

A New (Old) Way of Reading Scripture

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Introduction:

1. We read different material in different ways:
 - Scanning newspaper for information.
 - Slowly reading a letter from our wife or husband, or from a faraway friend.
2. There are several helpful ways to read the Bible:
 - For information: Who speaks? Setting? Doctrine?
 - For formation: Change of heart, encountering God, being shaped into the image of Christ.
3. By slowly, reflectively reading Scripture we allow the word to read us (see Hebrews 4:12-13). We do not master the Bible but allow God to Master us through it.
4. This process goes by several names: spiritual reading, praying the Scriptures, *lectio divina*.

A Four-Part Exercise in Spiritual Reading of the Bible.

1. Listening.
 - Choose a biblical text that is not too long. The purpose is to hear God's voice in your current situation, not to cover material or prepare lessons. Resist the temptation to "double-up."
 - Get into a comfortable position and maintain silence before God for several minutes. This prepares the heart to listen.
 - Read slowly. Savor each word. Perhaps read out loud. Listen for a particular phrase that speaks to you. Ask God, "What are you trying to tell me today?"
2. Meditation.
 - Slowly repeat the phrase that seems to be for you today.
 - Think on it, memorize it. Write it in a journal.
 - Let those words sink deeply into your heart.
3. Prayer.
 - Speak to God in words or images what is on your heart.
 - Respond in faith and humility to the word God has given you.
 - That response may be confession, thanksgiving, joy, or even pain.
4. Contemplation.
 - Rest in the goodness and grace of God. Contemplation is sabbath rest, accepting whatever God is doing in us.
 - If the word calls for repentance, then accept God's forgiveness.
 - If the word calls forth joy, experience it.

Take the word from God with you for the day.

A Group Exercise in Spiritual Reading.

Listening

1. Five minutes of silence.
2. Slow reading of a passage.
 - Isaiah 30:15-22
 - Matthew 9:1-8
 - Mark 12:28-34
 - Luke 9:37-45
3. A minute of meditation on the passage.
4. Briefly share the word or phrase that struck you.

Personal Message

5. A second reading of the same passage.
6. A minute of silence.
7. Where does this touch your life today.
8. Responses: I hear, I see, etc.

Life Response

9. Brief silence.
10. What does God want you to do today in light of this word?

Group prayer.