

Making Sense of the Bible: What Grandma and Seminary Taught Me

By Kitt Evans

As I enter my last semester of seminary I find myself finally making sense of the deconstruction and reconstruction of my meaning making, especially as it relates to the Bible.

I was born and reared in a small southern town in North Carolina, where my grandma was the epitome of a “good Christian woman.” I remember a vivid picture of her. Grandma is sitting on her porch with a Bible in one hand, and another Bible under her chair. She is studying the text with her glasses on while also eating a fresh tomato sandwich. The person taking the picture calls her name and she delights in looking at the camera with a beautiful smile. Grandma loved God, people, and reading the Bible.

Grandma lived to be 70 years old; however, she suffered several heart attacks, strokes, and the amputation of both legs. But, through it all, she still professed her trust in God and her strong belief in a literal interpretation of the Bible. My grandmother was my connection to Christianity. She was also the connection that linked me to the African Methodist Episcopal Church in which I grew up.

I entered seminary embracing all that my grandmother and the church had taught me. Scripture was the word of God and should not be questioned. It was “a lamp to my feet and a light for my path,” which guided my daily life.

I never thought that after my first semester of seminary I would literally be knocked off of my feet. After my Old Testament and New Testament classes all that I thought I knew about the Bible was put on an operating table and dissected. Who “really” wrote each book in the Bible? Did God influence each book? From whence did the manuscripts come? What is the social, historical, and political context of each book in the Bible?

I went from sleeping in the bed with my Bible for comfort to putting it on my bookshelf and only taking it out for church and Old Testament class on Mondays. I felt as if I had to choose one or the other: look at the Bible critically or accept the Bible as the word of God, without question. There seemed no in between.

Over the last 3 years I have worked to find the in between. There is not one perfect copy of the Bible: true. Every version is based on a variety of manuscripts: true. Scripture has a variety of social, political, and historical contexts, which should not be taken literally in today’s contexts: true.

Beyond all the dissection and healthy questioning I have concluded that by understanding the social, political, and historical context of the Bible I am allowed to “dig deeper” into the meaning of scripture. Though the people in the Bible lived in different contexts than us today, we can learn a lot from the teachings within the Bible and can often apply the teachings to our lives today.

When I read scripture now I have a new lens one that allows me to look into the text and understand the context of what lies beneath. Thank you, seminary! When I read scripture now, I also have a lens that allows me to receive the sacredness of this text that my grandmother and so many before her knew very well. Thank you, grandma! As I enter 2012 I can say that my Bible is no longer on my bookshelf. It lies next to my bed, on the nightstand!