

TNT Class, Smyrna Church

August 24, 2008

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Paul in Troas and Beyond

Text: Acts 20.1-16 and Earl Lavender, *Acts of the Apostles, Jesus Alive in His Church*. Abilene: Leafwood Publishers, 2006, pages 169-173.

Prayer requests and introductions

Introduction

Cf. Earl's introduction¹ for a strategy of Bible study that is not informational but intentionally transformational in both goal and content. Instead of retelling Biblical stories or mining the text for data (as is too often the case in purely *informational* Bible study) a meditative, or transformational, reading of Scripture intends to transform both how we study the Scriptures and, having encountered them, how we live as people of faith.

In other words, it is a new way to study that is quite different from how Bible classes are usually conducted, and its reflective and meditative nature (as opposed to story-telling or fact-finding) is explicitly structured so as to help us align our lives more closely with God's intent for us as revealed in the particular Biblical text under consideration. The goal here is to bring our hearts and minds and lives into conformity with God's intent for us, not just to study with our heads.

One other word of introduction, this is crock-pot Bible study, not microwave Bible study. There are no short-cuts in spirituality or to a deeply spiritual reading of the Biblical text.

A new old way

This new way of Bible study isn't "new" at all. With roots in the 12th century this method of *lectio divina*² (divine, or holy, reading) is one way to assist us in a meditative reading of Scripture. It is simple and consists of four moments: *lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio*.

Lectio is slow, careful reading; *meditatio* is meditating and ruminating on the reading; *oratio* is prayerfully opening the heart to God to be formed by the reading; *contemplatio* is a simple resting in the presence of God and contemplating his glory, grace and goodness.

While there are no hard and fast rules about this method of holy reading, these are the core elements. Our practice this morning will incorporate these elements.³

¹ Pages 7-19, especially 7-14.

² Page 10.

³ This method is adapted from Rhonda Lowry via John Mark Hicks. Cf. his blog post of July 8, 2008 titled *Beyond (Before?) Theological Hermeneutics II* at <http://johnmarkhicks.wordpress.com/2008/07/08/beyond-before-theological-hermeneutics-ii/>.

Hook – Song and two minutes of silence and prayer. The goal here is become receptive to the reading. Put away thoughts of the past, the present and future. Today we will open God’s word, read it together and be transformed by it. You may find deep rhythmic breathing helpful. You may pray a simple centering prayer. One such helpful prayer is the Jesus Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.* Or you may choose to enjoy a moment of quiet preparation, whatever your soul needs.

Song: *Break Thou the Bread of Life* (Songs of Faith and Praise, 431)

Book – reading the text: Acts 20.1-16. The text will be read twice:

First, read slowly and deliberately with the class listening instead of following along in their own Bibles. The goal is to hear the Word closely, not only with our ears, but also our hearts.

On the second read, the class will read the text for themselves in their own Bibles. In this reading we are looking to compile a list of 5 observations from this text. We are looking for factual observations, not interpretations or explanations, nor ‘lessons’ we can ‘get’ from the text. Simply observe and note what you observe.

Look – brainstorming about our observations. From our list of five, choose one and explore it.

One preliminary note: Narrative (such as we have here in Acts) in Scripture is inherently selective. Not everything is reported about every person or event. Characters are often unnamed and the details we are given seem to be given less for the sake of completeness and more to make or underscore a larger point. A good question to ask about narrative is why *this*, and why *here*? Why not something else? What larger point is served by this narrative?

The task for **look** is to brainstorm along these lines. Given your one observation, ask *why this*? What does it mean? How could this be understood? Why would the author include this? What might this teach or mean for me? List five possible meanings, nuances, interpretations or explanations for your one observation.

One other note: this might prove difficult at first. Resist the urge to simply declare a meaning and move on.

Took – here we are taking from the text something for our own minds, hearts and lives. This is application.

Class should break into groups of three. In your group of three share your one observation and brainstorm together about how this observation impacts how we might live. Brainstorm about how we can take the message of the text into our lives and be transformed by this text.

One helpful hint might be to transform your observation into a prayer. For example, in 20.1-2 Paul encourages churches and Christians; this might be turned into a prayer, “Lord, direct my steps and let me be an encouragement. Help me bless my sisters and brothers with the gift of an encouraging word.”

Closing – Two minutes of quiet reflection to close the class. Leader dismisses with prayer or blessing.