

The Good Fight: Dan File and the Colorado Capitol Commission's Bible studies

by [Ernest Luning](#) on March 16, 2017



Dan File of the Capitol Commission discusses the weekly Bible study he leads at the Colorado Capitol in a House committee room on Tuesday, March 7, 2017. (Photo by Ernest Luning/The Colorado Statesman)

If Dan File's Bible studies at the Colorado Capitol have one rule, it's this: "We don't discuss politics," he says.

It can be a tough rule to stick with, because nearly everyone else at the table lives and breathes politics, but File is nothing if not up to the task.

"We try to keep that," File says. "If that was the case, I would all of a sudden be a lobbyist. I am not a lobbyist."

Leaning back under a shock of white hair, his eyes sparkling and an easy smile never far from his face, File rests his hands on the table next to the leather-bound Bible and nods in its direction.

“I’m just an ambassador, I’m just a representative of God through the teaching of his word,” he says. “It’s a privilege to do that.”

For 13 years, he’s made the 250-mile drive once a week when the Legislature is in session from Lake City in Hinsdale County to Denver, usually arriving late Sunday. Then he visits with lawmakers and Capitol denizens on Monday and Tuesday, leading two Bible studies while he’s in town. (When the Wyoming legislature is in session, he drives up the highway to Cheyenne the next day, but when it’s adjourned — it finished work this year at the end of February — he heads back to Lake City.)

File drives an older Chevy S-10 Blazer with four wheel drive and studded snow tires. “I have never not made it,” he says. “The longest trip from Lake City to Denver was this session, and it took me 13 hours to get here. But I made it.”

“It’s a privilege,” he says. “This is what I’m called to do, so I love doing this. Sometimes the drive gets a little long,” he says with an earnest shake of his head, “but, you know what, God’s given me the energy to do that. What he calls us to, he also gives us the energy to carry out, and I have the energy to do it. So, a perfect fit.”

Every Tuesday morning during the legislative session, before the gavels fall, and again over the lunch hour, File’s ongoing Bible studies meet in a corner committee room in the Capitol basement for an hour or so, providing a refuge, a time apart from the politics of the day and the pressing concerns outside the room.



Dan File of the Capitol Commission opens his Bible to 2 Timothy, the book his weekly Bible study at the Colorado Capitol has been making its way through since 2014, in a House committee room on Tuesday, March 7, 2017. (Photo by Ernest Luning/The Colorado Statesman)

Lawmakers and their spouses — usually somewhere from 12 to 20 and from both sides of the aisle — attend the early morning Bible studies. They start at 7:15 a.m., earlier than they used to, because too often the studies hadn't finished by the time Capitol business was calling. The noon studies, held in the same back corner committee room, attract everyone else, from legislative aides to sergeants-at-arms, from lobbyists to State Patrol officers and even the occasional journalist.

"It's been a real solid time of non-political encouragement here at the Capitol," says Sen. Kevin Lundberg, one of only two lawmakers, along with Sen. Nancy Todd, who have been in the building as long as File has been leading his Bible studies.

“Digging into God’s word, supporting one another. It’s been a very positive time,” Lundberg says. “I have found it to be the highlight of the week for me.”

Lundberg and a handful of other lawmakers started a Bible study back in 2003, he recalls, but it wasn’t until File arrived the next year and offered to lead a weekly Bible study that it really took off at the Capitol.

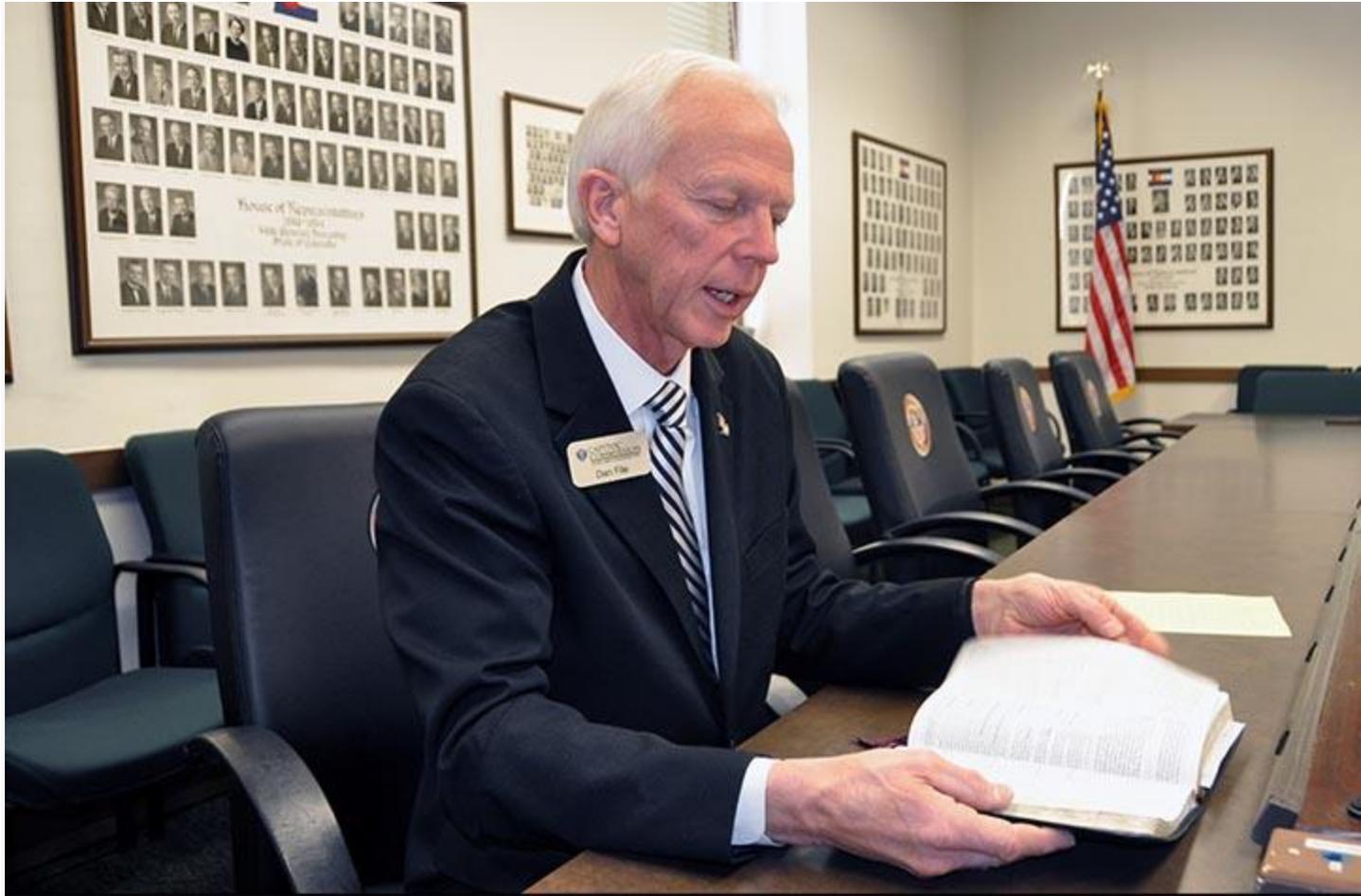
“He’s the one who really consolidated the efforts,” Lundberg says.

The Larimer County Republican has even rearranged a committee schedule to accommodate the weekly Bible studies.

“I make it a priority,” Lundberg says. “As a matter of fact, I’m chairman of Appropriations in the Senate, which often meets Tuesday mornings, which is the same time the Bible study meets. I agreed to that, and Appropriations meets after the Bible study is done.”

It was Lundberg, too, who opened the doors to File’s work in Wyoming, having introduced the pastor to a cousin who happened to be serving in the Wyoming House of Representatives at the time. “He said, ‘Hey, you oughta come do that for us,’” Lundberg recalls, and that’s what happened.

File operates at the Colorado Capitol under the auspices of a national Christian organization called the Capitol Commission, whose goal is to have a pastor leading Bible studies in every state capitol and in Washington, D.C. (The organization currently operates in 22 states.)



“It is a real privilege to represent Christ, it is a real privilege to represent God’s word,” says Dan File of the Capitol Commission as he describes the weekly Bible study he leads at the Colorado Capitol in a House committee room on Tuesday, March 7, 2017. (Photo by Ernest Luning/The Colorado Statesman)

“We’re still looking for guys,” File says, noting that he’s helped pastors get started in Arizona and Idaho over the years, although those two pastors have either retired or moved on. “But it’s a great ministry. If you think about Paul, on all the missionary journeys he went on, he went to — they weren’t necessarily called capital cities, but he went to ‘cities of influence.’ It’s important that God’s word is imparted in the capitol building.”

File had been working as a director at a Christian camp in Lake City for more than 20 years when, he recalls, the camp’s board “decided they wanted to make more money, so they asked me to shy back from the gospel of Jesus Christ, and I said, ‘Not on my watch,’ so they removed six of us at that time.”

A little while later, he was teaching a Sunday school class at a local church when someone approached him and described the Capitol Commission. “We’re looking for a guy in Colorado who won’t compromise in his faith,” he said, and I said, ‘I’m not planning on it,’” File says, and he started the weekly journey to Denver soon after that.

“The way we do it is a little bit different, in that our Bible studies are expository,” he says. “We go through it verse by verse by verse.”

File is half way into the fourth year studying 2 Timothy, and he expects to finish the book by the end of the legislative session. He spent three years studying Philippians when he began the ministry at the Colorado Capitol, and then six years after that studying the Book of James. He hasn’t decided which book is next but is taking suggestions.

“I try to choose books to go through that are really relevant for where the legislators and their staff — where they are, what they struggle with in this building,” File says. “Paul was definitely someone who endured a lot of hardship. When he wrote 2 Timothy, he was in prison in Rome — the Mamertine Prison — and he never came out. He was under a ruler, and we all know who that was — Nero, who was not a follower of Christ at all; he hated Christians. It’s very practical for the legislators and their staff.”

The painstaking, extremely detailed expository study — on a recent Tuesday, File spent an entire hour barely getting through just two of the three verses that had been set for that day’s studies — means that he can count on the text to steer the studies and not have to worry about sidestepping current events and the politics of the day.

“I get to go through a book, and I deal with things as God brings them up in the text. I don’t have to go to some hot-button issue that we’re having in the Capitol that day, and then people think I’m a lobbyist,” File said. “If we deal with it, we deal with it. And I will deal with it, if God puts it in the text. Forthrightly. Because it doesn’t matter what I think about God’s word, it matters what God is saying about his word, and that’s what I want to impart.”

Last Tuesday, for instance, File and his Bible studies devoted their attention to 2 Timothy 4:6-7, and spent most of the time on verse 7: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith ..."

"And that's where Paul was — he did fight that good fight, he did accomplish it," File said in an interview between the morning and noontime studies.

"And, as believers in Jesus Christ, for those that are in this building, they are called here by God to accomplish a task and to do it in a godly fashion. It's a noble fight."

Adding context, File described what Paul was saying in his letter to Timothy and how that message resonated within the walls of the Capitol.

"Here in 2 Timothy 4, Paul is giving Timothy a charge to preach the word, and 'preach' is the Greek word for 'herald,'" he said. "A herald was a person who took something a king stated or an emperor stated and would tell people in the communities, because communication was very different then. He was very attuned to the fact that he did not have the ability to change what the emperor had told him to say. That's what Paul is saying to Timothy, is that we are to herald the word of God, from the king of kings and the lord of lords, and we don't have the ability to change that word."



“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.” Dan File of the Capitol Commission reads from 2 Timothy 4:7, the verse his weekly Bible study at the Colorado Capitol considered at two meetings on Tuesday, March 7, 2017. (Photo by Ernest Luning/The Colorado Statesman)

That brought to mind times File said the Scripture had inspired work under the dome.

“I have seen legislators or staff encouraging others in the midst of a bill to be a godly example and yet to be bold, to speak the truth in love,” he said. “And I’ve seen that over the years that I’ve been here, and that has been just a real joy for me to see.”

It’s that attention to speaking the truth in love, to serving as a godly example, yet boldly, that File says has brought the studies to life in the Capitol before his eyes.

“The legislators can take that and apply it, as my prayer for them is for them to truly be statesman,” he says. “And that’s what we lack, right? We’ve got too many politicians. We’ve got way too many politicians, and we need statesmen.”

“It seems like we’ve lost a little bit of that in our culture today,” he adds. “People are pitted against each other. But we need to be focused on God’s word. Our culture is trying to throw God out of everything. From history, as we have seen other countries do the same, the result of it isn’t necessarily good. God needs to be the center of who we are, not the sideline of who we are.”

As he welcomes the legislative aides, sergeants and officers to the noon study, before asking who needs prayers — a relative has had a recent, dire diagnosis, another has been subject to harassment and hatred from her community and wants peace, a young man has an important interview in a week, and residents of southeast Colorado are facing raging, destructive wildfires — File says as if in passing that the day’s Bible verse is among his very favorites. It turns out he isn’t exaggerating.

After about 45 minutes of prayer, conversation and detailed study, well into a close examination of 2 Timothy 4:7 — “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith ...” — a stillness falls over the room as File leans in to the group, looking as serious and determined as he has all day.

“I wanted to share — I don’t do this a lot — but I wanted to share something about my father-in-law,” he says, and everyone around the long wooden table leans in a little bit toward him. “My beautiful first wife, Ruthanne — her dad, he got pancreatic cancer, back in the ‘80s. It wasn’t good, it wasn’t good at all, as far as this earth, as far as his life went. He went home out of the hospital, he was in hospice.”

File says he was there with his father-in-law, with his wife and her brother and their mother.

“And my father-in-law looked up, and this is what he said. He said, ‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.’ And then — he died. And we saw him go from this life to eternity.”

A moment later, the stillness still filling the room, File blinks and continues.

“You guys,” he says, “that changed my life. Because what it did to me was put an important priority on what in the world Dan File ought to be doing the rest of his life. What should I be doing? We all, every one of us, regardless of what job we are in,” he says, placing each word slowly and carefully, like a piece in a jigsaw puzzle, “we need to fight that noble fight. Loving our neighbor. I’m talking about loving them so much that we give them eternal life. You guys, that changed my life.”

Later, the long day nearly finished — after the early Bible study, File gave the prayer in the Senate, and he’s been making his way all over the Capitol since — File reflects about how hard it can be to hear what God is saying, to listen to his words.

“It takes a person who has a biblical worldview, and then can take that biblical worldview and apply that in different circumstances,” he says. “Sometimes it’s excruciatingly painful to know exactly what to do. But to go to God, seek him for wisdom, as it says in James 1, and to trust God for imparting godly wisdom, not human wisdom. We all need that — I know I do.” He smiles. “It’s a privilege to be able to do that.”