

Pastor's Winter Book Club 2022

Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again

By Rachel Held Evans

Session #1

January 5 at 6pm on Zoom and January 6 at 10:30am in the Fellowship Hall

For Session #1 read: *Introduction, The Temple, Origin Stories*

Zoom Link for Wednesday, January 5 at 6pm: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84865582248>

Or use meeting ID: 848 6558 2248

Opening Prayer

Warm up question:

Do you have a Biblical name (first or middle or Christened)? What do you know about the Biblical person or people who share your name?

Introduction:

1. How have your thoughts about the Bible changed over the years? What have been some crucial turning points in your experience of the Bible?
2. The author describes various roles the Bible played in her life—storybook, handbook, answer book, etc. Do you relate to some of these?
3. As she introduced her book, what challenged you? What resonated with you?
4. 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Outdated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?

5. Do you have any trepidation about reading or studying a book about the Bible?

“The Temple” and *Origin Stories*

“Origin stories tell us who we are, where we come from, and what the world is like.” Rachel Held-Evans

6. What was helpful about the *Origin Stories* chapter for you? What is challenging?

7. What struck you about the differences between the two creation stories featured in “The Temple” (The Babylonian story recounted by little Haggai and the biblical story recounted by his father)?
8. How have you traditionally understood the nature of the Bible’s creation stories?
9. What are some ways in which you’ve observed the Bible treated as a conversation-ender? What are some ways in which you’ve observed the Bible treated as a conversation-starter?

Scripture Exercise: Genesis 32:22-32

²²The same night [Jacob] got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.

²⁴Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶Then he said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.” ²⁷So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” ²⁸Then the man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.” ²⁹Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. ³⁰So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.” ³¹The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. ³²Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

Midrash: A Jewish method of interpretation and commentary that plumbs the depths of scripture by clarifying or expounding on a point of the Law, “filling in the gaps” of the biblical narrative with new stories and anecdotes, and exploring intriguing questions left open-ended by the text. Historically, rabbis wrote *midrash* to help resolve contradictions in the text and fill in missing pieces of the stories...*Midrash* is a way of reading between the lines. The method is discussed more in depth, with examples on pages 21-24 of *Inspired*.

Read the scripture. In the spirit of midrash, imagine the conversation between Jacob’s two wives, Rachel and Leah, as they wait–camping by the river with their children, their maids, and livestock–for Jacob to return from wrestling with the stranger.

Reflection Question:

What might it mean for you to wrestle with the Bible until God gives you a blessing? What sort of a blessing are you seeking?

Sharing Joys and Concerns

Closing Prayer