

## Why Teach the Bible to Young Friends?

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Having grown up in a Buddhist family, I was not familiar with the Bible as a child. I always felt myself to be an outsider, that the people around me had something in common that I did not share. In my teens, after a spiritual experience, I began studying the Bible by reading a chapter each day, closing the book and writing what I remembered. Through this discipline, I came to two realizations:

1. The Bible is a powerful tool for spiritual deepening, and
2. The Bible is essential for cultural literacy in American Society.

I'd like to explore both of those concepts with you today.

**First let's talk about using sacred stories from the Bible to gain spiritual depth.** As allegories, Bible stories have the power to take us into the contemplation of our lives in relation to the Divine: who we are, how to love and what to do.

Violent and contradictory in many ways, the Bible teaches us to reach for God, to question ourselves, and through a broad sweep of positive and negative examples, to lead courageous, loving, inspired lives. I teach the Bible because it is *our* sacred text as members of a Christian faith. These stories are integral to our faith and culture.

I also believe Young Friends need a foundation in the Bible to truly understand Quaker faith and practice. The Bible was essential reading for early Friends. Explicit and implicit references to the Bible are woven throughout their writings.

The *Godly Play* method creates a sacred space, brings the most beloved Bible stories to life and invites the class to wonder about the symbolic value of the story for our lives today. I find *Godly Play* to align with Friends faith and practice because it invites Young Friends to enter the sacred space together, where silence, inquiry and imaginative play are woven into the rhythm of storytelling.

**Cultural literacy is the second reason to teach the Bible.** Globally there are 2.2 billion Christians, 1.6 billion Muslims and 14 million Jews. The sacred texts of these faiths share many of the same stories. And according to a 2015 Pew Research Center study, there are more Christians in the U.S. than in any other country. Seven in ten Americans identify with some branch of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

As Anthony Manousos from Pacific Yearly Meeting points out, "Bible stories are a living sacred tradition that has enormous influence on how Americans think and behave today."<sup>2</sup> Young Friends are surrounded by people who look to the Bible as a source of wisdom and moral guidance. The Bible is used to justify a wide range of beliefs, values and actions.

Our children should be equipped to engage in the conversation in an informed, respectful way. I believe they benefit from the chance to examine the scriptures from a Quaker perspective. With eyes wide open, our teens need to learn how some passages in the Bible have been used to justify violence and oppression as well as those used to promote peace and justice. They need the opportunity and skills to interpret the passages for themselves.

I tend to teach the Bible's greatest hits, but when teaching youth my husband often picks a puzzling or controversial passage. Young Friends read the passage in several translations. Then they discuss how the passage has been interpreted, what they see that is problematic, and how the message can be instructive to Friends.

Young Friends lead busy lives, bombarded with conflicting messages. By introducing them to the Bible, and to practices that will help them draw insight from its pages, we give them a compass for their journey to truth. As their faith community, I believe we owe it to them. I also believe that our children can be our gift to humanity; the leaven in the loaf so desperately needed in the world today.

Sita Diehl  
Nashville Friends Meeting

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://laquaker.blogspot.com/2016/05/why-bible-study-is-important-for.html>