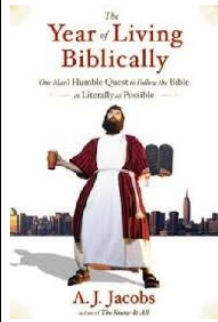




Discussion Guide



About the Book

Book Title: *The Year of Living Biblically* Author: A.J. Jacobs

Published by: New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007

Author website: <http://ajjacobs.com/>

Book website: <http://ajjacobs.com/books/the-year-of-living-biblically/>

Questions for Discussion

1. What were your general impressions of this book?
2. Do you try to follow the Bible in your life? If so, in what ways are your experiences similar to and different from Jacobs'?
3. Jacob said his original goal was to take issue with Jewish and Christian fundamentalists who take the Bible literally, by trying to do just that. Did he expose this approach as intended? Why or why not?
4. How did this experience broaden Jacobs' own understanding of his Jewish tradition?
5. Talk about Jacobs' forays into prayer. Do his experiences resonate with your own? Why or why not?
6. Jacob deliberates over how to raise his son in terms of religion. He sees the value of a strict religious upbringing, but also struggles with this. What is your perspective on childrearing related to faith issues and do you agree or disagree with Jacobs?
7. Comment on Jacobs' writing style. Would you read more books by him? Why or why not?
8. Read over the MAMs comments on the book. Which of them do you most agree with and why?
9. In what ways, if any, will this book change your life or perspective?

Other Links...

Book Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qySpB4-4VV0>

Author's Ted Talk on the Book: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5MkpzMAOZM>



NANCY: *“Sometimes miracles occur only when you jump in.”* I enjoyed the humor, the honesty and the authentic voice of AJ Jacobs as he explored the Bible. As a person who chooses to err on the side of faith, I really appreciated the way the Bible and the path of the faithful inspired him, despite his often disbelief. Granted most faith traditions contain some slants that are hard to swallow, and he explored many of these. And yet the power of ritual, the Sabbath, unconditional love and forgiveness make the faithful path relevant. As the light in the scripture touched him he seemed to come alive and transform from within. Very well-written and life giving.



SALLIE: Remember that time his wife cried “Helmet!” when AJ was being too overprotective of his son? I enjoyed the way he talked about his struggle with parenting. He wanted to protect his son and yet he knew he couldn’t. He was afraid to let him go to an international preschool because he might move to another country some day. He didn’t know how to raise him in terms of a spiritual tradition, realizing that a structured religion might help ground him, These are the hard decisions parents make when they really care about their child. He expressed it all so well.



ABIGAIL: *“There’s a beauty to forgiveness, especially forgiveness that goes beyond rationality. Unconditional love is an illogical notion, but such a great & powerful one”* Well, I appreciated that Jacobs’ could see the goodness in the scripture, such as his awareness here of forgiveness and unconditional love. For someone who considered himself living a “secular” life, he really entered into the heart of living Biblically. This book gives me hope.



MOLLY: *“This is what the Sabbath should feel like. A pause. Not just a minor pause, but a major pause. Not just lowering the volume, but a muting. As the famous rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel put it, the Sabbath is a sanctuary in time.”* The Sabbath is a great idea. We need a break each week. I loved the way the Sabbath grew on him. Tom and I have been trying to keep Sunday sacred and really stop working. Our life pace is too intense these days. Yes, AJ, I agree with you here.



PRISCILLA: *“As grandma said, if you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all”* Well, I think this book helped him get back in touch with the wisdom and faith of his ancestors, but I wish he tried faith more. The Bible must be read with faith or it doesn’t make sense. It was like he tried to live the life of faith without really believing in God. That doesn’t work.



KATHARINE: *“The year showed me beyond a doubt that everyone practices cafeteria religion... But the important lesson was this: there’s nothing wrong with choosing. Cafeterias aren’t bad per se... the key is in choosing the right dishes. You need to pick the nurturing ones (compassion), the healthy ones (love thy neighbor), not the bitter ones.”* I find this book an interesting exploration of the varieties of fundamentalism and approaches to the Bible. I chose this quote because it seems to summarize Jacobs’ conclusion on the best strategy. Once again, we read a book that I can see using in class to broaden my students’ perspective on the Bible. Perhaps I’ll try it in my survey of the Bible class, to encourage my students to think about the various ways people approach the Bible. Ultimately, we each have to reach our own conclusion on this.



JANE: *“I thought religion would make me live with my head in the clouds, but as often as not, it grounds me in this world.”*

What a quirky book! This guy really embraced the experience, didn’t he? From the desert in Israel with the shepherd to the Creation Museum to Jerry Falwell to the Hasidic practices, he explored the fringes (literally) and also the heart of the religious traditions. And every now and then he came out with a gem like this quote above. As I’ve become more spiritual in my life, I really find my faith tradition grounds me. I’ll keep thinking about this book for a long time to come,