

WORKSHOP ON BIBLE

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

INTRODUCTION

“ How can I, unless someone instructs me? ” Act 8,31

A Journey through the Bible: What is it?

Now you have a bible! I am happy that you all have got a bible and you are interested to explore it, to chew it, to dig what lies deep in it. I may not really know what you want to do exactly with the Bible. And by coming here what do you expect me to do for you?

Am I the one who wrote the Bible?

What is the Bible for you?

- A friend:
 - It can support you and strengthen you in the difficulties of life.
 - It can bring you light and warmth.
 - It can challenge you to grow, to open up and not remain shut up within yourself.

- An experienced guide
 - It has guided millions of people before us, showing where life is to be found.
 - People who have used it have called it “Word for heaven” from the Father to his sons and daughters away from home.

- The most published and translated book:
 - No other book has been published so often like the Bible.
 - No book has been translated in so many languages like the bible
 - No book is so often read like the bible.

The word bible comes from Greek, “*BYBLOS*”, which means ‘*book*’. It is the book for all peoples, all nations, all tribes, generations after generations. For Christians it is the record of God speaking to his people through many generations. It is the word of God for us today, the word of God as it has been passed down faithfully by our ancestors and written by human hands.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE WHEN YOU READ IT ALONE?

One man was asked after he has read the Bible, what was his experience like? The man answered:

Thank you! But in a way it frightens me a little, it's so big. It's not only long, but I'm told, not easy to understand. In fact I have already read some pages, here and there. Some things I understand but others, ah no!

What about you? This may be the experience of all of us. I notice it when I visit small Christian communities when they have their Bible sharing. But don't worry. Remember the story of Peter and the officer of the Queen of Ethiopia. This officer was returning from Jerusalem in his wagon. Philip was walking. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Philip asked him whether he understood what he was reading. *"How can I, the officer answered, unless someone helps me!"* He had been reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. He invited Philip to come up, and as the wagon rolled again, with the help of Philip, the officer came to understand. He became the first Ethiopian Christian.

So I will try to give you some tips on how to read the bible more fruitfully and I will give some suggestions how you can use it also for your prayer.

i) What do you know about it?

- In what language was the Bible written?
- Is it still read in those languages?
- Why should they do lots of works of translations again?
- What would be a more important reason, then?

Languages: The Bible was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Aramaic and Greek for the later books. The New Testament was wholly written in the spoken Greek in that time.

ii) Hebrew Bible:

The Jews recognize 3 groups of works, in our OT:

1. The Law or Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These are the most important books for the Jews.
2. The Prophets:
 - Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1&2) and Kings (1&2).
 - Later Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
 - Minor Prophets (12): Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.
3. Writings: In this group falls all the remaining books: Books of prayers, prophecy, wisdom and history. There are psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs,

Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles (1&2). This gives a total of 39 books.

iii) **Greek Bible:**

It was translated from Hebrew. This translation is known as the Septuagint. It contained additional books, which are also included in Catholic bibles and are known as the ***Deuterocanonical books***. These are the Books of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch and Maccabees (1&2). In the Septuagint, books are classified as follow:

- The Pentateuch: the first 5 books, the Law.
- The Historical books: include former prophets of the Hebrew Bible, Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1&2), and Kings (1&2), and in addition Chronicles (1&2), Ezra, Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, and Maccabees (1&2).
- The Poetic and Wisdom: Classified together: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Sirac.
- The Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

It is this classification which is found in Catholic bibles today.

iv) **The New Testament:**

All was written in Greek. It consists of 27 books, comprising 4 gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), the Acts of the Apostles, (also written by Luke), 13 letters of St. Paul along with the Letter to the Hebrews which is associated with him, 7 more letters, written by Peter, James, John, James and Jude. And finally the Book of Revelation written by John.

v) **Content of the Bible:**

All books of the Bible speak in their own way of the covenant or promise between God and the people of Israel, and between God and all humanity. The OT recorded the covenant between God and the Jews. The NT shows how this same covenant was renewed and further revealed through Jesus, the Son of God, on behalf of all peoples.

vi) **Translations:**

Not so many people would understand those languages. The need of a translation was felt early. By the year 200 before Christ, many Hebrews (Israelites, Jews) who had settled in Egypt and cities on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea longer understand well their mother tongue, Hebrew. They knew Greek instead. This is what prompted the famous and important translation of the OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS, called the SEPTUAGINT.

Later on, Latin translation was needed because Latin became widespread in The roman empire. This translation is The VULGATA. This is mainly the work of St Jerome.

Nota:

Old translations are used only by scholars. For other people, translations in modern languages are needed. Generally, the Bible has been translated in 2000 languages, including Sibemba, Sitonga, Siluvale, Silozi, Sinyanja, Sikongo. However, The work of translating the Bible never ends.

The earliest hand-copied manuscripts of the OT (only Parts) dated from the time of Jesus or a little earlier; of the NT, from about 125 A.D. Then there are many manuscripts from different copyists.

But when you copy by hand, some word is skipped or word is written twice or you have read wrongly. Then somebody copies from your copy. What happens? He will had some mistakes of his own. So experts try to reconstruct what the original text was. That is why you will find some differences in translations.

But the main reasons are two: Changes in modern languages (evolution, dynamism), contextualization (translations need to have in mind for which they are translating). Suitable languages for different categories of people: For High educated people, for children, etc.

vii) Why Protestant – Catholic translations:

A Protestant translator would be influenced by his belief and a Catholic by his. But it is a good sign that both groups, Catholic and Protestants have come together with one translation called TOB (Traduction Oeucumenique de la Bible – Ecumenical Translation of the Bible).

Which translation is perfect?

In studying some passage in the Bible, it good to consult more than one translation: The different translations can help one grasp the meaning more fully.

viii) Composition and Classification of the books:

The Bible is like a library. It consists of so many books and so many types of books. In the OT, there is a poetry (psalms), laws (Leviticus), Prophecies (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), history (Genesis, Joshua, Kings), Proverbs (proverbs), and love songs (Song of Songs). In the NT, we have 27 books: gospels (different records of the life of Jesus), Acts (account of life in the earliest Christian community) and letters (a record of teachings given to those communities). These lists result from the efforts of Athanasius (Egypt) and Augustine (North Africa).

Who is the author of these books? Many hands have touched and retouched till they finally got to be as we now have them. Maybe some books, like the Apocalypse, is signed by one author. It took over a 1000 years till the Bible reached its final stage. The earliest sections of the Bible took basic written shape around 900 B.C and the last around 100 A.D.

Behind many hands, there is also God, as ultimate author. The Bible can rightly be called God's book.

The Bible was divided in numbered verses over three hundreds years after the books were divided into chapters the English Cardinal Stephen Langton, who died in 1228. Those useful divisions were not done by the authors themselves. Sometimes, the divisions are not well done.

1. THE WORLD OF THE BIBLE:

The Bible deals with real people – people who lived at a certain time and in a definite place: It is not a book containing only ideas. Where did those people live and their events were taking place?

The Land of the Bible:

- The time before Jesus: This area comprises Iran, moving from the east to Iraq in the west up to Turkey, then down to Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan, and finally to Egypt.

Those people saw the rise and fall of many civilizations and empires: Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Egypt. All these civilizations touched the people that are at the centre of Bible history, the Israelites.

To the West, there the Mediterranean Sea. Alexander's Greek Empire, which brought the Hellenistic culture. There came as well the Romans. By then the OT was passing to the NT.

Keys centers: (map on pg. 14)

Mesopotamia (between the rivers): Situated between Tigris and Euphrates. Abram first moved here in from Ur to Haran

Egypt: Refuge for dissenters, it influence the customs of Israel, served as a place of shelter for many Jews, especially the descendants of Abraham. Later on it became the place where Yahweh powerfully liberated his people to set them moving into the Sinai Peninsula and towards the land of the promise.

Alexandria: On the coast of Egypt is the place where the Septuagint was born.

Assyrian empire: came into contact with the people of Israel around 850 B.C. They had strong armies, destroyed their enemies and plundering conquered territories.

Babylon: conquered Assyria under Nabuchadnezzar (605-562). Babylon became the symbol of evil and of opposition to God. Israel was deported to Babylon in Exile.

Persia: Cyrus the great will bring the Babylonian empire to the end and will allow the exiles Jews to return to Palestine and to rebuild Jerusalem.

The Greeks: They came to end the Persian rule. The Greek language was the widespread in the all empire conquered by Alexander of Macedoine, it was known as the “koine”. The clash between the Jews and the Seleucids took place at the time King Antiochus tried to force the Jews to worship Greek gods. This led to armed resistance. The resistance fighters were the Maccabees.

The Romans: They may Palestine part of their empire only in 63 B.C. The Romans controlled the whole Mediterranean from coast to coast. Greek was the common language with the Roman law. This opens the way to Christianity.

2. THE PEOPLE AND THEIR LAND

- *Palestine:*

Palestine was just a small land. It was important because it was a corridor, a narrow piece of land connecting Asia to Africa: Communication between Mesopotamia and Egypt went through it. So also between Arabia and Syria and Phoenicia. The fights were over the control of this piece of land. It was a fertile land for ploughing.

- *The People:*

The experience of the Jews is centered on Moses who led the people of Yahweh for many years, in the desert. They learn to live as a people and to trust their God, who had brought them out of Egypt. Joshua, Moses’ successor led them across the Jordan into the promised land. The Hebrews settled in Palestine. When neighboring peoples threatened them, God would raise some leader from among the people to unite the efforts of the tribes and help them to resist their enemies. Such leaders were called ‘Judges’, like Gideon and Samson.

- *Israel: God’s first nation:*

Israel considered herself as god’s nation. Their first king was Saul. But the model of kingship was his successor David. He was composer and singer of religious songs, the psalms. He united Israel around the city of Jerusalem. His son Solomon succeeded him. Solomon built the Temple, was renown for his wisdom. Some of the proverbs in the Bible come from him.

The Israelites, by Solomon’s time had come to have a better knowledge of God, of Yahweh, who had liberated their ancestors from Egypt. They had come to understand him as God of the whole universe, as a good God and a saviour.

- ***Kingdom of Israel:***

The kingdom of Israel split in two under Rehoboam, Solomon's son. It never reunited. The Northern Kingdom kept the name of Israel under the leadership of Jeroboam, and the southern kingdom was called Judah. Israel was the bigger, with its 10 tribes. Judah had only two tribes. Most of the kings in both kingdoms came in for criticism and correction by the prophets.

- ***The prophets:***

Prophecy flourished mainly during the time of the kings. There were prophets in both kingdoms. Elijah, Amos and Hosea spoke out in Israel. Isaiah and others were God's spokesmen in Judah as the people went through difficult times. They continued to speak out to Israel heart even when there were no more kings. Slowly they disappeared from the scene.

They were God's spokesmen. They had to challenge their people to conversion. They warned and challenged kings and ordinary people. One important warning of the prophets came true, when Assyria destroyed Samaria, and people were dispersed and strangers were brought to replace them. The Northern Kingdom was no more. In 721 B.C. some Israelites found refuge, however, in Judah.

In Judah, king Hezekiah and King Josiah brought some religious reforms. But those reforms were not enough. In 587, prophetic threats became a reality.

The Temple was destroyed and people deported to Babylon in exile that lasted about fifty years. The Jews in exile were questioning themselves whether God had given up on them and there was no hope for them. Out of these painful situations, some great pieces of the Bible were written. Their history from Joshua to the last king in exile was re-examined:

"Israel came to see how God was truly faithful to what he promised, but that his threats were to be taken seriously as well; they came to understand that the exile was a punishment that they had deserved."

The prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and, years after them, an anonymous one labelled 'Second Isaiah', has left wonderful pages. They pointed forward to a time when ***God was going to restore the fortunes of his people. They invited Israel to renew her trust in Yahweh's love.***

- ***What did they learn from exile experience?***

This experience deepened Israel's (and our) understanding of God. The Jews in exile realized that God took care of them also outside Jerusalem and Palestine. This is probably the time they started having synagogues, weekly gatherings of people to listen to the

written word of God on the Sabbath. They stressed the Sabbath, circumcision, signs of their identity as Jews. This is the beginning of Judaism.

- *End of exile and Ezra's time:*

Cyrus, the king of Persia allowed the Jews in Babylon to return to their homeland, in 538. Many Jews returned to Palestine, some remained in Babylon.

Ezra's time:

Sometime before 400 B.C., a Jewish priest came from Babylon bringing with him almost two thousand other Jews. He was authorized by the king of Persian to set things in order. His reforms were based on the Torah or Law of Israel. He sometimes called 'the father of Judaism'. His name was EZRA.

The books that belong to this time are the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as shorter prophetic books, like those of Malachi and Zehariah, and the book of Jonah. The book of Job probably belongs here. Some book that personify wisdom. The Pentateuch received its latest additions at this time, and a good number of psalms were composed during this time.

The Greek period: Development of the Book of Wisdom and of Ben Sira (Ecclesiasticus). The book of Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) is believed to belong to this period.

The Maccabees:

This is time the Greeks persecuted the Jews. The Maccabees, father and sons and their followers, rose up and took arms to resist persecutions from the Greeks. They showed their fidelity to God and to the Law of Moses. The Apocalyptic books like Daniel belong to this period.

4. CHRISTIAN CHURCH:

The Jews who accepted Christ in faith became the Christians. This religion quickly spread all over the Roman Empire. God chose the Jews to offer through them his gifts of salvation to all mankind.

5. FORMATION OF THE CANON:

- *What is a canon?*

The process by which different books came to be included in the Bible is referred to as the formation of the Canon. The Canon is the lists of books which the leaders of the community recognizes as authorized for use in the community. For the Jews it was done by Rabbis. For the Christians, it was a long process, which finally was issued by the Council of TRENT (1546-1563), in the sixteenth century.

- *The Apocrypha and the Deuterocanonical Books:*

The Jewish canon of the Hebrew is the 39 books mentioned above. The extra books in the Septuagint are not accepted by the Hebrew canon. At the time of the Reformation in Europe, the Protestant Churches rejected the extra Greek books from the OT canon, naming them *Apocrypha*.

But they were retained in the Catholic canon, where they are known as *Deuterocanonical Books*, because belonging to the second canon.

For this reason, the OT in Catholic Bibles contains 46 books. Today many of the Protestant Churches recognize the value of the Deuterocanonical books and they are often included in Protestant translations of the Bible as the Apocrypha.

The 7 Deuterocanonical books are Baruch, Judith, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Tobith, and Wisdom.

The Protestant Churches adopted what was done by the Jewish community around 100 A.D, maybe be also later around 200 A.D. The Catholic Church, on her side, adopted had been accepted by the Christians of the early centuries. The Protestant, like the Jews do not accept the “*apocrypha*”.

6. HISTORICAL VALUE OR THE BIBLE: GOD’S BOOK. BUT ALSO MAN’S

- *God’s own book:*

The Bible is called the word of God. **It is God’s own book**: He is the author of the Bible. It is his **WORD**. It contains no error. Jews and Christians, Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox believe so.

How is that possible? You would expect god to appear to you to tell you that he is the author of the Bible. Things done by God are believed to belong to him after experience of the people. He never told us that he created the world and everything that exist. Yet we believe.

So there are two main elements to support that the Bible is God's book. First, The Israelites refer to some writings as expressing God's plan. Jesus, in his turn quotes the same writings as having divine authority. Secondly, this is not accepted by an individual, but the matter of the whole community – ancient Israel or the Church – that recognized such writings as binding.

Finally, the conviction that God's authority is behind some writings should be understood in the context of Israel and the Church's experience: God has guided them and will still guide them. The Bible only supports this experience with God.

- *Role of the prophets:*

They were only passing on God's message. What they proclaim was not their invention. They were God's spokesmen. The people did discern and rejected some prophets whom they did not recognize as signs of God's authority in them. For those who were accepted, Jeremiah is the clear example. He spoke God's word.

- *Man's authorship:*

Men are truly authors and at the same time, God is truly author of all the writings in the Bible. This means that the **Bible is inspired. The writing of the Bible arose out of the faith experience of the authors and we need to allow them to speak to and nourish our own faith experience.**

Reflection texts: 2Tim 3.16; Rom 15:4; 2Pt1:19-21

7. CONTENT OF THE BIBLE

How to read the Bible:

- *Context:*

Do not isolate a sentence from the section in which it belongs. The means and understanding of the sentence depends on which comes before it and after it. The sentence must not be taken out of its context. E.g. Ps 14.1 There is no God. The psalm is introduced by the sentence the fool says...

- *Ways of communication:*

Ways of communicating God's word depend on what the writers wanted to tell us. These are stories, even invented stories (Jonah). They are stories that contain God's message of life. It tells us how God cares for everyone. The story of Adam and Eve... How could a snake talk? What matters is how God planned man and woman; how man was made free;

how man refused to trust God and to listen to him, and so brought great trouble on himself, on society; ... and so on. God also uses stories to teach us.

- *Genealogies (kind of family tree): connect periods of history or makes connections.*
- *Narratives (kind of writing that narrates stories).*
- *History books: Bible historians went beyond reporting simple events. Ex 15*
- *Prophetic way: Recalling the past, threat of punishment, invitation to conversion, etc.*
- *Symbols: animals, numbers, colours, like white, which may express victory, holiness e.g. Apocalypse, Daniel use many images and symbols.*
There is a danger of missing the real message of those writings.
- *Wisdom books (Job, Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes) are familiar and less easy. They also contain a lot of human reflection on life as we experience it, with pain and joy and trouble and work.*

- *Presentation of the gospels:*

A gospel is another way of writing. It may look like a life of Jesus. We ask ourselves why don't they all start with the birth of Jesus?

Gospel means proclamation of the 'good news'. The good news that God has saved us in Jesus. Gospel writers wanted to share with the readers their faith, their joy in coming to know the truth about Jesus. They present Jesus to us in such a way that we might come to share our faith in him.

Each writer presents Jesus as he knew him, he understood him. Personal experience and understanding of Jesus. Our understanding may not be exactly the same. It is important to know that the Gospels represent both the personal faith of the writers and that of the early Christian communities. They are not merely a private witness to Jesus. They are the witnesses of the early Church.

There are three levels of message in the Gospels:

- *Jesus' words and deeds*
- *Comments and reflections on those words and deeds.*
- *Comments originating from the early Church as she discovered in Jesus' words and deeds help to face problems or to understand her situation. The 3rd level is the writer's own contribution. His materials come from the community remembering Jesus' words and actions, even from places and time where and when they took place. The main work of the writer was to select and organize his material and to present in the way he saw him.*

Matthew stresses the community of Christ's disciple.

Luke organizes a lot of material along the journey to Jerusalem (Lk9.51-19.27).

Mt 9.8: Power of forgiving sin given to men

Mk 12; Mt 22; Lk 20: When facing hostile civil rulers.

Mt 13; Mk 4; Lk 8: use of a parable and extending its meaning for teaching purposes.

- *Jesus as the center of the bible teaching:*

One preacher said that the whole Bible speaks of Jesus. In fact, in the gospel of Luke, Jesus himself says the whole Old Testament speaks of him (Lk 24.44). This means that God's plan, both in the OT and in the NT, is one, and it is centered on Christ Jesus. The creations of man, the call of Abraham, the exodus were all preparatory steps leading to the **revelation of Christ**. *"The Prophets also by their mission pointed to Christ. They helped to shape God's people, and witnessed to God's care and love for them. In Jesus the revelation of the Father's love and his salvation reached its fullest"*.

- *Prophecies and Jesus:*

Prophets did not know Christ, they did not have him in mind when they wrote their prophecies. What they spoke was meaningful for their hearers. For instance, in Is 7, the prophet speaks of the king Ahaz. Guarantee of God's protection. The symbolic name of the child is Emmanuel (God-with-us). This guarantee of God's protection is found in Jesus. If Isaiah had lived in Christ's time, he would have been greatly surprised.

In the second part of the book, the prophet speaks of the suffering of an innocent (Is 52-53). Through his death, he will bring life to many, to many other that are innocent. One may think immediately of Jesus. The words were surely fulfilled in him. *"But whom did the prophet have in mind? He must have been thinking of some one (or possibly a group?) of his own time. Yet the truth of God saving the guilty through the suffering of a holy one was never as true as in Jesus"*. P. 48

- *Caution:*

We should avoid rushing into applying Bible passages to Christ's time or the time of Christianity. We have to look first for what the passage meant to the writer in his own time. Only then should we further ask: What the passage says, was it fulfilled also in Jesus?

This is what we should always do when we read any passage in the Bible: Discover what the writer meant by his writing. If we do not do that, the writer will tell us, that is not what I said. That is not my idea, but yours.

- **How to understand a text correctly:**

- 1. DO NOT TAKE IT OUT OF ITS CONTEXT;**
- 2. KNOW WHAT KIND OF WRITING IT BELONGS TO;**
- 3. SEEK TO FIND WHAT THE AUTHOR ORIGINALLY MEANT.**

Writings in the Bible

- **invented stories**
- **genealogies**
- **history**
- **prophetic speech**
- **apocalyptic**
- **proverbs, wisdom literature**
- **gospel**

3 levels in the Gospels

- 1. What Jesus meant**
- 2. What the early Church further understood**
- 3. How it fits in the Gospel: what the Gospel Writer further wanted to say through the episode or passage.**

8. ADDRESSEE OF THE BIBLE

- *Word of God destined to people:*

The Bible is not a book of History or a story-telling book that keep the memories God in the past. The word of God is addressed to the readers and the listeners. When God finished writing the Bible, he had not finished the job he wanted to do. One could say that was only the beginning. God intended to use the Bible to address people of all times and all generations. He would work on people both from the inside and from the outside; he would move their heart and mind, but would also reach them through the words he left us in black.

- *Living and active word:*

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews says of God's says that God's word is "something alive and active" (4.12). He compares to a double-edged sword, and adds that it judges man, even in secret thoughts and emotions. It shows that the Bible is not inert, dead, letter, but a living word addressed to the reader and the listeners. God communicates with his people through his word. "*The written word is a tool in the hands of a living God for saving living human beings*".

St. Anthony of Egypt: After reading Mt 19.21 He did the same

- *Word to be listened to:*

God's word is a living word addressed to his people. The repetition of the word "*Listen*", which appears many times, expresses better communicative aspect of the word:

- Psalm 95; Dt 4:10;

- Dt 5:27; Jer 6:10; Jg 5

- *The word in the Church:*

In the Church, the Bible is read in public worship. Proclamation of the word in liturgy. Reflection and meditation in various devotional prayers, during recollections, retreats, meetings, prayers. “ *The whole of worship is praising God and listening to his word. The Church strongly believes that God’s word is life for his people: through it he guides, challenges, encourages and sustains them*”.

People are becoming aware of their need to hear God’s word and to let it shape our life. Bible study groups, Bible prayer sharing, reading-exercise of the whole Bible, etc.

The preacher at the Mass has to “break the bread” of God’s word for the people that they may eat and find strength. He has to help the people to see the challenges to face, after listening to the word of God, and to bring light and comfort in people’s concrete situations.

- *Relevance of the Bible today:*

The context in which the Israelites and the Early Christian community lived is different from ours. How is the Bible relevant to us because there are different circumstances and their problems were not our problems?

The world has changed so much since the Bible was written. And human life is the same with so many problems.

What do we still have in common with the people of the Bible?

What is our situation comparing to Mk 6 (multiplication of bread) , Lk7 (sinner woman)?

How to pass from the bible to my own situation?

How to pass from my own situation to the Bible?

We need to listen to the Bible and ask it questions. When you have read and prayed with the Bible for some time, you start getting a sense of its values: what the Bible likes or doesn’t like, what it esteems and what it despises, and so on.

When you are puzzled you will ‘search the Scriptures’: Reading a passage which fits you situation will bring you light.

THE BIBLE SPEAK TO ME

- 1. *WHAT DO I HAVE IN COMMON WITH THE PEOPLE IN THE PASSAGE I HAVE READ/HEARD? WHAT CAN I LEARN?***
- 2. *FROM MY SITUATION I ASK: WHAT WOULD THE BIBLE HAVE TO TELL ME? I "SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES" AND WHAT LIGHT IT BRINGS TO MY SITUATION.***

8. A BOOK OF PRAYER: PRAISE, THANKSGIVING, GRATITUDE, etc.

The Bible is a book of prayer. For instance the Book of Psalm is a prayer book. Many people use Psalms daily (seminarians, sisters, priests, and some lay people). The Bible is the only book of prayer whose author is God. Praying with the book of Psalms expresses praise, admiration and thanks for all the blessings and gifts, and graces God has been showering on his people. It encourages us to praise God more often opening our eyes to God's love continually caring for us.

It contains a lot of pleading, begging. The Psalms lead to expressing all our needs in prayers. But there is also expression of anger, sadness.

Jesus himself found the Psalms suitable for him. On the cross, it was a psalm he used to express his pain and sense of abandonment to the Father (Ps 22). Following his example, the Church encourages Christians to use the Psalms for their prayer. She encourages us to recite them as our own prayer. Many people sing them daily.

St. Augustine put it this way: *Praying with song is praying double!*

Prayers are found in the book of Daniel (Dn 3), in the Book of Revelation (Rev 5), and in the Gospels (Lk 1). Benedictus, Nunc Dimittis, Magnificat, sacerdotal prayer of Jesus, canticles, etc.

- *How to pray with psalms?*
 - Take a psalm and recite it by yourself or with others.
 - Go back and look for phrases, which strike you more or appeal to you.
 - Each phrase you like, repeat it to yourself slowly
 - If it is in a group, each one may be invited to point out some phrase he or she likes.
 - But after one has spoken, none should rush to point out another phrase.

- *Prayer in Bible study or sharing groups:*

After bible sharing or studying some passages, the group has to see what the passage tell them (challenges and comfort). They could put their findings in the form of prayer or make some request to God in connection with what they have seen.

Another way of praying with the Bible is the method of 7 steps. It combines time of silence and time of talking, time of personal experience and time of sharing with others.

METHOD OF 7 STEPS:

- *We invite the Lord (one says a prayer to make members aware of God's presence)*
- *We read the text (another volunteer read the text aloud)*
- *We look at the text again (each member reads what struck him/her, then a pause)*
- *We let God speak to us (the passage is read again right through slowly, and then followed by silence by silence for 2-5 minutes, as announced. One may. E.g. keep repeating a phrase of the reading quietly to himself during that short silence).*
- *We share what we have heard in our hearts (sharing of experiences, not discussion or preaching to others)*
- *We search together (members examine their lives in the light of the Gospel. What they bring up for discussion need not be directly connected with the passage read in the beginning. But in situations of prayer, one can see even daily problems in a new light)*
- *We pray together (everyone is invited to pray in his personal words: The words of the Bible, the experiences of God's Word during the meeting, the daily problems, all become food for prayer).*

BENEDICTINE METHOD:

- Read some passage from the Bible
- Stop when you find a sentence appealing to you
- Meditate on it (keep repeating it in your mind or with your mouth)
- Express in spontaneous prayers thoughts or feeling arousing in you by the sentence)
- Continue reading the passage till you meet some other appealing phrase or sentence, and repeat the steps.

(See other methods in Welcome to the Bible on page 60)

CONTEMPLATION:

- Consider people involved in the episode
- Listen to their words
- Watch their actions

- Pray over what comes in mind
- Talk, if you like, to the person or persons concerned
- Wind up with a short prayer based on what you have seen and heard and understood.

- Identification to symbol and image in the Bible:

The Bible contains many images and symbols of God or of man before God. One lets the image or symbol sink into the mind, quietly imagining it looking at a picture of it. Slowly, thoughts and feelings will come up, which can lead to true prayer.

Ps 63 speaks of the good man feeling like dry land yearning for the rain in his desire for God. Think of yourself as the dry land....

Ps 42 speaks of the deer searching for water

Jn 7.37-38: Fresh water

Jn 6: Food

Ps 144: a rock

CONCLUSION

After speaking so long about the Bible, it is time to go to the Bible itself. Friendship grows through contacts. This is also required for the Bible.

How to maintain friendship and contacts with the Bible?

Resolutions:

- **For a reading follow a book through**
- **Take a gospel page after page and follow it**
- **Do read introduction to each book if your bible gives that**
- **Do not be afraid to read a book you have already read if you find it more helpful**
- **Read notes accompanying biblical passages**
- **Read Bible commentaries but never lose contact with the Bible itself.**

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Nota:

We apologise for not referring to the sources. The texts have been used many years ago for bible study, bible spirituality seminars without prior intention of posting them on website. We will appreciate your comments and clarification. Hope these materials shed some light to your search of God in the revealed scriptural texts.