

Another Way to See the Bible: Lesson 2 Wednesday

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.

If you've come from a Christian denomination that reads Scripture in a literal way . . . or if you've come from a tradition that took a "sophisticated" and critical view of Scripture, Richard Rohr shares some good news.

Beyond ignoring inconsistencies or dry intellectualism is another way to see and read the Bible. In the previous lesson, we looked at Jesus' hermeneutic, an approach to interpreting the Judeo-Christian text that focuses on healing and transformation.

Father Richard says that **to take Scripture seriously is not to take it literally**. Literalism is invariably *the lowest and least level of meaning* (only 1 of 4 levels; we'll get to that in the next lesson). Most biblical authors understood this, which is why they were free to take so many liberties with what Westerners call "facts."

For example, consider that the New Testament was largely written in Greek. While Jesus may have understood some Greek, his probably didn't use it on a regular basis. Most of the Gospels were written thirty to seventy years after Jesus' death. This was centuries before the age of digital recorders. So, it makes sense that we only have a few snippets of Jesus' precise words in his native Aramaic. Jesus' exact words were apparently not that important for the Holy Spirit—or for us to read. This should keep us all humble and searching for our own experience of the Risen Christ in Scripture *now* instead of arguing over Greek verbs and tenses.

This approach understandably makes some people nervous. They might be worried that if they give an inch on a particular interpretation of Scripture, then their whole system of belief will fall apart. **Richard invites us to follow Jesus' practice of connecting the dots, searching for and focusing on the recurring themes throughout Scripture that reveal a loving and compassionate God.**

In today's lesson, continue reading about the Bible as a transformative text, an invitation to growing in wisdom and love. Then reflect on what this means to you through a few questions and a simple practice.

A Transformative Text

The Bible is an anthology of many books. It is a record of people's experience of God's self-revelation. It is an account of our very human experience of the divine intrusion into history. **The book did not fall from heaven in a pretty package. It was written by people trying to listen to God.** I believe that the Spirit was guiding the listening and writing process through human instruments, each with their own context of time and place.

Humans see "through a glass darkly . . . and all knowledge is imperfect" (1 Corinthians 13:12). **Prayer and patience surrounding such human words will keep us humble and searching for the true Living Word, which is how the Spirit teaches** (1 Corinthians 2:10,13).

This is what it means to know something "contemplatively." Scripture, like life itself, is always three steps forward and two steps backward. We get the point and then we lose or doubt it. In that, the biblical text mirrors our own human consciousness and journey. Our job is to see where the "three steps forward" texts are heading (invariably toward mercy, inclusion, nonviolence, and trust) and to spot the "two steps backward" texts (which are usually about vengeance, exclusion, a rather petty and insecure God, law over grace, incidentals over substance, and technique over relationship).