



Savoring Scripture *A Six-Step Guide to Studying the Bible*

November 29, 2022 | \$22, 200 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0409-8

Andrew Abernethy (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College. He is the author of *Eating in Isaiah*, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament*, and *Discovering Isaiah*.

Responding Faithfully to God's Word

What led to your interest in writing about how to study the Bible?

Andrew Abernethy: The academic study of the Bible is no guarantee that someone will grow in their knowledge of God or live a more faithful life; in fact, many testify to a growing distance between themselves and God after training in the academic study of the Bible. *Savoring Scripture* stems from a desire to write an introductory book on how to study the Bible that integrates the best of academic training with the ultimate aim of Bible study—communion with God and faithful living.

Who did you have in mind as you were writing this book?

Abernethy: I want this to be the first book people turn to for guidance on how to read the Bible. For many, this takes place through enrolling in a Bible college or in a required course at a Christian liberal arts college. I imagine this being assigned in gateway courses that give students an orientation on how to read the Bible. So beginning college and first seminary students are a target audience.

I imagine that this book will be greatly appreciated by those in the church who have been given their Bible and told to read it but have no clue what to do. I dream that this book will be a go-to guide for Christian high school students, women's Bible study leaders, Christians across universities, and any disciple hoping for guidance on how to read the Bible.

How does this book connect to your vocation as a professor and a scholar?

Abernethy: As a teaching professor, *Savoring Scripture* stems from years of teaching courses in hermeneutics, biblical interpretation, and Old Testament survey. This work is the fruit of these years of teaching that I hope will serve other teachers who share a similar concern for training students to read the Bible in a way that will draw them closer to God.

As a professor who contributes to my academic discipline, this is by far the most "church friendly" book that I have written. By "church friendly" I mean a book that someone might actually recommend for a small group study, to a friend hungry to grow in Christ, or to a pastor. I have written several specialized books on Isaiah and biblical theology for pastors and seminary-trained readers (*The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*; *God's Messiah in the Old Testament*; *Discovering Isaiah*), but *Savoring Scripture* has the potential to reach beyond pastors to lay people. In this way, *Savoring Scripture* propels me more directly into the life of the church as a scholar in and for the church.

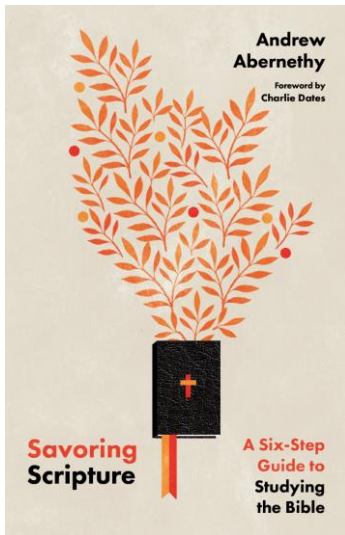
What are three features of your book that you would like to highlight?

Abernethy:

- Practical, step-by-step guide
- Spiritually oriented while being academically informed
- Accessible to entry-level students although academically informed



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Posture

I had the chance to go to Jerusalem in 2014. On the itinerary was "Hezekiah's Tunnel." I was excited to see it. This tunnel under Jerusalem is longer than five football fields. It may have been dug 2,800 years ago when King Hezekiah was preparing to face the Assyrians. On the itinerary, under "Hezekiah's Tunnel," was a caption: "Bring waterproof shoes, a flashlight, and a hat."

It was a dark tunnel with running water, so I knew why I would need my Crocs (yes, grown men can wear Crocs) and a flashlight. But why on earth would I need a hat? Hats are for protecting my eyes or balding scalp from the sun, not for dark tunnels.

As we prepared to enter the tunnel, the leader said, "The ceiling of the tunnel can be as low as five feet in some places, so you'll want to duck down and wear a hat to protect your head from scraping the ceiling." Now I knew why I needed a hat. I am 6'6". They didn't make tunnels back in ancient times for giants like me. To make it through the tunnel, I had to crouch low and wear a cap for about 500 yards. *Without adopting a lowly posture, there would be no way I'd make it through.*

Similarly, entry into the Bible demands a particular posture of mind and heart. When we read the Bible with the right posture, the odds of meeting with God and hearing His voice increases. What posture of mind and heart will position us to hear from God as we read the Bible?

Teachability. We come to Scripture to meet with God. Don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that we approach the Bible as if it were God—that would be idolatry, *bibliolatry* (worshiping a book rather than the God of the Good Book). Bibliolatry can manifest itself in the innocent guise of wanting to know the Bible. While there is nothing wrong with seeking to study and learn the Bible, bibliolatry surfaces when the quest for knowledge becomes an end in itself.

Jesus confronts some of the most dedicated students of Scripture in ancient Israel. These Jews could have schooled any of us in their knowledge of the Bible. But Jesus was not impressed. He said to them, "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (Jn 5:39-40).

Scary stuff. It is possible to be the most diligent students of Scripture and still fail Jesus' exam. You fail if your study of Scripture does not lead you to Jesus. What can help us move beyond bibliolatry to encounter God as we read the Bible? The posture of our heart makes a difference. We need to be teachable.

The Bible gives us several vantage points for thinking about teachability. Have you ever thought about our need for God himself to be our teacher? Mary of Bethany models for us a teachable spirit as she sits at the feet of Jesus, hungry for his every word.

This posture before God as teacher includes recognizing one's need for God to help us know the things of God. We can't assume that in and of our own efforts we will automatically grasp the Bible.

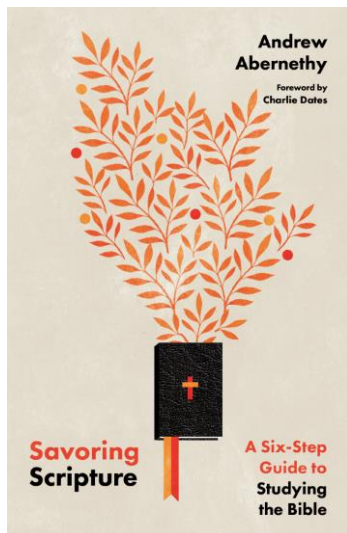
The psalmist models this. He prays, "Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes" (Ps 119:33). No doubt the psalmist had studied God's statutes, but he knew that for them to sink in God would need to teach him. The prophets themselves look



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forward to a time when God would teach his people (Is 30:20-21; Jer 31:34). Jesus even speaks to his disciples about how the Holy Spirit would teach his disciples (Jn 14:26). As we approach the Bible, then, we need to come with hearts yearning to be taught by God, the Master Teacher himself.

Childlikeness. Another vantage point on teachability is childlikeness. We are coming to meet with God, our Father, when we approach the Scriptures. Jesus highlights childlikeness as a key to hearing God's voice. Consider this scenario in Matthew 11.

Jesus is traveling from city to city around the Sea of Galilee. Miracles are happening left and right. With just a touch, Jesus cleanses a leper, relieves the fever of Peter's mother-in-law, and opens the eyes of the blind. With just a word, Jesus heals a paralyzed servant and casts out a legion of demons. People from across the region are bringing the sick and demon-possessed before him, and they are all experiencing healing and deliverance.

If you witnessed such events, how would you respond? You'd repent and turn to Jesus, right? Well, maybe not. Check out what Matthew says: "Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent" (Mt 11:20). Those who saw the mighty works of God in their midst were calloused, unchanged, and unresponsive. So Jesus curses those cities, declaring that Sodom is better off than them. This is not good news, considering the fact that God wiped Sodom off the map due to their sin in Genesis 19.

Jesus next says something that seems like it is out of left field: "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do" (Mt 11:25-26). Hold on a minute. Jesus was just calling down curses, and now he's praising God. What is going on? What is happening becomes clear when we see the contrast between Jesus condemning the "wise and learned" who do not get it (the cities of Galilee who remain unrepentant after seeing miracles) and those "little children" who do get it.

The ways of the Father are far different from one would expect. From a human point of view, the "wise and learned" of Jesus' day—those scribes and Pharisees who went to "seminary"—are those you would expect to grasp the things of God, to repent on seeing God's miracles in Jesus. There is nothing wrong with being "wise" per se. The issue is their assumption that their status in society as those in the know gives them the inside track on knowing the ways of God. They have God in a box, so they are closed off to being pushed beyond their current thinking about God. Jesus takes great delight in how the Father hides these things from the proud who presume a privileged place of being in the know.

Who are the "little children" that receive God's unexpected revelation? Jesus does not have in mind *actual* infants; instead, "little children" is a metaphor for Jesus' disciples. Jesus speaks of his disciples as "little ones" (Mt 10:42) or as "the least" (Mt 11:11) right before this.

One reason why Jesus speaks of his disciples as little children is because infants are not known for their intelligence. If you spend time around little children you know this.

My son Oliver is two as I write this book. The following conversation is typical.

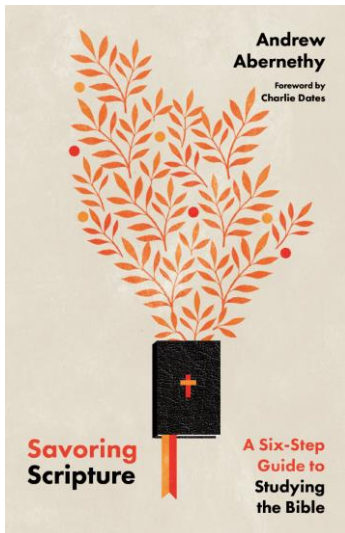
"Oliver, how old are you?"



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"Five," he'll declare.

"No, Oliver, you are two," I respond.

"Two," he'll echo back.

So, I follow up by asking, "Oliver, how old are you?"

"Five," he announces with pride.

We get lots of laughs about this. My son amazes me. I love him to bits. But he—along with all other little children—are not intellectually developed, so they are not known to be the "wise and learned" in society.

When Jesus celebrates how "infants" are recipients of divine revelation, he taps into the common knowledge that little children are not expected to be smarter about the ways of God than schooled scribes. Jesus is celebrating how the Father reveals himself to those who might not be "wise and learned" in the world's eyes. Jesus calls fishermen, tax collectors, prostitutes, and the lowly to receive insight into the ways of God in Jesus. These are the "little children." The key seems to be that such folks would not presume to be in the know when it comes to the things of God. This creates a childlike dependence on God to make himself known to them. They are open, teachable. Childlikeness seems to be the key, and, as Jesus says elsewhere, we must become like children to enter the kingdom of God (Mt 18:3). The very posture that enables us to enter the kingdom is the posture that positions us to hear from God as we read the Bible.

—Taken from step one, "Posture"



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