Lectio Divina - Sacred Reading

Modern day contemplative prayer movement stems from the monastic period of Christianity (early middle ages), which was a time of experimentation and mystical practices. One of the practices, lectio divina, meaning sacred reading, involved taking a page of Scripture and reading it over and over again in a spirit of contemplation.

The goal isn't analysis; it's allowing God to speak to us through the word. Christians often refer to the Bible as God's love letter to mankind, and when we take the time to read it as such, we are practicing sacred reading.

Why is it necessary or helpful? For two thousand years, since Christ’s ascension, His followers have been able to gain assurance of God’s presence in their lives through the knowledge that He has risen and now dwells in their hearts. For the early church, there was no written word in wide circulation to “resonate,” “attract” or “disturb” them. Throughout the centuries, faithful believers focused on the Word [who] became flesh and dwell among us (John 1:14) rather than trying to find assurance through a single written word circulating through their minds.

Choose a text of the Scriptures … Place yourself in a comfortable position and allow yourself to become interiorly silent. To do this, some Christians focus for a few moments on their breathing; others have a beloved ‘prayer word’ or ‘prayer phrase’ they quietly recite.

Reading (lectio) - Slowly begin reading a biblical passage as if it were a long awaited love letter addressed to you. Approach it reverentially and expectantly, in a way that savors each word and phrase. Read the passage until you hear a word or phrase that touches you, resonates, attracts or even disturbs you. Savor each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the ‘still, small voice’ of a word or phrase that somehow says, ‘I am for you today …’

Reflecting (meditatio) - Ponder this word or phrase for a few minutes. Let it sink in slowly and deeply until you are resting in it. Listen for what the word or phrase is saying to you at this moment in your life allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories and ideas, see what it may be offering to you, what it may be demanding of you.

Expressing (oratio) - When you feel ready, openly and honestly express to God the prayers that arise spontaneously within you from your experience of this word or phrase. These may be prayers of thanksgiving, petition, intercession, lament, or praise.

"Resting (contemplatio) - Allow yourself to simply rest silently with God for a time in the stillness of your heart remaining open to the quiet fullness of God’s love and peace. Learn to use words when words are helpful, and to let go of words when they no longer are necessary. Rejoice in the knowledge that God is with you in both words and silence, in spiritual activity and inner receptivity.

Once you sense the Lord’s presence, the content of what you read is no longer important. The scripture has served its purpose; it has quieted your mind; it has brought you to him. …You should always remember that you are not there to gain an understanding of what you have read; rather you are reading to turn your mind from the outward things to the deep parts of your being. You are not there to learn or to read, but you are there to experience the presence of your Lord!” There is a difference between reading the Word and understanding its meaning versus a method of focusing on a single word to gain a mystical experience.