

On SPIRITUAL READING

Spiritual reading (*lectio divina*) is the ancient practice of savoring a text with patient playfulness. This way of reading is alert with expectation that a transforming word of life will make its way from the written narrative of the author to the lived narrative of the reader. Spiritual reading holds out the promise of fresh meaning, insight, or truth emerging between writer and reader that transcends time and space. Yet this experience assists the reader to enter more reflectively and faithfully into his or her own time and space. In this respect, spiritual reading embodies the pattern of the Incarnation, where Word becomes flesh for the life of the world. Peter of Celle, the great twelfth-century Benedictine abbot, describes spiritual reading this way:

* *Peter of Celle, Selected Works*, trans. Hugh Feiss, OSB (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 135.

“Reading is the soul’s food, light, lamp, refuge, consolation, and the spice of every spiritual savor. It feeds the hungry, it illuminates the person sitting in darkness; to refugees from shipwreck or war it comes with bread. It comforts the contrite heart, it contains the passions of the body with the hope of reward. When temptations attack, it counters them with the teaching and example of the saints. . . . In the bread box of sacred reading are breads baked

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in an oven, breads roasted on a grill, or cooked in a frying pan, breads made with the first fruits and sprinkled with oil, and barley cakes. So, when this table is approached by people from any walk of life, age, sex, status or ability, they will all be filled with the refreshment that suits them.”*

Weavings® seeks to offer this refreshment for those who read the journal alone or in small groups, for personal enrichment or pastoral ministry, for spiritual formation with individuals or gatherings in a wide variety of settings. We extend to you the invitation heard by Augustine in the garden on the threshold of his conversion: “Take and read.”

support enrich share savor
question experience foster
journal discuss read gather
articulate encourage invite
participate encounter feel

Weavings Reading Groups are designed to support and enrich each participant's experience of spiritual reading. Such groups differ from traditional discussion groups in one important respect. The purpose of the gathering is not to talk about the content of the reading. Rather, participants are encouraged to share with one another how some aspect of the content has provided a doorway into a deeper encounter with their own life story and God's presence and work in that story. This approach to the content of the reading remains vital for both the individual participants and the group because it fosters a growing consciousness of their relationship with God and a developing capacity to articulate the nature of that relationship. In contrast, groups gathered simply for the purpose of discussing the content of *Weavings* articles will have both a limited life span and limited impact on the lives of the participants. Why? Because concentrating only on discussion of the content allows participants to keep at a safe distance the issues addressed by the authors.

In preparation for the *Weavings* Reading Group meeting, participants are invited to read one selected article slowly, savoring it the way they would a letter from a dear friend. Before the group meeting, they should read the article several times, alert to what images, stories, or ideas catch and hold their attention. If helpful, they might choose to make notes in a personal journal or in the pages of the article. What questions or insights surface in this experience of reading?

For the meeting, participants should be prepared to share with the group one question or one insight prompted by their meditative reading of the article. That's all.

These blessings must be taken all together as described of the way Jesus himself the earth, and calls us to not as separate blessings of different personality type hunger and thirst after justice to mourn over all that goes wrong, to make peace and endure persecution for seeking to purify the heart show mercy—all that not only cleanse our to see God and enter God's gracious rule grow us toward the "meek" first parents surrendered began to separate their use from God's purposes. They the humble dignity of sought to "be as the The "meek," as the Gr praus suggests, are not but have their power under control. They know their place in God's purposes not organize things around themselves, but rather what makes for the well of the whole. Thus, human righteousness and the fate are linked again and again. In our day, the ancient tions that crop failure or drought or refreshing rain wasted or a land bountiful

WEAVINGS Reading Group Process

BEFORE THE SMALL GROUP MEETING

Participants read one assigned article, noting what images, stories, or ideas catch and hold their attention. Each person is asked to bring one question or one insight prompted by the reading. The leader will also be prepared to assign the article for the following meeting.

WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER [10 minutes]

Leader ensures that the meeting space is prepared and greets participants. Leader briefly reviews the group process, asks for any general questions, and offers an opening prayer.

REVIEW OF READING [5 minutes]

Leader may wish to briefly overview the reading.

SHARING OF QUESTIONS AND INSIGHTS [45 minutes]

Leader invites responses to the reading in the form of one insight or one question from participants. Participants offer these freely (rather than moving person by person around the group) and not every participant must speak. Participants should have permission to pass if neither a question nor insight emerged from the reading experience. Often, participants bring more than one insight or question to share, but it is important to allow each person to share one point before additional responses are invited. Discussion is reserved for later, after the break. Insights and questions may be recorded by participants in the margins of the article (or can be recorded by the leader on a flip chart). These notes will help guide the discussion following the break.

COMMENT AND BREAK [15 minutes]

Leader may choose to offer a comment or question for participants to think about during the break, or may simply encourage silent reflection on what has been shared. Participants refresh themselves and think about what has been shared and heard.

GROUP RE-GATHERS [45 minutes]

Leader initiates a conversation in any way that seems most suitable (for instance, by simply asking participants to respond to what they have heard or inviting engagement with a specific question formed from the time of sharing). Participants are free to interact and respond to one another's insights and questions during this time.

LOOKING AHEAD [1 minute]

Leader assigns reading for next meeting and, if needed, distributes the issue of *Weavings* in which the upcoming assignment appears.

CLOSING PRAYERS AND BLESSING [10 minutes]

Groups should feel free to modify time allocations to fit their life together.



Frequently Asked Questions

How frequently do we meet: weekly, every other week, monthly?

Monthly or bi-weekly meetings are typical because they give time to read the material in a leisurely way.

How long will each meeting last?

Consider meeting for about two hours each time when using this process. A format for One Hour Settings is also available at www.weavings.org.

How many meetings should a group plan to gather?

A good starting point is six to eight meetings in a series. If the group wishes to continue after a short break (a few weeks off), you may desire to schedule another set of meetings, at which time new participants may join the group.

How much time will I need to prepare for the group? How much reading is required?

Typically, the leader selects one article to be read for each meeting. The amount of time spent reading this one piece will depend on how slowly and deeply participants want to sink into it and how they choose to note their responses (in a journal or in the margins of the article). It would be counterproductive to read the material quickly the day before the meeting.

The leader, of course, will need to take a little added time to prepare in order to read and select material for the following meeting as well. Each article is selected based upon what the leader considers to be an appropriate and interesting choice for their group.

How many people should be in a group?

The process works best with six to twelve participants for a single leader.

Is this a drop-in group or should the same participants stay in the group through the meetings?

This is not a drop-in group format. The experience will be better for all if participants covenant to attend all meetings in a series. Because this is a short-term group design, new participants should be encouraged to join the next series.

If I have questions about *Weavings* Reading Groups, who do I contact?

Email weavings@gbod.org or call *Weavings* at 1.877.899.2780, ext. 7254.

How to order *Weavings* for a Reading Group

■ **MULTIPLE COPY SUBSCRIPTIONS:** Call 1.800.972.0433 or visit www.weavings.org. \$4.50 per copy.* (Requires a purchase of 5 or more copies to the same address.) *Weavings* is published four times per year.

* There are two payment options for multiple copy subscriptions: You can be billed per shipment of each issue. Or, you may pay for a full year in advance. To discontinue your order at any time, write CANCEL on your invoice or call us at 800.972.0433

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■ **INDIVIDUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS:** Call 1.800.925.6847 or visit www.weavings.org. \$29.95 per year (4 issues) or \$49.95 for two years (8 issues). Subscriptions outside the U.S., \$37.95/year; \$57.95/two years. You may pay by credit card or request that you be billed.

NOTE: No additional volume discounts are available. Group orders are valid for Domestic U.S. delivery only.



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WEAVINGSTM
A JOURNAL OF THE CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL LIFE

A publication of Upper Room Ministries
P.O. Box 340004, Nashville, Tennessee, 37203