

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members to believe:

1. that God himself is the Author of the Bible
2. that the Bible is authoritative for our faith and behaviour
3. and that we are responsible for our response to the words in the Bible

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Definition of worship

Read. Worship is more than merely singing songs of praise.

Worship is an *attitude* of awe, adoration, submission and dedication to God, *expressed* in different forms of prayer and our daily life-style.

In order to worship God, you must know who God is. Therefore during every lesson we will meditate about one characteristic (attribute) of the God of the Bible.

3. Meditation

Worship is to stand in awe of God.

Theme: God is unfathomable

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

God is unfathomable and yet people can know him

Job 11:7-8

Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens – what can you do? They are deeper than the depths of the grave – what can you know?

No one can fathom the Almighty and Living God, i.e. define him or analyze his divine being. No one can understand or explain every possible aspect of God. To define something is to point to its limits. And to point to God's limits would make you bigger than God. However, while man cannot fathom God, God fathoms man. He defines and determines our limits. This attribute of God should make people humble in God's presence.

But, if no one can fathom God, can we still know God? Yes! People can know God to the extent that he has

revealed himself, first in the Old Testament prophets and finally in Jesus Christ. Whatever God makes known about himself people can know and pass it on to others. For example, God has revealed himself as One divine Being differentiated in three Persons. The LORD (Hebrew: JaHWeH) is One (Deuteronomy 6:4) and yet he reveals himself as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). This revelation no man can fathom, but also not reject! God reveals himself as God the Father, with whom people can have a personal and intimate relationship. God reveals himself as God the Son, through whom people get to know God and are reconciled to God. God reveals himself as God the Spirit, through whom people are regenerated and renewed, i.e. become children of God.

God is invisible and yet people can see him

Colossians 1:15

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

God is Spirit (John 4:24) and therefore invisible to the human eyes. No one has seen God. Unless God himself reveals certain aspects of his being and personality to people, no one can describe his being or his personality.

Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. The Almighty and Unlimited Divine Spirit takes on the weak and limited human nature and came to live among people, so that people could see him and get to know him. Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In Jesus Christ people can see God's love and mercy, God's holiness and righteousness, God's sovereign power and humility, God's truth and wisdom, in short, God's glory!

God's 'glory' is a summary of all God's divine characteristics (attributes) or perfections, including his divine presence. Jesus Christ is the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of his being (Hebrews 1:3). The invisible God in heaven revealed himself in and through the visible Jesus Christ on earth. In Jesus Christ lives all the fullness of the Deity in bodily form (Colossians 2:9).

God is unapproachable and yet he approaches people.

1 Timothy 6:15b-16

God, the blessed and holy Ruler, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might forever. Amen

God lives in unapproachable light and therefore no one can devise a method to approach God. No one can as it were climb up to God in heaven by means of any human devised way, method or religion! No one can arrogantly force a way to the unapproachable God. Not a single religion has a way to approach the God of the Bible!

But while people by themselves cannot approach God, God approaches people in and through Jesus Christ! Only after regeneration are believers in Jesus Christ able to approach God through the Holy Spirit with freedom and confidence (Ephesians 3:18; Hebrews 4:16).

Conclusion:

Thus, although no one can fathom the being, personality, perfect characteristics, presence, eternal decrees (decisions, plans) and motives of God, Christians can know God and his will *to the extent* that he has revealed them in the Bible, in Jesus Christ and through his Spirit.

4. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to worship God (in one or two sentences) as the unfathomable God, whom we may personally know.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

**The theme for this meeting is:
The Bible (God's revelation)**

Read or explain.

1. The Bible is God's revelation

If God had not revealed himself, then people would not have known anything about God. We can only know God through his self-revelation to us. God reveals himself to people by speaking to them and by acting within human history. God commanded that his words be recorded in the Bible. Everyone who reads and studies the Bible with an upright seeking heart will get to know God personally (cf. Hebrews 11:6).

2. The Bible reveals the beginning of everything

The Bible relates the beginning of the universe and the beginning of the human race, the beginning of the revelation of God and his will to man, the beginning of human sin, the beginning of divine salvation, the beginning of marriage and family life, and the beginning of civilization and nations. That is why the first book in the Bible is called 'Genesis', which means 'beginning'.

3. The Bible reveals the meaning and purpose of all things

The Bible teaches how people ought to live, how families ought to function, how politicians ought to rule, how judges ought to judge, how businessmen ought to conduct their business, etc.

The Bible answers the deepest questions of man:

"Where do I come from?"

"Who am I?"

"Why am I here?"

"How must I live?"

"How do I have influence? (How do I bear fruit?)"

"Where am I going?"

4. The Bible reveals why all people need salvation and how they can be saved

The Bible proclaims God's plan of salvation and describes God's history of salvation.

5. The Bible also reveals how all things will come to their end

The Bible speaks of the death of man and all other creatures, the end of human history on this present earth, the final destruction of all human kingdoms on this earth, the last judgement and in close the final renewal of all things. That is why the last chapter of the Bible speaks of 'the new heaven' and 'the new earth'.

6. The Bible is God's Word for you and me

God had commanded his prophets and apostles to record all his words and deeds in human history (Jeremiah 36:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-2; Revelation 1:10-11). The Bible consists of 66 canonical books.

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: How can you use the Bible practically?

- Day 1 Joshua 1:6-9
Meditate Day and night on the Bible
- Day 2 Psalm 119:9-16
Hide God's Word in your heart
- Day 3 John 14:21,23
Love by obeying God's Word
- Day 4^{BS} Luke 8:4-15
What is the condition and attitude of your heart?
- Day 5 Luke 6:46-49
Do what Jesus teaches in his Word
- Day 6 Deuteronomy 6:4-9
Speak with one another about the Bible

- Day 7 2 Peter 1:19-21
How only can you explain the Bible?
- Day 8 Acts 17:10-12
Develop your own biblical convictions
- Day 9 Ezra 7:9-10
Study the Scriptures, live according to them and teach them to others
- Day 10 Proverbs 1:24-33
Do not be obstinate and self-sufficient

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.
If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: The origin of the Bible

- How did a specific book in the Bible originate?
Why do the 4 Gospels differ from each other?
How could you divide the book of Acts?
Which letter of Paul appeals to you? Why?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following question and record their answer:

“In what respect would you modify your view of the Bible?”

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment.

Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review of Bible verses

Introduce that during every meeting the group members will review each other’s previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

THE BIBLE 2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture is God-breathed
and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting
and training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV)

3. Memorisation of the Bible books

The 5 books of the Law:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: How should a Christian respond to the words in the Bible?

1. Bible Study

Make use of the 5 step Bible Study method and study:

Luke 8:4-15 (a parable).

⁴While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable:

⁵“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. ⁶Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” When he said this, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

⁹His disciples asked him what this parable meant. ¹⁰He said, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that,” ‘though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.’

¹¹“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. ¹²Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. ¹⁴The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. ¹⁵But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

2. Emphasis

The message of this parable:
See the end of the explanation.

3. Explanation for the group leader

8:10. The words ‘parable’ and ‘riddle’ are the same (Hebrew: *mashal*, Greek: *parabolé*). A parable that is not understood remains a riddle, a secret. But a parable understood becomes a secret revealed. The secrets of the kingdom of God are revealed to the disciples by means of the parables (about the kingdom of God), but for other people the parables remain ‘riddles’.

In the context of Matthew 13:3-23 these other people were the Pharisees, who constantly criticised and opposed the teachings and actions of Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:2,7,10,14,24). They kept on hardening their hearts against God (Jesus Christ) (cf. Isaiah 1:2-4; 6:9-10). Note the warning of the Holy Spirit: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 3:7-8)!

8:11. A parable has only one main point of comparison, one message. The explanation clearly shows that this parable is *not* about ‘a sower’, because the seed gets sown anyway (either by Jesus Christ or a Christian). This parable is about the same good seed being sown on four different kinds of soil. This parable is about the same Word (the gospel or any other words from the Bible) that is sown on four different conditions of the human heart. It is the different conditions of the heart that yields the different results!

8:12. ‘The path’ represents a hardened, unresponsive heart (either of a non-Christian or a Christian). The heart of a person with such an attitude or condition hears the Word of God, but does nothing with what he hears. When the Word of God is heard, but not understood (Matthew 13:19) and is not immediately accepted (Mark 4:20), the devil comes and takes God’s Word away from his/her heart, because he does not want the non-Christian to believe the gospel and consequently be saved. Or he does not want the Christian to believe God’s Word and consequently be transformed and bear fruit.

8:13. ‘The rock’ represents a shallow, impulsive heart (either of an unregenerate or regenerate person). The heart of a person with such an attitude or condition hears God’s Word and receives it with joy. But because he is impulsive, he does not consider the consequences of that Word; he does not count the cost (cf. Luke 14:28-30). As soon as ordinary daily life with its troubles and opposition begins, he lets go of God’s Word. He does not cherish or retain (hold on to) God’s Word (Luke 8:15). Because the unregenerate person has no root in Christ (only in some religious feelings or experiences), he

believes in the gospel only for a while. His faith is historical, theoretical and temporary. In the time of testing (by his family and friends) he lets go of what he believed about Jesus Christ. Or because the regenerate believer is not rooted in Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4,14-15; Ephesians 3:16-19; Colossians 2:6-7), he too believes in God’s Word only for a while. In the time of testing (difficult circumstances, opposition or persecution) he lets go of God’s Word.

8:14. ‘The thorns’ represent an unclean, divided or pre-occupied heart. The heart of a person with such an attitude or condition not only receives God’s Word, but also makes room in his heart for the worries, riches and pleasures of the world and consequently cannot grow to maturity and a fruitful Christian life. An unclean, divided or pre-occupied heart can only bear bad fruit. It is not able to bear good fruit (Matthew 12:33-35).

8:15. ‘The good’ soil represents a clean and well prepared heart. A born-again believer, with a heart that is not hardened, shallow or unclean (the first three conditions), but rather prepared, deep and clean, hears the Word of God (Luke 8:8), understands it (Matthew 13:23), accepts it (Mark 4:20), retains (cherishes, holds on to) it (Luke 8:15), and by persevering (in faith and obedience to that Word) produces a crop (Luke 8:15), thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown (Mark 4:20)!

Compare Matthew 13:23, Mark 4:20 and Luke 8:15 with each other. Note the seven principles how to practically respond to God’s Word:

Matthew 13:23. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who (1) hears (2) the Word (i.e. the Bible and no another book) and (3) understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Mark 4:20. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the Word, (4) accept it, and produce a crop – thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.

Luke 8:15. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a (5) noble and good heart who hear the Word, (6) retain it, and (7) by persevering produce a crop.

Such is the amazing power of the seed! God has programmed the seed so that it knows exactly what it should do and what it should become. For example, the apple seed contains all information about what kind, quality and quantity of apples it should produce and even when it should produce that crop. Likewise, God’s Word has amazing power (cf. Jeremiah 23:29)! When it is heard, understood, accepted, held fast in a clean heart and is believed and obeyed with perseverance, it will produce a crop many times larger than what was sown!

The message of this parable

- *This is actually NOT a parable about the sower of the seed, but a parable about the receiver of the seed. Jesus does not divide the people of this world into four groups on the basis of where the sower sows his seed! It is a parable about four possible conditions and attitudes of the human heart (whether non-Christian or Christian) and about the different responses of the receiver to that same Word of God that is sown!*

That is why this parable is the key to understand and study the Bible: “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable (or anything in the Bible)?” (Mark 4:13)!

- *Jesus spurs you and me on to respond to his Word in a way that we will bear much fruit!*

The heart of every believer can once in a while be like a hardened path, or like shallow soil on a rock plate, or like a patch of thorns and thistles. Then Jesus wants us to immediately change our attitude and do something about the condition of our heart.

Every time we hear (read, meditate or study) the Word of God we have a choice and responsibility what we do with what we hear (read, meditate or study). Jesus wants us to commit ourselves to respond to his Word as the fourth soil responded to the seed.

- *The message of this parable:*

The condition and attitude of your heart determines how you respond to God’s Word.

And how you respond to God’s Word determines how much fruit you bear!

Or:

The quality and quantity of fruit you will bear is dependent on how you respond to God’s Word.

And the way you respond to God’s Word is dependent on the condition or attitude of your heart!

- *Every time you hear, read or study God’s Word you get a new chance to choose your response to God’s Word.*

At any time you can change the condition or attitude of your heart from being hardened (unresponsive), shallow (impulsive) or unclean (divided, pre-occupied) to being clean and prepared!

Every time you hear, read or study God’s Word you are responsible how you respond to it!

- *A comparison between the parable of the sower and the parable of the self-growing seed:*

While the parable in Mark 4:1-20 teaches about *our responsibility* with respect to God’s Word, the parable in Mark 4:26-29 teaches about *God’s responsibility* with respect to God’s Word! When the condition and attitude of our heart is good, we will bear fruit! God’s Word will never return empty to him. It will accomplish what he desires and achieve the purpose for which he sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.