

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Reading with the heart: How do we meditate on the Bible?



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

How do you understand what meditation means?



Understanding the information (15 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

In the Bible the "heart" is the place of real change and connection – it is the centre of our being, from where all our desires come. "Heart" and "soul" are often used as alternatives. Psalm 119 talks about laying up God's words "in my heart." The writer Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "...accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all... ponder this word long in your heart until it has gone right into you and taken possession of you."



In our culture people can be sceptical about "God speaking to us" personally. We might struggle with the way in which, throughout the Bible, God communicates with those who have the spiritual capacity to hear and see spiritual realities. But throughout the Bible we consistently see an expectation that God will speak to each individual, through the heart.

St Ignatius believed that we need to both understand God's story with our minds, but in order to be able to make a true response to it, we know to also understand the feelings and desires we have when we read it.

The practice which helps us to grow in this is meditation. The part of us that helps us to meditate is by using our imagination as we read the Bible. Meditating on the Bible regularly was often seen by early Christians as the normal foundation of a spiritual life. The aim is not so much to learn about God in the Scriptures, but to meet God through the Scriptures.

Meditating on the Bible is not looking at it, in order to study it, but looking at everything through it – and being changed by the view.

Through our imaginations we can read the story as if we are present. This is not make-believe – because Jesus is not bound by time the event we are reading about on the page is a living present-tense experience for Him. Meditating with the Bible starts with us wanting to meet with God – it is hard to meditate well if we don't have this desire. It's very important to have enough time to do it in a relaxed way, to be comfortable in our place and in the way we are sitting, kneeling or standing.

A simple technique, which is being widely used today, is known as “holy reading.” (Lectio divina in Latin). It's an old practice of meditation (hence the Latin title!). Regularly learning to use lectio divina can help us read the Bible, and be with God, in our hearts. It involves reading the text slowly and repeatedly, using our imaginations and perhaps a number of questions to help us see ourselves, and God in it. We first prepare to meet with God by relaxing our breathing and centering our thoughts on Him. Then we read, reflect with questions, respond to what God is saying to us, and finally rest in His presence.

Discuss: Why and how can God speak to us and change us through meditation?

Reading the Bible (20 minutes)

Rather than Discovery Bible Study, the aim this session is to experience the four stages of Lectio Divina.

Read and listen. Pray for God to speak to each person in the group through His word. Then read John 15: 5-9 slowly, three times, perhaps emphasising different words as you do so:

Jesus said: 5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. 9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

Meditate and explore. Invite the group to see whether one phrase from the passage particularly speaks to them. They may want to share.

Pray and respond. Invite the group to individually respond to that phrase in prayer, either quietly or out loud, and ask, “How is God calling you to respond?”

Rest. Give some silence in order to rest together in God's presence and allow this word to take root.

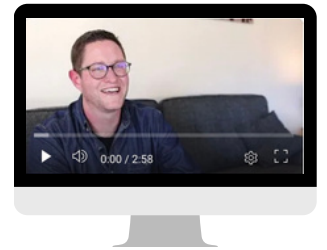


Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/0emOLiel2tk>

What struck you as important in the video?



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

Read out this verse from John 15 a few times:

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Pray silently.





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