

# Engaging Scripture: Living into God's Story

by Phil Reinders

My son's kindergarten class was invited to watch a dress rehearsal of *Snow White* that the eighth-graders of his school were preparing to perform. Having read or heard the story several times, my son knew it well. Yet in watching the live performance of the fledgling actors, he became present to the world of the story. When Snow White raised the poisoned apple to her lips, he was unable to contain himself, and he yelled out, "Stop! Don't eat that!" Transported from the dimly lit school auditorium, he had imaginatively entered another world and found himself a participant in the story. Snow White, however, wasn't quite sure what to do.

A few of my friends make their living by bringing a script or musical score to life in a performance. For these actors and musicians, a performance that lives is much more than simply uttering all the words in the script or hitting all the notes of a musical composition. Though they add nothing new to the score or script, compelling actors enter into the story and character; a virtuoso musician submits to and dwells in the composition—understanding its tone and texture, internalizing and then enacting the score or script, and so participating in its life.

My kindergarten-age son and artist friends offer a helpful window for how Christians engage with the Bible. We give the Scriptures a privileged place because it is the revelation of God and his purposes, the authority for our life and faith. But engaging with the Bible is different from studying a textbook, reading the news, or scrolling and swiping our way through our social media feeds. We're not skimming for inspiration or scavenging for doctrinal bullet-points. Instead, we faithfully engage the Bible on its own terms as participants, listening to the story and living out the script. It's God's story, and we're in it.

## **Listening to the story**

Scripture is God's grand story that makes sense of our stories; it's the story of the whole world, as N.T. Wright puts it. The Bible narrates the way the world is, and in listening to its story we seek to live in alignment with reality, allowing it to form us into our true selves.

Through the Holy Spirit, the Word shakes off ink, paper, and pixels, stepping out of the page or screen and into our daily lives. That comes through patient attentiveness, a way of listening that takes the time to slow down and savor. As we read Scripture, we seek to attend to the living voice of God that addresses our everyday lives.

Reading and studying the Bible are not the same as listening to the voice of God. When we come to the Bible, the words on our screens or pages are part of a living communication. God first speaks and reveals, and that living voice has been written down so that people in different places and times can have access to the story of God. We engage the written text of our Bibles through

different practices in order to listen to the living voice of God, to the story that continues to reveal and shape our lives.

### **Living the Script**

Since the Bible has come to us in the shape of a story, and since we believe it to be the true story of the whole world, we properly engage with it as lively participants, people who are invited into the story. The Scriptures, then, provide for us a script to live out.

Everyone lives out of some story, a life-script that guides, directs, and shapes our living. For Christians, the Scriptures form our script. The Bible narrates what God is doing in the world and invites us to live in communion with God and to participate in what God is doing—something we might also call obedience.

The aim of our Bible reading is participation in God's life and mission. There's a lovely verbal link between listening (Latin, *audire*) and living, or obedience (Latin, *ob-audire*), which underscores the necessary posture of ready obedience for understanding the Bible. Eugene Peterson notes, "A simple act of obedience will open up our lives to this text far more quickly than any number of Bible studies and dictionaries and concordances." Faithfully engaging with Scripture forms obedient participants in God's story.

### **So how do we engage the Bible today?**

If you are interested in finding new ways to engage with God's Word, explore some more of the Faith Practices Project's resources on engaging Scripture. These resources are designed to help us all dig deeper into Scripture, immersing ourselves in the true story of God's faithful love so that we become more like Jesus as we grow in recognizing God, ourselves, and the world around us. Please also share what you learn with others at #CRCFaithPractices, and tag Faith Formation Ministries on Twitter (@crc\_ffm), Facebook (@faithformationCRC), and Instagram (@crcfaithformation).

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