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How do you get Inspiration from the Bible?

Live audio chat with Elise Moore August 16, 2005

spirituality.com host: Hello everyone! Welcome to another spirituality.com live question-and-answer event. My name is Rosalie Dunbar and I'll be your host for the next hour.

Many visitors to spirituality.com are familiar with the Bible, but others find that it's a closed book. Today, we're going to ask and answer the question "How do you get inspiration from the Bible?" Our guest is Elise Moore, who is in the full-time practice of Christian Science healing. She has served as a chaplain in a homeless shelter, where she was involved in spiritual counseling and leading Bible study, and she has both spoken and written about spirituality in many venues, including articles you can read right here, on our Web site.

Elise, to get the discussion rolling, do you have some thoughts you'd like to offer?

Elise: Thanks, Rosalie. I'm really humbled to be here, and I'm looking forward to hearing everyone's questions. When I think about getting inspiration from the Bible, it's more about the spirit than the letter. It's more about feeling the truth behind the words. The words are just a vehicle to convey that spiritual sense.

You know, one of the dictionary definitions of inspiration is "a divine influence that communicates truth without error." And that reminds me of the definition for grace--the Greek word for grace--and the definition of grace is: "the divine influence upon the heart and its reflection in the life, including gratitude." Well then, both inspiration and grace come from that divine influence. Inspiration is a divine influence that enables a person to know the truth; grace is the divine influence that enables a person to live the truth. So, for me, inspiration is the knowing, and grace is the doing.

spirituality.com host: And that would be the truth that comes from the Bible.

Elise: That's right. And that's the message of Jesus Christ. The Bible talks about grace and truth coming from Jesus Christ. Well to me, that's a very direct statement: that the inspiration or truth that Jesus brought to the world is not just intellectual, it's to be lived and practiced. That's the grace, living that truth. What's wonderful about the inspiration from the Bible is that it's timeless. The same inspiration that helped a person in Bible times is the same truth that will help you and me today. Not like a carton of milk that spoils after a certain date. Inspiration is forever.

spirituality.com host: That leads me to the first question we have, from Suzanne in Coral Gables. She says "There's a lot of fear and worry and chaos in the world today. Do you have a favorite Bible story that can help calm worries about war, terrorism and disruption?"

Elise: Oh, Suzanne, that's a great question. The first thing that comes to mind is one of my favorite Bible stories. It's a little-known Bible story: it's in Jeremiah, chapter 38. It's about a character named Ebedmelech. At this point in history, Israel was about to be under attack by one of their enemies, and there was a lot of fear about this.

There was a sense of being terrorized. This enemy had been capturing other states or cities around, and the people, King Zedekiah and his princes were terrified about this. They turned to Jeremiah, asking him for a word from God. Well actually, the word that God gave Jeremiah was that they were going to be conquered. This so infuriated the already terrified people that they threw Jeremiah into this nasty pit. Thus enters the hero of the story, Ebedmelech, an Ethiopian slave. He heard about this, and decided that he would go to the king and tell him that this was unjust and unfair, and plead for Jeremiah's life. So he gets the courage and faces the king, tells him that Jeremiah's going to die in this pit, and the king allows him to go and save Jeremiah, which he does.

spirituality.com host: Now I just want to interrupt here. This gentleman, Ebedmelech, he wasn't some rich and powerful person, was he?

Elise: No, that's why I love this story. He's a slave. He's a black slave; he had no status, no power, no authority-and a person such as himself, going to the king, pleading any particular reason, would fear for his own life. And yet he

goes, and has the courage to stand up for what he felt was right: that Jeremiah had been speaking the word of God, and that God was with Jeremiah, and that he needed to be saved. I think I like two things about this story. I love the courage and strength of Ebedmelech to stand up for what was right in the face of fear and terror and overwhelming odds. I find that very inspiring. And I also love thinking about Jeremiah, at the bottom of a pit, unable to do anything humanly in terms of saving himself except pray. Although the Bible doesn't speak of Jeremiah's prayer, or how he prays in this instance-you know he was. I love thinking about the fact that Jeremiah prayed in the midst of a terrible human situation, and the answer that came was probably one that he could never have imagined: a slave coming with a motley crew of 30 people and rescuing him with some old rags.

To me, that's the power of God at work. So in praying about situations around the world, I think about these two characters and their fearlessness, their complete confidence and trust in God. Although their deliverance might have been unorthodox, there was an answer there that saved them.

spirituality.com host: That leads me to a question from the San Luis Obispo Reading Room in California: "Should we consider the entire Bible inspired? What about the uninspiring things such as gory battles, food laws and so forth?"

Elise: You know that's a question that is theologically debated by all Christian denominations, talking about the inerrancy of the Bible. The first tenet of Christian Science is that we take the inspired word of the Bible as our sufficient guide to eternal life. There is a spiritual thread that runs through the Bible that illuminates the human experiences and uplifts them to increasingly more moral and spiritual ways of action.

And sometimes, when we're reading the Old Testament, it's helpful to realize this progress of thought. Just like each one of us, individually, has our own individual inspiration and progress of thought in our own lives, so the Bible is showing this unfolding inspiration and progress throughout the centuries.

I find it helpful to not be too judgmental about some of the Old Testament situations, and instead recognize the progress of thought that was happening for them that was so dramatic, given the context of the times in which they were living.

spirituality.com host: This leads to another question, from Raymond Meyers in Nashville, Tennessee. He's asking: "How much weight do you give to the Old Testament versus the New, or is there any difference?"

Elise: Hi, Raymond, I'm delighted that you asked that question. I spend a lot of time with the Old Testament because I feel it is the foundation upon which the New Testament rests. Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. If we aren't aware of what the prophecies are, if we aren't aware of the foundation, then we're not getting the full measure of inspiration from the fulfillment of those prophecies. It would be like trying to build a building without putting a basement and first and second floor on it, and just starting with the third and fourth floor.

spirituality.com host: From Ann in Florida, we have a question: "Some of the Bible stories are so familiar to us. How can we get new inspiration from these well-loved stories, so they stay fresh?"

Elise: Oh, Ann, that is a great question, especially for people who are reading the Bible on a daily or weekly basis. There are several ways, I'm sure, that everyone has for keeping Bible stories fresh. One of the ways that has been particularly helpful for me is to look at the Bible story from different characters' points of view. So, for example, with the story I gave about Ebedmelech, I look at the story from Ebedmelech's perspective, and then I go back and look at it again, from Jeremiah's perspective. I might also look at it from King Zedekiah's perspective, and what the lessons for him might have been.

Another thing I like to do is to look at stories from a different cultural and, if I can say it, age perspective. If I'm really familiar with a Bible story, I might look at it and think to myself, How would a teenager view this story? Is there anything speaking to a teenager here? And then I might think, How would a married mom with children view this story, or how would a businessman view this story? I try to put myself in different people's shoes, and then look at the story and see if it's speaking to this group. Often, I'll get special inspiration from that.

spirituality.com host: That sounds like a great idea. I remember a time when I did the king's point of view with Daniel in the lion's den, and how the king was thinking about things, and how much he was supporting Daniel, even though he was between a rock and hard place there.

Elise: Nice, very nice.

spirituality.com host: We've got a lovely question from Diane in Houston. She says, "Will you share inspiration you have found in any of the gospel healings and their practicality in your life, please?"

Elise: Oh, Diane, thank you for that question. That's a wonderful opportunity and opening. There's so much inspiration that one can get from Jesus' experience and healings. I think one of my favorite ones at this moment in my life comes from when Jesus was on his way to healing the 12-year-old girl who had already passed on. Well, she hadn't passed on yet, but he was on his way to healing her. On the way, another person needed help. A woman touched the hem of his garment, and found that her long-standing chronic illness was healed.

And he stopped and turned and sought out this woman, who had been seeking comfort and healing, and spoke to her directly, and really embraced her in his thought and blessed her so that she didn't feel she was surreptitiously seeking the Christ-truth. He embraced her openly. Then the messenger comes and says that the first case, the young girl, had passed on, and he said, "Oh, fear not," and he proceeds to raise this girl from the dead. I guess the reason I love this story right now is, all our lives seem to be filled with a lot of demands, whether it's personal, family demands or demands of our job or combinations of that, or maybe just demands of the world.

I love that message: that there's time to stop and embrace the searching heart, the heart that needs healing, and focus on each individual one by one. You're not going to lose anything, you're not going to miss an opportunity to help someone else and we're never too busy to love the person who needs help, right then at that moment.

spirituality.com host: What about Lazarus? That was another case where Jesus seemed to wait awhile before he went to him, and clearly, there was some pressure there.

Elise: When I think of Jesus and Lazarus, I think about Jesus' preparation of thought. I think his pausing was perhaps his turning to God, the Father of all, as well as Jesus' father, and getting a clear, spiritual view of life, of eternal life

uninterrupted, and of the power of God, divine Life, as being supreme. He was so clear on that, by the time he got to the place where Lazarus was, he could instantaneously heal him. Oh, that's a model that I certainly aspire to; I think we all aspire to.

spirituality.com host: That's very helpful. We have a question from Marilyn, who's in the Norway, Maine Reading Room: "What about using various translations of the Bible? I find them very helpful."

Elise: Marilyn, I really agree. I must own over 40 translations. I use them frequently. I find that the King James Version is beautiful and wonderful and inspiring, and sometimes obscure for me. Looking at another translation can clarify the spiritual meaning of the passage and open up a view that might not have occurred to me otherwise.

Another tool I rely on a lot when I do not understand a passage is Strong's Concordance. Strong's has definitions of the Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible-Hebrew in the Old Testament, Greek in the New Testament. Sometimes by reading the original meanings of the words, the sense of the verse, that has been obscured by the English, pops out. I also use some lexicons, which are discussions of words. Rosalie, can I give an example?

spirituality.com host: Sure!

Elise: There's a book that I particularly love. It's called the Key Study Bible. I have it in the King James translation; you can get it in other translations. It has the whole Bible there. Then it uses the Strong's numbers over what they consider the "key words," and they give the Strong's definition of the Greek or Hebrew word. They also discuss that word a little bit, and I've found that contextual discussion to enrich the original meaning of the passage.

So for example, in the Beatitudes, the word "blessed" is actually the Greek word makarios, and the original meaning of this word is "to be fully satisfied." And then the discussion of the word makarios in the Key Study Bible includes this: "Makarios differs from "happy" because happy describes the person who has good luck, from the English root "hap," meaning favorable circumstances. In the Biblical sense, a blessed person is one whom God makes fully satisfied, not because of favorable circumstances, but because he indwells the believer

through Christ. Makarios is the one who is in the world, yet independent of the world. His satisfaction comes from God, not from favorable circumstances."

spirituality.com host: And so is not subject to chance.

Elise: That's right! That sense of being blessed means it's our direct relation to God. It's God coming directly to us, and we are fully satisfied with the qualities and the thoughts and the guidance and the help He has given directly to us. It's not dependent on other people or on the circumstances going on around us.

spirituality.com host: This leads us to a question about the loaves and fishes. This is from James in Baden-Wurtenburg, Germany. His question is: "In the New Testament, we read of Jesus feeding the multitudes with five loaves of bread and fishes. Yet we are confronted with hunger in parts of the world, for example the Horn of Africa. What is the parallel between these current disasters and what transpired during Jesus' period?"

Elise: James, that's a good question. There's another place in the Bible that talks about this multiplication of food, and that, of course, is in the Old Testament, when Moses was leading the children of Israel through the wilderness for 40 years, and they were fed on a daily basis with manna and quail. Here they were in a desert area that could not support, for 40 years, that number of people. And yet they were fed and supported. I think the parallel today is for individuals to be turning, in a more consecrated manner, to God, as Jesus turned-wholeheartedly, without reservation and as Moses turned, wholeheartedly, without reservation.

And when I mean "without reservation," I don't mean a blind faith. I mean an understanding grasp of the presence of divinity on Earth now, that God indeed reigns supreme and governs-not human government, not weather, but divine Spirit, divine Life, God, reigns supreme and governs right now on Earth.

I think this is what Moses had grasped: that God was literally directing and governing their every footstep. And Jesus certainly knew that his Father was our Father, the Father of all, and he multiplied that spiritual understanding so that it met the needs of all those who were present with him and receptive to receiving that spiritual truth.

spirituality.com host: Well, I wonder if we could go back to your ideas about being satisfied. You were talking about the "blesseds," because, in a way, if one is really trusting God's government, then one is satisfied trusting God. To some extent, isn't the fear and the "well, I wonder if this is going to work" somewhat less important because of that idea of being blessed?

Elise: Yes, and certainly the qualities of thought that are pointed out as being imperative in the Beatitudes-the qualities of mercy, of meekness, of humility, of peacefulness, of purity of heart and so forth, these qualities are key factors in feeling the presence and power of God.

If I can just tell one short personal experience: when I was getting ready to go to college, there was no money for that. I had enough money for one semester. So I was really praying about this the summer before, and the thought that came to me was-like the inspiration to Moses when they were standing at the shore of the Red Sea-to simply go forward. If I would go forward, God would open the way. So since I had enough money for the first semester, that's what I did. I continued praying, I continued following inspiration that came to me. I got a little job, I applied for all the loans I could apply for, and scholarships and so forth. The bottom line was, I went through my college years and graduated, and there was always money for each semester.

spirituality.com host: There you go. It's that going forward.

Elise: Yes. That's also an example of how I use the Bible. When I'm in a pickle myself, I turn to the Bible and think about what Bible character might have had a similar experience. Now, I'm not looking for the Bible character who needed money to go to college, but I'm thinking about a Bible character who was faced with an obstacle that seemed very big.

That's why Moses' experience came to me. This was a similar situation. So I thought, okay, how did Moses handle it? And I re-read that story, and realized the inspiration that helped Moses was to go forward. Therefore, I simply reasoned, the inspiration that would help me would be to go forward.

spirituality.com host: Exactly. We have a message from Jean in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She's asking, "What do you think of the other gospels, Thomas, and so forth?"

Elise: That's a nice question, Jean. I think some of the other gospels are quite inspired, and I might add that my favorite other gospel is the gospel of Mary Magdalene. It's a short and fragmentary gospel, but it's incredibly inspired. Part of it has been lost, but the portion that remains begins with asking the question, "what is matter?" Jesus answers that question in the gospel of Mary Magdalene. It's one of my favorite other gospels to read and study.

spirituality. com host: Ron Tallbee, from Minnesota, is asking, "How would you recommend that we pray about the war in Iraq?"

Elise: Well, Ron, I think I spoke a little bit about that when I talked about Ebedmelech. I also find it helpful, in praying about specific world situations, not to get too involved in the details of the human situation. That can entrap us and limit our thinking, and sort of keep us on the ground when what we really need is to be lifted up.

In order to be lifted up, I find I have to be obedient to Jesus' command to his disciples. They were asking him how to pray, and just before he gave them the Lord's Prayer, he told them to "go into your closet and shut the door, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." For me, that going into the closet and shutting the door means shutting the door of my thought against the details of the human experience, so that I'm not embroiled and entrapped by them in my thought, and turning wholeheartedly to God, starting with God, and the all-presence, all-power and all-action of God, the divine presence of God.

Once I have that view, it serves to uplift thought, sort of like a hot air balloon, or maybe a helicopter, where thought is lifted up above the details of the human experience. And just like a helicopter, once you get up high enough, you can see solutions that are not visible if you're down there on the ground, embroiled in the jungle. So I find that's very helpful in praying about complex situations- to allow thought to be lifted up by turning to God and seeing the power and presence of God until our view is more spiritualized.

spirituality. com host: And in a way, it ties in with your Ebedmelech image because that solution was one that no one would have necessarily expected. So when one can have that higher view, it may reveal a solution that isn't obvious if you're down on the ground.

Elise: Yes.

So we need to turn away from the physical, and be so willing to see the spiritual view -God's view-that we can let go of the tethers that are holding us to the ground. Then the truths of the Bible will help lift you up and heal.

Back to that grain of mustard seed. When Jesus told his disciples to have faith as a grain of mustard seed, we often think of the size of the grain of mustard seed, and think that he was saying that they just needed a small faith. I don't think that was the message. If he just wanted to indicate a small faith, I think Jesus would have talked about a grain of sand; there was plenty of sand around.

A mustard seed in one season grows into this huge bush-like plant, between 10 and 12 feet tall. I think Jesus was conveying to His disciples that we need faith that grows quickly. So we're nurturing and cultivating our confidence in God and in the presence and power of God in human experience.

The definition of faith I like the most is sort of a paraphrase in Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures by Mary Baker Eddy. I'm paraphrasing this sentence: faith is spiritual evidence beginning to appear real. For me, that's what Jesus was indicating when he said we need faith as a grain of mustard seed. The spiritual evidence of God's government and presence and power on Earth must become more and more real and tangible and substantial to us, until it grows into this huge plant.

You know, the mustard plant is very productive; it has lots of seeds. Once one plant grows, the next season, all these little seeds have been planted and pretty soon you have a field full of mustard plants. Our whole thought and experience is full of this evidence of the spiritual being real right now in the human experience.

spirituality.com host: And in a way, are you saying that the process may be gradual, where the spiritual becomes progressively more real and more important to you as you grow spiritually, and then the material challenge, whatever it is, becomes progressively less real?

Elise: Another character that is very precious to me is in the Old Testament: Abigail. Abigail's story is in 1 Samuel 25. Part of what I love about the Abigail story is that she is a fearless woman. She was married to a man Nabal, who might have been abusive, was certainly not considerate of neither her, nor

any of his employees, and was in conflict, it seemed, a lot. He became in conflict with David when David was living in the wilderness with a group of men. The bottom line of the story is that David amassed a small army to come against Nabal and destroy his household.

When Abigail hears about this from one of the servants, she immediately takes action. She gathers up a present for David, goes forward herself with a few servants and some donkeys, and rides out to meet this small army of well-armed warriors coming to destroy her household. She meets David, flings herself down on the ground in humility and then proceeds, in a very beautiful and eloquent manner, to speak to him of his own Godlike mission and relation to God. She has a beautiful statement where she says that his soul is wrapped in the bundle with God. That's not an exact quote, but the beautiful soliloquy she gives turns David's thought, and transforms his heart. It awakens him immediately to realize that his anger and vengeance is misplaced.

He accepts her gift, he turns around and he and his army leave. There was no battle. I love the courage of this! Again, you have a powerless person, like Ebedmelech, but one who is willing to stand for what is right and true-willing to stand for conviction fearlessly, and go forward, trusting God. Trusting God to be with them every step of the way. Certainly, it was that Godlike Christ-message of wisdom that touched David's heart and transformed the situation from battle readiness to a willingness to turn around and go home.

spirituality. com host: There's a follow-up question that ties right in with the one you're just talking about. It's from Trish in Dallas, and she says, "Have you found the Bible helpful in addressing diversity issues that are so important in today's workplace, specifically valuing womanhood and other minorities?"

Elise: Well, Trish, yes. I gave just two examples here. Of course, Ebedmelech was a black man and Abigail was a Jewish woman. I've also found that women and other minorities don't have to limit themselves to images that are associated in the Bible with simply minorities and women. I remember when I was working in an office, I had a really untoward circumstance happen, and a new boss stripped me of all my responsibilities and gave them to other people. I still was employed, but I had nothing to do!

When I was praying about this, the Bible story that came to mind was that of Joseph, when he was unfairly attacked by his brothers and then thrown in a pit.

Then a group of slave traders came along, picked him out of the pit, took him to Egypt and sold him. As I was thinking about this story, I was at first thinking I was relating to the story because of the unfairness of the situation. It seemed that I had been set upon, like Joseph had been set upon by his brothers, and thrown into a pit for somebody to just drag off to unemployment.

So I was relating to the injustice that I felt Joseph was enduring. But as I continued to think about this story, and pray about it, this wonderful inspiration came to me that turned the whole situation around for me. I suddenly realized, oh my goodness, Joseph was being protected. One of the brothers had put him in the pit to prevent him from being killed by the other brothers. So the pit was actually a protection that saved Joseph's life. That the slave traders came and took him away was a further protection. I began to think of all of Joseph's life and experience, and I realized that God had been protecting him from envy or anger or really terrible situations his whole life, and then lifted him up to a position of responsibility and authority.

So suddenly, I thought, okay, this is the way I'm going to view my own situation. Instead of thinking of the pit being a negative place, I'm going to see this as being God's protection for me, and I did! I thought about that for several weeks. During this time period, there was a huge upheaval in my department. Several people were reassigned, jobs were lost, people were moved. Because of my unusual position, not being in the thick of things, if you will, it seemed all of that did not affect me. When it was over, my job responsibilities were returned to me, I returned to my original place, and additional responsibilities were added on, which were very pleasant and wonderful. I truly felt I'd had a "Joseph" experience, not in the sense of it being a negative experience, but in the sense of being beautifully protected by God.

spirituality. com host: Actually that might be a good answer to a question from Dan in Oregon: "I'm dealing with a challenge to my honesty. I've been accused of something that is not true. Can you recommend a Bible passage that I could work with?" I'm just thinking about in the Joseph story, he was accused of going after his owner's wife. That was an unjust thing that was quite different.

Elise: Right. That certainly is true. Dan, I think when we are challenged on honesty issues, I think about the last Beatitude: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake." You can study that whole Beatitude, it's beautiful. When we're in this situation, it's not our selves who are going to

change everyone's thought. We need to know that the truth speaks directly to everyone's thought. What is true shines forth like the Star of Bethlehem, and all the wise men and women will see it, and it will lead them to know what the true facts are.

And Dan, I've found that to be true in my own experience. So you don't need to feel that you have to run out and correct everyone else's impression of you. You let your Christliness and honesty shine forth, and your humility and confidence in good shine forth, and the Word of God, that Christ-truth, will come to the heart of every single individual around you, and will speak directly to their thought.

spirituality.com host: Elise, we're just about coming into the end. I've got one more question I'd like to ask you, because it's a question someone asked me. In a way, we've been answering it right along. How can someone, in the age of the Internet, with all of the many thinkers and writers that are being heard today, still feel the Bible is relevant, as compared to all of the other things that are available in the area of spirituality?

Elise: You know, when I think of the Bible, I think about thousands of years of inspiration. The Bible is recording God's words, God's direct communication and blessing to individuals over thousands of years. I don't think we want to lose that. That isn't saying that there isn't inspiration today, and that there aren't some wonderful, helpful and useful ideas today. Of course there are. Inspiration is infinite, and it's unlimited, and constantly unfolding.

But I sure don't want to ignore the profound and deep lessons that have been learned by those in the past. I want to build my life on their foundation. I don't want to reinvent the wheel. It's also how we build a taller building. You're building on the foundation of inspired individuals who had solid building materials. So you can build even a taller building because those first few stories, or maybe the first twenty stories and the foundation, have been built by others, and you can build on top of that instead of having to start all over again from scratch.

spirituality.com host: Sometimes when things are looking kind of dark, you can take those examples and say, well, it worked for them!

Elise: That's right. That's so true.

Rosalie, that's because it's not the words, it's the Spirit that the words are conveying, and that Spirit is felt.

spirituality.com host: That sort of gets us back to the dialog that Jesus had with his disciples when they were having difficulty healing the boy, because perhaps they were thinking a little bit too much about the process and not so much about the inspiration.

Elise: That could be very true.

spirituality.com host: Because, remember the man said to him, "Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief." There was just a kind of mental embracing of the man.

Elise: Yes, that's right. That's so true. I think also, it's helpful to think about being wise men and women. Like the wise men who saw the star of Bethlehem shining in the east, and went and found the Christ child. You know, that star was shining for everybody to see, but those who were humble and were looking for guidance found it. Then they were willing to follow and take action. Through their wisdom and humility, and willingness and action, they found the Christ-truth. And each one of those listening today, you will find your answers, the answers that you need, by humbly listening. The Christ-truth is shining before you, and is leading you to the answers that you need in your life.

spirituality.com host: Those answers do bring healing, don't they?

Elise: They sure do.

spirituality.com host: Well, Elise, it's been great to have you with us, and we're grateful to all of you who sent in questions. We hope you will join us again in future chats, and we're very grateful for the time you've spent with us this afternoon.

Elise: Thank you, Rosalie, and so much love to every one of the listeners.

Citations mentioned in this chat:

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75:13

King James Bible:

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