



## The Five R's Method of Bible Study

from *The Art of Teaching the Bible* by Christine Eaton Blair  
This practical book is highly recommended.

### Begin with Prayer

#### Remembering

Make a list of things you already “know” about the scripture text. List both memories from your life and references from culture. Don’t worry about whether these things are good interpretations.

#### Revisiting the Text

1. Read the text silently to yourselves (make notes, jot questions), then read it together as a group.
2. Ask questions about the text. Follow your curiosity; ask “what did this mean to the original hearers?” Ask “Behind-the-Text” questions and “In-the-Text” questions.
3. Find answers to your questions using interpretive tools. Interpretive tools are commentaries, Bible dictionaries, concordances, Bible atlases, Sunday school lessons, several Bible translations, etc.

We ask the historical and contextual questions in two ways: We ask Behind-the-Text Questions, and In-the-Text Questions. Behind-the-Text questions are *historical*. They ask, who, what, when, where and why. In-the-Text questions are *literary*. They ask about key words, actions, dialogue, and narration.

Revisiting the Text is also the first move toward *interpreting the text*. This step can go on as long as participants are engaged—even for several class sessions!

#### Reflecting Critically

“to discern, to make careful judgments”

This is where we are actively addressing the question: *How do we discern the way of Jesus as we engage the culture in which we find ourselves?*

In this step, we think carefully about two texts and how they meet: the text of our lives and the Bible text we are studying.

#### Steps for Reflecting Critically

1. Review basic principles of biblical interpretation:
  - Biblical texts must be understood within their historical and cultural context.
  - Biblical texts must be read within the framework of the larger text—the whole gospel, which is the good news of God’s grace, love and mercy.

- Jesus Christ is the center of our interpretation. “When the Bible seems to disagree, Jesus is the referee.” (Marion Bontrager)
  - God’s word is always calling us into God’s future, God’s new creation. What God is doing in the world is reconciling people to God, each other and all creation.
2. Consider what you learned about the text during Revisiting the Text.
    - Think about what it means for us in today’s world.
    - Begin to draw some conclusions and test them as a group. Ponder them prayerfully for a few minutes.
  3. Examine the issues present in the text of our own lives
    - You could list issues present in your personal lives, community, region or nation.
    - You could peruse newspapers, watch a news video clip, refer to prayer lists, etc.
    - You could journal about issues that concern you
  4. Reflect together on the intersection of #2 and #3.
    - You could review the list from step one, deciding which items are valid and which are not, based on your study of the text.
    - Have a lively discussion of how we apply this text to our lives in practical ways.
    - Keep in mind the goal of understanding the Bible and being changed by it; we do not all have to understand and apply it in exactly the same way.

## **Reinterpreting**

“Retelling the story in our own language.”

- Allow the Holy Spirit access to your imaginations and emotions.
- Use your imagination to retell the story as an interview, mediation, skit, blog post, email, poem, twitter feed, Powerpoint, song—whatever seems good.
- Express the message of the text in your own language.
- Reinterpreting can spark new understanding as we hear the text retold by others.

## **Responding**

- Ask together: “What does this text call me--or us--to be and to do?”
- Respond to the text through both action and prayer.

