



Being with God: Session 6 – Facilitator’s ppt script.

The numbers correspond with the slides. This is an edited version of the Content booklet. ① indicates an animation click is needed.

1. Intro slide

2. How do we hear from God and understand what He wants?

3. At ① the heart of discipleship is *paying attention to God*. As we have already explored, in a general way our main focus is to “*keep God ① before our minds*”. (Dallas Willard) In a more specific way we are to be ① “watching, listening, learning” because “The master is going to speak”. (Archbishop Rowan Williams) “We ① are what we hear from God” (Emil Brunner), and, as apprentices of Christ, we are those who hear His words and put them into practice day by day. The prophet Samuel is a good model for us – his first real prayer was perhaps, ① “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”
4. As we have seen, God communicates in a *general way* ① (general revelation) ① through His creation and through the qualities within human beings such as conscience or self-awareness which point to His existence. But God’s covenant relationship with us is personal – He calls us to ‘be with Him’, and He has communicated, and does communicate with us in two very ① *specific ways* (specific revelation). Firstly it is through the ① life, death and resurrection of Jesus that we are able to see and understand God’s purposes. And secondly it is through the gift of the Bible that we are able to both ① *keep God before our minds* and ① *hear what He says to us personally*. ① Christians understand that the Bible contains the complete foundational content of what God wants His people to know, and so when God uses the Bible to speak to us today He does so *not to add anything new to what it reveals*, but to enable us to *apply* it to our lives.

5. How is the Bible different from other books?

6. 2 Timothy 3:16 is the perhaps the verse within the Bible which best explains its significance: ① “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...” The phrase ① “God-breathed” reveals that the Bible is different because it is *divinely inspired*. In other words, ① the many human authors of the various parts of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit in their writing. The early Christians came to accept these writings as uniquely God-given, and drew them together in the form which we have today.
7. Even without necessarily believing the Bible was inspired by God, for Gandhi it was far more than just a book: ① “You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilisation to pieces, turn the world upside down and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature.” Once Jesus was challenged by the Sadducees (a religious grouping) who were trying to trap Him. He replied, ① “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.” (Matthew 22:29) For Christ, it is those who “know the Scriptures” who will know how to live.

8. How does God shape me through the Bible?

9. The content booklet unpacks how In our life journey of discipleship the Bible can be a foundation through which we can grow in being with God, becoming like Christ, and joining in with the Spirit. **Drawing us to God:** While God may speak to many people through general revelation, it is uniquely through the Bible people can be brought into a relationship with God through Jesus. It is through the words of Scripture that we can be first drawn to God’s loving offer. They can give us the wisdom to come to faith. ① **Being fed and renewed by God:** The words of God can feed us spiritually, emotionally and mentally, bringing us into a life-giving sense of God’s presence and purpose. ① **Being spoken to and guided by God:** In one Psalm the writer experiences God’s word being like a “Lamp to my feet and light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)
10. **Becoming ① like Christ.** ① **Discovering who we are.** If the first step of becoming like Christ is to have a true understanding of ourselves, though the stories and teachings of Scripture we are offered a way of seeing in what ways and how we can change. As one writer puts it, ① “I don’t read the Bible. The Bible reads me.” ① **Discovering how God works in people.** As we shall see more in module 4, the Bible is full of stories of real people, with real failures, sin and brokenness.
11. **Joining ① in with the Spirit.** ① **Seeing what God is doing.** Everyone has a way of looking at reality (a worldview) even if it is largely subconscious. ① Our worldview will shape the decisions we make, the things we focus on, the purpose of our lives. It tells us who we are (what kind of creature am I?), where we are (what kind of world is this?), what is wrong and what the solution is. As disciples, the more conscious we are of having a ‘biblical worldview’, in other words, seeing reality as God sees it, the more likely we are to spend our lives doing the things which God

desires. Paul talks about us ① “being transformed by the renewing of our minds” – being changed because what we think about is so saturated in God’s life-giving reality. ① **Being equipped to join in.** Similarly, the more we are familiar with the Bible, the more likely it is that we will not only know *what* God wants in the world, but as we see how He has acted through Jesus and others *how* He calls us to join in.

12. What is at the heart of the Bible?

13. The fantastic resource *The Bible Project* describes the Bible as ① “a unified story that leads to Jesus”. While the Bible has many parts, and tells a long story, He is at the centre of its meaning and purpose. Any individual section will only be understood through the lens of Christ, and *the purpose of any interpretation is to find Him*. As Martin Luther put it, ① “The Bible is the cradle wherein Christ is laid.” Or as Hugh of St. Victor expressed it, ① “...the whole of scripture is one book, and that one book is Christ.” ① How do we know this? This was something Christ Himself claimed, saying that all the earlier books of the Bible point to Him: ① “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.” (John 5:46) After His resurrection, Jesus taught two of His disciples about what had happened in this way: “Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, ① he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27) In what would have been shocking at the time, Jesus assumed He had authority to replace teachings of the Old Testament with his own. For instance, while the Old Testament commands people to make oaths in God’s name (Deuteronomy 6:13), Jesus forbids it (Matthew 5:33-37).
14. *The ① Bible in itself is not the Word of God. Jesus is the Word of God. The Bible is a book which is useful only if it helps us grow as disciples who are being with Him.* ① Jesus confronted religious leaders who did exactly that: “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” (John 5:39-40)

15. What is in the Bible and how was it written?

16. As we have seen, the Bible is a ‘unified story’ told over a long period of time. The word Bible comes from the Greek word ① *biblia* meaning books - it is actually a collection of ① 66 books (39 books in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament) ① written over 1200 years (1100BC to 100AD) by ① 40 different authors. ① The Bible is full of different kinds of writing, reflecting all of life. About 43% of the Bible is made up of stories, from history to parables. Approximately a third of the Bible is poetry and a quarter of the Bible is prose - laws, sermons and letters. ① We have explored how the Bible uniquely claims that God uses the words of human authors to speak His message, and that through this divine mind speaking through many people in many ways a unified message and story is revealed in history. *There are of course big questions that arise from believing this: How ‘error free’ is the Bible? How can we trust the accounts as being accurate? Why are there different interpretations? Who decided what should be in it and why? How do we make good decisions in today’s world based on what the Bible says? We will look at these in more detail in module 4 “Knowing the Story and having Bible Confidence”.*

17. How do I read with my mind?

18. Having faith is not about turning off the mind or stopping asking questions. Teaching was at the heart of the life of Israel - God told them to ① “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates...” (Deuteronomy 11: 18-20) Jesus’ ministry was marked by teaching crowds and individuals, Paul taught and *persuaded* people wherever he went. This is the reason why in most of our sessions we use the ① Discovery Bible Study method. One of the aims of it is to encourage us to engage with our minds *and* hearts. The other is to learn by doing that studying the Bible is not just for a few people.
19. To begin growing in the practice of studying the Bible it is good to start by doing it with other people – supporting each other and learning from the way in which others do it. While there are different techniques that can be used (see below) an effective study will always involve regular elements: A sense of *repeating the experience* over time to build up knowledge and understanding. ① Putting *aside time* and making effort to concentrate on the Bible. ① Finding ways to understand what God is saying. ① Always looking for the *personal significance* of what you are studying (the listening for the fuller meaning).
20. If you are starting out, these thoughts might help: It’s important to remember Bible study is not a test of how clever you are – remember the mistake of those who had a lot of knowledge, but missed the point of coming to Jesus. ① Not every part of the Bible is equally relevant *for every stage of life or situation*. ① You don’t need to start with the more difficult parts. In 1 Corinthians 3:2 Paul wrote, “I fed you with milk, not solid food.” In other words, he knew that ① different people benefit from studying different things depending on their stage of discipleship.
21. We might be concerned with the question as to whether we are reading the Bible in the right way. The Content booklet, and module 4, goes into more detail about how we *interpret* Scripture well, including: ① It’s always good to read each part of the Bible *through the lens of the whole story*. It is a unified story, and the more we can interpret

parts by looking at how they relate to others the more balanced our interpretation will be. ① It's good to be aware that the Bible is made up of *different kinds of writing* – story, poetry, fact, image, letters. When we interpret it's always good to think about what this particular piece of writing was doing. If we try and interpret a parable of Jesus as a historical fact, for example, we will miss the point because we are looking at it in the wrong way. ① The Bible is also an *evolving story* (called a progressive revelation). The complete picture, which is fulfilled by Jesus, is not given all at once, but was the result of people listening to God over centuries. Which means that anything we read in the Bible, particularly within the Old Testament, can only be fully understood in the way that they point to Jesus. Difficult passages earlier in this evolving story will be consistent with the direction of the whole story, but may not be the complete picture of God's character. ① Whenever we read something which doesn't resonate with God's love, the best way to interpret it will always be to find, in whatever way possible, how it points to Christ.

22. How do I read with the heart?

23. In the Bible the 'heart' is the place of real change and connection – it is the centre of our being, from where all our desires come. 'Heart' and 'soul' are often used as alternatives. Psalm 119 talks about laying up God's words "in my heart." The writer Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that as we allow God's words to get into our hearts we really change: "And just as you do not analyse the words of someone you love, but accept them as they are said to you, accept the Word of Scripture and ponder it in your heart, as Mary did. That is all...Do not ask, 'How shall I pass this one?' but 'What does it say to me?' Then ① ponder this word long in your heart until it has gone right into you and taken possession of you." ① In our culture people can be sceptical about "God speaking to us" personally. We might struggle with the way in which, throughout the Bible, God communicates with those who have the spiritual capacity to hear and see spiritual realities. But throughout the Bible we consistently see an expectation that God will speak to each individual, through the heart.
24. The practice which helps us to grow in this is meditation. The part of us that helps us to meditate is by using our *imagination* as we read the Bible. Meditating on the Bible regularly was often seen by early Christians as the *normal foundation* of a spiritual life. The aim is not so much to learn about God in the Scriptures, but to *meet* God through the Scriptures. Through our imaginations we can read the story *as if we are present*. This is not make-believe – because Jesus is not bound by time, the event we are reading about on the page is a living present-tense experience for Him. Meditating with the Bible ① starts with us *wanting to meet with God* – it is hard to meditate well if we don't have this desire. It's very important to have enough time to do it in a relaxed way, to be comfortable in our place and in the way we are sitting, kneeling or standing.
25. A ① simple technique, which is being widely used today, is known as 'holy reading'. (Lectio divina in Latin) It's an old practice of meditation (hence the Latin title!). Regularly learning to use lectio divina can help us read the Bible, and be with God, in our hearts. There is a handout about Lectio divina. It involves reading the text slowly and repeatedly, using our imaginations and perhaps a number of questions to help us see ourselves, and God in it. We first prepare to meet with God by relaxing our breathing and centering our thoughts on Him. Then we read, reflect with questions, respond to what God is saying to us, and finally rest in His presence.

26. How do I read the Bible with others?

27. The ① fact is that left to our own devices we can often find reading the Bible hard. This is not only because it is long and sometimes hard to understand, but because there can be an element of spiritual struggle involved in even opening it – we will explore that more in module 3. Reading with others can help us build rhythms of being with God in the Bible. We can learn from each other how to approach the Bible. The best way to learn something is by watching others do it, and then trying yourself. The more we can read the Bible with those who have more experience, and are willing to empower us, the more we will grow in confidence. We can help each other interpret the Bible well. God always uses people in community, and by reading His word with others we can aid one another in arriving at as faithful an interpretation as possible. The Content booklet unpacks how preaching and teaching can help, and the difference between them.

28. Where do I start?

29. There are many suggestions for being with God through Scripture in the practices of study and meditation in this session and in the handouts. The best final advice comes from Bernard of Clairvaux, who suggests we read the Bible regularly, in bits we can manage for the stage we are at, and often with others: "Think of the word of God in the way you think of your food. When bread is kept in a bin, a thief can steal it, or a mouse can find its way in and gnaw it, and eventually, of course, it goes mouldy. Once you have eaten your bread, you have nothing to fear from thieves, or mice, or mould! In the same way, treasure the word of God....Feed on it, digest it, allow its goodness to pass into your body so that your affections and whole way of behaviour is nourished and transformed. Do not forget to eat your bread and your heart will not wither. Fill your soul with God's richness and strength."