

ANOTHER WAY TO SEE THE BIBLE

Another Way to See the Bible: Lesson 1 Tuesday

Begin with an open heart and a curious mind. God is always present -- most times, we are the distant and absent ones. So put yourself prayerfully and purposefully in God's presence; pray this simple prayer: Maranatha. Come, Lord. Then, be still, be open, be present. Read slowly. Stay with what touches (or disturbs) you. Offer it to God who blesses and transforms.

Many have shared why they "gave up" on Christianity or stopped going to church. And it's this: **The Bible stopped making sense to their lives and reality. They heard the stories when they were young, but as teenagers and Adults, they began to notice inconsistencies and inaccuracies in a book they were told to accept as completely and literally true. What choice, they wonder, does that leave them?**

When the truth we are told to expect from Scripture (in the specific ways we are taught to interpret it) does not match what we know (through science and history) or what we experience (through relationships with God and others), we often feel left with two choices:

We can shut off our brains, limiting our critical thinking and discernment, and take the Bible at face value.

Or we can leave Scripture behind, dismissing its message entirely. What many of us have forgotten or didn't have the opportunity to learn is that there's another way: developing a consistent hermeneutic that helps us understand both the historical context of the Bible and its relevance for us today.

Hermeneutics, the science of interpretation, is essential, not only for reading Scripture, but for every book or document -- from the *Odyssey* to the South African Constitution -- that requires us to decipher and make meaning.

We can't help but use our own lens of interpretation when we read a text. Yet many aren't aware that they are interpreting the Bible, let alone understand the importance of learning how to do it well.

It's important that we recognize our own biases, those of the writer, and a host of other variables.

This series with Richard Rohr introduces what he calls "**The Jesus Hermeneutic.**" He explores Jesus' own relationship with the Hebrew Scriptures (wisdom literature, histories, prophets, and psalms) and offers a lens we can use to read the Bible. **These lessons are stepping stones for your own further study and exploration.**

The Jesus Hermeneutic

I've often said the Bible is the best book in the world and the worst book in the world. It is the worst when it is used for bullying and self-justification; it is the best when it is used for the healing of the world and for our own transformation. Obviously, God intended the latter. I'd like to begin by sharing the way I approach Scripture, a way that focuses on healing and transformation.

My methodology and hermeneutic is almost too simple: *I try to read the Bible the way that Jesus did.* This is precisely what Christians should mean when we speak of understanding the Scriptures "in the light of Christ."

A Practice to Deepen Experience

Think of your experience with the Bible: Was there a point when you felt it lost its relevance to your life and the world? Or recall a time when people who considered themselves "the gatekeepers" of Scripture used it to prove a point. What stands out to you? How did you respond at the time?

Take a few moments to imagine yourself in that moment. What does it feel like in your body? Notice your stomach, chest, jaw, and breathing. Do those sensations feel like a constriction or an expansion? Without trying to explain or name the sensations, just lovingly notice and welcome what is arising in you. Sit with these sensations for a while.

Then imagine Jesus or a trusted guide or friend joining you. What might this person say? Do they reach out and hold your hand or put an arm around your shoulders? How do their presence and words change the sensations you were experiencing as a reaction to Scripture? Stay here—in your imagination—as long as you like.

Choose a way to express this experience, for example by journaling, drawing, or talking about it with someone you trust.