

What is Theological Reflection?

Theological Reflection (TR) is the heart of the EfM program. It offers a way to equip people to be faithful and thoughtful ministers. It offers a structured methodology for analyzing any topic, from a piece of scripture, to a personal story to an object.

As an EfM participant puts it:

When I recommend EfM to people, I stress the two parts of the evening (text discussion and Theological Reflection). From a dualistic approach, it's almost like the first part feeds the head and the second part feeds the heart. But it all feeds the faith and soul. For me it's important to talk about and look at the text in different ways. And then to root all this in things we encounter in life.

Some TR topics resonate more with me than others, but I think doing it every week strengthens that muscle, that practice of seeing God in unexpected place and in unexpected ways. And when I'm focused on trying to see all the different layers of a single topic, I really learn to expand my mind or look at things from an angle I'm not used to. With the TR we build such beautiful collects and wonderful observations such as "It's easier to fast with the people you feasted with," or "Walking from Jerusalem to Gethsemane and to the light of Easter, shedding our baggage as we go."

—Peggy Lo, EfM member, Grace Cathedral

Below is a shortened Theological Reflection, based on the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Most groups devote one to two hours most weeks (when there is not a Common Lesson) to TR.

1. Select a passage from the Bible that has enough action, thought, feeling, and easy application to everyday life. Have copies of the passage for every person attending the introductory meeting. (We will use the story of the prodigal son.)
2. Read the story aloud, then divide the participants into three groups. One group will focus on the elder brother, another on the younger brother, and the third on the father.
3. Instruct the groups to read the story again, hearing it from the perspective of their assigned character. Ask them to select a particular moment in the story and to list on newsprint the thoughts and feelings they think their assigned characters experienced at that moment. (Give some brief instruction on ways to delineate thoughts and feelings.) Ask them also to think of times in their own lives when they have had similar thoughts and feelings.
4. After 15 minutes, have the groups come back together and present the moments they chose, the thoughts and feelings listed, and one or two life experiences that were brought to mind by the exercise.
5. Let the group decide which experience they would like to look at more closely. Have one member retell the experience. (On newsprint, record what the group identifies as the "givens" in a world where this is experienced.) What are the problems in that world? What brings those problems to our awareness? What would make things all right? Ask if they see things any differently after going through this process. Are there any follow-up actions to which they feel committed?