

Formational Reading

Excerpts from: *Shaped by the Word*, by Robert Mulholland. The Upper Room, 1985.

Information Versus Formation

In every piece of Scripture, real attention is as different from mere reading as friendship is from entertaining, or the love of a friend from a casual greeting...It is less *what* one reads than *how* one reads that counts. It is an attitude of mind that is at issue.

We are a culture shaped by the informational mode, which is an integral part of the functional orientation of our culture. Our culture seeks more information – new facts, new methods, new systems – in order to improve its functional control of its environment. Bottom Line: We have been trained to seek only information when it comes to reading – even when we read the Bible.

The Nature of *Informational* Reading:

1. Cover as much as possible as quickly as possible
2. Linear in nature – little more than a process of moving through the parts
3. Seek to master the text – bring it under our control
4. Text is an object “out there” for us to control – we are disengaged
5. Approach is analytical, critical and judgmental
6. Characterized by problem-solving mentality

If this is the case, where is there a space, a silence, in which God can speak? We are more often seeking some tidbits of information that will enhance our understanding of the Christian faith without challenging or confronting the way we live in the world.

Thomas Merton: Any serious reading of the Bible means personal involvement in it, not simply mental agreement with abstract propositions. And involvement is dangerous, because it lays one open to unforeseen conclusions.

The Nature of *Formational* Reading:

1. Not at all concerned with the amount – just read small portions
2. Seek depth: allow the text of God’s Word to address you, to encounter you
3. Allow the text to master you: approach the text with an openness to hear, to receive, to respond
4. Rather than controlling the text, *we* become the object that is shaped by the text – we are engaged
5. Approach is humble, willing and loving – a radical reorientation of the inner posture of our being
6. An openness to mystery

Some amount of discipline and preparation is necessary for formational reading. You need time to slow down, to be still, to let go of your life in the presence of God. Take time to “center down” as you approach the reading and studying of God’s Word. Even this preparation itself is spiritually forming.