

## Making Peace With the Bible

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There are different ways to look at relationships. One of the models I like to use for relationship counseling that applies to couples as well as other relationships such as teachers and students, and employers and employees, is idealization, realization, and mutualization.

Idealization is the beginning phase of the relationship. When the relationship is new we tend to idealize the other person and their odd little ways are seen as cute and endearing. The other person is perfect and we are convinced that they are our soulmate.

Realization is when all their little ways stop being cute and begin to be annoying. At this point in the relationship we begin to see that they may not be perfect and they begin to see that maybe we are not perfect either. This realization is a major crossroads for the relationship. Do we separate or do we stick it out.

The third stage is mutualization. This means that we have decided to stick it out. We make a commitment to get past the disappointment and tough times of realization and work together to see what we can make on the other side of realization.

I have shared this with you before but not quite this way. Today I am asking you to think about applying this model to your relationship to the Bible.

I remember the beautiful pictures of my children's bible, the warm graces of Sunday School teachers, and the Sunday School songs affirming the rightness and authority of the Bible.

*Jesus loves me! This I know,  
For the Bible tells me so.  
Little ones to Him belong;  
They are weak, but He is strong.  
Chorus:  
Yes, Jesus loves me!  
Yes, Jesus loves me!  
Yes, Jesus loves me!  
The Bible tells me so.*

The stories were true and the authority of the Bible was not questioned. There was no need to question it. My bible affirmed who I am especially with my new name. My mother and my adopting father gave me a King James version of the Bible. It has a shiny black cover with gold lettering. On the front of the Bible in all capital letters it says,

HOLY BIBLE and toward the bottom of the front cover was my new name, Kenneth Heintzelman. The reverence of which it was treated and the new sense of belonging it symbolized made it perfect. However, my idealization did not last.

Over time I begin to read more and question more. I began to question all authority. I do not know which came first my questioning of the authority of my parents or the questioning of the authority of all social institutions. At some point I no longer believed that the Bible was literally true and quite honestly no one ever told me that it was. In terms of my own cognitive development my views of the world changed and my orientation to authority changed. Not all teachers were right all the time. Not all police officers and clergy were good. The Bible had some bad stuff in it. Abusive people used it in abusive ways. People often hide behind an appeal to the authority of the Bible rather than take responsibility. Interpretation in a black/white, all or nothing kind of way doesn't match the way life is. I was fortunate that while I separated myself from a fundamentalist and simplistic interpretation of the Bible, I was able to do so without divorcing myself from the Bible itself. It is at this realization stage that our relationship with the Bible is either remade or it is broken.

Isn't this true of all of our relationships? I think this is the emotional process of the Jesus Seminar people like Borg, Spang, and Crossen. They came to a crossroads in their relationship with tradition and the Bible and instead of divorcing they decided to stay in it, go deeper, and renegotiate the boundaries and terms of the relationship.

Fall of Giants by Ken Follett, excerpt p.118-120.

We cannot and should not maintain a starry-eyed view of the Bible. Nor should we surrender it to those who maintain and are stuck in such an idealization stage of the relationship. In our disposable and easy fix culture it would be easy to put the Bible in the recycling bin but I believe we would lose something that contains ideas of eternal worth.

Instead, I encourage us, as people of a progressive faith, to work on the mutualization stage rather than throw out the idealized baby with the realized bath water. There is in this collection of writings we call the Bible, the theological and spiritual DNA of our hope, our values, our mission, and our vision.

The over-arching story of the Bible begins in a garden that speaks of our relatedness to all creation, and it ends in a city which speaks to our being in community with all people of the earth. Let this over-arching narrative of reconciliation and healing be our new starting point for a new relationship of mutualization with the Bible.

Amen.

