Course Two: *A Path to Spiritual Maturity*

SEGMENT 3: BIBLE STUDY

PARTICIPANTS' GUIDE

The Bible is the living word of God. It is divided into three sections: the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Apocrypha. Through Bible study we maintain contact with our spiritual tradition. Bible study is an integral part of our rule of life.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP 236)

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

What is the Bible?

What tools are available to help you study the Bible?

The Bible

Old Testament

New Testament

Apocrypha

Bible Study

USING THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

As we live out the ministry of the baptized, we find direction through the five Baptismal Covenant promises. These promises are made at every baptism and we ask God's help in keeping these promises. First and third promises are relevant to this segment.

1. Read these Bible stories using different translations such as *King James, New Revised Standard Version, The Good News Bible, The New International Bible* etc. Is one version more familiar to you than another? Try your hand at rewriting one of these passages, as you would expect to hear it today.

  Psalm 23

  Isaiah 40:1-5

  John 3:16

2. Do you have a favorite Bible story? What is it? Why is it your favorite?

3. Illustrate or discuss one of your favorite Bible stories. Where are you in this story?

It is important that we listen to the biblical story in its entirety. The Holy Spirit does not open the meaning of the Scriptures for us easily in a kind of lightening flash. It happens through years of study. Bible study involves looking at the historical, literary and theological settings of the text. It involves asking questions about the meaning of words and explaining the cultural context in which it was written to better grasp what the original hearers understood. The Bible is the story of God's people, not one person. The text needs to be approached with community in mind.

The Bible is the story of how the people of faith understood and responded to God who acted in history. It can be the same for us. We must take these stories and compare them to our own times. The Bible doesn't tell us what to do, it tells us who we are – children of God. By studying what others did in particular situations in history, we can help frame our responses to situations today in the best way. Some of the biblical stories of people's responses show that they did not make the best choice they could have made. We can look at the Bible as our family story. In sharing and learning our family story, we know who we are and how we should live our lives as part of that family.

The Episcopal Church is a biblical church. Besides the appointed readings, the words used in our worship services are often taken directly from scripture. Over a three-year period we read most of the Bible in our services. At every Eucharist, we retell the basic part of our story and celebrate who we are. This memory of our spiritual community is important.

And, the story of the people of God does not end with the last book of the Bible. We are people of God, and our story continues as we continue to live lives in faith. Our own stories are sacred, too. The story is not over – God is still with us.

The following selections can help us reflect on our discussions today. You may either read and pray or sing and pray your selection(s).

The Hymnal 1982
#536 - God has spoken
#630 - Thanks to God whose Word was spoken
#631 - Book of Books

Wonder Love and Praise
#788 - As newborn stars were stirred to song

Lift Every Voice and Sing
#64 - I love to tell the Story

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