



Study Guide

Making Love with Scripture: Study Guide

This is a four-week study guide, complete with suggested readings, pull quotes, and discussion points, to be used in conjunction with the book, *Making Love with Scripture: Why the Bible Doesn't Mean How You Think It Means*. This study guide is intended for use in classrooms, church small groups, book clubs, and Sunday school classes. Each week includes reading assignments to be completed before the session. It's important to read ahead so you can be ready for discussions and questions.

Think of this guide as a four-week course, covering the most relevant themes of the book. You can also easily turn this into a seven-week course, which would give you time to delve more deeply into the biblical texts discussed in parts one, two, and three of the book.

In addition, this study guide provides Internet links to many of the pop culture references employed in the book. Feel free to utilize these media in conjunction with the book and this study guide. Each section also includes questions for discussion, key takeaways, and a few key quotes that can foster deeper conversation.

Week One: Making Meaning with Scripture

Read: Introduction and Chapter One (pp. 1-27); 1 John 4

Media: *The Big Lebowski* scene (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwbKkNUyE64>)

Talladega Nights scene (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1Nh_3JCFj8)

Talladega Nights (clean version): (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQmz5699DPQ>)

This first week focuses on two matters that are often invisible when we read the Bible: *how* we interpret scripture and how we understand God at work *through* scripture. The key argument of this book is that God wants us to love God and our neighbors, and if we are not careful, the way we read scripture can foster the same kind of objectifying (i.e., non-loving) mode of engaging the world that the rest of Western culture teaches. Love leads us to the kind of non-objectifying way of reading the Bible that fosters love of God and neighbor.

Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:

- How do you understand God to be at work when you read the Bible?
- Can you think of a time when your understanding/interpretation of scripture was challenged? How did this make you feel?

- How might your life experiences, ethnic background, gender, etc. have shaped how you understand God, and particularly, how you understand God working in and through scripture?
- How might the love of God displayed most fully in Jesus Christ structure a way for making love with scripture?

Key Takeaways (these are good conversation boosters if discussion goes flat):

1. If you want to encounter God through Holy Scripture you must be willing to make *love* with scripture, that is, *to make love happen in yourself and the world through your engagement with scripture*.
2. The Bible exists to shape your way of being in the world with God and creation. Thus, understanding *what* scripture means is not the same thing as understanding *how* it means.
3. Making love begins where objectification ends.
4. We worship the God we know. For Christ-followers, the Bible shapes our conception of God, but how we understand the God revealed in and through scripture is in turn shaped by our context.
5. It's not by our understanding of love that we come to understand both love and God; but it is by God's self-revelation of Godself *as love* that we come to know both.
6. When we who are Westerners move toward a theology of scripture that is guided by love, we have to do a bit of ground clearing to keep the weeds of Western thought from choking the life out of our erotic flora.
7. The distance created and maintained between the self and the other, between the lover and her beloved is crucial. And it is precisely this distance that is disclosed upon and collapses under the weight of Western ways of thinking.

Key Quotes:

“Scripture *becomes* Holy Scripture only when it drives us to a *holy* way of being in the world, a way that is *wholly* for human and nonhuman others” (p. 7).

“There is no such thing as a *true* or *right* interpretation of scripture. That does not mean that there are no *wrong* interpretations” (p. 11).

“God's Word revealed *in* scripture must be allowed to keep its distance. When the Word of God in scripture is reduced to the mere semantic value of the words of the text, when this distance is not respected, the result is idolatry” (p. 25).

“We require the means to swim against the current of Western Christianity. To love God and neighbors requires us to place our ways of thinking at risk by opening ourselves to the other in love” (pp. 26-27).

Week Two: Loving Your Neighbor through Scripture

Read: Part One (pp. 29-70); Matt. 20:1-16; Numbers 25:1-8; Gal. 3

Media: *Fifty Shades of Gray*: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfZWFDs0LxA>)

How to Get Away with Murder (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbSl-SPyHtg>)

“99 Problems”: (<http://slack-time.com/music-video-2081-jay-z-99-problems>)

Lord of the Rings: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3IUoR9E7D4>)

This week we see a way of interpreting scripture, and understanding God’s agency *through* scripture, that is oriented toward loving our neighbor as ourselves. Chapter two introduces a historical development in the philosophy of interpretation that opens up biblical meaning-making beyond the intention of a text’s author. Chapter three showcases how particular individuals interpret biblical texts from their respective cultural locations. Chapter four introduces a variety of theologies of scripture that are oriented toward liberation of oppressed and marginalized communities.

Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:

- How does Jesus interpret scripture? How might Jesus’s way of interpreting scripture have offended the dominant ways that his fellow Jews interpreted it? Can you think of anywhere that this got Jesus into trouble?
- Where do you find yourself in relation to the Bible culturally, economically, sexually, and politically? How does the “death of the author” movement excite you? How does it frighten you?

Key Takeaways (these are good conversation boosters if discussion goes flat):

1. Reading the Bible like Jesus means reading existentially, that is, reading in such a way that God’s radical concern for the world takes shape in and through you, the reader.
2. Thanks to “the death of the author” campaign, we can stop obsessing over the almighty and all-knowing capital-A Author, who gets to decide what his text means for all people and all times.
3. Once the author is no longer sufficient to bludgeon biblical interpretations that diverge from those of mainstream biblical scholars, we are free to attend to scripture in many and varied ways. Not only does the “death of the author” lead us toward a certain interpretative freedom, it also allows us to listen to the call of those who have been objectified, marginalized, and mistreated by societal systems.
4. Textual meaning arises out of the dynamic interplay between scripture and the lived experiences of participants in various communities. People find in the Bible different ways of meaning, meanings open to human flourishing and communities subverting

societal norms and injustices. That is why we must listen to such voices; it is a necessary first step toward loving one's neighbor as oneself.

5. Scripture's vivacity is such that no passage of scripture can ever be wholly interpreted and no understanding of God is spared from critique.
6. Christian liberation theologies are rooted in the way of God arising out of God's boundary-breaking, life-giving Word revealed in scripture.
7. We can't claim to love our neighbor and then situate our understanding of God in some pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by ideal, an otherworldly sentiment beyond the real suffering of men, women, and children. To ignore God's promise of abundant life is to misunderstand Jesus' entire life and ministry, the Law, and the Prophets.

Key Quotes:

"It takes a village to raise an interpretation. Said differently, no interpretation of scripture takes shape apart from a community of interpretation—the people, circumstances, and life-experiences that shape her understanding" (p. 46).

"The dynamism of scripture to which we point when we say 'the Word of God for the people of God' loses all meaning when we don't regard the Bible as at least as dynamic as our lived experiences in the world" (p. 53).

"Taking the time to understand how different people read the Bible in different ways does not mean that you have to accept everything they say as 100 percent certified, grade-A gospel. At the same time, to reiterate, exposure to another's interpretation does not mean that I should adopt another's interpretation as my own" (p. 55).

Week Three: Loving God in Scripture

Read: Part Two (pp. 71-109); Romans 4; Gen. 11:1-9; Joshua 2; John 4:7-15

Media: "Gangnam Style": (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH1XGdu-hzQ>)

The Lego Movie: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZ_JOBCLF-I)

Hunger Games: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lu9WqhbYZ9Y>)

Empire (starts at 7:06): (<http://www.fox.com/watch/393116739895/7684647168>)

This week we see a way of interpreting scripture, and understanding God's agency *in* scripture, that is oriented toward loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Chapter five introduces deconstruction as a means to open up biblical meaning through exposure to the Word of God. Chapter six showcases deconstruction in action, attending to particular readings of biblical texts. Chapter seven introduces radical theologies of scripture that help us see God in scripture beyond our ideologies.

Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:

- How closely does your experience with scripture jive with the idea of the Bible as a rave?
- When you read the Bible, or hear the Bible read in worship, how hopeful are you that you will receive a fresh Word from God? Discuss.
- What does it teach us about God that God has elected human language to communicate Godself to us? What does this mean for how we approach scripture and understand God's agency therein?

Key Takeaways (NB, these are good conversation boosters if discussion goes flat):

1. The Bible is a collection of texts. We have to acknowledge its textuality so that we can embrace what God is up to in our reading of scripture.
2. Words are slippery suckers. They mean all kinds of ways. God speaks to us through the words of the Bible, but its ways of speaking are weird. If we want to love God in scripture then we must embrace the Bible's oddness.
3. Deconstruction is radically oriented to life. It's a kind of orientation that helps us participate in the fullness of life.
4. Deconstruction is what happens when we see that there are elements at work within all acts of discourse—be they biblical, literary, historical, or cultural—that at once strengthen and weaken the discourse itself.
5. Texts—all texts, by their very nature—are sort of radioactive in that their very constitution is unstable. *Texts already leak meaning*. They are always in the process of coming undone at their core.
6. Deconstructive modes of interpreting scripture share a certain radicality, that is, they expose themselves to the root (*radix*) of undecidability in play with every interpretation of scripture. Radical readings of scripture, each in their own way, recognize and even celebrate their own rootedness and rootlessness.

Key Quotes:

“We must not worship created things; but neither can we ignore the fact that God has elected such weak vessels to tell us that God loves us. The Word is in the words” (p. 74).

“Biblical meaning can't be glued down. The love of God and neighbor requires us to constantly reconsider how our understanding of biblical texts calls us to make love happen in our lives and relationships today” (p. 76).

“Scripture is holy to the extent that God reveals God's holiness, God's radical otherness, to us through its many pages. We may only claim that the Bible is Holy if it also sets *us* apart, makes *us* holy, so that we may participate in God's love and justice in the world” (p. 82).

Week Four: Making Love with Scripture

Read: Part Three and Conclusion (pp. 111-162); Phil. 2:1-11; Luke 10: 25-37; Exodus 16

Media: “What is Love?”: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEXWRTEbj1I>)

Divergent: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sutgWjz10sM>)

“What Does the Fox Say??:” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jofNR_WkoCE)

A Few Good Men: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FnO3igOkOk>)

This week draws the book to a close by articulating how, exactly, to make love *with* scripture. This erotic approach to God’s Wor(l)d, that is, God’s Word revealed *in* scripture and God’s liberating World (aka The Kingdom of God) revealed *through* scripture. Chapter eight lays out the first step of the erotic approach, which centers upon the self before the Wor(l)d of God. This consists of a double-movement in the self that creates room for the other—a “bold humility.” Chapter nine focuses on a kind of listening *for* the Wor(l)d of God approached *in love*. By this step, we listen intently for the Wor(l)d to summon us toward love of God and neighbor. Chapter ten articulates the third and final step of the erotic approach, teaching us how to engage that which manifests—that which *might* manifest—between the self and the other *in* and *through* love.

Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:

- How do you love those people, places, and things that you love? How did such love begin? How has it changed for you?
- Have you ever been surprised by love? In what way?
- How does this three-step approach toward the Wor(l)d of God challenge you? How does it reinforce your current ways of engaging with the Bible?

Key Takeaways (these are good conversation boosters if discussion goes flat):

1. We need a different approach—an erotic approach—that enables us to think and feel on a different register than the one promulgated by modern Christianity. The mental transformation that is required by the erotic approach begins by moving away from seeking *what* biblical texts mean, to discerning *how* they mean.
2. Making love with scripture leads us beyond the ways of knowing propagated by modernity, which teaches us to turn God and neighbor into objects about which we can be certain and thereby control.
3. Whenever we love another, God has already loved us. Every lover is a belated lover. She is tardy to the party, so to speak, because God has already loved her. She is already claimed as a beloved.

4. The way of love revealed by Jesus on the cross is one of selflessness *and* bravery. It was an act of ultimate divestment *and* an act of radical boldness; as such, it is a model for we who would follow Christ today.
5. When we open ourselves fully to another's pain and suffering in love, it inverts the polarity of our engagement with the neighbor, so to speak. In other words, it transforms me as a passive recipient of external information into an active agent in solidarity with another.
6. The point of the third step of the erotic approach is not to handle, but to open yourself up to *be handled* in service to the Word, to participate in the love of God and neighbor that constitutes the World of God, or, as Jesus likes to call it, the Kingdom of God.
7. We display our love of God, self, and neighbor by employing the power given to us as a catalyst for life and flourishing. This is what it means to *make love with scripture*.

Key Quotes:

To participate in the way of Jesus is to follow him from the margins toward the seats of power, to speak truth to power, to fight to set the captives free" (p. 126).

"Making love with scripture opens us up to a way of seeing the world beyond the mundane, rational mindset inaugurated by Western modernity that continues to suffuse the church with its means and methods" (p. 154).

"God is love. The greatest commandment is love. The church is called to be a community of love. When we pay attention to God's theological handwriting we see that it is impossible to call yourself a Christ-follower in any sense if you do not love" (p. 158).