

Practice Makes Perfect (Almost): Scripture, Study, Meditation

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Object of the Practice

Scripture is the primary text for Christian spirituality. Study goes further than listening to a sermon or a Sunday school class or devotions. We come to Scripture to understand what it meant and to reflect on its significance.

- Revelation 10:9-10 → “Eat the book” = assimilate it into your whole body.
- Ezekiel 2:8-3:3
- Jeremiah 15:16

Why “eat”?

- Deuteronomy 11:18ff [6:4ff]
- Hebrews 4:12-13
- 2 Timothy 3:14-17
- Amos 8:11-12

Protestant reformation based on *sola scriptura*. It grew out of the Bible for every person. We have such a freedom and ignore it in practice.

Distinctions in the Practice

Klaus Issler says “We come to scripture as a conversation *with God*” (2012, 139).

The goal is to affect the head and the heart. In fact, the spiritual practice of study can be broken down into two aspects: (1) analytical study and (2) meditative study.

- Analytical study = Bible study, exegesis, hermeneutics → meaning of text
 - ✓ See Eugene Peterson 2006, chs. 3-5. Exegesis is a love affair with words and sentences like a dog-with-a-bone kind of reading.
 - Grandson Hans goes to park with grandmother after preschool, eats lunch, then pulls Testament out of backpack and “reads” it. Then closes, puts it away, and declares now they are ready to go to the next thing. Unfortunately, too often we read with the same kind of understanding.
 - ✓ John Ortberg 2002, ch. 11: (1) ask God to meet you in Scripture; (2) read the Bible with a repentant spirit; (3) meditate on a fairly brief passage or

narrative; (4) take one thought or verse with you through the day; (5) allow this thought to become part of your memory.

- Meditative study = patiently wait and listen for God to speak → significance
 - ✓ “Participatory” meditation = get inside the biblical story to get inside ourselves. Suck it like a lozenge.
 - ✓ Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; 119:78.
 - ✓ Psalm 63:6; 139:23-24.
 - ✓ 1 Samuel 3:10
 - ✓ Hebrew word “meditation” = Isaiah 31:4; 38:14 → *otium sanctum* (holy leisure) like a cow ruminating or a dog with a bone or dove cooing.
 - ✓ Communication and communion! Luke 21:33 “my word will not pass away”

Practices in the Practice of Study

In church history, the study of scripture as part of spirituality came to be known as *lectio divina*, “sacred reading.” It is a balance of silence and word. It goes beyond informational to formational, where the Word becomes part of you.

Analytical and meditative approaches to scripture complement each other. One without the other – it does not matter which way you err – strikes an imbalance. If you only analyze, you can fall into several pitfalls – privatize as inspiration, atomize like a lab dissection, or pride of knowledge. If you only meditate, you may lapse into subjectivism, where any truth can emerge from anywhere.

Tradition provides a series of steps to *lectio divina*. Ruth Haley Barton lists:

- (1) preparation (*silencio*) [*hinneni*, ‘Speak, your servant is listening’, ‘palms up, down,’ breathing, feet on ground],
- (2) read (*lectio*) [listen to a word or phrase, repeat it in different tones],
- (3) reflect (*meditatio*) [what do I hear? Imagination, Emmaus walk],
- (4) respond (*oratio*) [apply or respond to what is read],
- (5) rest (*contemplatio*) [return to rest],
- (6) resolve (*incarnatio*) [incarnate or live out the Word of God].

Often limits are set, i.e., 5-8 verses.

Practical Ideas

1. Reading plan – 1 year, 2 year; pause on some parts (5-8 verses) or it becomes too fast and legalistic without impact.
2. Bible private retreat – half a day, overnight, weekend.
3. One month for reading same book every day – 1 Peter.
4. Read commentary on a book.
5. Journal on reading.

- Handout #1 questions?
- Isaiah 55

Bibliography

Ruth Haley Barton. *Sacred Rhythms*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2006. Ch. 3.

Richard Foster 1998, ch. 5.

Klaus Issler. *Living into the Life of Jesus*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2012.

John Ortberg 2002, ch. 11.

Eugene H. Peterson. *Eat This Book*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

Week 2 Handout on “Study”

Go over the verses again on “eat this book” and reflect on whether you are allowing the scriptures into your whole being.

- Revelation 10:9-10
- Ezekiel 2:8-3:3
- Jeremiah 15:16

Why “eat”?

- Deuteronomy 11:18ff [6:4ff]
- Hebrews 4:12-13
- 2 Timothy 3:14-17
- Amos 8:11-12 Ouch!

What do you think about the following statement? Do you tend toward one or the other of the two aspects of “study”? Why?

The goal is to affect the head and the heart. In fact, the spiritual practice of study can be broken down into two aspects: (1) analytical study and (2) meditative study.

What is your reaction to Barton’s list of traditional steps for lectio divina?

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Is there a take-away from the practice of “study” you could commit to for the next few months?

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2. Bible private retreat – half a day, overnight, weekend.
3. One month for reading same book every day – example, 1 Peter.
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