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Lectio Divina -- Spiritual Bible Reading

By Jeremy M. Hoover

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Lectio divina is a very useful and practical discipline for spiritual growth. Rooted in ancient monasticism, the practice is a fourfold cycle: Reading, Meditation, Prayer, and Contemplation. In fact, the term itself means "sacred reading."

Reading. Lectio divina begins with a "text," whether that is the Bible, a spiritual classic, something in nature, or even another person. You must "take up and read." But the reading is not done to acquire knowledge or information, to master the text. Reading is done slowly, focusing on words and connections. In lectio divina, we are seeking to let the text master us.

I read through the Bible, a practice known as lectio continua, during my devotional times. I used to read for information, and to get through a certain amount (say, four chapters every day), but now I read slowly, taking at most a chapter each day. As I read, I listen for how the Word of God is addressing me.

Meditation. Meditation is focused thought. In lectio divina, we are neither letting our mind run wild with thoughts nor letting it empty of all thoughts. Instead, we concentrate our focus on the words of the text, thinking about each one. Let each word resonate within you.

Think of the meditation phase as though it were tea steeping. You are the hot water, and the tea bag is the Bible. As the tea bag steeps (reading), flavor is diffused throughout the hot water. This is meditation. It is the slow, simmering period where we digest the text and gain insight.

Prayer. The prayer phase takes the fruit of our meditation and offers it back to God. Perhaps a text led us to joy because of the gifts of God, or maybe a passage exposed sin in our lives and the need for repentance. Prayer is when we offer these insights back to God.

Contemplation. Contemplation is the act of sitting in the presence of God with total attention and concentration on God. After a time of prayer, we just sit with God.

If you preach or teach, you should use lectio divina as part of your preparation. Sit with the text away from analysis and exegesis, and let God speak to you through his word. A sermon or class could follow this four-part cycle.

For a sermon, the preacher could read the passage, describe the paths he or she explored during meditation and the insights found, and offer a prayer to God based on the meditation. After, there could be a congregational period of silence for contemplation.

When I teach, I often use lectio divina as an outline. I read the passage from my Bible and ask two or three others to read the same passage, but from different translations. Then I help the class to "meditate": I ask what words or images struck them from the reading, what they noticed or didn't notice, what feelings they had as they read, or what was most surprising in the text. We follow these threads, learning from each other, and then conclude with prayer.

Lectio divina is a very helpful discipline for spiritual growth. If the reader practices lectio divina often, she will begin to plumb the depths of her soul and her relationship with God. The single greatest facet of lectio divina is its ability to create a mindset that can actually listen to and for God.

Jeremy M. Hoover is a part-time minister and writes full-time in Windsor, Ontario. Visit his website at <http://hoovermarketing.info/amg/introduction.htm> to learn how he supports his writing with an online business.

How To Share Christ With A Nonbeliever

By Mike Wendland

We're told by Jesus to go out into the whole world and tell others about the Good News? But just how can we do that?

Here's my top ten suggestions on how to share Christ with a nonbeliever.

1. Look for common interests. With most people, it does little good to hit people over the head with a Bible. Instead, talk about common interests, problems, experiences. In other words, build a relationship.
2. Listen more than you talk for the first few minutes. Ask questions. How did that make you feel? What did you think about then? Then what? Open-ended questions are always the best.
3. Empathize. Sympathize. Let your eyes and body language convey to the person that you are listening and understand. Don't pass judgment. Don't ever say "I know just how you feel." you don't.
4. Ask questions that let you go for Biblical direction. "Have you read what the Bible says about this?" Or "Can we see what the Bible says about this?" Always present the Bible as an authoritative resource. Try some humor. You know the acronym for BIBLE:

Basic...Instructions...Before...Leaving...Earth.

5. Share your story. Tell about your life BC – Before Christ. And your life AC – After Christ. Learn to be able to give your personal testimony in three minutes or less.
6. Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to a particular question or problem. Offer to check it out and promise to get back with an answer or scriptural reference. And do so.
7. Remember your witness. Often, before a friend or coworker seeks spiritual counsel, they've been watching you for weeks. If you stress out or lose your temper, apologize. No one expects you to be perfect. It's how you handle difficulties that often open the door for a conversation.
8. Seek out open doors for a continuing dialogue. Don't try to deal with every issue in one meeting. Take time to discuss one or two in depth. Try to arrange follow up discussion times.
9. Invite them to church. There they can find true spiritual community. Offer to pick them up and drive them and treat them to lunch afterwards.
10. Practice lifestyle evangelism. Have a Bible always handy. Wear Christian T-shirts or jewelry where appropriate. Many a spiritual conversation has started because of a T-shirt.

Mike Wendland – Online Christian Shopper

Mike is a pastor

from a large Bible-believing church in the Midwest who founded the Online Christian Shopper Web site to make it easy for Christians to practice lifestyle evangelism. His Web site sells quality Christian T-shirts and jewelry.



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