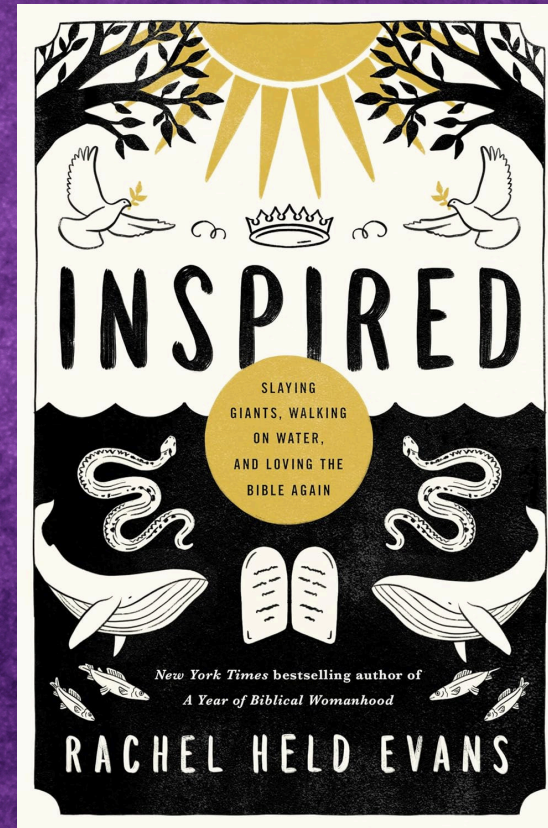


Leviticus Book Study

Delving deeper into our
understanding of scripture

www.diocgc.org/inspired



8-Week Discussion Guide*

"Inspired" by Rachel Held Evans

*Adapted from the "Inspired" Reading Guide (www.rachelheldevans.com/inspired)



Episcopal Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast

From the author: *Perhaps more than any other book I've written, Inspired is intended to be read, wrestled with, discussed, debated, and creatively engaged with in the context of community. And that's precisely because the Bible invites us to do the same. Contrary to what you may have heard in church or Sunday school along the way, the Bible does not always provide clear, straightforward answers to difficult questions, but rather relies on story and song, letters and laws, poetry and proverb to spark among God's people the questions, ideas, and actions that bring them closer to truth and to one another. With this posture, "the sacred text becomes a crucial point of contact, a great dining room table, erected by God and set by God's people, where those who hunger for nourishment and companionship can gather together and be filled" (p. 24). My hope is that Inspired helps you set that kind of table—in your church, in your small group, or in your time of personal study.*

Questions for Every Week of the Study

The questions presented each week come primarily from Rachel Held Evans' own study guide and questions we have culled at the diocesan level. After working through the questions for the week, close with the following questions as time permits:

- What stood out to you in the section you read? Any new insights?
- What reinforced your existing opinions of the Bible, and what challenged them?

Video Reflections for Every Week of the Study

Members of the bishop's staff have recorded reflections to accompany each week's reading. There is also an introductory video to guide participants in this study. Each video is approximately 5-7 minutes in length. Videos are available on the diocesan YouTube channel and also at www.diocgc.org/inspired.

Week 1 - "The Temple" and Origin Stories

READ "Inspired" pages 1-28 | Scripture: Genesis 1 & 32:22-32

What Bible story do you remember from childhood? Do you see the story differently now?

Rachel names the ways she saw the Bible in her life as a storybook, a handbook, an answer book, etc. Do you relate to any of these images?

What are some of the most important origin stories in your family, your community, and your culture? (See pages 15-17 for examples of origin stories.) How have those stories shaped the world around you in both positive and negative ways?

Consider the following words:

Inspired

Inerrant

Infallible

Trustworthy

Authoritative

Sacred

Oppressive

Outdated

Which ones strike you as appropriate ways to describe the Bible? Which ones strike you as unhelpful? Why?

Week 2 - "The Well" and Deliverance Stories

READ "Inspired" pages 29-57 | Scripture: Genesis 16; Psalm 63:1-8; Matthew 23:37-40

Have there been times in your life when God has "made a way where there seems to be no way"? What did you learn from those experiences?

When you hear a reference to "the Law" in Scripture, is your impression positive or negative? Has that changed?

Do you find yourself in some sort of wilderness now? What brought you here?

Thinking over the wilderness experiences in your life, have there been places or moments when God has provided or been powerfully present that you might mark with a naming, as Hagar and Jacob did? What name would you give your "well" in the wilderness?

Week 3 - "The Wall" and War Stories

READ "Inspired" pages 59 - 79 | Scripture: Joshua 6; Judges 11; Philippians 2:6 - 11

Which story from the Bible would you make disappear if you could?

Rachel finds perspective in 1) paying attention to the experiences of biblical women, 2) keeping humble about her own culture's violent tendencies, 3) seeing in Jesus a God who "would rather die by violence than commit it." Which, if any, of these perspectives do you find most helpful or challenging?

What are some hard questions you have about the Bible that perhaps you've been afraid to confront? What might it mean to continue in your faith, even if your doubts are not fully resolved?

What are some of your favorite (or least favorite) war stories—movies, books, plays, etc.? Do you see similarities between how we tell war stories in our culture and how the ancients told war stories in theirs?

Week 4 - "The Debate" and Wisdom Stories

READ "Inspired" pages 81-111 | Scripture: Job; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Proverbs 3; Psalm 139

What comes into your mind when you hear the word wisdom? Consider sharing your free-association thoughts around that concept.

How have you observed wisdom as circumstantial? What are some examples of advice that are helpful and true in one scenario but false in another (like "you reap what you sow")?

Were you aware of the Bible's "angry psalms"? Why might there be a need for them in scripture?

What do you make of the claim that the Bible includes tensions and even contradictions? Have you ever noticed these tensions and contradictions before? How did you resolve them?

Week 5 - "The Beast" and Resistance Stories

READ "Inspired" pages 113-140 | Scripture: Isaiah 13:19-22 & 25:6-12; Amos 5:21-25; Daniel 7:1-4; Esther; Revelation 13:1-10 & 20:7-10

Do you ever feel hopeless or cynical about the injustices in the world around you? Does anything from this chapter encourage you?

What comes into your mind when you hear the word apocalyptic? Has that changed since reading this chapter? What about prophet and prophecy?

Who are some people you consider to be modern-day prophets who are willing to speak up for the marginalized?

What's your experience with the Book of Revelation? In the past, have you found it scary? Bizarre? Inspiring? Confusing? How has your interpretation of that text changed and evolved?

Week 6 - "The Water" and Gospel Stories

READ "Inspired" 141-164 | Scripture: John 4:1-42 & 9; Acts 8:26-40

When did you first encounter Jesus? Even if it was in childhood, try to recount as many details as possible. What did Jesus look like, sound like, smell like, taste like? What about the message or the presence of Jesus first struck you as "good news"?

What are some of your favorite stories from the gospels? Is there one encounter someone had with Jesus that always moves you? Why do you think that story strikes you the way that it does?

What does it mean—to you personally, to the church, and to the world—that "Jesus didn't just come to die; he came to live"?

Why are you a Christian? Yes, that's a BIG QUESTION! Spend lots of time with it, and let it take you to unexpected places. Try to answer honestly and specifically.

Week 7 - "The Sea" and Fish Stories

READ "Inspired" pages 165-189 | Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 1:40-45 & 5:21-43

Do you have trouble believing some of the Bible's miracle stories? Which ones?

How have the Bible's miracle stories been explained to you? What guidance have you received from faith leaders, family, and friends? Has it been helpful or not-so-helpful?

On page 188 the author writes, "It's been said that if you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat. Sometimes getting out of the boat looks like showing up for another recovery meeting. Sometimes it looks like filling out hospital paperwork for an elderly neighbor. Sometimes it looks like making a casserole for the family down with the flu or offering free babysitting for the friend with a job interview. Sometimes it looks like jumping when it matters." What does "getting out of the boat" look like for you? What does it mean to "jump when it matters"?

Rachel says that when it comes to belief, sometimes you have to "fake it till you make it," and to "move your feet and your heart will catch up"? Have you found this true in your own life?

Week 8 - "The Letter" and Church Stories, and the Epilogue

READ "Inspired" pages 191-221

Have quotes from the Bible's epistles ever been used to justify cruelty or injustice against you or someone you love? How did that affect your view of the Bible? How did it affect your view of the apostle Paul?

On page 208 the author writes, "To make peace with the Bible, I had to make peace with Paul." Can you relate? What is your experience with the writings of Paul?

Which Bible story changed the most for you after reading this book? What parts of the Bible are you inspired to explore in more depth?

Rachel says, "If the biggest story we can imagine is about God's loving and redemptive work in the world, then our lives will be shaped by that epic." What does it mean for our lives to be shaped by the story of Scripture?