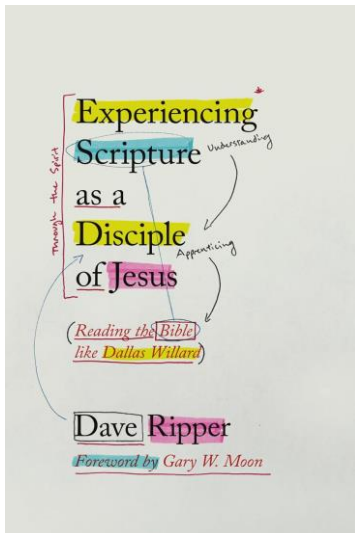


## EXCERPT



### ***Experiencing Scripture as a Disciple of Jesus*** *Reading the Bible Like Dallas Willard*

June 3, 2025 | \$21.99, 208 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-1310-6

**Dave Ripper** uncovers the unique, realistic approach Willard took to reading the Bible, in which he moved beyond mere propositional knowledge about God to truly encountering the personal reality of the God of the Bible.

## Southern Baptist, Philosopher, Mystic

How do you read the Bible?

One way we may begin to answer this question centers on *intent*. You read the Bible for the purpose of devotion, or prayer, or study. If you're a preacher like me, you may read the Bible because Sunday's coming, and sermons must be prepared. Or to be more real, perhaps you often read Scripture simply because it's what a good Christian is supposed to do. In other words, you read to assuage any guilt you might feel for *not* reading the Bible.

Another approach to answering this question focuses on *methodology*—how we go about reading the text. Maybe you read Scripture by following a pattern like the *REAP method* (read, examine, apply, pray). Alternatively, you might follow a more intense inductive method of studying the Bible, or you might experiment with the ancient approach of reading Scripture known as *lectio divina*, or sacred reading. Its fourfold progression begins with reading (*lectio*), continues to reflecting (*meditatio*), moves toward responding (*oratio*), and concludes with resting (*contemplatio*).

Let's consider this question—*how do you read the Bible?*—from one other angle. What are the influences and the people whose voices have shaped the way you read the Bible the way you do? Did you learn to read Scripture from a particular theological tradition or Christian organization like InterVarsity Christian Fellowship or Cru, or from a youth leader, mentor, or pastor? Maybe it's been a podcast or video from The Bible Project. Take a moment to deeply consider: how and why do you read the Bible the way you do?

Willard quipped that he was “a King James Baptist with a Quaker twist.” This “twist” perhaps accounts for how Willard maintained a high view of the authority and inspiration of Scripture like a Southern Baptist, but with nuanced understandings of key terms like *inerrancy* and *infallibility*.

Willard's views and approaches to reading Scripture are most thoroughly outlined in *Hearing God*, originally published as *In Search of Guidance*. In this work, he writes,

The Bible is *one* of the results of God's speaking. It is the *unique* written Word of God. It is inerrant in its original form and infallible in all of its forms for the purpose of guiding us into a life-saving relationship with God in his kingdom.

While this initial description of the Bible's inerrancy and infallibility appears to resonate with conventional evangelical understandings of the authority of Scripture, Willard adds clarification to what he means by these two words.

First, Willard says the Bible is infallible “precisely because God never leaves it alone.” Second, when speaking of inerrancy, Willard believes, “The inerrancy of the original texts is rendered effective for the purposes of redemption only as that text, through its present-day derivatives, is constantly held within the eternal living Word.” In other words, the trustworthiness of a given text is not due to its written record we have in various Bible translations alone, but the texts of Scripture can be fully relied upon in concert with Jesus, the eternal living Word.



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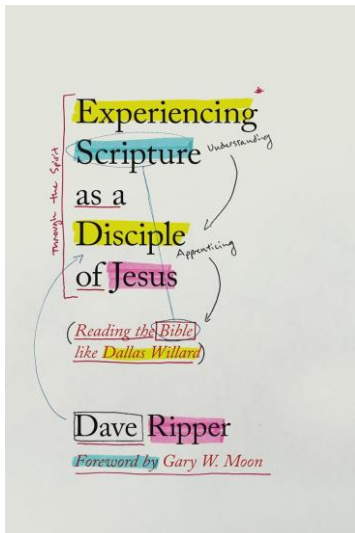
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## EXCERPT



### ***Experiencing Scripture as a Disciple of Jesus*** ***Reading the Bible Like Dallas Willard***

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*“If you want to walk along the pathway that leads into union with the Trinity, as you read Scripture like Dallas did, Dave’s book offers lamplights to make that pathway more clear and visible.”*

—**Gary W. Moon**, founding director of the Dallas Willard Center at Westmont College and author of *Becoming Dallas Willard*, from the foreword

Willard expounds upon this by saying, “Inerrancy by itself is not a sufficient theory of biblical inspiration, because as everyone knows, the Bible in our hand is not the original text. Inerrancy of the originals also does not guarantee sane and sound, much less error-free, interpretations.” The power and authority of Scripture, then, must not depend simply on the written word of Scripture. Rather, Willard says, “Our dependence as we read the Bible today must be on God, who now speaks to us in conjunction with it and with our best efforts to understand it.” These nuanced understandings of infallibility and inerrancy give context to Willard’s clear and bold statements about what the Bible is and what it is not.

Dallas Willard believes that “*while the Bible is the written Word of God, the word of God is not simply the Bible*. The way we know that this is so is, above all, by *paying attention to what the Bible says*.” For instance, while the Bible is the Word of God in its unique *written* form, it is not, as John 1 makes clear, Jesus Christ, who is the *living* Word. The Bible is not the word of God that is settled eternally in the heavens (Psalm 119:89). The Bible is not the word of God expressing itself in the natural world (Psalm 19:1-4). Furthermore, the Bible is not the word of God in Acts that expanded and multiplied (Acts 12:24), nor is it the word sown as Jesus describes in Matthew 13. All of these, Willard says, are God’s words, “as is also his speaking that we hear when we *individually* hear God.” Thus, while the Bible is the infallible written Word of God, the word of God is not limited to just the Bible.

Willard claims, “If we try to dignify the Bible by saying false things about it—by simply *equating* the word of God with it—we do not dignify it. Instead we betray its content by denying what it says itself about the nature of the word of God.” Willard thus highly esteems the Bible but is cautious to ensure we do not believe things about the Bible that the Bible does not believe about itself.

In *The Allure of Gentleness* he urges readers to remember: “*To be a biblical Christian* is not to have high views about the Bible. *It is to seek and know and live the life that is depicted in the Bible*.” Beyond this, he warns, “One of the things that people do with Scriptures is to twist them. But notice that this is ‘to their own destruction.’ The Bible can kill you.” He suggests that, to handle the Bible wisely and reverently, when you come to the Scriptures, you should say, “Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord.” Thus he concludes that “anyone who approaches the Bible *for the purpose of finding God* will indeed find him and will be spoken to by God through the Scriptures.” For Willard, knowing the Bible is a means to the greater end of knowing God interactively and experientially.

—adapted from chapter two, “Southern Baptist, Philosopher, Mystic”



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