
What's The Best Way To Study The Bible?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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Do Episcopalians take the bible literally? What's the best way to study the bible? Do you consider the bible the Word of God?

I want to answer all those questions by referring to one of my favorite disciplines in life. It occurs every Tuesday morning, very early at 7 a.m. A group of men gathers with me at the Cathedral of St. Philip for bible study. The study is for men only, but one need not be a member of the Cathedral to attend; and guests are always welcome.

Our bible study structure is intentionally simple. We have coffee and sausage biscuits, we share a quick personal story, we pray, and then we actually read scripture, verse by verse and chapter by chapter. We go around the entire table, with each person reading one verse at a time from whatever his particular translation of the bible is.

Questions, discussion, and observations ensue. I offer guiding comments, and historical and theological notes; but the study is not merely a presentation by me, or anyone else. We close by praying for particular needs, and we depart in time for folks to get to the day's commitments.

This study structure demonstrates several features of healthy Anglican bible study. For one, Anglican bible study always features the actual reading of the text. We do not merely listen to other folks tell us what the bible says. For me, one of the chief fallacies of biblical fundamentalism is that it is a doctrine about the bible which does not take the bible seriously. Fundamentalists seem to spend more time defending their doctrine about the bible than they do studying the bible itself. For instance, nowhere in the bible itself do we read that the bible is infallible!

When one listens to the same scripture being read in different translations, when one reads the chapters straight through, without picking and choosing, it becomes apparent that the bible is far more complex and living than any simplistic doctrine about the bible. Yes, certain parts of the bible are meant to be taken literally. But other parts most certainly are not meant to be literal.

Secondly, the bible is best studied in community, with other believers and searchers. It is easy to come up with some great interpretation when we read alone. But it is far more valuable to wrestle with a colleague's observation that may not be ours. In that community, the living nature of the bible emerges. In fact, the Holy Spirit is present in the community bible study. Good bible learning always involves the Holy Spirit. So, to answer the second question above: The best way to study the bible is in community; the Spirit offers truth to us from each other!

Finally, healthy Anglican bible study always considers the bible to be the Word of God. This is powerful material. Hebrews 4.12 claims that "the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword." I believe that verse refers to the bible as the Word of God, but it also refers to much more. The living Jesus Christ is the Word of God ("In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God," John 1 says).

It is because the Word of God is living and active, that it really does mean different things from generation to generation. Indeed, it speaks differently to us this year than it did last year. The text has certainly not changed, but our lives and

cultures have. Only a living and active Word of God is worth studying year after year.

The discipline of bible study is serious stuff (take the bible seriously, but not always literally!). But it is also fun stuff. God speaks to us in various ways in each of the various sixty-six books of our scripture. But don't just take my word for it. Join one of the many bible studies here (a morning bible study for women only meets each Wednesday at 7 a.m!), or start a group, today, and hear the Word for yourself!

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