

Module Overview

Leader's Guide

Aim of this module

The aim of this module is to introduce participants to some of the major themes running through the Bible.

Participant outcomes

When you have completed the work for this module, you will be able to read the Bible with an understanding of the major themes. In so doing you will enhance your understanding and appreciation of the Bible.

Leader's role

The process is critical for the participants' learning. Please provide a relaxed, friendly and open environment with brief breaks if and where appropriate.

Resources

The leader will need access to a white board, or an overhead projector or newsprint sheets.

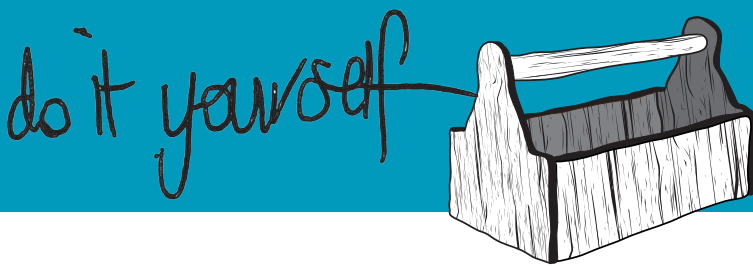
Each participant will need access to:

- Photocopies of the 3 Handouts
- Pens
- Writing paper.

Session Outline

90 mins

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Introduction | 5 min. |
| 2. Individual and group activity | 10 min. |
| 3. Plenary discussion | 5 min. |
| 4. Group Discussion (F4.H1 and F4.H2) | 20 min. |
| 5. Group Research (F4.H3) | 15 min. |
| 6. Plenary discussion | 15 min. |
| 7. Small group discussion | 10-15 min. |
| 8. Close | 5 min. |



1. Introduction

Tell the group: *In this session the focus is on major themes of the Biblical witness, or witnesses. Different situations and different times in history have encouraged people and nations to identify more strongly with one theme or another. We too, in our time and place, may well decide that one aspect of God's message is more powerful and relevant for today than another. Nevertheless, we explore the diversity of the scriptural messages and celebrate their timelessness and relevance for all people. Initially we focus on how we receive and 'know' the message coming to us through revelation and inspiration.*

Commence with a brief time of reflection and thanksgiving, recognising and claiming the presence of the Holy Spirit for the discussion and time ahead. (5 min.)

2. Individual and group activity

Individually, at first, ask participants to reflect quietly on what for them is the major biblical message, at this point in their lives, acknowledging that at other times and places, other messages may have been more significant.

In a general discussion, invite participants to share with the whole group what some significant messages or themes of the Bible are. Write these on the whiteboard or newsprint, so that the breadth of responses is obvious. (10 min.)

3. Plenary discussion

Ask the group: *What can we learn from this "list" of biblical themes or messages?* (5 min.)

(Possible answers: that there is a diversity of themes running through the scriptures; that for different ones of us different messages are more important; our experiences influence what we "get out" of the Bible.)

4. Group Discussion F4.H1 and F4.H2

Invite participants to read Handouts F4.H1 and F4.H2 individually, marking aspects that are helpful, confusing or affirming. (5 min.)

In groups of three or four discuss the two aspects: revelation and inspiration. (5 min.)

In a plenary time discuss generally the information and thoughts offered in the handout, specifically addressing how the images of the light bulb, jumper leads and music help us to gain further insight into how we receive the biblical message (10 min.)

(It may be helpful to have the three objects at the session: a CD with music, a light bulb and jumper leads for a vehicle)

5. Group Research F4.H3

Divide the whole group into small groups. Each small group will take one (or two) major themes of the Bible from Handout F4.H3. Discuss the theme in general and then give an indication where in Jesus' life the theme was evidenced. (15 min.)

(This may be a challenging task for some. The Bible readings are for general direction only. Encourage the participants to explore their own understanding and knowledge of Christ's life and witness before using the references.)

6. Plenary discussion

In a plenary session, share and explore the different thoughts of the groups on the major themes of the Bible. (15 min.)

7. Small group discussion

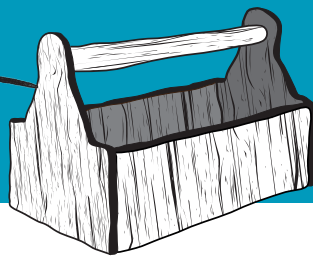
If time permits, share in smaller groups how these themes might influence or be evidenced in our current community, and in our own personal lives, and then discuss this in the larger group. (15 min.)

OR Alternatively, if time is short, discuss in a plenary session the place of these themes in today's society. (10 min.)

8. Close

Close the session with a brief time of reflection and with prayer. (5 min.)





Handout #1 The Bible is ...

The Bible is both human and divine. We can investigate the different characteristics and emphases of the various writers, how and when the books were written, and in general study them as we would study other ancient writings.

On the other hand we approach the Bible as no other book:

- to listen to it, to learn from it, and to submit to its teaching,
- to recognise its authority as coming from God, and
- to be confident that the Holy Spirit will bring it alive for us.

The Bible is an interpretation of life and an invitation to creative living.

The Bible is:

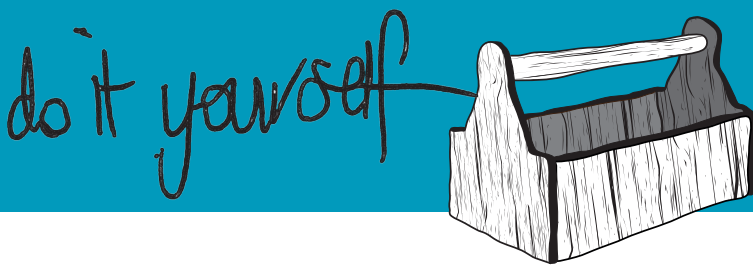
- an interpretation of the universe; the purpose for which it exists and the nature of the Creator. It shows our place and our relationship with its Author.
- an interpretation of history: a purposeful process leading to an ultimate end.
- an interpretation of life: as choice.
- an invitation to cooperate with God in changing society and shaping the future.

The Bible is **the story of God's dealing with humanity and all of God's creation.**

We know that:

- the writers were ordinary human beings, much like ourselves.
- we can detect some obvious errors and misunderstandings eg medical and scientific knowledge
- we can acknowledge an element of borrowing from other sources.
- we need to acknowledge the presence of myth and legend, pre-modern world views and theological perspectives
- Archaeological evidence supports some of the Biblical stories, and that the interpretation of such evidence is contested by various experts
- in places the text is corrupted (meaning edited from different sources, or the original meaning is unclear) and therefore in some places it doesn't make sense.
- we cannot say in general "The Bible says ..." without recognising "The Bible also says ..."

We can say that the Bible reveals that "God so loved the world ..."



Handout #2 Revelation and Inspiration

Revelation

The word “revelation” means “uncovering” or “disclosure”. Revelation may be something that is sudden, or more gradual. It may be immediately obvious that God is saying something with absolute clarity and certainty. On the other hand, and probably more often, we may only become gradually aware of where God is at work.

Does the Bible contain the Word of God (like a light bulb contains light)?

Does the Bible convey the Word of God (like jumper leads convey electricity)?

Does the Bible become the Word of God (like the notes of a symphony become music)?

In what sense is the Bible the Word of God?

The Basis of Union, paragraph 4

“The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work. Christ who is present when he is preached among people is the Word of God, who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist. Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command attention and awaken faith; he calls people into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church.”

The Basis of Union, paragraph 5

“The Uniting Church acknowledges that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which she hears the Word of God and by which her faith and obedience are nourished and regulated. When the Church preaches Jesus Christ, her message is controlled by the

Biblical witnesses. The Word of God on whom salvation depends is to be heard and known from Scripture appropriated in the worshipping and witnessing life of the Church. The Uniting Church lays upon its members the serious duty of reading the Scriptures, commits its ministers to preach from these and to administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper as effective signs of the Gospel set forth in the Scriptures.”

Revelation is the process by which God’s knowledge becomes ours!

The Basis of Union, paragraph 11

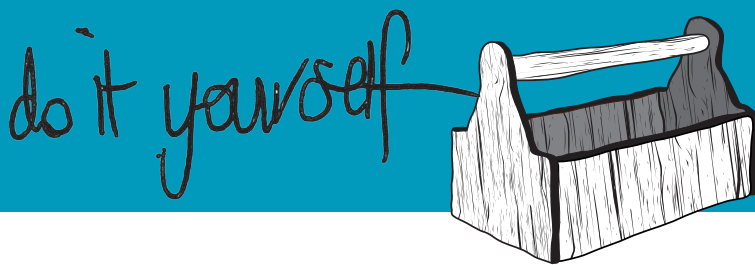
The Uniting Church acknowledges that God has never left the Church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture, or without those who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, God’s living Word. In particular the Uniting Church enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries, and gives thanks for the knowledge of God’s ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith. The Uniting Church lives within a world-wide fellowship of Churches in which it will learn to sharpen its understanding of the will and purpose of God by contact with contemporary thought. Within that fellowship the Uniting Church also stands in relation to contemporary societies in ways which will help it to understand its own nature and mission. The Uniting Church thanks God for the continuing witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of prophet and of martyr: It prays that it may be ready when occasion demands to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds.

Inspiration

There are several levels of inspiration; in the writing and setting down, in the receiving and interpretation, and in the living out or implementation of the good news that the Bible communicates.

For example, consider the words “God is love” (1 John 4:8). This was a revelation to John. The writer of the letter was inspired to write this down. In reading these words we receive their message, and interpret their meaning for





our life context: we can experience the love of God in many ways. When we share this love, it becomes good news in our place and time.

Apart from the story of salvation, there are some details within the Bible which are not relevant to our world today. Yet, as a part of the story, they fill out the picture of the writers' context and perspective.

Some aspects of the Bible are even ungodly, because we learned at later times that God's nature is different. Warfare and slavery are two examples to us today. As Christians we believe that God is supremely revealed in Jesus Christ and hence, if some parts of the Bible are contrary to what we see in him, then this cannot be the Word of God. In a sense, then, revelation is gradual.

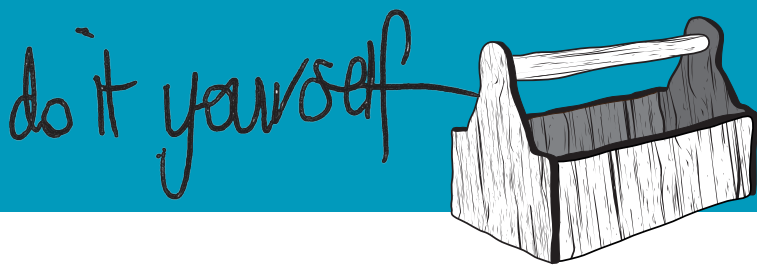
As we read and receive the Bible, the Holy Spirit brings it alive for us. But believing in the Holy Spirit does not guarantee instant understanding of everything. Interpretation and understanding are not simply matters for the individual, but are a corporate process within the community of the church.

Common questions

1. How can we tell between truth and trivia? We need to consider the form and intention of the writing we are considering. We ought not to come to ancient writings expecting the authors to be committed to the very modern values and standards of history or biography writing. They wrote within the expectations and standards of the day. Our faith suggests that we use our common sense!

2. In what sense is the Bible inspired, or in-Spirited? We cannot "prove" this, but we may discover it as the Spirit uses the scriptures to guide the church. We may find inspiration both as individuals and as faithful communities to live in the light that the Bible sheds on God, and on earthly life as shown to us through Jesus Christ.

3. How does the Bible help interpret the Bible? Many stories in the Bible accept and even condone violence, warfare and slavery – does this mean that God calls us to do likewise in our time and place? The lived and living example of Jesus Christ is the interpretive lens (or hermeneutical key) through which the Bible is read faithfully. Would Jesus enact physical violence, beyond turning over tables? Would Jesus engage in warfare, or condone slavery? The gradual realisation of the Church has been that major Biblical themes of abundant life and freedom help interpret the biblical violence, warfare and slavery as human failure rather than Godly commands.



Handout #3 Six biblical themes for faith

Hans-Ruedi Weber (Power, WCC Publications, 1989) in his writing on Biblical Theology suggests there are six biblical themes for faith which have emerged from our reading and understanding the Scriptures. Weber states that all six themes converge in the person of Jesus Christ.

God's liberating acts

Through the exodus and the covenant the Israelites were freed from slavery. This liberating power of God is a central part of Jewish and Christian remembering, teaching and confessing.

See how this is connected to Jesus Christ in Jude 5; Lk. 9:31; 22:20; Mk. 1:1-13; Jn. 6:14; Rom. 8:21; Col. 1:13f.

God's royal rule

The expectation of a Messiah as king follows from the election and anointing of King David. King David is a reflection of "what is truly human authority under God's royal power". (p22)

See how this is connected to Jesus Christ in Matt. 2:2f; Jn. 19:10f, 19f; Acts 2:25, 30ff; 17:6f.

God's enlightening wisdom

The men and women of wisdom used their learning and teaching to create a deeper reflection on "the human predicament and on the mysterious power of God the Creator". (p. 22.).

See how this connects to Jesus Christ in Prov. 8; Wis. 7; cf. John 1:1-18; 1 Cor. 1:22f; 1 Cor. 2:7ff; Col. 2:3; Rev. 5:12.

God's holy presence

In this tradition or theme the emphasis is on what is holy and unholy, clean and unclean and focuses upon the temple in Jerusalem, the power of sacrifices, blessings and praise and the worshipping community.

See how this connects to Jesus Christ in 1 Cor. 15:3; Rom. 5:6; 12:1; Rev. 19:1f, 16f; Gal. 1:4; 3:13f; Heb. 13:15f; Phil. 4:4.

God's vindication of the poor

In contrast to the world's treatment of the poor and powerless, the Bible shows God's concern and care for the weakest and most valuable.

This highlights the biblical theme of God's preference for the poor and "that God's power often works through the powerless". (p23)

See how this connects to Jesus Christ in Lk. 1:46-55; Matt. 5:3-10; Acts 2:44f; 4:32-37.

God's renewing judgment

In true apocalyptic tradition "A new heaven and a new earth are expected from God's re-creating power, but this will only come through radical judgment and is now revealed only to those who have courage of a radical hope". (p23)

See how this connects to Jesus Christ in Jesus Christ in Mk. 1:1-15; Lk. 10:18; Matt. 12:28; Rom. 5:12; Rev. 21:2; 22:3.

