

## Contemplative Bible Study/Spiritual Reading

In addition to your daily Bible Study (Perhaps The One Year Bible) that involves researching the author, audience, theme, historical background and application...consider adding a contemplative study once a week or more. To slow down, not just check something off your list, to truly pour over scripture. We can't "taste and see that He is good" if we never show up and sit down at the table.

Bonaventure says "*To know much and taste nothing—what good is that?*"

Spiritual reading is more than respect, it's more than knowledge, it's to read and spend time with The Lord in awed reverence. One form of spiritual reading is called Lectio Divina.

### **Lectio Divina:**

In Christianity, *Lectio Divina* (Latin for "Divine Reading") is a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation and prayer intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God's Word. It does not treat scripture as texts to be dissected, but as the living word. It's not only about learning more but becoming more.

Lectio Divina traditionally has four different steps but some add silence as the fifth...I have included it here: silence, read; meditate; pray; contemplate. Once in silence a passage of scripture is read, then its meaning is reflected upon. This is followed by prayer and contemplation on the Word of God.

### **Silencio (silence):**

"Be still, and know that I am God" (PS 46:10) Prepare to enter this devotional time by singing a hymn, reading a psalm, or praying. Thank God for life and his presence. This time is for you to slow down and focus. Sit comfortably, alert, and relaxed. Try, if you can, to put away your thoughts of the day and ready yourself to listen. Start with a simple prayer, such as: "Lord, help me to be still and enter into your presence."

### **Lectio (reading):**

Read the passage aloud (or silently, if you are not in a place where you can read aloud). Listen for a word that sticks out to you (for example, in Psalm 23, it could be "shepherd" or "dwell" or "green pastures"). Read the passage again. If one word or phrase stood out the first time, see if it does the second time. Begin to repeat this word or phrase to yourself and let it resonate with you. If nothing sticks out, that is okay; just read again! Remember, this is not a performance-driven exercise (spiritual devotions are not meant to be about performance; they're meant for worship of our Most High God!). Focus on spending time with God in His Word.

### **Meditatio (meditation):**

Is the discipline we give to keeping the memory active in the act of reading.

Reread the passage. Meditate upon your word or phrase and ask God how this word speaks to your life. This could be a realization, feeling, sensory perception, image, thought, etc. Let your imagination be engaged, as well as your heart and mind. As these images, thoughts, and feelings come to you, take time to think about them. When you feel like praying, move to the next phase.

**Oratio (prayer):**

*"Bible searching and searching prayer go hand in hand. What we receive from God in The Book's message we return to Him with interest in prayer."*—P.T Forsyth

Pray what you most desire to say to God, and then listen! Journal and write down thoughts that come to mind, and what you believe God is speaking to you. Listen to the Holy Spirit to discover a possible invitation relevant to today, the next few days, or the year to come. It could be an action to take, a truth to discover about God, a way of life to change, someone to forgive, or something to celebrate. As you sense God bringing the time to a close, pray to close the time.

**Contemplatio (contemplation):**

Contrary to much current thinking, contemplation has nothing to do with making our minds blank or having "happy" thoughts. Its chief aim is to encounter Christ. Pray that you will be able to respond to God in the ways he's spoken in your chosen passage of scripture. Celebrate hearing from God and simply be still. Reflect on the experience. Regardless of how you feel, thank God for the chance to encounter him and his living Word.

*"Lectio Divina is not a methodical technique for reading the Bible. It is a cultivated, developed habit of living the text in Jesus' name. This is a way that the Holy Scriptures become formative in the Christian church and become salt and leaven in the world."*—Eugene Peterson

Suggested books for learning more about Contemplative Bible Study:

1. Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines. Edited by Richard J. Foster and Emilie Griffin
2. Eat This Book. By, Eugene Peterson