

## *A Different Way to Read the Bible*

### **Syllabus and Study Guide**

Version 2.3

**Dedicated to Bill Murchison, a Loyal Parishioner and Best Friend to Everyone. He is missed sorely.**

### **Table of Editions**

- 2.10.19 – First version
- 2.13.19 – First revision

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Chapter 1. Orientation to 7-Week Class .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Class Process &amp; Structure .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Resources for this Class.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Learning Theory – Divergent &amp; Convergent Thinking Process.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Week-by-Week Layout.....</b>	<b>6</b>
First 7-Week Class.....	6
Second 7-Week Class.....	7
<b>Chapter 2. Week-by-Week Guide.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Weekly Format .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Opening Prayer.....	8
<b>Syllabus .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 3. Class Notes.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter 4. Overview of the Meditations and Reflections Process .....</b>	<b>16</b>
Orientation to Meditation.....	16
<b>Chapter 4. Meditations for Bible Study.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter 5. Journal .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix A. Binding of Isaac.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Appendix B <i>A Different Way to Read the Bible: A 3-Step Process</i>.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Appendix C <i>Non-Dualistic Process to More Fulfilling Relationships</i> .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Appendix D <i>Stop Worry 3-Step Process</i> .....</b>	<b>40</b>

## Chapter 1. Orientation to 7-Week Class

In the Introduction to the book upon which this class is based, the author, Rob Bell, *Time* magazine 2011 “100 Most Influential People” & leading author advancing Christian thought, writes, “I had just given a sermon, and I was standing around afterward talking to people when a man named Richard walked up to me and said, ‘You missed it.’

“ ‘What?’ I asked him. ‘What did I miss?’

“He then proceeded to rattle off a seemingly endless list of things that were happening in the story from the *Bible* that I had just given a sermon about. Background and hints and meaning and innuendo and humor and tension and history. The more he went on, the more I realized how right he was: I had missed it. Richard went on to remind me that Jesus lived in a first-century Jewish world of politics and economics and common stories and inside jokes, and the more you know about that work, the more He & His message will come to life. “ (Bell, 1-4)

The book, *What Is the Bible? How an Ancient Library of Poems, Letters, and Stories Can Transform the Way You Think and Feel About Everything*, was recommended by Phil Johnson and Michael Thompson as an excellent Christian Education endeavor. Boy, were they right!

### Class Process & Structure

After reading and analyzing the best approach to extract the richness of this analytical work, it has been organized into two 7-Week classes (and perhaps a third follow-on 7-Week segment later on). Each week we will discuss the chapters and underlying Scripture assigned for that week, perhaps watch a video, and engage in lively discussion. For Post-Class enrichment, optional materials for meditation & reflection, further independent study

suggestions, and online “Discussion Group” opportunities via the Christ Church website will be made available.

## Resources for this Class

(Either provided or available in class):

- *The Bible*
- The book
- *Wikipedia*
- This Study Guide, including a Journal for Journaling
- Hebrew & Greek to English Translation book
- Videos (on website)
- Meditations and Reflections (for optional use)
- Online “Discussion Group” via the Christ Church website

## Learning Theory – Divergent & Convergent Thinking Process

First, a suggestion on how to get the most out of Rob Bell’s thoughtful and enlightened work. Many scholars in the field of learning theory suggest that adults are far too quick to attempt to arrive at the “perfect” interpretation of information and data. Instead, they invest woefully too little time considering as many alternative explanations of an event, a situation, or data. In group learning and analytic sessions you can almost feel the tension among individuals in the group as they seemingly sit on pins and needles until they find the opportunity to jump in with an explanation or solution. Even when they are schooled in use of tools like brainstorming whose purpose is to assist groups in staying in the open mind state, one or more individuals will jump in when one of their colleagues suggest an alternative by critiquing that person’s idea. We, as humans, are just not that great at listening to different explanations, different ideas, different interpretations.

These competing mindsets have names. Divergent thinking refers to that open-minded, free-flowing, “Blue Skying”, if you will, or brainstorming process; it’s quest is to unleash the creative process in our minds and in groups to identify multiple options as shown the figure below. Convergent thinking, on the other hand, is that thinking process designed to narrow

those alternatives and choices into a single agreed-upon solution. It has been suggested that individuals and groups invest more time in the divergent thinking phase than in the convergent thinking phase. More on this when we get into Rob Bell's *Reading the Bible* process in Week 3.

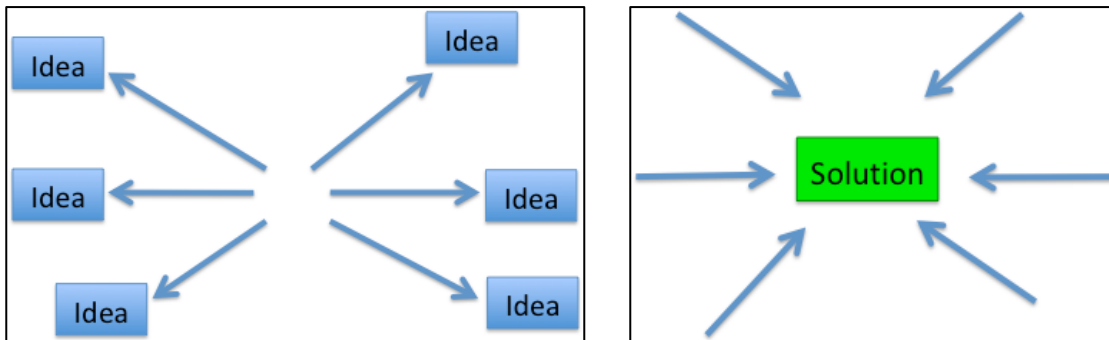


Figure 1: Divergent & Convergent Thinking

## Week-by-Week Layout

### First 7-Week Class

Week	Topic
1	• <i>Why You're Probably Reading the Bible Wrong</i>
2	• <i>A New Kind of Tribe; A New Kind of God</i>
3	• <i>A Different Way to Read the Bible</i>
4	• <i>Dualistic vs. Non-Dualistic Thinking: A 4-Step Process to More Fulfilling Relationships</i>
5	• <i>Forgiveness: Jonah, the Assyrians, and the Fish</i> • <i>Worry - It's Over-rated: About Pearls &amp; Pigs</i>
6	• <i>Summation: The 3 Best &amp; 3 Worst Questions to Ask When Reading the Bible</i>
7	• <i>Applied Learning Using Rob Bell's Reading the Bible Process</i>

## Second 7-Week Class

Week	Topic
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Did Jesus Have to Die?</i> (Ch.32)</li><li>• <i>Why Are There Two Genealogies of Jesus in the New Testament?</i> (Ch.29)</li></ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>In What Context Can We Understand Sin?</i> (Ch.35)</li></ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Is the Bible True? Is It Inspired? How Do We Deal with Contradictions in the Bible?</i> (Ch.38-40)</li></ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Is the Wrath of God Arbitrary (Trick Question)</i> (Ch.34)</li><li>• <i>Why Did People Just Fall Over Dead in the New Testament?</i> (Ch.31)</li></ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Predestination: What or What-Not?</i> (Ch.33)</li></ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>The Word "Word" Appears 1400 Times in the Bible. Why?</i> (Ch.36)</li><li>• <i>Why is Leviticus in the Bible?</i> (Ch.30)</li></ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Dealer's Choice: Participants Select a Favorite Scripture to Share with Others in the Class</i></li></ul>

Bell, Rob. 2017. *What Is the Bible? How an Ancient Library of Poems, Letters, and Stories Can Transform the Way You Think and Feel About Everything*. NY: HarperOne.

## Chapter 2. Week-by-Week Guide

### Weekly Format

#### Opening Prayer

Begin each class with this or another suitable Opening Prayer.

As we enter this special time with you, O Lord, quiet the busy-ness of our minds, free us from distraction, and open our eyes, our ears, our minds, and our hearts to be enlightened anew to Your Word with openness and eagerness, not to understand as we would understand, but as You would have us understand. May the richness of our heritage come alive in You that we may leave this place with enriched ways of seeing Your world, living in Your world, and the destiny within it You have carefully constructed for each one of us. Through Him who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### Syllabus

Week	Topic	Readings
1	<i>Why You're Probably Reading the Bible Wrong</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opening Prayer</li><li>• Orientation to Class process &amp; structure – Review this syllabus and study guide</li><li>• Handout resources</li><li>• View Video <i>Why You're Probably Reading the Bible Wrong</i></li><li>• Discussion of video</li><li>• Prep for Next Week<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Read book assignment and <i>Bible</i> reading for next week</li><li>○ Complete Meditation &amp; Reflection (optional)</li><li>○ Record in Journal</li><li>○ Participate in online Discussion Group (if desired)</li></ul></li></ul>	



## 2 *A New Kind of Tribe; A New Kind of God*

- Opening Prayer
- Discussion of readings
  - How different was Rob Bell's version of Isaac's (almost) sacrifice & the Jewish, Christian, & Muslim accounts on *Wikipedia*?
  - Were you able to track Rob Bell's analysis from the *Bible* reading?
  - What were the differences (if any) in Rob's way of interpretation & your previous understanding?
  - Were there any "Ah-Ha's"?
- Prep for Next Week
  - Read book assignment and *Bible* reading for next week
  - Complete Meditation & Reflection (optional)
  - Record in Journal
  - Participate in online Discussion Group (if desired)

- Gen 12 & 22
- Introduction, Ch. 16, & Ch. 14
- Appendix A of this study guide or,
- *Wikipedia*, search "Binding of Isaac"
- 

## 3 *A Different Way to Read the Bible*

- Opening Prayer
- Video *Rob Bell's Reading the Bible Process – Week 3*
- Discussion of readings & video
  - What are the key steps in Rob Bell's process to read *Bible* scripture?
  - Were you able to track Rob Bell's dialogue as you read *Ruth & Gen 13*?
  - Were there any "Ah-Ha's"?
- Rob Bell's *A Different Way to Read the Bible: A 3-Step Process* (Appendix B) (Bell, 15, 78)
- Prep for Next Week
  - Read book assignment and *Bible* reading for next week
  - Complete Meditation & Reflection (optional)
  - Record in Journal
  - Participate in online Discussion Group (if desired)

- Intro, Ch. 6-7, p.70, Ch. 10-11, Ch. 21, p.292-last 2 paragraphs
- Ruth, then Gen 13
- Video *Rob Bell's Reading the Bible Process –Week 3*

#### 4 *Dualistic vs. Non-Dualistic Thinking: A 4-Step Process to More Fulfilling Relationships*

- Opening Prayer
- Video: Richard Rohr on *Dualistic vs. Non-Dualistic Thinking*
- Discussion of readings & video
  - What were your major take-aways from the video and readings?
  - What do you think are the causes of Dualistic Thinking in today's world?
  - How can we apply Non-Dualistic Thinking more often?
  - Rob Bell's *Non-Dualistic Thinking* Process: Appendix C
    - Block out differences (that is, dualistic)
    - Identify commonalities
    - Share each other's stories
    - Develop non-threatening/non-judgmental descriptions of your differences (best if jokingly).
  - Were there any other "Ah-Ha's"?
- Prep for Next Week
  - Read book assignment and *Bible* reading for next week
  - Complete Meditation & Reflection (optional)
  - Record in Journal
  - Participate in online Discussion Group (if desired)

- Ch. 22
- Video - Richard Rohr on Dualistic vs Non-Dualistic Thinking

#### 5 • *Forgiveness: Jonah, the Assyrians, and the Fish* • *Worry - It's Over-rated: About Pearls & Pigs*

- Opening Prayer
- View video *Jonah, the Assyrians, & the Fish* & p.97
- Discussion of readings & video
  - What were the differences (if any) in Rob's way of interpretation & your previous understanding?
  - Were you able to track Rob Bell's dialogue as you read *Jonah* and *Matthew 7*?
  - Were there any "Ah-Ha's"?
  - *Stop Worry 3-Step Process* page 71 & Appendix D
    1. Commit yourself to God's Loving Care
    2. Surrender your worry & anxiety & drama & stress
    3. Entrust *others* to God

- Read *Jonah 1:1 – 4:11*
- Website video *Jonah, the Assyrians, & the Fish*
- Read *Mt 7*
- Read Ch. 19, 13, & 9

- Prep for Next Week
  - Read book assignment and *Bible* reading for next week
  - Complete Meditation & Reflection (optional)
  - Record in Journal
  - Participate in online Discussion Group (if desired)

6 *Summation: The 3 Best & 3 Worst Questions to Ask When Reading the Bible*

- Read Ch. 41-42

- Opening Prayer
- Discussion of the “3 Best & 3 Worst Questions to Ask When Reading the *Bible*”.
- Prep for Next Week
  - Homework
    - Read the story of Jesus, the Pharisees, & the Adulterer (Jn 8:1-11)
    - Complete the Rob Bell *Reading the Bible* process in Appendix B, tell the story of Jesus, the Pharisees, and the Adulterer.
    - Be prepared to discuss your “lessons learned” in applying the process to this *Bible* story.
  - Complete Meditation & Reflection (optional)
  - Record in Journal
  - Participate in online Discussion Group (if desired)

7 *Applied Learning Application Using Rob Bell’s Reading the Bible Process: Jesus, the Pharisees, and the Adulterer*

- John 8:1-11
- Appendix B

- Opening Prayer
- Jesus and the Adulterer (Jn 8:1-11) – Using the Rob Bell *Reading the Bible* process in Appendix B, tell the story of Jesus, the Pharisees, and the Adulterer
- Final Steps
  - Complete Meditation & Reflection (optional)
  - Record in Journal
  - Participate in online Discussion Group (if desired)

## Chapter 3. Class Notes

In order to take maximum advantage of the education and discussions, this section is provided for your notes and incorporation into revelations during meditations and reflections.

Week 1.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Revelations.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Week 2.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Revelations.

_____	_____
_____	_____

---

---

---

---

---

---

Week 3.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Revelations.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Week 4.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Revelations.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Week 5.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Revelations.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Week 6.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Revelations.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Week 7.

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Revelations.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

## Chapter 4. Overview of the Meditations and Reflections Process

### Orientation to Meditation

First, for our purposes in this and other meditations series, we hold a specific meaning for meditation. Some think of meditations as a synonym for prayer. Others refer to meditation as “thinking”. These are not what we seek in this meditations process as they do not enrich God’s intended relationship with us. They suggest a one-way relationship, one in which we are the only active participant, one in which we talk to God, but rarely remain silent to allow His grace and wisdom to guide us through directed “listenings”.

For the purpose of these meditations we intend a highly specific definition of meditation. Meditation as a structured, disciplined, and dedicated process to allow God to speak directly to our hearts, minds, and our spirits. That is, it is “a listening”. Therefore, by this definition, meditation is not a time for us to speak to God, either for intercessions or for thanksgiving or praise. Reflect on the number of times in the Gospels that the writer observed that Jesus had gone away to “pray” – up into the hills, most often. The purpose of these times alone with God has been made perfectly clear to us. Jesus did not enter this time as petitioner, nay, not to request intervention from God upon His own life, to provide Him earthly comfort or to avoid a difficult path, nor to request anything on His own behalf. But, rather, His time with God was to ask for guidance, perhaps for specific actions and steps to take in the coming hours or days. In other words, His time with God was to listen, to meditate, not to petition. Even in His dying meditation He said, “Yet not what I will, but what you will.” [Mk 14:36] Can we learn anything more important from His time on earth as a human above that He listened and meditated with God, seeking God’s will, not His own? As advised in Ecclesiastes, “..., there is a time to speak, ....” But, now is not that time. Now is “... a time to be silent....”

The meditations appearing in this manuscript follow a category of meditation known as Lectio Divina (Kaisch, 162-182). The main attraction to Lectio Divina for a meditations series



like this is that in following the Gospel readings with a specific focus area, like Bible Study, Lectio prepares us in such a way that we, first, with faith and grace from God, close our connectedness to all things of this world, connect our hearts, minds, and spirits to God, followed by a living out of the words and life of Christ in a state beyond time, space, and physics. We are transcended by God into His world where He speaks directly to us, sometimes with undeniable clarity, sometimes in undetectable ways, and sometimes by His silence to our minds. Who knows but God what He may be recording beyond our temporal sensory capabilities in our hearts and spirits?

Other categories of meditation, however, for those who would like to expand their experiential horizons beyond Lectio, abound. These other types are:

- Contemplative Meditation, a higher order meditative form in which we silence all our being into a Jungian-type connectedness to God;
- Monologistic Prayer, like mantras, the use of a rosary, or recitation of the Jesus Prayer (CF: Anonymous. R.M. French, trans. *The Way of the Pilgrim*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1965.)
- Sensory Meditation, in which we draw upon a visual image, or music, or smell, to experience God's call to us; and,
- Recollection.
- Reflection.

For our purposes in this guidebook, expect to be guided by God, using a purposeful meditation or reflection drawing from scripture, hymn, or inspirational story.

Second, journaling is an important component in our spiritual growth and development. For your convenience, a journaling vehicle is provided throughout the meditations where appropriate. However, do not feel obligated to use this form to journal. Whether you journal here or another form of diary or planning template is immaterial. It is the journaling process that is important.

Third, these meditations follow a specific focus area of *Growth in Spirit*. It is a vital element of stewardship beyond giving of time, talent, and treasure. Considering that each meditation lasts between eighteen and sixty minutes, that is a lot of meditation. Do not feel compelled to engage in a predetermined timeline of the Bible Study or any other arbitrary time constraint. It is more important that we are ready to listen to God, not rushing to complete the meditation series. So, if it takes six months to complete the series, or if you skip half of them, do not be concerned, but rather feel drawn into your conversations with God, as He desires. You will know when the time with Him is just the right amount. Trust Him, not yourself, to gauge your schedule. If you feel drawn by God into a time of meditation, enjoy it. If you feel you are still absorbed in processing a past meditation, allow God to complete the process before moving on. Or, even return again to the last or past meditation until you feel God is drawing you ahead.

Fourth, some “rules of the road” have benefited others in their meditation journey, as follows:

- Truly listen to God and avoid speaking more than is prudent to gain an understanding of what He is placing in your heart. A good rule of thumb might be to listen at least 75 percent of the time, speaking no more than 25 percent or not at all.
- Be patient, both during your meditations and in your reflections in the hours, days, and weeks after. Allow God to speak directly to your heart, not your head.
- At times, expect incompleteness, silence, and/or a feeling that God is not interacting in ways that are immediately detectable. You may feel that God is not speaking to you (and indeed He may not be at that exact moment). You are on God’s time now and not your own. Who other than God can know His calendar unless He reveals it to us? Do not attempt to direct His path, but rather patiently listen and grow from your time with Him.
- Expect varying emotional responses. You might find tears in your eyes or you may feel totally emotionless. You may feel elation or you may feel despair. In other words, expect the unexpected. Nothing inside your communion with God is beyond limits. But, of course, in times of “at this moment” discomfort or despair, always know that His love

proceeds beyond this moment and transcends all human suffering. Allow yourself to feel His love for you even at times you feel completely unloved, unlovable, and utterly alone. And know that, like Ruth, in His time, He will provide, perhaps not euphoria or perpetual elation, but rather for your contentment.

- Expect to attempt to shape God's call to you to your own desires, later feeling a discomfort in your heart. After all, you are human and have human fears and self-centeredness in your core. God made you this way (for whatever reason) and obviously loves you just as you are. If you feel so conflicted, either during a meditation or sometime after, simply return to that meditation, as often as it takes, until your heart tells you to move on.
- Expect that what seemed a clear revelation, perhaps even a direct "promise" from God in a meditation, does not materialize. These seem the most disappointing when they occur to me, but a return to meditation, placing your anxieties and confusion directly in God's hands prepares your heart for God's ultimate call to you.
- You might feel that it is a good idea to share your revelations with a trusted friend or spiritual mentor, someone who can aid you in understanding the deeper nature of your heart. But, be careful not to replace the interpretations of others with those revealed to you by God in your meditations. Rather, if you become conflicted about the meaning of a meditation response as a result of an interpretation or expressed feeling of a friend or spiritual mentor, repeat that meditation as often as you feel necessary until God's intentions for your life, either short-term or long-term, become crystallized.
- Finally, you may feel a particularly strong connection to God after a meditation. As you reflect on these revelations, prayerfully consider sharing your conversation, and any resultant change in your life or the lives of others, beyond your immediate sphere of influence. Regardless of how insignificant you feel your meditation might have been, your small candle may become a floodlight for others. So, with all humility, prayerfully consider sharing Christ's revelations in your life so that they might be shared with others for their journey.

## Chapter 4. Meditations for Bible Study

The meditations and reflections contained in this chapter are to guide us to prayerfully consider the impact of our Bible Study on our day-to-day lives.

### Opening Prayer

As I enter this special time with you, O Lord, quiet my mind, quiet my ears, quiet my heart, that I may fully enjoy this communion with you. Through faith and Your grace, permit me to ignore all that troubles my heart that you may live in me and me in You and be guided by You in this special time with You. Through Him who reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### Reading

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the Holy One, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.’ ” *Rev 3:7-9,11*

### Meditation

Before beginning this meditation, assure that you will have at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted time with God in a comfortable place. After reflecting on the Reading, expect to be led to God, not to "talk" to Him, but rather for a "listening". Distractions during a meditation are normal. If you feel yourself talking to God or thinking of something else, simply acknowledge the thought and instruct yourself to return to the meditation in silence. As advised in Ecclesiastes, "... there is a time to speak,..." But, now is not that time. Now is "...a time to be silent."

Read through the meditation below. Then, after re-reading the Reading or Bible Study notes, expect to be silent, listening to God for as long as you feel He is speaking to you. Accept the mystery of God's presence in your heart in whatever forms it takes - through

quietness or through a distinct feeling of communication. Whatever form your meditation takes will be the right form for now. Accept God's gift and trust in Him.

To begin this meditation, find a comfortable spot where you will be uninterrupted for at least 30 minutes. Seat yourself comfortably. Breathe deeply and slowly for two to three minutes. Visualize all the things that trouble you fall from your shoulders onto the ground, leaving your body light as a feather.

Visualize yourself on a warm, sunny day, walking in a park. Feel the warm sun on your face. Breathe in the smell of fresh bread in an oven in a diner nearby. As you continue leisurely strolling, a *Bible* verse or Bible Study revelation pops into your head.

For the next several minutes, quietly reflect upon these thoughts seeking God's enlightenment.

Feel your meditation come softly to an end. Feel the refreshing sensation Jesus has placed upon you and know that this sensation will stay with you all day long.

**Reflection** – to be used when time is short

During your reflections time, what revelations were revealed to you? How do these revelations make you feel? How will these revelations impact your day-to-day or more long-term life? What actions, if any, do your revelations stimulate?

**Journaling** - see next chapter or use another form of journaling

# Chapter 5. Journal

Record your reflections below. Include date, scripture, and any major revelations.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---





















## Appendix A. Binding of Isaac

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binding\\_of\\_Isaac](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Binding_of_Isaac)

The Binding of Isaac (Hebrew: קִדְּוֹת יִצְחָק (Qedat Yitzhaq, in Hebrew also simply "The Binding", הַקְּדוּת הַיִּדְהָ Ha-Aqedah, -Aqedah) [1] is a story from the Hebrew Bible found in Genesis 22. In the biblical narrative, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac, on Moriah. Abraham begins to comply, when a messenger from God interrupts him. Abraham then sees a ram and sacrifices it instead. This episode has been the focus of a great deal of commentary in traditional Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources, as well as being addressed by modern scholarship. Biblical narrative Jewish views Christian views Muslim views Modern research Redactors and narrative purpose Ethical responsibility Possible child sacrifice Rite of Passage See also Notes References External links According to the Hebrew Bible, God commands Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice.[Gen 22:2-8] After Isaac is bound to an altar, a messenger from God stops Abraham at the last minute, saying "now I know you fear God." Abraham looks up and sees a ram and sacrifices it instead of Isaac. The passage states that the event occurred at "the mount of the LORD" [2] in "the land of Moriah." [3] 2 Chronicles 3:1 refers to "mount Moriah" as the site of Solomon's Temple, while Psalms 24:3; Isaiah 2:3 & 30:29; and Zechariah 8:3 use the term "the mount of the LORD" to refer to the site of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, the location believed to be the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. In *The Binding of Isaac, Religious Murders & Kabbalah*, Lippman Bodoff argues that Abraham never intended to actually sacrifice his son, and that he had faith that God had no intention that he do so. Rabbi Ari Kahn (on the Orthodox Union website) elaborates this view as follows: Isaac's death was never a possibility — not Mosaic "Sacrifice of Isaac" - Basilica of San Vitale (A.D. 547) The Sacrifice of Isaac by Caravaggio, in the Baroque tenebrist manner Contents Biblical narrative God commands Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, Domenichino Jewish views as far as Abraham was concerned, and not as far as God was concerned. God's commandment to Abraham was very specific, and Abraham understood it very precisely: Isaac was to be "raised up as an offering", and God would use the opportunity to teach humankind, once and for all, that human sacrifice, child sacrifice, is not acceptable. This is precisely how the sages of the Talmud (Taanit 4a) understood the Akedah. Citing the Prophet Jeremiah's exhortation against child sacrifice (Chapter 19), they state unequivocally that such behavior "never crossed God's mind", referring specifically to the sacrificial slaughter of Isaac. Though readers of this parashah throughout the generations have been disturbed, even horrified, by the Akedah, there was no miscommunication between God and Abraham. The thought of actually killing Isaac never crossed their minds. [4] The Jewish Publication Society suggests Abraham's apparent complicity with the sacrifice was actually his way of testing God. Abraham had previously argued with God to save lives in Sodom and Gomorrah. By silently complying with God's instructions to kill Isaac, Abraham was putting pressure on God to act in a moral way to preserve life. More evidence that Abraham thought that he would not actually sacrifice Isaac comes from Genesis 22:5, where Abraham said to his servants, "You stay here with the ass. The boy and I will go up there; we will worship and we will return to you." By saying we (as opposed to I), he meant that both he and Isaac would return. Thus, he did not believe that Isaac would be sacrificed in the end. [5] In *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides argues that the story of the Binding of Isaac contains two "great notions". First, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac demonstrates the limit of

humanity's capability to both love and fear God. Second, because Abraham acted on a prophetic vision of what God had asked him to do, the story exemplifies how prophetic revelation has the same truth value as philosophical argument and thus carries equal certainty, notwithstanding the fact that it comes in a dream or vision.[6] In *Glory and Agony: Isaac's Sacrifice and National Narrative*, Yael S. Feldman argues that the story of Isaac's Binding, in both its biblical and post-biblical versions (the New Testament included) has had a great impact on the ethos of altruist heroism and self-sacrifice in modern Hebrew national culture. As her study demonstrates, over the last century the "Binding of Isaac" has morphed into the "Sacrifice of Isaac", connoting both the glory and agony of heroic death on the battlefield.[7] In *Legends of the Jews*, rabbi Louis Ginzberg argues that the binding of Isaac is a way of God to test Isaac's claim to Ishmael, and to silence Satan's protest about Abraham who had not brought up any offering to God after Isaac was born,[8] also to show a proof to the world that Abraham is the true god-fearing man who is ready to fulfill any of God's commands, even to sacrifice his own son: When God commanded the father to desist from sacrificing Isaac, Abraham said: "One man tempts another, because he knoweth not what is in the heart of his neighbor. But Thou surely didst know that I was ready to sacrifice my son!" God: "It was manifest to Me, and I foreknew it, that thou wouldst withhold not even thy soul from Me." Abraham: "And why, then, didst Thou afflict me thus?" God: "It was My wish that the world should become acquainted with thee, and should know that it is not without good reason that I have chosen thee from all the nations. Now it hath been witnessed unto men that thou fearest God." — *Legends of the Jews*[8] Abraham and Isaac (oil on canvas), Rembrandt, 1634 Mosaic on the floor of Beth Alpha depicting the Akedah The Book of Genesis does not tell the age of Isaac at the time.[9] Some Talmudic sages teach that Isaac was an adult in his age of thirty seven,[8] likely based on the next biblical story, which is of Sarah's death at 127 years[Genesis 23:1] , being 90 when Isaac was born[Genesis 17:17, 21] . [10] Isaac's reaction to the binding is unstated in the biblical narrative. Some commentators have argued that he was traumatized and angry, often citing the fact that he and Abraham are never seen to speak to each other again; however, Jon D. Levenson notes that they never speak before the binding, either. [11] The Binding of Isaac is mentioned in the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews among many acts of faith recorded in the Old Testament: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." (Hebrews 1:17–19, NKJV) Abraham's faith in God is such that he felt God would be able to resurrect the slain Isaac, in order that his prophecy (Genesis 21:12) might be fulfilled. Early Christian preaching sometimes accepted Jewish interpretations of the binding of Isaac without elaborating. For example, Hippolytus of Rome says in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, "The blessed Isaac became desirous of the anointing and he wished to sacrifice himself for the sake of the world" (On the Song 2:15).[12] Other Christians from the period saw Isaac as a type of the "Word of God" who prefigured Christ.[13] This interpretation can be supported by symbolism and context such as Abraham sacrificing his son on the third day of the journey (Genesis 22:4), or Abraham taking the wood and putting it on his son Isaac's shoulder (Genesis 22:6). Another thing to note is how God reemphasizes Isaac being his one and only son whom he loves (Genesis 22:2,12,16). The version in the Quran differs from that in Genesis. In Islamic sources, when Abraham tells his son about the vision, his son agreed to

be sacrificed for the fulfillment of God's command, and no binding to the altar occurred. The Quran states that when Abraham asked for a righteous son, God granted him a son possessing forbearance. When the son was able to walk and work with him, Abraham saw a vision about sacrificing his son, Ishmael. When he told his son about it, his son agreed to fulfill the command of God in the vision. When they both had submitted their will to God and were ready for the sacrifice, God told Abraham he had fulfilled the vision, and provided him with a ram to sacrifice instead. God promised to reward Abraham.[14] The next two verses state God also granted Abraham the righteous son Isaac and promised more rewards.[15] Among early Muslim scholars, there was a dispute over the identity of the son. One side of the argument, the majority, believed it was Isaac rather than Ishmael (notably ibn Qutaybah and al-Tabari) was that "God's perfecting his mercy on Abraham and Isaac" referred to his making Abraham his friend, and to his rescuing Isaac. The other side held that the promise to Sarah was of a son, Isaac, and a grandson, Jacob (Sura 11:71–74) excluded the possibility of a premature death of Isaac. Regardless, most Muslims believe that it is actually Ishmael rather than Isaac despite the dispute.[16] Christian views Sacrifice of Isaac, by Adi Holzer, 1997 Muslim views Ibrahim's Sacrifice. Timurid Anthology, 1410-11. The submission of Abraham and his son is celebrated and commemorated by Muslims on the days of Eid al-Adha. During the festival, those who can afford and the ones in the pilgrimage sacrifice a ram, cow, sheep or a camel. Part of the sacrifice meat is eaten by the household and remaining is distributed to the neighbors and the needy. The festival marks the end of the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. In Islam, the site of al-Marwah near the Kaaba is identified with the Moriah mentioned in the Book of Genesis. Modern scholars operating under the framework of the documentary hypothesis commonly ascribe the Binding's narrative to the biblical source E, on the grounds that it generally uses the specific term Elohim (אלוהים) (and parallels characteristic E compositions. On that view, the second angelic appearance to Abraham (v. 14–18), praising his obedience and blessing his offspring, is in fact a later Jahwist interpolation to E's original account (v. 1–13, 19). This is supported by the style and composition of these verses, as well as by the use of the name Yahweh for the deity. [17] In *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, the literary critic Erich Auerbach considers the Hebrew narrative of the Binding of Isaac, along with Homer's description of Odysseus's scar, as the two paradigmatic models for the representation of reality in literature. Auerbach contrasts Homer's attention to detail and foregrounding of the spatial, historical, as well as personal contexts for events to the Bible's sparse account, in which virtually all context is kept in the background or left outside of the narrative. As Auerbach observes, this narrative strategy virtually compels readers to add their own interpretations to the text. More recent studies question the analysis of E and J as strictly separate. Coats argues that Abraham's obedience to God's command in fact necessitates praise and blessing, which he only receives in the second angelic speech.[18] That speech, therefore, could not have been simply inserted into E's original account. This has suggested to many that the author responsible for the interpolation of the second angelic appearance has left his mark also on the original account (v. 1–13, 19).[17] More recently it has been suggested that these traces are in fact the first angelic appearance (v. 11–12), in which the Angel of YHWH stops Abraham before he kills Isaac.[19] The style and composition of these verses resemble that of the second angelic speech, and YHWH is used for the deity rather than God. On that reading, in the original E version of the Binding Abraham disobeys God's command, sacrificing the ram "instead of his son" (v. 13) on his own responsibility and

without being stopped by an angel: "And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son; but Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked and beheld, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went, and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son" (v. 10, 13). By interpolating the first appearance of the angel, a later redactor shifted responsibility for halting the test from Abraham to the angel (v. 11–12). The second angelic appearance, in which Abraham is rewarded for his obedience (v. 14–18), became necessary due to that shift of responsibility. This analysis of the story sheds light on the connection between the Binding and the story of Sodom (Genesis 18), in which Abraham protests against God's unethical plan to destroy the city, without distinguishing between the righteous and the wicked: "Far be it from you to do such a thing: Shall not the judge of all the earth do what is just?" Abraham's ethical rebellion against God in the destruction of Sodom culminates in his disobedience to God, refusing to sacrifice Isaac. [20] The Binding also figures prominently in the writings of several of the more important modern theologians, such as Søren Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling* and Shalom Spiegel in *The Last Trial*. Jewish communities regularly review this literature, for instance the recent mock Francesca Stavrakopoulou has speculated that it is possible that the story "contains traces of a tradition in which Abraham does sacrifice Isaac. [22] R.E. Friedman argued that in the original E story, Abraham may have carried out the sacrifice of Isaac, but that later repugnance at the idea of a human sacrifice led the redactor of JE to add the lines in which a ram is substituted for Isaac.[23] Likewise, Terence Fretheim wrote that the text bears no specific mark of being a polemic against child sacrifice. [24] Some scholars also point at the genealogical snippet(verses 20–24) as containing a hint to the question whether Abraham sacrificed Isaac or not. First of all, the description of a rash of newborns placed right after the main story suggests the existence of some direct cause-effect connection between the two. From the perspective of a sacrificial economy, such a numerous progeny could not have been conceived without the preceding payment in an appropriate 'currency'. Secondly, the said passage is problematic due to its onomastic content. The verses 20–23 list the progeny of Nahor and Milkah while v. 24 adds the offspring conceived with Re'umah, said to be his concubine. However, whereas verses 20–23 have some significant links with other parts of the Hebrew Bible as well as with the historical and cultural entourage of the ancient Near East, such connections are absent in v. 24. The very name of Nahor's concubine appears here exclusively and in no other place in the Hebrew Bible is Re'umah mentioned. The same applies to her children's names with the exception of Ma'akah which is sometimes utilized in the historical books. The extreme rarity of these appellations demands some alternative interpretation with regards to its purpose. Contradictory, the Hebrew name list of the children born after the sacrifice, may contain some "coded" explanation refuting any possible child sacrifice: Re'umah (רְאוּמָה) – (see what" Tevah (טְבַח) – (slaughtering of animal" or "slaughtered animal"[25] Gaham (גַּחַם) – (flame" or "burning" Tahash (תַּחַשׁ) – (animal skin" [26] Ma'akah (מַעַכָּה) – (blown" or "crushed" In other words, v. 24 begins with an interpretational invitation and continues with the names which seem to explain the cause of the rash of newborns present at the conclusion of the pericope: An animal (not Isaac) had been blown, slaughtered, put on the tabernacle, and burned.[27] It has been suggested that Genesis 22 contains an intrusion of the liturgy of a rite of passage, including mock sacrifice, as commonly found in early and preliterate societies, marking the passage from youth to adulthood.

## Appendix B A Different Way to Read the Bible: A 3-Step Process

Step 1. Read the selected scripture (the “story”).

Step 2. Ask “Why” 5 times (or more).

- Why? Why did the author feel the need to write this down?
- Why? What would this story have meant to the audience of that time (i.e. context)? Why is it important? (E.g. Was the audience under suppression? Was their society in upheaval at that time? Are there competing alternative responses to the situation?) Review a *Bible* commentary, *Wikipedia*, *Google*, or other resources. Look for original Hebrew or Greek translations of key words. Attempt to identify any cultural context of the times.
- Why? Examine the wording or phrases. Do any seem out of place or hint at a deeper meaning. Look for hidden meaning. E.g. What did Jesus write in the dirt when he bent down as the Pharisees questioned him about what the Law commanded be done with the adulterous woman? (Jn 8:1-11) Why?
- Why? What are the sections before and after the scripture? How does the book begin & how does it end? Are there other similar stories in other books of the *OT* & *NT*? Why was this story placed in this order in the book?

Step 3. How does this story relate to our lives today? How might we behave differently & communally as a result of this story? Why?

Bell, 15, 78

Source: *A Different Way to Read the Bible Syllabus, Study Guide, and Meditations*.  
[www.christchurchchattanooga.org](http://www.christchurchchattanooga.org), “Christian Education”, tab “A Different Way to Read the Bible”.

**Application Homework:** *Jesus, the Pharisees, & the Adulterer* (Jn 8:1-11). Complete the 3-step process, record your discoveries, & bring to class.

Step 1. Read the Scripture.

Step 2. Ask “Why” 5 Times. Record your insights below.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Step 3. How does this story relate to our lives today? How might we behave differently & communally as a result of this story? Why?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Appendix C Non-Dualistic Process to More Fulfilling Relationships

1. Block out differences (that is, dualistics)
2. Identify commonalities
3. Share each other's stories
4. Develop non-threatening/non-judgmental descriptions of your differences (best if jokingly).

Step 1. Block out differences (that is, dualistics).

Step 2. Identify commonalities.

\* After all, we are 99.9997% the same DNA.

Step 3. Share each other's stories

\* Do you have children/ grandchildren? Have you shared the pain of the death of a close loved one? Do you share common upbringing or job?

Step 4. Develop non-threatening/non-judgmental descriptions of your differences (best if jokingly).

\* "Bless Her heart. She's a Trumper (or Pelosi Person)!"

To further support your path to better relationships, analyze those times you find yourself falling into the dualistic trap.

- What happened?
- What were the circumstances?
- If the other person started "it", what techniques might I deploy to shift the conversation toward Steps 2 & 3 above?
- In the future, what preventive actions might I take to avoid a dualistic situation in the first place?

Rob Bell, Chapter 22

Source: *A Different Way to Read the Bible Syllabus, Study Guide, and Meditations*.  
[www.christchurchchattanooga.org](http://www.christchurchchattanooga.org), "Christian Education", tab "A Different Way to Read the Bible".

## Appendix D *Stop Worry 3-Step Process*

1. Commit yourself to God's Loving Care
2. Surrender your worry & anxiety & drama & stress
3. Entrust *others* to God

Rob Bell, page 73.