

BIBLE STUDY METHODS

The Book of Faith Initiative recommends a 4-fold method of reading Scripture. For many of us, the encounter with Scripture is limited to the excerpts that are read on Sunday morning. Many of us—and many of our neighbors—are biblically illiterate, unsure of how to engage Scripture. Many of us are unaware of the rich Lutheran insights that have been helpful in understanding the many ways that God engages us through the Bible. The challenge of Book of Faith is to address these realities directly and to experience more fully the power of the Word.

1. DEVOTIONAL READING

We begin by reading the Bible text and reflecting on its meaning. We ask questions and identify items that are unclear. We bring our unique background and experience to the Bible, and the Bible meets us where we are.

2. HISTORICAL READING

We seek to understand the world of the Bible and locate the setting of the text. We explore who may have written the text and why. We seek to understand the particular social and cultural contexts that influenced the content and the message. We wonder who the original audience may have been. We think about how these things “translate” to our world today.

3. LITERARY READING

We pay close attention to how the text is written. We notice what kind of literature it is and how this type of literature may function or may be used. We look at the characters, the story line, and the themes. We compare and contrast these with our own understanding and experience of life. In this interchange, we discover meaning.

4. LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL READING

We consider the Lutheran principles that help ground our interpretation of the Bible text. We ask questions that bring those principles and unique Lutheran theological insights into conversation with the text. We discover how our Lutheran insights can ground and focus our understanding and shape our faithful response to the text.

Devotional reading; we return to where we started, but now we have explored and experienced the Bible text from four different dimensions. We are ready to move into the “for” dimension. We have opened Scripture and joined in conversation for a purpose. We consider the meaning of the text for faithful living. We wonder what God is calling us (individually and as communities of faith) to do. We consider how God’s Word is calling us to do God’s work in the world.