

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## How can the Bible be human and divine? How was it put together?



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

How could the way the Bible is written be understood as a partnership between God and people?



### Understanding the information (20 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Christians believe that the Bible is divinely inspired. However, it is also a very human book. For example it draws from other sources, such as the creation myths of other cultures. It is obvious as well that being breathed by God cannot mean that the personalities, experiences, and characters of the individual authors are not included in the Bible.



Paul says that he cannot remember who he baptised. (1 Corinthians 1:16). Matthew has Jesus incorrectly referring to Zechariah as the son of Berekiah instead of the son of Jehoiadah. (Matthew 23:35). Paul admits he received no command from the Lord regarding unmarried women, but was willing to give his own judgement as a trustworthy person. (1 Corinthians 7:25).

Large parts of the Bible are not written as God speaking to us but rather humans speaking to God and in Psalm 89 the writer accuses God of breaking His promise. Most of what Job and his friends say to God throughout the book of Job is not true.

Rather than this being a problem which we have to try and find ways of getting around, the human-divine nature of the Bible is a precise reflection the way God works.

It reflects the way in which God always works indirectly with human beings to achieve His purposes. The way God relates to the world is not one-way but through relationships. The writing of the Bible is a partnership in the same way that God giving human beings responsibility for the world is a partnership.

This means that throughout the writing of Bible God acts towards humans, but He also allows them to act towards Him. We see most fully on the cross, where God absorbs our sin. In the same way we find God including our sin and mistakes as part of the Bible text.

John Henry Newman describes this way of God breathing Scripture by comparing two Latin words for writer.

He says the word ‘author’ describes someone who creates a work without any help or influence from anyone else – much as the Quran is a direct reciting of Allah’s words.

But the word ‘auctor’ describes someone who is the first cause of a work, but who allows for other influences to contribute to the work that the writer produces.

God breathes His word by emptying Himself – just as throughout the Bible He accommodates Himself to us in order to reach us. This means that He is willing to speak to human beings from inside the world, taking our own experiences as His starting point.

So it is not a case of God taking away human beings’ ability to speak so that He can replace our words with His words.

Instead, as an ‘auctor’, God takes the words and actions of human beings and uses them to become the reliable “word of God”.

He takes the initiative as His Holy Spirit works in the hearts and minds of the human writers, but always leaving the personhood of the human authors in place, which affects the results of His breathing through them.

Discuss: How does the way God shares with us in creating the Bible show how amazing His love is?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Jeremiah 1: 4-10 which describes how God partners with a small human being in speaking His words.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:

What does this passage teach me about God?

What does this passage teach me about people?

How does this passage call me to obey God?

What might I do in response to this this week?



# Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/F1TtxTcdguU>

What struck you as important in the video?



## Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

The Bible emerged over time, but one question that may undermine our confidence in it is uncertainty about how it was finally put together. Who decided which books should be included, why and when? And can we trust their decision as authoritative?

The list of books that make up the official “canon” of the Bible (the books seen as inspired by God) was finalised at a series of Councils of bishops from across the churches in the 300 ADs.

By the time of Jesus, the existing Jewish scriptures had been mostly agreed upon – and this was “officially” recognised by 250 AD.

After Jesus died and rose again nothing was written down for some time and the early Christians were used to using their memories to tell stories and ideas. The first written New Testament texts were Paul’s letters – known as the Epistles. As the church grew it became necessary to write the accounts of the good news – known as the Gospels. There were other ‘gospels’ in existence, some of which we still have, such as the Gospel of Thomas.

It became necessary to establish which were the authentic, God-inspired, accounts. The twenty-seven books we have today began to be recognised early on. By 50AD the apostles had written or endorsed 23 books, and by the end of first century most of the books were already established. Paul sees Luke’s gospel as having authority in his letters, and Peter recognised Paul’s writings as Scripture.

The first New Testament, known as the Muratorian Canon was compiled in AD 170. It included 22 of the 27 books that were eventually decided on by 397AD.

In deciding which books had been truly inspired by God’s Spirit they asked questions such as: Was the author of the book an apostle or have a close connection with an apostle? Is the book being widely accepted in the church? Is its teaching consistent? Is it transformative?

The crucial thing to know is that we can have confidence in the way the Bible was put together because the Councils that met 400 years after Jesus were not deciding what should be in the Bible from scratch but were confirming what was already known and used – and had been for a long time.

Discuss: Do you think the early Christians did the right thing in the way they put the Bible together? Why or why not?

## Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

Blessed are you, Lord our God.  
How sweet are your words to the taste,  
sweeter than honey to the mouth.  
How precious are your commands for our life,  
more than the finest gold in our hands.  
How marvellous is your will for the world,  
unending is your love for the nations.  
Our voices shall sing of your promises  
and our lips declare your praise  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.



## HOW CAN THE BIBLE BE

# human AND divine?

**“All scripture is inspired by God (God breathed)” (2 Timothy 3:16)**

Christians believe that the Bible is divinely inspired. However, it is also a very human book.

### HOW IS IT A HUMAN BOOK?

It draws from other sources, such as the creation myths of other cultures.

It is obvious as well that being breathed by God cannot mean that the personalities, experiences, and characters of the individual authors are not included in the Bible.

Paul says that he cannot remember who he baptised. (1 Corinthians 1:16). Matthew has Jesus incorrectly referring to Zechariah as the son of Berekiah instead of the son of Jehoiadah. (Matthew 23:35).

Large parts of the Bible are not written as God speaking to us, but rather humans *speaking to God* - in Psalm 89 the writer accuses God of breaking His promise. Most of what Job and his friends say to God throughout the book of Job is not true.

#### WHY IS THIS A GOOD THING, AND NOT A PROBLEM?

Rather than this being a problem which we have to try and find ways around, the human-divine nature of the Bible precisely reflects the way God usually works.

It is consistent with the way in which God always works with human beings to achieve His purposes.

The way God relates to the world is not one-way but through *mutual relationships*. The Bible is a *partnership* in the same way that God making humans in His image is a partnership. This means that...



#### GOD BREATHES HIS WORD

by emptying Himself. Throughout the Bible God accommodates Himself to us in order to reach us – most fully by becoming human. This means that He is willing to speak to human beings *from inside the world*, taking our own experiences as His starting point. So it is not a case of God taking away human beings' ability to speak so that He can replace our words with His words.

#### THROUGHOUT THE WRITING OF BIBLE GOD ACTS TOWARDS HUMANS

but He also allows them to act towards Him (just as we see most fully on the cross), even at the cost of absorbing our sin and mistakes as part of the text.

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**Auctor** describes someone who is the first cause of a work, but who allows for other influences to contribute to the work that the writer produces.



**INSTEAD  
AS AN AUCTOR**

God takes the words and actions of human beings and uses them to become the reliable “word of God”.

He takes the initiative as His Holy Spirit works in the hearts and minds of the human writers, but always leaving the personhood of the human authors in place, which affects the results of His breathing through them.

**WE DO NOT HAVE TO  
DEFEND THE BIBLE AS  
BEING “WITHOUT ERROR,  
OR NOT CAPABLE OF IT”  
(INERRANT OR INFALLIBLE)  
FOR IT TO BE GOD’S WORD.**

Nor does every part of the Bible has to be equally inspiring in order for the Bible to be divinely inspired.

Instead it might be helpful to see **the Bible as a whole as divinely inspired**. (This is known as “plenary (full) inspiration”).

**WE DON'T  
CHOOSE**

**WHICH PARTS OF IT TO PAY  
ATTENTION TO**

and which to reject (as if we are a greater authority than the Bible).

But we read the whole Bible faithfully, as a human-divine book,

trusting that the content *and* nature of the Bible *both* draw us to knowing the “foolishness” and beauty of the cross.

**SO THE BIBLE DOES NOT HAVE  
TO BE ERROR-FREE TO BE  
DIVINELY INSPIRED.**

Because...

God always honours the partnership He has with us – even when writing the Scriptures.

And God has always revealed His love most fully by being willing to take on human imperfections.

The relatively small number of “human errors” in Scripture do not have to be signs that God has not inspired the Bible.

They can strengthen the credibility of the Bible because *they are consistent with the loving way in which God works*.

His power is made perfect in our weakness.

**THE BIBLE AS A WHOLE  
DOES NOT FAIL TO FULFIL ITS MAIN  
PURPOSE – TO BEAR WITNESS TO CHRIST  
AND HIS CRUCIFIXION AS THE CENTRAL  
WAY WE KNOW GOD.**

Jesus said, “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).

He explained to the disciples on the road to Emmaus “...what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” (Luke 24:27)

**The whole Bible is perfect** in pointing us to Christ. In Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Colossians 2:3)







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## Additional notes:

The Bible emerged over time, but one question that may undermine our confidence in it is uncertainty about how it was finally put together. Who decided which books should be included, why and when? And can we trust their decision as authoritative?



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