

Discussion questions

Living in the Library - October 2018

(30 September - 27 October)

The Bible is a book but it is also much older, stranger and wilder than the category 'book'. It is more of a library than a book - a collection written over thousands of years across a number of different cultures, spanning multiple genres. The Bible, inspired by the breath of the Holy Spirit, is history, poetry, theology, legal text, true crime, songbook, biography and more... It features compelling characters and gripping stories that continue to inspire countless generations of artists and writers...

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [Living in the Library Resource Pack](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose what interests your group.

Part I: Reversal of fortune		
<p>Read Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29</p> <p>Eldad and Medad didn't go to the tent to stand up and be counted... and yet they found themselves anointed and thrown into the thick of things anyway.</p> <p>Sometimes people go looking for adventure and sometimes adventure comes looking for them.</p> <p>Why do you think Eldad and Medad didn't go out to the tent in the first place?</p> <p>How do you think they felt, having hung back, only to end up in the midst of the action?</p> <p>This reluctance to get involved but being thrown in the mix anyway is a common theme in literature. from Bilbo Baggins in <i>The Hobbit</i> to Katniss Everdeen in <i>The Hunger Games</i>.</p> <p>Who do you identify more with? Those who go out seeking adventure? Or those who don't - and find adventure seeking them out instead?</p>	<p>Read James 5: 13-20</p> <p>This reading offers advice for a healthy well functioning community that looks up to God and out for one another. The close knit relationships described in verses 13-16 give us the ability in verse 19 to bring back others that have wandered.</p> <p>Scientific research is beginning to understand just how interconnected forests are in a big linked ecosystem. When one tree is suffering, other trees - even of a different species - can send nutrients through the root system underground to help it - to dramatically reverse its fortune. For more on this see this short BBC clip.</p> <p>Just as trees look up to the sky and out across the forest to one another - we are asked to do the same - to look upwards to God and out for one another.</p> <p>This would seem to suggest that trees and people are in some sense responsible for one another - we have a part to play in the stories of others, not just our own story. How does this make you feel? Excited? Anxious? Resentful? Encouraged?</p>	<p>Read Luke 19: 1-10</p> <p>This encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus is a dramatic reversal of fortune in two senses.</p> <p>In the first - Zacchaeus a despised figure on the social periphery is made to feel welcome and included by Jesus.</p> <p>Secondly, Zacchaeus reverses the direction of his own personal fortune - promising to give away half of what he owns to the poor and to pay back those he has defrauded four times as much.</p> <p>If you were writing a contemporary version of this story where would you set it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What job would you give Zacchaeus? • Would you use a sycamore tree or something else? • What details would you use to set the scene? • How would the encounter go?

Part 2: Tension and suspense		
<p>Read Job 1:1, 2:1-10</p> <p>This week we are focusing on themes of 'tension and suspense'.</p> <p>The suspense building in this reading and (throughout the rest of Job) is just how Job will respond to all that he endures - will he break and curse God?</p> <p>Let's focus on 2: 2 - what do you think is going on in this little detail - that Satan has been "going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." Why do we need to know this?</p> <p>How does it make you feel that Satan has been <i>going to and fro, walking up and down</i>?</p> <p>How does it affect the rest of the reading?</p> <p>Is this information important - does it tell us something bigger about who Satan is? Or is it simply serving to build tension? Or both? Or something else?</p>	<p>Read Mark 10: 13-16</p> <p>This reading has a moment of suspense: the children are causing a commotion and the disciples are getting annoyed. The tension mounts - how is Jesus going to react...</p> <p>Often it is children, or other innocent or carefree characters that disturb the equilibrium and show us how things really are.</p> <p>Can you think of examples in your life (or in stories you have read) when a child or someone acting in childlike way - has helped you to understand things in a new way, or to see things from a new perspective?</p> <p>Why is <i>childlike</i> positive and <i>childish</i> negative? As a family, as a community, as a society - do we listen to children enough?</p> <p>In many church services by the time you get to the Bible reading the children and adults have been split up into separate groups - meaning that when this reading is being read the children are nowhere to be seen... What would Jesus make of the irony?</p>	<p>Read I Corinthians 10: 13</p> <p>One of the things that makes the storytelling of the Bible so compelling is that it is an ongoing story that we are invited to join in...</p> <p>The Bible is full of moments of suspense of people being tested - sometimes showing incredible forbearance and sometimes failing spectacularly.</p> <p>With this reading - we become a character in the unfolding narrative of creation - the same God that moves and acts in these pages moves and acts in our lives.</p> <p>If your life was written down as a story - what would be the key tests that you have overcome to get to where you are now?</p>

Part 3: Comeuppance		
<p>Read Proverbs 1: 20-33</p> <p>This week we are thinking about 'comeuppance' - those moment when we "reap what we sow" and those moments when we don't.</p> <p>What do you think the 'fruits' are in verse 31?</p> <p>What do you make of this metaphor? Is it significant that the fruit is eaten? How does the language affect the message?</p>	<p>Read Galatians 6: 7-10</p> <p>This reading contains one of the most famous phrases from the Bible "you reap whatever you sow".</p> <p>Seeds start out as small, seemingly insignificant things that grow into things much, much larger. In the same way small actions we take and decisions that we make can have dramatic consequences over time. Sometimes we can't see this until we step back and look in retrospect.</p> <p>If your life was a story, what are some of the early seeds you planted (maybe without even knowing it), actions you took or decisions you made, that led you to where you are now?</p> <p>It's never too late to turn over the ground and plant new seeds. What little actions or decisions could you take now to make a difference in the long run?</p>	<p>Read Ephesians 2: 8-9</p> <p>Grace - getting what we don't deserve - undermines the idea of comeuppance. Grace means we get something we have not and cannot earn.</p> <p>A famous example of grace from literature is from Victor Hugo's Les Miserables, where the character Valjean is desperate and steals silverware from a bishop who has given him shelter. When he is caught, the bishop doesn't accuse him of theft. Instead he gives him his silver candlesticks as well. This act of grace profoundly affects Valjean and transforms his life, he gains a new sense of self-worth. He doesn't get what he deserves - he gets far more.</p> <p>Can you think of moments in your favourite novels, films, tv programmes or fairytales when a character is rewarded with more than they deserve? How does it affect them?</p> <p>In your life, have you ever been the sudden unexpected recipient of grace?</p>

Part 4: Reality check		
<p>Read Job 38:1-7, 34-41</p> <p>This final week of the theme we are focusing on those moments when the jaw drops - when the reader and the characters involved encounter something bigger and stranger than anything we (or they) have ever known.</p> <p>Job 'meets his maker' in this dramatic sequence. How would you feel in Job's shoes?</p> <p>Can you think of similar gobsmacking moments in your favourite novels, films and stories?</p>	<p>Read Isaiah 53: 4-12</p> <p>Sacrifice is a common compelling theme across literature.</p> <p>The reading foreshadows the sacrifice that Jesus would make - becoming human and suffering very human pain. One of the things that is so arresting about Jesus' sacrifice is that he not only gave up his life - he also experienced humiliation, shame, loneliness, and mockery - as it says in the reading he is: "numbered with the transgressors". He didn't die in a triumphant CGI movie scene - taking down a bunch of bad guys - instead he experienced indignity and taunts. Jesus became human and in so doing felt the horror of being 'dehumanised'.</p> <p>This is illustrated in C.S. Lewis's <i>The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe</i> where (spoiler alert) the majestic lion Aslan is tortured and taunted and has his mane shaved. He doesn't only sacrifice himself, he suffers shame and humiliation.</p> <p>Why is this aspect of the sacrifices important? Why is it significant that Jesus didn't just die - that he didn't only feel physical pain - but that he also suffered emotionally and psychologically?</p>	<p>Read Exodus 3: 1-17</p> <p>What would you do? If you were just pottering about, minding your own business - and a bush suddenly burst into flame? Not only that, it doesn't burn up. And then it starts speaking...</p> <p>Would you pull out your phone and start streaming it to social media?</p> <p>Would you take off your sandals as Moses did?</p> <p>Would you use those sandals to run away as far as possible?</p> <p>Why do you think God chose to speak to Moses in this way?</p> <p>Should we be more open to hearing God in unexpected ways?</p>