

The [Seattle Pacific University School of Theology](#)
and [Center for Biblical and Theological Education](#) present

“The Future of the Bible”

*A conversation with noted author, professor of religion
and SPU alumnus Timothy Beal*

Monday, January 30, 2012

7:30 pm

Fine Center

First Free Methodist Church, Seattle

3200 3rd Avenue West

Free and wheelchair accessible. Limited seating.



Join us for a lively and robust reimagining of the future of the Bible featuring Timothy Beal, Ph.D., the [Florence Harness professor of religion](#) at Case Western Reserve University and author of *The Rise and Fall of the Bible*.

With respondents [Jeff Keuss](#), Ph.D., SPU professor of Christian ministry, theology, and culture; and [Blake Wood](#), D.Min., lead pastor, [First Free Methodist Church](#).

Bio

Timothy Beal has authored 11 books, including *Biblical Literacy: The Essential Bible Stories Everyone Needs to Know* and *Roadside Religion: In Search of The Sacred, the Strange, and the Substance of Faith*, which was a *New York Times Book Review* Editor's choice and one of *Publisher's Weekly's* ten Best Religion Books of 2005. He has published essays on religion and American culture in *The New York Times*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. He received a B.A. (English) from Seattle Pacific University and a Ph.D. (Old Testament/Hebrew Bible) from Emory University.

Interview

On January 30, whom do you hope to see in the audience?

Seattle Pacific University students, for sure, as well as alumni, pastors, other church leaders, and friends. Undoubtedly, there will be a few former professors who know my story.

Can you give us a quick peek at what you'll be talking about on January 30?

The popular, cultural idea is to think about the Bible as a kind of moral guidebook God wrote to give us all the answers. If we take this approach, we tend to experience a disconnect with God when our expectations of what we think the Bible promises aren't met. What I want to explore and suggest is this: What if we could approach the Bible, not as an answer book, but rather as a "library of questions" that invites us, as an interpretive community, into the practice of learning to ask good questions?

What does that look like in a classroom discussion, or a church study group?

It can *sound* like a lot of noise. Encountering Scripture through good questions can generate lots of discussion, even arguments (the Latin root "arguere" means "to make clear"). Yet, this cacophony of many voices can actually be like a sacred hymn raised up to God.

Will you be sharing a few good classroom stories from your time as an SPU student?

Yes, I have stories to tell, and some of the names will be recognizable.

What should we be listening for as you talk about "the future of the Bible"?

First, from a media perspective, our children and grandchildren won't be reading Scripture in the form of a bound book we're used to reading today. We're in a media revolution right now. As we move out of a print book culture into a digital culture of social networking, hyperlinks, and blogs, we need to be asking the question, "How is the Bible going to change?" Jewish tradition and scriptural culture hold some interesting clues about how we can be rediscovering and receiving Scripture in our day.

Excerpts

The Bible creates community by providing space for community to happen. It offers storied words and theological vocabularies around which people can come together in conversation about abiding questions. It calls for creative, collaborative participation. This is true especially for Christians. It is “our” library of questions and pool of imagination, the place we gather to read again in order to find meaning and new situations. In its many voices, perspectives, and contradictions, it both embraces the diversity of voices among us and provides a context in which we can affirm unity within that diversity – not by agreeing about what it means but by joining in the creative, meaning-making process of interpretation that it hosts.

The New Testament literature likewise is shaped by rereading.

All its writings are fundamentally concerned with rereading Jewish Scriptures in order to understand the meaning of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Again and again, the Gospels quote Jewish Scriptures that they reinterpret as “fulfilled,” that is, filled out, by Jesus’s words and actions. Moreover, they ground Jesus’s authority in his own readings of Jewish Scriptures. Jesus is presented, first and foremost, as a biblical interpreter. We saw this very clearly in the story of Jesus reading from the Isaiah scroll in his hometown synagogue in the Gospel of Luke. Another good example is the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew (chapter 5), in which Jesus repeatedly quotes passages from the Torah and then reinterprets them in radically new ways. “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,’” he declares, quoting a line that appears three times in the Torah. “But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” Here and throughout the Gospels, Jesus does not simply cite Scripture as though it were a self-evident, self-interpreting source of authority. He rereads it, drawing out new, often highly provocative meanings, “fulfilling” it in a way that gives it new form for a new day. What would Jesus do? Reread. The Bible tells me so.

From *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book*, Timothy Beal, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011.