How Do People Get Hungry?

The past few months, Franziska and I have been busy with our move. We are finally getting back to a more settled state, so from here on, I should be able to give more of my attention to Create a Learning Site again. For this month, I am taking the presentation I did during the Biblical Studies Consultation in Kyiv in November 2016.

There is a live video with the content of this presentation. I recorded it myself using Franziska's iPad, so it is not great video – the video equivalent of a selfie – but it is good content, and it comes with two live demos of Bible meditation that are not included in the text below. So you may want to switch to the video version *(takes about 26 minutes).*

How do we get people hungry? I am not thinking of physical hunger or appetite. That is easy. Prevent people from eating long enough and they will get hungry. But when it comes to the Bible, this will not work. It may even be the opposite: if people abstain from Bible reading or meditation long enough, they may lose whatever appetite or interest they once had.

How do we get people hungry? In this context, I can think of only one answer. Give them a taste!

In this month's issue, I am going to focus on Bible meditation and I'm going to present five different forms to do this, to give people a taste. They can be used in a class setting to kick off first thing in the morning, to break the flow somewhere in the middle, or as part of an application time toward the end. They can also be part of a base meeting or of something we do in a church, providing simple and easy ways to get people to engage with the Word and help them to pick up tools for their own Bible meditation at the same time.

1. Guided Meditation

I first used a guided meditation while teaching Leviticus. I took chapter 1, instructions for the burnt offering, and I asked people to visualise or imagine in their minds being the person who brings their animal to the tent of meeting as a sacrifice and going through the ritual as I slowly described the procedure to them.

This is a form that works well for rituals and especially for stories in the Bible.

2. Guided Group Meditation

I have used a guided group meditation with Leviticus 16, the Day of Atonement, but it works with most passages. I read the text sentence by sentence, leaving some room after each verse for people to respond.

That's all. It is simple, but a great way to change the pace of a lecture and do something different. It comes with real potential to lead people to a fresh encounter with the text and to learn from other people's observation and reflection.

3. Lectio Divina

Since this is Latin, it sounds more difficult than it is. It comes out of mediaeval monastic practice and originally consisted of four steps:

- Read
- Meditate
- Pray
- Contemplate, which in this context is more a spiritual seeing of or receiving what the text speaks about, something mystical, rather than contemplation in the sense of reflection.

The four steps can be rephrased as questions and be changed and varied in whatever way you like. It may be helpful for people to get a simple sheet with the text and the questions you are going to use. An alternative that requires a bit more work is to have the text written or printed on a relevant shape or image, to provide something visual and tactile.

Of course, if you use this as part of a sermon in a church service with 300 people present… PowerPoint would be less work. But don't underestimate the power of giving people something they can touch.

Give people something like this, read the text several times, and then lead them through the questions (leaving some time for reflection after each question), moving from reading and observation to a personal response.

4. A Verse to Think, Talk, or Pray about

The same verse(s) and form can also be used simply as something for people to think about, talk about with their neighbour, or turn into a prayer. Based on Psalm 18:2 for instance ("The Lord is my fortress"), one could say: "Turn to your neighbour and talk about: what does it mean that God is your fortress?" Or: "How

do you need God to be your fortress right now? Share and pray for each other."

Praying Scripture is a powerful way to get people into the Word. And it is of course a powerful way to pray.

5. Meditation Demo

My final form is a meditation demo. A meditation demo is not easy to do but I have felt compelled to do it on different occasions. Because how else can we teach people how to do Bible meditation?

I picked up this idea of a demo from the coach training Franziska I did some years ago. One part of it was a five-day seminar. We covered subjects like asking good questions, listening well, and setting goals, all part of the coaching process. Most of these units consisted of input, that is theory, a demo, and practice. Sometimes the demo would precede the input and sometimes follow it. Each demo and each practice was followed with a debriefing, a time of sharing observations and reflections.

When you think about it, this makes a lot of sense. Coaching is about practical skills. We learn a skill through watching someone do it and through practice.

We therefore need to do demonstrations of Bible meditation. And it won't do to present a *prepared* meditation. It needs to be an *authentic* demo, meaning it is *not* prepared. If I spend a few hours preparing a 10-minute meditation, I can probably dazzle most people. But this does not help them to do it themselves.

The way to do a meditation demo is to think out loud. I don't find this easy. I am not a verbal processor. It makes the process a bit forced, a bit unnatural, but it is the closest I can get to letting someone share in my process of thinking about a text, in what is going on in my head and my heart as I meditate.

I need a somewhat random verse to get me started. This needs to come from the audience. I ask for two or three suggestions and pick one. After reading the verse several times, I start talking about it to myself and increasingly to God.

It is a bit scary, because I don't know where the process will take me, but it makes for a powerful demonstration of the process of Bible meditation. I normally finish with a debriefing, asking a few questions, such as: "What stood out to you? What did you notice? What do you take away from this exercise?"

[See the video for such a demo.]

Get Them Hungry

So how do we make people hungry? We give them a taste or, in different words, we give them a demo. I will finish with a demo of the fourth form I mentioned: give people a verse to think, talk, or pray about. In this case, a paraphrase of Matthew 4:4, to illustrate my final point:

> It is our task to feed people but it is also our task to make them hungry.

So, as we close, think about this text for a moment:

Man shall not live by Bible study alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

References

Image used: Eugenio Hansen, OFS (23 Aug. 2010), "Lectio Divina" (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Standard Bible Society (2001), *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Standard Bible Society)