

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Below are some thoughts and ideas for how you might incorporate this Holy Habit into worship.

Biblical material

Old Testament passages:

- Genesis 1:1–2:3 Creation
- Exodus 24:1–8 God speaks to and through Moses
- Deuteronomy 17:14–20 Ruling by constant reference to the scriptures
- Psalm 119 Walking in the law of the Lord
- Isaiah 55:1–11 God's word will accomplish God's purposes
- Ezekiel 3:1–11 Nurtured by God's word to speak God's words

Gospel passages:

- Matthew 22:34–40 Jesus summarises God's commandments
- Luke 4:1–13 Jesus resists temptation three times by reference to scripture
- Luke 4:14–30 Jesus reads, preaches and fulfils scripture
- Luke 24:13–50 The road to Emmaus
- John 1:1–18 The Word becomes flesh

Other New Testament passages:

- Acts 2:14–41; 3:12–26 Peter preaches
- Acts 8:26–40 Philip and the Ethiopian
- Romans 15:1–6 Through the scriptures we have hope
- Colossians 3:12–17 Let the word of the Lord dwell in you richly
- 2 Timothy 3:14–4:5 Faith in Christ enables us to interpret the scriptures

Suggested hymns and songs

- Break thou the bread of life (RS 314, StF 153)
- Come, divine Interpreter (StF 154)
- Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire (StF 155)
- Come, living God, when least expected (CH4 609, RS 354)
- God has spoken – by his prophets (StF 157)
- Help us, O Lord, to learn (StF 501)
- Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it (RS 268, StF 353)
- Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread' (RS 199, StF 252)
- Lord, thy word abideth (RS 317)
- Master, speak! Thy servant heareth (StF 666)
- Not far beyond the sea nor high (RS 318, StF 159)
- Now in reverence and awe (SoF 1468)
- Powerful in making us wise to salvation (StF 160)
- Prepare our hearts, O God (SoF 3031)
- Speak, O Lord (StF 161)
- Thanks to God whose word was spoken (CH4 605, RS 319)
- The prophets' voice comes down the years (StF 162)
- The Spirit of the Lord revealed (RS 311)
- Thy word (SoF 1066)
- We have a gospel to proclaim (CH4 363, StF 418)
- You're the word of God the Father (SoF 1669)
- Your hand, O God, has guided (CH4 511, RS 567, StF 692)
- Your words to me are life and health (RS 321, StF 164)



Introduction to the theme

For this Holy Habit, two introductions to the theme are suggested. These could be used in two consecutive services, or at different points during a single service.

The importance of biblical teaching – Colossians 3:12-17

Have a selection of dressing-up clothes and invite volunteers to come and try something on. If people are willing, invite them to walk up and down the catwalk (aisle). Play some music to accompany them.

Talk together about what clothes are needed for different occasions or activities (e.g. work, sport, going out).

Talk about how Paul calls the Colossians to clothe themselves with garments of holiness – compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, love, peace and thankfulness (Colossians 3:12-17). Invite the congregation to talk about what that might look like.

Remind them that developing, nurturing and embedding the Holy Habits will clothe us in the garments of holiness.

See how many of the Holy Habits the congregation can recall. Can anyone recall from memory Acts 2:42-47?

Talk to the congregation about the Holy Habit of **Biblical Teaching** and what that means. (You may find it helpful to refer to the Introduction.)

Read Colossians 3:16-17 and break it into three parts:

- Explain how letting 'the word of Christ dwell in you richly' is achieved by studying and living God's word.
- Talk about the importance of learning from God's word together: 'teach and admonish one another in all wisdom.'
- Think about different ways of learning from God's word, through music, dance, drama and art: 'with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God'.

To close, pray the Holy Habits prayer (see p. 5), or you could sing 'With psalms and hymns and spiritual songs' by Steve Morgan-Gurr.

Exploring the books of the Bible – the whole Bible

How well does your Christian community know its Bible? We are in a generation now where many who come to faith will not have a traditional Sunday school grounding. This is a fun way to introduce the idea of the Bible as a 'library' rather than one homogenous book. It can be adapted in many ways for different contexts.

Prepare 66 strips of coloured paper – representing the spines of books on the shelf – and write or print on each one the name of one book of the Bible. Each category of book (poetry, history, wisdom, etc.) should be on a different colour. Either hide the 'books' around the worship/meeting space in advance, or give them out to people as they arrive.

You may wish to bring in a range of different books to show people and let them choose one each or one per small group to have a look at, e.g. cookery book, knitting patterns, car manual, DIY instructions, storybook/novel, poetry, hymn book, art book, history book, textbook, atlas, diary.

Go round and ask:

- What kind of book do you have?
- What is it for?
- Who is it for?
- Who wrote it?

Explain that the Bible (literal meaning: 'library') is a collection of lots of different types of writing that help us in different ways. In this activity, we are going to form the Bible library.

Invite people to search for the hidden strips or begin to collect those given out as people arrived. As the 'books' are found or collected, the aim is to build up your library and eventually to make a Bible with all 66 books in place – so you will need to keep moving fairly fast. People can put the books of the same colour together, or decide as they go along where they will go in the 'library'. As the groups build, invite people to observe what those of the same colour have in common. If there is sufficient knowledge (or using a Bible), organise the books into Bible order.

During the collation, you can share the following information about the Bible. You might want to reflect on this again at the end of the exercise.

- We usually meet the Bible bound as one book, but it was written by many different authors over a period of years.
- In some cases, we are confident about who wrote the individual books, in other cases we are less certain.
- In this one book, we find anthologies, stories, history and law (if all ages are present, you may need to use other terms). A good way to think of this is to imagine the shelves in a library. If we wanted to read about someone's life, we might turn to biographies; for a more personal insight, we might find some of their letters; to understand what is accepted, we might need to look up the legal situation under 'law'.
- In a library, information is not stored in the order it was written in and the Bible is the same.

Once all the strips have come forward and are laid in place, invite people to share their reflections on the exercise. Does it help knowing that there are different types of books and writing in the Bible, written by different people at different times? What questions does this raise for you?

Conclude with a reflection or conversation about the rich resources we have in the Bible and about how we continue to learn from it and be inspired by it and are challenged to interpret what it means for our living today.

Round off in prayer, giving thanks for those who wrote the books we have in the Bible and for those who help us to understand them. Pray too for the help of the Holy Spirit to both understand and live out the teachings of the Bible in everyday life and action.

Thoughts for sermon preparation

Colossians 3:12-17

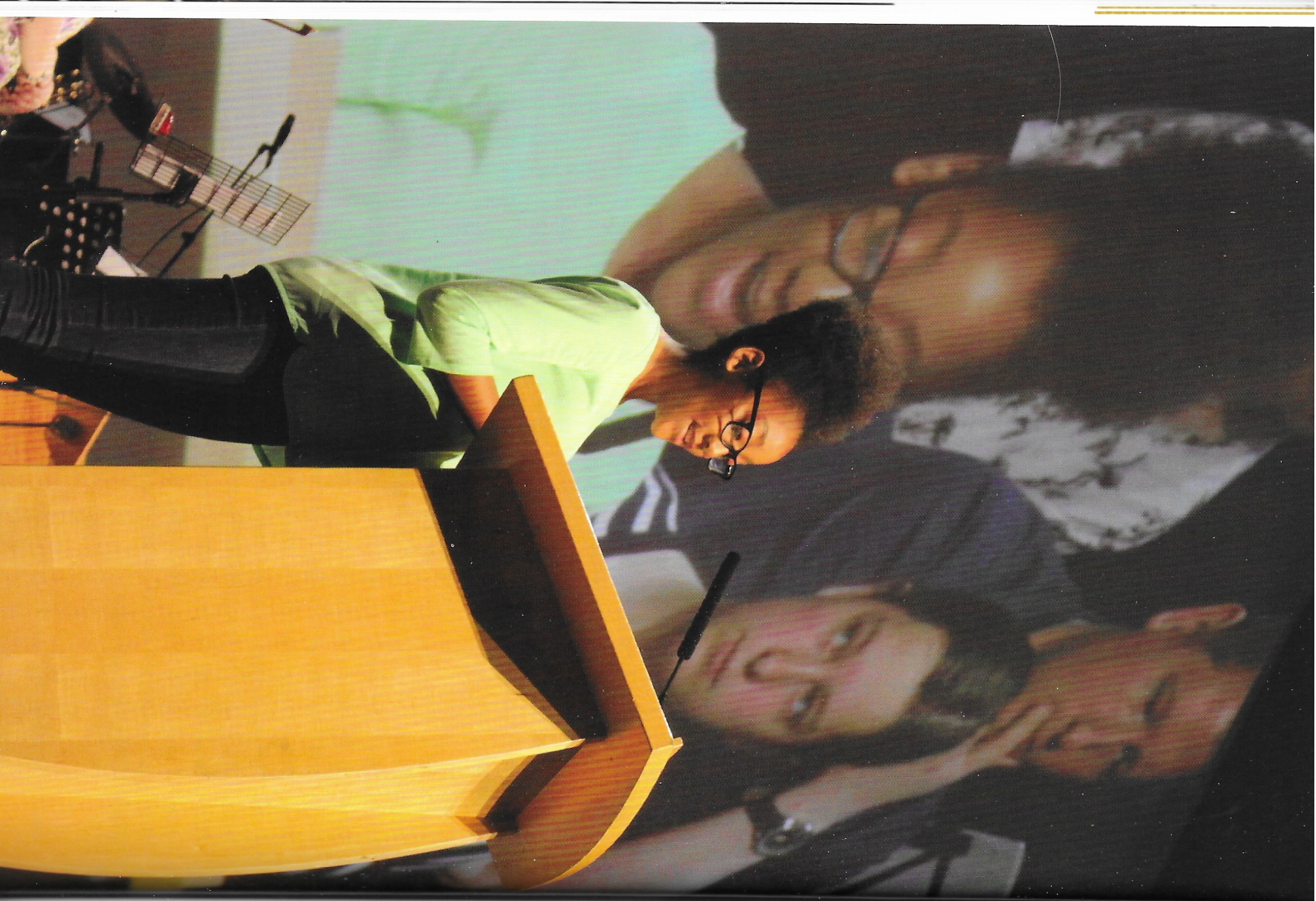
Paul's letter to the Colossians is an excellent place in which to explore the importance of devotion to **Biblical Teaching**. One of Paul's motives for writing the letter was to address what is sometimes called 'the Colossian heresy'. This appears to have centred on a view that faith in Christ was not sufficient for salvation and that a variety of mystical experiences and (mainly Jewish) ritual practices were also needed. Colossians reminds us of the need to reflect on what the Bible does and doesn't say and to be careful that we don't lay burdens on others or create value systems that have no foundation in scripture, however attractive or popular they may sound e.g. 'Charity starts at home'.

In this particular passage, Paul opens with a call to the Colossians to clothe themselves with garments of holiness: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, love, peace and thankfulness. As you explore Holy Habits, it is important to remember that they are *holy* habits. You may wish to pause and reflect on your journey thus far. How are the habits you have explored forming holiness in you individually and as a church?

If you are looking for a text to build a sermon upon about **Biblical Teaching**, then verse 16 is particularly appropriate:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

You could explore this in two parts. First, reflect upon the opening words, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly'. In some Greek manuscripts, the text reads 'let the word of God dwell in you'. The Greek used for 'word' is *logos* – which is most famously found in the prologue to John's Gospel. You may wish to explore the richness of this word and concept in the context of thinking about **Biblical Teaching**. How do our understandings of the written word, the spoken word and the living word impact on our engagement with and, critically, our living of **Biblical Teaching**? As ever, Paul is keen to see **Biblical Teaching** lived out and, towards the end of the letter, he speaks of how the word of Christ might be lived out in the family (3:18-21), at work (3:22-4:1), in the church (4:2-4) and in life in general (4:5-6). Please note that these verses are not all straightforward and illustrate why we need to handle **Biblical Teaching** with care.



You may also wish to reflect on Paul's encouragement to 'dwell' in the word of Christ. Again, this is a very important phrase when it comes to Holy Habits. If the habits are to be fully formative and transformative, we need to dwell in them. For ideas on how we might dwell in **Biblical Teaching**, see the ideas for 'Forming the habit' later on.

The second part of verse 16 that you may wish to work on is Paul's instruction to 'teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God'. The phrase 'one another' is interesting. Australian New Testament lecturer Sylvia Wilkey-Collinson has studied the rabbinical teaching methods of Jesus in depth. Drawing on that study and her knowledge of good adult teaching practices, she advocates a 'Discipling Model of Teaching' for the fruitful nurture of disciples today. Her model has six key characteristics. It is:

- 1 relational
- 2 intentional (all members have a responsibility for learning)
- 3 mainly informal and life related
- 4 typically communal
- 5 reciprocal (learning is mutual and collaborative)
- 6 centrifugal in focus (disciples go out from the community to be involved in service and mission and then return to reflect).

While not disputing the view that some are graced with a particular gift of teaching, she strongly affirms the view that teaching and learning are gifts of the whole community:

Although some may have a gift of teaching which they frequently use... all members of the community have a responsibility for enriching and contributing to the up-building of others. This is achieved in part by the exercise of their spiritual gifts and the example of their faithful, Christ-like living. Learning thus becomes a mutual, collaborative affair.

Sylvia Wilkey-Collinson, *Making Disciples* (Paternoster, 2004), p. 241

You may wish to explore this and consider how more people may participate in the teaching offered by your church.

Finally, you could also think how 'psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs' and not just sermons, talks and studies might help people engage with and live out **Biblical Teaching**.

Prayers

Dear Father God,

We ask that you will help us to learn more about you through the Bible.

May you guide us through life
with the knowledge and understanding from your teachings
as we learn about you from Jesus' parables.

Please help us to grow closer to you
by focusing on your ways as Jesus taught.
Amen

Prayers from the Bible

The Bible includes many prayers that can be used today in worship, for example many of the psalms, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), the Benedictus (Luke 1:68–79) and the Nunc dimittis (Luke 2:29–32).

A prayer for inspiration

The collect for Bible Sunday in *The Methodist Worship Book*, p. 561.

Blessed Lord,
who caused all holy scripture to be written for our learning:
help us so to hear them,
read, mark and inwardly digest them,
that through patience and the comfort of your holy word
we may embrace and ever hold fast
the hope of everlasting life
which you have given us.
In our saviour, Jesus Christ
Amen



Prayers from young people 🙏 😊

The following prayers were written by young people and children around the theme of **Biblical Teaching**. Use them as they are or as the inspiration to encourage your children and young people to write their own prayers for your services.

Dear Lord,
We thank you for all you have done for us,
for teaching us now
and when you first gave your word to the people.
May you teach us now and evermore.
Amen

Dear Lord,
We thank you for everything you do for us.
Thank you for teaching us your ways through your Word, the Bible.
Thank you, God, for showing us your love by sending us your son to die for us.
Thank you for showing us your forgiveness through the story of the prodigal son.
Thank you for showing us your greatness through the stories of creation.
Thank you for wanting us to be with you by showing us the way and guiding us.
Amen



Dear God,
 Our world which you have provided is imperfect –
 your kindness being ignored,
 your creatures being persecuted.
 As a community we are sorry for our many blemishes;
 as a church, we are sorry we ignore your Bible,
 which is so wise and so easy to forget.
 Though we will probably be bad citizens again,
 we ask for your forgiveness and admit our sins.
 Sorry.
 Amen

Dear God,
 We're sorry for the times we don't follow your ways
 as recorded in your word, the Bible.
 We're sorry for the times when we don't follow the teachings of Jesus
 and instead choose to neglect your ways.
 Please forgive us for our sins
 and let us try again to live as your son Jesus taught us.
 Amen

Dear God,
 In the Bible we read about wars and people seeking refuge.
 We are worried about the wars and conflicts around the world.
 Please let the wars stop and help refugees find a safe place to live.
 Please help us make it a more peaceful place for the citizens in the country.
 Help the families in war-torn areas live their lives in peace.
 Amen

Dearest Father,
 Please help us to understand your Bible and your Fellowship.
 May you give us wisdom in our daily tasks and help us through life.
 Amen

A prayer of gathering

Invite the congregation to reflect on the following words. Follow this with a period of silent reflection.

We gather to read, to listen,
 yearning for your yes,
 hoping to hear
 the one word of truth
 that might settle our doubts,
 quieten our questioning,
 nail down meaning,
 once for all.

But you came to us crosswise,
 questioning our questions,
 whispering on the edge of hearing
 something that calls to us:
 snatches of a conversation
 old as the world,
 still unfinished.

Different ways of praying

A listening prayer

After the sermon or Bible readings, ask the congregation to sit in silence, with eyes open or closed, hands held open in their laps.

Invite them to listen to what God is saying to them.

You could play an appropriate piece of music.

A wondering prayer

God is creator of our creativity and our imagination. Invite the congregation to wonder about the passage you are exploring together. You will need to adapt the sentences to fit the passage. You could 'wonder' your way through the whole passage using the words and phrases in the text.

Inform people that after each phrase there will be plenty of silence to allow them to let God work with their imaginations.

At the end, take time to allow people to share where their wondering has taken them.

God, creator of our creativity and our imagination

I wonder what it would have been like to have been there that day/in that place...

I wonder what it would have been like to have witnessed...

I wonder how [Name] felt when...

I wonder what s/he could see...

I wonder how [Name] was changed by what happened...

I wonder how I would have reacted had I been there...

I wonder how it made you feel...

I wonder what you want me to learn from this passage...

I wonder how it relates to my life/the life of this church/this community...

God of wonder, help me to see all things with your eyes and understand all things with your mind.

Amen

Praying the Bible

Choose a psalm or Bible passage and pray the text slowly.

Repeat lines or the whole passage, or hold long periods of silence between the verses or lines.

A prayer of confession

Ask the congregation to think about how they have failed to follow God's word and done things they regret. Invite them to write these down on small pieces of paper, in words, symbols or initials as they feel most comfortable.

Explain that you are going to read a psalm and encourage them, as the verses are read, to offer what they have written to God and to ask forgiveness.

Read Psalm 32, 38 or 51 (or selected verses).

As the words of pardon are read, encourage them to rip up the paper and place the pieces in a metal bin at the front of the church.

If it is safe to do so, burn or shred the paper as a sign of God's forgiveness. Dispose of any remnants safely and securely.

Acrostic prayers

A number of the Psalms in the Bible are acrostic psalms, where each line starts with the next letter of the alphabet. Try writing your own acrostic psalm as a prayer.

Start the first line of your psalm with the letter A, start the next with a B, and then carry on using the next letter of the alphabet to begin each new line (you might not get through the whole alphabet!).

You may find it helpful to give people a topic to write their psalm about, or to specifically focus on praise, or you may prefer to encourage people to write about whatever is on their hearts and minds.

GROUP MATERIAL AND ACTIVITIES

Some of these small group materials are traditional Bible studies, some are more diverse session plans and others are short activities, reflections and discussions. Please choose materials appropriate to whatever group you are working with.

Learning together in community

Acts 8:26–40

It is easy to think that Bible studies should only be led by someone with academic training in theology, but while they might have particular gifts and insights to offer, all those who gather around the Bible have a part to play in opening up its teaching. We all bring our own experiences of life, and our own questions about what the text means for us. A group from the Birmingham Methodist Circuit with no academic theological training, just a passion for the Bible, prepared the original version of this study, both to share their insights and to encourage other groups to do likewise.

Spend a few moments either as a group or individually thinking about how and when you read the Bible, what you find most helpful and why. What helps you to live out the Holy Habits?

Read Acts 8:26–40.

The story focuses on two characters: Philip and the Ethiopian official. Who are they? What do you make of them? Look at what is said about each character and note what they have in common and how they differ. This is not a natural teacher-and-student relationship. How would each character have felt talking with the other one?

In verse 27, we hear that the Ethiopian is returning from worship yet later, in verse 31, he declares that he does not understand the scripture he is reading: ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ (Acts 8:31).

- Do you always understand what is written in the Bible? What would help?
- If you find something that you don’t understand, what do you do? Where do you take your questions?

Verse 31 says that the Ethiopian invited Philip to join him in the carriage. The Ethiopian took a risk, but so did Philip. Through taking the risk they both gained much.

- Who would you expect to teach you about the Bible?
- Do you ever consider your own interpretation less valid than others?
- Has there been a time when someone who you would not expect to teach you opened your eyes to what a Bible passage meant?
- Do we invite people into our churches, youth or home groups and expect to learn from them?

There are many different ways to read the Bible. God can speak to anyone through the Bible and therefore we can all learn from one another irrespective of our education, age or experience. Different groups may read the Bible in different ways: young or old, black or white, male or female. Why not encourage someone who comes from a different perspective to explain what specific passages mean to them and how those passages shape their living?

The Ethiopian hears Philip’s interpretation and immediately feels compelled to be baptised himself.

- Has a passage in the Bible, or a new understanding of a biblical passage, ever touched you and made you respond in a way that you would never have expected to respond?

The Holy Spirit led Philip and gave him the courage to take a risk.

- When has the Holy Spirit guided us, or given us courage?
- Have we felt the Spirit’s presence in a special way when reading the Bible?
- How does the Holy Spirit help us to live out **Biblical Teaching**?



The road to Emmaus

Luke 24:13-50

This reflective exercise on a biblical passage could be used in a small group or as a meditation in a service of **Worship**. It involves inviting people to place themselves into the text and imagine their responses to the events in the narrative. The meditation makes connections between **Biblical Teaching** and several of the other Holy Habits.

Read the piece out slowly, pausing for a good amount of time as you go to allow people to dwell in the word and to let the scriptures and the Spirit speak to them. The verse numbers are there for reference and don't need to be read out.

You and one of the other disciples are getting out of Jerusalem. As you go, you are trying to make sense of what has happened (vv. 13-14).

Are you scared or just completely confused?

A stranger joins you as you go, but you do not recognise him. Why? Are you so wrapped up in what has happened, or is it because you are not expecting to see him, or is there another reason (vv. 15-16)?

The stranger joins in your conversation. Then he starts to refer to passages in the Hebrew scriptures which he says talk of a messiah suffering and then being glorified, and which he then implies refer to Jesus (although he is not yet saying directly that he is Jesus) (vv. 25-27).

To which scriptures is he referring? Irritatingly, Luke does not tell us in detail. Which passages do you think he may be referring to?

Jesus is reinterpreting and reapplying the scriptures to help you reinterpret your own experience, see more clearly what God is doing in it, and reapply yourself to your discipleship. You feel comforted and excited. It fires you up (v. 32). How do you respond?

You invite him in to the place where you are staying. You allow him to take over as the host. Then something about the way he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and shares it with you reminds you of the last supper and all the other meals you shared with Jesus (vv. 28-30). All at once, you realise that this is Jesus (v. 31)! How do you feel now?

Breaking Bread and exploring the scriptures have enabled you to explore your experience and discover things in it that you were not recognising before. They have enabled you to welcome the risen Christ into your life. You cease to see him as you used to do, because he is living within you (v. 32).

This turns you round. Rather than running away, you go back to re-engage with the other disciples. You listen to their experience. You discover that since you left, Peter has not just seen the tomb is empty but has met the risen Lord! You then share your experience and your new understanding with them (vv. 33-35).

What does this say about the place and value of another Holy Habit, **Fellowship**?

Suddenly you all experience Jesus present among you. You realise that this is not a ghost or some new spiritual being. It is the Jesus you knew before he was crucified, but now alive in a new way (vv. 36-43).

He again explores the scriptures with you. That helps you understand what is happening to you. Understanding your experience better helps you understand the scriptures better. Then, again, you cease to see him as you did before. You prepare to go out and bear witness to these things in all the world (vv. 44-50). Soon you will feel yourself strangely warmed – this time, not just in your heart. You will find yourself fired up by the Spirit to be the body of Christ in the world (Acts 2).

How do you respond to this in **Worship**? How do you respond to this in **Prayer**?

What do you imagine that you are going to do by way of **Serving** or encouraging others to follow afresh the Jesus you have encountered?

Might you explore other biblical passages this way?

The whole Bible

When the Church of England broke away from the church of Rome in the 16th century, one of the key issues was the authority of the Bible. The English Reformers' understanding of biblical authority was encapsulated in Article 6 of the Thirty-nine Articles of faith which they drew up:

Holy scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

What does this statement say about the Bible as guide? What does it not say about the Bible as guide? At this point, if you haven't already read the piece on 'Understanding the nature and purpose of the Bible' (see p. 50), you may wish to do so in order to engage with the question of the balance between the Bible and the Holy Spirit as we seek God's guidance, in our lives and in the church. It is important that you think about this carefully before undertaking the following activity.

Activity and discussion

Create a maze/labyrinth or easy obstacle course and play in pairs. One person is blindfolded, and the other acts as a guide, either by calling instructions from the sidelines or by going ahead and leading their partner by the hand.

If you have or can borrow a floor labyrinth painted on a sheet, you could use this as your course. Or try using chairs, cardboard boxes, mats, etc. Prevent trip hazards!

Once everyone has had a turn, talk about their experiences. How did it feel to be unaware of the path ahead? To trust someone else? Was it easier to hear instructions or to follow a physical lead? Can they relate this experience to following Jesus?

Show the group some camping equipment such as a map, compass, torch or walking stick.

Discuss with people how each item helps on a journey. Explain that, for Christians, the Bible is seen as a guide on their journey through life. But add that this cannot be divorced from the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:1–14, especially verse 14, in conjunction with 2 Timothy 3:14–17).

We need to take seriously this charge to Timothy:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is [or alternatively, Every scripture inspired by God is also] useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:14–17

It is important to realise, though, that the sacred writings which Timothy knew from childhood were the Hebrew scriptures. Christians believe that the Old Testament points to 'salvation through faith in Christ' but this is something that is not at all obvious to most sincere Jewish readers, and for Christians it needs to be discerned through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Verses to look up:

- Psalm 119:11: 'I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you.'
- Psalm 119:105: 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.'
- Hebrews 4:12: 'Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.'

Ask the group how the Holy Spirit guides, on the pathway of living out **Biblical Teaching**.

What is the word of God?

Look up John 1:1. How is the title 'the Word' applied in John's Gospel?

James Dunn tells us that, in Judaism before the time of Jesus, Jews came to use Wisdom, Word and Spirit all as terms that spoke of the active presence of God in the world (James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament enquiry into the origins of the doctrine of the incarnation*, 2nd edition, Eerdmans, 1989). So to read these verses above about the word of God as referring simply to the Bible is not accurate. Christians believe, however, that the Bible is intimately connected with the active presence of God in the world. Get the group to discuss how this applies in their own understanding and experience.

Divide a large piece of paper into sections, including things such as family, friends, celebrities, teachers, youth leaders, parents, the internet, books, magazines, the Bible, etc.

Give each person some counters or tiddlywinks. Ask them the following questions and ask them to place their counters on the relevant section of paper to answer each question.

Who or what would you look to when making a decision about:

- what to wear?
- what hobby to do?
- how to treat a new person?
- what job you should do?
- how to learn a new skill?
- whether to forgive someone or not?
- a moral dilemma (you could think of some examples relevant to the age/context of the group)?

You may like to add more questions.

At the end of the exercise, discuss whether the group felt that they would look to the Bible for guidance, and why or why not.

Explain that many Christians look at what the Bible says alongside other things such as tradition, experience or their reason, to work out what guidance the Bible is offering.

You could take a simple example to explain this, such as guidance about what a person should eat. Look at what is literally said in the Bible about what you should eat, and then compare that with how Christians have – or have not – applied it literally. Draw out how complex it can be for Christians to hold all of these things in tension when making decisions, while recognising the authority of the Bible.

If you want to know a little more about how scripture, tradition, reason and experience might work together in a Christian view of authority, see the final paragraph of the section at the end of this booklet on 'How does a Christian read the Bible' (p. 53).

Bible in context

It is important to understand the context of when the Bible was written. You could spend time researching with your group some of the authors of the Bible, when sections were written, etc.

To get a 'bigger picture' of the overarching story of the Bible, of God's love for his creation and outworking of salvation, you could look at a Bible timeline. Scripture Union has display versions and mini pocket size versions:

- For youth: [content:scriptureunion.org.uk/resource/through-bible-timeline](http://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/resource/through-bible-timeline)
- For 5–11s: [content:scriptureunion.org.uk/resource/bible-timeline](http://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/resource/bible-timeline)
- Under-5s: [content:scriptureunion.org.uk/resource/bubbles-compedium-red](http://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/resource/bubbles-compedium-red)

The youth resource 'Navigate' (www.methodist.org.uk/navigate) has a session plan exploring the overarching story of the Bible, with a number of different activities and video clips (session 2 in particular).

Alternatively, you could spend time over a series of weeks making your own timeline. Don't forget, as you read different passages each week, to talk about what style of writing it is in, who may have written it and where it fits into the overall story.

I wonder

'Godly Play' (www.godlyplay.uk) explores Bible stories using objects and symbols as well as words, in order to help those who share in the stories become more aware of God's presence in their lives. The focus is not on the storyteller, but on the storytelling materials and on the story.

In preparing for a session, the storyteller memorises a script and internalises the story, and reflects and works on it. The conversation that will take place in the group will then focus on the participants' responses.

In an 'I wonder' section, the thinking and feeling about the story comes from the participants, where they are in their lives at that moment, their concerns, worries and joys. There is no prescribed conclusion, but a space to interpret.



Godly Play then aims to create a safe space where ideas, opinions and gifts are deeply respected and a model community might be formed which demonstrates how Christians might live together in a way that is biblical.

Religious language is used – parable, sacred story, silence and liturgical action. A pattern is followed beginning with being greeted at the door or threshold by a ‘doorkeeper’, which prepares participants to enter the storytelling community or circle. This preparation – creating a place for stilling and silence – is crucial.

The word of God in the story is then presented using visual materials, and this is followed by open, wondering questions. In the conversation, all contributions are equally valued.

Participants then respond by choosing an activity from the range of craft and arts materials provided, or exploring other Godly Play stories and books, or simply enjoying a quiet space.

To close the session, the group is brought back together to eat, drink and chat before a blessing and sending back into the world.

The Parable of the Deep Well

The material for the ‘Parable of the Deep Well’ explores **Biblical Teaching**. It is taken from the rabbinical tradition (the Midrash Rabbah). For a full script, see Jerome W. Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: 20 presentations for winter* (Church Publishing Inc., 2002, 2011).

You will need props in a box (sized in proportion to your setting):

- a cylinder to represent a deep well
- some cloth to represent the desert
- a bucket
- strands of gold thread.

Invite participants to sit around you in a horseshoe. Take the props out of the box (without explaining what they are). Tell the story – emphasising the well’s clear, cold, refreshing water.

Point out that the water is so far down that it can’t be seen clearly. It is impossible to drink it: Imagine the crowds who reach the well but walk past. One person stops and wonders, looks at the well and sees a rusty object that looks like a cup and some golden strands. Ask how this cup might make drinking possible.

As the story continues, begin tying the threads together and attach the longer thread to the bucket.

The person who stopped lowers the bucket into the well and gets a cup of water to drink. It is life-changing. They leave the bucket and the long string by the well so that the next person can taste the water too.

Pretend to take a drink yourself and offer others the opportunity to pretend as well.

Continue with some open questions, such as:

- What might the water from the well be?
- What might the deep well be?
- Why did the person stop and wonder?
- What do you wonder about?