


Editorial

Michelle Christian Curtis and Scott Litwiller

*In honor of Dr. Mary H. Schertz
with much love and gratitude*

Learning to read the Bible as if our lives depend on it is a journey from standing outside the biblical text to finding ourselves inside it. Instead of trying to master the Bible intellectually, we join biblical characters in a desperate search for God, who cannot be tamed by finite human minds.



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The phrase “reading the Bible as if our lives depend on it” came to us through our beloved Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary professor Mary Schertz, who adapted it from Old Testament scholar Ellen Davis. We proposed an issue of *Vision* dedicated to this idea in honor of Mary’s lifelong work teaching

students to read Scripture in exactly this way. We want to tell you two stories that happened in classes we took with Mary, but they are not stories about Mary. They are stories about encountering God in Scripture. And that is our aspiration for this issue: to share with the church the practices of reading Scripture that helped us to encounter God in new ways, practices we learned from Mary.

The semester I, Michelle, took a course called “Biblical Spirituality,” we studied stories in Luke where people come to Jesus seeking something. That semester my brother was going through a difficult time. I worried about him and felt guilty for living ten hours away from home while my family was in turmoil. The second week of class, we read the story of the man whose friends carry him on a mat and lower him down through the roof so that Jesus can heal him (Luke 5:17–26). It is a familiar story. I must have read it a dozen times before. Yet when we walked around inside the story in our imaginations, I noticed, as if for the first time, that these friends were carrying the man to Jesus. I noticed that this healing was not

just between the man and Jesus. Loved ones could participate. The friends had the power to pick up their loved one and carry him to Jesus, tearing up someone's roof to get him there if necessary. My life and my family's life depended on that Scripture in that moment. I felt less helpless when I saw myself in those friends. Like them, my family and I couldn't heal my brother, so we were desperately clamoring at the door of the only one who could. I spent half an hour writing and rewriting and praying the words from Luke 5, "carrying him to Jesus." I covered a sheet of paper with the phrase until these words traveled from my head through my hand into my heart. When I entered this story with my whole self, the Scripture burst into life. The friends in Luke 5 encouraged me to play an active role in my brother's healing, even from a distance.

To say that I, Scott, struggled through my seminary Greek courses is an understatement. When I was assigned the Matthew 15 account of the Canaanite woman for my final paper in Greek 2, I was dismayed. Prior



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to coming out of the closet as gay, I almost lost my faith because of this passage. When the Canaanite woman asks Jesus for help, he first ignores her and then calls her a dog. If Jesus dismissed this woman as a Canaanite, then I felt certain he would also reject me as a gay man. This Jesus wasn't for me.

Digging deep into the Greek made me slow down. By slowing down, I was able to enter into the story and see the

Canaanite woman as fierce and persistent as she went to Jesus with her last ounce of effort. Even when Jesus called her a dog, she boldly and desperately approached him.

Because of Jesus's disregard for this outsider woman's concern—her daughter being tormented by an evil spirit—I questioned if he was someone I ought to follow. Through seeing the woman—with her fearlessness and her faith—as the hero of the story, I saw something worthwhile. I then saw myself fiercely and desperately approaching Jesus as the woman did. In my final reading, I boldly approached Jesus with this woman, and he responded! I realized that the entire time I had been reading this text as if my life depended on it—because it did.

We begin this issue with an article from Mary Schertz telling the story of the epiphany that led her to reading the Bible as if our lives depend on it. We hope that through her storytelling and her argument, you will catch the vision that inspired us to bring the issue together.

After that framing follows a series of testimonies and examples. What does this way of reading the Bible look like in spiritual direction (Sally

Longley) or in prison ministry (Sungbin Kim) or in a congregation (Renee Reimer) or individually (Rianna Isaak-Krauß) or in the context of oppression (Sue Park-Hur and Annika Krause) or in a sermon (Isaac Villegas) or in an artistic form (Jacob Curtis, Laura Funk, and Sara Erb)? These pieces range from artwork to lament to sermon. Through these varied contexts and expressions, we hope that you will come to understand “reading the Bible as if our lives depend on it” as an expansive approach

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to Scripture, not as a static practice or a tool that only works if you can read Greek or draw beautiful pictures.

We conclude with more theoretical pieces to help reflect on the breadth of models for reading the Bible. Ellen Davis identifies key components of reading confessionally, and Melissa Florer-Bixler addresses tough questions about reading the Old Testament as Anabaptist Christians.

The practices this issue describes and exemplifies have drawn together Mary’s students—and authors who have never met her—from many different backgrounds toward new and renewing experiences with the Bible. They gathered those of us who learned to read the Bible for that one moral with those of us who doubted whether the Bible could speak to the present at all. We experienced the Bible as more expansive and generous and learned together to trust Scripture to speak into the messy complexity of our whole lives, which is exactly what we all need. We read the Bible because our lives depend on it. We enter Scripture to seek and find Jesus, the living Word on whom all our lives depend.

About the authors

Michelle Christian Curtis is co-pastor of Ambler Mennonite Church, Pennsylvania, with her husband, Jacob. She also works part-time for Christian History Institute as an editorial assistant where she finds deep satisfaction in putting en-dashes and em-dashes in their proper places. Michelle enjoys just about any hobby that friends will do with her, including board games, long walks, hiking, knitting, gardening, and hosting dinners.

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Michelle and Scott met at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary where their friendship blossomed through Mary Schertz's Greek classes and morning prayer, a shared garden, and four years of on-campus seminary life.