

THE PRACTICE OF DWELLING IN THE WORD

... being formed and transformed by God's Word; becoming humble servants of the text.

Prayer

O Holy One,
we hear and say so
many words,
yet yours is the
word we need.

Speak now,
and help us to listen.
Amen

Where the Spirit does
not open the Scrip-
ture, the Scripture is
not understood even
though it is read.

Martin Luther

In our meditation,
we ponder the
chosen text on
the strength of
the promise that it
has something
utterly personal to
say to us for this
day and for our
Christian life.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Come before the Lord
and begin to read. Stop
reading when you feel
the Lord drawing you
inwardly to himself.

Now, simply
remain in stillness.
Stay there for awhile.

Jeanne Guyon
Experiencing the Depths
of Jesus Christ

Dwelling in the Word is a spiritual practice of reading and dwelling in the biblical text with an openness to be formed and transformed by the Living Word. This practice is a unique way of allowing God to speak to us both individually and corporately. Dwelling in the Word values listening deeply to God and to one another. We read for spiritual formation by coming to the Word and patiently allowing the text to intrude into our lives, address us, and be encountered by the God of Mystery.

Because we live in a culture that loves information, we may not realize what a radical suggestion it is to read the Bible to be formed and transformed. There is a difference between approaching God's Word through **informational** reading and **formational** reading. As we dwell in God's Word in community, we open ourselves to what God may be saying to us in and through a text.

We dwell in God's Word to gain new insights and understandings —
*not seeing only what we heard or read about a particular text
or what we think we know about it.*

We read and listen to the Scripture text aware of God's presence —
not reading quickly and unconsciously.

We desire to be shaped by God's Word —
not control God's Word based on our desires, wants, or needs.

We become humble servants of the text —
not masters of it.

We benefit from and need a variety of ways to study and read God's Word. The Spirit of God has the power to transform our souls and lives in whatever way we approach the Scripture. Dwelling in the Word with the community invites the Living Word to penetrate to the innermost being of our personal and communal lives. It is here that God desires to dwell.

Informational Reading	Formational Reading
Quick reading to cover as much as possible	Living in the same text for a period of time
Linear reading to acquire knowledge, information, and techniques to support personal position, or change the world to our way of functioning	Multi-layered with depth that changes our quality of being
Master the Word; control it	Servant of the Word; receive it
Manipulate the text for our intentions	Formed and transformed by the text
Analytical and critical reading through our perceptions or needs	Being with the Word humbly and willingly
Problem-solving or instructional manual	Open to the God of Mystery addressing us

Lancaster Mennonite Conference

For more information on the practice of Dwelling in the Word go to: www.lancasterconference.org

LEADING DWELLING IN THE WORD

Preparation

- ▶ **Choose a Scripture passage to dwell on for an extended period of time** (perhaps a Scripture text used in a recent worship service, a passage meaningful to your group, or a passage that is discerned together by the group).
- ▶ **Prepare printed copies of the Scripture passage** in the translation that your congregation uses or occasionally choose to change the version.

Dwelling in the Word begins by preparing to listen

- ▶ The leader provides a brief introduction to the practice of Dwelling in the Word - more if the practice is new to any member in the group; less if it is a developed practice.
- ▶ The leader invites and prepares the group to listen to the Spirit's nudging through spoken or silent prayer.
- ▶ Before the passage is read, the leader should instruct hearers to be aware of what word or phrase captures their attention or use one of the questions below for reflection.
- ▶ Ask a volunteer to read the text aloud and indicate there will be a moment of silence following the reading to reflect on a word, phrase, or question.
- ▶ Additional questions applicable to all scriptures:
 - What word or phrase "stops you cold" - catches your imagination or dominates your thoughts?
 - What was surprising? What questions did you have about the text?
 - What would you like to ask a Bible scholar about the text?
 - How does this text read us and our world?
 - What is God doing in this text? What are God's followers doing in the text? What is the Good News for us?
 - What is God saying to us through this passage? How are we being changed or transformed in our personal and corporate life?
 - How is God sending and equipping us to be witnesses? How are we to be signs of the kingdom (reign) of God?
 - What does following Jesus look like (feel, smell, taste, sound) in the text?
 - How does this text inform us about what following Jesus looks like for us here and now?

After reading the Scripture text and silence, draw attention back together as a community

- ▶ The leader invites each person to get up out of their seat and find one person to share with for two-three minutes— someone they do not know or do not know very well (a reasonably friendly-looking person-stranger ☺).
- ▶ Invite persons to take turns listening attentively and carefully to the other. Listen the other into "free speech" regarding their questions and reflections of the text. Listen carefully so that each can share what they heard the other share.
- ▶ At the half way point, the leader indicates it is time to switch the sharing and listening.
- ▶ After sharing in pairs, gather together with others to form a group of 6-8. Each person will introduce their partner and what they heard shared about the text (meaning, challenges, etc.). This is a practice in listening as well as speaking.
- ▶ If you have several groups of 6-8 people, call the entire group together and invite several persons to share on common themes or particular reflections that were significant for those in the group. Record the reflections that relate to the work of the group.

Reflecting on the Scripture passage during the meeting-gathering

- ▶ Leaders should invite participants to keep the Scripture text in mind throughout the meeting. Encourage participants to share reflections from the text throughout the time together. What does the text say in the midst of the meeting/gathering and making decisions?
- ▶ End the meeting by reading the Scripture text one more time. Invite people to reflect on how the passage influenced the discussion and planning. Record these reflections in the minutes of the meeting.
- ▶ Pray that the Lord will continue to speak to the group through the Scripture and that all will be listening.
- ▶ Bring the Scripture text to the group in the same manner at the next meeting.