

Module Overview

Leader's Guide

Aim of this module

This module aims to outline and discuss some basic aspects and themes of the New Testament.

Participant outcomes

When you have completed the work for this module, you will be able to discuss the various types of writing and themes found in the New Testament to enhance your faith journey.

Leader's role

The leader's main role is to encourage conversation among participants and to help them explore the Handouts and the implications of the information supplied. Leading discussions is an important leadership skill for this module.

The process used in this module is important 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 whiteboard and pen, or an overhead projector or blank newsprint sheets.

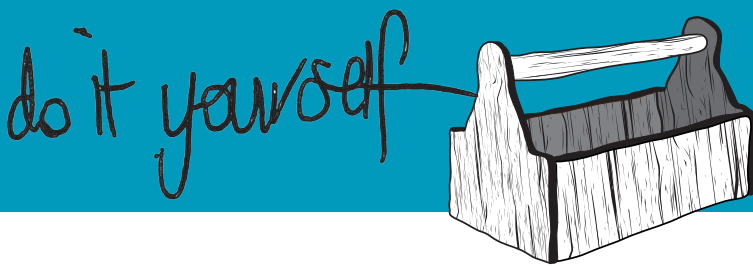
Each participant will need:

- Photocopies of the four Handouts
- Plain paper for group exercises
- A Bible (preferably the NRSV translation)

Session Outline

90 mins

1. Introduction	5 min
2. Group activity and plenary (F3.H1)	20 min
3. Group activity and plenary: (F3.H2)	20 min
4. Group activity and plenary: (F3.H3)	15 min
5. Group activity and plenary: (F3.H4)	15 min
6. Plenary discussion	10 min
7. Closing activity and prayer	10 min



1. Introduction

Tell the group: *This session briefly explores perspectives on the New Testament. The session specifically has the intention of offering some basic tools for understanding, and an introduction to some of the particular aspects of the content and message of the New Testament.*

Commence the time together in prayer: (5 min)

2. Group activity and plenary (F3.H1)

In groups of three or four read and complete Handout F3.H1. (10 min.)

Invite participants back into the larger plenary group, and invite them to share the different insights they have gathered (5 min.)

Ask the group: *What are the implications and learning from this activity, with respect not only to our understanding of the Gospels in particular, but to the Bible in general?* (5 min.)

(Possible discussion points: the writers of the gospels were different individuals seeking to meet the needs of different audiences. They used different styles and emphases as appropriate for different audiences. Their audiences would have different contexts, assumptions, and experiences to rely upon. We can celebrate the diversity rather than seeing it as cause for concern, etc.)

3. Group activity and plenary (F3.H2)

In groups of three or four, read and complete Handout F3.H2 (10 min.)

In a plenary time invite any key reflections from the small group discussion, then discuss briefly:

Are there differences in the way the various groups interpreted the letter? (5 min.)

What are the reasons for these differences in interpretation? (5 min.)

(Possible answers: different life experiences, different expectations of the writer of the letter, different hopes

and needs etc.)

Tell the group: *As we read different portions of the New Testament it becomes clear that it is a gathering of a variety of styles of writing and testimony.*

4. Group activity and plenary (F3.H3)

Tell the group: *As we look at the different books of the New Testament, scholars suggest to us that there are particular questions that help to 'open up' the text for us. Some questions are helpful for particular types of material, while others may be a distraction or even unhelpful. The question for us is how we might gain the necessary understanding to enrich our understanding of the scriptures. We don't all have adequate libraries, or the time, or the inclination, to research all the portions of scriptures we might choose to read.*

Discuss Handout F3.H3 in small groups (10 min.)

Ask the group: *How we can help ourselves to more effectively read the New Testament?* (5 min.)

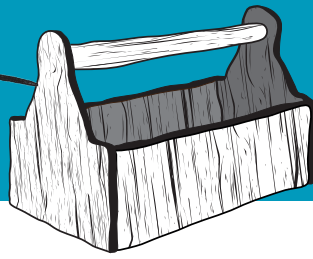
(Possible discussion points and answers: purchase a Study Bible, a version of the Bible that has introductions to each book; have a moment of explanation prior to the scripture readings in worship; attend Bible Studies, watch videos eg *Who wrote the New Testament?* (Bible Society UK), read books eg *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, Fee and Stuart)

5. Group activity and plenary (F3.H4)

Divide the participants into small groups and ask each group to take one of the segments of the New Testament that are described in Handout F3.H4. (10 min.)

Each group is to answer the three questions at the bottom of F3.H4, and be prepared to report back to the larger group.

In a plenary time, allow each group to report briefly to the larger group. (5 min.)



6. Plenary discussion

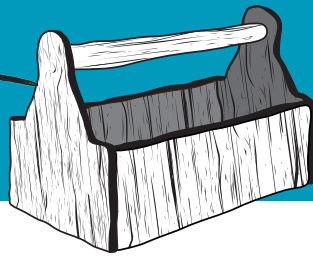
In a brainstorming activity, ask the participants to summarise in simple sentences what they have learned, affirmed or discovered in today's session. (5 min.)

Invite the participants to indicate what further questions they have of the New Testament. (5 min.)

7. Closing activity and prayer

If time allows, ask participants to take a moment to choose, and then read to the whole group, a favourite verse from the New Testament. Use this time of sharing to be the final prayer for today's work, concluding with a final blessing. (10 min.)

do it yourself



Handout #1 Events in History

The following three newspaper articles report the same event. Read through each article and note the perspectives, the sort of words used, and the people included.

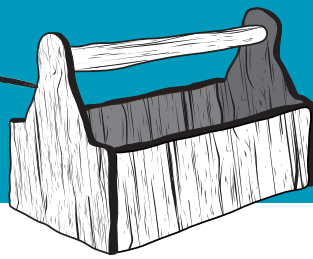
What is distinctive? What reasons might explain these differences?

Makes some notes on the following questions for sharing with the whole group:

What is common to the three pictures/headlines?
What reasons might explain what is common to each article?

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The Daily Telegraph



We say sorry --- PM's plea to heal nation

THE most anticipated apology in the nation's history will be made today when Federal Parliament says "Sorry" for the "indignity and degradation" inflicted upon the Stolen Generation.

Thousands of people have converged on Canberra to witness the reading of the historic apology to the Aboriginal families whose children were forcibly removed.

The motion, the wording of which was released late yesterday, will have Parliament resolve that "the injustices of the past must never, never happen again".

"We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country," says the motion, to be read by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

"For the pain and suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say, 'Sorry'.

"To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say, 'Sorry'.

"And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say, 'Sorry'."

The motion makes no mention of financial compensation for members of the Stolen Generation, which Mr Rudd has ruled out. But indigenous leader Noel Pearson yesterday called for compensation, claiming it was the flip side of any apology.

His comments were backed by National Aboriginal Alliance spokesman Michael Mansell, who said the wording of the motion left the door open for compensation.

"The fact the Prime Minister put in the text that Australia must right the wrongs of the past indicates that action will be taken," Mr Mansell said.

"The fact that these words were used in the text does indicate that the door is open for negotiations."

Today's motion will receive the support of both sides of federal politics, although some Liberal MPs were considering boycotting the parliamentary consideration of the motion.

NSW MP Alby Schultz said yesterday he had not made up his mind on the issue or if he would attend Parliament.

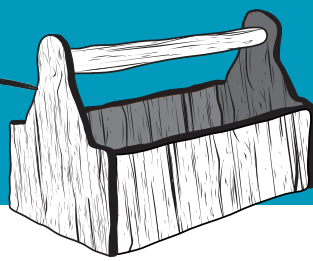
Opposition Whip Michael Johnson accused Mr Rudd of acting like a "benevolent dictator" for refusing to release the wording of the motion earlier.

National Party Leader Warren Truss was outraged he would not be able to speak in support of the motion, with speeches restricted to Mr Rudd and Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson.

Mr Nelson was given a copy of the words at 4pm yesterday.

A meeting of the Liberal Party's leadership group resolved to support the motion.

Sue Dunlevy. The Daily Telegraph [Surry Hills, N.S.W.] 13 Feb 2008: 1



THE AUSTRALIAN



The sorry road to unity

KEVIN Rudd will today offer a broad apology to all Aborigines and the Stolen Generations for their "profound grief, suffering and loss" in a carefully worded statement that has divided indigenous leaders.

The Prime Minister, who last night tabled the 360-word apology, will use the word "sorry" three times in the motion to be read to parliament this morning.

"We reflect on their past mistreatment," it reads. "We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations, this blemished chapter in our nation's history."

The father of reconciliation, Pat Dodson, described the apology as a "seminal moment in the nation's history".

But Stolen Generations member John Moriarty criticised the Government for failing to go far enough.

Some indigenous leaders feared the apology would mean an end to claims for compensation for Aboriginal children removed from their homes under previous government policies.

But others argued that Mr Rudd left the door open to payments for past injustices.

Mr Dodson said the apology was a courageous statement after a decade of denial by the government of John Howard and went "beyond what I thought they might say".

"It is a seminal moment in the nation's history," he told The Australian. "And one that, I think, instils confidence that we're capable of arising to those issues that we know are still before us."

But Mr Moriarty -- the first Aborigine to play soccer for Australia and chairman of the Jumbana design studio responsible for the indigenous art used by Qantas -- said it did not go far enough.

"It doesn't tell what the Stolen Generation really is," he said. "I'm questioning the cultural genocide aspect. I think it's an appeasement in the sense that it's saying sorry, but it doesn't get down to the real crux of the issue, in my view, that people like me were taken away from their full-blooded mothers to breed out the culture. It doesn't come to that. It doesn't hit home with me."

The Opposition, which was given the text about two hours before Mr Rudd tabled it, will support the apology. But some Liberal MPs were last night still reserving their right to boycott the apology by not turning up to parliament today.

The Greens will today move a motion to include compensation as part of the apology.

Senior lawyers said last night that the form of words chosen by Mr Rudd, while more effusive than apologies made by the state governments in the late 1990s, would have no legal effect on the ability of Aborigines to claim damages in court.

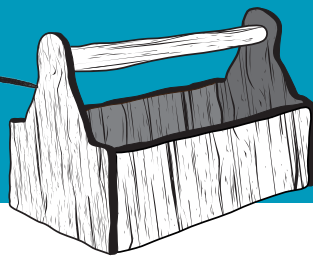
They said the statement admitted no act of illegality or negligence and would, as a result, expose the commonwealth to no potential liability.

The Stolen Generations refers to the victims of official government policies that ordered the removal of many thousands of "half-caste" children from their families between 1910 and the 1960s.

Thousands of indigenous Australians have descended on Canberra to watch the historic apology, which will be televised around the nation, including at special outdoor settings in remote indigenous communities.

Continued...

Patricia Karvelas, Stuart Rintoul. The Australian [Canberra, A.C.T.] 13 Feb 2008: 1.



THE AGE



'We'll never let it happen again'; Historic gesture to Aborigines

IN A historic gesture of reconciliation, Australia's Parliament, will today say sorry to the stolen generations of indigenous children for a "blemished chapter in our nation's history" - and vow never to let it happen again.

Eleven years after a landmark inquiry exposed the trauma and tragedy of children removed from kin and country, the apology will also offer remorse for "the indignity and degradation inflicted on a proud people" by past laws and policies.

In a 361-word statement crafted with Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin and advisers, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd will use the word "sorry" three times - acknowledging its power in indigenous culture.

Liberal leader Brendan Nelson last night confirmed his party's backing

for the apology, despite misgivings about the term "stolen".

Nationals leader Warren Truss said his party would also support it, although he thought the wording was "trite" and "lacked substance".

Mick Dodson, co-chairman of Reconciliation Australia, led a chorus of praise by indigenous leaders. "I am inspired by this apology as an act of true reconciliation towards indigenous Australia," Mr Dodson said.

"It allows us to move forward with honesty, an acceptance of shame about parts of our history and with courage, pride, maturity and hope."

But praise was qualified from some indigenous leaders, who said the apology should be accompanied by compensation.

National Aboriginal Alliance spokesman Michael Mansell declared the wording had left open the prospect of compensation with a pledge on "righting the wrongs of the past".

"The fact that these words were used in the text does indicate that the door is open for negotiations," he said.

Mr Rudd has repeatedly ruled out offering compensation, insisting his priority is instead to fund a plan to tackle chronic indigenous disadvantage. But Greens leader Bob Brown said it was embarrassing for Parliament to ask for the apology to be accepted without reparations, and he has vowed to seek an amendment

inserting an offer of compensation.

Only Mr Rudd and Dr Nelson will speak to the motion in the House of Representatives just after 9am today, before it is put to a vote. The Senate will follow a similar process 30 minutes later, but with the leaders of all parties invited to speak.

The event will be televised live and is expected to be watched in schools around the country - some of which have asked students to arrive early for the telecast - and in public spaces such as Melbourne's Federation Square.

In an emotional precursor to today's apology, the official opening of Parliament yesterday featured a traditional indigenous welcome - a far cry from the opening of the first Parliament in Canberra in 1927 when a sole Aboriginal witness, Jimmy Clements, was moved on by police.

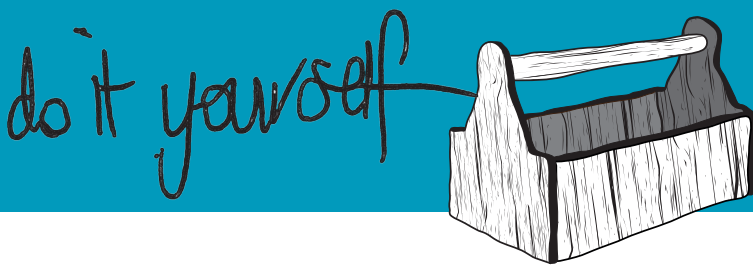
After yesterday's welcome, hundreds of people marched outside Parliament House to protest against aspects of Canberra's intervention in the Northern Territory, aimed at fighting child sex abuse.

Many indigenous leaders, moved by the occasion, last night offered thanks for Parliament's apology, which says in part: "For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry."

Continued...

Misha Schubert and Sarah Smiles Canberra with Bridie Smith, Dewi Cooke, Ari Sharp. The Age [Melbourne, Vic] 13 Feb 2008: 1.





Handout #2 Epistles

Dear Alicia and Friends,

I was sorry to hear the news that has brought to you such sadness and also change within your family and friends' lives. It is always surprising how people react in these situations, we can hope and pray that as time goes by the issues are resolved.

I know when I was in a similar situation in my own community, I too found it hard when those that I thought were friends no longer shared the same dreams and hopes that I had.

It seems to me in my Christian faith journey that we are all called to be more compassionate and loving. However, I also think one of God's demands upon us is to seek justice. I have my ideas as to what justice might be in your situation!

Have you thought of simply resigning or starting a new venture somewhere else?

But I'm sure you don't need me to be angry or offer advice.

Life throws my way similar questions and hurts that you are wrestling with as I contact those with whom I have worked over the past years. Why is it that we can mouth truths but not follow through when the crunch comes? And why is it that in those times the first thing that flies out the window are the lessons we have learned from one another?

Nevertheless, there's no need for me to go on and on and on about it.

I just wanted to write and let you know that I am thinking of you and to affirm that we worship a God of justice and mercy.

Hang on to the fact that you are a person of integrity and that those who hound you are not serving the needs of either the community or themselves.

Keep well, I hope to catch up with you – perhaps even at the football one day!

Love, Derek.

Questions for discussion

Briefly reflect on the following questions and share your thoughts in the small group:

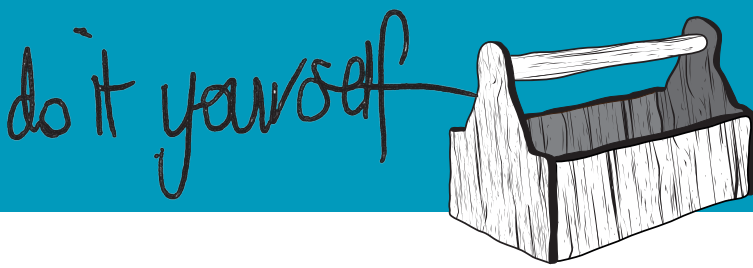
In general terms, what is your response to the letter?

How has the letter left you feeling?

What do you think might be the issue or cause for the letter to be written?

What insights might we gain about God and the religious beliefs of the writer from this letter?

Have you other comments regarding this letter?



Handout #3 New Testament genres

The New Testament contains several different styles of writing, or genres, each of which has a particular purpose and distinctive characteristics. Read the descriptions below, and in your small group share your favourite genre and the genre that you find most challenging.

Gospels

The Gospels are four accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus. Each one culminates in his death and resurrection in Jerusalem.

As we read the gospels, we will need to ask if the particular passage is narrative, instruction or parable, and how we might apply its wisdom today.

Acts

The book of Acts tells the story of the first Christians from the time of Jesus' death and resurrection, and the gradual spread of the message from Jerusalem around the Roman Empire. The latter half of the book tells the story of Paul and his travels.

As we read the book, we will want to ask, "Was each story included to make a special point?"

Letters

There are also letters by various writers to small fledgling Christian communities. They contain both teaching about Jesus and also sound advice on how to follow Jesus.

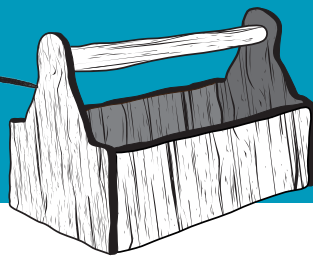
As we read the letters, we will want to ask, "Who was writing to whom - and why?" "What is the main point or argument of the letter as a whole?" "How does this particular passage fit into the whole?"

Apocalypse

The book of Revelation is written in an apocalyptic style. It uses symbols as a kind of code to convey a message to persecuted communities in Asia Minor.

In order to understand the book, we need to know something of the historical background in which it was written and learn to decode the symbols to get the message. The book needs to be read with imagination

and emotion to get the point. We need to ask "What did the passage mean to the original hearers?" before we can begin to think about the message for us today.



Handout #4 The New Testament

Adapted from *The Lion Handbook to the Bible*, Lion Publishing, 1989. Used for education under the Copyright Act 1968.

The Gospels

Virtually all we know about the earthly life of Jesus is to be found in the four gospels contained in the New Testament. The gospels were not composed until at least thirty years after the death of Jesus. The material of the gospels was preserved and handed down by word of mouth and by written records that no longer exist today.

The gospels are not simply historical reports, for each writer presents Jesus in his own characteristic way. Marshall (in *The Lion Handbook*, p. 470) sums it up this way:

"Matthew concentrates on the relationship of Jesus to the Jewish faith. He shows how Jesus came to fulfil the Old Testament, but at the same time to judge the Jews for their unfaithfulness to their religion. ...Matthew portrays Jesus very much as the teacher. He has given us systematic accounts of Jesus' teaching for the church's inner life and evangelistic mission.

"Mark emphasises action rather than teaching. He stresses how Jesus taught his disciples that the Son of Man must suffer and be rejected, and that they must be prepared to tread the same path.

"The Gospel of Luke speaks of the blessings of salvation brought by Jesus. It emphasises the signs of the coming of the Messiah, prophesied in the Old Testament, and seen in Jesus' healing of the sick and preaching of the gospel to the poor and needy.

"Finally the Gospel of John reveals Jesus as the One sent by God into the world to be its Saviour. As the Son, he has his Father's authority, living in close communion with him."

Acts

The book of Acts covers the period of the birth of the Church on the Day of Pentecost to the close of Paul's imprisonment at Rome, approximately 30 years. It

describes the spread of Christianity and the "acts" mainly of the apostles Peter and Paul.

Scholars are convinced that Acts was written by Luke as a sequel to his earlier gospel of Luke. It is addressed to Theophilus ('God-lover') and was probably written in the eighties to give an accurate record about Christianity (Luke 1:1-4).

It is significant to read LUke and Acts as two volumes by the same author, who describes Jesus 'good news' moving from the wilderness of Galilee to the city of Jerusalem, and then from Jerusalem throughout the Roman empire.

The Letters

These make up about one third of the New Testament. Combining teaching about God and Christian life, they also give insight into the problems of the new established church.

The letters of Paul fall into four groups:

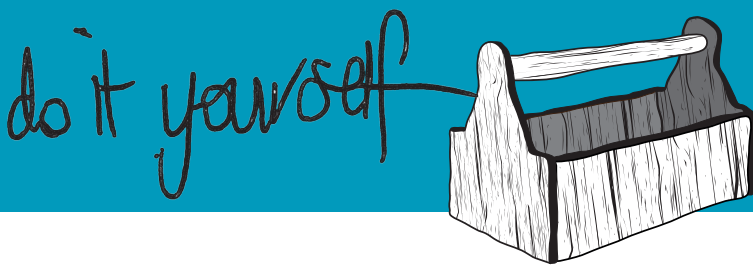
- 1 & 2 Thessalonians
- Romans, Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians
- the captivity letters of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon
- the pastoral letters, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.

The other letters are often grouped under the heading "General Epistles".

The Letters are best understood by considering the environment in which they were written and the background from which they came.

The Hebrew Scriptures are frequently appealed to by the writers and much of the imagery of the letters is drawn from the Hebrew Bible.

Although the extent is still debated, Hellenism (the Greek philosophical system of thought at the time) certainly was strong in the areas where many of the letters were written. Much of Paul's writing is best understood in terms of the debates and arguments evidenced in the Greek philosophy of the times.



Paganism was strongly entrenched in the environment of the time of the writing of the letters and clearly some of the contents of the letters address concerns directly related to the pagan influence. In the New Testament, Paganism refers to the mixture of non-Jewish and non-Christian religions which included the Greek (Hellenistic) & Roman religious mythology of the gods, the Roman imperial cult, and various mystery and tribal religions.

Judaism was still the most ethical form of religious teaching in the ancient world of the time and received many converts from the pagan (gentile) religions of the time.

The main themes of the Letters include:

God is a holy God who expects holiness

A variety of descriptions of the person and work of Christ

The new covenant and new beginning offered to a corrupt and evil world through the new creation in Christ

Life in Christ demands a new way of living and being in the world.

Revelation

The book of Revelation was written about AD 90-95. The message is conveyed in forms designed to inspire and instruct. It is a literary form based on poetry and visionary symbols and imagery. It is rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures where the clues to the various symbols are found. Apocalyptic literature such as Revelation and Daniel is similar in some ways to modern horror or disaster movies and challenge readers to imagine what they would do if the world was ending. It was written in a time of persecution and when some Christians were beginning to waver and therefore reinforces that God is in control, and that Christ, not the emperor, is the Lord of history and of our destiny.

Questions for discussion:

1. Read the portion of the Handout specific to your group's task.
2. Open the Bible and skim through the book/s that you are focussing on.
3. Comment on aspects of the book/s that interest you, concern you, or puzzle you and share these with one another.
4. From the Handout, discuss three particular aspects of this portion of the scriptures that your group believes would be appropriate to emphasise to the larger group.
5. Choose a verse or verses that your group believes can offer an example of the style of writing and the purpose of the writing of this or these book/s.
6. Be prepared to share verse/s with the larger group and explain why it is a good example of the style and purpose of the writing.