

Spiritual Formation for Teachers
Vermeer Teacher Workshop, 11 June 2009
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Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation

Rich Reading vs. Jeff Reading vs. David Reading
Information vs. Transformation – Both/And not Either/Or

Question: What keeps us from being transformed by the reading of the Scriptures?
Richard Foster (*Life with God*) identifies 2 problems:

1. Reading the Bible for _____ or _____ alone
 2. Reading the Bible for a _____ to _____ a pressing _____
- Important foundations for transformational reading:

1. Reading the _____ Bible, taking it at _____ (Foster says “_____”)
2. Reading the Bible in its _____ – seeking to know the original author’s _____
3. Reading the Bible in _____ with itself – noting the _____ between _____
4. Reading the Bible in conversation with the _____ of the _____ – the Church helps to guide us in our understanding – theologians, creeds, confessions, etc.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*: “Whereas in our devotions together we read long consecutive passages, in our personal meditation we confine ourselves to a brief selected text, which possibly may not be changed for a whole week. If in our reading of the Scriptures together we are led into the whole length and breadth of the Bible, here we go into the unfathomable depths of a particular sentence and word. Both are equally necessary, ‘that ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height’ (Eph. 3:18).”

Personal Reading – this is for *me*.

Bonhoeffer: “In our meditation we ponder the chosen text on the strength of the promise that it has something utterly personal to say to us for this day 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. And when we do this, we are doing no more than the simplest, untutored Christian does every day; we read God’s Word as God’s Word for us.”

This type of reading – spiritual reading, *lectio divina*, transformational reading, Ignatian reading – reading not so much for knowledge as for transformation.

Lectio Divina

1. _____ (*Silencio*) Quieting (breath prayer, busy monkeys)
2. _____ (*Lectio*) Receiving/Listening (paying attention, noticing)

Bonhoeffer: “It is not necessary that we should get through the entire passage in one meditation. Often we shall have to stop with one sentence or even one word, because we have been gripped and arrested and cannot evade it any longer. Is not the word ‘Father,’ or ‘love,’ ‘mercy,’ ‘cross,’ ‘sanctification,’ ‘resurrection,’ often enough to fill far more than the brief period we have at our disposal?”

3. _____ (*Meditatio*) Reflecting/Studying (studying)

Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*, points to Isaiah 31:4 “As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey...” “‘Growls’ is the word that caught my attention and brought me that little ‘pop’ of delight. What my dog did over his precious bone, making those low throaty rumbles of pleasure as he gnawed, enjoyed, and savored his prized, Isaiah’s lion did to his prey. The nugget of my delight was noticing the Hebrew word here translated as ‘growl’ (*hagah*) but usually translated as ‘meditate,’ as in the Psalm 1 phrase describing the blessed man or woman whose ‘delight is in the law of the LORD,’ on which ‘he meditates day and night’...

“‘Meditate’ is far too tame a word for what is being signified.... Isaiah uses the same word (*hagah*) a few pages later for the cooing of a dove (38:14). One careful reader of this text caught the spirit of the word when he said that *hagah* means that a person is ‘lost in his religion,’ which is exactly what my dog was in his bone.”

Bonhoeffer: “It is not necessary that we should discover new ideas in our meditation. Often this only diverts us and feeds our vanity. It is sufficient if the Word, as we read and understand it, penetrates and dwells within us. As Mary ‘pondered in her heart’ the things that were told by the shepherds, as what we have casually overheard follows us for a long time, sticks in our mind, occupies, disturbs, or delights us, without our ability to do anything about it, so in meditation God’s Word seeks to enter in and remain with us....

“Above all, it is not necessary that we should have any unexpected, extraordinary experiences in meditation. This can happen, but if it does not, it is not a sign that the meditation period has been useless.”

4. _____ (*Oratio*) Praying
5. _____ (*Contemplatio*) Resting, listening some more – What is God’s Word here *for me to receive, embrace, live out?*
6. _____ (*Incarnatio*) Obeying – Go and be/live/do

Ignatian Reading

Can You Imagine?

For example, what the trees do
not only in lightning storms
or the watery dark of a summer's night
or under the white nets of winter
but now, and now, and now - whenever
we're not looking. Surely you can't imagine
they don't dance, from the root up, wishing
to travel a little, not cramped so much as wanting
a better view, or more sun, or just as avidly
more shade - surely you can't imagine they just
stand there loving every
minute of it, the birds or the emptiness, the dark rings
of the years slowly and without a sound
thickening, and nothing different unless the wind,
and then only in its own mood, comes
to visit, surely you can't imagine
patience, and happiness, like that.

Mary Oliver
Long Life: Essays and Other Writings
Da Capo Press, 2004

Peterson: "One of the characteristic marks of the biblical storytellers is a certain reticence. There is an austere, spare quality to their stories. They don't tell us too much. They leave a lot of blanks in the narration, an implicit invitation to enter the story ourselves, just as we are, and discover for ourselves how we fit into it." (p. 42)

- Works best with *narrative* accounts of scripture.
- Put yourself in the text as an observer – a “fly on the wall”
- Use all five senses – What do you *see*? What do you *hear*? What do you *smell*? What do you *taste*? What do you *feel*?
- Put yourself in the place of one of the characters, and see the story unfold from his/her viewpoint.
- As you live into the story, ask God to show you how to live in greater faithfulness and obedience, which is the goal of Ignatian reading (and Ignatian spirituality).

G.K. Chesterton's Father Brown – solves many mysteries and one day is talking about solving crimes. One friend asks his secret. Father Brown says “You see, it was I who killed all those people.” Everyone gasps, startled and appalled at this timid priest. Then he says, “I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer himself, of course I knew who he was.”

WAYS OF ASKING THE EXÁMEN QUESTIONS

Consider the previous day (or other period of time), and think over the various events. Ask yourself....

When did you see God today?
When did God seem distant?

When was I happiest today? When did I experience the most joy?
When was I saddest today?

For what moment today am I most grateful?
For what moment today am I least grateful?

When did I feel drawn closer to God today?
When did I feel pulled away from God today?

What gave me hope today?
What drained hope from me today?

When did I experience peace today?
When did I most lack peace today?

What was the best part of the day?
What was the worst part of the day?

What strengthened my faith today?
What undermined my faith today?

When did I give and receive the most love today?
When did I give and receive the least love today?

What did I feel good about today?
What was my biggest struggle today? When did I feel sad, helpless, or angry?

What helped me most with my anger [or any sin/temptation you struggle with] today?
What helped me least with my anger [or any sin/temptation you struggle with] today?

Final Exámen: In your prayer, imagine that you are 80 years old and dying. See the events of your life flash before you. For what are you grateful? What do you wish you had done differently? Pay special attention to the years between your present age and your death.*

* Some of these questions are taken from *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn, illustrated by Francisco Miranda; Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1995.

Otherwise

I got out of bed
on two strong legs.
It might have been
otherwise. I ate
cereal, sweet
milk, ripe, flawless
peach. It might
have been otherwise.
I took the dog uphill
to the birch wood.
All morning I did
the work I love.

At noon I lay down
with my mate. It might
have been otherwise.
We ate dinner together
at a table with silver
candlesticks. It might
have been otherwise.
I slept in a bed
in a room with paintings
on the walls, and
planned another day
just like this day.
But one day, I know,
it will be otherwise.

Jane Kenyon

Otherwise: New & Selected Poems

Select Resources

- Bajema, Clifford E., *At One with Jesus: Rediscovering the Secret of Lectio Divina*, Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1998
- Barton, Ruth Haley, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1954
- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005
- Foster, Richard J., *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 10th Anniversary Edition, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988
- Foster, Richard J., *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*, San Francisco: Harper One, 2008
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- Linn, Dennis, Linn, Sheila Fabricant and Linn, Matthew, *Sleeping With Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995
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- Thompson, Marjorie J., *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995
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