

# Savoring the Scriptures

Colossians 3:16 – “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...”



There are a variety of ways to approach Scripture. We can study the Bible with reason and logic; comparing other passages and using commentaries, and applying exegetical tools of interpretation. *Yet, believing that the head and heart are to be integrated and not divorced, the goal is never about just obtaining more information.* While there should always be room for serious study that does not bypass critical scholarship, the goal of any scripture reading is to internalize and personalize the Scripture so that its

truth can affect how we think, our attitudes, and how we live, our actions. We must strike a delicate balance between historical-critical engagement with scripture and opening oneself to the Word's life-transforming potential. If we approach God's Word simple to gather more information we miss what God is saying to us, saying about himself, and His Word will have no meaningful connection to our lives.

We must recognize that mere information never brings transformation. When it is reduced to something that is simply studied, memorized and used as a “spiritual instruction manual so we can make some changes in our spiritual life at points where it is not ‘working properly,’” the danger is that it no longer becomes a means by which we listen to God.

The part that is missing so often in our usual reading of the Bible is the pondering; the reflection; the leisurely thinking. As we approach God's Word through this contemplative posture, this is where these words begin to shape our lives. As we continue in this posture of openness and response, it naturally leads to a posture of yieldedness to God and we abandon ourselves to God and to whatever God wants to do with us.

Distinct from other ways of approaching the Bible, the practice of reading Scripture devotionally is the primary mode of reading the Bible for transformation. It is an approach to Scripture with a spirit of attentiveness, seeking to be open and receptive, trusting and listening for how the living Word may be speaking to us in a fresh way.



“Be sure to read, not cursorily or hastily, but leisurely, seriously, and with great attention; with proper pauses and intervals, and that you may allow time for the enlightenings of divine grace.”

John Wesley in *Savoring God's Word*



Devotional reading is reflective and prayerful. It is concerned not with speed or volume but with depth and receptivity. That is because the purpose of spiritual reading is to open ourselves to how God may be speaking to us in and through any particular

passage. This requires unhurried time and an open heart. If the purpose of our reading is to be addressed by God, we will need to practice attentive listening and a willingness to respond to what we hear. The attitude suffusing spiritual reading is that of the boy Samuel: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:10).

So rather than information-driven, in devotional reading, one of the primary purposes is "to allow the text to have control over us and become a place of encounter with God." It's a discipline that allows the Scriptures to "come alive" in our hearts and transforms us from the inside out.



In our meditations we ponder the chosen text on the strength of the promise that it has something utterly personal to say to us today and for our Christian life, that it is not only God's Word for the Church, but also God's Word for us individually. We expose ourselves to the specific word until it addresses us personally."

Bonhoeffer in *Savoring God's Word*



### **Practice**

While the Bible clearly teaches that the indwelling Spirit will communicate truth and formative experiences that go beyond intellectual knowledge [John 16:12-16, Romans 8:13, Luke 24:32, Ephesians 1:17-19, 3:16-19], one of the specific methods that developed within the ancient Christian tradition was called *Lectio Divina*, which means "sacred reading." It includes six components. These are not a rigid sequence but five components that could ebb and flow during a quiet time with God and God's Word.

**Choose a passage** that is 6-8 verses long. Any short passage will do. It could be part of your daily reading schedule, or something from a lectionary or devotional book. Here a few examples...Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:17-26;

Ephesians 6:10-17; 1 Peter 2:7-12; Isaiah 55:1-5; John 15:12-17

**Preparation** (Silencio) The art of *lectio divina* begins with cultivating the ability to listen deeply, to hear "with the ear of our hearts." Learning to hear the voice of God, which often speaks very softly, we must learn to be silent. Take a moment to quiet yourself, take a few deep breaths and become consciously aware of God's presence with you.

**Read** (Lectio) Read the verses slowly several times (out loud if possible), savoring the words and letting them sink in. Pause frequently—especially if something catches your attention. Don't analyze or worry about what the word is or why it has stood out to you but seek to listen and be receptive to whatever word or phrase emerges for you. Trust God's Spirit to bring to your mind what is significant for you at this time.

**Reflect** (Meditatio) Now begin to think about the words or phrases that stood out to you. Reflect and ponder the possible significance or connection in your life of that word or phrase that you feel drawn to. Ponder any instruction or invitation God's Spirit brought to your mind. Ask yourself, *What in my life needs to hear this word right now?* This is a

great time to incorporate a journal. Through *meditatio*, we allow God's Word to become his word for us, a word that touches us and affects us at our deepest levels.

**Respond** (Oratio) Now is the moment to enter into a personal dialogue with God. Respond from your heart to what he has been revealing to you personally in his Word. There is no right or wrong way to do this. The important thing is to respond truthfully and authentically. Express in prayer or through your journal whatever has stirred in your heart. Give praise. Give thanks. Confess sins. Acknowledge your needs and your longings. Intercede for others. Identify where you are resistant or want to push back.

**Rest** (Contemplatio) If you've been writing, put the pen down. There is no further need to listen, reflect, imagine, or respond. Release all your thoughts, feelings, and intentions to God. If you have been wrestling and resisting, put that aside for now and simply rest in God's Presence. Allow some time for the Word and the Spirit's truth take root in your heart.

**Resolve** (Incarnatio) Incarnate (live out) the word of God. Consider how you might continue to ponder and follow the Spirit's promptings as you go about your life. As you move into your daily activities, be alert to how the Spirit might bring the passage to mind, and resolve that you will live out any truth that you have learned.

### **Food for Thought:**

"Jesus didn't say, "Come and study me." He said, "Come and follow me." It is through practicing what we study from the Bible in the laboratory of daily life that transformation happens in our own lives and we become a blessing to others. Bible study is not only important, it is absolutely vital and essential, and neither Alan nor I minimize its place in the daily rhythm of following Jesus. But the point here is that it is only the first step in feasting with the Lord on a daily basis, and just because we've studied something from the Bible doesn't mean the lesson is learned or complete. It has just begun." – Lance Ford

### **Matthew 7:24-27**

24-25 "These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

26-27 "But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards." ™

**Psalms 119:114** "You're my place of quiet retreat; I wait for your Word to renew me." ™