

A Guide for Discussion

You may of course read the books in this series on your own, but because they focus on the transformation of the Episcopal Church in the twenty-first century the books are especially useful as a basis for discussion and reflection within a congregation or community. The questions below are intended to generate fruitful discussion about an experience of the Bible in the congregations with which members of the group are familiar.

Each group will identify its own needs and will be shaped by the interests of the participants and their comfort in sharing personal life stories. Discussion leaders will wish to focus on particular areas that address the concerns and goals of the group, using the questions and themes provided here simply as suggestions for a place to start the conversation.

chapter one

The Bible as Meeting Ground

In this chapter Wade uses the analogy of the Bible and a book about swimming: “Such a book could tell us much about the physics of water displacement, the manner in which various aquatic creatures move about, the disciplines of Olympic athletes, and the joys of pool and pond. But the study of swimming can take us just so far. At some point the book must be put down and the water entered. Our own faith seeks such a moment” (pp. 15–16).

- ♦ What aspects of Bible study are similar to the process of learning the physics and dynamics of swimming? Why are they important to learn? Where and how did you learn them?
- ♦ When have you “put down” your Bible and “entered the water”? How was your life changed or your faith deepened by the experience?



Wade notes that the books of the Bible were chosen in the midst of conflict and serious cultural and political problems, to “help form identity in tumultuous and confusing times” (p. 30). He therefore has confidence that the “ancient truths of scripture” will “guide us through the uncharted waters of the twenty-first century” (p. 31).

- ♦ In what ways do you see the Bible’s “ancient truths” guiding the church today?
- ♦ How does the church recognize and receive the guidance of scripture?
- ♦ What are some of the barriers to our hearing and acting on the truths of the Bible today?

chapter two

The Art of Effective Bible Study

In this chapter Wade describes Anglican's "three-legged stool" of scripture, tradition, and reason, and notes that the "conversation" among them "works best when the deeper rhythms and wider truths of the Bible are allowed to speak to the experiences of life" (p. 47).

- ♦ What are some of the "deeper rhythms" and "wider truths" of the Bible? How do you identify them?
- ♦ How does tradition and reason inform or challenge your interpretation of "difficult" passages in the Bible, such as the acceptance of slavery (Ephesians 6:5–8); the mandate for genocide (Deuteronomy 20:10–18); or the silencing of women in worship (1 Timothy 2:11–15)?



Wade affirms the importance of the community of faith as "the repository of scripture, tradition, and reason, the interpreter of experience, the setting for the sacraments, and the home of our companions in the meeting ground where God is known" (p. 50).

- ♦ Describe an occasion in which the community of faith has changed your understanding of a passage or basic truth of the Bible.
- ♦ When have you been affected or harmed by the "bad fruit" that developed from a biblical interpretation that you believe is misguided or wrong?
- ♦ If our "theophanies" and interpretations of scripture need the validation of a community (see p. 56), how does that happen, practically speaking? How do we "hear" our community?

chapter three

Surveying the Methods

In this chapter Wade distinguishes between “methods” and “systems” in studying the Bible: methods are about “*moving* along a path,” while systems are about “*taking a stand*.” He notes that “in a method we know the path but not the answer we will find. In a system we know the answer and are showing the path by which one might come to it” (p. 59).

- ♦ Describe a time in which you encountered a system of Bible study. What was the “stand” that was taken? How was the Bible used to support that stand?
- ♦ Describe a time in which you encountered a method of Bible study. What “path” was followed? Where did it lead?



Revisit the principles of Anglican Bible study that Wade outlines on page 61.

- ♦ Do these principles reflect the experiences you have had of reading the Bible in your congregation? in your personal study?
- ♦ If you have studied the Bible in non-religious settings or in other Christian traditions, how did their approach to scripture differ from the principles outlined here? What did you find most helpful in those different approaches? What was lacking?
- ♦ Do you have experience with any of the methods described in this chapter? In what ways did they express the Anglican principles Wade outlines? What other methods have you found to be effective? Why?

chapter four

Rethinking Our Attitudes

In this chapter Wade considers our underlying assumptions regarding God and the Bible. He describes these attitudes as “embedded theology”: they are “our unexamined ideas about life, faith, and God,” and are “distinct from ‘deliberative theology’—the ideas we have really worked on and figured out in a systematic way” (p. 105).

- ◆ How would you describe the basic principles of your “embedded theology”?
- ◆ What preconceived ideas about God or the Bible have you discovered when you have encountered suffering, your own or others’?
- ◆ What preconceived ideas about God or the Bible have you discovered when you have encountered success or abundance, your own or others’?



Wade quotes C. S. Lewis as noting that “two heads are better than one, not because they are infallible but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction” (p. 107).

- ◆ When has the church’s tradition or the witness of other faith traditions caused you to rethink your understanding of God or the Bible?
- ◆ When have scientific discoveries caused you to rethink your understanding of God or the Bible?
- ◆ When have changes in your experience of culture or society caused you to rethink your understanding of God or the Bible?

chapter five

Stories from the Meeting Ground

In this chapter Wade tells the stories of churches that have creatively engaged the Bible and been transformed by it through listening to the stories of others.

- ◆ When have you experienced the power of the Bible to bring reconciliation in the midst of conflict? Describe how the Bible was used to resolve the disagreements.
- ◆ When have you experienced the power of the Bible to divide a community? Describe how the Bible was used to create or exacerbate the divisions.
- ◆ What are some of the differences between these two experiences of conflict? How can the Bible both unite and divide us?



Wade concludes this chapter with a question: “Episcopalians have all of the pieces in place for a powerful experience with the Bible—so why are we not characterized by such experiences?” (p. 135).

- ◆ How would you answer his question?
- ◆ Have you ever told someone about an experience of God you had or an insight you received while reading the Bible? What was the response? If not, why have you chosen not to speak of that experience?
- ◆ What would it take for you to develop a discipline of Bible study that is characterized by “regular, expectant reading of the Word” (p. 136)? What is stopping you?