

# Mentoring Matters

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**The Student's Voice** - *I have been growing and changing the most in the area of scripture reading and study. When we started the book of Mark on the retreat, learning the 'SOAP' method, I was inspired to continue reading the Bible with more thought on it when I read. Since the retreat I have continued to read Mark, putting lots of thought and question into what I read. SOAP time gave me a renewed excitement for reading the gospels and growing in my understanding of Jesus and who he was. I am so excited about the Word of God.* - Maja

**MQW** – “Who tells you who you are?” This is a great question for moving into the realm of influencers in our lives. The answer needs to go deeper than “Jesus”. Examining where we spend our time will speak volumes about how we see ourselves.

## **Reading the Scriptures**

During the MQ retreat we begin each morning with **SOAP**. This is a devotional method that combines prayerful reading of Scripture, observation of the text, application to life and prayer. Students spend about 30 minutes solo time with God and then we get together in small groups to share what has come alive for us in the text that morning. Students receive a Life Journal to keep a record of their reflections. You may want to experiment with the SOAP method as part of your mentoring sessions. Choose a scripture to study and share your reflections. Many good conversations have arisen from this exercise.

**Lectio divina** – At MQ we encourage a wide variety of spiritual practices. Lectio divina is a practice of listening for God's still small voice. It may be practiced individually or in a group setting. You may want to use it occasionally in your mentoring sessions for a change of pace. Below is a description of what it is and some suggestions for how to practice lectio divina.

A very ancient art, practiced at one time by all Christians, is the technique known as *lectio divina* - a slow, contemplative praying of the Scriptures which enables the Bible, the Word of God, to become a means of union with God. Together with the daily Bible reading and prayer, time set aside in a special way for *lectio divina* enables us to discover in our daily life an increasing ability to offer more of ourselves and our relationships to the Father, and to accept the embrace that God is continuously extending to us in the person of his Son Jesus Christ.

**READING/LISTENING:** the art of lectio divina begins with cultivating the ability to listen deeply, to hear “with the ear of our hearts”. Imitating the prophet Elijah, we allow ourselves to become

women and men who are able to listen for the still, small voice of God. This gentle listening is an "atunement" to the presence of God through the Scriptures. In order to hear someone speaking softly we must learn to be silent. We must learn to love silence. If we are constantly speaking or if we are surrounded with noise, we cannot hear gentle sounds. The practice of *lectio divina*, therefore, requires that we first quiet down in order to hear God's word to us.

THE READING or listening which is the first step in *lectio divina*, is very different from the speed reading which modern Christians apply to newspapers, books and even to the Bible. *Lectio* is reverential listening; listening both in a spirit of silence and of awe. In *lectio* we read slowly, attentively, gently listening to hear a word or phrase that is God's word for us this day.

MEDITATION: once we have found a word or a passage in the Scriptures that speaks to us in a personal way, we take it in and "ruminate" on it. Like Mary, "pondering in her heart" we take in the word memorize it - allow it to interact with our thoughts, our hopes, our memories, our desires. Through meditation we allow God's word to become His word for us, a word that touches us and affects us at our deepest levels.

PRAYER: both dialogue with God and offering to God of parts of ourselves that we have not previously believed God wants. In this consecration-prayer we allow the word that we have taken in and on which we are pondering to touch and change our deepest selves.

CONTEMPLATION: finally, we simply rest in the presence of the One who has used His word as a means of inviting us to accept His transforming embrace. Once again we practice silence, letting go of our own words; this time simply enjoying the experience of being in the presence of God.

### **PRACTICING LECTIO DIVINA**

CHOOSE a text of the Scriptures that you wish to pray. It makes no difference which text is chosen, as long as one has no set goal of "covering" a certain amount of text: the amount of text "covered" is in God's hands, not yours.

PLACE YOURSELF in a comfortable position and allow yourself to become silent. Some Christians focus for a few moments on their breathing; others have a beloved "prayer word" or "prayer phrase" they gently recite in order to become interiorly silent. For some the practice known as "centering prayer" makes a good, brief introduction to *lectio divina*. Use whatever method is best for you and allow yourself to enjoy silence for a few moments.

THEN TURN to the text and read it slowly, gently. Savor each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the "still, small voice" of a word or phrase that stands out for you. Do not expect lightening or ecstasies. In *lectio divina* God is teaching us to listen to Him, to seek Him in silence. He does not reach out and grab us; rather, He softly, gently invites us ever more deeply into His presence.

NEXT TAKE the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories and ideas. Do not be afraid of "distractions." Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself which, when they rise up during *lectio divina*, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this rumination, to invite you into dialogue with God.

THEN, SPEAK to God. Whether you use words or ideas or images or all three is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. And give to Him what you have discovered in yourself during your meditation. Experience God using the word or phrase that He has given you as a means of blessing, of transforming the ideas and memories, which your pondering on His word has awakened. Give to God what you have found within your heart.

FINALLY, SIMPLY rest in God's embrace. And when He invites you to return to your pondering of His word or to your inner dialogue with Him, do so. 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.

SOMETIMES IN *lectio divina* one will return several times to the printed text, either to savor the literary context of the word or phrase that God has given, or to seek a new word or phrase to ponder. At other times only a single word or phrase will fill the whole time set aside for *lectio divina*. It is not necessary to anxiously assess the quality of one's *lectio divina* as if one were

“performing” or seeking some goal: lectio divina has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures.

When practicing lectio divina with others, take a few minutes at the end of the exercise to share what God has laid on your heart.

To find out more about this practice, check out - [www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html](http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html)

Tony Jones has written about his experience with lectio divina and his youth group in a book called Divine Intervention (2006, Th1nk, an imprint of Nav Books). It's worth the read if you are looking for more resources on lectio divina.