

BIBLE WORKSHOP

An SCM Workshop

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

This workshop aims to be a simple (and sometimes silly) way to get groups thinking and talking about the Bible. It is in no way a comprehensive introduction and you don't need any expertise to run it or take part in it; just enthusiasm! If you want to explore things in more depth then there are more Bible resources available on our website.

You will need enough chairs for everyone in the group, a bit of space, Bible quotations, some large pieces of paper and thick pens. You will also need some Bibles, which may come into use during the discussions; one for each person would be great but is not essential.

INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

If you ever played 'fruit salad' at school then you'll see a striking resemblance with the game. Sit in a circle on chairs with one less chair than the number of people. The person without a chair (at first the workshop leader) stands in the middle. Ask participants to shout out names of books of the Bible (four or five) e.g. Genesis, Samuel, Mark and Revelation. Then go around the circle naming each person one of those books (the easiest way is to point like a primary school teacher and say, for example, "Genesis, Samuel, Mark, Revelation" and repeat until you're back where you started). The person in the middle can call out one of the books' names and everyone who is that book has to swap seats, or they can call 'Bible salad!' and everyone has to move. This silly game should inject some energy and laughter into the workshop.

ASK THE QUESTION(S) (25 MINUTES)

Gather the group together and explain that this workshop aims to explore the issue below.

"Do we make assumptions about the Bible and do these affect how we use it?"

Explain to the group that one side of the room is 'Old Testament' and the other side is 'New Testament'. Using a list of quotations from the Bible read one at a time and ask the group, without conferring, to decide whether they think the quotation is from the New or Old Testament and move to the corresponding side of the room.

Sometimes the whole group may choose the same side but if not then ask each side to explain their choice. This should bring out people's assumptions about the nature, style and content of the New and Old Testaments or certain books. If a discussion opens up around the issues raised

feel free to let it happen and ask questions to the group to encourage it. When you feel it's time to move on reveal where the quotation is really from and read out the next one.

REMEMBER: There will be varying levels of knowledge within the group so make it clear that everyone's opinion is valid; this game isn't about getting all the answers right but discussing our ideas about the Bible and its nature. Make sure everyone gets heard; not just the theology students! If this is proving difficult you could ask people to discuss their choice in pairs before talking as a whole group. This is also a good idea if there are lots of people.

EXPLORE THE ISSUE(S) (15 MINUTES)

Ideas about the style of writing and its implications may have come up in the activity above. Explain to the group that this game and the following discussion pick up on the issue of how we think about different genres in the Bible.

Divide the group into smaller groups of four or five (pairs if the total group is small). Give each group a set of Bible quotations (you can use the same ones as in the previous game) and a large sheet of paper. Either ask one member of the group to draw the grid below or draw on the paper before the workshop.

Prophecy	Poetry	History	Parable

Ask the groups to arrange the quotations under the heading that they think corresponds with their genre. If this is a new idea for some group members then read out an example verse and discuss as a whole group what its genre would be and why. You can give the quotations out with labels as to which book they come from; this should make the task easier.

When the groups have finished categorising you may like to go through the verses and ask which category different groups chose; if there are verses that have been categorised differently then this may spark discussion. Alternatively you could ask if there were any verses that were difficult to place. Your discussion can be aided by the questions below.

How does recognising a part of the Bible as a certain genre change the way we think about it? Why does it matter if it's poetry not history? Could giving a passage a genre actually restrict the way it speaks to us? Or perhaps it helps us access it better? Are there some genres that you feel speak to you more? Do any of the ways of writing in the Bible seem obscure or distanced from our experience? How can we react to this?

INVITE THE RESPONSE (15 MINUTES)

To conclude, ask each participant to pick a quotation that stood out for them in today's workshop. It could be one they really liked, one that challenged their perceptions, one they found puzzling or anything else that they find striking. Ask them to bring their verse/s and join a circle with the whole group.

Going around the circle ask each person to share the passage they've chosen and why they've chosen it.

You may like to conclude with a time of quiet, open prayer or this reflection:

*Hold it in your hands, feel its weight.
Does it sit heavily in your hands
or are you surprised by the lightness of God's message? Flick the
pages through your fingers.*

*Are they crumpled after years of turning
or crisp and fresh, ready to be inscribed with your fingerprints? Open it
up and look inside.*

*Do bookmarks and collected memories fall out
or are its depths unexplored and open to discovery?
Close your eyes and hold this book of stories.
Whose voices do you hear?*

*Ruth's voice of love: 'Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will
lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.'*

*Job's voice of suffering: 'I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no
rest; but trouble
comes.'*

*David's voice of praise: 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within
me, bless his holy name.'*

*Mary's voice of grief: 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not
know where they have laid him.'*

*Thomas' voice of doubt: 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his
hands, I will not believe.'*

*Voices of human experience and emotion.
Stories of encounters with the One who loves us. Think how far they
have travelled to be in your hands.*

FUTURE DISCUSSIONS AND MORE RESOURCES

If your group is interested in exploring this theme further, then you could try some of these topics for further discussions or invite a speaker. Get in touch with the SCM office if you need any help or resources (scm@movement.org.uk).

- *Explore different readings of the Bible e.g. feminist, liberation, queer. Invite a speaker or prepare a Bible study. Perhaps you could have a series of studies on the same passage or story, each with a different approach to reading and interpretation*
 - *Ignation spirituality and scripture – imaginative contemplation (where you use a story from the Bible and imagine yourself within it) or lectio divina (where you pray with a piece of scripture*
 - *Use the Context Bible Study in Reading the Bible to explore the historical roots of a passage*
 - *Read the Gospels vocationally – what does Jesus’ call to discipleship mean to us today? What should we do? Where should we be? See John Vincent’s book on discipleship (below) for a good discussion guide on Mark’s gospel.*

 - *SCM’s publication Reading the Bible*
 - *Discipleship by John Vincent (the SCM office has copies)*
 - *Scripture and the Authority of God by N.T. Wright (2005)*
 - *The New Perspective on Paul by James D.G. Dunn (2007)*
 - *Reading with God: Lectio Divina by David Foster (2005)*
 - *Texts of Terror by Phyllis Trible (2003)*
 - *The Bible: A Very Short Introduction by John Riches (2000)*
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