

Chapter 17: Research Remix: Soundwriting Studies of the English Language

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3. Sarah Johnson's Discourse Ethnography: Intrinsic Bible Study

Sarah Johnson examines how language helps a group of Christians delve deeper into intrinsic Biblical study.

Transcript

[Dramatic keyboard music plays in a minor key with big drums, as if something important is about to happen. Deep, distorted male voice says, "Get ready . . . to have your mind . . . revolutionized." Music and voice stop with a dramatic, digital, descending record scratch.]

Sarah Johnson: Okay, so, no. This audio essay is probably not going to revolutionize your mind or change your life. But it might make you think about Bible studies just a little differently.

[New music begins and plays briefly under the following narration before fading out: a friendly keyboard-driven groove in a 1980s style.]

Sarah: Hi, everybody. My name is Sarah Johnson, and I wanted to tell you a little bit about the discourse community I studied over the past couple months. The group is an inductive Bible study group that prides itself on going through passages of the Bible—this text they believe to be inspired by God—very carefully in order to not miss anything. This is what two of the members said about how their type of Bible study is different than others.

Interviewee 1: Studying the Scripture verse-by-verse or inductively, and not just as a . . . necessarily a topic that people will give their opinions on, but you're studying through the verse.

Interviewee 2: I feel like this method is important because the real understanding comes from doing the Inductive method because of mainly the three things of observation, interpretation, and application. But the observation part of it is really the key point because it makes you slow down, doing verse by verse, and you see things in there that you probably wouldn't have seen before.

Sarah: So really the main method this group uses to study the Bible is to look at each verse in the part that they're studying individually. First, it's observing exactly what the text says without adding anything. And next they interpret what the words they observed mean. Lastly, they examine how the passage can apply to their lives.

Interviewee 2: In any Bible study, that is the one thing we fail at, is we may know what the knowledge is and what the word says, but what are we doing with it? We don't—we usually skip out on the application part.

[Same music as earlier returns briefly before fading.]

Sarah: Maybe it won't change your life, but Bible study for this group is absolutely transformational. This can even be heard when the teacher is leading discussion. I know you know what a math formula is, an "a" plus "b" equals "c" kind of thing [*yawning sound*], but the teacher almost spoke in formula language. [*nonverbal surprised sound*]

She would make a statement or give a list and then turn the information around. Make a statement: “But think about this.” Give a list: “But God” This was repeated over and over during discussion and as time went on, I started to see why she did this, whether it was conscious or not.

[New music starts playing beneath the narration: peaceful string chords with no beat.]

This transformational language triggers a more engaging, emotional response, not because the teacher was trying to manipulate the group or their emotions, but the information that to some seemed so familiar is suddenly seen in an entirely new light.

Interviewee 2: I have had senior adults in their 80s come to the classes and they have said that they have been in church their whole life and thought they knew the Bible until they started slowing down and really studying it verse-by-verse to realize how little they *did* know.

[Same music plays a bit on its own, ends.]

Sarah: So how is their inductive Bible study different? It all comes back to that three-step method.

Interviewee 2: Observation, interpretation, and application.

Sarah: They let the words from the Bible almost speak for themselves instead of adding in their own opinion first. According to my first interviewee, the method itself is not transformational. But what the method allows to take place is where the impact comes.

Interviewee 1: Just continually being challenged to allow the *Holy Spirit* to teach you and not to lean on your own understanding.

Sarah: So I’ll leave you with the challenge this group poses to anyone who joins: When you study the Bible, let it speak for itself instead of changing the words and meaning to suit your life.

[New music begins under these final words: energetic, positive pizzicato strings played over deep drums.]

Let God’s Spirit, the actual author of the Book, transform you.