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Lectio Imagio Divina

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"Beware of the barrenness of the busyness of life."
—Corrie ten Boom

Silence and solitude. That was the answer Dallas Willard gave me when I asked, "What is the most significant spiritual discipline for our youth today?" The Q & A followed the seminar during which he cautioned us as youth pastors not to be caught up in the buzz or vogue around spiritual formation while neglecting the most important mandate we have: discipleship, the tending of the hearts and souls toward Christ-likeness.

There's a divine center in us—a place where we see pictures of what it's like to abide in Christ. In his book *A Testament of Devotion*, Thomas R. Kelly writes:

"Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a divine center, a speaking voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is in our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives...Life is meant to be lived from a center, a divine center. Our real problem, in failing to center down, is not a lack of time; it is, I fear, in too many of us, lack of joyful, enthusiastic delight toward him at every hour of the day and night."

But is busyness the reason we falter? I think perhaps it's more than that. There's a disconnect between the way information is received and how it's processed. The evolution of pedagogical styles has gapped the printed and linear, text-only information-alley generation (that is so last century) and the high-speed, graphic- and image-driven, information-highway generation. How do we distill information and experiences into an understanding and knowledge of oneself and God?

Vincent Van Gogh said that he must grasp life at its depths; but how do we access the depths of life? The spiritual disciplines of contemplation, silence, and solitude have become the tools of the hour; because with the speed that information is thrown at us from every side, the only way we can make sense of it is if we take time to stop, be silent, and contemplate—creating a space where we can hear the still small voice of God.

Unfortunately, we're often still quite limited in how we do "quiet times." The written word isn't the only way God can speak to us; but many Christians, especially Evangelical Protestants, are word based. We love meditating on the written word, but with the image-driven media we have to adapt to, the written word can seem sublimely boring in quiet time practices, especially to younger people.

Have you ever had a quiet time reading pictures instead of the written word? One day a friend asked me to teach at his youth group. He gave me a guitar to use as an opener, the kids were there with their Bibles, and all seemed ready for me to start preaching. I opted out on all of the tools so familiar to me and to the kids. Instead, I pulled out my laptop and ran a slide show of different images. I told them that we were going to have our quiet time together "reading" images. I went on to explain that this high-tech quiet time was actually a *lectio divina*—the sacred reading of the word.

Lectio divina is an Ancient Christian version of a quiet time. I added a version of 21st-century *lectio divina* using images to hear the voice of God even in its faintest whisper. In our *lectio divina*, or should I say *lectio imagio divina* (divine reading of images), before I run the slide show, I ask the students to be quiet and ask the Lord to speak to them through the slide show. I show the images very slowly and gently; we take time to be silent with the ear of our hearts ready to hear the quiet voice of the Lord interacting with our world.

Images and stories related to the slide show became the very text of God for us to read. The slide show images are selections of secular and sacred, but through the *lectio* the secular and divine became an abiding world where Christ incarnates.

As youth pastors we face an amazing opportunity to reinvent ourselves. Our roles are being redefined. We're learning how to be poets, artists, innovators, guides, and techies. The guitar isn't the only tool. We need to become contemplatives, mystics, and more. For only in becoming a beloved do we become Christ incarnate so our young people can taste and see the goodness of the Lord.