



## *THE ART OF ENGAGING HOLY SCRIPTURE (taehs):* A Brief Introduction

*Prayer – The Relationship for Engaging Holy Scripture.* Begin with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit for the grace, mercy, and guidance you want and need, knowing *by faith* that you are in God’s presence. Tell God that it is your desire and intention to be with God. This is the best that you can do. You cannot make yourself feel God’s presence. All you can do, by faith, is offer yourself to God and ask God to be present *to you* and to speak to you through the text. No matter how experienced we are, we all begin here *every time*.<sup>i</sup> If you have trouble focusing or concentrating when you begin, that’s okay; go ahead and begin; let your reading help to focus you.

*Observation:* After prayer, the first aspect in *The ART of Engaging Holy Scripture* is that of making Observations. In one respect, this is a very simple, straightforward activity in which we are simply noticing what is in the text. The difficulty is in the temptation not to spend adequate time in Observation and jump too quickly to conclusions about what we are reading.<sup>ii</sup> Observing a text of Scripture follows along the lines of observing a fine work of art; we need to give ourselves the freedom and time simply to take in the details, the whole, and how each informs the other.

*Attraction:* Attraction has to do with those things in a passage of Scripture to which we find ourselves particularly drawn. We can be drawn for positive or negative reasons, that is, because we like or dislike what we’re reading. In taking the time to become aware of what attracts us and pausing to focus upon it, we open ourselves to Scripture. We are placing ourselves in a listening posture, listening for what the passage (or God) might have to say to us.

*Response:* Responding has to do with interacting with Scripture, with entering into a dialogue with the God of Scripture. In Observation we focus upon seeing what’s in the text. Following Observation we take a moment to become aware of anything that might be attracting us. We pause to listen. On the one hand, we ask ourselves, “Why is this attracting me?” On the other hand, we are simply allowing it to happen; we are noticing that something is getting our attention, we are pausing to allow it to continue, and then, as that attraction actually forms itself into a Response, whatever it is, we offer that Response to God.

*Contemplation*: Here we learn to rest *by faith* in Christ's presence. This is about *simply* being in Christ's presence. Much like sitting silently and in rapt attention as we gaze across the ocean, the mountains, or a sunset, so here, in a very simplified manner, we silently rest in the presence of Christ.

By “*simply*” or in a “*simplified manner*,” we mean without focusing on thoughts, words, or feelings. Our conscious awareness becomes simplified or quieted as we allow ourselves to rest or sink into a sense of reverence and awe in the presence of Christ. In this practice we are learning to go through and beyond our thoughts, feelings, and experiences to the spiritual level of our being and rest there in Christ.

When we say “*by faith*” we are saying something foundational to Christianity. Regardless of how we “feel” in the moment or how clear (or confused!) we are in our thoughts, *by faith* we *know* Christ *is* present and *is* for us not against us. So regardless of our thoughts or feelings, *by faith* we rest in Christ's presence. Growth in this faith bears the fruit of the peace that passes understanding.

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<sup>i</sup> As we become more experienced practitioners, we realize that this humble starting attitude is of utmost importance.

<sup>ii</sup> This is especially true for highly intuitive people and for people who know the text well.