

WHAT IS READING BETWEEN THE LINES?

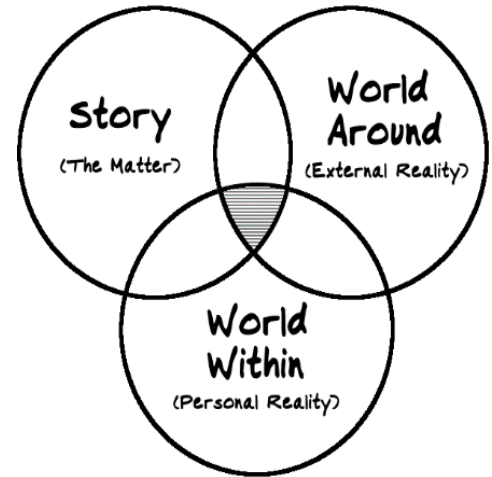
We believe in stories. Stories are how we make sense of our own experience and learn about the experiences of others. Stories are how we pass on perspectives, traditions, understandings and expectations. As we make our way through life each day, we are surrounded by stories—from conversations around the breakfast table to items in the newspaper or on TV to books, movies, songs, pictures and videos.

The Bible is full of stories, too. They speak to us of what is best and worst, hopeful and despairing, creative and destructive about human life and the experience of the sacred in its midst. From generation to generation, human beings have discovered themselves again and again in the Bible stories.

Reading Between The Lines offers a different way to engage the Bible stories, to connect them with the world around us, and to explore the resonances those stories stir in our inmost depths. Some forms of Bible study treat the Bible as an objective teacher, a ground for doctrine, or a quaint historical record, others look at it as a book of rules for behavior.

Reading Between The Lines invites you to use your imagination as well as your intellect, your intuition and your reason.

Our assumption is that the biblical text and story is not *about* you, but it *is* you. Engaging at that level requires stepping through the looking glass as Alice did, into a world where assumptions and values are challenged and brought to awareness. An encounter of this kind with the text invites you not simply to analyze and understand the text, but to experience it as a reality within yourself, connecting the text, the world around you, and your inner world.



What's in *Reading Between The Lines*?

For each Sunday of the Church year, there are five components:

Lectionary Text: Each week, one of the readings designated by the Revised Common Lectionary is featured. The text is taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, and is formatted without verse numbers, to focus more clearly on the story. Line numbers in the margin can help in referring to specific sections.

Begin with the text. Try to read it as if you have never seen it before. *Don't confuse the words with the Word.* Read between the lines, listen to and note your feelings, questions, wanderings, confusions, and surprises. Rather than trying to figure out, master, or understand the text, your initial task is to begin to see yourself in the text and to recognize the text within you.

Entering the Story: Some brief contextual notes to help you get started. It helps you to locate the story in the flow of the larger Bible story, and may include some historical background to help you understand the story better.

Exploring the Story: This series of open-ended questions helps to move systematically from encountering the text to connecting with the world around and to the inner world. Enter as fully as you can in response to questions and suggestions, and try the non-verbal exercises.

What is Reading Between The Lines?

The questions can be used "as-is," but be open to other ways of encountering the text that may come to mind. Particularly if you are working with a group, shape the questions to fit what you know of the members. Let the process be "God's playground" where you can stretch and dig and build.

Between the Lines: These brief comments and questions may open up other avenues of approach to the text. They can be incorporated into the main questions, or substituted as seems appropriate.

Exploring Further: Readings are offered to stir up, console, challenge, upset, enrich, and tantalize you. There is no right answer hidden here. Sometimes readings will contradict each other or other material presented for the same text. They will, hopefully, be timely words from the world for your reflection.

Group Guidelines: Over years of practical experience, we have developed a set of guidelines for using *Reading Between The Lines* in a group setting:

- **Focus on the text.**
Reading Between The Lines is an invitation to enter into the story. It is not a group for exegesis, theology, discussion, or therapy. If the focus begins to wander, come back to the text.
- **"I statements" are encouraged.**
The goal is to explore how *you* respond to the text. This is not to discount tradition and the scholars; but to say that here it is how you hear, feel, think about, and react to the text that is of primary importance.
- **Pauses between responses are important.**
A subtle reminder that we are not in a discussion group. The aim is to engage the text rather than one another. What we hear others say can be crucial. Why they say what they do is a conversation that can take place over coffee later.
- **The goal is not consensus, agreement, or a right answer.**
The richness and value of the experience may depend upon the very opposite.
- **There is no expectation that you explain, justify, or defend anything you say.**
This may be hard to remember; even if you are working through *Reading Between The Lines* alone.
- **Silence is part of the process/ silence can be pregnant.**
Alone this may simply be about taking your time and allowing some in-between spaces. In the silence there is a chance not only to ponder what others have said, but to hear the echo of your own voice.
- **Allow space for others to speak**
The richness of the discussion depends on hearing different voices and different perspectives, not just one.
- **You can change your mind as often as you like.**
"How do I know what I think until I hear myself say it?" In this process, once you hear what you have said, feel free to change your mind not once but over and over again.
- **Honestly try the nonverbal exercises.**
This is not an art or theater competition. Silence your inner critic and be prepared to be amazed and enlightened.
- **What is said in the *RBTL* group stays in the group.**
In the group, we touch sacred ground in ourselves and each other. Have the respect for the group and yourself to honor that confidentiality.