

# GOD WORKSHOP

An SCM Workshop

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

You will need a flip-chart or a big piece of paper, pens, a hat or similar container and some small slips of paper. The quotes for the Knowing God activity could be projected onto a screen, written on a board or given out as handouts.

## INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

This SCM workshop aims to help a group explore different understandings and experiences of God. This is an introductory workshop which you could follow up with further discussion (suggestions at the end). Allow 90 minutes if you want to use all the activities.

Invite the group to come up with as many different images of God as they can in 5 minutes – both ones they feel comfortable with and ones they find unsettling. If you have flipchart paper then write up the images as people call them out. For example, people might say Creator, Warrior, Old white man with a beard.....

If they need prompting – ask about childhood images of God, images of God in different cultures, images of God in the Bible.

After 5 minutes or when you have a good collection of images, ask each person in the group to pick and share their favourite and least favourite.

## ASK THE QUESTION(S) (10-15 MINUTES)

Ask each member of the group to think of a question about God that might spark discussion or debate. It could be something about the nature of God or about the group's experience of God. An example might be 'Where is God?' or 'Does God intervene in the world?' They should write the question on a slip of paper and put it in a hat (or bowl or box or teapot or whatever you have to hand!).

Ask someone to pick a question out of the hat and read it out as a starting point for discussion. Give 5 minutes or so for a discussion of each question, try to keep things moving and encourage everyone to participate. Don't be afraid to move on to the next question if discussion dries up. Depending on the size of your group you probably won't cover everyone's questions – but you could save them for a future discussion, or talk about them in the pub later.

The idea of this activity is not to provide all-encompassing answers to matters of theological debate (!) but to stimulate thinking and discussion, and bring out different viewpoints within the group.

## EXPLORE THE ISSUE(S) (30 MINUTES)

Explain that a 'kenning' is an Anglo-Saxon form of words, usually joining two words with a hyphen to express something more complex and creative than a single noun. It's often used as a poetic device.

For example: these kennings describe God of Genesis 1:

Chaos-brooder, Light-bringer, Land-former, Sea-restrainer, Sun-shaper, Man-creator, Woman-imager, Goodness-maker, Sabbath-rester.

A kenning could also be the more familiar Prince of Peace, King of the Heavens or Wonderful Counsellor. Split into groups of three or four and ask each group to come up with ten new kennings that express their understanding of God. Ask each group to share their kennings with the rest of the group.

## INVITE THE RESPONSE (15 MINUTES)

Read the following quotes in pairs (put them on a projector or on handouts) and ask people to discuss the questions that follow.

*From God we hear the word: "If you want my goodness to stay with you then serve your neighbour, for that is where God comes to you."  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German Lutheran pastor and theologian*

*You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking for...  
Shug in "The Colour Purple" by Alice Walker*

*We must be clear that whatever we say of God in such human concepts can never be more than an indication of Him; no such concept can really conceive the nature of God. God is inconceivable.  
Karl Barth, Reformed theologian*

*He who is filled with love is filled with God himself.  
Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430), philosopher and theologian*

*Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him'.  
John 14: 6-7*

Consider the following questions: Which quote do you feel most drawn to? Do any of them express your understanding of God? Do you think it is possible for us – as individuals and the Church - to 'know' God? What have you found helpful or unhelpful in your search for God? Is there anything you would like to do or explore more following the discussions in this session?

## CLOSING THE SESSION (5 MINUTES)

Bring the discussions to an end and thank everyone for their contributions. You could end the session with some open prayer or read the following reflection as a prayer:

*Living God  
a burning bush  
a baby in bulrushes  
a Passover lamb and freedom  
a sky of stars  
a coat of colours  
a land of milk and honey  
a rainbow arc  
a still small voice  
a valley filled with dry bones  
everywhere we find clues  
that tell us you are with us,  
O God signs that you alive in us  
a rumour of transformation  
broken bread  
an empty cross  
grave-clothes in a tomb, folded  
Living God  
as you are always on the move  
starting the change that is waiting within things  
may we try and keep up with you  
and be change-makers of justice*

*from Mucky Paws, Volume 5, 2008: <http://abbotsford.typepad.com>*

## 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](mailto:scm@movement.org.uk)).

- *God and the arts. How is God depicted in art and literature?*
- *Christian mysticism and God (e.g. Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich)*
- *Understandings of God in different faiths (e.g. invite a Muslim student or chaplain to share something of their understanding of God)*
- *God and film. For some light-relief try Dogma (1999) or Monty Python and the Holy Grail (1975)*
- *Who or What is God? by John Hick (2008)*

- *A History of God by Karen Armstrong (1999)*
- *The Evolution of God by Robert Wright (2009)*
- *The God Conclusion by Keith Ward (2009)*
- *God: A guide for the perplexed by Keith Ward (2003)*
- *How (Not) To Speak of God by Peter Rollins*
- *Is there a God? by Richard Swinburne (1996)*

