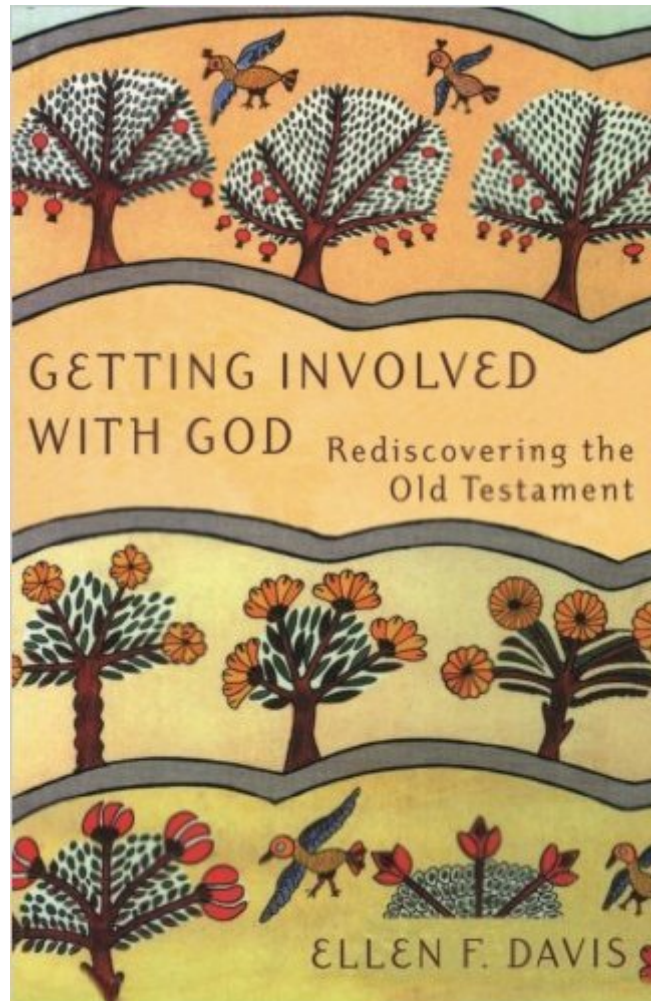


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# Getting Involved With God: Rediscovering The Old Testament



## Synopsis

This is a book about getting, and staying, involved with God-what it takes, what it costs, what it looks and feels like, and why anyone would want to do it anyway.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dr. Davis' book is not an exhaustive commentary, but a series of reflections on selected texts of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is an excellent source for delving into the wisdom of the Old Testament for both novices and the learned. While written from the perspective of a believing Christian, her commentary is heavily influenced by her extensive experience in dialog with Rabbinic Judaism and its texts. Especially intriguing is her commentary on the Ecological Crisis and the imperatives found in the Scriptures to act as good stewards of the land.

Davis does an outstanding job shedding light on tough passages from the Old Testament such as the Binding of Isaac and the cursing psalms. Through impressive scholarship (she does all of her own Biblical translations), she reveals a story of God's quest to have a relationship with humankind - as captured by the Old Testament. Well worth reading.

I've been called an Old Testament Christian before, so it's not likely a surprise that I would like this book. But Ellen Davis does something special and unexpected here, because I don't agree with her on a number of points. Still, this book gave me a view of a facet of the diamond that is the Gospel

that, frankly, I'd never seen. The book is divided into five sections: the Psalms, Love, Wisdom, Disciplines of the Heart and Ecotheology. Here are some things that opened Scripture up for me through this book:

1. How can we reconcile those hard Psalms--the ones that pray for the destruction of our enemies? Davis reminds us that the Psalms "are undisguessedly human utterances (pg. 9)." While the rest of the Bible is formatted as God's Word/message to us, the Psalms are our imperfect prayer to God--God's Word THROUGH us. And as imperfect beings, harshness shows through. When pressure from the outside mounts, then the Psalmist leans in with "cries of anguish and rage [that] would seem to violate all the rules for Christian prayer." (pg. 14) Davis points out that this truth of heart to God is the first step toward praise. The answer I loved here is this idea that these Psalms show real-time conversion back to the heart and mindset of God. The Psalmist almost always comes out a different door than he went in. "The point of the shocking psalms is not to sanctify what is shameful (for example, the desire for sweet revenge) or to make us feel better about parts of ourselves that stand in need of change. Rather, the Psalms teach us that profound change happens always in the presence of God." (pg. 5) "So the Psalms call for honest speech, but honesty is not everything in an intimate relationship. We must also speak wisely, at least some of the time." (pg. 9)

2. OK, I get that, but how do we reconcile the seemingly totally wrong, disrespectful and accusatory prayers? Don't they pray for others destruction? Who is that God? Davis points out that Psalms 1-72 are dominated by a focus on self. They are full of "I" and "me" and and accuse God of all sorts of terrible deeds. They push and prod. They tell God to leave well enough alone and pray down destruction on the heads of their enemies and even children. "These cries of anguish and rage would seem to violate all the rules of Christian prayer." (pg. 14) Davis helped to sharpen my focus on these prayers by pointing out "When you lament in good faith, opening yourself to God honestly and fully--no matter what you have to say--then you are beginning to clear the way for praise. . . . When you lament, you are asking God to create the conditions in which it will become possible for you to offer praise--conditions, it turns out, that are mainly within your own heart." (pg. 15) These psalms begin with God and mark the beginning of our journey, but also with acknowledgement, from the Psalmist, that the God who created the heavens actually cares about us. Davis points out what a remarkable assumption that actually is, but that "the lament psalms regularly trace a movement from complaint to confidence in God, from desperate petition to anticipatory praise. ... The fact that the Psalms never clearly report a change in external circumstances is one mark of the Bible's persistent realism. ... One further mark of the realism of the Psalter is the fact that it includes two psalms--Psalms 38 and 88--that make no turn toward praise." (pg. 21) This real time turning of men in the midst of terrible circumstances shows us how

we can begin and move through tragedy. Lastly, Davis reminded me, when considering the hurt experienced by the Psalter, to ask, "Is there anyone in the community of God's people who might want to say this to God about me-or maybe, about us?" (pg. 28) Putting ourselves on the pointed end of the Psalter's prayer gives a new perspective to this challenging text. This is getting a little long, so I'll wrap up. I love this book. I don't align with everything Davis says (especially the way Davis seems to limit the power of God in Chapter 6 and the power within Ecclesiastes in Chapter 9), and felt that such a great book was lessened by what seemed like a thrown together fifth section-devoid of the critical eye and research that I appreciated throughout the rest of the book. Despite those weaknesses, this book helped me with the above and Chapter 7, on the Song of Solomon should be required reading for all Christians. It opened in me a view of the love of Christ that has me as the pursued. I learned more from this book that I could possibly share here, and I pray that others will search for the wisdom contained here. Here's SOME THINGS I

UNDERLINED: "If God has a best friend (and why not?), then surely it is Moses." (pg. 46) "God accommodates [Moses'] complaints and makes in-course corrections. God does not take a human being so fully into the divine confidence--you might say, God does not depend on a human being so fully--until Mary conceives by the Holy Spirit." (pg. 16) "The Song [of Solomon] captures the ecstatic aspect of love that is the main subject of the whole Bible." (pg. 67) "That the Old Testament represents God chiefly as angry Judge and vicious Warrior is a false stereotype. While these images are not absent, they are more than balanced by striking portrayals of God as Lover or Husband, infatuated with Israel beyond all reason or deserving. God is not too proud to grieve terribly over Israel's unfaithfulness, nor to be giddy over her return home. ... [This covenant's] primary quality is love at the highest pitch of intensity." (pg. 77) "The very idea of wisdom, as the Bible understands it, challenges the mind-set of our society and the view of knowledge that all of us have to some extent internalized." (pg. 94) "...consider how [the Proverbs] define success: the establishment of righteousness, justice and equity." (pg. 95) "But 'true wisdom is such that no evil use can ever be made of it.' That is worth our pondering because we, more than any previous generation, are witnessing the evil effects of perverted knowledge, knowledge not essentially connected to goodness. ... No other generation has been so successful at using its technological knowledge in order to manipulate the world and satisfy its own appetites." (pg. 96) "The sufferer who keeps looking for God has, in the end, privileged knowledge. ... She passes through a door that only pain will open, and is thus qualified to speak of God in a way that others, whom we generally call more fortunate, cannot speak." (pg. 122) "The fourth-century Greek theologian St. John Chrysostom said that Job's greatest trial was that his wife was not taken." (pg. 125) "...our role as comforters is

not to solve the problem of pain; even less is it to stick up for God. Trying to vindicate God to a person in agonizing pain is like explaining to a crying infant that Mommy is really a well-intentioned person. ... While [Job's friends] remain mired in their convictions, Job is moving." (pg. 130)"...Job rails against God, not as a skeptic, not as a stranger to God's justice, but precisely as a believer. It is the very depth of Job's commitment to God's ethical vision that makes his rage so fierce, and that will finally compel an answer from God." (pg. 133)"The Garden of Eden was the place where the first human creatures might have acquired wisdom: Eden was the place for total intimacy with God, and that is the sole condition for becoming wise. Day by day they might have grown in wisdom and stature, taking those strolls with God in 'the breezy time of day" (Genesis 3:8). But they could not wait to get smart, so they chose the quick and dirty method..." (pg. 149)"For us the true measure of our wisdom will never be the grade point average we covet, a degree or rank, the right job, the book accepted by a prestigious press. No, we will be wise when we desire with heart, soul, mind, and strength only the things that God also desires for us--and nothing else compels us, or ever catches our wandering eye." (pg. 151)"Worship is a vigorous act of reordering our desires in the light of God's burning desire for the wellness of all creation." (pg. 152)"And there we recognize that our frailty is not meant to cause us anxiety and sorrow. Rather, God means it to be a source of confidence, and even, as it was for Etty [the Dutch Jew previously mentioned that died in Auschwitz], a source of joy. For it is exactly that frailty--the strict limits to our powers, their inevitable failure, the certainty of death--that creates the need and the desire to see God's power at work..." (pg. 167)"Contrition means finding the courage to let your heart break over sin. Willfully letting your heart break and then offering the pieces to God is a radically counter cultural idea in our society" (pg. 168)There are so many other things I underlined here, but for now, I'LL END WITH A PRAYER:Lord of all, Creator of the universe, Motivator of all that is Good, Thank you. Thank you for the beauty that is Wisdom visited on this person, Ellen Davis, and the expression of her love that is this wonderful book. I don't question Your great motives and You don't owe me anything, but there is excellence here in tiny corners of smallish books and forgotten lectures that could change everything. Release this wisdom. Release this love and let us, let every man that has thought he checked the box on the Gospel, and let every woman who purchased a neat little bowl to put on a very special shelf to hold the Gospel--let each and every one of us know that within You, within your Word, there is something beyond all value. Let us see that men gladly gave their lives so that we could just experience this moment and decide. Nudge us toward the Light, Lord, and bless the nudgers, like Davis, who carry the water for tens of years so that one or two or ten thousand may drink. We sow and water, Lord. You provide the increase. I love You. Amen.

In a very personal and engaging way, Ellen Davis challenges misconceptions about the Old Testament and successfully prods the reader to participate in a spiritually engaged reading of the Old Testament.

I read this book for a seminary class. Ellen Davis does a beautiful job of illustrating the profound human, emotive, cognitive power of books, stories, and themes in the Old Testament and how those books, stories, and themes deepen Christian faith. The chapters on Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Job especially stand out to me. They are ones that I have recommended to friends, ones that have shaped how I understand the role of faith in facing grief, and ones that I imagine I will come back to over and over. I highly recommend this book for anyone seeking to understand how to faithfully read the OT, anyone questioning how to honestly face painful experiences as people of faith, and anyone hoping to better understand God's involvement in the world, in history, and in our individual lives.

I bought this book for a bible study class in 2009 and found it to be interesting and easy to follow... a little too easy as a matter of fact. I would have liked it if Prof. Davis had gotten a little more in-depth on some of the topics. I realize she was probably writing this book for a wide audience, but I wish she had had more of a mind towards an intellectual crowd as I often found the essays ending just as she was getting to the most interesting points. Maybe I'll have to track down some of her other work for that.

Terrific book. It was part a group of assigned texts for a graduate OT class. However, don't let that discourage you, if you're a lay person, from reading it. It is very approachable. I'm thinking about using this as a book study for an adult Sunday school class. Davis' writing style is such that she invites you in by offering a spiritual as well as a scholarly look at the OT. Now, if I could only find time to read the rest of her books.

Dr. Davis has done a great job in discovering the word of God. She beautifully illustrates the meanings, the concept beyond some characters/statements, relationships, and deep thoughts of main characters of each chapter of the book of Exodus and ...Each chapter of this book recounts a unique journey along the deep understanding of each story or event. In one you see the beauty of God's love toward human and yet His holiness. In another one, it helps you to see a rational relation

between the Bible (the law) with humankind and his lifestyle in 21st century and more. I do recommend this book to pastors, seminary students and layman. This book will make you think to come up with good topic of sermons as well.

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