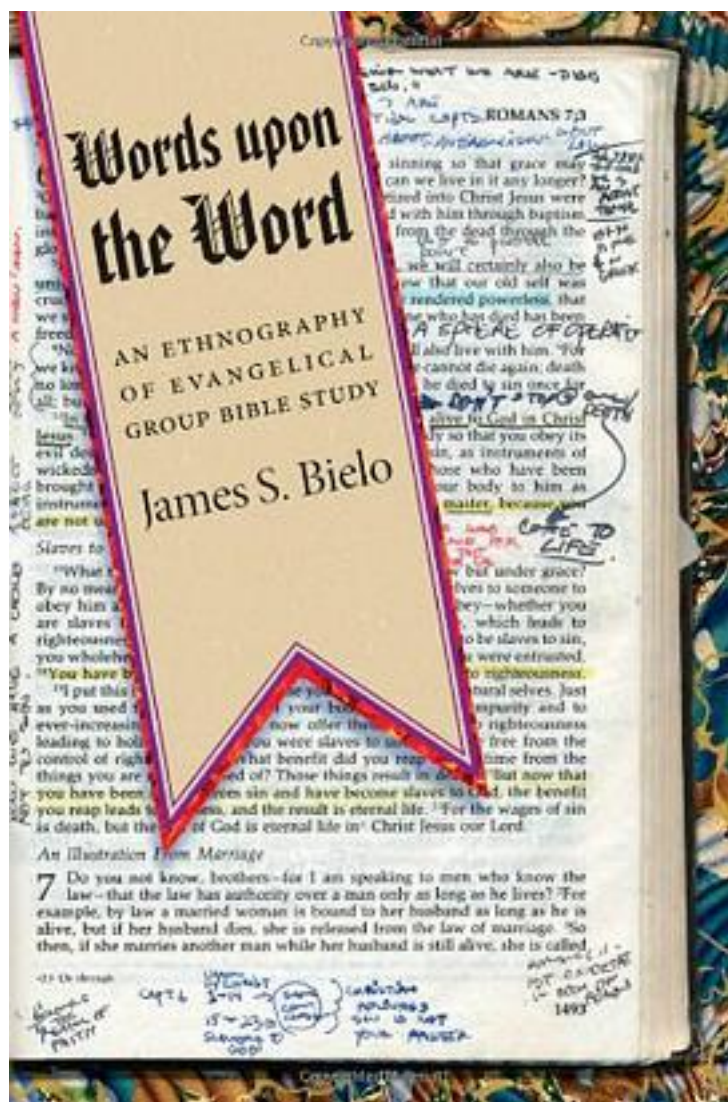


# Words Upon the Word



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Evangelical Bible study groups are the most prolific type of small group in American society, with more than 30 million Protestants gathering every week for this distinct purpose, meeting in homes, churches, coffee shops, restaurants, and other public and private venues across the US. What happens in these groups? How do they help shape the contours of American Evangelical life? While more public forms of political activism have captured popular and scholarly imaginations, it is in group Bible study that Evangelicals reflect on the details of their faith. Here they become self-conscious religious subjects, sharing the intimate details of life, interrogating beliefs and practices, and articulating their version of Christian identity and culture. In "Words upon the Word", James S. Bielo draws on over nineteen months of ethnographic work with five congregations to better understand why group Bible study matters so much to Evangelicals and for Evangelical culture. Through a close analysis of participants' discourse, Bielo examines the defining themes of group life - from textual interpretation to spiritual intimacy and the rehearsal of witnessing. Bielo's approach allows these Evangelical groups to speak for themselves, illustrating Bible study's uniqueness in Evangelical life as a site of open and critical dialog. Ultimately, Bielo's ethnography sheds much needed light on the power of group Bible study for the ever-evolving shape of American Evangelicalism.

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