

Confessional Bible Study in One Page

Developed by Mary Schertz¹ and summarized by Michelle Curtis

The goal of Confessional Bible Study is to practice more lively and life-giving Bible study that engages Scripture with our whole selves. These steps help us to practice that posture—but it's not a formula, so adapt as suits your group.

1. Study and Engagement: The first step is simply reading the text. The goal here is to open it up, not close it down. As you begin, encourage your group not to assume they already know what it says. Let it be unfamiliar so you can hear anew how the Spirit is speaking.
 - a. Begin with a prayer for illumination. This could be extemporaneous or a pre-written prayer you find online or a sung prayer like, “O God your Word”² (the goal is to prepare our hearts to slow down and listen).
 - b. Read the text aloud.
 - c. Read the text aloud a second time. Try using a different translation or if it is a story, assign people to read parts.
 - d. Give the group time to reflect on the text alone for 3-5 minutes. What *information* do you need to help you understand this text? What questions do you have about it? What do you already know (about what comes before/after; about the characters; about the book of the Bible it is in)? Then go around the room and allow each person to share one question, observation, or insight.
2. Artful Response: Allowing the text to get inside us and “read us” through art and imagination. This is likely to be the most unfamiliar step, and you will grow into it as your practice together and learn from one another. The point is not the product but rather allowing this Scripture get from your head into your heart.
 - a. Take a deep breath all together. Let go. Step out of the quest for information.
 - b. Prayer for illumination again. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak as you enter the text.
 - c. Give time for individual artful response (10-20 min.). The first time you do this, each person can write the text out by hand. Then as time allows mark it up with circling, highlighting, or doodles. Let people be creative and let it be okay to do something simple or childlike. See back side for additional ideas.
3. Worship: “As we come before God with these people and this text and adore Christ, we experience the Sabbath that renews, restores, and releases.”¹
 - a. Pray prayer of illumination again
 - b. Read Scripture again!
 - c. Ask if this Scripture has reminded anyone of a song or hymn. If someone has a song come to mind, sing it together or listen to a recording.
 - d. Give everyone a minute to listen for what prayer rises in them.
 - e. Close by going giving everyone a chance to pray their prayer (aloud or silently).

¹ For more, see: Mary Schertz, “Reading the Bible Confessionally” in *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* Vol. 22, No. 2 (2021): <https://press.palni.org/ojs/index.php/vision/article/view/705/649>.

² You can find this sung prayer by James Clemens on p. 405 of *Take Our Moments and Our Days: An Anabaptist Prayer Book, Volume 1, Ordinary Time*.

Confessional Bible Study Page 2: Additional possibilities

1. Study and Engagement: If you are studying with a group that comes from more than one first language, you might encourage people to look at text in their first language or another translation during their reflection time instead of the questions provided in 1.d. This can be a fruitful way to learn from one another in an intercultural group.
2. Artful Response takes practice. It will be awkward the first time. Some people will like it more than others. But even people who do not consider themselves artistic can do this! The goal is not to create “good art” but rather to respond to the text in a more imaginative and playful way that helps us to digest it differently than we can in an intellectual conversation. The following is a list of ideas for artful response and feel free to add your own:
 - a. Write out the text word for word by hand
 - b. Give everyone a printed copy of the text to mark up with colored pencils or highlighters
 - c. Rewrite the story in your own words—imagine how you’d tell this story to young children
 - d. Draw the story
 - e. Draw one image from the text
 - f. Make a collage about the text cutting out images from magazines
 - g. Create one image from the text in 3D art—pipe cleaners or play doh, etc.
 - h. If one word or phrase has stood out to you, stay with that word or phrase and write it out over and over until it fills a page. Use this as a practice to meditate on that word or phrase and what God is saying to you through it.
 - i. Write a song based on the words or ideas of the text
 - j. Make the text into a “blackout poem”
 - k. OR, instead of doing an individual response, you can lead the whole group in hearing and entering the text through their imagination: Read text again and ask everyone to imagine themselves inside this story. *Who are you? What do you see/hear/smell/feel? What do you experience?* Then ask another person to read the text and as the group listens, ask them to consider how this text intersects with their own lives. E.g. If you were reading John 20:1–18 you could ask people to consider how they would respond to Jesus’s question: “Why are you crying?”
3. Worship
 - a. As the leader, you might choose a song or hymn related to the text ahead of time to share with your group during this time. Especially when you’re first beginning Confessional Bible Study.
 - b. It may be helpful to provide a specific prayer prompt to help your group get started. For example, if you are reading psalm of thanksgiving, invite everyone to pray something as simple as “Thank you God for X.” Or if you are reading John 20:1–18, you might invite people to pray for the things that make them cry or to praise God for the places where they can say with Mary, “I have seen the Lord.”