this same image in 2 Timothy 3:16. The Bible is a book like no other because it is living and active (Heb 4:12). God has given it to us as a place of encounter, a place where we can meet with Him.

Unfortunately, often read the Bible like we would read a textbook or scholarly journal. Think about that for a second. When I was at university, studying engineering, I read my textbooks asking questions and looking for answers. How do I solve this equation? What type of machine will give me maximum efficiency? When I found the answer, I moved on to the next thing. But, when we go to the Bible simply looking for answers, we miss the point. Instead of encountering Christ and coming away changed, we find good information, but are still left feeling empty.

### **The Bible as a Love Letter**

Now imagine receiving a letter from a good friend. Instead of reading for information, you are now reading for relationship. You want to know how your friend is doing, what she thinking and experiencing and how she feels about those things. Shortly after my wife Marcie and I upgraded our relationship from just friends to seriously dating, I left to spend the summer in Ethiopia. Phone access was limited and very expensive, so I read every letter at least ten times, pondering every word. Those letters were our connection, and I was reading for relationship. We see this type of engagement with God's Word throughout the Scriptures.

***PS 119:15-16 PS 1:1-2 Josh 1:8 Co 3:16***

The practice of prayerfully reading and reflecting upon Scripture was passed on to the church through the Jewish tradition. This practice, formalized by the Benedictines, became known as *Lectio Divina* which means divine or sacred reading. *Lectio Divina* has four parts or movements which involve a balance of reading, attentive listening, reflecting and praying. The rest of this article presents a simplified version of *Lectio Divina*.

### **Preparation:**

The first stage of *Lectio Divina* prepares the heart and the mind to meet with God. It involves slowing down and shifting our focus from our current preoccupations to God, just as Psalms 46:10 instructs us, *"Be still and know that I am God."* In preparing our hearts, we adopt the attitude of Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:10 who prayed in response to God's invitation, *"Speak, for your servant is listening."* Our desire and our expectation is to meet with God as we engage His word.

*"Read with a vulnerable heart. Expect to be blessed in the reading.  
Read as one awake, one waiting for the Beloved. Read with reverence."*

Macrina Wiederkehr

## **Read**

In the second phase of Lectio Divina, we read a passage of Scripture. Because we want to engage the text and not just glean information, we choose a short passage, ideally, no more than 8-10 verses.

Read the passage slowly to let it sink in and to get a feel for what the text is saying. (If it is a difficult passage, you may need to do some study of the text or read a good commentary)

Read the passage a second time and pay attention to what grabs your attention. What words, phrases, or ideas stir your heart? What stands out to you? How are your emotions stirred? The Holy Spirit often uses our curiosity and our responses to point to areas to which we need to pay attention. He points to issues about which He wants to speak to us.

## **Reflect**

In this phase, you begin allowing the Scriptures to sound your heart. Prayerfully read the passage one more time. Pay attention to the things that stirred you and to what the Lord is saying. Why do these things move you? How do they relate to your life? How does your story intersect God's larger story in the passage. How do you feel about what is being done or said? What are your desires about these things? Allow these questions to prime your reflection as you talk with the Lord about your thoughts, feelings and desires.

## **Respond**

Read the passage one last time. What is Jesus saying to you? What is He inviting you to? Is he pointing out sin or showing you changes that He desires to make in your life? What will it look like for you to respond to Him? Are you experiencing resistance? What do you desire in relation to these things. Keep talking with the Lord, be open and honest before him. Remember, he knows your heart, so don't try to hide. Listen for what he has to say to you.

## **Rest and Resolve**

Continue your conversation with the Lord. Rest in his love and in the word he has spoken to you. Go forth and live it out in the world.