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Stay With It

Shirley Folkerts

Dordt College, shirley.folkerts@dordt.edu

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Stay With It

Abstract

"Sit quietly. Soak in the mystery of God's presence through his word."

Posting about the contemplative method of studying the Bible from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/stay-with-it/>

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Stay With It

 [inallthings.org/stay-with-it/](http://allthings.org/stay-with-it/)

Shirley Folkerts

“As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.” Mark 1:29-31

On my first reading of this assigned text, I notice that this is a very short miracle-story. On my second reading, I begin to think of this as a no-frills miracle. Ouch. I cringe to use that adjective; but compared to calming a storm or raising someone from the dead, this miracle seems, well, quite basic.

One of my seminary professors once said that if you read a passage and it appears boring, or it seems like there is nothing there for you, stay with it longer.

Today, we will use an ancient method of reading and praying scripture to stay with this story longer. This contemplative method (called *lectio divina*) uses a four-part process in which we **read, reflect, respond and rest** in God’s word. My writing, some of which you will see below, came about as I moved through these four steps. Feel free to progress through the steps with me; or if it suits you, follow the pattern* with your own thoughts and words instead of mine.

Before we begin, we offer a simple prayer of gratitude and openness to God and his word.

As I slowly **read** the story of Jesus healing Simon Peter’s mother-in-law, this phrase catches my attention: *He went to her, took her hand and helped her up.* If I had to choose a single word that stands out, it would be from Matthew’s account of this same miracle and the word would be: *touch.*

As I reflect on this story, I notice how little of the action is done by Peter’s mother-in-law. JESUS AND A FEW DISCIPLES went to the home of Simon and Andrew. THEY told JESUS about the fever. JESUS went to her. JESUS took her hand. JESUS helped her up. The FEVER left her. The only thing the woman does is lie in bed. She did not go to Jesus. Jesus came to HER and HE took HER hand. I imagine the common sight in a hospital room where a person takes the hand of their loved one lying in the bed, but instead of just sitting there with the patient, the person is Jesus and he helps the patient up out of the bed. *I am generally an I-can-do-it-myself type of person. But I am drawn to this image of Jesus helping the woman up. In my imagination I watch Jesus help her up over and over and over again. In my heart of hearts, I don’t want to do things on my own. I truly want God to do his work through me and with others. Let the old self die, I tell myself. Be transformed, Shirley. [Read that again but enter your name here.]*

When the fever leaves, Peter’s mother-in-law (I wish she had a name) begins to wait on them. That’s it. There is no fan-fare. No headlines in the local paper. No thanks to Jesus from the bottom of her heart. The healing happens and she carries on with her daily tasks. The gospel-writer includes no mention of gratitude; just the woman’s simple return to the work that was expected of her. Maybe the act of returning to her work was her expression of gratitude.

Everything in this story is so matter-of-fact; so ordinary. *In a way, it reminds me of my every-day life right now. Could it be that Jesus comes to me every morning and takes me by the hand and helps me up so that I can go about my normal tasks? Could the mother-in-law’s fever be a symbol to me of my spiritual ailment(s) which, when left untouched by Jesus, keep me from serving him? Has Jesus’ touch become so common, so matter-of-fact, that every day when I get up and go about my normal tasks I barely recognize his touch?*

As I **respond** to this story I am preoccupied with thoughts and prayers for a member of my extended family who has been lying in a hospital bed for over two weeks unable to regain full consciousness following a brain injury. I think of

the hands which have held his hands, unable to help him up. *Jesus, come to him, take his hand and help him up.*

As I rest in this story, I relinquish my work and am quieted by the touch of Jesus.

Amen.

*Here is a brief description of each of the four parts of this method of reading and praying scripture. Before you begin, offer a simple prayer of gratitude and openness to God and his word.

Read. Slowly read the passage, aloud if possible, and listen for a word or phrase which catches your attention. Acknowledge the word or phrase without trying to figure out why it glows more brightly than the rest. Receive the word or phrase as a gift from God.

Reflect. Read the passage again and allow yourself several minutes to reflect on it. Consider the following types of questions or exercises as you ponder the text. This is not a check-list to accomplish, but merely the types of things you could do to process the story. The reflections do not have to be all cozy and flowery. Let them be real.

- Imagine yourself in the story. Is there someone with whom you identify?
- What emotions do you sense as you read the story?
- What memories or imaginations come alive as you read?
- What things concern you today and how might this passage intersect with your life today or this week?

Respond. Read the passage again. Converse silently with God about the passage. Turn your reflections into a poem, drawing, song, dance, etc.—either real or in your mind’s eyes and ears—and make this your prayer. Tell God what this story says about him and what it says about you, or humanity in general. Consider what God might be saying to you, or asking you to do or be, through this passage today.

Rest. Sit quietly. Soak in the mystery of God’s presence through his word.