



**Reading and Reflection Guide A: Living Faithfully in Your World**

**Opening Session**  
**Unit One: Spiritual Autobiography and Listening**  
**and**  
**Resources**

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Education for Ministry (EfM) program is a four-year study and group reflection process for the formation of Christian ministry through the development of knowledge, attitude, skill, and identity as Christians. Published texts and essays provide the primary knowledge content in the study of the Christian tradition.

The first year studies the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). The second year offers a study of the New Testament. Year Three provides study of Christian (Church) history. Theology, ethics, and interfaith encounter constitute study in the fourth year.

### Texts for Each Year

- **Year One:** *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* by John J. Collins. *The Holy Bible*, Old Testament and Apocrypha .
- **Year Two:** *Introducing the New Testament* by Mark Allan Powell. *The Holy Bible*, New Testament.
- **Year Three:** *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* by Diarmaid MacCulloch.
- **Year Four:** *Theology for a Troubled Believer* by Diogenes Allen. *The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety* by Timothy F. Sedgwick. *My Neighbor's Faith* edited by Jennifer Howe Peace, Or N. Rose, and Gregory Mobley.

Note: The most recent Oxford Annotated edition of New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is recommended, but any translation may be used as long as it includes the Apocrypha. Paraphrased Bibles are not recommended for study.

### Reading and Reflection Guide

*A Reading and Reflection Guide* provides weekly reading assignments, reflection questions, and additional supportive resources for the group.

- The entire group uses the same *Guide* each year Volume A, B, C, or D. Each volume has a particular focus: Volume A, "Living Faithfully in Our World," works with the contexts of a person's life; Volume B builds on "Living Faithfully in an Intercultural World"; Volumes C and D explore "Christian Maturity" and "Our Journey into God," respectively.
- Each volume contains **Part One**, the reading and reflection assignments, and **Part Two**, supporting materials, such as methods of spiritual autobiography and theological reflection.
- Five primary units in each volume have six sessions each.
- Two interlude units in each volume have two sessions each.
- An organization session at the beginning and a closing session at the end bring the total to thirty-six sessions in a year.

### Focus of the Reading and Reflection Guide Units

The first session of each primary unit is either an essay or other material for all in the group to read to help set the stage for the focus of the unit:

- **Unit One**—identity and meaning (individual, corporate, and historical);

- **Unit Two**—theological reflection as a life skill; orientation to attitudes to prayer, worship, and spirituality;
- **First Interlude**—the authority of the Bible, praying with the Bible;;
- **Unit Three**—spirituality, prayer, and worship;
- **Unit Four**—integrating behavior and belief into a congruency that supports faithful living;
- **Second Interlude**—ministry and the priesthood of all believers ;
- **Unit Five**—vocation: hearing the call and passion of our lives in relation to God.

## Introduction

*Reading and Reflection Guide* Volume A, "Living Faithfully in Your World," attends to the different worlds (contexts) in which each person lives. These worlds have distinctive qualities and features that distinguish one from another.

Family life, especially the family of origin, provides a primary contextual reality. Work presents another context, while the world of play, recreation, and entertainment make up yet another sphere. The physical world including our body constitutes another powerful world. Over time these worlds change and morph into significantly different contexts, yet past events, people, and values endure even when they have faded into the past.

Once a person recognizes the various worlds she or he inhabits, faithful living can be explored. It is important to begin an examination of faith issues in our worlds by clarifying the difference between faith and belief. Urban T. Holmes and John Westerhoff, in a remarkable book called *Christian Believing*, made the distinction between faith and belief in the following way:

It is important to distinguish between *faith* and *belief*. Religious faith is an attribute of personhood. As long as we have records of humanity we have records of religious faith. Faith, deeply personal, dynamic, and ultimate, has always been present among all peoples at all times in history.

Faith—the word appears two hundred and thirty-three times in the Authorized Version of the Bible (belief appears only once)—is best understood as fidelity, as trusting obedience. Faith implies a deliberate and positive existential involvement; it precedes belief. The word for "belief" in Latin is *opinio*. "To believe" is *opinor, opinari*—that is, to have an opinion or to make an intellectual assertion.

*Credo* should never have been translated as "belief." The only reason it was so translated is that in classical theology, faith and belief were once considered synonymous. In any case, *credo* literally means "I set my heart." To have religious faith—*credo*—is to pledge allegiance, to hold dear, to prize, to love intimately, to give our loyalty, to commit our lives.

Faith can be and indeed must be expressed in words and ideas. *Beliefs are intellectual expressions of a people's faith*. But beliefs are *not* faith. Traditionally, theology has said that seekers ask two basic questions: First, "Is there a God?" —a question which demands a simple "yes" or "no" answer; *faith* is the affirmative response. Second, "What is God?" —a question of *belief* whose answer is complex, diverse, and inadequate.

Faith is like falling in love. But suppose you are the father of an adolescent daughter, with a typical, built-in suspicion of all her suitors. Your daughter tells you that she is "in love" with a man, but you want more than that. You ask: "Tell us what he is like." What you are asking for is a statement of belief.<sup>1</sup>

In the coming weeks, our work will move through five integrated units. Each has a purpose and builds on the work done in the prior unit(s). Unit One, "Spiritual Autobiographies and Listening," focuses on reflecting on experience from the standpoint of a variety of worlds (contexts). Its purpose is to provide the resources needed to create a spiritual autobiography using contextual lenses. In addition, as

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<sup>1</sup> Urban T. Holmes and John Westerhoff, *Christian Believing* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979) , 16.

individual spiritual autobiographies are shared, this unit explores listening as a fundamental skill for ministry. Unit Two, “Theological Reflection as a Life Skill,” lays the foundation for developing another fundamental skill for ministry, reflecting from a theological standpoint on all of one’s life. This unit provides the models and methods that EfM uses to integrate experience with the Christian heritage. Unit Three, “Spirituality, Prayer, and Worship,” encourages prayer and worship as spiritual disciplines and explores how spirituality sustains and supports a life of faith. Unit Four, “Building Your Theology,” provides resources for the intentional examination and construction of a personal theology through the integration of belief, behavior, and doctrine. Unit Five, “Vocation,” reflects on vocation as lived in daily life. This unit offers a vocational development model for use in discerning and responding to God’s call.

In Volume A, the first interlude unit, between Units Two and Three, assigns reading for the group in Christopher Bryan’s *And God Spoke*, which offers a perspective on how Anglican Christians approach the Bible. The second interlude unit, between Units Four and Five, assigns reading for the group in L. William Countryman’s *Living on the Border of the Holy*, which considers ministry in the context of the priesthood of all believers.

The year promises to be challenging, exciting, frustrating, encouraging, and sometimes perhaps even disturbing. The work is done together in a reflecting community of colleagues committed to helping one another know better what it means to live as an adult Christian in our worlds.

Week One  
Orientation and Planning for the Year

*This session is for mentors who may want to begin with a session to help organize the group and distribute materials. The components are suggestions of pieces that could be included in a Preparation Session. This is not a design that must or needs to be done, or done in this order, unless a mentor would find some or all of it helpful. After the Preparation Session, group members read according to the Guide. Unit One begins with Session Two.*

**Worship**

TRADITION

***Prayer for a Pilgrim Who Struggles with the Journey*<sup>2</sup>**

**Joyce Rupp**

Pilgrim God, there is an exodus going on in my life—desert stretches, a vast land of questions. Inside my heart, your promises tumble and turn. No pillar of cloud by day or fire by night that I can see.

My heart hurts at leaving loved ones and so much of the security I have known. I try to give in to the stretching and the pain. It is hard, God, and I want to be settled, secure, safe and sure. And here I am feeling so full of pilgrim’s fear and anxiety.

O God of the journey, lift me up, press me against your cheek. Let your great love hold me and create a deep trust in me. Then set me down, God of the journey; take my hand in yours, and guide me ever so gently across the new territory of my life.

God of my life, create in me the heart of a pilgrim. There is a part of me that fights letting go. Do not allow me to become so rooted or so accustomed to my daily tasks and inner securities, that I miss your voice calling me to greater growth and deeper maturity in faith. I want to hoard my blessings, to hang onto my gifts, to hide my talents and the blessings of my life,

I want to take them out, one by one, only when I know that it is safe and I won’t get hurt or emptied. Stir afire in me such a great love for you and your people that I will constantly celebrate life and appreciate its beauty, even when it is painful.

Allow me to “see visions and dream dreams” so that I can live with your vision and not be overwhelmed by the struggles of the journey. God of the Exodus, I know you are near.

Grant me the courage to change, whether that change is an inner or outer one. Deepen my awareness of your faithful presence and bless my pilgrim heart. Amen.

**Check-in**

Take a few minutes to consider the following:

What events during the break have especially affected you?

What for you is the essence of EfM?

**ACTION  
POSITION**

Journal briefly or make notes, as you wish.

Distribute textbooks.

TRADITION

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<sup>2</sup> Joyce Rupp, *Praying Our Goodbyes: A Spiritual Companion Through Life’s Losses and Sorrows* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave maria Press, 2009), 125.

- **Year One:** *A Short Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* by John J. Collins. *The Holy Bible*, Old Testament and Apocrypha.
- **Year Two:** *Introducing the New Testament* by Mark Allan Powell. *The Holy Bible*, New Testament.
- **Year Three:** *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* by Diarmaid MacCulloch.
- **Year Four:** *Theology for a Troubled Believer* by Diogenes Allen. *The Christian Moral Life: Practices of Piety* by Timothy F. Sedgwick. *My Neighbor's Faith* edited by Jennifer Howe Peace, Or N. Rose, and Gregory Mobley.

Distribute the *Reading and Reflection Guide, Volume A* to everyone.

Go over:

Using the weekly *Reading and Reflection Guide*

Overview of the Year, found on pages 31-40 in Part II of the Guide

Note that the readings for some sessions, in particular those at the beginning of each unit, will be found in the Reflection and Reading Guide rather than in the textbooks. Most participants will find looking ahead on a regular basis at the next several assignments, especially in the case of the Interlude books, will help them plan adequate time for reading before the sessions.

### Review Attitudes towards Change and Transition

CULTURE

William Bridges notes that change is situational and external—new job, different goals, and new rules. Transition is internal—what happens and is happening emotionally and individually as a result of the change. Without a transition, a change is just a rearrangement of the furniture. Unless transition happens, the change isn't "owned" and it "won't work," because it doesn't "take." Transition is a natural process of disorientation and reorientation. Bridges's Rule No. 1: When you're in transition, you find yourself coming back in new ways to old activities.<sup>3</sup>

*Returning participants come back to EfM with new texts while others come as newcomers to the program, which represents change and transition in itself.*

### Review Bridges's Outline on Change:

CHANGE

*All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy;  
for what we leave behind is part of ourselves;  
we must die to one life before we can enter into another.*

—Anatole France

1. Identify who is losing what.
2. Accept the reality and importance of the subjective losses.
3. Don't be surprised at "overreaction."
4. Acknowledge the losses openly and sympathetically.
5. Expect and accept the signs of grieving.
6. Compensate for the losses.
7. Give people information, and do it again and again.
8. Define what's over and what isn't.
9. Mark the endings.
10. Treat the past with respect.

<sup>3</sup> William Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2009),

11. Let people take a piece of the old way with them.
12. Show how endings ensure continuity of what really matters.

**Personal Reflection**

CULTURE/ACTION

Bridges’s Rule No. 2: Every transition begins with an ending. Our whole way of being—the personal style that makes you recognizably “you” and me “me”—is developed within and adjusted to fit a given life pattern.

Bridges’s Rule No. 3: Although it is advantageous to understand your own style of endings, some part of you will resist that understanding as though your life depended on it.

Think about how you tend to act at the end of an evening at a friend’s house or leaving a job or a neighborhood. Do you try to drag things out by starting new conversations and activities as others seem to be ready to leave, or do you say suddenly that it was a nice evening and dash out? (Share what you choose.)

**Learning Goals and Needs**

Think of the implications of stories told.

POSITION

What goals do you have for your participation in EfM this year?  
 What will help you to make this transition in your own life?

*Possible theological reflection suggestions:*

1) Explore “transition” from theological perspectives, using the traditional terms of creation, sin, judgment, repentance, and resurrection; or

2) Explore “transition” as a provocative word using the method found on page\_\_ in Part II of this guide.

**Covenant**

Questions to consider toward forming Norms:

POSITION

What environment will best facilitate your goals for this year?  
 What commitments will you make to your fellow travelers on this journey?

Note: The Respectful Communications Guidelines from the Kaleidoscope Institute, found on page 43 in Part II, may be a helpful resource in setting the group’s own norms for community life.

**Schedule**

ACTION/POSITION

Thirty-four seminar sessions in five six-week units and four Interlude sessions  
 Holiday breaks  
 Worship  
 Spiritual Autobiographies  
 Theological Reflection  
 Anything else that needs to be scheduled

**Optional Further Work on Change and Transition**

CULTURE

Bridges’s Rule No. 4: First there is an ending, then a beginning, and an important empty or fallow time in between.

**The Neutral Zone:** Attentive inactivity and ritualized routine, emptiness, old reality looks transparent, nothing feels solid anymore. The process of disintegration and reintegration is the source of renewal.

Tools: consisting of ways “in” not of ways “out”—surrender, acceptance, wilderness, retreat or liminal space, reminiscence, recollection and awareness, notice hunches, coincidences and synchronicities toward autobiography, making meaning, discovering what you really want and long for.  
 Traps: fast forward, reverse, depression.

**Beginnings:** Much as we long for external signs, we must settle for inner signals that alert us to the proximity of new beginnings—a new theme, a strange fragrance, an inner idea about an external opportunity—that bring us home to ourselves. When we are ready to make a new beginning, we shortly find an opportunity.

Ways to support the process—stop getting ready and act, begin to identify yourself with the final result of the new beginning, take things step by step, shift your purpose from the goal to the process of reaching the goal.

### **Personal Reflection**

**ACTION**

Think back to the neutral zones and the best and important beginnings in your own past. What tools have been most helpful to you? What has brought you home to yourself?

### **Worship**

Psalm 139, *Prayer of One Experiencing Adult Transition by Joyce Rupp*<sup>4</sup>

O Lord of revelation, once again I find myself opening up to another life process, full of pain, full of mystery and a certain aching wonder. I hear you calling me to face new beginnings, to leave the old behind, to discover new and deeper parts of my total being. O Lord God, help me to realize that I can be free, that I am being freed at this present moment. Let me look beyond my own small world and smile on the mysterious way that you allow each one of us to grow into the best of our own uniqueness. I want to live and to love the mystery. I remember the wonder and newness of discovering myself as person. I recall how I began to respect and to love the secret of who I am, of how I began to sense the greater and fuller dimensions of becoming “me.” I thank you for all the tastes you have given to me of myself through the crises of my life.

O God of revelation, I offer you the struggle and the beauty of being human. I ask your blessing as my human growth continues to be revealed in the midst of my daily activities. I realize that my birth was just a beginning, just a first step in the continuous series of births that have called me to constant dying and rising, to a deeper and more meaningful life. I hear now another call to die and to live more deeply, to live more wholly, more fully, a call to be opened and freed. O God, it takes so much time to bring all of myself to birth—a lifetime—and I become so impatient. This anxiousness and this anxiety I feel ... its healthy, you say? It's all right? It's a part of my existence? It's shaping my heart into yours? Fully human? Ah yes, my God, let me not fear the mistakes or the failures of the anxieties that come with growth; rather, let me see in all of this process the signs and the strength of your cross and your resurrection. Let me know the blessing of your presence in this ever-birthing life of mine. Amen.

*For Transformation the internal and external have to match.*

*—Laurie Rokutani*

***All begin the reading and reflection according to the Guide directions for Week Two.***

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<sup>4</sup> Joyce Rupp, *Praying Our Goodbyes*, 142.

# Unit One

## Spiritual Autobiography and Listening

## Week Two

### Overview

An EfM seminar differs from an academic seminar. In a college context, a primary concern is understanding and mastery of content. The EfM program invites people into small, mentored communities that help us understand our lives and shape our actions as we deepen our Christian faith. The seminar is the primary place where members through conversation, prayer, and theological reflection discover and exercise gifts for ministry among those with whom they live and work.

Adults learn what they need to know as they enter into the struggle to understand the challenges of living faithfully. Mentors are trained to facilitate conversation and provide support as participants take responsibility for their learning; a mentor is neither the teacher nor the authority on the text readings. The seminar is a place where we practice the art of framing open-ended questions and listening to one another.

Some optimal techniques help avoid book reporting or retelling of study material and assist in drawing learning from study and bringing that learning into a meaningful seminar conversation: reflecting on your reading notes and highlights; noticing key concerns that are raised for you in your study; thinking about how your study can support you in living in today's world with faith.

### Introduction to Context

A truism has grown out of thinking contextually: "Context is everything." The specific particularities of each experience shape how one views the urgent questions of being human. Who are we and who am I? What is truth and how can I know it? What is real and endures? What is the end (*telos*) and purpose of my life? Answers to these basic human questions arise out of particular contexts. To live faithfully in today's world requires attention to how different contexts impact our understanding of God, self, others, and the world. A person of faith does not live in a vacuum but among the specifics of cultural and religious contexts. Peter C. Hodgson, professor of theology at Vanderbilt University, wrote of the challenge of living in today's world:

What is the new cultural situation that we face as North American Christians? It seems that it is not that of the "underside" of history, as is in the case with Latin American, African, and Asian theologies, but rather that of the "passage" of history—the passing of Western bourgeois culture, with its ideals of individuality, patriarchy, private rights, technical rationality, historical progress, capitalist economy, the absoluteness of Christianity, and so on. It *feels* as though we are reaching the end of a historical era since we find ourselves in the midst of cognitive, historical, political, socioeconomic, environmental, sexual/gender, and religious changes of vast importance, comparable perhaps to the great enlightenment that inaugurated the modern age.<sup>5</sup>

Unit One of Volume A lays the foundation for thinking contextually. A person needs to be sensitive and compassionate to the contexts in his or her own life and that of others so that there is an increased probability of staying in conversation or community with others. Grappling with the reality of contextual sensitivity increases the growing awareness of God's activity within and among all people. Each week's work provides a portion of what a person or a group might need to create the foundation for living faithfully in the world.

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Hodgson, *Winds of the Spirit: A Constructive Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 53.

## Spiritual Autobiographies

A spiritual autobiography is your life story—the telling of your journey with the purpose of discerning and proclaiming how your experience has shaped your relationship with God. Each year in the program you are asked to recall your life story. Later, you are given an opportunity to share what you think is appropriate with your seminar group. A different structure is provided for your use for each of the four years of the program. These structured methods allow you to look at the whole sweep of your life. Constructing your autobiography provides a firm foundation for the continuing work of integrating the content of your year’s study with the events of your life. Your experience is a primary resource for your theological education; the yearly review of your life story enables you to hear how the timbre and direction of that story have changed in the last twelve months. Your call, discernment, vocation, and ministry are imbedded in your spiritual journey. This process of telling and retelling your story helps those themes come more clearly into your consciousness.

A spiritual autobiography may contain both religious material —significant people or times within the religious community—and everyday material—people and times in your life that have influenced who you are now and how you understand God’s presence or absence in your life.

The work you do on your spiritual autobiography is private, “for your eyes only.” This allows you to be free, without concern about how others will interpret either the context or expression.

Preparing a spiritual autobiography each year provides a way to deepen your understanding of Christian life and ministry. By virtue of your baptism you were called to ministry, guided and pushed by personal gifts, passions, skills, experiences, and interests.

Once you prepare your spiritual autobiography, you need to decide what you want to share with your seminar group. Martin Buber, a twentieth-century philosopher and Jewish theologian, is reputed to have said that he could never hold a significant conversation with another person until he had heard the other’s life story. The purpose of sharing autobiographies is to build trust and understanding within the group and to begin to make connections within your own story. We need the experience of hearing other life stories to know that we are not alone in God’s world. By sharing appropriate stories of our lives we form learning communities that can challenge and support us throughout our lives.

Your mentor will relate her or his own story and help the group structure the time for sharing of autobiographies. Most groups give each member around ten minutes to tell his or her story, followed by time for the rest of the group to respond. Spiritual autobiographies are the focus of most of the seminar time for the first few meetings of the year. This is a special time for your group. This component of your group’s life will carry you to the next phase of your year together. This may be the first time to tell your story in this way. It may seem a bit daunting at first. Remember that you should offer what you feel comfortable sharing in the group. This is not an opportunity for “group therapy” or psychologizing, so the group should not engage in raising questions about motives or probe for information beyond what you share. Feel free to say “no” or to say that you do not wish to explore questions that others may raise out of curiosity or concern.

Sharing your spiritual autobiography is a way to say, “Here I am,” and to join your EFM group as a full participant. Over the years in EFM you will probably find that your spiritual autobiography changes. You may find yourself free to talk about things that were previously guarded. You also may find that your freedom to be yourself will grow as your personal story, the life of the group, and the story of God’s people relate to each other.

## Preparation for Seminar Session Three and Following Sessions

### Spiritual Autobiography

**Background:** Experience begins from the moment of birth and continues to the present moment. “Raw” experience is neutral and insignificant until a person interprets the experience and gives it meaning. Each grows up living within multiple worlds. There is the world of the family, the intellect (mind), the physical world of the body through which we know that physical universe. Lives involve living within an economic world; that is, the way in which someone gets required resources. The world of play is part of experience. Each of these worlds constitutes a context in which a person creates or discovers identity and meaning.

In EfM, participants are invited to construct a spiritual autobiography according to methods that change each year. This year, the method grows out of the formation theme of Volume A: *Living Faithfully in Your World*.

**Recollection and Reflection:** Living and growing as a person means living among several worlds or contexts. Recall “worlds” or contexts in which you have lived: intellect, family, religion, play, body. You may be able to think of some others.

- Who are the people of importance in that world?
- What concerns or questions were central to the different worlds in which you live?
- What events do you remember?
- What stands out for you as you remember moving through different stages of your life?

After bringing together memories of those times and contexts, notice any sense of who you have been and who you are. These worlds or contexts and your recollection of the experiences shape your autobiography. In EfM our interest is in fashioning a *spiritual* autobiography that reflects the answers to theological concerns about the presence or absence of God, or the experience of grace, forgiveness, repentance or questions about evil or life after death, among other concerns.

**Preparation:** After working with the context/worlds to recall people and circumstances of your entire life, focus on any five to ten years: How was/is your faith impacted by your various worlds during that period; how has your faith sustained you through the selected period? When or how did you experience the presence of God? What would you consider grace in various periods of your life?

**At the Seminar:** Each person will have time in the next three or four weeks to offer his or her autobiography.

### ***Education for Ministry and the Importance of Listening***

Education occurs as a person reflects on experience and content. Listening initiates learning. Christian ministry begins and continues with deep listening—listening for God, listening to others, and listening to oneself. A learned ministry builds as a person “listens” to the Christian tradition and applies learning to daily living. Listening is central to both education and ministry.

Before proceeding much further, it is important to define what is meant by listening. Robert Bolton in *People Skills* takes great care in defining listening. The extended quotation below began to define listening by drawing a careful distinction between “hearing” and “listening”:

It is helpful to note the distinction between hearing and listening. “Hearing,” says Professor John Drakeford, “is a word used to describe the physiological sensory processes by which auditory sensations are received by the ears and transmitted to the brain. Listening, on the other hand, refers to a more complex psychological procedure involving interpreting and understanding the significance of the sensory experience.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, I can hear what another person is saying without really listening to him. A teenager put it this way: “My friends listen to what I say, but my parents only hear me talk.”

I recall a time when I was talking with someone who seemed to ignore everything I said. “You are not listening to me!” I accused. “Oh, yes I am!” he said. He then repeated word for word what I had told him. He heard exactly. But he wasn’t listening. He didn’t understand the meanings I was trying to convey. Perhaps you have had a similar experience and know how frustrating it can be to be heard accurately by someone who isn’t listening with understanding.

The distinction between merely hearing and really listening is deeply embedded in our language. The word listen is derived from two Anglo-Saxon words. One word is *hlystan*, which means “hearing.” The other is *hlosnian*, which means “to wait in suspense.” Listening, then, is the combination of hearing what the other person says and a suspenseful waiting, an intense psychological involvement with the other.<sup>7</sup>

“Listening is one of the greatest gifts we can give one another and a key component of a functioning group. Often we primarily focus on what we plan to say next rather than really listening to what others say.”<sup>8</sup> Skillful listening involves gestures, attitudes, and attention. Effective listening builds from a few basic, common sense approaches which emerge from the desire to respect the dignity of others.

Make eye contact without staring.

To really hear another person, listen for several things:

- What the person describes (what facts, events, situations, or information the person is trying to convey);
- How the person feels (what emotions accompany the information);
- Where the person places emphasis and shows energy;
- What the person’s body is saying (sometimes one is unaware of the mixture of reactions and important information the body gives).<sup>9</sup>

Any skill builds from the desire to acquire it and then practice, practice, and practice some more. Use the time from week to week to continually practice until listening becomes habitual.

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<sup>6</sup> John Drakeford, *The Awesome Power of the Listening Ear* (Waco, TX.: Word, 1967), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Bolton, *People Skills: How to Assert Yourself, Listen to Others, and Resolve Conflicts* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 31-32.

<sup>8</sup> “Listening Skills” from *Common Lessons and Supporting Materials* (Sewanee, Tennessee: University of the South, 1998, 2002), 6-8-1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

### Respond

Prepare your spiritual autobiography. Remember to divide the work into two phases. First, use the contextual format to remember your spiritual autobiography. This work is for your eyes only. Second, plan (and rehearse) what you will present to the other members of the group. Most groups ask each participant to speak for ten to fifteen minutes.

### Practice

Determine two or three ways you can put the listening skills listed above into practice. You may go to a coffee shop or some public place where you can practice listening among strangers. Also, plan how you will apply listening among those with whom you work and live.

## Week Three

### YEAR ONE

#### Read

Collins, Preface; Introduction; Chapter 1, "The Near Eastern Context" and Chapter 2, "The Nature of the Pentateuchal Narrative," pages 1-35

#### Focus

Identify and become familiar with pronunciation of: Essenes; Zealots; Mishnah; Talmud; Hellenism; apocalyptic thought; Septuagint; types of criticism; Dead Sea Scrolls

"Critical" does not mean debunking scripture, and it does not mean proving its truth. Religious people should and will find truth in their scriptures, but they may also be interested to learn something about where their scripture came from, who wrote it, and how editors collected it for them to read. For that only a historical-critical inquiry will do the job.

<http://www.wfu.edu/~horton/r102/hc-method.html>

Become familiar with terms and names such as anthropomorphic, Torah, Pentateuch, Julius Wellhausen, Hermann Gunkel, Rolf Rendtorff, Gerhard von Rad, Erhard Blum; sources in the Hebrew scripture, e.g. documentary hypothesis, J, E, P, and D sources.

### YEAR TWO

#### Read

Powell, Preface, Chapter 1, "The New Testament World," and Chapter 2, "The New Testament Writings," pages 9-62

Terms to note: testament; apostolic; catholic; seven categories of New Testament writings; Justin Martyr's account of Christian worship; canon; stages in the transmission of the Gospel Tradition; Marcion; exegesis; hermeneutics

In the chapter section "Exegesis and Hermeneutics" Powell states, "All the exegetical methods and academic disciplines described above are used by people who operate with different hermeneutical assumptions and interests. The methods themselves are simply tools that are employed for very different purposes by people with different attitudes and goals." [60] When reading the New Testament or reading how someone else interprets a passage, it is best (if not essential) to know the purpose in reading the text or the commentary.

### YEAR THREE

#### Read

MacCulloch, Acknowledgements, Introduction, Chapter 1, "Greece and Rome," pages xxiii-46

#### Focus

Perspectives and concepts to notice: Christians of the Middle East; Latin-speaking Church; Orthodoxy; repentance and conversion; Bible as central text of Christianity; "Books are the storehouses for human ideas"; historical truth; conventions used throughout book

Until recently, our church historians have primarily traced Christian history as the movement from Jerusalem, through the Roman Empire, and on to Europe steadily moving westward to the New World. Such a focus of history is no longer practical.

MacCulloch's book has been chosen for Year Three study precisely because of his taking a more global approach. He presents Christian history by following three paths: the movement west of Jerusalem that became the Western-Latin expression of Christianity; the path into the Middle East and Far East; and the Eastern Orthodoxies of Byzantium empires.

Points to note: *Logos*; *Hellas*; *polis*; *ekklesia*; Plato's influence on Christianity; Hellenistic Greece; *res publica* (republic); Roman Republic; imperial monarchy

The Greek understanding of *polis* provides a way to flesh out a fuller understanding of living within a social and intellectual context [cf. pages 25, 26]. It involves knowing the collective consciousness that greatly influences a person's identity. The *polis* greatly shapes how one behaves, thinks, and lives. MacCulloch writes extensively about the Greek and Roman worlds as the cultural contexts definitively impacting Christianity.

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

Allen, Preface, Introduction: "What is Theology?," pages ix-xxiv

### Focus

Identify the six motives Allen lists that draw people to Christianity. Reflect on which of the motives have been present in your being drawn to Christianity.

Allen notes that theological topics are sometimes organized under "rubrics." He includes such topics as creation, incarnation, Holy Spirit, etc. Compare the "rubrics" to the theological perspective questions used in the exploration phase of the theological reflection process. Identify two or three different topics that Allen names. Use the topic (rubric) to frame questions to explore a focus for theological reflection.

### Respond

What purposes, attitudes, and assumptions do you bring to your reading and study of the Christian tradition?

How have your attitudes and assumptions been fashioned by the various life contexts (worlds) identified in your spiritual autobiography work? How have those attitudes and assumptions affected your reading of the Christian tradition?

Use the notes or highlights you made during your assigned reading this week to reflect on the key contexts (concerns, interests, and issues) faced by the men and women of that time. What were some concerns for those who would live in faith?

### Practice

Describe what feeling "at home" means to you.

Knowing oneself includes an increasing awareness of the worlds in which each has lived or currently lives. In EfM a primary strategy for self-awareness is through the use of spiritual autobiographies. Review the information in Session Two regarding spiritual autobiographies as you are constructing your spiritual autobiography. Over the next few weeks, you will have opportunities to talk about your reflections on portions of your spiritual autobiography.

For the next few weeks the seminar will center on reflecting on your reading and reflecting on spiritual autobiographies. Instructions for preparing spiritual autobiographies are in this *Guide's* Part Two, Resources.

When you share your autobiographical reflections, what do you need to do to communicate your thoughts? When you listen to others, what do you need to do to listen well?

## Week Four

### YEAR ONE

#### Read

Genesis chapters 1-11

Collins, Chapter 3, "The Primeval History," pages 36-43

#### Focus

Terms to know: primeval; two creation stories; ' *adam*, Atrahsis myth; Epic of Gilgamesh; Sons of God (Genesis 6); Enuma Elish

Stories delight and entertain. They come in various forms and styles. Myths, epics, legends, novellas, and fables each tell some tale that entertains as they instill values, guidance, and meaning. Often the values live implicitly within the hearers of the stories only to surface in moments of crisis that call for decisive action. Some myths come into being to explain why things are as they are; others prescribe "right" behavior; while others venture into offering explanations along with establishing meaning.

All people, to some degree or another, seek answers to fundamental questions. What is truth and can I know it? What endures? What is real? Is there purpose to my life? Where did we come from and where are we going? Stories in all their forms, one way or another, offer answers to basic concerns.

### YEAR TWO

#### Read

Powell, Chapter 3, "Jesus" and Chapter 4, "The Gospels," pages 63-101

#### Focus

Points to define: The two doctrines of Jesus; kingdom of God; themes in Jesus' teaching; the historical Jesus

Terms to become familiar with: gospel as a literary genre; parables; miracle stories; pronouncement stories; passion and resurrection narratives; sayings of Jesus; the synoptic puzzle (*aka* problem); the Q source; Griesbach hypothesis; *Diatessaron*

### YEAR THREE

#### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 2, "Israel," pages 47-73

#### Focus

Terms to recognize: Maccabees; Tanakh; Apocrypha; the first and second exiles; Samaritans; the first and second temple; Septuagint; Hellenized Jews; creation out of nothingness; development of the notion of afterlife and individual soul; Hasmonian dynasty; Sadducees; Pharisees; Essenes; Zealots

Chapter 2 concludes Part I "A Millennium of Beginnings" in which MacCulloch traces the social and intellectual "seeds" of Christianity. The two histories (Greco-Roman and Israel) continually influence Christian life and thought.

The following quote appears near the bottom of page 50 of MacCulloch's *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*: ". . . even through their hardest and most wretched experiences of fighting with those they love most deeply, [Israel is] being given some glimpse of how they relate to God."

MacCulloch connects this struggle with Jacob's formational struggle with the angel of the Lord, with God, at the River Jabok. This way of drawing meaning from experience allowed Israel to view history through the eyes of faith. History became the arena in which they could see God at work, bringing them into being as a people bound to God. Some consider this a re-writing of history only, merely a means of self-justification. There is plenty of room for that view. However, this is also a way of interpreting history, of seeing God at work in the life and experience of an individual and a group; this is salvation history<M>history that tells the story of God's work of redemption.

#### **YEAR FOUR**

##### Read

Allen, Chapter 1, "The Holy One of Israel," pages 3-18

##### Focus

Identify the following terms and concepts: henotheist; monotheist; transcendence; immanence; *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*; Otto; Anselm; intellectual repentance; holiness  
Allen wrote that we know about God "because God makes Godself known or reveals Godself *in what God does*." (17) Identify what God has done that reveals something about God.

##### Respond

Trust, confidence, and faith often mean the same thing.

How have issues of trust been present in your life?

In your assigned reading this week, what issues of trust do you find?

What implication does trust have in your daily life?

##### Practice

### **LISTENING SKILLS**

#### **Review of Effective Listening**

Listening is one of the greatest gifts we can give one another and a key component of ministry and of a functioning group. Often we focus on what we plan to say next rather than really listening to what others say.

#### **Two Important Points**

Make eye contact without staring at the other person.

When you listen to another person, listen to four things:

- What the person describes (what facts, events, situations, or information the person is trying to convey)
- How the person feels (what emotions accompany the information)
- Where the person places emphasis and shows energy
- What the person's body is saying (sometimes one is unaware of the mixture of reactions and important information the body gives).

### **Ways Not to Listen**

Following are some exercises for developing effective listening skills and some dos and don'ts for framing questions when you listen to another person. Included are different types of listening and the purpose each type serves. Non-listening practices in a group reduce the sense of individual participation, detract from group cohesiveness, and contribute to conflict. The same styles detract from person-to-person engagement and limit ministry effectiveness.

1. Passive listening: not concentrating on what the person is saying.
2. Happy hooking: constantly changing the subject to center the conversation on you and not on the speaker. Many times people become very competitive and try to devise a topic that is similar but more exciting than the speaker's.
3. Mind reading: completing the other person's sentences, acting as if you understand what they are saying, giving advice before you have heard them through.
4. Inappropriate body language: jiggling your foot, clicking a pen, staring at the person, touching them without being sensitive to whether they want to be touched, saying you are interested while showing the opposite with your body, showing aggression and impatience with your body while saying you are concerned.

### **Ways to Sidetrack the Conversation**

1. Answering emotions with logic. When someone is excited about something, he or she does not want the first response to be a critical analysis. The speaker wants the other person to share some of his or her excitement.
2. Bringing in old issues. When people want to discuss a problem, they do not want to be told that they always have similar problems or that they failed to do something about the problem three months ago.
3. Using sarcasm or cynicism, or not taking the other person's issues seriously.

### **An Exercise to Improve Listening Skills**

PURPOSE: To provide an opportunity to practice listening skills.

1. During the week, give yourself a chance to carefully listen to something that someone tells you; a co-worker, family member, neighbor, store employee, and so forth. As soon as possible after the listening opportunity has ended, write about the experience, including the following:
  - a. A synopsis of the sharing
  - b. What he or she heard as the speaker's feelings about the event and about sharing the event
  - c. Words, images, and metaphors that stood out
  - d. What you thought the speaker was saying with his or her body.</LL>

2. During the week, when someone has listened to you in a way that caused you to feel really “heard,” tell the listener the following:
  - a. How the listener asked questions;
  - b. How the listener’s body posture encouraged sharing;
  - c. What other responses helped the you feel understood and helped you clarify what you were saying.<sup>10</sup>

What image conveys your sense of how it feels to really listen?

What image conveys your sense of how it feels for someone to really listen to you?

An additional resource on Storytelling and Holy Listening from the VocationCare program can be found on pages 41-42.

How might listening be a holy act?

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<sup>10</sup> Adapted from *Education for Ministry Common Lessons and Supportive Materials (2005)*, Section 6, pages 6-8-1 to 6-8-3.

## Week Five

### YEAR ONE

#### Read

"The Priestly Creation Story" essay provided in Part II, pages 36-40.

#### Focus

Identify and become familiar with pronunciation: covenant; Baals, cult; Sabbath, *ex nihilo*; Zoroastrianism; Manichaeism; dualism; Plato; Neo-Platonic; *via negativa*

"The Priestly Creation Story," consisting of only ten verses in Genesis, poetically presents a full doctrine of creation. It also offers a doctrine of God. A guided study of the story draws out the meaning contained in this ancient poem. The story shows God as wholly Other yet present to creation. God transcends all that is, thereby providing a corrective to all forms of dualism. Many theological difficulties get untangled by the implications in the story.

### YEAR TWO

#### Read

The Gospel according to Matthew (*Try to set aside enough time to read this gospel in one or two sittings.*)

#### Focus

Identify terms or references that you had to look up.

The Gospel writers tell the story of the Good News of God in Christ. The Gospel in its entirety communicates the story. However, seldom do people hear the entire story, rather they experience the Scripture verse by verse or in short pieces they hear within worship. Such reading is like watching a trailer of a film and believing you have seen the movie. Individual scenes make little or no sense without the context of the story. So too it is important to know the entire Gospel, allowing you to experience its drama. Once you have a sense of Matthew's story, you are positioned better to interpret individual scenes, teachings, and events.

### YEAR THREE

#### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 3, "A Crucified Messiah," pages 77-111

#### Focus

Points to note: cluster of words (*evaggelion, evangelium, Gospel*); Julius Africanus; *epiousios*; parables; *abba*; *Kyrios*<N>"Jesus is Lord, the word for God"; Paul of Tarsus; *epistole*; Paul's use of the word "church"; Johannine Christ; Jewish revolt and fall of Jerusalem

Change in the eastern region of the Roman Empire eventually upset the Roman Empire's social order. The history of Christianity began with seemingly insignificant events. The importance of those events became clear through the lenses of experience and hindsight.

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

Allen, Chapter 2, "Holiness for Today," pages 19-27

### Focus

Compare Isaiah's vision of God with Moses's encounter with God. Identify Simone Weil; Jean Vanier; absolute value.

State in your own words the justification of the claim that "human beings are significant, have dignity, and have absolute value." (27)

### Respond

Identify how or where you have evidence in recent years of debates between authority and revelation. Think more broadly than within faith communities.

How has your life experience helped you in matters of authority, whether related to the church or to politics or to culture (e.g. family, community, or nation)?

### Practice

Change disrupts continuity. New ways of speaking and even newer ways of behaving create unrest. Yet, without continuity change evaporates into nothingness. Society's reordering of itself after chaotic change provides the stuff of history.

Find evidence in news stories or other circumstances of changes that are challenging continuity. Practice listening for the voices on both sides of such a challenge—those embracing change and those advocating "holding true" to what has been. What do you discover when you listen for those voices?

What opportunities for ministry are there in the midst of such challenges?

## Week Six

### YEAR ONE

#### Read

Genesis 12-50

Collins, Chapter 4, "The Patriarchs," pages 44-55

#### Focus

Identify terms or references that you had to look up.

Reading the primary text is essential to understanding scripture. Your reading forms the basis for understanding what scholars and others say about the text. Dr. Robert Denton, professor of the Old Testament at General Theological Seminary, often reminded his students that they would be amazed by how much the text illuminates the commentary. Each person has unique experiences that shape how scripture is interpreted. While the work of biblical scholars is enormously valuable, only you can bring your distinctive experience to the learning process. Then, your experience with the text can be brought into dialogue with what scholars have written. It is within that dialogue that deeper learning occurs.

Identify, note, and define: types of legends (etiological, ethnological, etymological, ceremonial); Hermon Gunkel; *Sitz im Leben*; *bris*; Abraham Cycle; Jacob Cycle; Joseph Story

What sources do the "authors" of the stories of the patriarchs use to express the meaning of the story?

Notice what sources Collins uses in this chapter. (Possible candidates for the sources might be academic disciplines, biblical references, personal experience, or beliefs or conclusions he asserts.)

### YEAR TWO

#### Read

Powell, Chapter 5, "Matthew," pages 103-123

#### Focus

Identify: five speeches of Jesus; Beatitudes; binding and loosing of the law; *oligopistoi*; Eusebius; *Ecclesiastical History*

### YEAR THREE

#### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 4, "Boundaries Defined," pages 112-154

Sprinkled throughout the chapter are references to primary sources. Find two or three of them to read. They can be found in Bettenson's *Documents of the Christian Church* and online. Christian Classics Ethereal Library, [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org), provides numerous documents of the church. For example, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.viii.i.iii.html> presents *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Commonly Called the Didache*.

## Focus

Find and become familiar with pronunciation: *Hermas (The Shepherd)* and the *Didache* online or in Bettenson (if you have purchased that book) or elsewhere and read what you can or want.

Terms to learn: Letter to Philemon; *Didache*; gnosis, Gnosticism, Nag Hammadi; Docetism; key points of difference between gnostic and Jewish attitudes; Marcion; Diatessaron; *presbyteroi*; *diakonos*; *episkopoi*; the importance of Antioch and Jerusalem in the early church; Clement; Ignatius; Victor; Stephen of Rome

## YEAR FOUR

### Read

Allen, Chapter 3, "The Maker of Heaven and Earth" and Chapter 4, "Limits of Science," pages 28-43

### Focus

Identify: Von Rad; Israel's cosmology; Augustine's examination of time; contemporary cosmology; relationship of creation and salvation

State the difference between the biblical view of creation and the scientific view of the universe. Draw a distinction between the origin of the universe and the purpose of creation.

### Respond

Faith is a complex matter; like any form of life, it consists of beliefs, actions, attitudes, and patterns of behavior that are often hard to identify, much less distinguish from one another and then define. Thus, at times we may not know what it is we believe theologically or why we undertake the specific faith-practices that we do, but we nonetheless do them over and over again just as we are constantly re-enacting particular theological habits of thought in the course of our daily lives. Furthermore, our religious beliefs can almost never be separated from other beliefs, actions, and attitudes that we hold and that also shape us, such as our culturally constructed beliefs about what it means to be a woman or a citizen or a student of theology.<sup>11</sup>

What does living faithfully mean to you?

How have reading, reflecting, and listening expanded your understanding of what is involved in living faithfully?

Autobiography: Who are the people in your life of whom you could say, "That person is an example of living faithfully" ?

### Practice

Write the qualities or characteristics of living faithfully.

Listening requires attentiveness, which also requires silence. Practice attentive listening this week. Notice what it takes for you to be silent and really listen to someone else. Make some notes about that.

What do you have to do in order to achieve that? What is difficult about listening attentively?

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<sup>11</sup> Serene Jones, *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classic Themes*. A project of The Workgroup On Constructive Christian Theology. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 11-16-2012), Kindle edition.

## Week Seven

### YEAR ONE

#### Read

Exodus 1-24

Collins, Chapter 5, "The Exodus from Egypt" pages 55-63.

#### Focus

Describe the meaning of the term "salvation history." Define any names, terms, or references that were unfamiliar to you in Exodus.

Name the images/metaphors for God that the writer of Exodus uses to tell the story of God's action of liberation for the children of Israel. Select two or three of the images for God and explore what qualities of God the image reveals.

Terms that address the historicity of the Exodus event: Manetho; Hyksos; Hecataeus; Rameses II; Habiru; *Yam Sup*; Passover

Terms that deal with the meaning of the past: charter myth; history; legend; folklore; founding myth

Words and phrases related to God: YHWH; Adonai (Lord); *HaShem*; *'ehyeh 'aser* (I AM WHO I AM); *'ehyeh*; *eimi ho on* (I am the one who is); absolute Being; YHWH is on the side of the weak

Themes to keep in mind: revelation of God; liberation of people

Review the first twelve chapters of Exodus looking for moments of God's self-disclosure and moments of liberation.

### YEAR TWO

#### Read

The Gospel according to Mark

Powell, Chapter 6, "Mark," pages 125-145

#### Focus

Identify terms or references in Mark's Gospel that you had to look up.

In Powell's text, note: John Mark; intercalation; major themes in Mark; messianic secret; *inclusio*

Every discussion, written or spoken, draws on material to form the presentation. The content (images, story, ideas) comes from different sources, which may be other writings, personal experiences, or beliefs held. Make note of the different sources that Powell used throughout his chapter on Mark.

### YEAR THREE

#### Read

MacCulloch, Chapter 5, "The Prince: Ally or Enemy," pages 155-188

#### Focus

Terms and names to note and become familiar with pronunciation: *parousia*; *Apostolic Tradition*; *Celus*; *in catacumbas*; Origen; Plotinus; Mani; Manichee/Manichaeism; Diocletian; Syriac Church; Osroene; Dura Europos; Armenia; Ephraim; *Odes of Solomon*; Trdat (Tiridates)

Christianity not only survived but grew under the wave of persecutions from 100 to 300 CE. People willing to suffer and die for what they believe wield powerful inspirations. When religious conviction is stronger than the fear of pain and death, people notice. It's as if the persecutors' sword sharpens one's beliefs into passionate convictions. Clarity comes whenever a person discovers relationships that matter more than death. The witness born from martyrdom has transformative power for both believers and non-believers.

### YEAR FOUR

#### Read

Allen, Chapter 5, "What is Meant by 'God,'" pages 44-53

#### Focus

Ideas and images to know: universe as everything but God; hiddenness of God; cosmological argument for existence of God; faith as above reason

Having read the chapter, answer the question "What is meant by God?"

#### Respond

From time to time, a person needs to stop and take stock of what has been done and what is being learned. Conversations about important matters can bring fresh awareness and allow seeing newness within the ordinary. Insight brings a renewed energy and vitality to the creation of meaning. Understanding anew the dynamics present in daily life opens the door for a person to see how her or his life is being lived. Then, a decision can be made to continue living in that manner or to make different and possibly better decisions.

Review the thoughts and feelings that you have had over the previous several weeks. As you sift these recent experiences, consider what you have learned from listening to yourself and to others within the seminar. A corollary question: What difference does what you have learned make to how you live your life?

### Practice

In whatever place works well for you to focus and be still, set a timer for fifteen minutes and allow yourself to be present to your self, your environment, and to the presence of God. Just be still. Allow images and thoughts and sounds and sensations to just be, not trying to ignore them. Just be.

After fifteen minutes, write briefly about all that you were aware of during that time of listening and presence.

## Part II

### Resources for Unit One

## Readings for Year A: Faithful Living in Your World

Week	Unit	Year One Collins	Year Two Powell	Year Three MacCulloch	Year Four Allen, Sedgwick, Peace
1	<b>Introductory Meeting</b>	Norms, Books, Housekeeping, Orientation & Planning	Norms, Books, Housekeeping, Orientation & Planning	Norms, Books, Housekeeping, Orientation & Planning	Norms, Books, Housekeeping, Orientation & Planning
2	<b>Unit One</b> Listening and Spiritual Autobiographies	Common Readings: Listening as Ministry Spiritual Autobiography	Common Readings: Listening as Ministry Spiritual Autobiography	Common Readings: Listening as Ministry Spiritual Autobiography	Common Readings: Listening as Ministry Spiritual Autobiography
3		Preface, Introduction 1 Near Eastern Context 2 Nature of the Pentateuchal Narrative	Preface 1 New Testament World 2 New Testament Writings	Acknowledgements, Introduction 1 Greece and Rome	Allen Preface Introduction: What is Theology?
4		* Genesis 1 -11 3 Primeval History	3 Jesus 4 Gospels	2 Israel	Allen 1 Holy One of Israel
5		The Priestly Creation Story	* Matthew	3 A Crucified Messiah	Allen 2 Holiness for Today
6		* Genesis 12-50 4 The Patriarchs	5 Matthew	4 Boundaries Defined	Allen 3 The Maker of Heaven and Earth 4 Limits of Science
7		* Exodus 1-15 5 Exodus from Egypt	* Mark 6 Mark	5 The Prince: Ally or Enemy?	Allen 5 What is Meant by "God"
8	<b>Unit Two</b> Reflecting Theologically	Common Reading: Theological Reflection as a Life Skill	Common Reading: Theological Reflection as a Life Skill	Common Reading: Theological Reflection as a Life Skill	Common Reading: Theological Reflection as a Life Skill
9		* Exodus 16-40 6 Revelation at Sinai	* Luke	6 The Imperial Church	Allen 6 Nature as Witness and Innocent Suffering

10		* Leviticus * Numbers 7 Priestly Theology: Exodus 25-40, Leviticus & Numbers	7 Luke	7 Defying Chalcedon: Asia and Africa	Allen 7 Innocent Suffering and Life beyond Death
11		* Deuteronomy 8 Deuteronomy	* John	8 Islam: The Great Realignment	Allen 8 Suffering from Nature and Extreme Human Cruelty
12		* Joshua * Judges	8 John	9 The Making of Latin Christianity	Allen 9 The Sacrifice in Creation Essay: DuBose on the Trinity
13		9 Joshua 10 Judges	* Acts of the Apostles 9 Acts	10 Latin Christendom: New Frontiers	Allen 10 The Incarnation as Sacrifice
14	<b>Interlude</b>	Common Reading: Bryan, Part I	Common Reading: Bryan, Part I	Common Reading: Bryan, Part I	Common Reading: Bryan, Part I
15	<b>Interlude</b>	Common Reading: Bryan, Part II	Common Reading: Bryan, Part II	Common Reading: Bryan, Part II	Common Reading: Bryan, Part II
16	<b>Unit Three</b> Developing a Sustaining Spirituality	Common Readings: The Spiritual Person The Sanctification of Time & Life	Common Readings: The Spiritual Person The Sanctification of Time & Life	Common Readings: The Spiritual Person The Sanctification of Time & Life	Common Readings: The Spiritual Person The Sanctification of Time & Life
17		* Psalms	10 New Testament Letters 11 Paul	11 The West: Universal Emperor or Universal Pope?	Allen 11 The Temptation in the Wilderness
18		* Song of Songs 23 Psalms & Song of Songs	* Romans	12 A Church for All People?	Allen 12 The Sacrifice of the Cross
19		* Proverbs 24 Proverbs	12 Romans	13 Faith in a New Rome	Allen 13 The Resurrection of Jesus and Eternal Life
20		* Job * Ecclesiastes (Qoheleh) 25 Job & Qoheleh	* Hebrews 23 Hebrews	14 Orthodoxy: More Than an Empire	Allen 14 Jesus as Lord and Jesus as Servant

21		*Ruth * Jonah * Esther 26 The Hebrew Short Story	* 1 Peter * 2 Peter 25 1 Peter 26 2 Peter	15 Russia: The Third Rome	Allen 15 Revelation and Faith
22	<b>Unit Four</b> Integrating Belief & Behavior	Common Reading: Building a Theology: Integrating Belief, Behavior, and Doctrine in Everyday Life	Common Reading: Building a Theology: Integrating Belief, Behavior, and Doctrine in Everyday Life	Common Reading: Building a Theology: Integrating Belief, Behavior, and Doctrine in Everyday Life	Common Reading: Building a Theology: Integrating Belief, Behavior, and Doctrine in Everyday Life
23		* 1 Samuel * 2 Samuel 11 First Samuel 12 Second Samuel	* Philemon * Jude 22 Philemon 28 Jude	16 Perspectives on the True Church	Allen 16 The Holy Spirit, the Church, and the Sacraments
24		* 1 Kings * 2 Kings 13 First Kings 1-16 14 First Kings 17-2 Kings 25	* Philippians * Colossians 17 Philippians 18 Colossians	17 A House Divided	Allen 17 Sin, Evil, and Hope for the Future Epilogue
25		* Ezra * Nehemiah 21 Ezra & Nehemiah	* 1 Timothy * 2 Timothy * Titus 21 Pastoral Letters	18 Rome's Renewal	Sedgwick Preface, Introduction 1 Describing the Christian Life 2 An Anglican Perspective
26		* 1 Chronicles * 2 Chronicles 22 The Books of Chronicles	* 1 Thessalonians * 2 Thessalonians 19 1 Thessalonians 20 2 Thessalonians	19 A Worldwide Faith	Sedgwick 3 Incarnate Love 4 Love and Justice
27		* Amos * Hosea 15 Amos & Hosea	* James 24 James	20 Protestant Awakenings	Sedgwick 5 The Practices of Faith 6 The Call of God Appendix
28	<b>Interlude</b>	Common Reading: Countryman, Part I	Common Reading: Countryman, Part I	Common Reading: Countryman, Part I	Common Reading: Countryman, Part I

29	<b>Interlude</b>	Common Reading: Countryman, Part II	Common Reading: Countryman, Part II	Common Reading: Countryman, Part II	Common Reading: Countryman, Part II
30	<b>Unit Five</b> Hearing & Responding to God's Call	Common Reading: Mission, Vocation, & Gifts	Common Reading: Mission, Vocation, & Gifts	Common Reading: Vocation: Hearing and Responding to God's Call	Common Reading: Mission, Vocation, & Gifts
31		* Micah * Isaiah 1-39 Excerpt: Collins on Micah 16 Isaiah	* Galatians 15 Galatians	21 Enlightenment: Ally or Enemy?	Peace, Rose, Mobley Foreword Introduction 1 Encountering the Neighbor
32		* Isaiah 40-66 19 Additions to Isaiah	* 1 Corinthians * 2 Corinthians 13 1 Corinthians 14 2 Corinthians	22 Europe Re-enchanted or Disenchanted?	Peace, Rose, Mobley 2 Viewing Home Anew 3 Redrawing Our Maps
33		* Jeremiah * Lamentations 17 The Babylonian Era	* Ephesians 16 Ephesians	23 To Make the World Protestant	Peace, Rose, Mobley 4 Unpacking Our Belongings 5 Stepping Across the Line
34		* Ezekiel 18 Ezekiel	* 1 John * 2 John * 3 John 27 Johannine Letters	24 Not Peace but a Sword	Peace, Rose, Mobley 6 Finding Fellow Travelers
35		20 Postexilic Prophecy 29 From Tradition to Canon	* The Revelation to John 29 Revelation	25 Culture Wars	Peace, Rose, Mobley 7 Repairing Our Shared World
36	<b>Final Meeting</b>	Celebration	Celebration	Celebration	Celebration

### Notes

1. Common readings at the beginning of each unit are read by all years.
2. Assignments for years one and two marked with an asterisk are readings in the Bible. Chapters in the readings text are numbered. Please note that chapters are sometimes read out of sequence.
3. Readings in the each of the three texts for year four are indicated by name of the author(s).

## Provocative Word Method of TR

### SELECT THE WORD

Choose a word remarkable for its ability to call up vibrant emotion (scorned, ecstatic, lost, astonished, etc.), and post it on the board for all to reflect on in silence. Then share any revelations on the meaning of the word, anything it denotes or connotes.

### ASK THE QUESTIONS

Next, ask the six “journalist’s questions” about the feeling the word conveys:

WHO was involved when you were feeling \_\_\_\_\_?  
(Action...tell the stories from our lives)

WHAT image comes to mind about feeling \_\_\_\_\_?  
(Image...explore the metaphor)

WHERE does this come from and WHERE is it found in society?  
(Source/Culture)

WHEN does this come up in the Bible, lives of saints, hymns, etc?  
(Tradition...explore the world of tradition)

WHY is this manifest in our lives? (Position)

HOW might God redeem any negatives in this (Hope in Christ)

### CONSIDER INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

What have we learned for the next time we feel \_\_\_\_\_?

### WRITE A COLLECT

Use the outline:

Dear God... (naming of God’s aspects)  
You... (connect situation of the image to that aspect)  
We pray that... (petition of our hearts)  
So that... (result we desire)  
Amen.

-Method provided by Patricia Bleicher

## Session Five, Reading Assignment for Year One

### The Priestly Creation Story

The Priestly creation story in Gen. 1-2:4a is one of the shortest and yet most tightly packed theological statements in the Bible. In its present form it dates from the time of the Restoration in the fifth century BCE. It had developed, however, over a much longer period and had been polished smooth by the time P gave it its final working. We must study it line by line in order to unpack the many levels of meaning in it.

Let us go over the main points.

First read **Gen. 1-2:4a**.

Then read again the biblical reference for each point in conjunction with the discussion.

1. God alone is the creator of all, with no divine helpers. The world is not simply shaped by God. (1:1)
2. God creates by speaking; God simply says, “Let there be . . . ,” and what is spoken comes to be. (1:3, 6, 9, etc.)
3. God creates light; it is not the gift of the sun, which shines only with the light God has given it. (1:3)
4. God keeps the waters of chaos in their place by calling for a firm dome to keep out the waters that are above and by gathering the waters below into the seas so that the dry land appears. (1:6-10)
5. The heavenly bodies—sun, moon, planets, and stars—which were thought to be gods by many cultures in the ancient Near East, are only creatures of God. (1:14-18)
6. The earth shares in the task of creation, though only at God’s command: the earth brings forth vegetation. The waters also bring forth sea creatures and the earth, animal life, but not in the same way as the earth brings forth vegetation. God creates the higher forms of life. (1:11, 20-21, 24-25)
7. God creates humankind in God’s own image and gives it dominion over all the creation. (1:26)
8. God creates humankind male and female, and this fact is connected closely with humankind’s creation in the divine image. (1:27)
9. God blesses humankind with sexuality and the gift of children. (1:28)
10. The final work of creation is God’s rest on the seventh day. (2:2)

Even from this brief outline we can see some of the things that were on the mind of the author. First, one important aspect of this story cannot be seen in most English translations. Grammatically, the Hebrew begins in the middle of a sentence. What could this mean? Is it a mistake? Was the first corner of a manuscript lost? No, there is a theological meaning. Beginning a sentence in the middle is a way of saying, “We do not know what God was doing before our world came into being. Our knowledge cannot pry before the beginning of our world; God’s beginning is unknowable to us.”

Next, it is important to say, above all else, that God is completely different from everything else. Other religions may have said that there were all sorts of divine beings: animal monsters, heavenly bodies, the seas, storms—anything that seemed powerful or mysterious. For the P writer, nothing in the world is divine. Rather, the whole universe is God’s creation. Some religions may have thought of at least part of the universe as being made out of the substance

of the divine, flowing forth out of the god. For P, nothing of God flows into the universe; God is God, and all else that exists is not God and is not divine.

Third, there is no need to look to lesser gods for the fertility of the earth. Vegetable crops and animals are included in God's design for the world, and the earth brings forth her increase at God's command. The worship of Baals (fertility gods), with all the gross practices that went with it, is not necessary; indeed to worship them would be to deny the power of the one Creator.

Fourth, the whole creation leads up to the creation of humanity. Life has not been created in order to provide playthings for the gods nor to act as slave-servants to the gods. Humanity, man and woman, is created to be God's representative in governing creation. It is a position of great dignity and worth.

Each of these points was important in the life of Israel. She had been chosen to be God's people; God had made a covenant with her and had promised that, through Israel, all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The covenant was the basis for all of Israel's religious faith. After the Israelites had settled in Canaan, they were tempted and led away from God to the worship of the Baals and the *astral deities*—the sun, moon, planets, and stars—which the other nations worshiped. The prophets constantly tried to overcome the worship of these false gods so that Israel would be faithful to the covenant. When the northern kingdom was destroyed and the leaders of Judah (the southern kingdom) were carried into exile, the warnings of the prophets were shown to have been correct. Thus we can see the P writer—in the circumstance of exile—expressing in this story the true dignity of humankind and the complete sovereignty of God as these facts had been learned in Israel's life and taught by the prophets. All of what Israel stood for was expressed by the covenant. This was how Israel knew God; God was the God who had made the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and who had sealed it at Sinai through Moses. This God, and this God alone, had created the nation of Israel, and this God alone had created the heavens and the earth and all things.

The creation story expresses the faith of Israel learned by her experience as the people of God's covenant. Just as God had made Israel God's people at Sinai, so also God had made all of humanity in God's own image at creation. Both the covenant story and the creation story say the same thing: God has given humanity dignity and worth and dominion; therefore, the creation story reaches its climax in the creation of humankind.

The P author does not end the story with the creation of humanity. The final day of creation is not the sixth, on which human beings are created, but the seventh, on which God rests. This rest does not mean only a mere recuperation from the exhaustion of creation. Rather it is a cessation of regular work in order to enjoy the fruits of that labor. God rests in order to enjoy creation. The P author, with special interest in the *cult*—the practices of worship—leads us to the practice of the Sabbath. This is not, however, a contradiction of what we have just said about the creation of humanity as the climax. The covenant, the basis of Israel's faith in the dignity of all people, is what the Sabbath is all about. The Sabbath is the celebration of the covenant. Therefore, the story leads to two ends, both of which refer to the same central point of Israel's faith: (1) God's gift of life and authority—a people under God—and (2) the Sabbath, which is the celebration of this people under God through the covenant.

You are not expected at this point in your studies to be able to feel all that is involved in the covenant. The point you should be able to grasp at this stage is that the P creation story sums up the experience of Israel and is not a simple childish story. You will come back to this story again and again, and the more you become familiar with the rest of the Old Testament, the more you will feel the power of it. Now look back again to the beginning of the story, and we will go over it more closely.

This verse, which looks so simple in the English translation, is very strange in the Hebrew because it begins mid-sentence. The text can be translated, carrying it on through verse three, in several ways. (1) "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness. . . ." (2) "When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void, and darkness. . . ." (3) "In the beginning of God's creating of the heavens and the earth (when) the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the wind of God was moving over the face of the waters—God said, 'Let there be. . ..'" None of these translations really fits the text as we have it, but each one is possible. Somewhat closer might be to start with an ellipsis ". . ." and then use the wording of option 3 above.

What difference would it make which translation we pick? Some people have argued that if we use the first one, there is nothing before God creates. God creates the heavens and the earth, and they are formless and empty until God then shapes and fills them. While it is fine theology to believe God created from nothing—*ex nihilo* is the Latin phrase which is used—Genesis 1 does not make such a claim. If we take the second or third translation, there is already a formless empty abyss and God begins to create; God shapes and fills a chaos that already existed.

Later theology, especially Christian theology, has insisted that God created out of nothing not simply as a way of choosing one of these translations over the other. Theologians have been trying to oppose a point of view which was very common in the world of the first few centuries of the Christian era and is still very much with us. This point of view is called *dualism*. It says that there are two aspects of the world: the material and the nonmaterial, sometimes called the "spiritual." The material is usually regarded as less good, sometimes evil. Theologians have not wanted to say that there was something, anything, already existing when God began creation, because this already existing something, chaos, could be used by the dualists to refer to matter, the material stuff, which God shaped. They could then say that this matter is the source of evil. So the theologians said that God created *ex nihilo*, out of nothing; anything and everything that is, matter included, is created by God and is good. You can begin to see here that many beliefs, many truths, are not stated explicitly by every biblical passage on a similar theme.

Dualism had a great effect on the thinking of the early church. It came from eastern roots. In Persia the religion of Zoroastrianism taught that there were two gods, one evil and one good. The good god was the god of light; the evil god, the god of darkness. (The name of the god of light, Mazda, is known to many people although they may not know where it originated.) A man named Mani, who was greatly influenced by Zoroastrianism, developed a religion, dualistic in nature, which prescribed ways of combating the power of the material world and escaping into the world of spirit and light. His religion, called usually *Manichaeism*, flourished in the third and fourth centuries, especially in North Africa, and influenced many Christians. St. Augustine, one of the greatest theologians of the church, was a Manichee before he converted to Christianity.

The teachings of the great pre-Christian philosopher Plato have also led to dualistic conclusions. Plato taught that, although individual things in this world come and go—they are born and they die, they come into being and they decay—there lie behind the individual things the *ideas* of them. There are many individual trees, each different to some degree from the others and each destined to die and decay, but each is a partial representation of the idea Tree. The idea contains all that it is possible for a tree to be; it is complete and single, not needing many separate examples of itself to express its completeness; it lasts forever, eternally existing while the individual representations of it come and go. Why Plato said this, what problems he was trying to understand, we shall look at later. The fact that he said it, however, allowed people of a later time—during the third through the fifth centuries CE—to develop a religion that was dualistic in a much more subtle and sophisticated way than was Manichaeism. The *Neo-Platonists* taught that the ultimate *One* lies beyond all things, and it is impossible to speak of that One at all. The *via negativa* is all that is possible. From the One all the rest of the universe emanates as light emanates, flows, or shines from a light bulb or a candle. The farther away from the source, the less like the One a thing becomes, until finally, at the farthest remove, there is matter. A human being, according to Neo-Platonism, is really spirit, akin to the One, but the spirit is trapped in a material body. Below humanity there is no spirit; all is merely material. Only by mystical exercises can humankind rise above the material body and reach union with the One. This point of view has influenced much of Christian piety. Augustine was also a Neo-Platonist before becoming a Christian.

Whatever the correct translation of this verse may be, theologians were right in thinking that the Old Testament opposed dualism. The Hebrews did *not* make a distinction between matter and “spirit.” As we shall see in the JE creation story, the first human being is made from the dust of the earth and has life breathed into him so that he becomes “a living being.” The entire creature, without division into body and spirit, is a living being. When the Christian church said that Jesus is the word of God made flesh, it also spoke against any kind of dualism.

This is why many theologians prefer the reading of verse one which says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” But there is no way to decide on the basis of the text itself. The P writer has other ways of dealing with the problem of dualism.

Whichever way you translate the first verse, when the earth appears it is without form and void—that is, it is chaotic, empty of all form, design, or meaning—and darkness is upon the face of “the deep.” “The deep” is a translation of the Hebrew word *tehom*. Behind this word there lies a whole mythic tradition. In the ancient world of the Mesopotamian basin there existed a story of the creation of the world by means of a great battle between a warrior god and a dragon, a sea-monster, who represented watery *chaos*. To many peoples who lived in desert lands far from the sea, the sea was fearsome. Its great storms were powerful and destroyed ships and houses built close to the shores. Stories of sea monsters were told by returning sailors. So “the deep,” the waters of the sea with its monsters, was a symbol of chaos to the ancient people.

The Babylonian creation myth is a long story about the birth of various gods and about the eventual conflict between the god Marduk and the goddess Tiamat. In the course of the conflict, Tiamat is slain, and it is from her body that the firmament, the great dome of heaven, is made. It is worth noting here that the name Tiamat is closely related linguistically to *tehom*. By slaying

Tiamat, the chaos monster, the monster of the deep, Marduk makes it possible for order to reign.

Much has been made of the common background out of which the Babylonian and the Hebrew creation stories come. The differences between the stories are more important—and more instructive—than their similarities. The Babylonian myth is an involved story of the birth of the gods and of the struggles among them for supremacy. Human beings are created almost as an afterthought, to serve as slaves for the gods, tending the earth so that the gods might have leisure. In the P story, the reference to “the deep” is virtually the sole remnant of this older myth. There is no birth of God; God is there before the story begins. Only by taking a broad meaning of myth as we have done can the P story be called a myth at all. P has stripped the narrative of all features of a “story about the gods” and has reduced it to a statement of doctrine, using the older myth as a framework only. By using an older framework with which people were familiar, the writer is also able to “start where they are” and show them greater truth.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Education for Ministry* <M> *Year One: Old Testament*, 4th edition, ed. Patricia Bays (Sewanee, Tennessee: The University of the South, 2006), 29-46.

### Tips for First Storytelling

☞ *Tell a story about why you do what you do, love what you love, care about what you care about.*

#### **Be Specific**

Talk about what actually happened. It helps to begin stories with “One time...” or “I remember a time when...”

#### **Be Descriptive**

Use images, feelings and places to provide texture, color, and thick description to your story. Use the 5Ws: who, what, when, where and why

#### **Be Self Reflective**

What was the occasion of your discovering that *this* was what you loved, cared about, or loved doing?

Was there anyone with whom you shared this discovery?

How did it feel to know this about yourself?

### Tips for First Hearing of Another’s Story

#### **Undivided Attention**

Make eye contact with the storyteller and give him or her your full attention as if there was nothing else more important than listening to his/her story.

#### **Holy Listening**

Listen reverently as if you were in the presence of the Holy and witness the truth of this sacred story. Hold the space with your presence and receive the precious gift in this story. Imagine you are listening with God’s ears.

#### **Journaling**

As you journal: What images, key words, or phrases stand out as meaningful to you? Is there a question you might ask your partner that would move the conversation deeper into “the heart of the matter?” What did you enjoy or find yourself wondering about?

### Tips for Second Storytelling

*☞ Tell a story about a time when you found a note to sing that was unique and God-given, a time when you heard the echo of the Word in your life.*

#### **Be Specific**

Talk about what actually happened. It helps to begin stories with “One time...” or “I remember a time when...”

#### **Be Descriptive**

Use words, images, feelings and places to provide texture and color to your story description. Cover the 5Ws: Who, what when, where and why

#### **Be Self Reflective**

Where was I? What was I doing?

What happened? Was there any risk or challenge in claiming this inner harmony?

Were there any companions in this discovery? Anyone you could share this joy with you?

### Tips for Second Hearing of Another’s Story

#### **Undivided Attention**

Make eye contact with the storyteller and give him or her your full attention as if there was nothing else more important than listening to his/her story.

#### **Holy Listening**

Listen reverently as if you were in the presence of the Holy and witness the truth of this sacred story. Hold the space with your presence and receive the precious gift in this story. Imagine you are listening with God’s ears.

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As you journal: What images, key words, or phrases stand out as meaningful to you? Is there a question you might ask your partner that would move the conversation deeper into “the heart of the matter?” What did you enjoy or find yourself wondering about?

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# RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

**R** = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

**E** = use EMPATHETIC listening

**S** = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

**P** = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

**E** = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

**C** = keep CONFIDENTIALITY

**T** = TRUST ambiguity because we are *not* here to debate who is right or wrong

(from *The Bush Was Blazing but Not Consumed* by Eric H. F. Law)

I agree to uphold these guidelines for the time we have together.

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SIGNATURE

DATE

Modules 3-7 • Summer 2010 • PAGE 3

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