

# WAY TO READ THE BIBLE

e is something that most familiar with and do regu- really think about how we l to God's Word?

ive Bible reading is an of approaching Scripture , *divina*. Consisting of four d begins with the selected ; and moves to meditating. ntemplating what God is h his Word.

nd to think of meditating meting done individually, ing Scripture in a small o act and encourages us to s how God is calling us to

e Bible Reading examines scipline and invites your pproach the Scripture in a nging way. By exploring res and learning to hear hem, this guide will help d act on the truth of the

PH.D., holds the Robert Chair as Professor of and Church Renewal at ical Seminary. He is the erous books, including Love series (NavPress).

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Spiritual disciplines are

simply ways to open our-

selves to God. They help

us become aware of the

many ways God speaks

to us and provide us

ways to respond to him.

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explains how use of the

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nalizing, sharing, Bible

reading, prayer, and

repentance and faith)

can deepen both our

walk with God and our

community with other

believers.

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CONTEMPLATIVE BIBLE READING

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES SERIES

# CONTEMPLATIVE BIBLE READING

## Experiencing God

## Through Scripture

A SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

### *Centering: Preparation for Lectio*

Before you begin a lectio exercise it is usually necessary to take a few moments to focus your attention on God. Your aim is to let go of the issues and agendas that occupy your thoughts and move your mind instead to God. This is not always easy to do. Most of us live in an action-filled universe surrounded by distractions galore. So when we come into our group we bring with us all this internal baggage. The act of centering is a way to let go of our old agendas and give ourselves to a new agenda: openness to God.

There are two aspects of centering: the physical and the spiritual. How we position our bodies is important, so that there is no physical impediment to prayer. How we position our minds is important, so that we are focused on God and not on some other diverting issues.

#### **The physical:**

- *Seating:* It does not matter if you sit or kneel or stand. The important thing is for your spine to be straight but not tense. "This posture is important, for it brings the body to attention. If we slump, the mind and spirit slump as well, and then we are not attentive to the Word."<sup>1</sup> If you are sitting, let your weight rest on the seat of a straight-backed chair with both your feet flat on the ground. Let the chair take your weight. The aim is to remain alert, attentive, and aware.

- *Muscles:* Relax tense muscles. You can be very deliberate about this. Let the muscles in your legs relax. Feel your stomach muscles relax. Then relax your arms and chest. It is most important to relax the muscles in your throat. Tension collects there, unknowingly, for a lot of people. Relax your face muscles. To know what muscle relaxation feels like, try tensing a muscle group and then releasing it. Then try letting it relax even beyond its natural resting point.
- *Breathing:* Slow down your breathing. It is at this point that many people use a centering prayer (see the next page), praying the first phrase as you breathe in, praying the second phrase as you breathe out.

#### **The spiritual:**

- *Pray:* Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your exercise, to lead you to those words you need to hear, to make connections between the Word of God and your life, and to open you to God. Pray also that as you open yourself to the spiritual world that you will be protected from evil and surrounded by God's power and presence.

- *Focus on God:* You can do this by means of an image such as meeting Jesus on the road and talking with him; sitting beside a pool or near a mountain and breathing in the presence of God, etc. Or you might simply open yourself to God without image; simply praying in faith with expectation. Offer to God your concerns so that your focus is on God and not on your fears and problems. Ask God to take these burdens. You will sometimes find that certain issues will reappear during the lectio exercise as the text speaks in response to them.

- *Use a centering prayer:* These are brief phrases that help us focus on God. Examples include "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy" (the so-called Jesus prayer); "Come, Lord Jesus, come"; "Hosanna in the highest"; and "O God, you are my God." Find the words that seem best for you to pray. You might want to pray this prayer in rhythm with your breathing, e.g., as you inhale pray "Lord Jesus Christ" and as you exhale pray "Have mercy."

When you engage in daily lectio on your own it may be helpful for you to find the right place. There is something about "sacred space." These are environments in which we find the quiet, the peace, and the focus that enables us to reach out to God through lectio. This sort of space differs for different people. It may be a garden, a loft, a particular chair, a chapel to which we go when we pray. Environment helps us focus.

You also want to find a place that will be free of interruptions. This is true whether you are doing group lectio or daily lectio. Consider the ways you might be interrupted and then think about how to deal with them before they happen. Get a babysitter to look after the kids during the group time, make sure the phone answering machine is on, schedule your time when you know everyone is away, etc.

It is important to remember the aim of all this preparation, namely, the full attention to God, focus on God, and expectation that you are coming into the real presence of the living God.